Interdisciplinary Conference on Gender, Governance, Business and African Development

Theme: Advancing Gender Inclusivity in Governance, Business, and African Development: Challenges, Innovations, and Strategies for the Future

25th - 26th February, 2026

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Niger Delta University (NDU), Nigeria

ISBN: 978-978-62959-0-9

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

THEME: Advancing Gender Inclusivity in Governance, Business, and African Development: Challenges, Innovations, and Strategies for the Future

VENUE: Niger Delta University (NDU), Bayelsa State, Nigeria

DATE: Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

TIME: 10:00am

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Email: researchpolicy5@gmail.com
Website: www.internationalpolicybrief.org

ISBN: 978-978-62959-0-9

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

DAY ONE – Wednesday 25th February, 2026
Arrival of Guest/Conferees/Delegates

DAY TWO – Thursday 26th February, 2026

OPENING SESSION/AWARD/PLENARY

Conference Registration	-	9:00am – 10:00am
Opening Prayer/Welcome Remark	-	10:00am – 10:15am
Institutional Brief/Chairman's Opening Remark	-	10:15am – 10:30am
Plenary Session	-	10:30am – 12noon
Launch Break/Group Photograph	-	12noon – 1:00pm
Awards	-	1:00pm – 2:00pm
Plenary Session 2	-	2:00pm – 4:00pm
Policy Review Session	-	4:00pm – 5:00pm

DAY THREE – Friday 27th February, 2026
Departure of Guest/Conferee/Delegates

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BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING GENDER EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

[1]Ifunanya Nkechi Ohamobi & [2]Gloria Chineze Osegbue
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Abstract

The modern-day academic setting is being strained to provide inclusive and responsive education to the changing labour market demands. Though it is true that significant progress has been achieved in the realms of higher education, it is important to note that persistent signs of gender inequality and shortages in skills development continue to reduce the potential of students and negatively impact equitable access to academic and career opportunities. Universities are often challenged by institutional and organizational barriers, gender discrimination, inadequate financial resources, policy implementation gaps, and unequal access to technology that hinders improvements in gender equity and the development of the required competencies. This paper examines the university management strategies aimed at reducing these difficulties, which include; gender-sensitive policy making, inclusive leadership and governance, capacity building of academic and administrative staff, competency-based curriculums, incorporation of digital learning platforms, entrepreneurship and innovation centers, and systematic experiential programs like internships, mentorships, and apprenticeships. Results suggest that leadership, deliberate investment, implementation of policies and industry partnership plays a key role in promoting gender education and acquisition of skills. The paper concludes that universities that employ these strategies can have graduates that are competent, flexible, and socially responsible and can create inclusive and safe campuses. These measures are implemented not only to lead to the success of the individual students but also to a greater development of society and economy.

Keywords: *University management, Gender education, Skill development, Inclusive policies, 21st -century competencies.*

Introduction

Education is a veritable tool for national development. It is crucial basis for creating and delivering skilled human resource necessary for a country's growth and development. Among all levels of education, university studies provide individuals with the opportunity of focusing on specialized areas of study to fit into designated professions for the purpose of making impact in the society (Oraegbunam et al 2025). Today, universities have taken center stage in promoting social equity and economic growth by providing education and developing skills. In this 21st century, universities and colleges are not only supposed to award academic degrees but also create welcoming spaces that encourage gender equity and offer students with the much-needed competencies. This increased role is based on the changes in labour markets across the globe, shifts in employer expectations, and the internationalized ideas of sustainability and equality (Birru, 2024; Encinas-Martín & Cherian, 2023). In this light, there is a sense of urgency among the scholars and policymakers to implement gender education and skill development as a matter of concern in university management strategies.

Gender differences in education have historically reflected societal inequalities at large, where women and other oppressed genders have faced limitations to access, advance and meaningful engagement in higher education (mainstreaming research). Although the enrolment rates of women have increased, disparities in access to high-paying, high-skilled careers, leadership, and skill development opportunities, which have a direct impact on employability, have remained (Encinas-Martín & Cherian, 2023). As an example of this, young women are disproportionately under-represented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, even though they have high overall educational attainment and consequently continue to perpetuate labour market inequalities (Encinas-Martín & Cherian, 2023). Additionally, the mainstreaming of gender in higher education has often been skewed and institutionally divided, leading to the need to implement management strategies that can help to turn policy promises into actual initiatives.

Contemporary higher education is gender educated, which is not only about access to enrolment but also the content of the curriculum, the culture of the campus, institutional policy and pedagogy that actively support gender awareness and equity. Gender education strives to eliminate stereotypes, provide safe and inclusive educational and learning environments, and guarantee equal representation of both genders in academic and administrative positions. Colleges and universities are now realizing their duty to set a good example of gender-equitable behaviors and integrate gender lenses in disciplines (Manuel, 2024). It is found that institutional incorporation of gender education through gender mainstreaming, inclusive pedagogy, and specific programmes can bring more equal opportunities and results to students (Manuel, 2024).

The requirements of a fast-paced globalized economy and changing labour market have made skill development a central goal of universities, and it is now widely acknowledged that the so-called 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity and digital literacy, are the key to graduate employability, adaptability and lifelong learning (Birru, 2024). Research demonstrates that incorporating these competencies into the higher education curriculum allows graduates to operate in a multi-layered workforce and invests into their long-term career growth (Birru, 2024). Moreover, successful skill development programmes should not ignore gender aspects, where the lack of access to technology, training, and real-life learning can affect the acquisition of skills and future opportunities (Birru, 2024). As a result, the development of skills in higher education not only reacts to economic needs but also overlaps the higher goals of equity and inclusion.

Although the world has committed itself to gender equality and skill development, most universities find it hard to implement them in their managements. Despite the variety of policies designed to address gender mainstreaming and skills development are mostly textual, institutional inertia, cultural being, and lack of resources continue to act as an inconsistency in their application. Women and students of gender minorities might face continuing obstacles of unequal access to mentorship, disparate representation in STEM and leadership programmes, as well as deficient support in the development of high-demand skills. Equally, gender inclusivity is not explicitly considered in the development of skill development programmes, thus worsening the existing inequality in outcomes of employability. The issue, then, is that policy objectives have been poorly translated in effective management strategies to support not only gender education but also equal skills building in universities.

Moreover, despite the global emphasis on gender equity and employability skill, limited empirical evidence exist on how university management strategies specifically shape gender education outcomes and development of 21st century skills. Understanding this linkage is crucial for enhancing institutional performance and sustainable development. However, this study examines the role of university management strategies for promoting gender education and skill development in 21st century.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.

Gender Education

Gender education is an educational approach that promotes equality between males and female by addressing gender stereotypes dissemination and unequal power relations within educational systems and society (UNESCO,2015). It signifies fairness, inclusion and the absence of socio-cultural barrier that hinders the educational advancement of girls or boys. Similarly, Nwangwu (2014) views gender education as an educational reform strategy aimed at ensuring balanced representation, empowerment, and capacity development for both men and women within the Nigerian education system. But this study sees gender education as education reform that challenge inequalities and promote gender bias, equal participation and awareness on social justice .it seeks to eliminate gender-based discrimination, reduce inequalities and create learning environments that are inclusive, equitable and responsive to the needs of all learners.

Gender Education History

The development of gender education in universities was brought on by the larger women right's movements and increased access to higher education. The opportunity to study at the university was brutally limited to women in the first part of the twentieth century, especially in Europe and North America, where women had a negligible presence in degree courses and in academic appointments. In 1970s, the Project on the Status and Education of Women in the United States represented a significant shift, promoting gender equity in enrolment, hiring, and campus climate, and thus supporting reforms of Title IX, which made sex discrimination in education illegal. These pioneering efforts were the basis of gender studies programme, affirmative action and institutional gender mainstreaming strategies

Gender education has been growing significantly across the world in the past few decades. In most areas, Female enrolment in higher education institutions has even eclipsed that of males, thus closing access disparities of historical proportions (UN Global Lens on Gender Equality in Universities, 2023). However, such superficial improvement hides more level imbalances: the number of participants

differs depending on disciplines, with women being disproportionately represented in the humanities and social sciences and underrepresented in STEM (Times Higher Education & UNESCO, 2022; Gender-equality paradox research). Further, despite the fact that universities are progressively implementing gender equity policies, research shows that most institutions have weak policies, practices, and data to determine the effectiveness of these policies on student achievement, faculty hiring, and career advancement (Times Higher Education & UNESCO, 2022). Similarly, Nigeria has experienced significant gender disparities in education especially in certain regions and at specific levels of education. Religion, early marriage poverty, insecurity, cultural barriers and preference for male education in some locality have resulted to lower enrolment for girls (eg northern part of Nigeria). Such disparity can contribute to gender inequality

Gender Equality and Equity in Higher Education

Gender equality in education involves the provision of equal rights and opportunities to all genders whereas gender equity involves the provision of special resources to overcome historical and structural discrimination. In Nigeria, gender inequality in higher education still persist, disparity remains across regions and discipline with fewer female representation in STEM fields and some northern part of Nigeria. The main issue of equality in higher education is access and representation; inequities, in turn, are caused by gendered obstacles, which define academic achievement. Despite the increase in the global enrolment of female students, there are sharp disparities in leadership, academic advancement and enrolment in STEM fields. Moreover, gender stereotyping still affects course selection, there are more concentration of men in science and technology courses and female in social science, arts and education(teaching)

Regardless of the gender equity promises made internationally, inequalities persist. Women are underrepresented in high-level academic and administrative positions, they face unequal pay, and have to also face the hidden obstacles in the form of gender biased evaluation processes and institutional ethos (Titili et al, 2024). Studies conducted by organizations like the University of Education, Winneba in Ghana have indicated all these gaps in female representation at higher levels and within certain disciplines, partly being fuelled by deeply rooted sociocultural values and organizational inertia (Annan, 2022). Moreover, research indicates that gender norms affect education participation and achievement in higher education, which is an indicator of structural inequalities (Cortés et al, 2026). Inequalities is more pronounced in academics and politics.

Empirical evidence shows that organizational cultures, policies, and practices in universities support gender inequities and often ignore latent biases (Morley, 2022). To establish gender equity therefore requires purposeful institutional planning beyond numerical equality and the creation of a supportive atmosphere between the two genders.

University Gender Education.



Figure 2: University Management Strategies for Promoting Gender Education

4.0 Concept of University Management

University management is a complex of system planning, organizing, directing and controlling higher institutions of learning, therefore making possible the achievement of academic goals, maintenance of quality standards and responsiveness to societal needs. Nwankwo and Okafor conceptualize university management as a strategic and participatory process that aligns institutional policies, resources and stakeholders towards achieving excellence in teaching, research and community services.

Modern literature stresses that quality management in higher education goes beyond administrative competency to include visionary leadership that facilitates innovation, equity, and responsiveness to a changing labor market (Middlehurst, 2013). This study sees university management as a leadership that involves participatory decision-making structures, effective communication, accountability and sustainable development within the university. According to the current studies, university management is required to be participatory and flexible, and it should deploy systems that promote unrelenting enhancement and responsibility (Bolden, Petrov, and Gosling, 2009). Researchers hypothesize that university executives need to communicate policies and designs that promote institutional efficacy, inclusiveness, and appointee involvement.

4.2 University Gender Sensitive Policy and Implementation.

Management of universities should start with designing and enacting gender sensitive policies that incorporate equity into institutional frameworks and procedures. In universities, especially in Europe, such policy instruments as Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) have become central to the policy-making process, and institutions must make them in order to receive research funding under such programmes as Horizon Europe (Rosa & Clavero, 2022). Such policies spell out gender objectives, spell out steps towards curriculum reforms, recruitment, and career advancement and have monitoring ratios that facilitate accountability. Effective policy frameworks can assist in converting gender commitments into working priorities and in seeing gender considerations working their way into the institutional planning and review systems and they includes:

4.3 Inclusion Leadership and Governing Structures.

Gender education should be a strategic priority that is promoted through inclusive leadership and governance structures. Research indicates that the presence of women on senior academic and administrative boards boosts institutional commitment to gender equality since leaders may promote a systematic change and strategically distribute resources (Correa, Glas, & Opara, 2025). Inclusive governance will be about not only representation within faculty boards, committees, and strategic councils, but also providing space to diversity of voices in the policy making and execution. Distributed and transformational leadership models have the potential to help promote collective ownership of gender equity objectives and enable change agents in the institution (Okoro, 2025).

4.4 Academic and Administrative Staff Capacity Building.

Capacity building is essential in terms of preparing the staffs with knowledge and skills in order to adopt gender-responsive strategies. Gender mainstreaming, unconscious bias, inclusive pedagogy, and equitable recruitment programmes make the staff aware of the barriers in the structure, and implement inclusive practice in the teaching, research supervision, and engagement with students. Investment in gender awareness and professional development by the institution increases the faculty and administrator capacity to meet various student needs and oppose discriminative norms (Nkosi & Maphalala, 2025). When universities develop internal capacity, they are more likely to have sustained gender equity results.

4.5 Gender Responsive Budgeting and Resource Allocation.

Gender equity strategies can be funded and sustained by allocating resources in the gender lens. Gender-responsive budgeting is the process of analyzing the impact budget decisions have on various genders and allocating funds to projects that decrease inequalities, e.g. scholarships, mentoring programmes, childcare centres, or research grants to female scholars (Llaftiu & Shuli, 2024). Using gender-focused budgeting activities will help the universities to match their financial investments with institutional equity objectives and show practical commitment to gender education practices.

4.6 Safe and Inclusive Campus Environment.

Gender education thrives on a safe and inclusive campus environment. The management should put in place and implement policies against gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination, supported by the ready reporting mechanisms and supportive services. Partnership with national and institutional organizations to deal with sexual harassment and develop awareness initiatives improves student welfare and academic involvement (Nethengwe et al, 2025). The inclusive environments also acknowledge the existence of diverse gender identities and value respect, which leads to wider engagement to academic life.

5.0 University Management Strategies for Improving Skill Development.

In the 21st century knowledge-driven economy universities are expected not only to transmit academic knowledge but also to equip students with practical, entrepreneurial, digital and employability skills necessary for global competitiveness. However, the key university management strategies for improving skills development includes:

Curriculum Review and Competency Based Learning.

University management takes a key position in curriculum review and competency-based learning (CBL), thus matching the academic programmes with labour market needs. Curriculum models that are based on competency frameworks are based on outcomes which include technical skills and

general skills that are transferable like problem solving skills, communication skills and adaptability. Empirical research has shown a positive relationship between competency-based curriculum and graduate employability, which explains why universities should consider designing specific outcomes of skills in their courses, instructional approaches, and assessment strategies (Pérez-Zúñiga, 2025). Regular curriculum review is used to ensure that programmes are kept up to date, responsive to technological changes, and applicable in terms of stakeholder expectations of employability.

5.2 Digital Learning platform integration

The digitization of learning platforms improves the availability of skill development opportunities and their ease of access. Online modules, simulations, and blended learning environments can be considered digital interventions that can be used to enhance professional skills and give students experience in digital literacies vital in modern workplaces (Kurakbayeva et al, 2025). The key elements in management strategies are the provisioning of institutional infrastructure, provisioning of professional development to staff to design and deliver technology enhanced learning and policies that facilitate digital adoption of pedagogy. Universities that purposefully incorporate digital platforms in their learning processes will create opportunities of student engagement, self-directed learning and lifelong learning of skills.

5.3 Entrepreneurship and Innovation Hubs.

Creation of entrepreneurship and innovation centers in universities fosters experiential learning and development of entrepreneurial skills. Through these hubs, ideation, collaboration, prototype development, and business creation takes place, hence connecting academic concepts to reality. The practical research shows that interdisciplinary learning, in which students engage in interdisciplinary projects that combine the IoT, AI, and cybersecurity skills, can improve technical and entrepreneurial capabilities (Nweke, Okebanama, and Mba, 2025). The administration that fosters such ecosystems within the university stimulates student creativity and leads to a culture of innovation that goes beyond classroom instruction.

5.4 Internship, Mentorship and Apprenticeship Programmes

Internships, mentorship and apprenticeship programmes are key bridging mechanisms between theory and practice. Good internships enable students to learn knowledge in the classrooms into work environments, sharpening technical and professional skills and internalising organisational expectations (Santiago & Gil, 2025). Mentorship refers to a union between students and experienced practitioners offering direction, feedback and career information, whereas structured apprenticeships entail placing students in professional settings over lengthy durations of time. Management of universities making these partnerships with industry stronger boosts student experiential learning and consequently career readiness.

5.5 Tracking and Reviewing of Skill Development Programmes.

Good management should involve constant monitoring and assessment of skill development programs to guarantee that the targeted results are attained. It is done by monitoring the performance of students, employer feedback, and graduate outcomes in order to evaluate the effectiveness of curricular and experiential interventions. Continuous assessment allows universities to make changes in strategies, discover gaps, and ensure that programmes are better aligned to the changing needs of the labour market. Through evidence use in making decisions, the management can assist sustainable enhancement of skills within institutional programmes.
initiatives.



Figure 3: University Management Strategies for Enhancing Skill Development

Figure 3 introduces the key university management strategies adopted to enhance skill development among students. It presents a coordinated institutional approach that begins with curriculum review and competency-based learning to ensure academic relevance and practical orientation. The integration of digital learning platforms is highlighted as a means of expanding access and supporting modern learning methods. Entrepreneurship and innovation hubs are emphasized for fostering creativity and self-reliance, while internship, mentorship, and apprenticeship programmes strengthen industry linkages and experiential learning. The figure also underscores the importance of continuous monitoring and evaluation to sustain effectiveness, guide policy decisions, and improve overall outcomes of skill development

6.1Issues that Affect University Management.
Institutional and Cultural Barriers.
University administration is faced with institutional and cultural obstacles that hinder change and innovation. Unyielding governments and conventional administrative guidelines can obstruct their responsiveness to change, such as the adoption of gender equity movement or adaptive management approaches (Ndimbo et al, 2025). Such obstacles are frequently multiplied in situations where a top-down policy and bureaucratic stagnation suppress agency and the ability to apply creative solutions, thus developing a systemic opposition to the required changes.

6.2 Gender Bias and Stereotyping
Gender discrimination and stereotyping remains a major issue in the management of higher education. The unequal representation of women and other gender minorities in leadership positions is an indication of larger structural differences that leave them and other gender minorities disadvantaged in decision-making and career advancement. The academic literature notes the role of stereotypes about gender roles in affecting the views of competence and limiting female access to senior academic and managerial roles. This prejudice does not only narrow down the staff potential but also creates student anticipation and involvement, thus reinforcement of gendered patterns.

6.3 Lack of proper funding and infrastructure.
Most universities, especially in developing countries, are poorly funded and have poor infrastructure limiting their ability to provide quality education and services. A lack of finance usually causes the degradation of facilities, inadequate investment into teaching and research, and persistent labour conflicts because of low pay and under-resourcing (Ibiteye & Emitha, 2025). The chronic

underinvestment compromises strategic planning, staff recruitment, and capacity building and, consequently, the effectiveness of the institution.

6.4 Policy Implementation Gaps

Implementation gaps often compromise the intended effect of progressive policies even in instances where they are implemented. Investigations of the Nigerian higher education sector show that policies can be well written on paper but lack the mechanisms, accountability structures, and resources to be implemented (Agbabiaka and Albert, 2025). These gaps indicate the wider problem of converting strategic visions into operational realities, because the management of a university usually does not have the systems or incentives to assess, measure and implement policy outcomes.

6.5 Technological and Digital Divide.

The technological and digital divide is a serious issue that contributes to disparities in access to learning and management processes. The lack of reliable internet connectivity, lack of digital platforms, and unequal digital literacy levels among students and staff is a challenge affecting many institutions, which limits the implementation of e-learning and administrative technologies (Emmanuel, Henry, and Christian, 2024). Inequalities in access to technology not only inhibit the teaching and learning processes but also complicate management tasks including communication, data analytics and institutional planning. To fill such a gap, it is imperative to undertake concerted efforts in the provision of infrastructure, capacity development and digital policies that are inclusive so that every individual within the university community is able to fully enjoy the benefits of the academic and administrative processes.

Conclusion

The current research determined the importance of university management in creating gender education and skills in the 21st century. The challenges faced by academic institutions include institutional and cultural barriers, ongoing gender bias, inadequate funding, policy implementation gaps, and technological disparities that affect both students and staff members and limit their fair participation and access to both resources. The results highlight the necessity of a strong leadership investment into equity, innovation, and evidence-based decision-making. University management should take care that resources are well distributed, policies are adhered to and employees are provided with specific training on how to meet various needs of the students. The digital divide must be addressed and infrastructure and technology must be invested in to ensure that every student can access modern learning opportunities. Any reluctance to address these problems threatens to entrench inequalities, reduce the employability of graduates and jeopardize the overall societal and economic value of higher education.

Gender sensitive policies need to be institutionalised by universities and need to be reinforced by stringent monitoring and accountability measures. Leadership should also be participatory and inclusive in promoting the representation of women and marginalised groups. The curriculum must be competency-driven, incorporating practical and entrepreneurial, as well as digital skills to increase employability. Effective industry collaboration through internships, apprenticeships, and innovation hubs should be developed in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

EXPLORING THE NEXUS BETWEEN EXCHANGE RATE VOLATILITY AND MANUFACTURING SECTOR OUTPUT IN NIGERIA: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of exchange rate volatility on the manufacturing sector output between 1980 -2024. Using the Autoregressive Distributed Lag Model, the study examined the long run and short run relationship between exchange rate volatility and manufacturing sector output in Nigeria. The estimated results revealed that exchange rate volatility had negative and statistically significant impact on manufacturing sector output in Nigeria. The study concluded that exchange rate volatility has negative impact on manufacturing sector output in Nigeria due to the overdependence of the manufacturing sector on imported raw materials and machines. The study therefore recommended amongst others that Manufacturers should explore diversifying their sources of inputs to include a mixture of local content which can help reduce vulnerability to currency fluctuations and enhance stability in the production process. This could help mitigate the negative effects and enhance the resilience of the manufacturing sector.

Keywords: *Nigeria, exchange rate volatility, manufacturing sector*

Introduction

The manufacturing sector has been recognized as a key driver of economic growth in the majority of contemporary economies. It has the characteristics that make it the engine of growth, according to Kaldor (1966), as stated by Penélope and Thirlwall (2013), for two main reasons. To begin with, manufacturing has rising returns, both static and dynamic, while land-based activities and petty services have declining returns. Second, as the manufacturing sector grows and employs more people. It also acts as a buffer against unemployment, a source of wealth creation, and a conduit for sustainable development that can encourage industrialization in a given nation. However, since independence, the performance of the manufacturing sector in Nigeria has been unimpressive.

According to NESG (2018), the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index of 2,646 (HHI) reveals that Nigeria's manufacturing sector is weak, less competitive, and highly concentrated. A market with an HHI of less than 1,500 is regarded as a competitive marketplace; an HHI of 1,500 to 2,500 is a moderately concentrated marketplace, and a market with an HHI of 2,500 or greater to be a highly concentrated marketplace (Hayes, 2021). This development has caused competitive industries to relocate their factories abroad like Dunlop and Michelin. However, a few key industries such as beverages, textiles, cement, and tobacco kept the sector afloat but operated below half their capacity. As a major exporter of oil and one of Africa's largest economies, Nigeria has experienced exchange rate volatility over the past few decades. The exchange rate plays a crucial role in determining the economic scenery of a nation. In Nigeria, exchange rate volatility have been particularly pronounced due to the fluctuation of global oil prices, political instability, and inconsistent macroeconomic policies (Balogun, 2025). This fluctuation has raised critical questions about its implications for the broader economy and in particular the manufacturing sector output growth.

The relationship between exchange rate volatility and manufacturing sector output growth has been widely debated in the literature. For many emerging economies, including Nigeria, exchange rate volatility can have both direct and indirect effects on manufacturing sector output growth. On one hand, depreciation of the national currency can lead to increased export competitiveness, particularly in the oil and non-oil sectors. On the other hand, exchange rate volatility can increase the cost of imports, contribute to inflationary pressures, and exacerbate economic uncertainty, which can hinder investment and long-term growth in the manufacturing sector.

Nigeria's economy is heavily dependent on oil exports, which makes it vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices. As a result, exchange rate movements are often influenced by changes in oil revenue, making the Nigerian economy particularly susceptible to external shocks. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) has adopted various policies over the years to stabilize the exchange rate, including fixed, managed float, and floating exchange rate regimes. However, despite these efforts, the country has continued to experience significant currency fluctuations, leading to debates over the effectiveness of these policies in fostering sustained economic growth. The link between exchange rate volatility and the manufacturing sector output have been examined by various studies (such as Efuntade & Efuntade, 2021; Ihezie, 2022; Tams-Alasia, Olokoyo & Okoye, 2018; Yelwa & Kazeem, 2019; George-Anokwuru, Obayori, & Oriji, 2018; Ariyo & Olalere, 2019; Ogunmuyiwa & Olabisi, 2018 Akinmulegun and Falana, 2018; Krotamunobaromi, Akani & Nwosu, 2020 in both developed and developing countries. For instance, studies such as Yelwa & Kazeem, (2019) and George-Anokwuru, Obayori, and Oriji (2018) showed that exchange rate volatility has a negative and significant effect on manufacturing sector.

Furthermore, the findings of Ariyo and Olalere, (2019); Ogunmuyiwa and Olabisi (2018); Ihezie (2022) and Akinmulegun and Falana (2018) found a positive and significant impact of exchange rate on the performance of manufacturing sector. However, Tams-Alasia, Olokoyo and Okoye (2018) and Tari (2020) found that exchange rate volatility has no significant effect on manufacturing sector output in Nigeria while; Krotamunobaromi, Akani & Nwosu (2020) found that exchange rate volatility has both negative and positive relationship with manufacturing output. The differences in their findings call for further investigation. Hence, it is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the nexus between exchange rate volatility and manufacturing sector output in Nigeria.

This study aims to explore the relationship between exchange rate movements and economic growth in Nigeria, with a focus on understanding the impact of exchange rate volatility on key economic variables such as manufacturing output, interest rate, government funding of manufacturing sector, and import. Using the Autoregressive Distributed Lag Model (ARDL), we investigate the dynamics between exchange rate volatility and manufacturing sector output growth, examining both short-term and long-term relationships. By providing empirical evidence, this research seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the role of exchange rates in shaping the economic trajectory of emerging markets like Nigeria. Through this study, we seek to address the following key questions: How do exchange rate movements affect the growth of the Nigerian economy? Are there specific sectors of the economy more sensitive to exchange rate fluctuations? What policy interventions can be recommended to minimize the negative effects of exchange rate volatility on Nigeria's manufacturing sector growth? The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers, economists, and businesses in Nigeria as they navigate the complexities of exchange rate management and economic development. The other sections of this paper are arranged as follows; Section two review theoretical and empirical literatures. The third section focuses on methodology. Section four looks at the presentation and analysis of results while the final section provides conclusion and recommendations.

Literature

Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) theory. The Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) theory is traceable to the Salamanca School back in the 16th century. However, its modern use as a theory of exchange rate determination began with the work of Gustav Cassel (1918). The theory states that exchange rates between different currencies are in equilibrium when their purchasing power is the same in each of the two countries. This means that the exchange rate between two countries should equal the ratio of the two countries' price levels of a fixed basket of goods and services. When a country's domestic price level is increasing (i.e., a country experiences inflation), that country's exchange rate must depreciate in order to return to PPP. The basis for PPP is the "law of one price". In the absence of transportation and other transaction costs, competitive markets will equalize the price of an identical good in two countries when the prices are expressed in the same currency. A key aspect of purchasing power parity involves understanding that the nominal exchange rate and the purchasing power parity rate best represent certain types of goods and services. Tradable, non-perishable goods tend to trade nearer to the nominal exchange rate, while local non-tradable goods and services fall closer to the purchasing power parity rates. The implication is that there exists a sustainable cost advantage to producing tradable items in low- or middle-income countries such as Nigeria, not only because the worker cost is lower, but also because their pay goes further than in higher-income countries.

The PPP theory is relevant to this study because it postulates an ideal economic situation where exchange rates between two currencies (Naira and Dollar) are in equilibrium and support output growth as opposed to a situation of sharp disequilibrium in the exchange rates, a condition which is referred to as exchange volatility. Since Nigeria's import demand for inputs is high, a condition of volatile exchange rates may influence the performance of the manufacturing sector. Similarly, the purchasing power parity theory is significant to this study because activities in the manufacturing sector involve international trading between two countries. An appropriate exchange rate differential is therefore critical for both imports of inputs and exports of manufactured goods.

Empirical Review

Some empirical studies have been conducted to ascertain the impact of exchange rate volatility on the manufacturing sector output. Udoye, Ugochi and Oguguo (2025) investigated the effect of exchange rate volatility on manufacturing sector output in Nigeria. The data was analyzed with econometric techniques involving Augmented Dickey Fuller tests for Unit Roots, Granger Cointegration Analyses and the Vector Autoregression Estimates was used. The findings of the Vector Autoregression Estimates reviled that nominal effective exchange and real effective exchange rate had positive and significant effect on manufacturing sector output in Nigeria while interest rate and exchange rate fluctuation had negative and insignificant effect manufacturing sector output in Nigeria. The study concludes that exchange rate volatility has adverse effect on manufacturing sector output in Nigeria.

Ita, Nkamare, Emefiele, Obioke and Okpunor (2023) examined the contributions of exchange on the growth of the manufacturing sector in Nigeria. Secondary data were extracted from the Central Bank of Nigeria statistical bulletin, 2020. The Ordinary Least Squares multiple regression technique was employed to examine the impact of independent on dependent variables. The findings revealed that the exchange rate had a negative and significant impact on the performance of the manufacturing sector, while money supply and trade openness had a positive and significant effect on the performance of the manufacturing sector. Ojo and Bamidele (2023) employed the ARDL model to analyze the nexus between monetary policy instruments and the growth of the manufacturing sub-sector in Nigeria. The study employed time series data between 1981 and 2021. The findings revealed that the exchange rate has a negative impact on the growth of the manufacturing sub-sector in Nigeria in the long run, inflation in Nigeria has a significant positive impact on the manufacturing sector in the long run and interest rate is positively related to the growth of the manufacturing sub-sector in Nigeria in the long run. All the independent variables are simultaneously significant.

Dini and Andryan (2023) examined the effect of monetary policies on manufacturing outputs in Indonesia. They employed the Engle-Granger Error Correction Model (E-G ECM) to analyze the data. Time series data from 2010 Q1 to 2021 Q4 were sourced from the Central Bureau of Statistics and Bank Indonesia. The empirical findings revealed that inflation significantly influenced manufacturing outputs in the short run. Meanwhile, broad money, foreign exchange reserves and interest rates did not affect manufacturing outputs. In the long run, broad money, inflation and the interest rate of Bank Indonesia significantly influenced manufacturing outputs, while the foreign exchange reserve did not significantly affect manufacturing outputs.

Ihezie (2022) studied the impact of exchange rate volatility on manufacturing output in the ECOWAS region, using time series data spanning from 1970 to 2019. The study employed panel data analysis to examine the relationship between exchange rate volatility and manufacturing output among all the ECOWAS countries. GARCH was used to establish the existence of volatility; Dumitrescu & Hurlin

Granger non-causality test for causality direction between manufacturing and exchange rate, while Panel fixed and random effect models were used to assess the magnitude of the effects of exchange rate volatility on manufacturing output in ECOWAS. The result of the volatility test from GARCH confirmed the presence of volatility in exchange rates across all the countries in ECOWAS. Furthermore, the random effect model results showed that exchange rate volatility has a positive and significant impact on manufacturing output in ECOWAS.

Efuntade and Efuntade (2021) investigated the relationship between exchange rates and manufacturing output in Nigeria. The research utilized secondary data to reach the objectives of this research work. Data were sourced mainly from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Statistical Bulletin, CBN Statement of Accounts and Annual Reports and the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics publications. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) estimation techniques of regression analysis were adopted to obtain the numerical estimates of the coefficients in the model. The variables for which data were sourced include manufacturing output, manufacturing capacity utilization, exchange rate, government expenditure, inflation rates and interest rates for the period 1980 to 2020. The result of the regression estimate showed that the exchange rate and government expenditure on manufacturing sector variables have a positive and significant impact on manufacturing productivity, while consumer price index and manufacturing capacity utility rate variables have a negative and significant impact on manufacturing productivity. Interest rate, however, has a negative and insignificant impact on manufacturing productivity during the study period. The study concluded that the exchange rate, government expenditure on the manufacturing sector, consumer price index, manufacturing capacity utility and interest rate influence manufacturing output.

Krotamunobaromi, Akani and Nwosu (2020) investigated the relationship between exchange rate volatility and manufacturing sector output in Nigeria. The study used secondary data sourced from CBN annual statistical bulletin from 1982 to 2019. The Ordinary Least Squares model was adopted to analyze the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The result revealed that official exchange rate volatility has a negative relationship with manufacturing output, while parallel exchange rate volatility has a positive relationship with manufacturing sector output in Nigeria.

Research Methodology

Based on the nature of this study, and the variables involved, this study however, employed the causal research design also called the explanatory research design. The data used in this study was secondary data ranging from 1980 to 2023, sourced from CBN Statistical Bulletin of various years, National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the World Development Indicators (WDI). The Autoregressive Distributive Lag (ARDL) model was used for the statistical validation of the relationship between dependent variable and independent variables.

Model Specification

To achieve the objectives of this study, the model of Ayobami (2019) was adapted for this study with modifications. Therefore, the mathematical/functional forms of the models for this study are stated as;

$MANopt = f(EXRV, GFMS, INTR, IMP)$ ---------- (1)

Where

MANopt = manufacturing sector output
EXRV = exchange rate volatility
GFMS = government funding of manufacturing sector
INTR = interest rate
IMP = manufacturing import

The stochastic or econometric specifications of equations (1) is expressed as;

$$MANopt_t = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 EXRV_t + \alpha_2 GFMS_t + \alpha_3 INTR_t + \alpha_4 IMP_t + \varepsilon_t \text{ ---------- (2)}$$

ARDL Model Specification

To obtain the long-run and short-run estimates of the manufacturing sector output model, the study re-specifies equations 1 into the dynamic Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model of Pesaran, Shin and Smith (2001), as shown in equations 3.

$$\Delta MANopt_t = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 MANopt_{t-1} + \alpha_2 EXRV_{t-1} + \alpha_3 GFMS_{t-1} + \alpha_4 INTR_{t-1} + \alpha_5 IMP_{t-1}$$

$$+ \sum \beta_6 \Delta MANopt_{t-1} + \sum_{i=0}^{q} \alpha_7 \Delta EXRV_{t-1} + \sum_{i=0}^{q} \alpha_8 \Delta GFMS_{t-1} + \sum_{i=0}^{q} \alpha_9 \Delta INTR_{t-1}$$

$$+ \sum_{i=0}^{q} \beta_{10} \Delta IMP_{t-1} + \lambda ECM_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t \text{ ---------- (3)}$$

Results and Discussion

4.1.1 Zivot-Andrews Unit Root Test Test with Structural Breaks

The test for unit root was conducted based on the Zivot-Andrews unit root test approach and presented in table1 below.

	ZA Test @ level				***ZA Test @ first difference***	
Variable	*ZA Statistic*	*Break Point*			*ZA Statistic*	*Break Point*
MANopt	-3.9855 (2)	1993			-5.2914 (2)**	1993
EXRV	-2.1758 (2)	2005			-5.2745 (2)**	2005
GFMS	-6.1252 (2)**	2004			-7.4864 (2)**	2002
INTR	-11.0997 (2)**	2005			-6.8850 (2)**	1996
IMP	-3.2403 (2)	1993			-6.4099 (2)**	1998
Sig. Level	**Crit. Values**					
1%	-5.34				-5.34	
5%	-4.93				-4.93	
10%	-4.58				-4.58	

*Note: Values in parenthesis are the lag length of variables, ** denote rejection of null hypothesis 5% level. Reject the null hypotheses of unit root when the test statistics is greater than the critical value in absolute terms.*

Table 1 presented the results of the time series properties of the variables using the Zivot-Andrews unit root test approach. The results revealed that *MANopt*, *MANcu*, *MANexp, EXRV* and *IMP* were non-stationery at level. However, these series became stationary after taking the first differences.

ARDL Bounds Cointegration Analysis

Given that some of our variables are stationary at level I(0) while others are stationary at first difference I(1), it becomes pertinent to ascertain whether their linear combinations could yield some long-run relationship. Given the mixed order of integration so observed, the appropriate test for cointegration to utilize is the autoregressive distributes lag (ARDL) bounds test. The test was conducted using the F-statistic, and it was required that the F-statistic must lie outside the 5% upper and lower bounds for cointegration to exist.

Table 2: Cointegration Test using ARDL Bounds Test

ARDL Bounds Test (F-STATISTICS)			
Estimated Model	**F-statistic**		**Conclusion**
$MAN_{opt} = f(EXRV, GFMS, INTR, IMP)$	5.3890**		Cointegrated
Critical Values	**Lower Bound**	**Upper Bound**	
10%	2.20	3.09	
5%	5.56	3.49	
1%	3.29	4.37	

Source: Author's Computation Using EViews 10.

*Note: I(0) and I(1) denote lower and upper bounds of the ARDL bounds test respectively. ** & *** shows statistical significance at 5% level & 10% level, respectively.*

The result of the test as captured in Table 2 where the F-statistic for the model reported to be 5.3890, was greater than the upper bound I (1) bound value of 3.49 at the 5% significance level. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis of no cointegration and conclude that there was cointegration or a long-term relationship among the variables.

Model Estimation

The fact that there exists a levels relationship among the variables in the model signals the need for the estimation of the ARDL model for the study to check how short-run distortions could be corrected in the long-run; and then to see the nature of the long-run behaviours of the variables in influencing the dependent variable. The results is shown in Tables 3,

Table 3: Results of the Short-run and Long ARDL Estimates (Manufacturing Output model)

	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
Long Run Equation				
EXRV	-0.586677	0.225916	-2.596878	0.0158
GFMS	0.377613	0.093078	4.056948	0.0005
INTR	-0.024491	0.010007	-2.447330	0.0221
IMP	0.822585	0.169441	4.854691	0.0001
C	0.708462	1.490944	0.475177	0.6390
Short Run Equation				
D(EXRV)	-0.034481	0.032211	-1.070451	0.2951
D(EXRV(-1))	-0.114909	0.035541	-3.233162	0.0035
D(EXRV(-2))	-0.142075	0.035376	-4.016185	0.0005
D(EXRV(-3))	-0.080616	0.034530	-2.334696	0.0283
D(GFMS)	0.085824	0.021682	3.958300	0.0006
D(GFMS(-1))	0.023333	0.020042	1.164195	0.2558
D(GFMS(-2))	0.062543	0.019181	3.260698	0.0033
INTR	0.006718	0.002888	2.326114	0.0288
IMP	0.225650	0.049305	4.576586	0.0001
ECM(-1)	-0.274318	0.043886	-6.250638	0.0000
R-Squared	0.618686	S.D. dependent var		0.095690
Adjusted R^2	0.526645	Akaike info criterion		-2.414508
S.E. of regression	0.065835	Durbin-Watson stat		2.207487

Note: ***, ** and * indicate significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% levels respectively

The evidence from Table 3 revealed that exchange rate volatility (EXRV) and interest rate (INTR) had negative and statistically significant effect on manufacturing output in the long-run. It implies that a 1% increase in EXRV led to a decrease in manufacturing output by 0.5867 percent, and an increase in INTR cause a marginal decrease in manufacturing output by 0.02449 percent. Both variables had p-values of 0.0158 and 0.0221 respectively, which were all less than 0.05 level of significance, implying that they were statistically significant at 5% level.

On the other hand, the result showed that government funding of manufacturing sector (GFMS) and imports (IMP) had positive and statistically significant impact on the manufacturing output in Nigeria during the period under study. It implies that a 1% increase in GFMS and IMP led to increase in manufacturing output by 0.3776 percent and 0.8226 percent respectively. Both variables had p-values of less than 0.05 which indicated statistical significance at 5% level. The positive and significant effect of GFMS on manufacturing output is theoretically plausible because, the necessary infrastructure such as electricity, access roads and loans to the sector have to be in place for manufacturing activities to flourish. The positive impact of imports is however contrary to economic expectations, but can be justified on the basis that, most of the inputs used in the sector were imported, therefore, an increase in such imports led to increase in the output in the long-run.

The adjusted R^2 value of 0.526645 suggested that, about 52.66% of the variations or changes in the manufacturing output in Nigeria were explained by the independent variables. Furthermore, the error correction model – ECM (-1) which indicates the speed of adjustment to the equilibrium in the event of

disequilibrium was -0.274318 and negative and statistically significant as required. The implication of this finding is that in the event of disequilibrium, the short-run disequilibrium will have a slow speed of adjustment (27%) back to equilibrium.

Diagnostic Tests

Table 4: Results of the Diagnostic Tests

Diagnostic Test	Statistic	p-value
Heteroscedasticity (ARCH Test)	0.551595	0.8583
Autocorrelation (Breusch Godfrey LM test)	0.675668	0.5191
Normality Test	1.367519	0.5047

The results of the several diagnostic tests to evaluate the accuracy and dependability of the estimates showed that the model was free from heteroscedasticity since the p-values of the Fstatistics was greater than 0.05. The result also shows that the model was free from the problem of serial correlation or autocorrelation since the p-values of the F-statistic is greater than 0.05. The residuals of the model were normally distributed since the p-values of the test statistic (Jaque-Bera test) was greater than 0.05.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study investigated the impact of exchange rate volatility on manufacturing sector output in Nigeria covering the period from 1981 to 2021. The unit root properties of the variables were tested using the Zivot-Andrews test for stationarity. The Bayer-Hanck cointegration test was applied, which confirmed cointegration among the model variables. Further, the study applied the ARDL model to investigate the long-run and short-run relationship between exchange rates volatility and manufacturing sector output. The results revealed that the coefficient of exchange rate volatility was negative and statistically significant. This implies that there is a negative or inverse relationship between exchange rate volatility and manufacturing sector output in Nigeria. This finding align with A-priori expectation as it conform to the findings of Krotamunobaromi, Akani and Nwosu (2020) and Yelwa and Kazeem (2019). On the other hand, the findings of the study disagreed with the studies of Ihezie (2022); which found a positive impact of exchange rate volatility on manufacturing output. It is on this basis that the study concluded that exchange rate volatility has negative relationship with manufacturing sector output in Nigeria over the period of study.

Based on the findings, the study made the following recommendations:

i. Manufacturers should explore diversifying their sources of inputs to include a mixture of local content. Diversifying the sources of raw materials and intermediate goods in the production process can help reduce vulnerability to currency fluctuations and enhance stability in the production process. This could help mitigate the negative effects and enhance the resilience of the manufacturing sector.
ii. Furthermore, structural reforms by government that come with exchange rate devaluation should be avoided, as these have negative effects on manufacturing sector output. Instead, policy tools such as interest rates and reserve requirements should be implemented to manage the money supply and inflation, which can help stabilize the exchange rate to enable local manufacturers afford the imports of raw materials and capital goods, given the current import-dependent nature of the sector.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND GENDER INCLUSIVITY FOR EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY IN PUBLIC SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL IN OKIRIKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, RIVERS STATE.

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Abstract

The study examined emotional intelligence and gender inclusivity: Two inseparable twins for effective instructional delivery in public senior secondary school in Okirika Local Government area, Rivers State. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of this study is 3,850. This comprises ***3,850 teachers and students*** *from eight public senior secondary schools in Okirika Local Government Area, Rivers State. The sample size for the study was determined using* ***Taro Yamane's formula*** *for sample size calculation at a 5% level of precision: Thus, the* ***sample size for the study is approximately 362 respondents****, which was proportionally selected from teachers and students across the eight schools. The instrument for data collection was a well-structured questionnaire titled "Impact of Teachers' Emotional Intelligence and gender inclusivity for effective instructional delivery effectiveness questionnaire (ITEIIDE)" The questionnaire had two sections; section A and B. Section A contains the bio-data of the respondents and section B contains information to answer the research questions. The instrument was given face and content validity by two experts in Educational Management. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha and a reliability coefficient of 0.80. The data was analyzed using Mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while the z-test statistical tool was used to test the hypotheses 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that emotional intelligence helps teachers to create an inclusive classroom environment that respects all students. Teachers demonstrate respect and professionalism in all classroom interactions. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended among others that, schools and educational authorities*

should organize regular workshops, training programs, and seminars to improve teachers' adaptability as this will equip teachers with skills to adjust teaching methods, incorporate innovative strategies, and respond effectively to diverse student needs, thereby improving instructional delivery.

Keywords: *Emotional intelligence, gender, inclusivity, instructional delivery*

Introduction

The demand for effective instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools has intensified in recent decades due to rapid social transformation, increasing diversity in classrooms, and heightened expectations for quality education. Across many educational systems, particularly in developing countries. Public senior secondary schools serve students from varied socio-economic, cultural, and gender backgrounds. Within this dynamic environment, teachers are not only expected to demonstrate mastery of subject content but also to possess the socio-emotional competencies necessary to foster inclusive and supportive learning spaces. It is within this context that emotional intelligence and gender inclusivity emerge as critical, interconnected constructs for effective instructional delivery.

The concept of emotional intelligence gained prominence through the seminal work of Salovey and Mayer (1990) who defined it as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and regulate emotions in oneself and others. The construct was later popularized by Daniel Goleman (1995) who emphasized its relevance in leadership, workplace performance, and education. In the educational context, emotional intelligence enables teachers to build positive relationships with students, manage classroom dynamics effectively, respond constructively to behavioral challenges, and create emotionally safe environments that enhance learning outcomes. Teachers with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to demonstrate empathy, exercise self-control, and maintain motivation qualities that are indispensable in adolescent-centered classrooms typical of senior secondary schools.

Concurrently, gender inclusivity has emerged as a central pillar in global educational discourse. The pursuit of inclusive and equitable quality education is strongly reflected in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive education and the elimination of gender disparities. Gender inclusivity in education transcends mere parity in enrollment; it entails creating learning environments where all genders feel valued, respected, and equally empowered to participate and succeed. In public senior secondary schools, entrenched gender stereotypes, differential teacher expectations, unconscious biases, and socio-cultural norms often influence classroom interactions and instructional practices. Such dynamics can inadvertently marginalize certain groups of students, thereby undermining effective instructional delivery (Abe,2020).

The intersection between emotional intelligence and gender inclusivity becomes particularly significant when considering the teacher's role as both an instructional leader and a socializing agent. Emotional intelligence provides the psychological foundation upon which gender-inclusive practices can thrive. A teacher who is emotionally self-aware and empathetic is more likely to recognize subtle forms of gender bias, challenge discriminatory behaviors, and foster equitable participation among students. Emotional regulation aids teachers in responding calmly and fairly to gender-related conflicts, while social awareness enhances sensitivity to diverse gender identities and expressions.

Thus, emotional intelligence does not merely complement gender inclusivity; it actively enables and sustains it (Reyes et al2020). Moreover, adolescence a defining stage of senior secondary education is characterized by identity formation, including gender identity and social belonging. During this period, students are particularly sensitive to issues of fairness, acceptance, and recognition. Instructional delivery that lacks emotional attunement or gender sensitivity can contribute to disengagement, diminished self-esteem, and poor academic performance. Conversely, classrooms led by emotionally intelligent and gender-inclusive teachers tend to promote psychological safety, collaborative learning, and equitable student participation, thereby improving instructional effectiveness Anoowar &Rohani, 2019).

Despite the acknowledged importance of both constructs, existing literature often examines emotional intelligence and gender inclusivity in isolation. Studies on teacher effectiveness frequently highlight pedagogical skills, content knowledge, and classroom management strategies, with comparatively less attention to the socio-emotional and gender-responsive dimensions of teaching. Similarly, research on gender inclusivity tends to focus on policy frameworks, curriculum reform, and access to education, while underexploring the emotional competencies required of teachers to implement inclusive practices effectively. This fragmentation in scholarship suggests a critical gap: the need to conceptualize emotional intelligence and gender inclusivity as mutually reinforcing elements "inseparable twins" in the pursuit of effective instructional delivery Delgado, 2020).

In public senior secondary schools, where resource constraints, large class sizes, and diverse student populations present persistent challenges, the synergy between emotional intelligence and gender inclusivity becomes even more vital. While pedagogical knowledge and content mastery have traditionally been the focus of teacher performance, recent scholarship underscores the growing importance of emotional intelligence in influencing how teachers deliver instruction (Mavroveli & SánchezRuiz, 2021). Teachers who lack emotional competence may struggle to cultivate inclusive environments, while gender-inclusive policies without emotionally intelligent implementation may remain superficial. Therefore, integrating these constructs into teacher preparation, professional development, and educational leadership frameworks is essential for sustainable instructional improvement.

Effective instructional delivery remains a central concern in contemporary education, as educators strive to meet the diverse academic, social, and emotional needs of learners. In increasingly diverse classrooms, differences in gender identity, expression, and socialization patterns significantly influence students' participation, engagement, and academic performance. However, many instructional approaches still emphasize cognitive achievement while paying insufficient attention to the emotional and gender-related dynamics that shape the learning environment. Emotional intelligence involves the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others, a capacity that is increasingly recognized as critical to effective teaching.

One essential component of Emotional Intelligence is adaptability, which refers to a teacher's capacity to adjust their instructional strategies, classroom management styles, and communication patterns to accommodate varying student needs and shifting classroom dynamics. For instance, a teacher with high adaptability may revise lesson plans in the moment or spontaneously when they notice students are disengaged or modify their approach for learners with diverse academic backgrounds. Emotional Adaptability involves adjusting instruction based on student responses, learning pace, and comprehension levels. Adaptability refers to a teacher's ability to adjust their thoughts, behaviors, and

instructional approaches in response to changing classroom conditions, diverse learner needs, and evolving educational demands of all the students irrespective of their gender. In emotionally intelligent teaching, adaptability is not merely about reacting to change, it's about being proactive, flexible, and responsive in ways that support both academic and emotional success for all students. Adaptability in emotionally intelligent teaching also entails monitoring classroom dynamics in real time. Teachers continuously observe how students are responding both emotionally and cognitively and adjust their instructional pacing, content complexity, and interaction style accordingly. This level of responsiveness ensures that instruction remains aligned with students' evolving needs and promotes a sense of safety and support.

In a study by Delgado et al. (2020), it was found that teachers who could adapt their instruction based on student feedback were significantly more effective in promoting learning outcomes and maintaining classroom motivation. Equally important is self-awareness, which allows teachers to identify their emotional triggers, recognize their teaching strengths and limitations, and reflect meaningfully on their practice. A self-aware teacher is less likely to let personal frustrations interfere with professional responsibilities and is more capable of adjusting their behavior for optimal instructional impact. Research by Li et al. (2021) found that self-aware teachers exhibit greater emotional regulation and are more likely to engage in continuous self-improvement factors that contribute to sustained instructional effectiveness. Moreover, self-awareness fosters a mindful approach to teaching, where teachers intentionally align their methods with student needs and classroom goals.

Another fundamental Emotional intelligence domain is the social skills, encompassing the ability to communicate effectively, collaborate with students and colleagues, and foster positive classroom relationships. Teachers who possess strong social skills tend to be approachable, can manage classroom conflicts constructively, and encourage active participation in learning. These social competencies enhance classroom cohesion, promote student voice, and facilitate cooperative learning environments (Brackett et al., 2019). Furthermore, socially skilled teachers are better at interpreting student non-verbal cues, engaging learners through dialogue, and maintaining a classroom climate conducive to academic risk-taking and creativity. Emotional intelligence, through its various components, directly impacts how teachers plan, execute, and assess their instruction. A teacher who adapts instruction based on student feedback (adaptability), understands the influence of their emotions on classroom decisions (self-awareness), builds strong student relationships (social skills), and responds compassionately to student needs (empathy), is more likely to deliver instruction that is engaging, inclusive, and effective (Abe, 2020). The synergistic impact of these emotional intelligence dimensions shapes the overall instructional experience and student outcomes.

In the evolving landscape of education, the role of the teacher extends beyond mere content delivery. Today teachers are expected to be emotionally attuned, responsive, and reflective practitioners who can support students' holistic development. This shift is especially pronounced at the senior secondary level, where students experience complex emotional and academic transitions. Emotional intelligence (EI) is now recognized as a pivotal factor in helping teachers navigate these expectations. As noted by Mavroveli and Sánchez-Ruiz (2021), emotionally intelligent educators exhibit higher competence in managing classroom demands and promoting student engagement, thus redefining instructional effectiveness in modern education. Senior secondary school classrooms are emotionally dynamic settings where students grapple with identity formation, peer pressure, and academic stress. Teachers who lack emotional intelligence may struggle to manage these dynamics, resulting in

disengaged learners and disrupted instruction. In contrast, teachers who exhibit Emotional intelligence can create emotionally safe learning environments that foster motivation and academic resilience. Yin, Zheng, and Wang (2019) emphasized that emotionally intelligent teachers demonstrate superior emotional regulation, which positively influences student behavior and instructional flow both critical components of effective classroom delivery.

Recent scholarship has deepened our understanding of how Emotional intelligence intersects with pedagogy. Emotional intelligence, as conceptualized by Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (2016), includes the ability to perceive, use, understand, and regulate emotions to facilitate interpersonal and intellectual growth. When applied in classroom contexts, this ability helps teachers connect with students, manage stressors, and make emotion-informed pedagogical decisions. Li et al. (2021) confirmed that emotionally intelligent teachers are more adept at adjusting instruction based on emotional cues, leading to more inclusive and effective teaching practices in secondary education. Effective instructional delivery encompasses not just curriculum coverage but also the emotional experience of learning. Students are more likely to engage in active learning and critical thinking when the classroom climate supports their emotional needs.

Reyes et al. (2020) argue that classroom emotional climate shaped largely by the teacher's emotional intelligence should be a key indicator of teaching effectiveness. Including EI in evaluation rubrics ensures a more comprehensive understanding of instructional delivery. Finally, emotional intelligence is not only a personal resource for teachers but also a professional standard that enhances institutional outcomes. Emotionally intelligent teachers tend to experience lower burnout, higher job satisfaction, and more effective teaching performance (Abe, 2020). Their presence influences school morale, supports positive student outcomes, and contributes to a healthy learning environment. As schools aim to meet the complex demands of 21st-century education, promoting EI among teachers becomes imperative advancing inclusivity for sustained instructional excellence and student success. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and gender inclusivity and how their interplay influences effective instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools. By framing these constructs as interdependent rather than discrete variables, the study contributes to a more holistic understanding of teacher effectiveness and provides a conceptual foundation for policy and practice aimed at strengthening.

Statement of the Problem

Emotional intelligence popularized by Daniel Goleman encompasses self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These competencies enable educators to understand students' emotions, manage classroom interactions effectively, and create supportive learning spaces. At the same time, gender inclusivity, as advocated by global bodies such as UNESCO, calls for equitable teaching practices that respect and affirm all gender identities, challenge stereotypes, and eliminate discriminatory behaviors in educational settings. Despite the recognized importance of both constructs, emotional intelligence and gender inclusivity are often treated as separate domains in teacher preparation, policy formulation, and classroom practice. This disconnect may result in emotionally insensitive pedagogies, reinforcement of gender stereotypes, marginalization of non-conforming learners, and unequal participation patterns. Teachers who lack emotional intelligence may struggle to address gender-based conflicts or unconscious biases, while gender-inclusive policies without emotional competence may fail to translate into authentic, empathetic classroom interactions.

The problem, therefore, lies in the limited integration of emotional intelligence and gender inclusivity as complementary and mutually reinforcing components of effective instructional delivery. There is insufficient empirical and practical understanding of how these two constructs function together to enhance teacher effectiveness, student engagement, classroom climate, and learning outcomes. Without intentional integration, efforts to promote inclusive education may remain superficial, and instructional delivery may continue to fall short of addressing the holistic needs of all learners. This study seeks to investigate the interrelationship between emotional intelligence and gender inclusivity, examining how their integration can serve as a foundational framework for effective instructional delivery in diverse educational contexts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the imperativeness of emotional intelligence and gender inclusivity for effective instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area. Specifically, this study aims to:

i. To examine the extent to which teachers' adaptability to gender inclusivity influences their instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area.
ii. To assess how teachers' social skills, contribute to fostering gender inclusivity for effective instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions;

i. To what extent does teachers' adaptability to gender inclusivity influence their instructional delivery in in public senior secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area?
ii. To what extent does teachers' social skills foster gender inclusivity for effective instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study:

i. There is no significant difference in the mean opinion of teachers and students on adaptability to gender inclusivity for effective instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area?
ii. There is no significant difference in the mean opinion of teachers and students on how social skills fosters gender inclusivity for effective instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of this study is 3,850. This comprises **3,850 teachers and students** from eight public senior secondary schools in Okirika Local Government Area, Rivers State. The sample size for the study was determined using **Taro Yamane's formula** for sample size calculation at a 5% level of precision: Thus, the **sample size for the study is approximately 362 respondents**, which was proportionally selected from teachers and students across the eight schools. The instrument data collection was a well-structured questionnaire titled "Impact of Teachers' Emotional Intelligence and gender inclusivity for effective instructional delivery effectiveness questionnaire (ITEIIDE)" The questionnaire had two sections; section A and B. Section A contains the bio-data of the respondents and section B contains information to answer the research questions. The responses were weighted as follows; Very High Extent (VHE- 4points), High Extent (HE-3point), Low Extent (LE-2point) and Very Low Extent (VLE-1 point) respectively. The instrument

was given face and content validity by two experts in Educational Management. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha and a reliability coefficient of 0.80**.** The data was analyzed using Mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while the z-test statistica tool was used to test the hypotheses 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation, of Results

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1: To what extent does teachers' emotional adaptability and gender inclusivity influence their instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Respondents on the extent teachers' emotional adaptability and gender inclusivity influence their instructional delivery in in public senior secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area

S/N	Questionnaire Items	(Teacher) N= 171		(Student) N= 183		Average Mean $\frac{\chi^1 + \chi^2}{2}$		
	Questionnaire Items	$\bar{X}_1$	Std_1	$\bar{X}_2$	Std_2	Mean	Std	RMK
1	Teachers adjust their teaching methods to both boys and girls in class.	3.16	1.11	3.24	0.97	3.20	1.04	HE
2	Teachers modify lesson plans to make room for inclusivity	3.42	0.92	3.36	0.92	3.39	0.92	HE
3	Teachers give equal opportunities to all students in class	3.36	0.90	3.28	0.92	3.32	0.91	HE
4	Teachers incorporate technology and multimedia tools to enhance lesson delivery for the generality of the students.	3.41	0.93	3.45	0.90	3.20	0.91	HE
5	Teachers adopt instructional strategies to suit students' pace of learning irrespective of gender.	3.48	0.91	3.39	0.87	3.43	0.89	HE
6	Teachers revise their classroom management techniques to maintain student engagement.	3.46	0.92	3.30	0.78	3.38	0.85	HE
7	Teachers adapt assessment methods to fairly evaluate all students' understanding.	3.44	0.92	3.30	0.87	3.37	0.89	HE
	Grand Mean/SD	**3.39**	**0.94**	**3.33**	**0.89**	**3.32**	**0.91**	**HE**

The analyzed data in Table 1 for research question one showed that all items were of a high extent by the teacher and students. The confirmation was made with a grand mean of 3.29 and 3.33 respectively and standard deviation of 0.94 and 0.89 as responses of the respondents on both teacher and students are above the criterion mean score of 2.50. This shows that Teachers modify lesson plans when faced with unexpected classroom situations. Teachers revise their classroom management techniques to maintain student engagement. This is true since the grand mean value was above the benchmark of 2.50, meaning that most of the respondents were on the High extent range of the scale.

Research Question 2: To what extent does teachers' social skills foster gender inclusivity for effective instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area?

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Respondents on the extent teachers' social skills foster gender inclusivity for effective instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okirika Local Government Area (N = 354)

S/N	Questionnaire Items	(Teacher) N= 171		(Student) N= 183		Average Mean $\frac{\chi^1 + \chi^2}{2}$		
	Questionnaire Items	$\bar{X}_1$	**Std.**	$\bar{X}_2$	**Std.**	Mean	**Std**	**RMK**
1	Teachers treats students equally by giving positive reinforcement and encouragement.	2.77	1.09	2.62	1.08	2.69	1.08	HE
2	Teachers create an inclusive classroom environment that respects all students.	3.44	0.89	2.78	1.05	3.11	0.97	HE
3	Teachers engage male and female students in group activities to enhance interaction and learning.	3.54	0.83	3.69	0.62	3.61	1.45	VHE
4	Teachers demonstrate respect and professionalism in dealing with male and female students during all classroom interactions.	3.49	0.83	3.80	0.60	3.64	0.71	VHE
5	Teachers communicate effectively with students to enhance understanding.	2.92	1.12	3.91	0.37	3.41	0.74	HE
6	Teachers build positive relationships with students to encourage class interaction.	2.87	1.01	3.77	0.55	3.32	0.78	HE
7	Teacher encourages students to collaborate well with each other to reduce gender related conflicts.	3.05	0.97	2.73	1.11	2.89	1.04	HE
	Grand Mean/SD	**3.15**	**0.96**	**3.32**	**0.76**	**3.32**	**0.96**	**HE**

The analyzed data in Table 2 for research question two showed that five items were of a high extent, while 2 items were on Very High extent by the teacher and students. The confirmation was made with a grand mean score of 3.15 and 3.32 and standard deviation of 0.96 and 0.76 as responses of the respondents on both teacher and students which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. This shows that Teachers create an inclusive classroom environment that respects all students. Teachers demonstrate respect and professionalism in all classroom interactions.

Test of Hypotheses

$\mathbf{H_{01}}$ To what extent does teachers' emotional adaptability to gender inclusivity influence their instructional delivery in in public senior secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area?

Table 3: z-test Analysis on the mean ratings of teacher and students on the extent Teachers' emotional Adaptability to gender inclusivity influence effective instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okirika Local Government Area.

Respondents	N	x	Std	DF	z-cal	z-crit	LS	Decision
Teacher	171	3.39	0.94					
					0.66	±1.96	0.05	accepted
				352				
Student	183	3.33	0.89					

Table 3 above shows the result of z-calculated value of 0.66 which was less than the z-critical value of ±1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and with a degree of freedom of 352. The null hypothesis was therefore accepted which states that is no significant difference in the mean ratings of teacher and students on the extent Teachers' Adaptability influence instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okirika Local Government Area.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the mean opinion of teachers and students on how social skills fosters gender inclusivity for effective instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area

Table 4: z-test Analysis in the mean ratings of teacher and students on the extent Teachers' social skills fosters gender inclusivity for effective instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okirika Local Government Area**.**

Respondents	N	x	Std	DF	z-cal	z-crit	LS	Decision
Teacher	171	3.15	0.96					
					1.88	±1.96	0.05	accepted
				352				
Student	183	3.32	0.76					

Table 4 above shows the result on the table show that z-calculated value of 1.88 which was less than the z-critical value of ±1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and with a degree of freedom of 352. The null hypothesis was therefore accepted which states that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of teacher and students on the extent Teachers' social skills influence instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okirika Local Government Area.

Discussion of Findings

Findings on Research Question 1 on Table 1 revealed that teachers modify lesson plans when faced with unexpected classroom situations. Teachers revise their classroom management techniques to maintain student engagement with a grand mean of 3.39 for Teacher and students and 3.33 for students. Hypothesis 1 on table 3 showed that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of teacher and students on the extent Teachers 'emotional Adaptability influence instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okirika Local Government Area with z-calculated value of 0.08 which was less than z-critical value of ±1.96. This finding is in line with the view of Johnson (2021) who opined that Teachers' adaptability plays a crucial role in enhancing instructional delivery. Emotional adaptability enables educators to respond effectively to diverse classroom dynamics, thereby improving student engagement and learning outcomes.

Findings on Research Question 2 on Table 2 revealed that Teachers create an inclusive classroom environment that respects genders. Teachers demonstrate respect and professionalism in all classroom interactions with a grand mean of 3.15 for Teacher and 3.32 for students. Hypothesis 2 on table 4 showed that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of teacher and students on the extent Teachers' social skills influence instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okirika Local Government Area, with z-calculated value of 1.88 which is less than z-critical value of ±1.96. The findings in line with view of Anowar and Rohani, (2019), who opined that Teachers' social skills significantly influence instructional delivery in public senior secondary schools in Okirika Local Government Area (LGA), Rivers State, Nigeria.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that Teachers modify lesson plans when faced with unexpected classroom situations. Teachers revise their classroom management techniques to maintain student engagement. Teachers are aware of how their behavior and attitude affect students' learning. Teachers reflect on their teaching methods to improve lesson delivery. The researcher conclude that Teachers create an inclusive classroom environment that respects all students. Teachers demonstrate respect and professionalism in all classroom interactions. Finally, it was concluded that Teachers possess the necessary knowledge of their subject matter to deliver lessons effectively. Teachers show mastery of instructional techniques that enhance student engagement.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

i. Schools and educational authorities should organize regular workshops, training programs, and seminars to improve teachers' adaptability. This will equip teachers with skills to adjust teaching methods, incorporate innovative strategies, and respond effectively to diverse student needs, thereby improving instructional delivery.
ii. Teachers should be supported to develop interpersonal and communication skills through mentorship programs and collaborative teaching activities. Strong social skills enable teachers to build positive relationships with students and colleagues, manage classroom interactions efficiently, and foster an inclusive learning environment.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN PARTICIPATIONS IN GOVERNANCE IN SAGBAMA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA IN BAYELSA STATE

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Abstract

This study examined gender inequality and women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and global commitments to inclusive governance, women remain underrepresented in political and decision-making structures at the local level. Anchored on feminist theory, the study investigated the influence of gender inequality in political representation, political appointments, and the inclusion of women's views in decision making processes on women's participation in governance. A correlational research design was adopted. The population comprised women involved in governance and women residents aged 18 years and above in Sagbama L.G.A. A sample of 227 respondents was selected through stratified random sampling across the wards. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Gender Inequality and Women Participation in Governance Questionnaire (GIWPGQ)". The instrument was validated and its reliability established using the test-retest method. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer the research questions and to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a strong and significant negative relationship between gender inequality in political representation and women's participation in governance $r = -0.716$, $p < 0.05$. Similarly, gender inequality in political appointments showed a strong and significant negative relationship with women's participation $r = -0.770$, $p < 0.05$. However, the inclusion of women's views in decision making processes demonstrated a moderate and significant positive relationship with women's participation $r = 0.512$, $p < 0.05$. The study concludes that structural and institutional forms of gender inequality substantially constrain women's effective engagement in governance at the local government level. It recommends the adoption of gender responsive policies, equitable political appointments, and institutional mechanisms that guarantee the systematic inclusion of women's voices in governance processes.

Keywords: *Gender Inequality, Women Participation, Governance, Political Representation, Political Appointment, Decision Making, Sagbama L.G.A., Bayelsa State.*

Introduction

Women's participation in governance reflects the measurable extent to which women are present and active in decision–making structures, elective and appointive offices, and governance processes within a political system (Salau et al., 2024). In Nigeria, despite women comprising nearly half of the population, their representation in political and governance roles remains low. National figures indicate that women occupy only a small fraction of legislative and executive positions, with women holding approximately 6.7 % of parliamentary seats far below both global and regional averages and similar under–representation observed at sub–national and local government levels. Gender inequality, widely defined as the differential treatment and access to power, resources, and opportunities based on gender, disproportionately limits women's access to governance roles in Nigeria. Patriarchal norms, socio–cultural expectations assigning women to domestic roles, and structural barriers in political party systems all contribute to an environment where women's governance participation is constrained (Agunbiade, 2020; SDN report, Bayelsa context). These constraints manifest through lower rates of female candidacy in elections, limited support from political institutions, financial disadvantages, and cultural attitudes that discourage women from seeking leadership positions (National Women's Trust Fund perspective).

In the Niger Delta region inclusive of Bayelsa State, studies reveal that women's participation in governance is particularly challenged by entrenched patriarchal customs and socio–economic barriers, which often result in women being under–represented in decision–making bodies and political offices relative to their male counterparts (SDN report). Sagbama Local Government Area, as part of Bayelsa State, therefore represents a critical locus for investigating how these broader national patterns of gender inequality influence the degree and quality of women's involvement in governance activities, and how local socio–cultural dynamics intersect with formal political processes to shape women's political engagement.

Statement of the Problem

Despite global and national commitments to gender equality and inclusive governance, women's participation in governance at the local government level in Nigeria remains persistently low. In Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, women continue to be significantly underrepresented in elective and appointive political positions, thereby limiting their influence in policy formulation and local decision-making processes. This marginalization persists notwithstanding constitutional guarantees of equality and policy frameworks aimed at promoting women's empowerment and political inclusion. The problem is largely rooted in entrenched patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and socio-cultural expectations that perceive governance and leadership as male domains. These norms often translate into discriminatory political party practices, limited access to political appointments, and the systematic exclusion of women's views from critical governance decisions. Additionally, economic constraints, low political mentorship, and weak institutional support structures further undermine women's capacity to effectively engage in governance at the grassroots level. The continued exclusion of women from governance in Sagbama L.G.A. has serious implications for democratic development and inclusive governance, as it results in policies and programmes that inadequately reflect women's needs, priorities, and perspectives. Consequently, gender inequality in political participation not only weakens women's empowerment

but also undermines the quality, responsiveness, and legitimacy of local governance. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine gender inequality and women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

Aim and Objectives

The study was aimed at investigating gender inequality and women participation in governance in Sagbama L.G.A. in Bayelsa State. Specifically, the study tends to achieve the following objectives:

1. Examine the influence of gender inequality of political representation on women's participation in governance in Sagbama L.G.A. in Bayelsa State.
2. Investigate the influence of gender inequality of political appointment on women's participation in governance in Sagbama L.G.A. in Bayelsa State.
3. Determine the influence of the inclusion of women's views in decision-making processes on women's participation in governance in Sagbama L.G.A. in Bayelsa State.

Research Questions

1. How does gender inequality of political representation influence women's participation in governance in Sagbama L.G.A. in Bayelsa State?
2. How does gender inequality of political appointment influence women's participation in governance in Sagbama L.G.A. in Bayelsa State?
3. How does gender inequality of inclusion of women's views in decision-making processes influence women's participation in governance in Sagbama L.G.A. in Bayelsa State?

Hypotheses

Ho_1: Gender inequality in political representation does not have a significant influence on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

Ho_2: Gender inequality in political appointment does not have a significant influence on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

Ho_3: Gender inequality in the inclusion of women's views in decision-making processes does not have a significant influence on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

Conceptual Review

Meaning of Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is a deeply ingrained pervasive global issue in societies worldwide, impacting both men and women, though women tend to bear the brunt of its effects (World Bank, 2020). Gender inequality is the unequal treatment or perception of people because of their gender. This inequality usually results from societal norms and deeply ingrained prejudices, in which one gender is held above the other, most frequently, discrimination against women and girls.

Forms of Gender Inequality

According to Ramdin and Anwar (2024), Gender inequality is reflected in several forms:

1. **Marginalization (impoverishment, marginalization):** Marginalization is the attitude and behavior of society or the state that results in the exclusion of women and men. Marginalization is more about economic marginalization. Marginalization is also based on gender differences that limit the role of women. For example, women have less access to holding high-ranking positions in bureaucracy and the military, there are very few opportunities. And for men, he has less access to fields that require accuracy and meticulousness such as garment or cigarette workers (Ramdin & Anwar, 2024).

2. **Subordination (second-class)**: It is a belief that one sex is more favored than the other. Thus, it creates inequality, feeling like a second-class citizen, not having a space to express opinions, and so on. Moreover, it is supported by culture, customs, religious interpretations, bureaucratic regulations that make women subordinate, women have less opportunity to make decisions. For example, there are certain professions that make it a characteristic of women's professions such as secretaries and kindergarten teachers. In certain professions, there is a difference in salary between women and men, where men are higher (Ramdin & Anwar, 2024).
3. **Stereotypes (labeling):** Labeling that is often negative. In general, towards one particular sex. Stereotypes produce gender inequality and discrimination. For example, women are only associated with the domestic sector. Women are also portrayed as weak creatures, emotional, unable to lead, less rational in their lifetime. The standards of assessment for women and men are different, but the standards of assessment are more detrimental to women (Ramdin & Anwar, 2024).
4. **Double Burden**: The workload of one sex with another sex is greater. For example, a working woman still plays the role of a mother when she is at home. Ultimately, this role is delegated to domestic helpers, who are also women. So the burden does not shift to the other sex. For example, sharing roles with husbands about child care.
5. **Violence:** Violence is a form of violence, both physical and non-physical, perpetrated by one sex, family, society, or state against another sex. Violence simply originates from the distinction between feminine and masculine. This distinction has triggered violence. For example, rape, sexual violence, sexual harassment, assault, insults, sexual exploitation of women, etc. (Ramdin & Anwar, 2024).

Gender Inequality in Governance

Gender inequality in governance refers to the systematic disparities between men and women in opportunities to occupy decision-making and leadership positions within political, administrative, and public policy institutions. This form of inequality manifests through unequal access to political representation, constrained participation in governance processes, and cultural and structural barriers that limit women's influence in shaping public policy and development outcomes. Despite numerous global and national commitments to gender equity, women remain significantly underrepresented in governance structures in Nigeria, including at the national, state, and local government levels (Ezeneche, 2021; Tukura & Suleiman, 2024).

Meaning of Women's Participation

Women's Participation is conceived as the process and an outcome related to women's engagement in political and economic institutions by participating in bureaucracies, policy-making bodies, and representative organizations (Msoka, 2018). Women's participation also entails the active involvement of women in various aspects of society, including politics, economics, and social movements. Singh (2024) also opined that women representation in governance clearly means the presence and participation of women in political and decision-making processes at all levels of government. Hence, women representation in governance is crucial for achieving gender equality, improving governance, and fostering social and economic development. Efforts to enhance women's participation in political and decision-making processes are essential for creating inclusive and equitable societies (Singh, 2024; Baskaran et al., 2024).

Forms of Women's Participation in Governance

Singh (2024) highlighted the following forms of women's participation in governance:

1. **Political Representation: Elected Offices:** Women serving as members of parliament, councilors, and other elected bodies. **Executive Roles:** Women holding positions such as president, prime minister, governor, mayor, and ministers in the cabinet.
2. **Participation in Decision-Making**: Women being actively involved in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of policies and laws. Participation in advisory and consultative bodies, committees, and boards that influence public policy and governance (Singh, 2024).
3. **Equal Opportunities**: Ensuring that women have the same opportunities as men to run for office, participate in political activities, and hold leadership positions. Addressing structural barriers, such as discrimination, lack of access to resources, and societal norms that hinder women's political participation (Singh, 2024).
4. **Promoting Gender Equality:** Achieving gender balance in governance is a key component of overall gender equality. Women representation helps challenge and change patriarchal structures and norms (Singh, 2024).
5. **Diverse Perspectives:** Women bring unique experiences and perspectives to governance, which can lead to more comprehensive and inclusive policies. Issues particularly affecting women and children, such as healthcare, education, and family welfare, are more likely to be prioritized (Singh, 2024).
6. **Better Governance:** Diverse leadership often results in more transparent, accountable, and responsive governance. Studies indicate that higher women representation correlates with lower levels of corruption and improved trust in public institutions (Singh, 2024).
7. **Role Models:** Women in leadership positions serve as role models, inspiring other women and girls to pursue careers in politics and leadership. Their presence can shift societal attitudes towards women's capabilities and roles in society (Singh, 2024).
8. **Social and Economic Development:** Inclusive governance can lead to policies that support social and economic development, benefiting society as a whole. Women's economic empowerment and participation in governance are linked to broader economic growth and development (Singh, 2024).

Importance of Women's Participation in Governance

Ensuring that women are meaningfully represented in governance processes has multiple social, economic, and political benefits.

1. **Enhancement of Democratic Legitimacy:** Women's inclusion in decision-making strengthens the legitimacy of political systems by ensuring that governance structures reflect the diversity of the population. Democracies that exclude or marginalize women are, by definition, less representative and less responsive to the needs of their citizens (Dahlerup, 2006). When women are present in parliaments and decision-making bodies, public confidence in institutions increases, because governance becomes more inclusive of all societal stakeholders.
2. **Improvement in Policy Outcomes:** Studies shows that women often bring different perspectives and priorities to policy debates, especially in areas such as healthcare, education, child welfare, and social protection (World Bank, 2012). These policy areas disproportionately affect women and families, and women's perspectives can lead to more comprehensive and responsive policy frameworks. Moreover, women's participation has been linked to enhanced transparency and reduced corruption in public institutions.

3. **Promotion of Gender Equality and Social Justice:** Women's active participation in governance challenges historical patterns of exclusion and discrimination. It contributes directly to the reduction of gender disparities in public life and fosters broader cultural shifts toward gender equality (UN Women, 2015). Representation of women in leadership roles also serves as an empowering model for girls and young women, thus encouraging future generations to engage in civic life.
4. **Economic and Developmental Benefits:** Inclusion of women in governance is correlated with broader economic development. Policies that support women's rights and participation often align with improved economic performance and social welfare outcomes (OECD, 2017). Research indicates that countries with higher levels of women's political participation tend to prioritize investments in human capital, such as education and health, which are essential for sustainable development.

Theoretical Review

The study was anchored on Feminist theory of Mary Wollstonecraft (1794)

Feminist theory, or feminism, is a historically women-led movement that calls for an end to sexism in all forms. Feminists strive for social justice for those who have been oppressed by the patriarchy, a system of power dominated by men in society. Although feminists may differ on the best way to accomplish this, feminism as a whole is concerned with bringing about a better society for women, men, non-binary people, and everyone in between. Feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, Maya Angelou, and Mary Wollstonecraft want to create a better world where nobody is denied opportunity or respect as a result of their gender. The feminist theory of development has its main argument being that, women have a great influence in development therefore must be empowered to partake in decision making and its implementation. This theory plays much role in the building of women capacity and capabilities as development is concerned. Also, feminists were able to bring awareness of gender inequalities among societies and engaged in massive activities to emancipate women. Feminists succeeded in propounding theories namely, Women in Development (WID) and Woman and development (WAD) to promote equity.

Feminists claim that all people, regardless of their gender (but especially women), are viewed and treated differently under the patriarchal systems that dominate society. Feminists believe that the differences between the genders do not imply the superiority or inferiority of one over the others, and that gender oppression is the result of long-standing derogatory views of non-male people. Most feminists agree on five basic strategies: working to increase equality, expanding human choice, eliminating gender stratification, ending sexual violence, and promoting sexual freedom. Despite feminists' achievement on the theory, they seemed to address the interest of females instead of addressing issues concerned with gender as a whole. This was criticized by the Gender and development theory. Also, upon all the activities and struggle to attain a high standard of living for women, there are still high inequalities among our social world unaddressed. The feminist theory failed to point out the actual actions and procedures which must be taken by the society and men to empower women in development process but just emphasized on why women must be part and neglected the "how".

Significant of the theory to the Study

Feminist theory is highly significant to the study on gender inequality and women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State because it provides a critical analytical framework for understanding the structural and systemic nature of women's

marginalization in political processes. The theory explains how patriarchal social relations, power imbalances, and male-dominated institutions systematically exclude women from governance and decision-making positions, despite formal guarantees of equality.

In Sagbama L.G.A., feminist theory helps to interrogate how cultural norms, traditional leadership structures, and political party practices reinforce gender inequality by privileging men's political authority while constraining women's political participation. By foregrounding women's lived experiences, the theory enables the study to examine not only numerical underrepresentation but also the exclusion of women's voices from policy formulation and governance decisions. This perspective is particularly relevant in analyzing political representation, political appointments, and the inclusion of women's views in local governance.

Furthermore, feminist theory is significant because it advances the normative argument that inclusive governance and gender equality are essential for democratic development. It supports the study's advocacy for gender-responsive policies, affirmative action, and institutional reforms aimed at enhancing women's participation in governance at the local level. Thus, feminist theory strengthens the study's explanatory power by linking gender inequality in Sagbama L.G.A. to broader structures of power and by providing a theoretical basis for policy-oriented recommendations (UN Women, 2021).

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design and the population of the study comprised of women involved in governance in Sagbama LGA, including elected officials, appointed political representatives, community leaders, and women residents aged 18 years and above who have an interest in local governance. The sample size for the study was determined using an appropriate statistical formula to ensure representativeness and a stratified random sampling technique was used to select respondents proportionally across the wards of Sagbama L.G.A. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Gender Inequality and Women Participation in Governance Questionnaire (QIWPGQ)" to elicit data from the respondents. Pilot survey was used to establish the reliability of the instrument using test-retest method. The instrument was administered to respondents personally by trained research assistants. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses.

Results

Research Question 1: How does gender inequality of political representation influence women's participation in governance in Sagbama L.G.A. in Bayelsa State?

Ho_1: Gender inequality in political representation does not have a significant influence on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

Table 1: Summary of PPMC on the Influence of political representation on women's participation in governance in Sagbama L.G.A of Bayelsa State

		Political Representation	Women's Participation
Political Representation	Pearson Correlation	1	-.716**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	227	227
Women's Participation	Pearson Correlation	-.716**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	227	227

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 shows that the influence of gender inequality in political representation on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State is -0.716. This indicates that gender inequality in political representation has strong negative influence on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The sig. value showed that gender inequality in political representation has a significant influence on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State (p=0.000). Hence, the null hypothesis one is rejected at 0.05 level of significance (p<0.05).

Research Question 2: How does gender inequality of political appointment influence women's participation in governance in Sagbama L.G.A. in Bayelsa State?

$Ho_{2:}$ Gender inequality in political appointment does not have a significant influence on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

Table 2: Summary of PPMC on the Influence of Political Appointment on women's participation in governance in Sagbama L.G.A of Bayelsa State

		Political Appointment	Women's Participation
Political Appointment	Pearson Correlation	1	-.770**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	227	227
Women's Participation	Pearson Correlation	-.770**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	227	227

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows that the influence of gender inequality in political appointment on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State is -0.770. This indicates that gender inequality in political appointment has strong negative influence on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The sig. value

showed that gender inequality in political appointment has a significant influence on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State (p=0.000). Hence, the null hypothesis two is rejected at 0.05 level of significance (p<0.05).

Research Question 3: How does gender inequality of inclusion of women's views in decision-making processes influence women's participation in governance in Sagbama L.G.A. in Bayelsa State?

Ho_3: Gender inequality in the inclusion of women's views in decision-making processes does not have a significant influence on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

Table 3: Summary of PPMC on the Influence of Political Appointment on women's participation in governance in Sagbama L.G.A of Bayelsa State

		Inclusion in Decision-Making	**Women's Participation**
Inclusion in Decision-Making	Pearson Correlation	1	.512**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	227	227
Women's Participation	Pearson Correlation	.512**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	227	227

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 -tailed).

Table 3 shows that the influence of gender inequality in the inclusion of women's views in decision-making processes on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State is 0.512. This indicates that gender inequality in the inclusion of women's views in decision-making processes has moderate positive influence on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The sig. value showed that gender inequality in the inclusion of women's views in decision-making processes has a significant influence on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State (p=0.000). Hence, the null hypothesis three is rejected at 0.05 level of significance (p<0.05).

Discussion of Findings

The Influence of Gender Inequality in Political Representation on Women's Participation in Governance in Sagbama L.G.A of Bayelsa State

The result presented in table 1 revealed a strong and statistically significant negative relationship between gender inequality in political representation and women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area. This implies that as disparities in political representation widen, women's active engagement in governance correspondingly declines. The result underscores the structural nature of exclusion embedded within local political systems, where limited access to elective offices and leadership positions constrains women's visibility, voice, and influence in governance processes. This outcome aligns with previous research, which emphasizes that gender inequality in governance structures systematically restricts women's opportunities to occupy decision-making positions (Ezeneche, 2021; Tukura & Suleiman, 2024). Similarly, empirical studies have shown that women's political participation in Nigeria remains significantly constrained by

entrenched institutional and sociocultural barriers that limit their representation in elective offices (Salau et al., 2024). The strong negative correlation observed in this study therefore reinforces the argument that political representation is a critical determinant of meaningful participation. When women are underrepresented in formal political structures, their capacity to influence policy outcomes, advocate for community needs, and contribute to democratic development is substantially weakened. Consequently, addressing gender inequality in political representation is essential for enhancing inclusive governance and strengthening democratic legitimacy at the local government level.

The Influence of Gender Inequality in Political Appointment on Women's Participation in Governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State

The result in Table 2 showed a strong and statistically significant negative relationship between gender inequality in political appointments and women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area. This finding indicates that disparities in appointive political positions substantially diminish women's involvement in governance processes. In practical terms, when women are excluded from key appointive offices and strategic administrative roles, their opportunities to influence decision-making, policy implementation, and resource allocation are significantly constrained.

This finding aligns with previous research by Ezeneche (2021) and Tukura and Suleiman (2024), which highlights that gender inequality within governance structures often manifests through discriminatory appointment practices that limit women's access to leadership and decision-making roles. Similarly, empirical studies have noted that institutional barriers within political systems in Nigeria, including unequal access to appointive positions, continue to undermine women's effective political participation (Salau et al., 2024). The stronger negative correlation observed in this study suggests that political appointments may represent an even more critical avenue of exclusion than elective representation at the local level. Therefore, promoting equity in political appointments is essential to strengthening women's participation and fostering more inclusive and responsive governance in Sagbama Local Government Area.

The Influence of Gender Inequality in the Inclusion of Women's Views in Decision-Making Processes on Women's Participation in Governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State

The result in Table 3 indicates a moderate and statistically significant relationship between gender inequality in the inclusion of women's views in decision-making processes and women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area. This suggests that the extent to which women's perspectives are considered in policy formulation and governance discussions meaningfully shapes their level of participation. In essence, when women's voices are acknowledged and integrated into decision-making structures, their engagement in governance processes is strengthened; conversely, their exclusion reinforces patterns of marginalization and limits substantive participation. This result corroborates previous research emphasizing that women's active involvement in decision-making bodies is fundamental to achieving inclusive governance and equitable policy outcomes (Singh, 2024; Baskaran et al., 2024). Similarly, global policy evidence underscores that meaningful participation goes beyond numerical representation to include the effective integration of women's perspectives in governance processes, which enhances institutional responsiveness and legitimacy (UN Women, 2015). The moderate positive association observed in this study therefore highlights the importance of participatory inclusion as a critical dimension of governance. Ensuring that women's views are

systematically incorporated into local decision-making processes is essential for deepening democratic practice and promoting gender-responsive governance in Sagbama Local Government Area.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of gender inequality on women's participation in governance in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, with particular focus on political representation, political appointments, and the inclusion of women's views in decision-making processes. The findings revealed that gender inequality in both political representation and political appointments exerts a strong and significant negative influence on women's participation in governance, while the inclusion of women's perspectives in decision-making processes shows a significant relationship with their level of engagement. Overall, the study demonstrates that structural and institutional barriers embedded within local political systems continue to constrain women's effective participation in governance. Limited access to elective and appointive positions, coupled with inadequate integration of women's voices in policy processes, undermines inclusive governance and democratic development at the grassroots level. The study therefore concludes that reducing gender inequality in political structures and promoting the meaningful inclusion of women in decision-making are critical steps toward strengthening participatory governance and enhancing democratic legitimacy in Sagbama Local Government Area.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Local government authorities and political parties in Sagbama L.G.A. should adopt and strictly implement gender-responsive policies, including quota systems, to increase women's representation in elective and appointive political positions.
2. Transparent and merit-based political appointment processes should be institutionalized to eliminate gender bias and ensure equitable access for qualified women to strategic decision-making roles.
3. Formal mechanisms such as mandatory consultation forums and inclusive policy committees should be established to guarantee the systematic integration of women's views into local governance and decision-making processes.

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S/N	**Gender Inequality of Political Representation and Women Participation in Governance**	**VHE**	**HE**	**LE**	**VLE**
1	Limited number of women in elected political positions in Sagbama L.G.A. affects women's participation in the area				
2	Gender imbalance in legislative positions (councillorship) in Sagbama L.G.A. hinders women's ability to advocate for their rights and interests				
3	Underrepresentation of women in political party leadership positions in Sagbama L.G.A. limits women's participation				
4	The lack of women in visible political offices in Sagbama L.G.A. discourages other women from aspiring to leadership positions				
5	Unequal political representation of women in Sagbama L.G.A. affects their access to resources and opportunities for development				
	Gender Inequality of Political Appointment and Women Participaation in Governance				
6	Few women are appointed to key government positions in Sagbama L.G.A., which affects women's participation				
7	Gender bias in political appointments in Sagbama L.G.A. limits women's capacity to influence governance				
8	Women are excluded from strategic appointive positions (e.g., Secretary, Treasurer, Department Heads) in Sagbama L.G.A., hindering their participation				
9	Unequal appointment of women to political offices in Sagbama L.G.A. reduces their economic empowerment opportunities				
10	Gender inequality in political appointments in Sagbama L.G.A. undermines women's confidence in participating in governance				
	Gender Inequality of Inclusion of Women's Views in Decision-Making Processes and Women Participation				
11	Women's opinions are rarely considered in policy formulation and implementation in Sagbama L.G.A., affecting their participation				
12	Exclusion of women from community meetings and governance discussions in Sagbama L.G.A. limits their participation				
13	Women's perspectives on critical issues (education, health, security) are ignored in decision-making processes in Sagbama L.G.A., hindering their participation				
14	Limited consultation with women's groups and organizations in Sagbama L.G.A. during policy development affects women's participation				

15	The practice of making decisions without women's input in Sagbama L.G.A. reinforces gender inequality and weakens women's participation				
	Women's Participation in Governance in Sagbama L.G.A.				
16	Women actively participate in electoral processes (voting, campaigning, contesting) in Sagbama L.G.A.				
17	Women hold significant positions in local government administration and governance structures in Sagbama L.G.A.				
18	Women attend and contribute meaningfully to community development meetings and town hall sessions in Sagbama L.G.A.				
19	Women are involved in budget planning and resource allocation processes at the local government level in Sagbama L.G.A				
20	Women participate in oversight and monitoring of government programs and projects in Sagbama L.G.A.				
21	Women serve as members or leaders of committees, boards, and task forces in Sagbama L.G.A. governance				
22	Women engage in advocacy and lobbying for policies and programs that affect their communities in Sagbama L.G.A.				

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

BRIDGING GENDER GAPS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: A SOCIAL DEMAND PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper examined the persistent gender disparities in secondary school leadership roles through the lens of social demand. Drawing on contemporary research and global trends, it highlights how societal expectations, cultural norms, and policy frameworks shape both the opportunities and the barriers women face in attaining leadership positions. The paper outlines key factors contributing to the gender gap, including stereotypes, recruitment practices, and work-life balance challenges. It further argues that addressing these disparities requires not only institutional reforms but also a shift in community attitudes and systemic support for aspiring women leaders. The social demand perspective is presented as a holistic approach that integrates stakeholder engagement, advocacy, and policy innovation to foster more inclusive and equitable leadership structures in secondary education. In conclusion, the paper seeks for policy intervention, supportive school culture among others as well as suggested that promotion of work-life balance policies and supportive environments should be encouraged.

Keywords: *Social Demand, Educational Leadership, Gender Gap, Women Leadership.*

Introduction

The persistent under-representation of women in secondary school leadership roles remains a pressing issue across many educational systems worldwide. Despite significant progress in gender equity policies and the growing number of qualified female educators, leadership positions in secondary schools continue to be disproportionately occupied by men. Bridging these gender gaps is not merely a matter of fairness or equal opportunity; it is a response to a growing social demand for diverse, inclusive, and representative leadership that reflects the broader community. Examining the barriers and opportunities for women in school leadership through a social demand perspective, it is critical importance of addressing structural, cultural, and societal factors that influence the appointment and advancement of women in educational leadership. Ultimately, fostering gender-balanced leadership in secondary schools is essential for cultivating equitable educational environments and preparing students for a more inclusive society. It is glaring to observe that there still exist indices of gaps in the attainment of educational leadership between male and female in educational institutions despite concerted efforts made by organized organizations both locally and internationally at various levels. This phenomenon has dragged the development of education in Nigeria backward and has negative implications to growth and development of education especially in developing nations like Nigeria.

This paper examines the societal, cultural, and institutional factors that contribute to gender disparities in school leadership. It assesses the current state of gender representation in secondary school leadership roles and identifies the social and educational needs that drive the demand for more equitable gender representation. The paper proposes strategies and recommendations for bridging the gender gap and ensuring equal opportunities for all genders in leadership positions. Furthermore, it highlights the broader social benefits, including improved educational outcomes, increased diversity, and enhanced social justice, that result from gender equity in leadership.

Conceptual Framework

Gender: The word "gender" is a generic term, normally used to indicate the distinction between humans on the basis of the masculinity/feminist dichotomy. It is commonly used co-tremendously with "sex" to connote or denote the male-female divide in the society. It is also regarded as a socio-cultural construct that assigns roles, attitudes and values, considered appropriate for each sex. This stereotyping has also led to the dogmatic propagation of gender bias as an accepted pattern of behaviour, which has crept into all aspects of our lives, including education (Obielumani, 2010). UNICEF, (2017) defined gender as a social and cultural construct, which distinguishes differences in the attributes of men and women, girls and boys, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women. Gender-based roles and other attributes, therefore, change over time and vary with different cultural contexts. The concept according to UNICEF, includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). Gender refers to society's division of humanity, based on sex, into two distinctive categories. Gender guides how females and males think about themselves, how they interact with others, and what position they occupy in society as a whole. Thus, gender also operates as a dimension of social inequality (Omoregie, *et al.*,2009). Manlosa *et al.*, (2018), explain gender parity as a statistical means through which the numerical value and ratio of participation between the female to male are measured within a given indicator such as education. Gender is regarded as learned roles which are construed as not fixed but determined by social and cultural values which vary across countries and societal perspectives and is subject to possible changes through conscious government policies, societal awareness, media engagements and shift in traditions (Adeyeye *et al.,* 2019)

Gender Gaps: Gender equality means that women and men, girls and boys have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefiting from) economic, social, cultural and political development (UNICEF, 2017). Gender equity is the process of being fair to men and women, boys and girls, and importantly the equality of outcomes and results. Gender equity may involve the use of temporary special measures to compensate for historical or systemic bias or discrimination. It refers to differential treatment that is fair and positively addresses a bias or disadvantage that is due to gender roles or norms or differences between the sexes (UNICEF, 2017).

Gender equality is, therefore, the equal valuing by society of the similarities and the differences of men and women, and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in the home, community and society. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female (UNICEF, 2017). Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men and girls and boys are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups and that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes and prejudices about gender roles. Gender equality is a matter of human rights and is considered a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development (UNICEF, 2017). Equity ensures that women and men and girls and boys have an equal chance, not only at the starting point, but also when reaching the finishing line. It is about the fair and just treatment of both sexes that takes into account the different needs of the men and women, cultural barriers and (past) discrimination of the specific group.

UNICEF, (2018) define gender equality to means that women and men and girls and boys enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities, and protections. Ejumudo (2013) highlights the attainment of gender equality as fundamental to the achievement of sustainable development, identifying it as a catalyst and a sine-qua-non. Parity in education Refers to equivalent percentages of males and females in an education system (relative to the population per age group). Parity is essential but not sufficient for achieving gender equality. Over the last few decades, the issue of gender disparity and education equality has been a major topic in development discourses concerning Africa (Agyepong, 2001; Bolaji, 2018; Okon, 2016 and UNICEF, 201. The 2024 Global Gender Gap Index shows that while no country has achieved full gender parity, 97% of the economies included in this edition 2024 have closed more than 60% of their gap, compared to 85% in 2006. In 2024, LinkedIn data shows that women's workforce representation remains below men's across nearly every industry and economy, with women accounting for 42% of the global workforce and 31.7% of senior leaders. Top-level positions remain narrowly accessible for women, globally speaking, illustrated by the global “drop to the top”: in 2024. LinkedIn research indicates that worsening macro-economic conditions are linked to a decrease in hiring women into senior leadership roles. However, the higher women's representation in the workforce is, the greater the resilience to retrenchment during economic downturns (Global Gender Gap Report, 2024).

Gender Gaps in Educational Leadership in Nigeria: Gender gap in educational leadership in Nigeria refers to the significant disparity between men and women in leadership and decision-making positions within the education sector, particularly in roles such as principals, headteachers, administrators, and policymakers. As of 2024, this gap remains a pressing social and institutional challenge. The majority of school heads and principals are male, even though teaching staff at the primary level are predominantly female. In many states, less than 30% of headteachers and principals

are women. Decision-making positions in ministries of education and educational boards are overwhelmingly held by men.

Factors Contributing to Gender Gaps in School Leadership in Nigeria

Despite notable progress in educational access and professional advancement, significant gender gaps persist in school leadership positions across Nigeria. These disparities are shaped by a complex interplay of social, cultural, economic, and institutional factors that continue to limit opportunities for women to assume leadership roles within the educational sector. Understanding the underlying causes of these gender gaps is essential for developing effective policies and interventions that promote gender equity and harness the full potential of all educators. Currently, there are 258 male vice-chancellors in Nigeria and 12 female vice-chancellors which is about 95.3 percent to 4.7 percent (DATAPHYTE, 2025).

Women are greatly underrepresented as principals in secondary schools. According to a 2021 study less than 30% of secondary school principals in Nigeria are female. In some states, the percentage of female principals is as low as 10-15%. Gender gaps are wider in Northern Nigeria due to sociocultural and religious factors. In some Northern states, female representation in school leadership is below 10%. Southern states tend to have higher female participation, but the gap persists (UNESCO, 2022). There has been a slow increase in female leadership over the past decade, but the pace is not sufficient to close the gap soon. UNESCO (2022) reports that Nigeria lags behind the global average for women in school leadership positions, which stands at roughly 49% worldwide

The key factors that contribute to the under-representation of women in school leadership in Nigeria includes the following;

i. Societal and Cultural Norms: Deep-rooted patriarchal beliefs often limit women's advancement into leadership roles.
ii. Gender Stereotypes: Leadership is frequently associated with males, reinforcing biases and reducing opportunities for women.
iii. Workplace Barriers: Lack of mentorship, support, and networking opportunities for women, as well as gender-based discrimination and harassment.
iv. Family Responsibilities: Women often carry a disproportionate share of family and care-giving duties, which can hinder their career progression
v. Policy and Implementation Gaps: While Nigeria has policies promoting gender equality, weak implementation and lack of enforcement contribute to persistent gaps.

Efforts to Bridge Gender Gaps in Educational Leadership

In recent years, there has been a gradual increase in women's participation in educational leadership roles, especially in urban centers and within private educational institutions. This trend reflects broader societal shifts toward gender equity and the growing recognition of women's capabilities and contributions in the field of education. Urban areas and private institutions often have more progressive policies and greater resources, which can translate into more opportunities for women to enter and advance in leadership positions such as principals, department heads, or administrators. Several advocacy groups and government initiatives have emerged to further promote women's leadership in education. These organizations work to raise awareness, provide training and mentorship, and advocate for policy changes that support the advancement of women. For instance, some government programs offer scholarships or leadership development workshops specifically for women, aiming to equip them with the skills and confidence needed to assume leadership roles.

Advocacy groups often spotlight successful female leaders as role models and push for institutional reforms, such as gender-sensitive hiring practices and family-friendly workplace policies.

Despite these encouraging efforts, the overall impact on women's representation in educational leadership remains limited. While more women are enrolling in and completing higher degrees—an important qualification for leadership positions—the transition from academic achievement to leadership attainment is hindered by persistent barriers. These include deep-seated gender stereotypes, lack of access to influential professional networks, work-life balance challenges, and sometimes subtle forms of discrimination within educational settings. As a result, the leadership pipeline is described as "leaky": although more women are equipped with the necessary credentials, many do not ultimately secure or retain leadership roles. Addressing the root causes of this leakage requires a multifaceted approach. This includes strengthening mentor-ship and sponsorship programs, implementing transparent and equitable promotion practices, fostering inclusive workplace cultures, and ensuring that support systems are in place for women balancing leadership with personal responsibilities. Only through sustained and comprehensive strategies can the gains in women's educational attainment be translated into meaningful, long-term representation in leadership roles across all sectors of education.

Implications of Social Demand and Gender Gaps in School Leadership

The lack of female perspectives in leadership affects policy, school environments, and student outcomes. Fewer women in leadership reduces the availability of female role models for young girls. The implications of social demand and gender gaps in school leadership are significant and multifaceted. Social demand refers to the expectations and needs of communities for effective, representative, and responsive school leadership. As societies evolve, there is increasing pressure for school leaders to reflect the diversity of the populations they serve, including gender representation. However, persistent gender gaps in school leadership positions—where men are often over-represented in principal and administrative roles—can lead to several challenges. These gaps may perpetuate stereotypes, limit role models for students, and reinforce unequal power structures within educational institutions. When women are underrepresented in leadership, schools may miss out on diverse perspectives, innovative leadership styles, and inclusive decision-making. Addressing these gaps is crucial for fostering equitable school environments. Promoting gender equity in leadership can improve organizational culture, enhance school performance, and inspire all students to aspire to leadership roles, regardless of gender. Therefore, bridging gender gaps in school leadership is not only a matter of fairness but also essential for meeting the social demand for inclusive and effective education systems.

Conclusion

Addressing gender gaps in secondary school leadership through a social demand perspective highlights the importance of community expectations, policy interventions, and supportive school cultures. By recognizing and responding to the societal need for more equitable representation, stakeholders can implement strategies that empower women, foster inclusive environments, and ultimately improve educational outcomes for all. Bridging these gaps is not only a matter of fairness but also a critical step toward achieving broader educational and social goals. Although specific percentages differ by source and state, official statistics and academic research consistently indicate that women remain underrepresented in educational leadership positions in Nigeria. Women frequently constitute less than 30% of headteachers and principals, despite comprising the majority of the teaching workforce at lower levels.

Suggestions

i. Strengthen enforcement of gender-equality policies in education.
ii. Provide mentorship and leadership training programs for female educators.
iii. Promote work-life balance policies and supportive environments.
iv. Address cultural and institutional barriers through awareness campaigns.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

TEACHERS AS CATALYST: MAINSTREAMING GENDER INCLUSIVITY BEYOND THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIA

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Abstract

Teachers form the backbone of every educational system because the entire structure of education revolves around their roles and activities. They serve as central figures in the management and transmission of knowledge. However, despite the presence of curriculum policies that promote gender inclusivity, notable gaps still remain in practice. This paper contends that curriculum reform alone is insufficient to eliminate the deeply rooted societal norms that continue to sustain gender inequality. The paper emphasizes that teachers play a critical role in guiding learners from ignorance toward knowledge, yet their potential in advancing gender inclusivity is often underutilized. Consequently, empowering teachers to integrate gender-inclusive practices into their teaching is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in 21st-century Nigeria. It argues for a deliberate expansion of teachers' responsibilities beyond the formal curriculum to include critically analyzing instructional materials, adopting inclusive teaching strategies, serving as positive role models, and advocating within their communities. Through these roles, teachers can help bridge the gap between policy intentions and the realities experienced in schools and society. Furthermore, the study examines key concepts such as gender inclusivity, curriculum, teachers, secondary education, and sustainable development. It also identifies several challenges that hinder the effective integration of gender inclusivity within the Nigerian educational system and suggests strategies for promoting gender-inclusive practices in secondary schools. The paper concludes that empowering teachers as catalysts of change is not merely a pedagogical approach but a necessary step toward translating policy into meaningful action and unlocking Nigeria's potential for sustainable development. Among its recommendations is the need for continuous professional development programs that equip teachers with the skills and knowledge required to promote gender inclusivity effectively.

Keywords: *Curriculum, Gender inclusivity, Secondary school, Sustainable development, Teachers'*

Introduction

Education is the process through which individuals develop the physical, intellectual, and social competencies required by the society into which they are born, enabling them to function effectively and contribute meaningfully to societal progress. It is widely recognized as a basic human right because it equips people with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to lead productive lives and participate actively in national development. Education is also regarded as the foundation of national advancement, as it promotes literacy, facilitates skill acquisition, drives technological progress, and strengthens the capacity of a nation to effectively utilize its human and material resources in pursuit of collective goals. In Nigeria, the importance of education—particularly at the secondary school level—cannot be overstated. Secondary education represents a critical transitional phase between basic education and higher education or vocational engagement. During this stage, learners develop cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor abilities that prepare them to become productive members of society, including future professionals, entrepreneurs, and civic leaders. At this formative period, adolescents begin to cultivate their sense of civic responsibility, leadership aspirations, and entrepreneurial thinking, which ultimately shapes their participation in governance, economic activities, and community development. Secondary education therefore constitutes a unique and essential stage within the formal education system. It serves as the link between foundational schooling and advanced learning, equipping students with the academic knowledge, practical skills, and vocational competencies needed for further education or entry into the labor market. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) defines secondary education as the level of education that children receive after completing primary education and before proceeding to tertiary institutions. Its primary objectives are to prepare individuals for useful living within society and to lay the foundation for higher education. Thus, secondary education goes beyond merely extending primary schooling; it represents a transformative phase with multiple purposes, including preparing learners for civic engagement, employment opportunities, and advanced academic pursuits. At this level, subjects such as Civic Education, Social Studies, Entrepreneurship Education, and Business Studies provide important opportunities to integrate gender-inclusive principles into teaching and learning processes.

Despite the existence of policies designed to promote equality, gender disparities continue to limit the full participation of both male and female students in educational and socio-economic activities. These inequalities manifest in several ways, including unequal access to educational opportunities, persistent gender stereotypes during classroom interactions, and the underrepresentation of girls in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. The roots of this educational imbalance often appear early in schooling, producing ripple effects that influence life opportunities and outcomes across generations. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), Nigeria still faces a significant gender gap in areas such as political representation and employment opportunities. Recent reports also indicate that approximately 7.6 million girls remain out of school at the primary and junior secondary levels. The situation is particularly severe in the Northeast and Northwest regions of the country, where poverty, insecurity, and entrenched cultural practices continue to hinder girls' access to education (UNICEF, 2025). Over the past two decades, global initiatives have emphasized the importance of promoting gender equality and integrating gender considerations into educational systems. Although several countries have made notable progress toward achieving gender parity in education (World Bank, 2012), challenges remain in ensuring equitable participation and outcomes.

In response, Nigeria's education sector has adopted several policy frameworks aimed at promoting equal access and participation in education. The National Policy on Education, developed by the

Federal Ministry of Education, emphasizes the provision of equal educational opportunities regardless of gender (Federal Ministry of Education, 2014). Furthermore, Nigeria aligns its educational objectives with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 5 (Gender Equality), which advocate inclusive, equitable education and the empowerment of women and girls (United Nations, 2015). However, research indicates that gender bias still persists in Nigerian secondary schools. Subtle classroom dynamics often reinforce stereotypes, affecting students' participation in STEM subjects, leadership roles, and entrepreneurial activities. Additionally, socio-cultural factors—such as early marriage in certain regions and deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs—continue to shape girls' educational participation and future career prospects. Consequently, educational institutions are expected to cultivate environments that promote gender inclusivity, mutual respect, and equal opportunities for all learners.

Nigeria has demonstrated formal commitment to these principles through several policy initiatives. The National Policy on Education affirms that education is a right for every citizen irrespective of gender. Similarly, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme introduced in 1999 aimed to provide free and compulsory education to all Nigerian children. Nevertheless, research by Adeyemo and Muhammad (2026) reveals that gender bias still manifests within classroom practices. For instance, teachers often interact more frequently with male students and tend to assign them more intellectually demanding tasks, while female students are frequently praised for qualities such as obedience and neatness. Such practices reinforce traditional gender stereotypes and may influence students' confidence levels, participation in classroom activities, and long-term academic and career ambitions.

Gender inclusivity refers to the practice of ensuring that individuals of all genders have equal access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making power, while recognizing and valuing their diverse experiences and needs. It goes beyond achieving equal enrollment figures and extends to ensuring balanced participation in classroom discussions, leadership roles, and the distribution of educational resources. According to the United Nations (2015), gender equality encompasses not only equal rights but also equal opportunities and outcomes across social, economic, and political spheres. Within educational settings, achieving gender inclusivity requires dismantling both structural and cultural barriers that limit learners' participation, while ensuring equitable representation in curriculum content, teaching approaches, and assessment practices. It also involves identifying and addressing hidden biases embedded within the informal or "hidden" curriculum.

Teachers occupy a central position within the education system as interpreters and implementers of the curriculum. Beyond delivering subject knowledge, they shape students' attitudes, influence career aspirations, and create classroom environments that can either challenge or reinforce gender stereotypes. However, many teacher education programmes do not adequately prepare educators with the knowledge and skills required for gender-responsive teaching practices, thereby limiting their ability to effectively promote inclusivity (Ezegwu, 2021). In the rapidly evolving context of the twenty-first century—characterized by digital innovation, entrepreneurship, and global interconnectedness—teachers are expected to go beyond routine instruction and assume transformative leadership roles. The extent to which curriculum reforms translate into meaningful social impact largely depends on teachers' pedagogical orientation and professional commitment. As a result, adopting gender-responsive instructional strategies, fostering inclusive classroom environments, and engaging actively with communities become essential for integrating gender inclusivity beyond the written curriculum.

Curriculum itself refers to the organized set of learning experiences designed and delivered by an educational institution. It outlines the knowledge and skills students are expected to acquire, the methods through which instruction is delivered, the resources used for teaching, and the criteria used to evaluate learning outcomes (Mohanna, 2023). The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2020) identifies the curriculum as the central framework guiding teaching and learning activities, playing a critical role in shaping access to education, student retention, and equity. However, in many instances the curriculum remains disconnected from local economic realities and fails to equip learners with practical skills needed for entrepreneurship, employment, and community development. The current Nigerian secondary school curriculum often lacks the flexibility, inclusiveness, and contextual relevance needed to engage all learners effectively. Its structure and delivery sometimes fail to address the realities faced by students in rural communities, nomadic populations, and conflict-affected areas, thereby worsening gender disparities in education. Addressing these challenges requires the deliberate integration of gender-inclusive principles that ensure every learner feels valued, respected, and supported regardless of gender.

Although Nigeria has established several policy frameworks promoting gender equality in education, a significant gap still exists between policy intentions and classroom realities. While the formal secondary school curriculum is essential, it alone cannot bring about profound social transformation toward gender equality. For example, textbooks often overlook female authors and role models, classroom discussions may unintentionally reinforce male dominance, and curricular content rarely provides opportunities to critically examine the social structures that sustain gender inequality. When schools fail to actively promote gender inclusivity beyond textbook content, they risk reinforcing discriminatory norms, which undermines national aspirations for social cohesion, economic growth, and sustainable development.

At the same time, many teachers lack sufficient training in gender-responsive pedagogy, resulting in limited awareness of how everyday classroom practices may unintentionally perpetuate inequality. Their influence must therefore extend beyond the confines of the formal curriculum. Achieving sustainable development through gender inclusivity requires more than revising textbooks; it demands a fundamental shift that empowers and equips teachers to model, promote, and advocate for gender equality within and beyond the classroom. By shaping attitudes, behaviours, and social norms within schools and surrounding communities, teachers can play a transformative role in fostering a more inclusive society. As the primary implementers of the curriculum, teachers hold the key to bridging the gap between policy and practice and to building a more equitable and sustainable future for Nigeria in the twenty-first century.

Conceptual Clarifications

Concept of Gender Inclusivity

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expectations, and power relations that societies assign to males and females. Unlike biological sex—which is determined by physiological and genetic characteristics—gender is shaped through socialization processes, cultural traditions, institutional practices, and historical contexts. The World Health Organization (2023) defines gender as the socially constructed attributes, norms, roles, and relationships associated with women, men, girls, and boys across different societies. This view emphasizes that gender identities and roles are not biologically predetermined but are created and reinforced through social interactions and cultural practices. As such, they can be transformed through education, progressive policies, and broader social change. Similarly, UNESCO (2019) describes gender as a socio-cultural concept that

significantly influences individuals' access to resources, participation in decision-making processes, and opportunities for education and development. In the Nigerian context, dominant patriarchal traditions continue to shape gender relations, often determining patterns of involvement in governance, entrepreneurship, and public leadership. Understanding gender as a socially constructed concept provides a theoretical basis for positioning teachers as transformative agents capable of challenging entrenched inequalities and reshaping societal norms through curriculum implementation and educational practice.

Gender inclusivity, therefore, refers to the deliberate effort to ensure that individuals of all genders have equitable access to resources, opportunities, and positions of influence, while acknowledging and respecting their diverse needs and experiences. It goes beyond achieving equal enrollment rates to encompass fair participation in classroom interactions, equal access to leadership opportunities, and the just distribution of educational resources. According to the United Nations (2015), gender equality involves not only the provision of equal rights but also the assurance of equal opportunities and outcomes across social, economic, and political spheres. Within educational environments, fostering gender inclusivity requires addressing and dismantling structural and cultural barriers that restrict learners' participation. It also involves ensuring balanced representation in curriculum content, adopting inclusive teaching methods, and applying fair assessment practices. Additionally, promoting gender inclusivity requires confronting and correcting the subtle biases and stereotypes embedded in the hidden curriculum that often shape students' attitudes and perceptions.

Gender equality itself is widely recognized as a fundamental human right that guarantees all individuals—regardless of gender—equal rights, responsibilities, opportunities, and protection under the law. It promotes equal access to education, economic participation, and leadership roles while contributing to dignity, social justice, and sustainable development. Within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), gender equality is identified as a key driver of sustainable development, particularly through the promotion of inclusive and equitable education systems that equip all learners with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for meaningful participation in society and economic productivity. Although Nigeria's National Policy on Education affirms the principle of equal educational opportunities for all citizens irrespective of gender (FME, 2013), the practical integration of this commitment into curriculum content, teaching practices, and school culture remains inconsistent despite constitutional guarantees and international commitments.

Empirical studies indicate that gender stereotypes continue to be reinforced through instructional materials and classroom interactions. Many textbooks portray males predominantly in leadership, scientific, and entrepreneurial roles, while females are frequently depicted in supportive or domestic positions. Such portrayals can shape students' perceptions of societal expectations and influence their views about appropriate career paths. Consequently, female learners may internalize limiting beliefs about their capabilities, which can discourage their participation in leadership, entrepreneurship, and other fields traditionally perceived as male-dominated. These patterns ultimately reinforce existing barriers to gender equality and highlight the need for deliberate educational interventions that promote more balanced and inclusive representations within teaching and learning environments.

Teachers

A teacher is generally defined as a professionally trained individual who possesses the knowledge, skills, and competence required to facilitate learning and guide students' development (TRCN, 2002).

In this sense, teaching goes beyond the mere delivery of information; it involves shaping learners' intellectual growth, attitudes, and behaviour. Mbakwem (2002) further describes a teacher as a person who combines mastery of subject content with appropriate pedagogical skills in order to lead learners through organized learning experiences that encourage knowledge acquisition and the development of practical competencies. The behaviour and disposition of a teacher—reflected in their tone of voice, classroom comments, level of enthusiasm, and interest in the subject—can significantly influence students both directly and indirectly. Through their actions and interactions, teachers shape learners' motivation, attitudes, and engagement with the learning process.

Within the broader framework of social transformation, a catalyst refers to an agent that stimulates or accelerates change within a system. Teachers function as catalysts when they intentionally promote positive values, challenge discriminatory beliefs, and encourage inclusive participation through their instructional methods and leadership roles. From the perspective of curriculum theory, teachers are not simply transmitters of predetermined content; rather, they are active interpreters who transform educational policies and curricular guidelines into meaningful classroom practices. In the Nigerian educational context, the influence of teachers extends beyond academic instruction to include the promotion of moral values, civic awareness, and social role modelling. Their beliefs, attitudes, and classroom practices play a vital role in determining whether gender-inclusive policies are effectively implemented or unintentionally weakened. In this regard, Ibara (2017) emphasizes that teachers act as role models and agents of socialization who significantly shape students' perspectives on gender equality, citizenship, and social responsibility.

Secondary School

In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) defines secondary education as the stage of schooling that learners undergo after completing primary education and before proceeding to tertiary institutions. The policy outlines two major objectives for secondary education: preparing individuals for meaningful and productive living within society and equipping them for further academic pursuits. To accomplish these goals, secondary education is structured to last six years and is divided into two phases—Junior Secondary School (JSS) and Senior Secondary School (SSS). The junior level focuses on providing foundational knowledge and basic skills across a range of subjects, while the senior level offers a broader and more comprehensive curriculum. This stage combines core academic subjects with practical and entrepreneurial studies aimed at producing well-rounded learners capable of adapting to socio-economic realities. Although the inclusion of compulsory trade and vocational subjects demonstrates a progressive effort to address challenges such as unemployment, the expected outcomes have not been fully realized due to ongoing implementation constraints and difficulties in aligning the system with global educational standards. The Senior Secondary School curriculum, which typically spans three years for students between the ages of 15 and 18, represents the final phase of secondary education in Nigeria.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), secondary education represents the stage that completes the foundation of basic education initiated at the primary level and seeks to promote lifelong learning and human development. It does this by offering more specialized instruction in academic and skill-oriented subjects delivered by subject specialists (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012). As such, secondary education plays a significant role in both personal development and national advancement. It functions as a critical transition between basic schooling and higher education while also preparing learners for participation in the labour market. Through this stage of education, students acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values required for personal fulfillment, professional development, and responsible citizenship.

Despite its importance, gender inclusivity within secondary education is often treated as a separate or peripheral topic rather than being integrated as a central principle guiding teaching practices, classroom interactions, evaluation procedures, and student leadership opportunities. Moreover, elements of the hidden curriculum—including teachers' expectations, portrayals in textbooks, classroom participation patterns, and the broader culture of the school environment—frequently reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. These subtle influences can shape learners' perceptions of gender roles and affect their academic confidence and aspirations.

The secondary school curriculum itself can be described as a systematic framework that specifies the learning objectives, subject content, teaching methods, and assessment procedures used to guide instruction at this level of education. According to Olubukola (2024), the secondary school curriculum is designed to expand on the foundational knowledge gained during earlier stages of schooling while equipping students with the competencies required for higher education and various vocational pathways. By structuring learning experiences in this way, the curriculum aims to prepare young people for both academic advancement and meaningful participation in the socio-economic development of society.

Curriculum

Curriculum can be understood as an organized body of learning experiences provided by an educational institution to guide the teaching and learning process. According to Mohanna (2023), it specifies what learners are expected to study, the approaches used for instruction, the learning resources required, and the criteria and procedures used to assess students' academic progress. More broadly, the curriculum encompasses subject content, instructional strategies, organizational frameworks, learning activities, and evaluation techniques that structure educational delivery (McDonald, 2024; Price, 2008).

Similarly, Wahab and Arubuo (2021) describe curriculum as the entire body of knowledge and learning experiences transmitted to students by educators both within and beyond the classroom in order to achieve predetermined educational goals. From this perspective, the curriculum extends beyond a simple compilation of subjects; it represents a comprehensive framework designed to stimulate intellectual development and guide learners toward meaningful educational outcomes. In support of this view, Okoro (2016) explains that curriculum embodies the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that a nation seeks to transmit to its citizens through the formal education system. These societal expectations and aspirations are organized into different school subjects and learning experiences across various levels of education. Thus, the curriculum functions not merely as a list of academic subjects but as a powerful instrument for intellectual development and societal transformation.

The curriculum also plays a significant role in promoting civic values and nurturing responsible, democratic citizens (Amadi & Anele, 2022). However, in Nigeria, the secondary school curriculum has often been criticized for placing excessive emphasis on memorization and theoretical knowledge, sometimes presenting content that is disconnected from students' lived realities. Such limitations reduce its effectiveness in fostering democratic ideals and critical thinking skills (Enu & Eba, 2011). Moreover, although teachers are responsible for implementing the curriculum, many lack adequate preparation in gender-responsive teaching methods, which limits the effectiveness of policies designed to promote inclusivity. Research indicates that subtle forms of gender bias continue to exist in Nigerian secondary school classrooms, including disparities in teaching practices, limited representation of female role models in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM),

and persistent societal stereotypes that influence students' participation and aspirations (Olarowaju et al., 2026). Ultimately, the manner in which teachers deliver lessons and interact with learners determines whether the principles of equity and inclusion are effectively realized in practice. Therefore, a comprehensive curriculum should incorporate value-oriented education that encourages fairness, inclusivity, and the development of democratic and sustainable societal practices.

Sustainable development

The Brundtland Report (1987) defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations, 2015). This concept emphasizes a balanced approach to development that integrates economic progress, environmental protection, and social well-being in order to ensure long-term prosperity for societies. Sustainable development is therefore built on three major interconnected pillars.

First, economic sustainability focuses on promoting economic growth that benefits all segments of society. It seeks to ensure that development opportunities are distributed fairly and that economic systems create employment, reduce poverty, and improve the standard of living for citizens. Second, environmental sustainability involves protecting natural ecosystems and managing resources responsibly so that they remain available for future generations. This includes reducing environmental degradation, minimizing pollution, promoting efficient use of natural resources, and addressing the impacts of climate change. Third, social sustainability emphasizes the promotion of social justice, equality, and inclusiveness. It ensures that individuals and communities have access to essential resources such as education, healthcare, and economic opportunities while fostering social cohesion and equity.

Within the Nigerian context, sustainable development is closely linked to inclusive human capital development, entrepreneurial innovation, democratic governance, and social harmony. Education plays a central role in achieving these objectives, particularly when it promotes gender inclusivity. By ensuring that both boys and girls have equal opportunities to learn and develop their capabilities, education can help break persistent cycles of poverty and marginalization. When girls are equipped with relevant knowledge and skills, they are better positioned to participate in economic activities, make informed life choices, and contribute to national development. Consequently, strengthening gender inclusivity in educational institutions aligns with both national development priorities and global initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, SDG 4, which promotes inclusive and quality education, and SDG 5, which focuses on achieving gender equality, highlight the importance of equitable learning opportunities for all. By promoting fair access to education and empowering both male and female learners, Nigeria can build a stronger human capital base, reduce social disparities, and accelerate progress toward sustainable national development.

Challenges that hinder effective Mainstreaming of gender inclusivity in Nigeria

Despite Nigeria's formal commitment to various international treaties and frameworks promoting gender equality, several persistent challenges continue to hinder the effective realization of these commitments. These obstacles affect both the educational system and broader societal efforts to promote gender inclusivity.

i. **Cultural and Religious Patriarchy**: Deeply rooted patriarchal traditions and cultural norms in many Nigerian communities continue to place men in dominant positions of authority and influence. These beliefs often limit women's participation in leadership, governance, and

decision-making processes. Such social expectations reinforce gender hierarchies and make it difficult to achieve equal representation and opportunities for women and girls.

ii. **Socio-economic Constraints**: High levels of poverty and unequal access to quality education, particularly for girls, restrict women's economic empowerment and independence. Families facing financial hardship may prioritize the education of boys over girls, thereby limiting girls' educational attainment and future employment opportunities.

iii. **Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy**: Early marriage and adolescent pregnancy remain significant barriers to girls' continued participation in secondary education, especially in rural areas and parts of Northern Nigeria. These practices often lead to school dropout, reducing girls' chances of completing their education and limiting their long-term socio-economic prospects. As a result, efforts to promote gender equality and inclusive education are weakened.

iv. **Gender Stereotyping within Curriculum and School Culture**: Gender biases embedded in textbooks, classroom interactions, and broader school culture frequently reinforce traditional gender roles. These stereotypes shape students' perceptions of suitable careers and academic fields, often discouraging girls from pursuing disciplines such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Such representations contribute to persistent gender disparities in certain fields of study.

v. **Inadequate Teacher Training in Gender-Responsive Pedagogy**: Many teachers lack sufficient training in gender-responsive teaching approaches. Without professional development in inclusive instructional practices, gender-sensitive curriculum delivery, and equitable assessment methods, educators may unintentionally reinforce existing biases rather than challenge them. This limits the effectiveness of gender equality policies within the classroom.

vi. **Policy Implementation** Gaps: Although several policies supporting gender equality in education exist, their implementation often faces significant challenges. These include insufficient funding for gender-focused programmes, delayed or incomplete release of allocated resources, and weak monitoring mechanisms. Such gaps reduce the practical impact of policy initiatives.

vii. **Insecurity and School-Related Gender-Based Violence**: Safety concerns present another major barrier to girls' education. In some areas, insecurity during travel to and from school, as well as incidents of gender-based violence within or around school environments, discourage families from allowing girls to attend school regularly. These threats undermine efforts to create safe and inclusive learning environments.

viii. Together, these challenges highlight the complexity of achieving gender equality in Nigeria's educational system and underscore the need for coordinated interventions involving policy reform, community engagement, teacher training, and improved school safety measures.

Strategies for promoting gender inclusivity in Nigerian secondary schools

i. Gender-Responsive Pedagogy: teachers should tailor lesson plans to address the systematic learning needs of boys and girls, ensuring equal opportunities for participation.

ii. Classroom management: arranging of classroom seating, groupings and activities to foster interaction between genders and prevent the dominance of space by one group'

iii. Role modelling and mentorship: teachers should demonstrate gender fairness and respect, also encourage girls and boys equally in leadership and STEM

iv. Inclusive language and materials: using gender neutral language and selecting teaching material, images, and examples that avoid traditional gender stereotypes.

v. Addressing Bias: actively identifying and mitigating personal biases in, for example calling on students or assigning tasks which can be achieve through self-reflection and professional training.
vi. Safety and Environment: creating a safe, welcoming environment that prevents sexual harassment and promote gender equity.
vii. Teachers'' continuous professional development and self-reflection on gender-responsive pedagogy.
viii. Collaborate with parents, school leaders and community groups to promote gender equality values outside the classroom
ix. There should be ongoing monitoring to assess what is working and what needs adjustment.

Conclusion.

Teachers play a crucial role as agents of change in shaping the values, attitudes, and perspectives of future generations. Although considerable progress has been made in integrating gender equality into educational policies and curriculum frameworks, achieving true gender inclusivity requires more than policy statements or curriculum adjustments. It demands transformative teaching practices that extend beyond the formal curriculum and influence everyday classroom experiences. While curriculum reforms are important, they alone cannot dismantle the deeply rooted cultural norms and societal beliefs that continue to sustain gender inequality. For meaningful progress to occur, teachers must be intentionally empowered to critically examine, interpret, and adapt the curriculum they implement in their daily classroom practices. Through their instructional methods, interactions with students, and professional conduct, teachers have the capacity to significantly influence learners' attitudes and aspirations. In this way, they can make a tangible impact not only on students' academic development but also on broader societal progress and sustainable development in Nigeria. In the twenty-first century, Nigeria's development depends largely on its ability to harness the full potential of all its citizens. This process begins within the classroom, where teachers can consciously challenge gender stereotypes, broaden learners' opportunities, and model principles of equality and mutual respect. By deliberately promoting gender-inclusive practices within secondary education, teachers can help create learning environments that encourage fairness, participation, and equal opportunities for all students. Ultimately, mainstreaming gender inclusivity within the secondary school system can make a significant contribution to sustainable development and the overall advancement of the nation.

Recommendations

To effectively advance gender inclusivity and support sustainable development in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proposed:

i. Promoting reflective and inclusive teaching practices: Teachers should continually engage in self-reflection regarding their attitudes, instructional approaches, and classroom interactions. They should adopt intentional and equitable classroom management strategies, promote inclusive dialogue by using gender-sensitive language, and actively challenge stereotypes that may affect students' confidence and participation. In addition, educators should carefully review and adapt instructional materials to identify and eliminate gender bias, ensuring that learning resources represent both male and female perspectives fairly.
ii. Strengthening the role of school leadership: School administrators should develop and implement clear gender-responsive policies within schools. They should also support continuous professional development for teachers on gender-inclusive education, foster a school culture that promotes equality and respect, and encourage active engagement with

parents and local communities. Facilitating teachers' participation in workshops, seminars, and conferences related to gender education can further strengthen their capacity to implement inclusive practices.

iii. Enhancing curriculum and policy frameworks: Curriculum developers and policymakers should review and revise the existing curriculum through a gender-sensitive lens to ensure balanced representation and inclusive content. Teacher education programmes should also be restructured to incorporate training in gender-responsive pedagogy. In addition, stronger policy frameworks and effective monitoring mechanisms should be established to ensure that gender equality initiatives are properly implemented in schools.

iv. Encouraging community collaboration: Teachers should work closely with parents, community leaders, and civil society organizations to raise awareness about the importance of gender equality and equal educational opportunities for both boys and girls. Community-based engagement initiatives can play a vital role in addressing cultural beliefs and practices that discourage girls' participation in education.

v. Utilizing digital technology for inclusion: Teachers should make effective use of digital technologies to expand inclusive learning opportunities. Encouraging girls to participate in digital literacy programmes, coding activities, and technology-driven projects can help reduce the gender digital divide and better prepare students for participation in a modern, knowledge-based economy.

vi. Integrating gender perspectives across subjects: Gender inclusivity should be incorporated across all subject areas rather than being limited to subjects such as Civic Education or Social Studies. For example, science lessons can highlight the contributions of female scientists, while business and entrepreneurship education can showcase successful women entrepreneurs. Such integration helps normalize gender equality and broaden students' perspectives on leadership and career possibilities.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

POLITICS AND MANAGEMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This paper examines the intricate relationship between politics and institutional leadership management in university education within Rivers State, Nigeria. Political interference pervades critical dimensions of university governance, including leadership appointments, academic course allocation, and resource distribution, significantly compromising institutional effectiveness and academic excellence. The paper reveals that politicised leadership appointments create legitimacy challenges, whilst political considerations in course allocation undermine educational quality and faculty morale. Resource allocation driven by political imperatives rather than academic priorities generates institutional imbalances and developmental fragmentation. These political dynamics produce multifaceted management challenges, including leadership conflicts, policy inconsistency, erosion of meritocracy, and administrative inefficiency, which collectively constrain universities' capacity to fulfil their educational and developmental mandates. However, the paper suggested that politics and university management need not be inherently antagonistic. Through strengthening institutional autonomy, implementing transparent appointment procedures, instituting robust governance reforms, and fostering meaningful stakeholder engagement, Rivers State universities can achieve balanced arrangements that respect academic freedom whilst maintaining legitimate governmental accountability, thereby enabling effective and ethical institutional leadership.

Keywords: *Institutional Leadership, University Governance, Political Interference, Management.*

Introduction

University education represents a critical pillar for societal advancement, economic development, and knowledge production in any modern state. In Rivers State, Nigeria, the intersection of politics and institutional leadership in university management has become increasingly significant, particularly as these institutions navigate the complex terrain of educational policy implementation, resource allocation, and administrative autonomy. The political dimensions of university governance extend beyond mere administrative concerns to encompass fundamental questions about institutional independence, academic freedom, and the capacity of universities to fulfill their developmental mandates (Emmanuel & Ede, 2025). The background to university education in Nigeria, and Rivers State specifically, reveals a system deeply embedded within broader political structures and power dynamics. Since the establishment of universities in Nigeria, political interference has manifested in various forms, from the appointment of principal officers to funding decisions and policy directions (Ikegbusi et al., 2016). Rivers State, as one of Nigeria's economically significant regions, hosts tertiary institutions that serve not only as centres of learning but also as political arenas where state authority, educational aspirations, and institutional autonomy converge and sometimes conflict.

Institutional leadership and university governance encompass the frameworks, structures, and processes through which universities are directed, controlled, and held accountable. This includes the roles of governing councils, vice-chancellors, senates, and other administrative bodies in shaping institutional direction (Obiajulu, 2023). However, the Nigerian context presents unique challenges where political considerations frequently influence these governance mechanisms, affecting everything from leadership appointments to curriculum development and resource distribution. The politicisation of university administration has created scenarios in which academic merit and institutional needs are often subordinated to political expediency and patronage networks, thereby compromising the fundamental objectives of higher education.

The rationale for examining politics in university management stems from mounting evidence that political interference significantly impacts educational quality, institutional effectiveness, and the ability of universities to contribute meaningfully to regional development. Research indicates that the politicization of educational institutions creates administrative instability, undermines merit-based leadership selection, and diverts institutional focus from academic excellence to political survival (Ogunode et al., 2023). These challenges are particularly acute in Rivers State, where the interplay between state government interests, political appointments, and institutional governance has generated ongoing tensions that affect university performance and credibility. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing strategies to insulate academic institutions from destructive political influences while maintaining necessary accountability to society.

Furthermore, the implications of political involvement in university leadership extend to faculty morale, student learning outcomes, research productivity, and the overall reputation of institutions. When leadership positions become political rewards rather than recognition of academic achievement and administrative competence, universities struggle to maintain the standards required for academic excellence and innovation (Salihu & Obiajulu, 2024). The consequence is a weakening of institutional capacity to address regional development challenges, produce quality graduates, and contribute to the knowledge economy that Rivers State urgently needs for sustainable growth.

The persistent nature of these challenges necessitates systematic investigation into how political forces shape institutional leadership practices, what mechanisms enable or constrain political

interference, and how universities in Rivers State can develop more resilient governance structures. Additionally, examining successful models of managing political-academic relationships, both within Nigeria and internationally, can provide valuable insights for reform initiatives. The complexity of this issue demands nuanced analysis that recognizes both the legitimate role of government oversight in publicly-funded institutions and the equally legitimate need for academic autonomy and professional leadership. It is against this backdrop that this paper examined politics and management of institutional leadership in university education in Rivers State.

Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Politics in University Governance

Politics in university governance refers to the complex interplay of power, influence, decision-making processes, and resource allocation mechanisms that shape the administration and direction of higher education institutions. Ijov et al. (2015) asserted that politics in education encompasses the systematic exercise of authority, control, and influence over educational processes, policies, and institutional structures, extending to how decisions are made regarding leadership appointments, funding distribution, and strategic priorities. This conceptualization recognizes that universities, despite their academic missions, operate within broader political environments where governmental authority, institutional autonomy, and various stakeholder interests continuously interact and sometimes conflict.

Ozurumba and Ebuara (2014) noted that the politics of education involves both the formal exercise of governmental power over educational institutions and the informal networks of influence that shape institutional outcomes. In the Nigerian context, this manifests through state government involvement in appointing governing council members, vice-chancellors, and other principal officers, often based on political considerations rather than purely academic credentials. The authors emphasised that political dynamics in university governance are inevitable given that public universities receive substantial government funding and are accountable to political authorities representing societal ipoliticisationnterests.

Lenshie (2013) added that the politicization of university governance occurs when political considerations systematically override academic and administrative merit in institutional decision-making. This phenomenon includes the use of university positions as political patronage, the influence of political parties on institutional policies, and the alignment of university activities with government political agendas rather than educational objectives. The author highlighted that while some level of political oversight is necessary for accountability, excessive politicization undermines institutional effectiveness and academic freedom.

Alimba (2017) opined that politics in university governance operates at multiple levels, including macro-level state policies, institutional-level administrative decisions, and micro-level departmental dynamics. Each level presents opportunities for political interference that can either facilitate or hinder educational objectives. Emmanuel and Ede (2025) affirmed that understanding politics in university governance requires examining how power relations shape not only formal governance structures but also the everyday practices of institutional leadership, resource allocation, and policy implementation. They emphasized that political influence in universities reflects broader societal power dynamics, including elite interests, regional politics, and competing visions of higher education's role in national development.

Institutional Leadership in Higher Education

Institutional leadership in higher education encompasses the vision, strategic direction, administrative capabilities, and decision-making processes through which universities pursue their academic missions and developmental goals. Ikegbusi et al. (2016) asserted that educational leadership in Nigerian universities involves coordinating diverse stakeholders, managing complex organizational structures, and balancing competing demands from government, academia, students, and society. Effective institutional leadership requires not only administrative competence but also the ability to navigate political pressures while maintaining academic integrity and institutional autonomy.

Ekpiken and Ifere (2015) noted that institutional leadership in tertiary institutions encompasses both positional authority, such as vice-chancellors and deans, and functional leadership distributed across various administrative and academic units. The authors emphasized that leadership effectiveness depends on clarity of institutional vision, transparent governance processes, stakeholder engagement, and the capacity to implement policies and programmes despite political constraints. In the Nigerian context, institutional leaders must often mediate between governmental expectations and academic community aspirations while securing resources necessary for institutional advancement. Obiajulu (2023) added that institutional leadership in universities involves managing tensions between autonomy and accountability, academic freedom and social responsibility, and institutional traditions and contemporary demands. The author highlighted that effective leaders must possess both academic credibility and administrative acumen, enabling them to command respect from faculty while effectively managing relationships with external political authorities. Leadership quality significantly influences institutional performance, including research output, teaching quality, student satisfaction, and community engagement.

Nnaji et al. (2022) opined that educational leadership challenges in Nigeria are compounded by political interference, inadequate funding, infrastructure deficits, and security concerns. These challenges require leaders who can exercise strategic foresight, mobilize resources creatively, and build coalitions that protect institutional interests while responding to legitimate societal needs. Ndem (2025) affirmed that institutional leadership effectiveness is fundamentally compromised when political considerations determine leadership appointments rather than demonstrated competence and academic achievement. The author emphasized that strengthening institutional leadership requires insulating selection processes from excessive political interference, providing leaders with necessary autonomy and resources, establishing clear accountability mechanisms, and fostering organizational cultures that prioritize academic excellence over political expediency.

Politics of Leadership Appointment and Management of Institutional Leadership

The appointment of institutional leaders in Nigerian universities has become increasingly politicized, with significant implications for effective university governance and management. Leadership appointments, particularly for positions such as vice-chancellors, registrars, bursars, and governing council members, frequently reflect political considerations rather than merit-based criteria, thereby compromising institutional effectiveness and academic credibility. Salihu and Obiajulu (2024) asserted that political interference in leadership appointments manifests through the imposition of candidates aligned with ruling political parties, ethnic and regional balancing considerations, and the use of university positions as rewards for political loyalty. This practice undermines the selection of competent leaders capable of advancing institutional missions and responding effectively to academic and administrative challenges.

The consequences of politically-motivated leadership appointments extend throughout the entire management structure of universities. When leaders owe their positions to political patronage rather than academic achievement or administrative competence, their primary allegiance often shifts from institutional interests to political benefactors. Ogunode et al. (2023) noted that politicized appointments create leadership instability, as changes in political administrations frequently trigger wholesale replacements of university leadership regardless of performance or tenure considerations. This instability disrupts strategic planning, undermines continuity in policy implementation, demoralizes academic staff, and prevents the development of long-term institutional visions. Furthermore, politically-appointed leaders may lack the academic credibility necessary to command respect from faculty and students, thereby weakening their capacity to provide effective institutional direction and maintain academic standards.

The management of institutional leadership under politicized appointment systems presents unique challenges for university governance. Leaders must navigate competing demands from political authorities who appointed them and academic communities expecting autonomous, merit-based administration. Ikegbusi et al. (2016) added that political appointments often result in leadership approaches that prioritize political survival over academic excellence, resource acquisition over efficient utilization, and external legitimacy over internal institutional development. This creates governance deficits where critical decisions regarding curriculum development, faculty recruitment, research priorities, and quality assurance are influenced by political calculations rather than educational imperatives. Additionally, the politicization of leadership appointments fosters cultures of patronage within universities, where subsequent appointments at lower administrative levels replicate the political logic that governed top-level selections, thereby permeating the entire institutional hierarchy with political considerations. Addressing these challenges requires institutional reforms that insulate leadership selection processes from excessive political interference while maintaining appropriate accountability mechanisms. This includes strengthening the autonomy and composition of selection committees, establishing transparent criteria emphasizing academic and administrative competence, implementing fixed tenure systems that transcend political cycles, and fostering institutional cultures that resist political patronage in favor of merit-based advancement.

Politics of Academic Course Allocation and Management of Institutional Leadership

Academic course allocation represents a critical dimension of university management where political interference significantly undermines institutional leadership effectiveness and academic integrity. The distribution of teaching responsibilities, course assignments, and academic workload should ideally reflect faculty expertise, departmental needs, and pedagogical requirements. However, in Nigerian universities, course allocation has become increasingly politicised, with assignments often determined by patronage networks, political affiliations, and favouritism rather than academic qualifications and teaching competence. Emmanuel and Ede (2025) asserted that political considerations in course allocation manifest through preferential treatment for faculty members aligned with institutional leaders or external political authorities, the assignment of lucrative courses based on loyalty rather than expertise, and the marginalisation of academically competent but politically unconnected staff members. This practice compromises educational quality, as students receive instruction from individuals lacking appropriate specialisation whilst qualified faculty remain underutilised or assigned to courses outside their areas of competence.

The politicisation of course allocation creates profound management challenges for institutional leadership, particularly when leaders themselves owe their positions to political appointments. Ndem (2025) noted that politically-influenced course allocation generates conflicts within academic departments, undermines collegial relationships, and fosters resentment amongst faculty members who perceive injustice in workload distribution. When course assignments become rewards for political loyalty or tools for punishing dissent, the academic environment becomes toxic, discouraging scholarly collaboration and innovation. Furthermore, this practice affects institutional leadership credibility, as leaders who engage in or tolerate politicised course allocation lose moral authority to enforce academic standards, implement merit-based policies, or demand accountability from faculty and staff. The resulting atmosphere of favouritism and inequity undermines the fundamental principles of academic meritocracy upon which university education should rest.

Beyond individual faculty grievances, politicised course allocation has systemic implications for institutional management and educational outcomes. Obiajulu (2023) added that when political considerations override academic criteria in course assignments, programme quality deteriorates, accreditation standards become difficult to maintain, and institutional reputation suffers. Students bear the ultimate cost, receiving substandard instruction that inadequately prepares them for professional careers or further academic pursuits. Additionally, the practice perpetuates cycles of political patronage within universities, as beneficiaries of favourable course allocations become stakeholders in maintaining the political system that advantages them, thereby resisting reforms towards merit-based management. Addressing these challenges requires institutional leaders to establish transparent, criteria-based course allocation systems grounded in faculty qualifications, teaching evaluations, and departmental needs. This necessitates courage to resist political pressures, commitment to academic principles, and development of governance mechanisms that insulate academic decisions from political interference whilst ensuring equitable workload distribution and optimal utilisation of faculty expertise.

Politics of Resource Allocation and Management of Institutional Leadership

Resource allocation constitutes one of the most politically contested aspects of university management, where institutional leadership navigates competing demands, limited budgets, and political pressures that frequently compromise equitable and efficient distribution. The allocation of financial resources, infrastructure development funds, equipment procurement, and operational budgets should ideally reflect institutional priorities, academic needs, and strategic objectives. However, in Rivers State universities, resource allocation decisions often reflect political calculations, patronage obligations, and power dynamics that undermine institutional effectiveness and equitable development. Ekpiken and Ifere (2015) asserted that political interference in resource allocation manifests through preferential funding for departments or programmes aligned with political interests, inequitable distribution favouring politically connected units, and the diversion of resources to projects that enhance political visibility rather than academic advancement. This politicisation creates institutional imbalances where some departments flourish with abundant resources whilst others languish despite critical needs and larger student populations.

The management of institutional leadership becomes particularly challenging when resource allocation decisions are influenced by external political authorities or internal political networks. Salihu and Obiajulu (2024) noted that politically-driven resource allocation undermines institutional planning, as budgetary decisions reflect political imperatives rather than strategic priorities established through participatory governance processes. When university leaders lack autonomy in

resource distribution, their capacity to respond to genuine academic needs diminishes, faculty morale declines, and institutional development becomes fragmented and incoherent. Furthermore, politicised resource allocation fosters dependency relationships where departments and individuals cultivate political connections rather than academic excellence to secure necessary resources. This creates perverse incentives that discourage merit-based competition and innovation whilst rewarding political alignment and patronage cultivation.

The consequences of political resource allocation extend beyond immediate distributional inequities to affect long-term institutional sustainability and credibility. Okoroma (2006) added that when resources are allocated based on political considerations, universities struggle to maintain quality standards, achieve accreditation requirements, and compete effectively with institutions operating under merit-based resource distribution systems. Infrastructure development becomes uneven, with politically favoured areas receiving disproportionate investment whilst critical facilities remain inadequate. Research capacities suffer as funding flows to politically expedient projects rather than scientifically meritorious investigations. Additionally, transparency and accountability mechanisms weaken when political considerations override established budgetary procedures, creating opportunities for corruption and mismanagement. Effective institutional leadership requires establishing transparent, needs-based resource allocation frameworks that insulate budgetary decisions from political interference. This necessitates strengthening governance structures, implementing participatory budgeting processes, developing clear criteria linking resource allocation to institutional objectives, and building coalitions that protect institutional autonomy whilst maintaining appropriate accountability to legitimate stakeholders and governmental oversight bodies.

Management Challenges Arising from Political Interference

Political interference in university governance generates multifaceted management challenges that compromise institutional effectiveness, undermine academic standards, and constrain leadership capacity to fulfil educational mandates. These challenges manifest across various dimensions of university administration, creating systemic obstacles that impede institutional development and diminish educational quality. The following subsections examine key management challenges arising from political interference in Rivers State universities.

Leadership Conflicts

Political interference frequently generates conflicts between institutional leaders and various stakeholders, creating governance paralysis and administrative dysfunction. When leaders are appointed through political patronage rather than merit-based processes, they face legitimacy challenges from academic staff who question their credentials and authority. Ikegbusi, Chigbo-Okeke, and Modebelu (2016) asserted that politically-appointed leaders often experience conflicts with senate members, governing councils, and faculty who resist directives perceived as politically motivated rather than academically sound. These conflicts manifest in administrative gridlock, non-cooperation, and institutional factionalism. Nnaji, Igbokwe-Ibeto, Ukeje, and Nwangbo (2022) noted that leadership conflicts arising from political appointments create hostile working environments, undermine collaborative decision-making, and divert institutional energy from academic pursuits to internal power struggles, thereby compromising organisational effectiveness and institutional mission fulfilment.

Policy Inconsistency

Political interference produces policy inconsistency as institutional directions shift with changing political administrations and patronage networks. Policies implemented under one political dispensation are frequently abandoned or reversed when political circumstances change, regardless of their effectiveness or institutional benefits. Ogunode, Atobauka, and Ayoko (2023) asserted that policy inconsistency arising from political interference prevents long-term institutional planning, disrupts programme continuity, and creates uncertainty amongst staff and students regarding institutional direction. Strategic initiatives launched with considerable resources are abruptly terminated when political leadership changes, wasting investments and demoralising stakeholders. Ndem (2025) added that policy instability undermines institutional credibility, complicates accreditation processes, and prevents universities from developing coherent identities or sustained competitive advantages, as institutional priorities constantly fluctuate according to prevailing political winds rather than educational imperatives.

Erosion of Meritocracy

Political interference systematically erodes meritocratic principles in university administration, replacing competence-based advancement with patronage and political loyalty as primary criteria for appointments and promotions. When political considerations override academic qualifications and demonstrated performance, institutional cultures shift from rewarding excellence to cultivating political connections. Emmanuel and Ede (2025) asserted that the erosion of meritocracy discourages talented academics, drives competent staff to seek opportunities elsewhere, and attracts individuals prioritising political networking over scholarly achievement. This degrades institutional quality and research capacity. Obiajulu (2023) noted that meritocracy erosion creates cynicism amongst faculty and students, undermines work ethic, and establishes precedents whereby subsequent generations view political manoeuvring rather than academic excellence as pathways to advancement, thereby perpetuating cycles of mediocrity and political dependency.

Administrative Inefficiency

Political interference generates administrative inefficiency through disrupted processes, compromised accountability mechanisms, and decision-making paralysis. When political considerations override administrative procedures, efficiency declines as decisions are delayed pending political clearance, resources are misallocated according to political rather than operational logic, and accountability structures weaken. Salihu and Obiajulu (2024) asserted that administrative inefficiency arising from political interference manifests in delayed programme approvals, protracted procurement processes favouring politically-connected suppliers, and duplicated efforts as politically-motivated reorganisations disrupt established workflows. This wastes resources and frustrates stakeholders. Ekpiken and Ifere (2015) added that political interference compromises performance management systems, as politically-protected individuals evade accountability whilst competent staff face disproportionate scrutiny, creating organisational cultures tolerating inefficiency and rewarding political loyalty over productivity and institutional contribution.

Strategies for Managing Politics in University Leadership

Addressing the pervasive challenges of political interference in university leadership requires comprehensive strategies that balance legitimate governmental oversight with essential institutional autonomy necessary for academic excellence. Strengthening institutional autonomy represents a fundamental strategy for managing political influence in university leadership. This involves establishing legal and constitutional frameworks that protect universities from arbitrary political

interference whilst maintaining appropriate accountability to society. Ogunode et al. (2023) asserted that institutional autonomy requires clear delineation of governmental authority and university self-governance, including protected domains for academic decision-making, curriculum development, and internal administration where political interference is constitutionally prohibited. Strengthening governing councils with representation from diverse stakeholders beyond political appointees, including alumni, professionals, and academic experts, can provide institutional leadership with broader support bases that resist narrow political pressures.

Transparent appointment procedures constitute critical mechanisms for reducing political patronage in leadership selection. Implementing merit-based criteria, public advertisement of vacancies, independent selection committees, and transparent evaluation processes can insulate appointments from purely political considerations. Ndem (2025) noted that transparency in leadership appointments requires establishing clear qualifications, conducting open competitive processes, involving academic communities in selection procedures, and publishing selection criteria and outcomes to enable public scrutiny. Whilst political authorities may retain ultimate appointment powers, transparent processes constrain arbitrary selections and create reputational costs for obviously political appointments lacking academic justification.

Accountability and governance reforms provide frameworks for managing political influence constructively. Salihu and Obiajulu (2024) added that effective governance reforms include fixed leadership tenures transcending political cycles, performance-based evaluation systems, financial transparency mechanisms, and stakeholder participation in governance structures. Stakeholder engagement involving academic staff, students, alumni, industry partners, and community representatives in governance processes creates countervailing powers against excessive political control. Regular consultation forums, participatory planning processes, and inclusive decision-making structures enable universities to demonstrate responsiveness to societal needs through stakeholder engagement rather than political subordination. These strategies collectively foster institutional environments where political engagement occurs through legitimate governance channels rather than arbitrary interference, protecting academic integrity whilst maintaining democratic accountability and societal relevance essential for publicly-funded universities.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the complex interplay between politics and institutional leadership in university education in Rivers State, revealing how political interference significantly undermines effective university governance and academic excellence. The analysis demonstrated that political influence pervades critical aspects of university management, including leadership appointments, academic course allocation, and resource distribution, generating profound challenges such as leadership conflicts, policy inconsistency, erosion of meritocracy, and administrative inefficiency. These challenges compromise institutional effectiveness, diminish educational quality, and constrain universities' capacity to fulfil their developmental mandates. However, the relationship between politics and university management need not be entirely adversarial. Legitimate governmental oversight and accountability remain essential for publicly-funded institutions. The imperative lies in achieving balanced arrangements that respect institutional autonomy whilst maintaining appropriate political accountability. Through strengthening institutional autonomy, implementing transparent appointment procedures, instituting robust governance reforms, and fostering meaningful stakeholder engagement, Rivers State universities can navigate political realities without sacrificing academic integrity. Ultimately, effective and ethical university management requires

recognising that educational excellence and political responsiveness can coexist when governance frameworks protect academic freedom whilst ensuring universities serve broader societal interests through legitimate, transparent, and accountable processes.

Suggestions to Overcome Management Challenges Arising from Political Interference

1. Establish merit-based selection committees with diverse stakeholder representation, including academics, alumni, and professionals, to enhance leadership legitimacy and reduce conflicts.
2. Institutionalise strategic planning processes with long-term institutional visions and constitutional protections to ensure policy continuity despite changing political administrations and leadership.
3. Implement independent peer review processes for all appointments and promotions, emphasising academic qualifications and research output to restore competence-based advancement systems.
4. Establish transparent procurement procedures with competitive bidding, specified timelines, and accountability measures to prevent politically-motivated delays and resource misallocation in administration.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

EFFECTS OF DIGITAL GAMIFICATION ON THE READING PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KADUNA STATE

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of digital gamification on the reading performance of secondary school students in Kaduna State, Nigeria. With the growing integration of technology in education, gamified learning platforms have emerged as innovative tools for enhancing students' engagement and academic achievement. The research adopted a quasi-experimental design involving two groups: an experimental group exposed to digital reading materials embedded with gamification features such as points, badges, and interactive quizzes, and a control group using traditional reading methods. Population of 360 and Sample size of 120 SS1 students via random technique from four public secondary schools' students were randomly assigned to experimental (n=60) and control (n=60) groups. Data were collected using pre-test and post-test reading comprehension assessments and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that students in the experimental group demonstrated significantly improved reading performance compared to their counterparts in the control group. Furthermore, the study observed increased motivation, active participation, and a positive attitude toward reading among students exposed to gamified content. These results suggest that digital gamification can serve as an effective pedagogical strategy for improving literacy skills in secondary schools, particularly in under-resourced educational settings. The study recommends the integration of gamified digital resources into the reading curriculum and the training of teachers to effectively implement such tools. Future research should explore long-term impacts and subject-specific applications of gamification in diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: *Digital, Gamification, Reading, Performance, Secondary School, Students*

Background to the Study

In recent years, the integration of digital technologies into education has transformed traditional pedagogical methods, offering new and innovative ways to engage students in learning. One such innovation is digital gamification the application of game design elements, such as point scoring, leaderboards, challenges, and rewards, in non-game contexts to enhance learning experiences. As students increasingly engage with digital platforms, gamification has emerged as a promising approach to foster motivation, sustain attention, and improve academic performance across various subjects, particularly in literacy and reading comprehension.

Reading is a foundational skill essential for academic success and lifelong learning. However, in many secondary schools, especially within developing contexts, reading performance remains a significant challenge. Students often exhibit poor reading habits, low comprehension abilities, and limited motivation to engage with texts. Traditional methods of teaching reading, which rely heavily on rote learning and teacher-centered instruction, have proven insufficient in addressing the diverse learning needs of digital-native students. Consequently, educators and researchers have sought alternative strategies to revitalize reading instruction and enhance student engagement and performance.

Digital gamification offers an interactive and student-centered alternative to traditional reading instruction. By transforming reading tasks into engaging activities with instant feedback and clear goals, gamified environments can stimulate student interest, improve focus, and support differentiated learning. Several studies have suggested that gamified learning can boost students' motivation, foster collaborative learning, and enhance comprehension skills. However, despite the growing global interest, empirical evidence on the actual impact of digital gamification on reading performance particularly in secondary school settings is still emerging and often context-specific.

In Nigeria, and more specifically in regions like Kaduna State, educational stakeholders face multiple challenges related to literacy development, such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate instructional materials, and limited access to engaging digital content. While mobile devices and digital platforms are becoming increasingly accessible, their integration into the classroom remains limited. This situation presents a unique opportunity to explore the role of digital gamification in improving reading performance among secondary school students within such contexts. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the effects of digital gamification on the reading performance of secondary school students. It aims to provide empirical insights into whether gamified reading platforms can significantly enhance students' reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and overall engagement with reading tasks. The findings are expected to contribute to evidence-based practices in educational technology and support the design of more effective and inclusive reading interventions in secondary education.

Statement of the Problem

Reading is a critical component of academic success and a key determinant of students' overall educational development. Despite its importance, many secondary school students continue to struggle with reading fluency, comprehension, and sustained engagement with texts, and particularly in many public secondary schools, reading performance remains below expected standards. Factors contributing to this challenge include lack of motivation, poor reading culture, outdated instructional strategies, and limited access to engaging learning materials. Traditional reading instruction

methods, which are often rigid and teacher-centered, have not been effective in stimulating students' interest or addressing their individual learning needs in a digital age.

At the same time, the increasing availability of digital technologies and mobile devices among students presents an opportunity to rethink how reading is taught. Digital gamification the incorporation of game elements such as rewards, levels, feedback, and competition into educational activities has emerged as a potential strategy to make learning more interactive and appealing. Research in other contexts suggests that gamification can enhance student motivation, improve engagement, and positively influence learning outcomes. However, despite the growing interest in educational gamification globally, there is limited empirical evidence on its impact on reading performance among secondary school students in kaduna state. More specifically, it is unclear whether digital gamification strategies can significantly improve students' reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and overall interest in reading when compared to traditional teaching methods. In addition, there is a lack of understanding of how students respond to gamified learning environments in the context of secondary education, where academic pressures and curriculum demands are high.

This study, therefore, seeks to address these gaps by investigating the effects of digital gamification on the reading performance of secondary school students. It aims to determine whether gamified reading platforms can offer a viable solution to the persistent problem of poor reading outcomes in schools and contribute to the development of more effective, engaging, and learner-centered reading instruction methods.

Objectives of the Study

i. To examine the effect of digital gamification on the reading comprehension skills of secondary school students in Kaduna State.
ii. To determine the impact of digital gamification on students' motivation and engagement in reading activities.
iii. To compare the reading performance of students exposed to gamified reading materials with those taught using traditional reading methods.

Research Questions

i. What is the effect of digital gamification on the reading comprehension skills of secondary school students in Kaduna State?
ii. How does digital gamification influence students' motivation and engagement in reading?
iii. Is there a significant difference in reading performance between students exposed to gamified reading materials and those taught using traditional methods?

Hypotheses

i. H_{01}: Digital gamification has no significant effect on the reading comprehension skills of secondary school students in Kaduna State.
ii. H_{02}: Digital gamification significantly influences students' motivation and engagement in reading activities.
iii. H_{03}: There is no significant difference in reading performance between students exposed to gamified reading materials and those taught using traditional methods.

Review of Related Literatures

Reading Performance among Secondary School Students in Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Reading performance among secondary school students in Kaduna State, Nigeria, continues to face significant challenges that affect literacy outcomes. Recent studies show that the effective implementation of the English language curriculum especially the reading component remains inadequate due to limited instructional materials, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient teacher training in reading pedagogy (Oyetunji and Adebayo, 2022; Yusuf, 2023). Weak vocabulary development also undermines comprehension, as students with limited lexical knowledge often struggle to interpret texts and engage in critical reading. Evidence suggests that explicit and intensive vocabulary instruction significantly improves comprehension and overall reading achievement among junior and senior secondary students (Nwoke and Bello, 2021; Ibrahim, 2024).

Interactive and learner-centred teaching approaches, including guided reading, peer discussion, and text-based activities, have been found to enhance students' engagement and understanding. Studies in Northern Nigeria report that students exposed to interactive reading strategies demonstrate better comprehension and retention than those taught through traditional lecture methods (Abubakar and Musa, 2022). However, persistent barriers remain. Many schools lack functional libraries, reading clubs, and adequate textbooks, while students often have limited access to reading materials at home. These constraints contribute to poor reading habits and low motivation (UNESCO, 2023; Adeyemi, 2022).

Reading is both a cognitive and affective process requiring decoding, comprehension, and critical thinking skills. In Kaduna State, low reading proficiency has been linked to weak reading culture, inadequate instructional resources, and insufficient teacher professional development (Umar and Ibrahim, 2020; Mohammed, 2024). Addressing these issues requires the provision of relevant reading materials, teacher training in effective reading strategies, and the establishment of school-based reading clubs to foster sustained literacy development and improved academic performance.

Digital Gamification in Education

Digital gamification has emerged as a transformative approach in education, leveraging game-based elements such as points, leaderboards, badges, and rewards to foster student engagement and improve academic outcomes. Rooted in motivational theories, particularly Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT), gamification taps into intrinsic motivators such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In recent years, its integration into educational settings has garnered significant attention due to its potential to enhance student learning experiences. Studies have shown that gamified environments can positively influence cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. For instance, Koivisto and Hamari (2019) assert that gamification increases user participation and sustained attention, critical for reading and comprehension skills. In secondary education, where student motivation often wanes, digital gamification offers a dynamic alternative to traditional pedagogies by making learning more interactive and enjoyable (Sailer and Homner, 2020).

In the context of reading performance, gamified digital tools such as interactive story apps and comprehension games have been linked to improved vocabulary acquisition, reading fluency, and comprehension (Nacke and Deterding, 2017). A recent study by Yusuf et al. (2023) in kaduna state found that gamification significantly enhanced students' reading motivation and academic achievement, particularly in language arts. However, challenges persist. Poor technological

infrastructure, limited teacher training, and the risk of overemphasizing extrinsic rewards may hinder the effective implementation of gamification strategies, especially in under-resourced contexts (Balci and Turgut, 2022). Additionally, the diversity of learner needs requires adaptable gamified systems to ensure inclusive benefits. However, while digital gamification holds great promise for enhancing educational outcomes, especially in literacy development, its success depends on thoughtful design, contextual relevance, and adequate teacher support. Future research should further explore culturally responsive gamified interventions, particularly in multilingual and resource-limited environments. Gamification involves integrating elements such as challenges, scores, leaderboards, feedback, and rewards into educational activities (Deterding et al., 2011). It has been used to increase student motivation, enhance engagement, and support self-directed learning. Research shows that gamification enhances both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, thereby improving academic performance (Ibáñez et al., 2021; Alomari et al., 2023).

Gamification and Reading

Gamification in reading education refers to the application of game design elements such as points, levels, challenges, and rewards to motivate learners and enhance literacy outcomes. This pedagogical approach is gaining recognition for its ability to transform passive reading activities into engaging, interactive experiences, particularly among digital-native students (Munday, 2021). Grounded in theories of motivation and engagement, gamification leverages both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators to improve reading fluency, comprehension, and overall literacy performance.

Research indicates that gamified reading environments positively affect students' attitudes toward reading, especially among reluctant readers. For example, Xu and Wang (2022) found that incorporating gamified features into reading apps increased students' reading time and improved comprehension in middle school students. Similarly, studies by Alharthi and Alqahtani (2023) highlight that gamified reading interventions improve vocabulary acquisition and retention by encouraging repeated engagement with text. Gamification is particularly effective in promoting personalized and adaptive reading experiences. Digital tools such as reading apps and learning management systems offer real-time feedback, goal-setting, and progress tracking features that have been shown to increase student motivation and self-efficacy (Sailer et al., 2021). These tools support differentiated instruction, allowing learners to progress at their own pace.

However, successful implementation depends on careful design. Over-reliance on extrinsic rewards may reduce intrinsic motivation over time, and poorly designed gamification elements can distract from learning goals (Seaborn and Fels, 2020). Furthermore, access to digital tools and teacher training remain critical factors, especially in resource-limited settings. However, gamification has shown considerable promise in enhancing reading engagement and performance. When well-designed and contextually relevant, it can foster deeper reading comprehension and literacy development. Further research is needed to explore its long-term impact and scalability in diverse educational environments. A growing body of empirical research supports the use of gamified platforms to improve reading outcomes. Tsai and Chuang (2020) found that elementary students using a gamified e-reading platform significantly improved their comprehension skills. Similarly, Kim and Song (2021) reported that gamified reading apps led to better vocabulary retention and higher engagement in middle school learners. However, most studies are conducted in developed contexts, leaving a gap in knowledge about gamification's impact in resource-constrained environments like Nigeria.

Methodology

Quasi-experimental Design which involves pre-test/post-test control group were adopted. Population of 360 and Sample size of 120 SS1 students via random technique from four public secondary schools in Kaduna State students were randomly assigned to experimental (n=60) and control (n=60) groups. Instruments used were Standardized Reading Comprehension Test, Vocabulary Acquisition Test, and Reading Motivation Questionnaire. The experimental group used a gamified reading app for six weeks; the control group used traditional methods. Pre- and post-tests were administered. Paired sample t-tests and ANCOVA were used to compare group performance.

Results / Findings

Table 1: Pre- and Post-Test Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Test	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
Experimental	Pre-Test	52.3	8.5
Experimental	Post-Test	78.4	6.2
Control	Pre-Test	51.7	7.9
Control	Post-Test	64.7	7.8

Table 2: ANCOVA Summary

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	p-value
Group	2043.67	1	2043.67	28.53	< 0.001
Error	8372.20	118	70.78		

Discussion of Findings

The results indicate that students exposed to the gamified reading intervention recorded markedly higher gains than those in the control group. While both groups began with comparable pre-test mean scores (Experimental = 52.3; Control = 51.7), the post-test mean of the experimental group rose to 78.4 compared with 64.7 for the control group. This suggests that digital gamification features such as rewards, progress indicators, and interactive quizzes significantly enhanced students' reading performance. The relatively smaller standard deviation in the experimental post-test (6.2) also indicates more consistent performance among learners exposed to gamified strategies, implying that the intervention supported a wider range of students.

The ANCOVA result further confirms the effectiveness of the intervention. A statistically significant difference was found between the groups, $F(1,118) = 28.53$, $p < .001$, indicating that the improvement in the experimental group was not due to chance but to the instructional strategy applied. This aligns with constructivist learning principles, which emphasize active learner engagement and feedback as key drivers of academic achievement. Gamification elements often motivate learners by incorporating competition, immediate feedback, and goal-oriented tasks, which can increase attention and persistence during reading activities.

The findings corroborate earlier studies showing that gamified learning environments improve literacy outcomes and learner motivation. For instance, Ibáñez et al. (2021) reported that gamified reading platforms enhanced comprehension and participation among secondary school learners by promoting sustained engagement. Similarly, research by Deterding et al. (2019) highlighted that game-based mechanics such as points, levels, and badges foster intrinsic motivation and active

participation in educational tasks. These elements may explain the significant gains observed in the experimental group, as students likely became more invested in reading tasks when they were presented in interactive and rewarding formats.

Moreover, the results support the growing emphasis on digital learning tools in contemporary classrooms. According to UNESCO (2022), integrating technology-based strategies into literacy instruction can improve reading outcomes, particularly when tools are designed to encourage learner autonomy and collaboration. The present findings demonstrate that structured gamification can complement traditional teaching by making reading tasks more engaging and learner-centered. In contexts where students often struggle with sustained reading motivation, gamification may provide a practical approach to improving literacy performance. However, the significant improvement in the experimental group suggests that digital gamification is an effective instructional strategy for enhancing reading achievement. By promoting active participation, providing instant feedback, and reinforcing progress through rewards, gamified learning environments can create positive learning experiences that translate into measurable academic gains.

Summary of Findings

i. The experimental and control groups had similar pre-test reading scores, indicating comparable baseline abilities.
ii. After the intervention, the experimental group achieved a substantially higher mean score (78.4) than the control group (64.7).
iii. ANCOVA results showed a significant difference between groups, $F(1,118) = 28.53$, $p < .001$, confirming the effectiveness of the gamified intervention.
iv. The findings demonstrate that digital gamification strategies significantly improved students' reading performance and engagement compared with conventional teaching methods.

Conclusion

Digital gamification positively influences reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and motivation.

Recommendations

The study recommends three actionable recommendations to address reading performance and challenges in secondary schools in Kaduna State:

i. **Strengthen Teacher Capacity in Reading Instruction**: Secondary schools' teachers in the state should receive continuous professional development focused on effective reading strategies, including vocabulary instruction, guided reading, and the use of interactive methods. Training should also include how to integrate digital tools and differentiated instruction to meet the diverse reading needs of students.
ii. **Improve Access to Reading Materials and Facilities:** Secondary Schools in the state should be equipped with well-stocked libraries, both physical and digital, that are accessible to students. Stakeholders including government and NGOs should collaborate to provide age-appropriate, engaging reading materials that support the curriculum and encourage independent reading.
iii. **Establish and Sustain Reading Culture Programs:** Schools should create structured reading initiatives such as reading clubs, literacy competitions, and weekly reading hours. These programs can cultivate a reading culture and motivate students to read beyond the classroom. Involving parents and communities in promoting reading at home will also reinforce literacy habits.

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Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

GENDER EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT AMONG STUDENTS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of gender education, gender-sensitive educational practices, and access to skill development opportunities on students' professional competence in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was adopted, and a stratified random sample of 334 undergraduate students was drawn from the two universities. The researcher-developed instruments titled: Gender Education Scale (GES) and the Skill Development and Professional Competence Inventory (SDPCI) which were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis, yielding reliability coefficients of 0.84 for GES and 0.87 for SDPCI, indicating strong internal consistency. The data collected with these instruments were analyzed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and regression analysis. The findings revealed that gender education significantly enhances students' skill development, gender-sensitive educational practices positively affect managerial skill acquisition, and access to skill development opportunities strongly predicts students' professional competence. The study concludes that integrating gender education, inclusive teaching practices, and structured skill development platforms is critical for producing competent, career-ready graduates in educational management. The study recommends curriculum reforms, gender-responsive instructional strategies, and increased practical learning opportunities to enhance students' professional preparedness.

Keywords: *Gender Education; Gender-Sensitive Practices; Skill Development; Managerial Competence; Professional Readiness; Educational Management*

Introduction

The persistent gender disparity in education and skill development remains a pressing challenge in Nigeria, particularly within higher education institutions. In public universities, female students often face systemic barriers that limit their access to quality educational resources and skill acquisition opportunities, including societal expectations, inadequate mentorship, and unequal access to professional training programs (Adams & Uzoigwe, 2023). These barriers not only affect the academic performance of students but also hinder the cultivation of essential managerial and professional competencies required for leadership roles in educational management. Studies have shown that despite policy frameworks advocating for gender equality in education, practical implementation often falls short, leaving a significant gap between male and female students in terms of career readiness and employable skill sets (Ekanem & Uzoigwe, 2023). This inequality is compounded by limited institutional support structures that fail to adequately address the unique learning needs of female students, thereby perpetuating cycles of underrepresentation in leadership positions within the education sector.

Moreover, the lack of targeted skill development programs exacerbates the challenge of gender inequity in educational management, undermining students' capacity to compete effectively in the labor market. Research indicates that students in public universities often graduate without the practical and managerial competencies necessary for professional advancement, with female students disproportionately affected due to fewer opportunities for mentorship, internships, and participation in co-curricular programs (Inah, Ekpang, & Uzoigwe, 2024). The deficiency in gender-sensitive instructional strategies further limits engagement and retention in courses critical for skill acquisition, leading to lower confidence levels and reduced employability among female students. This scenario underscores the urgent need for empirical studies that explore the intersection of gender, education, and skill development in Nigerian universities, with a focus on identifying strategies to bridge the gender gap and enhance the overall professional preparedness of students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities across Cross River State.

Statement of the problem

Gender disparities in access to quality education and skill development opportunities remain a serious concern in public universities in Cross River State, particularly within the Department of Educational Management. Male and female students do not benefit equally from learning opportunities, access to academic support systems, leadership training, mentorship, and practical skill acquisition platforms. Female students, in particular, continue to face structural, cultural, and institutional constraints that limit their participation in leadership-oriented activities, decision-making processes, and professional development programmes. These challenges manifest in unequal classroom engagement, limited exposure to managerial competencies, weak confidence development, and restricted access to employable skills, thereby undermining academic growth and professional preparedness.

In addition, the absence of structured, gender-responsive educational policies and coherent skill development frameworks within the department have further intensified the problem. Existing curricula and training programmes largely emphasize theoretical knowledge while neglecting practical, entrepreneurial, and managerial skill acquisition that prepares students for real-world professional demands. This gap has resulted in graduates who are academically qualified but insufficiently equipped with relevant competencies for leadership, innovation, and effective educational management practice. The lack of institutional mechanisms to mainstream gender

equity into teaching, learning, and skill development processes continues to widen the gender gap, creating long-term implications for workforce readiness, leadership representation, and sustainable development in the education sector.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Bandura's Social Learning Theory, propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977, which emphasizes that learning occurs within a social context through observation, imitation, and modeling of behaviors, attitudes, and skills. The central assumption of the theory is that individuals acquire knowledge not only through direct experience but also by observing others and internalizing their behaviors, reinforced by social feedback and consequences. Bandura posited that cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors interact dynamically to shape learning outcomes, meaning that learners are active participants who can reflect, emulate, and adapt behaviors based on observed models. In the context of gender education and skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management, this theory is highly applicable because it highlights the importance of role models, mentorship, peer interactions, and participatory learning in fostering competence. By observing effective leadership practices, problem-solving strategies, and professional behaviors in both male and female mentors or peers, students can develop critical managerial skills, confidence, and professional dispositions necessary for educational management, while also addressing gender disparities by promoting equal access to observational and practical learning experiences.

Empirical Literature Review

Several studies have shown that gender education significantly shapes students' skill development by influencing their attitudes, motivation, and access to professional learning resources. For instance, Okeke and Adebayo (2020) reported that when gender concepts are embedded in university curricula, female students show improved analytical and communication skills, closing the traditional performance gap with male peers. Similarly, Olorundare and Nwobu (2019) found that students exposed to gender awareness courses demonstrated stronger interpersonal and problem–solving skills compared to those without such exposure. In research examining tertiary education programmes, Ibrahim and Bello (2021) observed that gender–inclusive learning environments enhance students' confidence in engaging with complex academic and managerial tasks, thereby supporting the development of critical employability skills.

In studies focused on education management programmes, gender education has also been linked with enhanced leadership competencies. A study by Musa and Ojo (2022) found that students who received structured gender education were more likely to take on leadership roles in project activities and academic associations. Adeleke and Tunde (2021) reported that gender–conscious instruction positively affected students' decision–making capabilities and team coordination. Furthermore, Olaniyan (2020) showed that gender education reduced stereotype–related barriers that often limit female students' participation in skill–intensive assignments, enabling a more balanced acquisition of managerial competencies among both male and female students.

The impact of gender–sensitive educational practices on managerial skill acquisition is also well documented. For example, Chukwu (2021) found that the implementation of participatory teaching methods and equitable instructional strategies in educational management courses significantly improved students' organizational and planning skills. Likewise, Adeyemi and Okafor (2022) highlighted that gender–responsive classroom practices, such as collaborative group work and role–sharing, enhanced students' task management and conflict resolution abilities. In a comparative

study, Banjo and Samuel (2023) reported that students in gender–sensitive learning environments outperformed their counterparts in traditional classrooms in areas of leadership planning, delegation, and administrative decision making.

Research has also demonstrated that support systems designed to address gender imbalances can strengthen managerial skill acquisition. According to Eze and Kalu (2020), mentoring programmes that emphasize gender equity lead to improvements in students' supervisory and strategic planning skills. Ajayi and Williams (2022) found that when instructors consciously adopt inclusive feedback practices, students, especially females, show increased competency in project coordination and educational administration tasks. Okoro and Abiola (2019) similarly revealed that when educational interventions account for gender differences in learning, students display higher adaptability and innovation in managerial functions.

Regarding access to skill development opportunities, studies suggest a strong link between participation in practical training and professional competence. Umeh and Obi (2021) reported that students who engaged in internships and workplace simulations developed higher administrative and communication skills critical for careers in educational management. In a study on experiential learning, Kanu and Chima (2020) found that access to workshops and seminars significantly improved students' preparedness for professional duties, including planning, evaluation, and leadership. Research by Sanni and Rafiu (2019) also highlighted that student with regular opportunities for hands–on skill development exhibited superior self–management and organizational competencies.

The relationship between access to skill development opportunities and professional competence is further supported by evidence on co–curricular engagement. Ajiboye and Oladimeji (2023) observed that students participating in leadership clubs, conferences, and professional networks demonstrated more refined communication, analytical thinking, and administrative effectiveness. Olukoya and Fagbemi (2022) found that equitable access to training platforms fosters not only technical abilities but also professional confidence, positively influencing employability outcomes. Similarly, Afolabi and Yusuf (2021) revealed that students with broader exposure to skill development platforms performed better in evaluative assessments of institutional planning and resource management.

Empirical studies examining combined effects of gender education, gender–sensitive practices, and access to skills support the interconnectedness of these factors in promoting professional competence. Adetunji and Omolade (2024) found that students exposed to integrated gender–informed instruction and practical skill workshops exhibited significantly higher performance in leadership and administrative proficiency assessments. Olusanya and Ibrahim (2023) reported that female students with both gender education and access to co–curricular skills programmes were more likely to demonstrate competence on par with male peers. Oyetunji and Akinwande (2022) similarly concluded that equitable skill access coupled with gender–responsive practices leads to enhanced managerial competency across gender groups in educational management programmes.

Existing studies on gender education and skill development in higher education have largely focused on general student populations, with limited attention to discipline-specific contexts such as the Department of Educational Management. Most empirical works emphasize broad gender equity outcomes without systematically examining how gender education directly influences concrete managerial and professional skill development among students preparing for leadership roles in

education. There is also a noticeable gap in research that integrates gender education, gender-sensitive educational practices, and access to skill development opportunities within a single analytical framework, leading to fragmented understanding of their combined effects. Furthermore, few studies adopt a context-specific focus on public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria, despite the unique socio-cultural and institutional dynamics that shape gender relations and learning experiences in the region. This present study therefore fills these gaps by providing empirical, department-specific, and context-based evidence on how gender education and structured skill development mechanisms jointly shape students' professional competence in educational management.

Purpose of the study

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of gender education on skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought:

i. To examine the influence of gender education on skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.
ii. To assess the effect of gender-sensitive educational practices on managerial skill acquisition among students in the Department of Educational Management.
iii. To evaluate the relationship between access to skill development opportunities and students' professional competence in the Department of Educational Management.

Research Questions

The following research were raised to guide the study:

i. How does gender education influence skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?
ii. What is the influence of gender-sensitive educational practices on managerial skill acquisition among students in the Department of Educational Management?
iii. What is the relationship between access to skill development opportunities and students' professional competence in the Department of Educational Management?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

i. Gender education has no significant influence on skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.
ii. Gender-sensitive educational practices have no significant influence on managerial skill acquisition among students in the Department of Educational Management.
iii. Access to skill development opportunities has no significant relationship with students' professional competence in the Department of Educational Management.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which was considered appropriate for examining gender education and skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. This design enabled the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data from a representative sample, thereby allowing valid generalizations to be made about the study population. The target population comprised all undergraduate students in the Department of Educational Management in the two public universities in Cross River State, namely the University of Calabar (Federal) and the University

of Cross River State (State), with an estimated population of 2,840 students. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to draw a sample of 350 students, representing approximately 12.3% of the population. Stratification was based on levels of study and gender to ensure proportional representation across academic levels and both male and female students, thereby enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

Data for the study were collected using two researcher-developed instruments: The Gender Education Scale (GES) and the Skill Development and Professional Competence Inventory (SDPCI). Each instrument contained 30 items carefully aligned with the study's specific objectives. To ensure content and construct validity, the instruments were reviewed by three experts in Educational Management, Gender Studies, and Measurement and Evaluation. Based on their recommendations, necessary modifications were made to improve clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study variables and conceptual framework. A pilot test was conducted using 25 students from Departments of Educational Management in public universities outside Cross River State. The instruments were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis, yielding reliability coefficients of 0.84 for GES and 0.87 for SDPCI, indicating strong internal consistency.

The instruments were structured in three sections: Section A focused on demographic information; Section B contained items on gender education and gender-sensitive educational practices; while Section C consisted of items on skill development opportunities and students' professional competence. The questionnaires were administered both physically and electronically to accommodate students' accessibility and preferences and to improve response rates. Trained research assistants assisted in the distribution and collection of the instruments across lecture halls and departmental platforms over a four-week period. Of the 350 questionnaires distributed, 334 were correctly completed and returned, representing a 95.4% response rate.

Responses were rated on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). A criterion mean score of 2.50 was adopted as the benchmark for decision-making. Mean scores equal to or above 2.50 indicated positive influence of gender education, effective gender-sensitive practices, and adequate access to skill development opportunities, while mean scores below 2.50 indicated negative influence, ineffective practices, and inadequate access. This methodological approach ensured the generation of valid, reliable, and contextually relevant data for assessing gender education and skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Results

Research Question One

How does gender education influence skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Respondents' mean ratings and standard deviation on the influence of gender education on skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State (n = 334)

S/N	Influence indicators	n	Mean	S.D.	Decision
1	Gender education enhances students' confidence in skill acquisition	334	3.31	0.68	SA
2	Gender education promotes equal participation in academic activities	334	3.28	0.71	A
3	Exposure to gender education improves leadership skill development	334	3.35	0.66	SA
4	Gender education reduces stereotypes that limit students' learning opportunities	334	3.22	0.74	A
5	Gender education supports the development of communication skills	334	3.26	0.70	A
6	Gender education enhances students' problem -solving abilities	334	3.30	0.69	SA
7	Gender education improves teamwork and collaborative skills	334	3.24	0.72	A
8	Gender education strengthens students' managerial competence	334	3.27	0.71	A
9	Gender education promotes equitable access to learning resources	334	3.19	0.75	A
10	Gender education enhances students' readiness for professional roles	334	3.33	0.67	SA
	Grand mean score	334	3.28	0.70	A

***Source**: Fieldwork, 2025*

The results in Table 1 show that respondents acknowledged the positive influence of gender education on skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State. The grand mean score of 3.28, which falls within the "Agree" (A) category, indicates that the majority of respondents perceived gender education as a significant contributor to students' skill development. The highest-rated items include improvement in leadership skills ($\bar{X}$ = 3.35), enhancement of professional readiness ($\bar{X}$ = 3.33), and increased confidence in skill acquisition ($\bar{X}$ = 3.31), suggesting that gender education plays a strong role in building students' competence and preparedness for professional responsibilities. Other key areas such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving were also positively rated, reflecting broad developmental benefits. The standard deviation values, ranging from 0.66 to 0.75, indicate a moderate level of agreement among respondents. Overall, the findings demonstrate that gender education significantly contributes to the development of cognitive, managerial, and professional skills among students in the Department of Educational Management.

Research Question Two

What is the effect of gender-sensitive educational practices on managerial skill acquisition among students in the Department of Educational Management?

Table 2: Respondents' mean ratings and standard deviation on the effect of gender-sensitive educational practices on managerial skill acquisition among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State (n = 334)

S/N	Effect indicators	N	Mean	S.D.	Decision
1	Gender-sensitive teaching methods improve students' leadership abilities	334	3.34	0.67	SA
2	Inclusive classroom practices enhance students' planning and organizational skills	334	3.29	0.70	A
3	Equitable participation opportunities strengthen students' decision-making skills	334	3.31	0.69	SA
4	Gender-responsive mentoring improves students' supervisory competence	334	3.26	0.72	A
5	Gender-sensitive feedback practices enhance managerial confidence	334	3.28	0.71	A
6	Collaborative learning environments promote coordination and teamwork skills	334	3.33	0.68	SA
7	Gender-sensitive instructional strategies improve students' administrative skills	334	3.24	0.73	A
8	Fair task allocation strengthens students' resource management abilities	334	3.27	0.70	A
9	Gender-responsive classroom interactions improve conflict management skills	334	3.22	0.74	A
10	Gender-sensitive practices enhance students' readiness for managerial roles	334	3.36	0.65	SA
	Grand mean score	334	3.29	0.70	A

***Source**: Fieldwork, 2025*

The results in Table 2 indicate that respondents generally agreed that gender-sensitive educational practices have a positive effect on managerial skill acquisition among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State. The grand mean score of 3.29, which falls within the "Agree" (A) category, shows that these practices are perceived as significant contributors to students' managerial development. The highest-rated items include readiness for managerial roles ($\bar{X}$ = 3.36), improvement in leadership abilities ($\bar{X}$ = 3.34), and promotion of coordination and teamwork skills ($\bar{X}$ = 3.33), suggesting that gender-sensitive practices strongly enhance leadership and organizational capacities. Other areas such as planning, supervision, decision-making, and administrative competence were also positively rated, indicating broad managerial benefits. The standard deviation values, ranging from 0.65 to 0.74, reflect a moderate level of consensus among respondents. Overall, the findings demonstrate that gender-sensitive educational practices play a critical role in strengthening managerial skills and professional preparedness among students in the Department of Educational Management.

Research Question Three

What is the relationship between access to skill development opportunities and students' professional competence in the Department of Educational Management?

Table 3: Respondents' mean ratings and standard deviation on the relationship between access to skill development opportunities and students' professional competence in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State (n = 334)

S/N	Relationship indicators	N	Mean	S.D.	Decision
1	Access to internships enhances students' professional competence	334	3.35	0.66	SA
2	Participation in workshops and seminars improves students' managerial competence	334	3.32	0.68	SA
3	Access to practical training strengthens students' leadership skills	334	3.30	0.69	SA
4	Skill development programmes improve students' communication competence	334	3.28	0.70	A
5	Exposure to professional training enhances students' decision making ability	334	3.31	0.67	SA
6	Access to mentoring programmes improves students' administrative competence	334	3.27	0.71	A
7	Participation in co-curricular activities enhances students' teamwork skills	334	3.29	0.69	A
8	Skill acquisition opportunities strengthen students' problem-solving competence	334	3.33	0.68	SA
9	Professional development opportunities improve students' career readiness	334	3.34	0.66	SA
10	Access to skill development opportunities enhances overall professional competence	334	3.38	0.64	SA
	Grand mean score	334	3.32	0.68	A

***Source**: Fieldwork, 2025*

The results in Table 3 reveal a strong positive relationship between access to skill development opportunities and students' professional competence in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State. The grand mean score of 3.32, which falls within the "Agree" (A) category, indicates that respondents generally perceived access to skill development platforms as a major contributor to students' professional competence. The highest-rated items include overall enhancement of professional competence ($\bar{X}$ = 3.38), improved career readiness ($\bar{X}$ = 3.34), and enhancement of internship-based competence ($\bar{X}$ = 3.35), suggesting that experiential and practical learning opportunities play a critical role in shaping students' professional preparedness. Other indicators such as leadership development, problem-solving ability, communication competence, and teamwork were also positively rated, reflecting the broad impact of skill development access. The standard deviation values, ranging from 0.64 to 0.71, indicate a moderate level of agreement among respondents. Overall, the findings demonstrate that equitable access to structured skill development opportunities significantly strengthens students' professional competence and readiness for effective practice in educational management.

Hypothesis One

Gender education has no significant influence on skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

H_{01}: Gender education has no significant influence on skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Table 4: One-way ANOVA analysis of the influence of gender education on skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management (n = 334)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-crit	Sig. (p)	Decision
Between Groups	41.28	2	20.64	15.73	3.00	0.000	Reject H_0
Within Groups	434.16	331	1.31				
Total	475.44	333					

***Source**: Fieldwork, 2025*

The result of the one-way ANOVA presented in Table 4 shows that gender education has a statistically significant influence on skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. The calculated F-value (F-cal = 15.73) is greater than the critical F-value (F-crit = 3.00) at the 0.05 level of significance, and the significance value (p = 0.000) is less than 0.05. This indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected. The finding therefore establishes that gender education significantly influences students' skill development, implying that variations in gender education exposure lead to significant differences in students' levels of skill acquisition, professional competence, and preparedness for educational management practice.

Hypothesis Two

Gender-sensitive educational practices have no significant influence on managerial skill acquisition among students in the Department of Educational Management.

Table 5: One-way ANOVA analysis of the influence of gender-sensitive educational practices on managerial skill acquisition among students in the Department of Educational Management (n = 334)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-crit	Sig. (p)	Decision
Between Groups	38.64	2	19.32	14.89	3.00	0.000	Reject H_0
Within Groups	429.78	331	1.30				
Total	468.42	333					

***Source**: Fieldwork, 2025*

The result of the one-way ANOVA presented in Table 5 indicates that gender-sensitive educational practices have a statistically significant influence on managerial skill acquisition among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. The calculated F-value (F-cal = 14.89) is greater than the critical F-value (F-crit = 3.00) at the 0.05 level of significance, and the significance value (p = 0.000) is less than 0.05. This implies that the null hypothesis is rejected. The finding therefore confirms that variations in gender-sensitive educational practices significantly affect students' managerial skill acquisition, influencing their leadership capacity, administrative competence, decision-making ability, and readiness for managerial responsibilities in educational management practice.

Hypothesis Three

Access to skill development opportunities has no significant relationship with students' professional competence in the Department of Educational Management.

Table 6: Regression analysis of the relationship between access to skill development opportunities and students' professional competence (n = 334)

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	F-cal	F-crit	Sig. (p)	Decision
1	0.68	0.46	0.45	0.49	281.52	3.87	0.000	Reject H_0

***Source**: Fieldwork, 2025*

The regression analysis in Table 6 shows a strong positive relationship between access to skill development opportunities and students' professional competence in the Department of Educational Management. The correlation coefficient (R = 0.68) indicates a strong association, while the coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.46) reveals that 46% of the variance in professional competence is explained by access to skill development opportunities. The calculated F-value (F-cal = 281.52) exceeds the critical F-value (F-crit = 3.87) at the 0.05 level of significance, and the significance level (p = 0.000) is less than 0.05. This result leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis, confirming that access to skill development opportunities significantly predicts students' professional competence, including leadership capacity, problem-solving ability, teamwork, and readiness for professional responsibilities in educational management.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicate that gender education significantly influences skill development among students in the Department of Educational Management in public universities in Cross River State. Respondents reported improvements in leadership capacity, problem-solving, teamwork, and professional readiness, with the ANOVA analysis confirming a statistically significant influence of gender education on skill acquisition. These results are consistent with prior studies showing that gender-inclusive curricula enhance analytical, communication, and interpersonal skills among students (Okeke & Adebayo, 2020; Olorundare & Nwobu, 2019; Ibrahim & Bello, 2021). The results also align with evidence that structured gender education supports leadership and decision-making capabilities (Musa & Ojo, 2022; Adeleke & Tunde, 2021; Olaniyan, 2020). However, existing literature has largely focused on general university populations, leaving a gap regarding the specific context of educational management students in Cross River State, highlighting the novelty of this study in providing department-specific empirical evidence.

Similarly, the study found that gender-sensitive educational practices positively affect managerial skill acquisition, as students exposed to inclusive teaching methods, participatory classroom activities, and equitable instructional strategies reported higher competence in organizational, administrative, and supervisory tasks. The ANOVA results confirmed that these effects are statistically significant, reinforcing previous findings that gender-responsive interventions enhance planning, task management, and conflict resolution skills (Chukwu, 2021; Adeyemi & Okafor, 2022; Banjo & Samuel, 2023). In addition, access to skill development opportunities was shown through regression analysis to have a strong predictive relationship with students' professional competence, consistent with prior studies linking internships, workshops, and co-curricular participation to enhanced professional skills and career readiness (Umeh & Obi, 2021; Kanu & Chima, 2020; Ajiboye & Oladimeji, 2023). Despite these confirmations, most previous research has examined these factors independently, whereas this study integrates gender education, gender-sensitive practices, and access to skill development opportunities, thereby filling a critical gap and offering a more holistic understanding of the drivers of professional competence in educational management programmes in Cross River State.

Conclusion

The study concludes that gender education, gender-sensitive educational practices, and access to skill development opportunities significantly enhance students' skill development, managerial competence, and overall professional readiness in the Department of Educational Management. Integrating these factors within university programmes is therefore essential for producing competent and career-ready graduates in educational management.

Recommendations

i. Universities in Cross River State should incorporate structured gender education into the Department of Educational Management curricula to enhance students' skill acquisition, leadership capacity, and professional competence.
ii. University management should implement gender-sensitive teaching practices, including participatory learning, equitable task allocation, and inclusive feedback, to strengthen students' managerial and administrative skills.
iii. Higher education institutions should expand access to skill development opportunities, such as internships, workshops, co-curricular programmes, and mentoring, to improve students' professional preparedness and career readiness.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

GENDER AND POVERTY AS DETERMINANTS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS' TEACHERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS TEACHING IN IMO STATE

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Abstract

The attitude of teachers towards teaching especially in secondary schools is very important for enhancing students' learning experience and satisfaction. This study investigated gender and poverty as determinants of secondary schools' teachers 'attitude towards teaching in Imo State, Nigeria. The aims are to determine and also ascertain the nexus between gender, poverty and teachers' attitude towards teaching. Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the researcher in the course of the study. A total of 300 (three hundred) secondary schools' teachers in Imo state were randomly selected as samples for this study. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled: Gender, poverty and teachers' attitude towards teaching questionnaire (GPTATTQ). The hypotheses were carefully analyzed using the multiple regression tested at 0.05 level of significance. Findings showed that the attitude of teachers towards teaching correlates positively and low towards poverty. Furthermore, gender was found not to be a determinant of both teachers' attitude towards teaching and poverty. The results showed that to a large extent, if secondary schools' teachers are paid salaries and entitlements timely, their attitude towards teaching will improve significantly. This is because they will be able to handle their numerous financial challenges as and when due. Recommendations for further studies were also made.

Keywords: Gender, poverty, Secondary Schools' teachers, teachers' attitude and teaching

Introduction

In Nigeria, secondary schools' teachers strive to develop themselves through further education, engagement in staff development programmes, and so on. This is because of their passion for the teaching profession, and their quest to teach and impart knowledge satisfactorily. The attitude of secondary school teachers towards teaching is affected by gender dynamics and economic challenges (poverty) (Mezieobi, 2023). Furthermore, socio-economic factors and gender roles cause variations in commitment, job satisfaction, and pedagogical approaches. The research highlights how poor infrastructure and low rewards affect teacher motivation. This satisfaction teachers in secondary schools get apart from their quest to teach and teach well, is determined by how well and timely they are paid. This will also affect their attitude towards teaching and their level of preparation before walking into class to teach. Thus Kara (2020) pinpointed that attitude causes individuals to always behave in the same way to people, objects, events and foundations are constant and unchangeable beliefs, feelings and tendencies. According to Anderson (2021), attitude means a moderately intense emotion that prepares or predisposes individuals to respond consistently in a favourable or unfavourable manner when confronted with a particular object. For Okafor (2021), attitude is concerned with ones feelings towards an object, person or thing. Allport (2025) averred that attitude is a mental or neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related. Kerlinger (2022) on his own part perceives attitude as an organized predisposition to think, feel, perceive and behave towards a referent or cognitive object. According to Dieghton (2021) attitude is considered to be as a predisposition to classify objects and events, and to reach to them with some degree of evaluative consistency. Furthermore, Bolan (2024:78) asserted that attitudes"...help to determine what an individual does in a given situation".

Teachers' attitudes toward teaching are influenced by several factors. Some of these factors may be social, economic, physical, psychological, technological and so on. All these factors can also be classified as external or internal depending on their nature of influence whether the teacher is male or female (gender) or from a reach/way affect his or her attitude towards teaching. Gender can therefore be defined as a social construction that differentiates the male identity from the female identity. Thus Nzeni (2017) averred that gender is the social construction of female and male identity which is more than biological differences between men and women. It includes the way in which those differences have been valued, used and relied upon to classify women and men and to assign roles and expectations to them. According to Aydon (2025), gender is the social phenomenon of distinguishing males and females based on a set of identity traits, it as a social, not physiological or biological construction. In other words, a female biologically can be a male through social construction. The society ascribes gender to human beings and animals depending on their dispositions. Furthermore, Okeke (2022) refers to gender as many socially and culturally constructed characteristics, qualities, behaviours and roles which different societies ascribes to females and males.

It is important to note that this study is also anchored on poverty. Poverty in Nigeria has become a national issue even though not just particular or specific to Nigeria. The Millennium Development Goals (2000) declared that"wewill spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected". According to Mowafi (2023), absolute poverty refers to the set of resources a person must acquire in order to maintain a minimum standard of living. Furthermore, Mezieobi (2021) pinpointed that relative poverty is concerned with how well off an individual is with

respect to others in the same society. Poverty alleviation is a necessary step to prevent the ills of poverty becoming extreme in the lives of individuals in a given society. The UNPP (2020) noted that "while income/consumption measures continue to serve as an important tool for the evaluation of global poverty, it has been widely recognized that income-generation programmes are not sufficient for poverty alleviation. Nigerian teachers including irrespective of their institutional affiliation are perceived to be poor-societal stereotype because of the treatment melted on them by the Nigerian government and so on.

Also, Sharma (2024) carried out a study on classroom environment; Ludwig, Burton, Weingarten, Milan and Myers (2025) studied the health of students, others have studied class size, anxiety, self-concept, parents educational achievements, family size and so on all as determinants of attitudes both to learn among students of secondary schools and to teach among teachers of secondary schools. But this study will concentrate on gender and poverty as determinants of teachers' attitude towards teaching in secondary schools in Imo State, Nigeria.

Hypotheses

The following tentative statements (hypotheses) guided the study:

i. There is no significant composite effect of gender and poverty on teachers'attitude towards teaching.
ii. There is no significant effect of gender and poverty on teachers' attitude towards learning.

Methodology Research Design

A descriptive survey was used for the study. This is because the researcher wanted to depict the participants (teachers in secondary schools) in an accurate way. The researcher also did not have any opportunity of influencing the behaviours of the participants in any way.

Setting of the Study

Secondary schools in Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State were the setting of the study. There several private and public secondary schools in Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State. Secondary schools are made up of upper basic education level schools (JSS 1-3), and senior secondary schools. Owerri municipal council is a local government area serving as the heart of the state capital city, Owerri. It covers 58km2 with a 2006 census population of 127,213 composed of five indigenous villages known as Owerri Nchi Ise (Umuororonjo, Amawom, Umuonyeche, Umuodu, and Umuonyima). It is a major trade centre, overseen by a local government chairman and several traditional rulers (Okpara, 2023).

Participants

The participants for this study comprised three hundred (300) secondary schools' teachers in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State, Nigeria. The three hundred samples (150 males and 150 females) were selected through a simple random sampling technique from the different private and public secondary schools in Imo state.

Instrument

A questionnaire titled: Gender, poverty and teachers' attitude towards teaching questionnaire (GPTATTQ) was used in collecting data from the respondents. The questionnaire was made up of three (3) sections A, B and C. Section A who made up of the bio-data of the numerous respondents while sections B and C were made up of 15 questions each. Section B had questions on gender while section C

had questions on poverty. The 4-likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagrees and Strongly Disagree with Acronyms SA, A, D, and SD respective were used. Two experts validated the instrument, one from Educational Management in the Department of Social Science Education, Imo State University, Owerri and one from Measurement and Evaluation, Department of Educational Foundations, Imo State University, Owerri. Furthermore, test retest was used to test for internal consistency of the questionnaire.

Procedure

The researcher with the help of two research assistant visited Imo State University, Owerri. The 2 (two) researcher Assistants that were part of the research are postgraduate students of Imo State University, Owerri, and secondary schools'teachers. Their involvement in the research made the administration of questionnaire to secondary schools' teachers easier. Three hundred questionnaires were administered and retrieved same day.

Data Analysis

The data generated from the questionnaires administered were analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression. The SPSS 15.0 statistical package was utilised in the computation.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Gender on Secondary Schools' Teachers' Attitudes towards Teaching

S/N	Gender	$\bar{x}$	Std	Rem	Secondary Schools'Teachers' Attitudes towards Teaching	$\bar{x}$	Std	Rem
1	Current textbooks available on gender and poverty in secondary schools have improved my understanding of the term	3.09	0.41	A	Developing of reading culture of materials on gender and poverty	3.50	0.25	A
2	Teaching classes where the students learn about the importance of promoting gender equality, makes me understand that secondary schools are essential	1.67	0.27	D	Ability to teach about promoting gender equality	2.11	0.32	D
3	Watching movies on the impacts of gender equality affects my understanding of the term in the classroom	2.21	0.31	D	Enhancing teaching and study durations on gender equality	2.50	0.39	A
4	I enjoy reading books in my school's library on gender equality and gender mainstreaming in teaching and learning	1.63		D	Cultivation of research skills on gender equality and gender mainstreaming		0.42 0.3.9	A A
5	My school has a lot of resources on gender and poverty	1.80		D	Appreciation of books on gender and poverty		0.21	D
6	Orientation on the essence of gender equality and eradication of poverty should be organized for teachers and students regularly	1.62			Disposition to attending orientation programmes on gender equality and eradication of poverty		0.36	D

7	Computer literacy skills have positively affected my teaching capacity in the secondary schools	1.57	Ability to adapt to anyenvironment where teaching and learning can take place		
8	Consulted books on gender and poverty are always relevant to secondary schools' teachers		Exploring reading group opportunities on gender and poverty	0.29 0.26	D D
9	I am being encouraged to research in my school on the impacts of gender equality and poverty eradication		Receptive to other people's ideas and contributions to gender equality and poverty eradication	0.21	D
10	Maintenance of a positive attitude toward gender equality and poverty eradication		Enjoying the positive attitude toward gender equality and poverty eradication	0.24	D
11	Poor information services on gender equality and poverty eradication in my school discourage me from accessing materials on gender equality and poverty eradication		Unwillingness to make use of materials on gender equality and poverty eradication for pieces of research	0.21	D
12	I learned a lot in school during my training years about gender and poverty, and without accessing materials		Unwilling to participate in a literacy programme on gender and poverty Lack of interest in	0.23 0.26	D D
13	Educational activities on gender stereotyping are prohibited in my school		computer skills programme on gender	0.21	D
14	Increase in information materials available on gender and poverty		Unwilling to read books on gender and poverty		
15	High levels of crime happen in the secondary schools due to the effects of gender stereotype and poverty		Inability to make reference/consultation on issues of gender stereotype and poverty		
	Overall mean			**4-44**	

The result presented in Table 1 shows that all the items are positive. This is evident in the level of the respondents' agreement with the items' statement shown in the details of the table above. Meanwhile, the result shows that secondary schools' teachers'attitude towards the teaching is greatly influenced by gender.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and correlation between the gender and poverty on secondary schools' teachers' attitude toward teaching

Variables	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	T	Sig.
(constant)	23	2.316		19.518	.000
Gender	0.516	0.138	0.592	7.518	.000
Poverty	-0.54	0.702	-.0.122	-1.542	0.884

Dependent variable: Secondary schools' teachers' attitude towards teaching The regressional analysis results in table two show that only secondary schools'teachers' gender with the regressional coefficient (0) of 0.516 and a beta weight of 0.592 significantly contributed to secondary schools' teachers' attitude towards the teaching while the contribution of poverty was not significant. The prediction equation is, therefore, as follows: secondary schools' teachers' attitude towards teaching = 23 + 0.516 (G)–0.54P

Based on the result, the null hypothesis which proposed a no significant contribution of the individual variable to the prediction of secondary schools' teachers' attitudes towards teaching was accepted for gender and rejected for poverty.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics and correlation matrix for the relationship between the predictor variables and criterion variable

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Secondary schools'teachers; attitude towards teaching	Gender	Poverty
Secondary schools'teachers' attitude towards teaching	300	29.7466	4.44684	2.000	0.598	-0.152
Gender	300	29.2134	5.10242	0.598	2.000	-0.102
Poverty	300	2.9	0.998	-0.152	-0.102	2.000
						7

The result from table three indicates the mean and standard deviation of the respondents. The participants' value for Secondary schools' teachers' attitude towards teaching was M=29.7466, SD = 4.4684, gender was M = 29.2134, SD = 0.998. Meanwhile, the matrix correlation between the two variables (gender and poverty) and the criterion variable (Secondary schools' teachers' attitudes towards teaching) indicated that Secondary schools' teachers' attitudes towards teaching correlate positively and low towards gender. Also, poverty was never a determinant of both Secondary schools' teachers' attitudes towards teaching and their gender.

Table 4: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis between the predictor variable and the criterion variable

Multiple R (adjusted) = 0.61^, multiple R^2 (ADJUSTED) = 0.186
Adjusted R^2 = 0.162, Std. The Error of the estimate = 4.26386

Mode	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	136.922	4	64.462	15.062	0.736[b]
Resident	1336.264	294	9.09		
Total	1473.186	298			

Dependent variable: Secondary schools' teachers' attitudes towards teaching Predictors: (constant), poverty, gender.

From Table four, it was indicated that the independent variables gave a co-efficient of multiple regression®of 0.61, multiple R2 (0.186), and adjusted R3 = (0.162), which indicates that 93% of the two variables accounted for the Secondary schools'teachers' attitudes towards teaching. This, therefore, indicates that the analysis of the independent variables as a block did not contribute to the Secondary schools'teachers' attitudes towards teaching. The table from the analysis of variables also indicates, it produced an F-ratio of 15.062 and was found to be insignificant at 0.05 levels.

Discussion of Findings

The brief discussions on the findings of hypothesis 1 and 2 have been done immediately after the table 1 and 2 respectively. To reiterate, hypothesis one shows that poverty was not a determinant of both teachers attitude towards teaching and gender. For hypothesis 2, the results of the regressional analysis showed that only gender with the regressional coefficient (b) of 0.516 and a beta weight of 0.592 significantly is responsible for secondary schools' teachers' attitude towards teaching while poverty was not significant in predicting secondary schools' teachers' attitude towards teaching. In support of this study, Roman, cuestas and Fenollar (2018) in their study revealed that self-esteem has the strongest impact on learning and that improving self- esteem is important.

Conclusion

The relationship between gender, poverty and secondary schools' teachers' attitude towards teaching have been exposed through this study. Irrespective of the situation, with the Nigerian context, poverty, gender and secondary schools' teachers' attitude toward teaching will always impact on the other negatively or positively. With constant and improved salary package for secondary schools' teachers, their attitude towards teaching will be tremendously improved and students will learn effectively.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are important;

1. First, the teaching environment should be made conducive.
2. Second, gender should not be made a determinant for any positive or impression in the school environment or education sector.
3. Third, teachers' emoluments/remuneration should be relooked in all its ramification.

4. Four, teachers (lecturers)–students (undergraduates) postgraduates) relationship level should be improved.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

GENDER AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: PATHWAYS FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

Gender inclusivity is increasingly recognized as a pivotal factor for sustainable economic development in Africa. Despite periods of economic growth, structural inequalities continue to limit women's participation in governance, business, and productive sectors, thereby constraining inclusive and resilient development outcomes. This study examines six interlinked theses: (1) gender inequality as a structural constraint on economic development, (2) gender-inclusive governance and development outcomes, (3) women's entrepreneurship and business ecosystems, (4) gender inclusion, innovation, and human capital development, (5) socio-cultural norms, informality, and economic vulnerability, and (6) integrated strategies for gender-inclusive economic transformation. Utilizing desk-based research and comparative analysis across Nigeria, Rwanda and Ghana, the study highlights how policy frameworks, socio-cultural contexts, and institutional reforms influence gender-inclusive economic outcomes. Findings suggest that gender-responsive governance, financial inclusion, entrepreneurial support, and culturally aligned formalization strategies are critical for achieving sustainable economic growth, human capital development, and innovation-led transformation across African economies.

Keywords: *Gender inclusivity, economic development, women's entrepreneurship, governance, human capital, Africa, innovation, socio-cultural norms*

Introduction

Gender inclusivity has emerged as one of the most critical determinants of sustainable economic development in contemporary Africa. While economic growth across the continent has shown periods of resilience and expansion, persistent gender inequalities continue to limit the depth, inclusiveness, and sustainability of development outcomes. This study argues that advancing gender inclusivity is not merely a social justice imperative but a strategic economic necessity, as women's full participation in governance, business, and productive sectors significantly enhances economic resilience, innovation, and inclusive growth. Across African economies, evidence increasingly demonstrates that societies that invest in women's economic empowerment outperform those that marginalize half of their human capital (Duflo, 2012).

This paper would look at (1) Gender Inequality as a Structural Constraint on Economic Development, (2) Gender-Inclusive Governance and Development Outcomes, (3) Women's Entrepreneurship and Business Ecosystems, (4) Gender Inclusion, Innovation, and Human Capital Development, (5) Socio-Cultural Norms, Informality, and Economic Vulnerability and (6) Integrated Strategies for Gender-Inclusive Economic Transformation. This study adopts a desk-based research methodology combined with a comparative analytical approach to explore and interrogate six interlinked theses on gender inclusivity and economic development in Africa. Desk research is employed to systematically review existing academic literature, policy documents, development reports, and institutional datasets from credible sources such as international development agencies, peer-reviewed journals, and national policy frameworks. This approach enables a critical synthesis of existing knowledge on gender, governance, business, and economic development across African contexts.

In addition, a comparative analysis is utilized to examine patterns, divergences, and best practices across selected African countries. By drawing comparative insights from Nigeria, Rwanda and Ghana, the study highlights how different governance structures, cultural contexts, and policy environments shape gender-inclusive economic outcomes. The combined methodological approach allows for both depth of analysis and cross-national relevance, strengthening the explanatory methodology of the six interlinked theses which are explained below.

Gender Inequality as a Structural Constraint on Economic Development

This thesis posits that gender inequality constitutes a fundamental structural constraint on Africa's economic development, rather than a peripheral social concern. It is well noted consistently that disparities in access to education, land ownership, finance, and employment systematically undermine women's productive capacity and, by extension, national economic performance. Klasen and Lamanna (2009) assert that "gender inequality in education and employment significantly reduces economic growth by lowering the average level of human capital and labor productivity" (p. 92). This position underscores the argument that excluding women from full economic participation diminishes aggregate productivity and constrains long-term development.

From an institutional perspective, gender-based exclusion is deeply embedded within legal and economic structures. The World Bank (2020) opines that "gender-discriminatory laws and social norms restrict women's ability to own property, access finance, and participate fully in the economy," thereby limiting their entrepreneurial potential and economic mobility (p. 3). In many African economies, including Nigeria and Ghana, such constraints manifest in women's disproportionate concentration in informal and low-income sectors, where productivity gains and capital accumulation remain limited. According to the International Labour Organization (2018) "women are

overrepresented in informal employment, characterized by low earnings, limited security, and restricted opportunities for growth" (p. 23), a pattern that weakens economic diversification and resilience.

Comparative evidence further illustrates how structural gender inequality operates across national contexts. In Ghana, women dominate informal trading and micro-enterprises but face persistent barriers to scaling their businesses due to limited access to credit and formal markets. Similarly, in Nigeria, customary land tenure systems and financial exclusion continue to marginalize women economically. Duflo (2012) argues that "women are often prevented from accessing productive resources on equal terms with men, resulting in significant efficiency losses for the economy" (p.1053). This observation reinforces the view that gender inequality imposes measurable economic costs at both micro and macro levels. Overall, this thesis demonstrates that gender exclusion in Africa is not incidental or temporary but structurally produced and sustained by institutional, legal, and cultural frameworks. As UN Women (2021) asserts, "structural gender inequalities continue to shape economic outcomes by limiting women's access to power, resources, and opportunities" (p. 5). Addressing these entrenched constraints is therefore essential for unlocking Africa's full economic potential and achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

Gender-Inclusive Governance and Development Outcomes

The second thesis argues that gender-inclusive governance is a critical determinant of sustainable economic development in Africa. Governance structures shape policy priorities, resource allocation, and institutional accountability, thereby influencing economic and social outcomes. It is widely observed that when women are actively involved in political decision-making, governance becomes more effective and inclusive. According to the World Bank (2012), "women's participation in political decision-making bodies improves governance outcomes by strengthening accountability and responsiveness to citizens' needs" (p. 4). The statement emphasizes governance as a core institutional structure that enables gender inclusion to generate tangible development outcomes.

This study contrasts governance frameworks in Rwanda and Nigeria to illustrate how women's political representation influences economic planning and social investment. Rwanda's exceptional level of female representation in parliament has been widely cited as a catalyst for gender-responsive reforms. UN Women (2021) opines that "higher levels of women's political representation are associated with more inclusive laws and policies, particularly in areas related to social protection, health, education, and land rights" (p. 6). In contrast, Nigeria's relatively low female representation in political leadership continues to limit the integration of gender perspectives into economic planning and development policy. Examination of governance reforms further reveals that countries with stronger female participation in decision-making tend to prioritize inclusive social investments that support long-term economic development. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019) asserts that "gender-balanced leadership in public institutions leads to more equitable policy outcomes and more effective public service delivery" (p. 18). These policies are especially reflected in Rwanda's land reforms, health insurance programs, and education initiatives, all of which have strengthened human capital development and enhanced economic resilience.

A position reflected in Rwanda's post-genocide governance architecture. One of the most significant outcomes of this inclusivity is Rwanda's land reform policy, which legally guarantees women equal rights to land ownership and inheritance. The World Bank (2018) posits that "Rwanda's land tenure regularization program significantly increased women's land ownership and strengthened tenure

security, with positive effects on agricultural productivity and household welfare" (p. 45). Secure land rights have enabled women to invest productively in agriculture, access credit, and contribute more effectively to rural economic growth. In the health sector, Rwanda's community-based health insurance scheme (Mutuelles de Santé) further demonstrates the developmental dividends of inclusive governance. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) opines that "Rwanda's community-based health insurance model has been instrumental in expanding access to healthcare, reducing catastrophic health expenditures, and improving population health outcomes" (p. 12). Improved access to healthcare, particularly for women and children, has strengthened labor productivity and reduced vulnerability, thereby reinforcing national economic resilience.

Education policy reforms similarly reflect the impact of gender-responsive governance. Rwanda's commitment to universal primary education and gender parity in schooling has produced measurable human capital gains. UNESCO (2019) argues that "Rwanda has achieved near gender parity in primary and secondary education, contributing to improved educational outcomes and long-term economic prospects" (p. 7). By investing in girls' education and promoting equal access to learning opportunities, Rwanda has expanded its skilled labor base and enhanced its capacity for innovation and growth.

Collectively, these land, health, and education reforms underscore how gender-inclusive governance functions as a strategic lever for development. As UN Women (2021) asserts, "Rwanda's experience demonstrates that women's leadership in governance can drive transformative policies that strengthen human capital and support sustainable economic development" (p. 9). Rwanda's case thus provides empirical evidence that gender-balanced leadership is not merely symbolic but instrumental in building resilient and inclusive African economies. From a development planning perspective, gender-inclusive governance also enhances policy effectiveness by incorporating diverse experiences and needs into economic decision-making. The African Development Bank (2020) argues that "inclusive institutions that integrate women into governance structures are better positioned to design and implement sustainable development strategies" (p. 72). This perspective reinforces the view that women's political participation is not symbolic but instrumental to economic transformation. Overall, this thesis underscores governance as a key institutional lever for advancing gender-responsive economic transformation in Africa. As UNDP (2020) concludes, "sustainable development is unlikely to be achieved without women's full and equal participation in leadership and decision-making processes" (p. 11). Strengthening gender-inclusive governance is therefore essential for fostering inclusive growth, social equity, and long-term economic sustainability across African economies.

Women's Entrepreneurship and Business Ecosystems

The third thesis focuses on women's entrepreneurship as a critical driver of economic growth and employment creation in African economies. Across the continent, women-owned micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) constitute a significant share of business activity and provide essential livelihoods, particularly within urban informal and semi-formal sectors. The International Labour Organization (2018) postulates that "women's enterprises play a central role in employment generation and income security, especially in developing economies where MSMEs dominate the business landscape" (p. 21). This observation underscores the strategic importance of women's entrepreneurship beyond subsistence, positioning it as a pillar of inclusive economic development. Drawing on desk reviews of business and labor reports, this study analyzes the structural role of women-owned MSMEs in African economies. The World Bank (2020) observes that "women-owned

firms are a vital source of economic dynamism, yet they remain smaller, less profitable, and less likely to grow than male-owned firms due to systemic constraints" (p. 14). These constraints are not reflective of entrepreneurial capacity but rather of unequal access to productive resources and enabling environments.

Insights drawn from Nigeria and Ghana indicate that systemic barriers hinder the scalability of businesses owned and managed by women. Women entrepreneurs in Nigeria remain financially marginalized due to limited availability of formal loans, excessive collateral conditions, and fragile property rights protections. The World Bank (2019) asserts that "women entrepreneurs face disproportionately higher barriers to finance, including legal restrictions and discriminatory lending practices" (p. 37). Similarly, women in Ghana largely control micro and small businesses, yet these enterprises often struggle to move beyond limited growth patterns. The African Development Bank (2021) argues that "women-owned enterprises are heavily concentrated in low-value-added sectors and face persistent exclusion from formal markets and supply chains" (p. 62).

Access to formal registration and markets further shapes enterprise growth trajectories. According to UN Women (2020), "the lack of business formalization and market access significantly limits women entrepreneurs' ability to scale operations, innovate, and integrate into national and regional value chains" (p. 9). Such barriers sustain an entrepreneurship pattern centered on subsistence, where women-owned enterprises emphasize short-term financial security over strategic long-term expansion and market competitiveness. This study therefore, emphasizes the critical importance of creating business ecosystems that support women's shift from subsistence-driven ventures to enterprises aimed at sustainable growth. As the OECD (2018) asserts, "gender-responsive policies that improve access to finance, markets, skills, and networks are essential for unlocking the full growth potential of women-led businesses" (p. 25). Creating inclusive regulatory frameworks, tailored financial instruments, and supportive institutional environments is thus central to harnessing women's entrepreneurship as a transformative force for Africa's economic development.

Gender Inclusion, Innovation, and Human Capital Development

This study advocates that gender inclusion is a foundational driver of innovation and human capital development in contemporary economies. Inclusive governance frameworks expand access to education, skills acquisition, and productive opportunities, thereby strengthening the quality and diversity of human capital. The World Bank (2012) asserts that "gender equality is smart economics because it enhances productivity, improves development outcomes, and makes institutions more representative" (p. 4). This positions gender inclusion as an economic strategy rather than a purely social objective.

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) plays a critical role in translating gender inclusion into human capital investments. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019) states that "gender budgeting helps ensure that public spending supports equal access to education, health, and economic opportunities for women and men" (p. 15). Such fiscal frameworks improve workforce quality and long-term economic resilience. Policy formulation that integrates gender perspectives further stimulates innovation by enabling broader participation in knowledge production and entrepreneurship. UN Women (2020) argues that "inclusive policies that address gender gaps in education, science, and technology foster innovation and inclusive growth" (p. 9). By reducing structural barriers, governments unlock the innovative potential of women across formal and informal sectors.

Leadership representation also shapes innovation-driven development outcomes. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2018) asserts that "diverse leadership improves institutional performance and policy responsiveness, particularly in areas linked to human development" (p. 7). Gender-balanced leadership encourages policies that prioritize skills development, research, and social investment. Collectively, gender-inclusive governance frameworks strengthen sustainable development trajectories by enhancing innovation capacity and human capital utilization. The African Development Bank (2020) posits that "investing in women's skills and leadership is essential for Africa's long-term economic transformation and competitiveness" (p. 76). Gender inclusion thus emerges as a catalyst for equitable and innovation-led growth.

Socio-Cultural Norms, Informality, and Economic Vulnerability

This research asserts that gendered economic outcomes in African societies are strongly influenced by prevailing socio-cultural norms. Cultural assumptions surrounding women's roles, mobility, and authority hinder their access to key resources and involvement in decision-making processes. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018) asserts that "cultural and social norms continue to limit women's participation in formal labor markets and decision-making roles, reducing their economic agency" (p. 22). These embedded norms interact with institutional and legal frameworks to create persistent structural inequalities.

Informal economic structures, while providing critical livelihood opportunities for women, often perpetuate vulnerability. Women dominate informal sectors such as street trading, small-scale agriculture, and home-based enterprises, but these roles are typically low-income, insecure, and unprotected. The World Bank (2020) opines that "informal employment offers survival mechanisms for women but leaves them exposed to economic shocks, social insecurity, and lack of legal protections" (p. 18). This duality highlights the trade-off between economic participation and vulnerability in gendered labor markets. Comparative evidence across African countries, including Nigeria and Ghana, illustrates how informal economies are shaped by cultural expectations. UN Women (2021) argues that "without targeted interventions, women remain concentrated in low-value activities, limiting their ability to accumulate assets or participate in leadership and governance" (p.7). Desk-based analyses show that informal economies, though essential for livelihoods, often reinforce structural exclusion from credit, markets, and social protection systems.

This thesis thus advocates for culturally responsive strategies that formalize women's economic activities while respecting social cohesion. The African Development Bank (2020) posits that "policy interventions that integrate cultural contexts with formalization strategies can enhance women's economic security without disrupting traditional social structures" (p. 79). Such strategies enable women to transition from vulnerable informal roles to secure, growth-oriented participation in the economy.

Integrated Strategies for Gender-Inclusive Economic Transformation

This sixth research study posits that Africa's economic future depends on integrated, multi-sectoral strategies that embed gender inclusivity across governance, business, education, and innovation systems. Inclusive development requires coordination across multiple policy domains to maximize impact. The African Development Bank (2020) asserts that "gender-inclusive policies across sectors—education, finance, and governance—are essential to achieving sustained economic growth and resilience" (p. 81). Isolated interventions, while helpful, cannot fully address the systemic nature of gendered exclusion in African economies.

Cross-country comparative evidence highlights the importance of policy synergies and best practices. Rwanda's integration of gender-responsive budgeting, financial inclusion programs, and education reforms demonstrates how coordinated strategies can drive inclusive growth. UN Women (2021) opines that "Rwanda's experience illustrates that aligning multiple policy instruments around gender equality generates more sustainable and measurable development outcomes" (p. 10). Similarly, lessons from Nigeria and Ghana show that piecemeal approaches often fail to empower women effectively, underscoring the value of integrated frameworks. Financial inclusion initiatives play a pivotal role in supporting women-led enterprises and innovation. The World Bank (2020) argues that "access to formal financial services, coupled with supportive legal and regulatory environments, significantly enhances women's participation in productive sectors and economic resilience" (p. 16). When combined with education and skills development, these interventions strengthen human capital and expand opportunities for innovation.

Finally, this thesis frames gender inclusion as a long-term strategic pathway for sustainable and resilient economic development in Africa. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019) posits that "embedding gender considerations into national development strategies is not only a matter of equity but a strategic approach to achieving competitiveness, innovation, and long-term sustainability" (p. 20). By coordinating governance, business, education, and innovation policies, African states can transform gender equality from a normative goal into an economic driver.

Conclusion

This study underscores that gender inclusivity is both a social imperative and an economic strategy essential for Africa's sustainable development. Structural gender inequalities, embedded within legal, economic, and socio-cultural frameworks, continue to limit women's full participation in economic and governance systems. Evidence from Rwanda, Nigeria, and Ghana illustrates that gender-inclusive governance, equitable access to finance and education, and supportive business ecosystems can significantly enhance economic resilience, innovation, and growth. Women's entrepreneurship, when supported through formalization, access to markets, and financial inclusion, emerges as a powerful driver of inclusive development. Furthermore, integrating gender perspectives into human capital development and policy formulation stimulates innovation and strengthens long-term economic competitiveness. African economies must therefore adopt multi-sectoral, coordinated strategies that embed gender inclusivity across governance, business, education, and innovation systems to unlock the full potential of half of their human capital and ensure equitable, sustainable transformation.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT: NEED FOR GENDER EQUITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria's socio-economic development is intricately linked to its ability to harness the potential of its citizens, particularly women, who constitute over half of the population. Despite progress in increasing access to education, gender disparities persist in Nigeria's education and skill development landscape. This paper argues that achieving gender equity in education and skill development is crucial for Nigeria's development, and that concerted efforts are needed to address the existing gaps. This study highlights the current state of education and skill development in Nigeria, with a focus on the challenges faced by women and girls. It examines the impact of societal norms, cultural practices, and policy implementation on women's access to quality education and skills training. This study also discusses the benefits of promoting gender equity in education, including improved economic outcomes, better health, increased participation of women in politics and governance, and increased civic engagement. This study advocates for a multi-faceted approach to promoting gender equity in education and skill development, including policy reforms, increased funding for girls' education, and community-based initiatives. It also emphasizes the need for a shift in societal attitudes and norms that perpetuate gender inequality. The study concludes that achieving gender equity in education and skill development is not only a matter of social justice but also a critical component of Nigeria's development strategy.

Keywords: *Education, Skill Development, Gender Equity.*

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of economic growth, social mobility, and individual empowerment. It is widely recognized as a critical factor in promoting economic development, reducing poverty, and improving health outcomes (World Bank, 2018). It is the foundation upon which every other national planning stands. Education involves investment in human capital, and it is a labour-intensive industry. It helps to develop the full potentials of an individual and also prepares him for useful living. Okeke and Igbokwe (2018); Osegbue, (2025) opined that education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and values that enable individuals to participate fully in society and contribute to the development of their communities. In the context of this study, education is critical for promoting economic growth, reducing poverty, and improving health outcomes for everyone, irrespective of gender.

In today's competitive landscape, businesses must acknowledge the value of inclusion and diversity. By fostering an inclusive culture that supports women's progress, companies can tap into the vast talents and perspectives that drive innovation (Nkuna, 2024). The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), emphasizes the importance of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). Despite advancement in expanding educational access, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where Nigeria is located, the country still grapples with pressing concerns and significant challenges that impede progress, particularly in the context of education, skill development, and gender equity.

Current State of Education and Skill Development in Nigeria

The current state of education and skill development in Nigeria is a pressing concern. The United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] (2024) clearly pointed out that Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children globally, with over 10.5 million children not attending school, mostly girls. It further reported that 10.2 million primary school children were out of school in Nigeria, with 16% of them from North-Eastern States in Nigeria. Similarly, according to United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] report, Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world, with estimates suggesting that over 10 million children are not enrolled in formal education (Inusa, 2025).

Notwithstanding this daunting challenge, the Nigerian government has launched initiatives like the Transforming Nigerian youths Programme (Focusing on female entrepreneurs), Nigeria Youth Academy (NiYA), Youth Empowerment and Innovation Development Programme (YEIDEP), and women ICT training empowerment programme, aimed at transforming youths through skills, entrepreneurship, and empowerment (OECD, 2018). However, despite this progress, the country still faces significant challenges in ensuring that all citizens have access to quality education and skills training (Adegoke, 2018).

Challenges Faced by Women and Girls

Women and girls in Nigeria face significant barriers to accessing quality education and skills training. According to UNESCO (2-014) girls are more likely to be out of school than boys, with 36% of girls aged 5-14years not attending school compared to 32% of boys. Women who constitute almost half of the world's population has been subject to discrimination, exploitation, and domination by men that has resulted in gender disparity in almost all walks of social life. Momoh (2017) noted that men emerged as dominant individuals and began to control not only wealth, politics and power. They made sure properties are passed on to their sons. Women are yet to be recognized and given their due recognition

in the society. This is due to patriarchal societal structures, traditional practices against women. Similarly, Okonkwo and Obineli (2011) opined that inspite of all steps taken by international conference on women in Beijing in 1995, which enhance the effective participation of women in different sectors including politics and governance, women are still lacking behind. The challenges faced by women and girls in accessing education are multifaceted and include societal norms and cultural practices that prioritize boys' education over girls' education (Okojie, 2017).

Societal Norms and Cultural Practices

Societal norms and cultural practices play a significant role in limiting women's and girls' access to education and skills training in Nigeria. In many parts of the country, girls are socialized to prioritize domestic work and childbearing over education (Nweze, 2018). This is reflected in the fact that many girls are married off at a young age, which can result in early pregnancy and childbirth, making it difficult for them to continue their education (UNICEF, 2018). In many parts of the country, traditional and cultural norms prioritize boys' education over girls' education. This can limit their ability to attend school and pursue their educational and career goals. The patriarchal nature of Nigerian society also perpetuates gender inequality and limits women's access to education and economic opportunities. Women are often expected to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers over their personal and professional development, which can limit their ability to pursue education and skills development.

Cultural attitudes towards women's roles in society can also influence their access to certain subjects, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Many girls are discouraged from pursuing STEM subjects due to societal, cultural, and educational factors. Stereotypes and biases often suggest STEM fields are male-dominated, and girls are naturally less inclined towards mathematics and science. This is compounded by a lack of female role models in STEM, making it harder for girls to envision themselves in these careers. Societal pressure to prioritize traditional feminine roles, limited access to STEM resources and unlimited teacher bias, can also steer girls away. Cultural expectations and a lack of encouragement further limit their opportunities and perpetuate the existing gender gap in these fields. Sutherland (2001) noted that efforts to promote girls STEM programs, showcase role models, and raise awareness, aim to change this narrative and create a more inclusive environment where girls can thrive in STEM subjects

Policy implementation is also a significant challenge in promoting women's access to education and skills training in Nigeria. While the country has made significant progress in developing policies aimed at promoting girls' education, the implementation of these policies is often hampered by inadequate funding, corruption, and a lack of political will (Adegoke, 2018). Furthermore, policies aimed at promoting women's empowerment often focus on economic empowerment rather than addressing the underlying social and cultural barriers that limit women's access to education and skills training (Okeke, 2017; Osegbue et al., 2021). The Nigerian government has introduced several policies aimed at promoting girls' education, including the Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) (2020-2025), the National Policy on Gender in Basic Education (2021), and the Girls' Education Project (GEP3) (2012-2022). These efforts are supported by the Child Rights Act and the Safe Schools Declaration to reduce barriers like child marriage and school insecurity. However, the implementation of these policies has been slow and affected by corruption, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and a lack of accountability.

Similarly, in Nigeria's politics, women's participation is hindered by cultural expectations and traditional roles. Women involvement in politics in Nigeria has come a long way through the

formation of the National Council of Women's Society (NCWS) in 1959. The main goals of this organization included the improvement of welfare, progress and standard of living of women and increasing the role of women in political life for more access in decision making (Olojede in Okonkwo et al., 2021; Ohamobi, et al., 2018). There were other significant roles played by women in anti-colonial struggles. Many women have shown interest in politics and have been exceptional in their contributions, women like Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Sambo Gambo, Margret Ekpo, and Sarah Jubrin (first female presidential candidate), whose contributions to Nigerian politics are notable but, whose efforts are not being recognized by Nigerians because of her gender (Olojede, 2021; Okonkwo et al., 2021; Momoh, 2017).

Ajakaiye (2025) affirmed that the current state of women representation in Nigeria politics is relatively quite low. She noted that in the 10th National assembly, there are only 3 women in Senate (2.7%) and 17 women in the House of Representatives (4.7%). These numbers are a far cry from the recommended 35% affirmative action policy which are being considered in other African counties. This evidence is a clear indication that women are not being given equal opportunities in Nigerian politics. This underrepresentation means diverse perspectives are missing in governance, potentially leading to policies that does not address women's needs effectively as well as disenfranchising them from political participation.

Benefits of Promoting Gender Equity

Gender equity refers to the process of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their gender, have equal access to opportunities, rights, and resources. Gender equity is about creating a level playing field where everyone can thrive without discrimination, bias, or societal expectations that limit their potential (Ihrda, 2025). Achieving gender equality requires more than just equal representation or legal protections- it calls for a fundamental shift in attitudes, behaviours, and systems. Systemic barriers, such as unequal pay, limited access to leadership roles, and rigid gender norms, must be addressed. Yusuf, et al. (2025) affirmed that harmful stereotypes, which often confines individuals to narrow roles based on traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity, need to be dismantled. Gender equality also involves recognizing the intersectionality of identity. Gender equity in this study, refers to the fair distribution of opportunities, resources, and privileges between individuals of all genders, to ensure equal chances for growth and success. Factors such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation can compound the effects of gender inequality.

Similarly, Nkuna, (2024); Osegbue & Ohamobi, (2025) opined that gender equality is not just about balancing opportunities for men and women, but that it also includes breaking down stigmas surrounding gender identity and expression. Creating spaces where individuals can express themselves freely without fear of discrimination or judgement is vital to fostering inclusion. Such spaces include allowing women to participate in politics. This inclusion leads to more inclusive decision-making. Studies have shown that women leaders often prioritize issues like education, healthcare, end social welfare, benefiting society as a whole (Yusuf et al., 2025). Okojie (2017) clearly pointed out that by supporting policies and practices that value diversity and equity, societies can move closer to ensuring that everyone is valued for their unique contributions, not limited by outdated norms or biases. In furtherance, gender equity can boost economic growth by increasing women's participation in workforce. When women have equal access to education, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities, they contribute significantly to national economies. Studies have shown that closing the gap in labour force participation could increase Nigeria's GDP by up to 23% (UNICEF, 2024).

Gender equality is also essential to upholding human rights and fostering societal progress. It ensures that every individual, regardless of gender, can participate fully in society and realize their potential. Promoting gender equity fosters a more inclusive and participatory democracy. When women are empowered, they are more likely to engage in civic activities, vote, and hold leaders accountable. This leads to more responsive governance and better representation of citizens' needs. Societies that prioritize gender equality consistently see higher levels of economic prosperity, innovation, and social stability. Finally, when women and men have equal opportunities, the benefits ripple through communities, household income rises, children gain greater access to education, and civic engagement flourishes. NCA (2025); Aderinoye, (2007) maintained that recognizing the importance of gender equality is the first step towards creating a world where opportunities are universal, and progress benefits everyone.

Overcoming Barriers of Gender Equity – Way Forward

Despite growing awareness about gender equality, substantial obstacles persist, hindering true parity. Deep-seated societal norms and systemic inequalities continue to block the path to genuine equality, making it essential to tackle these challenges head-on to create a more inclusive and equitable world. To propagate the need for gender equity in Nigeria the following measures should be upheld:

- Patriarchal society and media stereotypes should be discouraged- Patriarchal systems often place rigid expectations on individuals based on gender, reinforcing power imbalances and limiting opportunities. These patterns highlight the importance of gender equality because they show how unequal structures can hold entire communities back. Media representations add to the problem by frequently portraying women in subordinate roles, while promoting narrow ideals of masculinity and femininity. This reinforces outdated views and further distances society from a true gender equality meaning rooted in fairness and shared opportunity. To overcome these challenges, education system can teach subjects that promotes gender inclusiveness, individuals and other stakeholders in the education industry, must also confront their own biases and support inclusive policies
- Peer pressure and societal Norms- Gender norms are deeply woven into the fabric of our society, shaping how individuals are expected to think, act, and even dream. From a young age, people often face pressure to conform to rigid gender roles that limit their choices and stifle their true selves. Men are meant to adhere to hyper-masculine ideals that value toughness over vulnerability. Women on the other hand are navigating discouragement or outright barriers when pursuing careers in traditionally male-dominated industries like engineering or technology. Understanding the true gender equality meaning helps reveal how these expectations restrict everyone and highlights the need for greater egalitarianism in homes, schools, and workplaces. These entrenched expectations can be isolating and damaging, thereby shoving people into roles that fail to reflect their individuality. The weight of societal norms often makes it difficult for individuals to step outside these predefined boundaries, leaving many unable to fully embrace their potential. To overcome these norms is a collective responsibility. Encouraging open conversations about gender expectations is a powerful starting point. Communities can amplify the voices of role models who have defied stereotypes. People like Prof. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (former Minister of Finance), Late Prof, Dora Akunyili (Former Director General of NAFDAC), Dr. Uche Ekwunife (Member of the Senate), Lynda Chuba Ikpeazu (former member House of Representative, representing Onitsha North and South), Mrs Virginia Etiaba (first and only female governor of Anambra State), Aisha Yesufu and Oruche Ogeamara Precious (two Nigerian youth female acivists). All these remarkable women have performed excellently and their achievement should be used to

encourage and inspire others. Grassroots movements and social campaigns also play a vital role in dismantling harmful norms and creating a culture the values diversity and inclusivity.

- Legislative Reforms: The government should ensure 35% representation of women in government and appointive position as acclaimed. These reforms should not only be in blue prints, but should be enforced. Countries like India has allocated over 90,859.54 crore towards schemes benefiting women and girls, focusing on welfare, education, health, housing, transport, and safety (Ihrda, 2025). Gender budgeting is a key policy reform in most advanced countries of the world, which prioritizes women-centric schemes. Nigeria need to adopt and implement gender-responsive budgeting, allocating specific funds to address the unique need and challenges of women.
- Community-based Initiatives: This is also crucial for promoting gender equity. This is achieved by organizing women's leadership programs, promoting women economic empowerment programmes, organizing local groups like women's foundation for skill development to support vulnerable women.

Conclusion

Gender equity is crucial for a fair, prosperous, and sustainable society. When everyone has equal opportunities, individuals succeed, communities thrive, and nations benefits. Gender equity is not just a social issue, it is a vital driver of economic growth, health and innovation. The challenges faced by women and girls in accessing quality education and skills training in Nigeria are significant. Societal norms and cultural practices, poverty, and policy implementation challenges all contribute to the existing gaps in education and skills development. To promote gender equity in education and skills development, it is essential to address these challenges through a multi-faceted approach that includes policy reforms, increased funding for girls' education, and community-based initiatives.

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Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

GENDER INCLUSIVITY IN CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND ENTREPRENEURIAL PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Women's participation in corporate governance remains limited in many African contexts, despite evidence suggesting that gender diversity enhances strategic decision-making, innovation, and firm performance. In Nigeria, where small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) drive economic growth, the influence of gender-inclusive governance on entrepreneurial performance remains underexplored. This study examines the effect of gender inclusivity in corporate governance on entrepreneurial performance in Nigerian SMEs. Using a quantitative survey approach, primary data were collected from 150 SMEs across manufacturing, services, and ICT sectors. Data were analysed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis to test the relationship between female representation in boards and executive roles, and measures of entrepreneurial performance, including profitability, growth, and innovation. Preliminary findings suggest that higher gender inclusivity in governance is positively associated with entrepreneurial performance, and firm-specific factors such as size and industry type moderate this relationship. The study contributes to the discourse on gender diversity by providing empirical evidence from a Nigerian context and offers practical recommendations for policymakers, entrepreneurs, and corporate boards seeking to enhance firm performance through inclusive governance practices. Findings also underscore the importance of equitable female representation in leadership as a strategy for advancing sustainable business development in Africa.

Keywords: *Gender Inclusivity, Corporate Governance, Entrepreneurship, Firm Performance, Nigeria*

Introduction

Gender inclusivity in corporate governance has become a critical topic of discussion globally, driven by the increasing recognition that diverse boards and management teams enhance decision-making, innovation, and firm performance (Simionescu, Gherghina, Tawil, & Sheikha, 2021). A wider commitment to social justice, corporate responsibility, and sustainable business development is reflected in the policies and regulatory frameworks that many developed nations have put in place to support women's participation on boards and in executive management in recent decades (Post & Byron, 2015; Pletzer, Nikolova, Kedzior, & Voelkel, 2015).

Despite the institutional, cultural, and financial obstacles that women face in achieving leadership positions in Africa, and Nigeria specifically, the corporate environment is still dominated by men (Oyerogba & Ogungbade, 2020; Musa, 2023). However, research indicates that gender-inclusive governance mechanisms can improve entrepreneurial performance by bringing diverse perspectives, improving strategic oversight, and encouraging ethical and innovative practices (Akpan, Otung, & Nsentip, 2025).

Nigeria's innovation landscape, job creation, and economic growth all depend heavily on entrepreneurial success, particularly in the small and medium-sized firm (SME) sector. However, there is a dearth of empirical data regarding the relationship between improved business results for entrepreneurial firms and gender inclusivity in governance structures, especially in developing nations like Nigeria. By examining the connection between gender inclusion in corporate governance and entrepreneurial performance in Nigerian SMEs, this study aims to close this information gap.

Statement of the Problem

Women are still underrepresented in boardrooms and executive leadership roles in Nigerian companies, despite growing recognition of the value of gender inclusion in governance (Oyerogba & Ogungbade, 2020; Akpan, Otung, & Nsentip, 2025). Due to the lack of different viewpoints, creative solutions, and ethical monitoring in decision-making, this underrepresentation may have a detrimental effect on entrepreneurial performance. Few empirical researches have concentrated on entrepreneurial and SME contexts in Nigeria, where governance arrangements are frequently less structured, despite the fact that numerous studies have looked at gender diversity in major listed organizations. As a result, there is not enough data to ascertain if gender-inclusive governance may considerably improve entrepreneurial success and how organizational factors like industry, firm size, and age might affect this relationship. Thus, the following issue is addressed in this study: Nigerian entrepreneurial enterprises continue to operate in circumstances with low female representation, despite the potential advantages of gender-inclusive governance. This raises questions regarding the impact of such inclusivity on entrepreneurial performance.

Objectives of the Study

This study's primary goal is to investigate how gender inclusion in corporate governance affects Nigerian entrepreneurs' performance. Particular Goals are:

i. To evaluate the proportion of women in executive management and on boards in Nigerian start-up companies.
ii. To ascertain the connection between entrepreneurial performance and gender diversity on the board.
iii. To assess the impact of gender-inclusive governance policies on the expansion, innovation, and sustainability of businesses.

iv. To investigate how gender inclusion and entrepreneurial performance are related to firm-specific variables (size, age, and industry).

Research Questions

The following research questions serve as the study's compass:

i. How many women are involved in Nigerian entrepreneurial enterprises' governance structures?
ii. What impact does gender diversity on boards have on the performance of entrepreneurs?
iii. How do gender-inclusive governance policies affect the expansion, creativity, and sustainability of businesses?
iv. Does the association between gender inclusion and entrepreneurial performance depend on firm-specific factors like size, age, and industry?

Research Hypotheses

The following theories are also tested in the study:

i. H_{o_1}: The success of entrepreneurs in Nigerian companies is not considerably impacted by the presence of women on boards and in upper management.
ii. H_{o_2}: Business development, innovation, and sustainability are not greatly impacted by gender-inclusive governance approaches.
iii. H_{o_3}: The association between gender inclusion and entrepreneurial performance is not moderated by firm-specific attributes (size, age, industry).

Significance of the Study

There are various reasons why this study is important:

i. Theoretical Contribution: The study closes a significant empirical data vacuum by expanding the literature on gender diversity and entrepreneurial performance in Nigeria, especially in SMEs.
ii. Practical Relevance: The results will educate managers, legislators, and business owners about the significance of gender-inclusive governance frameworks and how they affect corporate results.
iii. Policy Implications: The study's conclusions could direct institutional and legal frameworks to encourage women's involvement in corporate governance, which would ultimately improve economic growth and the sustainability of businesses.
iv. Social Benefits: By emphasizing the importance of gender inclusion, the study promotes diversity, equity, and fairness—all of which are essential for Nigeria's long-term social and economic growth.

Scope of the Study

SMEs and entrepreneurial companies in Nigeria that work in a range of sectors, such as manufacturing, trade, ICT, and services, are the subject of this study. The study examines gender inclusion in corporate governance as the independent variable and entrepreneurial performance as the dependent variable. Firm-specific traits like size, age, and industry type are examples of moderating variables. The study uses primary survey data collected from board members, business owners, and upper management.

Literature Review

The theoretical and empirical research on gender inclusion in corporate governance and its impact on business and entrepreneurial success is reviewed in this chapter. The review identifies key trends, gaps, and implications for this study by synthesizing findings from research with a global, African, and Nigerian focus.

Conceptual Review

Gender Inclusivity in Governance

Equal representation and participation of women in boardrooms and management leadership structures are key components of gender inclusion in corporate governance (Adamu & Abubakar, 2021). According to research, diverse boards may improve organizational outcomes by bringing a greater variety of viewpoints and high-quality decision-making. Board composition, senior management gender parity, and official policies supporting gender equity are all included in gender inclusive governance.

Entrepreneurial Performance

Measurable results like the profitability, expansion, innovation, and sustainability of entrepreneurial businesses are referred to as entrepreneurial performance. Financial measurements like ROA and ROE as well as more general indicators like market expansion and innovations are frequently used to operationalize this concept (Simionescu, Gherghina, Tawil & Sheikha, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

Agency Theory

According to agency theory, governance systems lessen disputes between managers (agents) and owners (principals). Stronger oversight and lower agency expenses can result from increased diversity in governance, such as the representation of women (Simionescu et al., 2021).

Resource Dependence Theory

According to the resource dependence theory, a diverse board can assist organizations in gaining access to vital outside resources like networks, knowledge, and credibility. It is believed that women on boards provide special social capital that can improve corporate performance and strategic decision-making (Tonoyan & Boudreaux, 2023).

Stakeholder Theory

The significance of governance procedures that represent the interests of all stakeholders, particularly underrepresented gender groups, is emphasized by stakeholder theory. According to Akpan, Otung, and Nsentip (2025), gender inclusive governance routes support societal legitimacy and justice, which can lead to improved performance outcomes.

Empirical Literature

Global Studies on Gender Diversity and Firm Performance

Numerous studies from developed economies have found that gender diversity has a variable but overall positive effect on economic outcomes: Campbell and Mínguez Vera (2008) found a positive relationship between board gender diversity and financial success in Spanish enterprises. In a meta-analysis of 140 studies, Post and Byron (2015) discovered that female board participation often correlates with higher accounting returns (such ROA and ROE), particularly in settings with strong gender parity. Similar meta-analyses were conducted by Pletzer et al. (2015) to show that, although

contextual factors have a significant role, there is a marginally positive association between the success of businesses and the participation of more women on boards. According to Mohsni et al. (2021), gender-diverse boards reduce business risk and are positively associated with operational success, especially in developing countries. These results demonstrate the complexity, multifaceted nature, and context-specificity of the link between gender diversity and performance.

Innovation, Risk and Diversity

Research indicates that gender diversity can influence inventive and risk-taking behaviors, both of which enhance corporate performance: According to a recent study by Board gender diversity, innovation ambidexterity, and company performance (2025), gender diverse boards have a positive effect on innovation ambidexterity, which can result in long-term value creation. A Chinese study on board gender diversity and innovation performance found that gender variety promoted balanced risk-taking, which enhanced innovation outcomes. This research has improved our understanding of the ways in which gender inclusion may impact entrepreneurial effectiveness.

Evidence from African Settings

- Nigeria and other African contexts show trends that are in line with more general global findings but influenced by particular institutional and cultural factors: Oyerogba and Ogungbade (2020) discovered that among listed Nigerian companies, boards with more women were linked to higher firm value. Ilo and Nnedu (2025) found that, when supported by directors' compensation, female board representation and gender-based credentials had a beneficial impact on Nigerian consumer goods companies' financial performance.
- Dada, Gbadebo, and Ibrahim (2025) found conflicting effects of gender diversity on financial performance, suggesting that Nigerian setting is unique. Musa (n.d.) highlights that gender diversity affects company performance through board characteristics and governance channels that go beyond simple representation. Akpan, Otung, and Nsentip (2025) demonstrated that gender diversity supports stakeholder viewpoints by positively influencing CSR performance among Nigerian healthcare organizations. These empirical studies show a variety of results; some discover mixed or conditional impacts, while many shows positive associations.

Other African Evidence

The ramifications of gender diversity in governance are also highlighted in other African nation contexts:

For companies registered on the Lusaka Stock Exchange, Mumba (2017) discovered a favourable correlation between board gender diversity and firm success. This highlights the potential generalizability of gender governance effects in many African contexts.

Gender Diversity and Performance: Mixed Evidence: A substantial amount of data shows that gender diversity does not necessarily lead to performance gains: According to Dada, Gbadebo, and Ibrahim (2025), gender diversity may have minimal or context-specific implications on performance in a variety of Nigerian businesses. According to Pletzer et al. (2015), gender involvement on boards may show no correlation with financial performance after adjusting for contextual factors.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite thorough research, there are still gaps:

i. There is little primary survey data on gender diversity in governance and entrepreneurial performance in Nigeria.
ii. Results that vary depending on the situation due to methodological differences and cultural effects.
iii. Inadequate research into mechanisms (e.g., fiscal constraints, resource availability, and inventiveness). This study uses primary survey data to investigate gender participation in governance and its effect on entrepreneurial performance in Nigeria in an effort to close these gaps.

Methodology

Research Design

This study uses a cross-sectional survey method with a quantitative research methodology. Because it makes it possible to measure the correlations between gender inclusion in corporate governance and entrepreneurial performance objectively, the quantitative approach is deemed appropriate. The study's cross-sectional design makes it appropriate for conference and policy-oriented research since it enables data to be gathered from a variety of Nigerian entrepreneurial enterprises at one particular moment.

Population of the Study

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) and entrepreneurial firms that operate in Nigeria make up the study's population. These companies operate in several important areas of the Nigerian economy, such as agribusiness, manufacturing, services, commerce, and information and communication technology (ICT). Due to their substantial contributions to Nigeria's economic growth, innovation, and employment creation, entrepreneurial businesses were chosen.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study's sample size consisted of 220 entrepreneurial businesses. The sample size is deemed sufficient for statistical analysis and in line with comparable empirical research on entrepreneurship and governance. The method used was convenience and stratified sampling. To guarantee sufficient participation, firms were initially categorized according to industry categories. Respondents were then chosen based on their accessibility and willingness to participate.

Sources of Data

The study only uses primary data that was gathered using a standardized questionnaire. Because they enable the researcher to directly capture firm-specific governance procedures and performance perceptions which are frequently unavailable in secondary data sources for Nigerian entrepreneurial firms' primary data were chosen.

Research Instrument

A standardized questionnaire that was created in accordance with the study's goals and pertinent research on corporate governance, gender inclusion, and entrepreneurial performance was used to gather data. There were five sections on the questionnaire:

i. Section A: Features of respondents and firms
ii. Section B: Inclusion of women in corporate governance
iii. Section C: Performance as an entrepreneur

iv. Section D: Women's issues in governance
v. Section E: Methods for advancing governance that is inclusive of all genders

Validity of the Research Instrument

The questionnaire items were modified from earlier empirical research on gender diversity, corporate governance, and business performance in order to guarantee content and construct validity. Academic specialists in accounting, finance, and entrepreneurship evaluated the tool to make sure it was clear, pertinent, and in line with the study's goals. These experts' input was taken into consideration prior to the questionnaire's final distribution.

Reliability of the Research Instrument

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to evaluate the research instrument's dependability. Constructs with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.70 and above were deemed reliable and appropriate for additional study after a pilot test. This cutoff point aligns with accepted norms in social science research.

Measurement of Variables

Independent Variables

Three metrics were employed to assess gender inclusion in corporate governance: Female Board Representation (FBR): Assessed utilizing metrics pertaining to women's involvement and presence on boards. Women in Top Management (WTM): Determined by measuring the participation of women in important managerial roles and decision-making. Gender Diversity Practices (GDI): This measure is based on items that evaluate gender-inclusive policies and practices**.**

Dependent Variable

Entrepreneurial Performance (EP) was measured using self-reported indicators relating to profitability, business growth, sustainability, and innovation. The mean scores of the performance-related elements were used to create a composite performance index.

Control Variables

The following firm-specific factors that could affect performance were taken into account in the study: The size of the firm, Firm age and Type of industry

Model Specification

To examine the effect of gender inclusivity in corporate governance on entrepreneurial performance, the following regression model was specified:

$EP=\beta_0+\beta_1FBR+\beta_2WTM+\beta_3GDI+\beta_4FS+\beta_5FA+\varepsilon EP$

Where:

- EP = Entrepreneurial Performance
- FBR = Female Board Representation
- WTM = Women in Top Management
- GDI = Gender Diversity Practices
- FS = Firm Size
- FA = Firm Age
- ε = Error term

Method of Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data. The following methods of analysis were used:

i. Using descriptive statistics to summarize the traits of the firm and respondents
ii. Utilizing Cronbach's Alpha for reliability analysis
iii. To investigate correlations between variables, use Pearson correlation analysis.
iv. Multiple regression analysis to evaluate the research hypotheses

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were carefully considered in the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. No personal identifiers were collected, and the data were used strictly for academic purposes.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Results

Response Rate and Data Description

A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed to entrepreneurial firms across selected sectors in Nigeria. Out of these, 220 questionnaires were correctly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 88 percent, which is considered adequate for quantitative analysis.

Reliability Test

Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the research constructs. A threshold of 0.70 was adopted as the minimum acceptable reliability level.

Table 1: Reliability Test Results

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Female Board Representation (FBR)	2	0.79
Women in Top Management (WTM)	2	0.91
Gender Diversity Practices (GDI)	3	0.83
Entrepreneurial Performance (EP)	6	0.88

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Female Board Representation (FBR)	3.22	0.84	1.00	5.00
Women in Top Management (WTM)	3.64	0.79	1.00	5.00
Gender Diversity Practices (GDI)	3.49	0.73	1.00	5.00
Entrepreneurial Performance (EP)	3.63	0.78	1.50	5.00

Interpretation: The mean values suggest a moderate level of gender inclusivity in corporate governance among Nigerian entrepreneurial firms. Entrepreneurial performance also recorded a relatively high mean score, indicating satisfactory business outcomes among sampled firms.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	EP	FBR	WTM	GDI
EP	1.000			
FBR	0.42**	1.000		
WTM	0.48**	0.36**	1.000	
GDI	0.53**	0.45**	0.48**	1.000

Note: $p < 0.01$

Interpretation: The results show positive and significant relationships between all gender inclusivity variables and entrepreneurial performance. This suggests that increased female participation in governance and management is associated with improved business performance.

Table 4: Regression Results
Dependent Variable: Entrepreneurial Performance (EP)

Variables	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-value	Sig.
Constant	1.213	0.317	3.89	0.000
Female Board Representation (FBR)	0.193	0.071	3.00	0.003
Women in Top Management (WTM)	0.231	0.058	4.26	0.000
Gender Diversity Practices (GDI)	0.297	0.065	4.68	0.000
Firm Size (Control)	0.112	0.059	2.39	0.023
Firm Age (Control)	0.096	0.042	2.20	0.036

Table 5: Model Summary

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F-statistic	Sig.
0.67	0.45	0.42	32.67	0.000

Interpretation of Regression Results
The regression results show that gender diversity practices, women in senior management, and female board representation all have favourable and statistically significant benefits on Nigerian entrepreneurial performance. The greatest impact on performance was found in gender diversity practices ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < 0.01$). Strong explanatory power is demonstrated by the model's ability to explain roughly 46% of the variation in entrepreneurial performance.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Decision
H_1: Female board representation significantly affects entrepreneurial performance	Accepted
H_2: Women in top management significantly influence entrepreneurial performance	Accepted
H_3: Gender-inclusive governance positively affects firm profitability and growth	Accepted

Discussion of Findings

The results show that entrepreneurial performance in Nigeria is improved by gender inclusion in corporate governance. According to agency theory, having more women on boards enhances strategic oversight and monitoring. Resource dependency theory, which contends that gender-diverse leadership offers access to a wider range of abilities, networks, and creative ideas, is supported by the notable impact of women in senior management. These findings support the claim that inclusive governance frameworks encourage sustained entrepreneurial development and are consistent with earlier research done in emerging economies.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

This study looked at how corporate governance's gender inclusion affected Nigerian entrepreneurs' performance. Despite the growing number of women participating in business activities, the study was motivated by ongoing gender discrepancies in the leadership and governance structures of entrepreneurial enterprises. Three important measures of gender inclusion were the focus of the study: the presence of women on boards, women in senior management, and gender diversity initiatives.

Primary data was gathered from 220 entrepreneurial businesses operating in specific sectors of Nigeria using a quantitative research design. Multiple regression analysis, correlation analysis, and descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. In order to explain the connection between gender-inclusive governance structures and entrepreneurial performance, the study was grounded in resource dependence theory and agency theory. The empirical findings showed that entrepreneurial performance in Nigeria is positively and statistically significantly impacted by gender inclusion in corporate governance. In particular, it has been discovered that gender diversity practices, women in senior management, and female board involvement improve corporate growth, profitability, and firm sustainability.

Conclusion

The study's conclusions lead to the conclusion that improving entrepreneurial performance in Nigeria requires gender inclusion in corporate governance. Businesses that embrace inclusive governance frameworks and encourage women to serve on boards and in senior management roles typically see better financial results, more sustainable operations, and better decision-making. The theoretical tenets of resource dependence theory and agency theory are supported by the favourable correlation found between gender-inclusive governance and entrepreneurial performance. Through improved oversight and accountability, gender-diverse governance models lessen agency issues while also giving access to important networks, resources, and expertise that boost business success. Therefore, gender inclusion should be seen as a strategic governing instrument for entrepreneurial success in Nigeria rather than just a social or ethical consideration.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are put forth in light of the study's results and conclusions: **Policy Recommendations**: In order to promote female involvement on boards and in leadership roles, especially in SMEs and entrepreneurial businesses, government and regulatory bodies should create and implement gender-responsive corporate governance policies.

Managerial Suggestions: To improve strategic decision-making and governance efficacy, entrepreneurial companies should consciously place competent women in board and top management roles.
Development and Stakeholder Recommendations: Non-governmental organizations and development partners should back initiatives that give women entrepreneurs access to capital and training in governance.

Contribution to Knowledge
This study makes multiple contributions to the body of existing literature. Using primary firm-level data, it first offers empirical evidence specific to Nigeria about the connection between gender inclusivity in corporate governance and entrepreneurial performance. Second, the study applies resource dependence theory and agency theory to Nigerian SMEs and entrepreneurship. Third, politicians, business owners, and development stakeholders looking to advance inclusive governance and sustainable entrepreneurial growth can benefit from the findings.

Limitations of the Study
The study has many shortcomings despite its contributions. Establishing causal links between gender inclusion and entrepreneurial performance is limited by the use of cross-sectional survey data. Furthermore, response bias could be introduced by using self-reported performance measurements. Additionally, the study was restricted to specific industries and geographical areas in Nigeria, which can have an impact on how broadly applicable the results are.

Suggestions for Further Studies
To investigate the long-term effects of gender-inclusive governance on entrepreneurial performance, future study should think about using longitudinal research methodologies. Comparative research among African nations would also offer more comprehensive understandings of entrepreneurship, government, and gender. Future studies may also use qualitative techniques to investigate the cultural and contextual elements that affect women's involvement in corporate governance.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

DIGITAL LEARNING PLATFORMS AND STUDENTS' ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCIES IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated Digital Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State. Two research questions and two hypotheses were drawn. The study adopted a correlational design. The population stood at 8,780 students across public universities in Rivers State, which include University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University. The sample size which stood at 383 respondents, was determined using Taro Yamen formula. Stratified sampling technique was use in selecting the respondents, comprising of 181 male and 202 female students. The instrument for data collection was two self-structured questionnaires titled: "Digital Learning Platforms Questionnaire (DLPQ) and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities Questionnaire (SECPUQ)". The instrument was validated by experts in the field of Measurement and Evaluation in Rivers State University. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha method. A cumulative reliability index of 0.80 and 0.83 was obtained. The data gathered from the respondents were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Furthermore, t-transformation was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that, there is significant relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms, Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that, Governments and Public universities should embed the use of digital learning platforms such as Coursera, edX, and YouTube Learning into entrepreneurship courses to expose students to global entrepreneurial knowledge, case studies, and best practices.

***Keywords**: Digital Learning Platforms, Entrepreneurial Competencies, Public Universities, Students. Rivers State*

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the landscape of higher education, especially in the way entrepreneurial skills are developed among students. Digital learning platforms have become essential tools for fostering students' entrepreneurial competencies, offering flexible, interactive, and personalized learning experiences (Okafor & George, 2023). In Rivers State, public universities have increasingly adopted Digital learning platforms to complement traditional classroom learning, aiming to prepare students not just for academic success but for real-world business and entrepreneurial challenges. The integration of digital tools has democratized access to entrepreneurial knowledge and allowed students to engage with global markets from their classrooms.

Digital learning platforms refer to online-based systems or applications designed to facilitate and manage the delivery of educational content and interaction between instructors and learners. These platforms provide flexible, accessible, and interactive learning environments, enabling users to engage with multimedia resources, participate in discussions, take assessments, and track progress from any location with internet access (Nwachukwu & Kalu, 2022). Examples include Moodle, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Canvas, and Coursera, which support blended and remote learning models in various educational settings. In the context of higher education, particularly in public universities in Rivers State, digital learning platforms have increasingly become essential tools for enhancing students' academic and practical competencies, including entrepreneurship, by promoting independent learning, digital literacy, and innovation (Onuoha & Ibiam, 2024). These platforms are not only transforming how knowledge is delivered but are also redefining the educational experience in ways that better prepare students for the 21st-century workforce. The types of Digital Learning Platforms that relates to Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State include; Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and Skill-Based Learning Platforms.

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platforms are digital learning environments that offer free or affordable access to a wide range of courses to a global audience, often with no restrictions on enrollment. MOOCs such as Coursera, edX, Udemy, and FutureLearn provide learners with the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills across various disciplines, including entrepreneurship, business management, technology, and innovation (Olanrewaju, 2022). In public universities in Rivers State, the adoption of MOOCs is increasingly becoming a strategic tool for supplementing traditional teaching methods, enabling students to develop entrepreneurial competencies such as critical thinking, innovation, business planning, and market analysis (Okafor & George, 2023). By participating in MOOC-based courses designed by leading universities and industry experts, students gain practical entrepreneurial insights that can enhance their ability to create and manage new ventures.

Moreover, MOOC platforms contribute significantly to shaping a more entrepreneurial mindset among students by offering real-world projects, virtual internships, and mentorship opportunities. Through MOOCs, students in Rivers State can access specialized entrepreneurial content that might not be readily available within their university curriculum, thereby broadening their perspectives and skill sets (Amadi & Odu, 2023). The flexibility of MOOCs also allows students to learn at their own

pace, balancing academic obligations with the pursuit of entrepreneurial knowledge. As global economic conditions increasingly demand entrepreneurial graduates, the integration of MOOCs into the learning ecosystem of public universities in Rivers State offers a promising pathway for building a self-reliant, innovative, and globally competitive student population.

Skill-based learning platforms are specialized digital platforms that focus on equipping learners with practical, job-ready skills relevant to various industries, including entrepreneurship, technology, finance, and creative sectors. Platforms such as LinkedIn Learning, Skillshare, and Udemy offer targeted courses that emphasize the acquisition of specific competencies like business plan development, digital marketing, financial literacy, project management, and innovation strategies. In public universities in Rivers State, the adoption of skill-based learning platforms provides students with a vital opportunity to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world entrepreneurial practice (Nwachukwu & Kalu, 2022). Through structured modules, practical assignments, and certification programs, students gain the hands-on expertise necessary to ideate, launch, and sustain entrepreneurial ventures in the increasingly competitive and technology-driven economy.

Furthermore, skill-based learning platforms play a critical role in promoting entrepreneurial competencies such as problem-solving, critical thinking, leadership, negotiation, and creativity, which are essential for business success. These platforms are designed to be flexible and personalized, allowing students to learn at their own pace while engaging with global best practices and industry-relevant trends (Okeke & Ugochukwu, 2023). For students in Rivers State, access to such platforms not only enhances employability but also empowers them to become job creators rather than job seekers. As public universities seek to align their outputs with national and global development goals, integrating skill-based learning into students' academic journeys becomes indispensable for nurturing a generation of innovative and resilient entrepreneurs.

Digital learning platforms promote competencies such as creativity, innovation, risk-taking, opportunity recognition, and critical thinking — all vital attributes for entrepreneurial success (Nwachukwu & Kalu, 2022). Through features like online business simulations, virtual mentoring, collaborative projects, and webinars with industry experts, students are exposed to the practical realities of entrepreneurship. In public universities in Rivers State, institutions such as the University of Port Harcourt and Rivers State University have embraced blended and online learning strategies to enhance students' entrepreneurial mindset and capability, addressing the increasing demand for graduates who can create jobs rather than merely seek them.

Students' entrepreneurial competencies in public universities refer to the set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that empower students to identify opportunities, innovate, take calculated risks, and effectively manage business ventures. These competencies include creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, resilience, leadership, financial literacy, and business management capabilities (Adeola & Evans, 2023). In public universities, particularly in Nigeria, there has been a growing emphasis on entrepreneurial education as a response to the rising unemployment rates and the need for economic self-sufficiency among graduates. Universities aim to nurture these competencies by integrating entrepreneurship courses, experiential learning opportunities, internships, and digital learning platforms into their curricula (Okafor & Ude, 2022). By developing strong entrepreneurial competencies, students are better prepared not only to create their own businesses but also to bring innovative solutions to existing industries.

Moreover, entrepreneurial competencies are increasingly recognized as vital for national development and economic growth. In today's rapidly changing global economy, students equipped with entrepreneurial mindsets are more adaptable, proactive, and capable of leveraging emerging technologies to solve societal problems. In Rivers State's public universities, initiatives such as entrepreneurship centres, business incubation hubs, and online entrepreneurship programs are being established to build these competencies (Ibeawuchi & Onuoha, 2023). These competencies are not only essential for launching startups but are also transferable across multiple sectors, ensuring that students can thrive in various professional environments. As noted by Eze and Oboh (2023), fostering entrepreneurial competencies among university students contributes significantly to reducing graduate unemployment, promoting innovation, and enhancing national competitiveness.

However, despite the numerous advantages offered by digital platforms, several challenges hinder their full potential in enhancing students' entrepreneurial competencies. Issues such as poor internet connectivity, limited digital literacy among both students and lecturers, and inadequate infrastructural support often slow down effective implementation (Amadi & Odu, 2023). Furthermore, a lack of localized entrepreneurial content tailored to the Nigerian economic context may limit the relevance of knowledge gained through these platforms. Addressing these barriers is critical for optimizing the role of digital learning technologies in shaping the entrepreneurial landscape among students in Rivers State. Thus, investigating the influence of digital learning platforms on students' entrepreneurial competencies becomes vital in informing educational policies and practices. In a rapidly changing global economy, ensuring that graduates are equipped with entrepreneurial competencies is essential for sustainable development, innovation, and job creation in Rivers State and Nigeria at large (Onuoha & Ibiam, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

In the 21st century, digital learning platforms have emerged as a transformative force in the delivery of education, offering flexible, accessible, and diversified learning opportunities. Public universities in Rivers State have increasingly adopted platforms such as Coursera, Udemy, LinkedIn Learning, and other Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) to complement traditional face-to-face teaching. Despite the promise these platforms hold for advancing entrepreneurial competencies among students, there remains a significant gap in understanding how effectively they contribute to nurturing entrepreneurial skills like creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and business management. Several students still graduate without the practical entrepreneurial competencies necessary to either start their ventures or adapt to the dynamic job market (Okoro & Nwachukwu, 2022). Consequently, questions arise as to whether digital learning platforms are being optimally utilized or aligned with the entrepreneurial development goals of public universities in Rivers State.

Furthermore, while digital learning environments offer numerous opportunities, challenges such as poor digital infrastructure, limited access to smart devices, inconsistent internet connectivity, and inadequate institutional support continue to impede the full realization of their benefits (Chukwuemeka & Aladejebi, 2023). Many students either lack the motivation to engage with digital entrepreneurship content independently or fail to translate online theoretical knowledge into practical entrepreneurial action. This situation points to a potential mismatch between the design of digital learning content and the entrepreneurial realities faced by students in Nigeria. Moreover, there is limited empirical research focused specifically on how the use of digital learning platforms enhances or inhibits the entrepreneurial competencies of students within public universities in Rivers State, highlighting a critical need for scholarly inquiry.

Given the urgent national emphasis on entrepreneurship as a solution to youth unemployment and economic diversification, it becomes crucial to investigate how digital learning platforms can be strategically leveraged to build entrepreneurial competencies among students (Odeh & Ekwueme, 2023). Without empirical insights into their influence, educational institutions risk investing in digital solutions that may not meet the developmental needs of their students. Thus, the researcher seeks to fill the existing knowledge gap by investigating; What is the relationship between digital learning platforms and students' entrepreneurial competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State? And to proffer solutions to the stated Problems.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate Digital Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

i. Find out the relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State.
ii. Ascertain the relationship between Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were asked to guide the study.

i. What is the relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and
ii. Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State?
iii. What is the relationship between Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State?

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

i. There is no significant relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State.
ii. There is no significant relationship between Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational design. The population stood at 8,780 students across public universities in Rivers State, which include University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University. The sample size which stood at 383 respondents, was determined using Taro Yamen formula. Stratified sampling technique was use in selecting the respondents, comprising of 181 male and 202 female students. The instrument for data collection was two self-structured questionnaires titled: "Digital Learning Platforms Questionnaire (DLPQ) and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities Questionnaire (SECPUQ)" were used to elicit data from the respondents. Each section was used to obtain information on the objectives which were designed in the pattern of four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree

(D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with numerical values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The validation of the research instrument was determined using face and content validity. This was done by two experts from the Department of Educational Management, Rivers State University. The reliability of the instrument was established through Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient method. The reliability of the instrument gave a Cronbach Alpha index of 0.80 and 0.83 which was considered reliable. The

researcher administered the questionnaire to the respondents with the help of two trained research assistants. All the copies of the instrument were administered and retrieved successfully. The data gathered from the respondents were analyzed Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Furthermore, t-transformation was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. T-cal value less than table value (1.96) was regarded as "accepted" while calculated hypotheses greater than the table value were regarded as "rejected".

Results

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State

N	ΣX ΣY	ΣX² ΣY²	ΣXY		
383	1883	60305			
Variables				**r-cal**	**Remark**
Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms			67935	0.91	High and Positive Relationship
Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies	383 1822	66299			

Source: Research Data, 2025

Table 1 shows the relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State. The analysis revealed that the correlation coefficient existing between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State is 0.91. This means that there is a high and positive relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State. It means that, MOOC platforms expose students to a wide range of global entrepreneurial strategies, case studies, and business models, helping them acquire up-to-date knowledge needed to thrive in a competitive business environment. Through specialized courses on topics like business management, marketing, finance, and innovation, MOOCs equip students with practical entrepreneurial skills essential for starting and sustaining businesses. Many MOOC courses are structured around real-world problems and projects, which enhances students' critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and decision-making abilities critical for entrepreneurial success. Using MOOC platforms teaches students how to navigate digital tools and resources, thereby improving their technological proficiency — a crucial competency for modern entrepreneurs. MOOCs encourage independent learning and responsibility, which are key traits for entrepreneurs who must often identify opportunities and act on them without external prompting.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State?

	N	∑X ∑Y	∑X² ∑Y²	∑XY		
	383	1872	64819			

Table 2: Relationship between Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State Variables r-cal Remark

Skill-Based Learning Platforms.			69556	0.80	High and Positive Relationship
Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies.	383	1884	66298		

Source: Research Data, 2025

Table 2 shows the relationship between Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State. Pearsson product moment correlation analysis revealed that the correlation existing between Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State is 0.80. The correlation coefficient obtained indicates that there is a high and positive relationship between Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State. This means that, Skill-based learning platforms offer hands-on training in essential areas such as marketing, financial literacy, business planning, and product development, helping students build the core competencies needed for entrepreneurship. These platforms provide targeted courses in industries like tech, agriculture, fashion, and digital marketing, enabling students to gain specialized skills that are critical for creating niche businesses. Through interactive projects, workshops, and simulations, students are encouraged to think creatively and develop innovative solutions, which are vital qualities for successful entrepreneurs. Skill-based platforms teach management principles, leadership strategies, and operational efficiency, equipping students with the ability to effectively run and scale their businesses. Students engage in problem-solving exercises that improve their ability to think critically, assess risks, and devise practical business solutions, essential for entrepreneurial decision-making.

Hypotheses Test

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Table 3: t-transformation of the Relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State

Variables	N	r-cal	A	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms.	383					
		0.91		0.05 19.73	1.96	Rejected
Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies.	383					

Source: Research Data, 2025

Table 3 shows the t-transformation of the relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State. the r-calculated value of 0.91 was subjected to t-transformation which yielded a t-cal value of 19.73. Since the t-calculated value obtained is higher than the t-critical value (1.96), the null hypotheses was hence rejected. That is, there is a significant relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: t-transformation of the Relationship between Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State

Variables	N	r-cal	A	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
Skill-Based Learning Platforms	383					
		0.77	0.05	11.31	1.96	Rejected
Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies	383					

Source: Research Data, 2025

Table 4 shows the t-transformation of the relationship between Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State. The rcalculated value of 0.77 was subjected to t-transformation which yielded a t-cal value of 11.09. Since the t-calculated value obtained is higher than the t-critical value (1.96), the null hypotheses was hence rejected. That is, there is a significant relationship between Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from table 1 shows the magnitude of relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State. It was revealed that correlation coefficient existing between the two variables was 0.91, indicating a strong positive relationship. The hypothesis showed that there is a significant relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State. This finding aligns with Olanrewaju (2022) who posited that, Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platforms offer free or affordable access to a wide range of courses to a global audience, often with no restrictions on enrollment. MOOCs such as Coursera, edX, Udemy, and FutureLearn provide learners with the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills across various disciplines, including entrepreneurship, business management, technology, and innovation. Also, Amadi and Odu (2023) maintained that, Moreover, MOOC platforms contribute significantly to shaping a more entrepreneurial mindset among students by offering real-world projects, virtual internships, and mentorship opportunities. Through MOOCs, students in Rivers State can access specialized entrepreneurial content that might not be readily available within their university curriculum, thereby broadening their perspectives and skill sets.

Secondly, the findings from table 2 shows that the relationship between Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis showed that there is a strong correlation between Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State. The tested hypothesis showed that the relationship existing between the two variables are significant at 0.05 alpha level. In relation to this finding, Nwachukwu and Kalu (2022) posited that, the adoption of skill-based learning platforms provides students with a vital opportunity to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world entrepreneurial practice. Through structured modules, practical assignments, and certification programs, students gain the hands-on expertise necessary to ideate, launch, and sustain entrepreneurial ventures in the increasingly competitive and technology-driven economy. Also, Okeke and Ugochukwu (2023) explained that, skill-based learning platforms play a critical role in promoting entrepreneurial competencies such as problem-solving, critical thinking, leadership, negotiation, and creativity, which are essential for business success. These platforms are designed to be flexible and personalized, allowing students to learn at their own pace while engaging with global best practices and industry-relevant trends.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study researcher concludes that, there is significant relationship between Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms, Skill-Based Learning Platforms and Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies in Public Universities in Rivers State. The integration of digital learning platforms in public universities in Rivers State has opened new pathways for enhancing students' entrepreneurial competencies. Through access to Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), skill-based platforms, and other online educational resources, students are increasingly exposed to practical, innovative, and globally competitive entrepreneurial knowledge.

These platforms offer flexibility, personalized learning experiences, and the opportunity to acquire critical 21st-century skills such as creativity, problem-solving, financial literacy, and digital marketing. However, despite their potential, several systemic challenges—such as digital illiteracy, poor infrastructure, and low motivation levels among students—continue to hinder the optimal impact of these technologies. As such, it becomes clear that while digital platforms offer immense promise, their

strategic integration, institutional support, and alignment with local entrepreneurial realities are crucial to truly fostering entrepreneurial competencies among students.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made for the study, that:

1. Public Universities in Rivers State should formally integrate digital entrepreneurship courses into their academic curriculum. These courses should focus on utilizing digital platforms such as MOOCs, Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, and others to expose students to global entrepreneurial trends, digital business models, and innovative thinking. Tailoring these courses to address both theoretical knowledge and practical skills will help bridge the gap between digital learning and real-world entrepreneurial activities,
2. Universities must prioritize the provision of stable internet connectivity, well-equipped digital learning centers, and access to modern technological tools. Without reliable infrastructure, students may be discouraged from utilizing online learning platforms effectively. Investing in strong ICT facilities and ensuring regular maintenance would create an enabling environment where students can fully engage with digital entrepreneurial resources.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

DIGITAL DEVIANCY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE LEARNING BEHAVOURS OF THE BOY-CHILD IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BAYELSA STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated digital deviancy and its influence on the learning behaviours of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The study was driven by the rising concern over how cyber-fraud and virtual betting distract male students from their academic goals. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were developed for the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. All male students in Senior Secondary Schools across the 207 public secondary schools in the state made up the study population. 248 male students make up the sample size. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Digital Deviancy and Learning Behaviour Questionnaire (DDLBQ). Mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the formulated hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings of study revealed that Yahoo-Yahoo syndrome influences learning behaviour to a high extent, with a significant negative correlation indicating that as fraud involvement increases, academic discipline declines. Similarly, online gambling was found to influence learning behaviour to a high extent, with a significant negative correlation showing that betting habits significantly erode study focus. The study concluded that digital deviancy serves as a major counter-culture to formal education for the boy-child. The study recommends that the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education implement robust Digital Citizenship programmes and gender-specific interventions to address the unique vulnerabilities of male learners.

Keywords: *Digital Deviancy, Learning Behaviors, Boy-Child*

Introduction

The contemporary digital ecosystem has transformed patterns of socialization, communication and knowledge acquisition, yet it has simultaneously generated patterns of behaviour that scholars increasingly conceptualize as digital deviancy. Digital deviancy has been seen as engagement in online behaviours that violate established social, ethical or institutional norms within digital environments (Hinduja & Patchin, 2019). Marcum, et al, (2019) characterize it as technologically mediated misconduct that encompasses cyberbullying, online harassment, exposure to explicit content, academic dishonesty and other forms of rule-breaking enacted through digital platforms. In a similar vein, digital deviancy is considered a maladaptive or antisocial online engagement that disrupts social harmony and undermines responsible digital citizenship (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2019). As digital deviancy becomes more pervasive, its psychological and environmental consequences begin to reshape the fundamental learning behaviours of students within the modern classroom. These behaviours, which dictate how an individual acquires, processes, and retains information, are increasingly subject to the volatile stimuli found in digital spaces.

Learning behaviours constitute the observable and internal dispositions that shape how learners engage with instructional content, peers and educators within formal and informal educational settings. Thompson (2019) sees learning behaviours as the observable manifestations of a student's cognitive engagement and self-regulatory habits during the educational process. Complementing this, Adejumo (2019) views learning behaviours as the intricate interplay between a student's motivation and their ability to sustain focus amidst the distractions of a high-tech environment. From a more functional perspective, Richards (2019) defines these behaviours as the adaptive responses a learner employs to navigate complex academic tasks, which are now being significantly altered by digital interference. The volatility of these cognitive responses is particularly pronounced when examining specific demographic cohorts, most notably the developmental trajectory of the male student.

The boy-child occupies a unique position in this discourse, as developmental and sociological factors often render young males more susceptible to the allure and risks of digital immersion. Masculinity and peer dynamics play a pivotal role in how boys navigate the digital world, frequently influencing their academic priorities and social conduct. Bennett (2019) describes the boy-child in this context as a male adolescent whose identity formation is increasingly tethered to digital validation and virtual exploration. In a similar vein, Nwosu (2019) defines the boy-child as a vulnerable demographic subject to specific gendered expectations that may encourage risk-taking and defiant behaviours in technological spaces. Moreover, Grant (2019) identifies the boy-child as a learner whose educational outcomes are uniquely sensitive to the distractions of gaming, social media, and online subcultures, often leading to a divergence from traditional academic success. Boys often experience schooling through gendered expectations that shape participation, discipline patterns and academic self-concept. Consequently, when digital deviancy manifests within the lived realities of the boy-child, it may exert distinct influences on his learning behaviours.

Digital deviancy in today's technology-driven world increasingly affects how the boy-child thinks, behaves and engages with learning. Online misconduct, excessive screen use and exposure to inappropriate digital content do not occur separately from schooling; rather, they influence boys' attention, motivation, discipline and participation in the classroom. Because boys often experience both digital spaces and education through gender-shaped expectations, these online behaviours may significantly shape their academic attitudes and performance. Hence examining digital deviancy with

the learning behaviours of the boy-child is therefore essential for improving educational practices and supporting positive development in a digital age.

Statement of the Problem

The digital age has brought incredible benefits to the world of education, offering students instant access to a vast ocean of information and new ways to solve problems. In the modern classroom, technology is a powerful tool that helps students develop the skills needed for the future. However, while these digital tools were meant to help students learn, they have also created a platform for serious digital deviancy that threatens to ruin the educational journey. Instead of using the internet for academic growth, many students are now using it to engage in various digital vices. This shift from positive use to harmful rebellion is creating a major crisis in schools, as the lure of the virtual world begins to outweigh the value of a formal education.

For many male students, this digital world has introduced specific and dangerous distractions, most notably the "Yahoo-Yahoo" syndrome, which refers to online fraud and cybercrime. This obsession with making quick money through illegal digital means has fundamentally damaged the learning behaviours of the boy-child. The learning of how to make quick money is now taking over academic learning. Students are spending their time studying fraud techniques and hustling strategies rather than their school subjects. Many boys sit in classrooms physically, but mentally they are far away, contemplating the large sums of money they hope to make online. They no longer see the point of sitting through long lessons when they believe they can learn how to become wealthy overnight through a laptop screen.

Beyond the pursuit of quick wealth through illegal digital means, boys are increasingly involved in other harmful digital habits that destroy their academic focus. These include excessive use of social media and online gaming, which can lead to addiction and a lack of motivation for schoolwork. Some students also use their devices to facilitate academic dishonesty, using websites to cheat on assignments rather than learning the material. These vices create a toxic digital lifestyle where the thrill of the screen and the learning of street-smart digital skills become more important than the discipline of the classroom.

This focus on cyber-vices and quick wealth is eroding the discipline and focus required for academic success. When a student is preoccupied with digital fraud or online addictions, their ability to pay attention and stay motivated in class disappears. Because they are more interested in learning how to cash out than how to pass their exams, they often skip school or ignore their teachers. This creates a situation where the student becomes completely disconnected from the school system, leading to a high rate of academic failure. If these behaviours are not addressed, the classroom will continue to lose the attention of students to the high-stakes world of online crime and digital rebellion.

Aims and Objectives

The study aims to examine digital deviancy and its influence on the learning behaviours of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. The objectives are:

i. Ascertain the influence of Yahoo-Yahoo syndrome on the classroom concentration levels of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State
ii. Assess the influence of online gambling on the study habits of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Research Question

i. To what extent does Yahoo-Yahoo syndrome influence the learning behaviour of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?
ii. To what extent does online gambling influence the learning behaviour of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?

Hypotheses

i. There is no significant relationship between **Yahoo-Yahoo syndrome** and the learning behaviour of the boy-child in public secondary schools in **Bayelsa State**.
ii. There is no significant relationship between online gambling and the learning behaviour of the boy-child in public secondary schools in **Bayelsa State**.

Methodology

This descriptive survey research design was used for that study. According to Ofo (2002), a descriptive survey involves direct interaction with respondents to collect information about their characteristics, behaviours, and experiences relevant to a particular research problem. This design was considered appropriate for the study as it allowed for the systematic investigation of digital deviancy and its influence on the learning behaviours of the boy-child without manipulating any variables. The population of the study comprised all male students in Senior Secondary Schools across the 207 public secondary schools in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Purposive sampling was used to select three Local Government Areas (LGAs) -Yenagoa, Sagbama, and Southern Ijaw. A total of 14 schools were randomly selected across the three LGAs, with 7 schools from Yenagoa LGA, 4 schools from Sagbama LGA, and 3 schools from Southern Ijaw LGA. Following the selection of schools, a total of 248 male students were proportionately selected. From the seven selected schools in Yenagoa, 30 respondents were chosen from each school, giving a total of 210 students. In Sagbama LGA, the 4 schools contributed 22 respondents per school, totaling 88 students. In Southern Ijaw LGA, the 3 schools contributed 11 respondents per school, giving a total of 33 students. Simple random sampling was employed within each school to ensure that every male student had an equal opportunity to participate, making the overall sample size 248 respondents.

The instrument for data collection is a structured questionnaire titled "*Digital Deviancy and Learning Behaviour Questionnaire" (DDLBQ)*. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A obtained demographic information from the respondents, while Section B addressed the items in the research questions. Responses were recorded on a four-point Likert scale: Very High Extent (VHE) = 4, High Extent (HE) = 3, Low Extent (LE) = 2, and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1. The instrument underwent face and content validation by experts in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation to ensure that the items were clear, relevant, and comprehensive. Reliability was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method which yielded a coefficient of 0.79, indicating strong internal consistency. The research questions were analysed with mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested with Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: To what extent does Yahoo-Yahoo syndrome influence the learning behaviour of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation responses on the influence of Yahoo-Yahoo syndrome on learning behaviour of the boy-child in public secondary schools

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	The obsession with cashing out makes students prioritize fraud over academic tasks.	3.58	0.59	HE
2	Students spend more time learning fraud formats than studying their textbooks.	3.64	0.55	HE
3	Mental preoccupation with billing clients leads to a lack of interest in classroom lessons.	3.47	0.68	HE
4	Late-night chatting with clients results in chronic absenteeism and late coming.	3.52	0.62	HE
5	The belief that school is a scam undermines the value of hard work in learning.	3.69	0.52	HE
6	Students often use school hours to monitor their digital transactions and scams.	3.41	0.73	HE
7	Success stories of Yahoo-Yahoo peers discourage students from completing assignments.	3.55	0.60	HE
8	The pursuit of quick wealth reduces the patience required for long-term academic growth.	3.48	0.66	HE
	Grand Mean	**3.54**		

The data in Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation responses regarding the influence of Yahoo-Yahoo syndrome on the learning behaviour of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. The results indicate that the respondents agreed with all eight items, as the mean scores were all significantly higher than the criterion mean of 2.50. The mean scores ranged from 3.41 to 3.69, suggesting a strong agreement that the lure of cyber-fraud distorts students' educational values. The grand mean score of 3.54 confirms that the Yahoo-Yahoo subculture exerts a profound negative influence, causing male students to abandon disciplined study habits in favour of illegal financial pursuits.

Research Question 2: To what extent does online gambling influence the learning behaviour of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation responses on the influence of online gambling on learning behaviour of the boy-child in public secondary schools

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Constant monitoring of live scores and betting odds disrupts classroom focus.	3.45	0.67	HE
2	Loss of betting stakes leads to depression and lack of motivation for school activities.	3.32	0.74	HE
3	Students use their feeding allowance for betting instead of purchasing learning materials.	3.41	0.70	HE
4	The thrill of potential winnings makes academic success seem slow and unattractive.	3.56	0.61	HE
5	Peer pressure into sports betting groups diverts attention from group study sessions.	3.48	0.64	HE
6	Frequent visits to betting shops during school hours leads to truancy and missed lessons.	3.39	0.71	HE
7	Betting addiction reduces the time spent on reading and independent research.	3.50	0.63	HE
8	The habit of staking creates a gambler's mindset that values luck over study efforts.	3.53	0.58	HE
	Grand Mean	**3.46**		

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation responses on how online gambling influence the learning behaviour of the boy-child. The respondents agreed with all items, with mean scores ranging from 3.32 to 3.56, all exceeding the 2.50 threshold. The grand mean of 3.46 indicates that online gambling significantly erodes the academic discipline of male students. The findings suggest that the risks and distractions associated with virtual betting led to poor time management and a general decline in the learning culture among boys in Bayelsa State

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between involvement in Yahoo-Yahoo syndrome and the learning behaviour of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Table 3: PPMC Analysis of the relationship between Yahoo-Yahoo syndrome and learning behaviour of the boy-child

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r-cal	r-crit	df	Sig. (p)	Decision
Yahoo-Yahoo Syndrome	248	3.54	0.62	-0.74*	0.125	246	0.000	Rejected
Learning Behaviour	248	2.15	0.58					

**Significant at 0.05 level*

Table 3 presents the correlation analysis between Yahoo-Yahoo syndrome and the learning behaviour of male students. The analysis yielded a calculated r-value of -0.74, which exceeds the critical r-value of 0.125 at a 0.05 level of significance with 246 degrees of freedom. The negative correlation suggests that increased involvement in or interest in cyber-fraud activities is associated with a significant decline in learning behaviour. Furthermore, the p-value of 0.000, being less than 0.05, indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected. This finding demonstrates that Yahoo-Yahoo syndrome has a significant negative impact on the learning behaviour of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between online gambling and the learning behaviour of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Table 4: PPMC Analysis of the relationship between online gambling and learning behaviour of the boy-child

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r-cal	r-crit	df	Sig. (p)	Decision
Online Gambling	248	3.46	0.65	-0.68*	0.125	246	0.000	Rejected
Learning Behaviour	248	2.15	0.58					

**Significant at 0.05 level*

Table 4 indicates a calculated r-value of -0.68, which is greater than the critical r-value of 0.125 at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings demonstrate a strong negative relationship, suggesting that increased participation in virtual betting and sports gambling is associated with poorer study habits and reduced academic engagement. As a result, the null hypothesis is rejected. This confirms that online gambling exerts a significant negative effect on the learning behaviours of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings for research question one indicates that Yahoo-Yahoo syndrome has a strong influence on the learning behaviour of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State, as reflected by a grand mean score of 3.54. The data specifically shows that the belief that school is a scam (Mean = 3.69) has become a dominant mindset, leading students to prioritise fraud formats over their textbooks. This suggests that the mental preoccupation with billing clients and cashing out has created a significant lack of interest in classroom lessons. These findings align with Olowu (2022), who noted that digital deviancy involves a deliberate shift away from institutional norms. Furthermore, Adejumo (2019) argued that learning behaviours are compromised when a student's motivation is hijacked by high-tech distractions.

Regarding research question two, the findings indicate that online gambling influences the learning behaviour of the boy-child to a high extent, as shown by the grand mean of 3.46. The results highlight that the constant monitoring of live scores and betting odds disrupts classroom focus and leads to a gambler's mindset that values luck over study efforts. This addiction reduces the time spent on reading and independent research, often leading to truancy when students visit betting shops during school hours. This supports the views of Grant (2019) who observed that the boy-child is uniquely sensitive to digital subcultures; the thrill of potential winnings makes academic success seem slow and unattractive, leading to a general decline in the learning culture among male students.

The analysis of the first hypothesis produced a calculated r-value of -0.74, which exceeds the critical r-value of 0.125 at the 0.05 level of significance. This negative correlation resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis, indicating that Yahoo-Yahoo syndrome has a significant adverse relationship with the learning behaviour of the boy-child. Foster (2019) notes that the pursuit of illegal digital wealth acts as a primary disruptor of academic focus, as students' cognitive energy is redirected toward fraudulent hustling. Consequently, the statistical evidence confirms that as interest in cyber-fraud increases, there is a corresponding and severe decline in the disciplined learning habits of male students.

For the second hypothesis, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) produced a calculated r-value of -0.68, which is greater than the critical r-value of 0.125. This finding led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, confirming that online gambling exerts a significant negative effect on the learning behaviours of the boy-child. Ibrahim (2019) argues that the addictive nature of virtual betting creates a gambler's mindset that devalues traditional classroom effort in favour of luck and quick returns. The data therefore proves that the more the boy-child engages in sports betting and online stakes, the more his study habits and academic engagement deteriorate.

Conclusion

The findings of this study lead to the conclusion that digital deviancy is a primary factor undermining the educational progress of the boy-child in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. The transition from academic learning to the learning of money-making techniques has created a significant pedagogical crisis. Yahoo-Yahoo syndrome and online gambling have shifted the focus of male students from the classroom to the screen, where the lure of quick wealth through cashing out and staking replaces the discipline required for long-term study. Ultimately, the boy-child is increasingly viewing formal education as a scam, a mindset that threatens to produce a generation of young men who are technologically savvy but academically and morally ungrounded.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, the study recommends that

I. The Bayelsa State Ministry of Education should introduce robust Digital Citizenship curricula in all public secondary schools to teach male students about online ethics, the dangers of cybercrime, and responsible technology use
ii. School authorities and guidance counsellors should develop targeted mentorship programmes specifically for the boy-child to re-orientate their mindset away from the Yahoo-Yahoo subculture and back toward traditional academic values.
iii. School boards should enforce stricter regulations regarding the use of mobile phones during school hours to curb the constant monitoring of betting odds and fraudulent digital transactions in the classroom.
iv. Public awareness campaigns should be launched to educate parents on the early warning signs of digital addiction and cyber-fraud involvement, encouraging them to monitor their children's online activities more closely.
v. Schools should revitalise sports, technical clubs, and debate societies to provide healthy, high-energy outlets for the boy-child, reducing the vacuum currently filled by online gambling and virtual vices.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ON HOUSING IN KADUNA METROPOLIS, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Climate change presents significant risks to housing systems, particularly in rapidly urbanizing regions of developing countries. This study examines community resilience and adaptation strategies to climate change impacts on housing in Kaduna Metropolis, Nigeria. A mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture both statistical trends and lived experiences. Data were collected from 300 respondents using structured questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and chi-square tests, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Findings reveal that housing vulnerability is strongly influenced by the use of substandard construction materials, proximity to flood-prone areas, and inadequate drainage systems. Approximately 70% of houses in high-risk zones were constructed with materials that lack resilience to extreme weather conditions. Community-based adaptation strategies, including traditional flood barriers, cooperative savings schemes, and elevated building designs, play a significant role in enhancing resilience. However, their effectiveness is constrained by limited financial resources and weak institutional support Government interventions such as relocation programs and building material subsidies show moderate success but are undermined by weak policy implementation and enforcement. Regression analysis indicates that response time, resource allocation, and community preparedness significantly influence disaster recovery outcomes (Cutter et al., 2008). The study concludes that sustainable housing resilience requires an integrated approach involving improved building standards, strengthened community participation, and effective governance.

Keywords: *Climate Change; Housing Vulnerability; Community Resilience; Adaptation Strategies; Kaduna Metropolis*

Introduction

Climate change has become a defining challenge of the 21st century, with far-reaching implications for human settlements, infrastructure systems, and socio-economic stability worldwide. The increasing frequency, intensity, and unpredictability of climate-related hazards—such as flooding, heatwaves, droughts, and storms—have significantly heightened the vulnerability of built environments. These hazards not only threaten physical structures but also disrupt livelihoods, displace populations, and strain urban governance systems (IPCC, 2021; UNDRR, 2019). Housing, as a fundamental component of human security and well-being, is particularly exposed to these risks, especially in developing countries where institutional capacity, financial resources, and technological advancement are often limited.

In sub-Saharan Africa, rapid urbanization has compounded the impacts of climate change, leading to the proliferation of informal settlements in environmentally sensitive and high-risk areas. Nigeria exemplifies this trend, as urban population growth continues to outpace infrastructure development and regulatory enforcement (UN-Habitat, 2020). Consequently, a significant proportion of urban residents live in housing characterized by poor construction quality, inadequate drainage systems, and limited access to basic services. These conditions significantly increase exposure to climate-induced hazards and reduce the capacity of households to cope with and recover from disasters (Adelekan, 2010).

Kaduna Metropolis, a prominent urban center in northern Nigeria, provides a critical case for examining these dynamics. The city has experienced recurrent flooding events in recent years, resulting in widespread damage to residential properties, displacement of households, and disruption of economic activities. These events have exposed fundamental structural deficiencies in housing development, including weak building materials, poor urban planning, and encroachment on floodplains. Moreover, the increasing unpredictability of rainfall patterns, attributed to climate change, has intensified the scale and frequency of such disasters, thereby underscoring the urgent need for sustainable and climate-resilient housing strategies (Oladokun & Proverbs, 2016).

Housing vulnerability is inherently multidimensional, shaped by an interplay of physical, socio-economic, and institutional factors. From a physical perspective, the durability and design of buildings play a crucial role in determining their resistance to environmental stressors. The widespread use of substandard materials such as mud blocks and unreinforced concrete significantly increases susceptibility to structural failure during extreme weather events. Socio-economically, poverty constrains the ability of households to invest in durable construction and adopt preventive measures, thereby perpetuating cycles of vulnerability. Institutionally, weak enforcement of building codes, inadequate land-use planning, and limited disaster preparedness frameworks further exacerbate risks (Douglas et al., 2008; Oladokun & Proverbs, 2016).

In response to these challenges, the concept of community resilience has emerged as a critical framework for understanding how societies cope with and adapt to environmental shocks. Community resilience emphasizes the capacity of individuals and groups to anticipate, absorb, respond to, and recover from adverse events while maintaining essential functions (Cutter et al., 2008). It extends beyond physical infrastructure to include social capital, local knowledge systems, and institutional arrangements that facilitate collective action. In the context of housing, resilience

encompasses both the structural integrity of buildings and the adaptive capacities of communities, including their ability to mobilize resources, share information, and implement locally appropriate solutions (Adger, 2000; Folke, 2006).

Community-based adaptation (CBA) strategies have gained increasing attention as effective mechanisms for enhancing resilience at the local level. These strategies leverage indigenous knowledge, social networks, and participatory approaches to address context-specific vulnerabilities. Examples include the construction of informal flood barriers, elevation of building foundations, and the establishment of community savings groups to finance recovery efforts. While such initiatives demonstrate significant potential, their effectiveness is often constrained by limited financial resources, lack of technical expertise, and insufficient integration with formal policy frameworks (Smit et al., 2006; Adger, 2009). Despite the growing body of literature on climate change adaptation and resilience, there remains a notable gap in empirical research focusing on the intersection of housing vulnerability and community resilience in Kaduna Metropolis. Existing studies have largely concentrated on broader urban or national scales, with limited attention to localized dynamics and community-level responses. This gap is particularly significant given the unique socio-economic and environmental characteristics of Kaduna, which influence both vulnerability patterns and adaptation capacities.

This study seeks to address this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of housing vulnerability, community-based adaptation strategies, and the role of government interventions in enhancing resilience to climate change impacts. By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, the research offers nuanced insights into the complex interactions between physical infrastructure, socio-economic conditions, and institutional frameworks. The findings are expected to contribute to policy development and inform sustainable housing strategies that enhance resilience in rapidly urbanizing contexts.

Literature Review

Climate Change and Housing Vulnerability

Housing vulnerability refers to the susceptibility of residential structures and associated systems to damage or loss resulting from environmental hazards. It is a multidimensional concept that encompasses not only the physical characteristics of buildings but also the social, economic, and institutional conditions that influence the capacity of households to anticipate, cope with, and recover from climate-related events. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change conceptualizes vulnerability as a function of three interrelated components: exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity (IPCC, 2021). Exposure relates to the degree to which housing is located in hazard-prone areas; sensitivity refers to the extent to which structures are likely to be affected by such hazards; while adaptive capacity reflects the ability of households and communities to adjust, respond, and recover.

In urban environments, housing vulnerability is often intensified by rapid and unplanned urbanization. The expansion of cities in developing countries frequently occurs in the absence of effective land-use planning and regulatory enforcement, leading to the proliferation of informal settlements in high-risk areas such as floodplains, wetlands, and steep slopes. These settlements are typically characterized by high population densities, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to basic services, all of which increase exposure to climate hazards (UN-Habitat, 2020). Furthermore, weak institutional frameworks often fail to enforce building codes or zoning regulations, thereby allowing unsafe construction practices to persist.

Empirical studies in sub-Saharan Africa have consistently demonstrated that housing vulnerability is closely linked to socio-economic inequality, with low-income households disproportionately affected by environmental risks (Douglas et al., 2008). Poverty constrains access to safe land, durable construction materials, and financial resources needed for risk reduction and post-disaster recovery. As a result, economically disadvantaged households are more likely to reside in structurally deficient housing and environmentally fragile locations. This creates a cycle of vulnerability in which exposure to hazards leads to repeated losses, further deepening poverty and limiting adaptive capacity (Adger, 2006).

In addition to socio-economic factors, the quality of construction materials and building practices plays a critical role in determining housing resilience. In many developing urban contexts, residential structures are constructed using locally available but substandard materials such as mud blocks, thatch, or poorly reinforced concrete. These materials often lack the structural integrity required to withstand extreme weather events, thereby increasing the likelihood of damage or collapse during floods or storms (Oladokun & Proverbs, 2016). The absence of technical expertise and oversight further exacerbates these risks, as buildings are often constructed without adherence to engineering standards or climate-responsive design principles.

Infrastructure deficits also significantly contribute to housing vulnerability. Inadequate drainage systems, for instance, increase the likelihood of flooding even during moderate rainfall events. Poor waste management practices can block existing drainage channels, further compounding flood risks. Additionally, the lack of integrated urban planning leads to inefficient land use and limited provision of protective infrastructure, such as flood defenses and stormwater management systems (Adelekan, 2010). These infrastructural challenges not only increase exposure to hazards but also hinder effective response and recovery efforts. Institutional factors, including governance quality and policy implementation, are equally important in shaping housing vulnerability. Weak regulatory enforcement, corruption, and limited institutional capacity often undermine efforts to promote safe and resilient housing development. Even where policies and building codes exist, their implementation is frequently inconsistent, particularly in informal settlements where regulatory oversight is minimal (Satterthwaite et al., 2007). This highlights the need for stronger governance mechanisms and inclusive planning approaches that integrate both formal and informal urban systems.

Overall, housing vulnerability is the outcome of complex interactions between environmental, socio-economic, and institutional factors. Addressing this vulnerability requires a holistic approach that not only improves the physical resilience of housing structures but also enhances the adaptive capacity of communities and strengthens institutional frameworks. Such an integrated perspective is essential for developing sustainable and climate-resilient urban housing systems in rapidly growing cities like Kaduna Metropolis.

Community Resilience

Community resilience is broadly defined as the capacity of a system—whether social, economic, or environmental—to absorb disturbances, adapt to changing conditions, and reorganize while maintaining its core functions and identity (Adger, 2000). In the context of climate change, resilience has evolved into a central concept for understanding how communities respond to, cope with, and recover from environmental shocks. It emphasizes not only the ability to withstand immediate impacts but also the capacity for long-term adaptation and transformation in the face of uncertainty

(Folke, 2006). The concept of resilience is inherently multidimensional, encompassing social, economic, institutional, and infrastructural dimensions. Social capital, in particular, plays a critical role in shaping community resilience. Social capital refers to the networks, relationships, trust, and norms that facilitate collective action within a community. Communities with strong social cohesion are more likely to share information, pool resources, and provide mutual support during and after disasters, thereby enhancing their overall adaptive capacity (Adger, 2003). These informal support systems often become especially crucial in contexts where formal institutional support is limited or delayed.

Local knowledge and indigenous practices also contribute significantly to resilience. Such knowledge systems, developed over time through lived experience, enable communities to anticipate environmental risks and implement context-specific adaptation strategies. For instance, traditional building techniques, settlement patterns, and environmental management practices often reflect an understanding of local climatic conditions and hazards. Integrating this knowledge with modern scientific approaches can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of resilience-building efforts (Smit et al., 2006).

Institutional support is another key determinant of community resilience. Effective governance structures, policy frameworks, and disaster management systems provide the necessary resources and coordination mechanisms for risk reduction and recovery. Strong institutions can facilitate access to funding, enforce building regulations, and support community-based adaptation initiatives. Conversely, weak institutional capacity and poor policy implementation can undermine resilience by limiting access to resources and reducing the effectiveness of response efforts (Cutter et al., 2008). Furthermore, resilience is closely linked to the concept of adaptive capacity, which refers to the ability of a system to adjust to potential damage, take advantage of opportunities, and respond to consequences (IPCC, 2021). Adaptive capacity is influenced by factors such as income levels, education, access to information, and technological resources. In many developing urban contexts, limited adaptive capacity constrains the ability of communities to implement proactive adaptation measures, thereby increasing their vulnerability to climate-related risks.

Importantly, community resilience is not static but dynamic, evolving over time in response to changing environmental, social, and economic conditions. It involves learning from past experiences, innovating new strategies, and transforming existing systems to better cope with future challenges (Folke, 2006). This perspective shifts the focus from short-term disaster response to long-term sustainability and development. Empirical evidence suggests that communities with strong social networks and institutional linkages are better able to mobilize resources, coordinate responses, and recover more quickly from disasters (Cutter et al., 2008). In urban settings such as Kaduna Metropolis, where formal infrastructure and services may be inadequate, these community-level mechanisms become particularly important. However, the effectiveness of such mechanisms often depends on the extent to which they are supported by broader policy frameworks and integrated into formal planning processes.

In summary, community resilience provides a valuable framework for understanding and addressing the impacts of climate change on housing systems. It highlights the importance of integrating social, institutional, and environmental dimensions in resilience-building efforts. Strengthening community resilience requires not only improving physical infrastructure but also enhancing social capital, supporting local knowledge systems, and ensuring effective institutional governance.

Adaptation Strategies

Adaptation strategies refer to deliberate actions and measures undertaken to reduce vulnerability and enhance the capacity of individuals, communities, and systems to cope with the impacts of climate change. These strategies are essential for minimizing potential damages, exploiting emerging opportunities, and adjusting to both current and anticipated climatic conditions (Smit et al., 2006). Within the context of housing, adaptation involves a range of interventions aimed at improving the resilience of built structures, strengthening institutional frameworks, and enhancing community preparedness.

Adaptation strategies are commonly categorized into structural and non-structural measures. Structural adaptation strategies involve physical modifications to the built environment designed to withstand or mitigate the impacts of climate-related hazards. Examples include the construction of flood defenses such as levees and embankments, elevation of building foundations above flood levels, reinforcement of building materials, and the incorporation of climate-resilient architectural designs. These measures directly address the physical vulnerability of housing by improving structural integrity and reducing exposure to environmental risks (Douglas et al., 2008). In flood-prone urban areas, for instance, elevating residential structures and improving drainage systems have been shown to significantly reduce the extent of damage during extreme rainfall events.

Non-structural adaptation strategies, on the other hand, focus on policy, institutional, and behavioral interventions that influence how communities prepare for and respond to climate risks. These include land-use planning regulations, enforcement of building codes, early warning systems, disaster risk reduction policies, and public awareness campaigns. Such strategies are critical in shaping long-term resilience, as they address the underlying drivers of vulnerability rather than merely its symptoms (UNDRR, 2019). For example, effective zoning policies that restrict development in high-risk areas such as floodplains can significantly reduce exposure, while community education programs can enhance awareness and promote proactive risk management behaviors.

An increasingly important dimension of climate change adaptation is community-based adaptation (CBA), which emphasizes the active participation of local communities in designing and implementing adaptation measures. CBA strategies leverage local knowledge, social networks, and indigenous practices to develop context-specific solutions that are both cost-effective and culturally appropriate (Adger, 2009). In many developing urban settings, including Kaduna Metropolis, community-led initiatives such as the construction of informal flood barriers, cooperative savings schemes, and collective drainage maintenance have proven to be vital in enhancing resilience. These approaches not only address immediate risks but also strengthen social cohesion and collective action, which are critical components of long-term resilience.

However, the effectiveness of adaptation strategies is often constrained by a range of challenges. Financial limitations represent a major barrier, particularly for low-income households that lack the resources to invest in resilient construction or relocation. Institutional weaknesses, including poor governance, inadequate policy implementation, and limited technical capacity, further hinder the effectiveness of both structural and non-structural measures (Satterthwaite et al., 2007). Additionally, there is often a disconnect between top-down policy interventions and local realities, which can result in poorly targeted or unsustainable adaptation efforts.

Another critical consideration is the concept of adaptive capacity, which underpins the effectiveness of all adaptation strategies. Adaptive capacity refers to the ability of a system to adjust to climate change, moderate potential damages, and take advantage of opportunities (IPCC, 2021). It is influenced by factors such as access to financial resources, education, technology, infrastructure, and institutional support. Communities with higher adaptive capacity are better positioned to implement proactive adaptation measures and recover more quickly from climate-related shocks. Furthermore, adaptation is not a one-time intervention but an ongoing and dynamic process that requires continuous learning, innovation, and adjustment. As climate risks evolve over time, adaptation strategies must also be flexible and responsive to new information and changing conditions (Folke, 2006). This underscores the importance of integrating adaptation into broader development planning and policy frameworks, ensuring that resilience-building efforts are sustainable and scalable.

In summary, adaptation strategies play a critical role in reducing housing vulnerability and enhancing community resilience to climate change. A balanced approach that integrates structural and non-structural measures, supported by strong institutional frameworks and community participation, is essential for achieving sustainable outcomes. In rapidly urbanizing contexts such as Kaduna Metropolis, the success of adaptation efforts will depend on the extent to which they address both the physical and socio-economic dimensions of vulnerability while fostering inclusive and participatory governance systems.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in resilience theory and the socio-ecological systems framework, which emphasize the interconnectedness of human and environmental systems (Folke, 2006).

Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was adopted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This approach integrates quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for triangulation and enhanced validity (Creswell, 2014).

Data Collection

Data were collected using:

i. Structured questionnaires administered to 300 households
ii. Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders
iii. Focus group discussions

Sampling Technique

Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across different residential zones.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Saunders et al., 2019).

Results
Statistical Analysis

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Housing Vulnerability Index	300	1.00	5.00	3.87	0.842
Construction Material Quality	300	1.00	5.00	2.41	0.913
Proximity to Floodplain	300	1.00	5.00	3.65	1.102
Community Preparedness	300	1.00	5.00	3.12	0.978
Government Support	300	1.00	5.00	2.95	0.884

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of key variables examined in the study, including housing vulnerability, construction material quality, proximity to flood-prone areas, community preparedness, and government support. All variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale, with a sample size of 300 respondents.

The Housing Vulnerability Index recorded a relatively high mean score of 3.87 (SD = 0.842), indicating that a substantial proportion of respondents perceive their housing conditions as highly vulnerable to climate-related hazards. The moderate standard deviation suggests some variability in responses, but overall, vulnerability remains consistently high across the study area. This finding reflects widespread exposure to climate risks and structural deficiencies in housing.

The mean score for Construction Material Quality is 2.41 (SD = 0.913), which is below the midpoint of the scale. This indicates that most residential buildings are constructed with relatively poor-quality materials, thereby increasing susceptibility to environmental hazards such as flooding and storms. The relatively higher standard deviation implies notable variation in material quality, suggesting disparities in construction standards across different households or neighborhoods.

Proximity to Floodplain shows a high mean value of **3.65** (SD = 1.102), indicating that many respondents reside in areas close to flood-prone zones. The relatively large standard deviation reflects significant spatial variation, meaning that while some households are located in extremely high-risk areas, others are comparatively less exposed. Nevertheless, the overall high mean underscores the importance of location as a critical determinant of housing vulnerability.

The variable Community Preparedness has a mean score of 3.12 (SD = 0.978), suggesting a moderate level of preparedness among residents. This indicates that while some adaptive measures and awareness exist within the community, they may not be sufficiently robust to effectively mitigate climate risks. The variation in responses further suggests differences in access to information, resources, and community support systems.

Similarly, **Government Support** recorded a mean of **2.95** (SD = 0.884), which is slightly below the midpoint. This suggests that respondents generally perceive government intervention and support mechanisms as inadequate. Although some level of assistance may be present, it is not sufficiently effective or widespread to significantly reduce housing vulnerability.

Overall, the descriptive statistics indicate a scenario characterized by high housing vulnerability, poor construction quality, and significant exposure to flood risks, coupled with moderate community preparedness and relatively weak institutional support. These findings highlight the urgent need for integrated interventions that address both structural and socio-institutional dimensions of vulnerability, consistent with existing literature on climate resilience in developing urban contexts (IPCC, 2021; Adelekan, 2010).

Table 2: Reliability Statistics (Cronbach's Alpha)

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Housing Vulnerability	0.812	6
Community Resilience	0.845	8
Adaptation Strategies	0.793	7

Table 2 presents the reliability statistics of the study constructs using Cronbach's Alpha, which measures the internal consistency of items within each scale. The Housing Vulnerability scale, comprising 6 items, has a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.812. This value exceeds the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating that the items used to measure housing vulnerability are highly consistent and reliable. Similarly, the Community Resilience scale, with 8 items, records a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.845, which reflects a very high level of internal consistency. This suggests that the items effectively capture the concept of community resilience and are well correlated. The Adaptation Strategies scale includes 7 items and has a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.793. Although slightly lower than the other two constructs, it still surpasses the acceptable benchmark of 0.70, indicating good reliability and consistency among the items. Overall, all three constructs demonstrate strong internal consistency, confirming that the measurement instrument is reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

Variables	**HV**	**CMQ**	**PF**	**CP**	**GS**
Housing Vulnerability (HV)	1	-0.621**	0.583**	-0.472**	-0.398**
Construction Material Quality (CMQ)	-0.621**	1	-0.402**	0.356**	0.289**
Proximity to Floodplain (PF)	0.583**	-0.402**	1	-0.315**	-0.267**
Community Preparedness (CP)	-0.472**	0.356**	-0.315**	1	0.441**
Government Support (GS)	-0.398**	0.289**	-0.267**	0.441**	1

Note: $p < 0.01$

The correlation matrix presents the relationships among Housing Vulnerability (HV), Construction Material Quality (CMQ), Proximity to Floodplain (PF), Community Preparedness (CP), and Government Support (GS). All correlations are statistically significant at $p < 0.01$, indicating strong evidence of meaningful relationships among the variables.

Housing Vulnerability (HV) shows a strong negative correlation with Construction Material Quality ($r = -0.621$), suggesting that better quality construction materials are associated with lower housing vulnerability. Similarly, HV has a moderate negative relationship with Community Preparedness ($r = -$

0.472) and Government Support (r = -0.398), implying that increased preparedness and government intervention contribute to reducing vulnerability.

Conversely, HV exhibits a strong positive correlation with Proximity to Floodplain (r = 0.583), indicating that buildings located closer to flood-prone areas are significantly more vulnerable.

Construction Material Quality (CMQ) is negatively correlated with Proximity to Floodplain (r = -0.402), suggesting that poorer quality materials may be more common in high-risk flood areas. However, CMQ shows positive relationships with Community Preparedness (r = 0.356) and Government Support (r = 0.289), indicating that improved materials are associated with better preparedness and institutional support.

Proximity to Floodplain (PF) has negative correlations with Community Preparedness (r = -0.315) and Government Support (r = -0.267)**, suggesting that areas closer to floodplains tend to have lower preparedness levels and less government support. Finally, Community Preparedness (CP) and Government Support (GS) are moderately positively correlated (r = 0.441), indicating that increased government support is associated with higher levels of community preparedness. Overall, the results highlight that environmental exposure (proximity to floodplain) increases vulnerability, while structural quality, community action, and institutional support play significant roles in mitigating housing vulnerability.

- Poor materials ↑ vulnerability
- Flood proximity ↑ vulnerability
- Preparedness ↓ vulnerability

Housing Vulnerability

Table 3: Factors Influencing Housing Vulnerability

Factor	Frequency (%)	Impact Level
Poor construction materials	70	High
Floodplain location	65	High
Inadequate drainage	58	Moderate
Low income levels	72	High

These findings align with previous studies that identify socio-economic constraints and poor infrastructure as key drivers of vulnerability (Adelekan, 2010).

Community Adaptation Strategies

Table 4.: Adaptation Strategies

Strategy	Percentage (%)
Flood barriers	50
Elevated foundations	20
Drainage improvements	15
Relocation	10
No adaptation	5

Community-based strategies reflect local knowledge and resourcefulness but are limited by financial constraints (Adger, 2009).

Table 4: Model Summary (Multiple Regression)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	0.742	0.551	0.543	0.521

The model summary statistics indicate the overall goodness of fit of the regression model.

The correlation coefficient (R = 0.742) shows a strong positive relationship between the dependent variable (Housing Vulnerability) and the set of independent variables (CMQ, PF, CP, and GS). This suggests that the predictors collectively have a strong association with housing vulnerability. The R Square value (0.551) implies that approximately 55.1% of the variation in housing vulnerability is explained by the independent variables included in the model. This indicates a good level of explanatory power, meaning the model captures more than half of the factors influencing housing vulnerability.

The Adjusted R Square (0.543), which accounts for the number of predictors in the model, is only slightly lower than R Square. This small difference suggests that the model is well-specified and that the included variables are relevant, with minimal risk of overfitting. The standard error of the estimate (0.521) reflects the average deviation of the observed values from the predicted values. The relatively low value indicates that the model's predictions are reasonably accurate. Overall, the regression model demonstrates a good fit, with strong explanatory power and reliable predictive capability for housing vulnerability.

Table .5.: ANOVA (Model Significance)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	82.341	4	20.585	75.842	0.000
Residual	67.221	295	0.228		
Total	149.562	299			

Table 4 presents the ANOVA results used to assess the overall significance of the regression model. The F-statistic (F = 75.842) with a corresponding p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.001$) indicates that the regression model is statistically significant. This means that the set of independent variables—Construction Material Quality (CMQ), Proximity to Floodplain (PF), Community Preparedness (CP), and

Government Support (GS)—jointly have a significant effect on Housing Vulnerability (HV). The regression sum of squares (82.341) represents the variation in housing vulnerability explained by the model, while the residual sum of squares (67.221) reflects the unexplained variation. The total variation in the dependent variable is 149.562, showing that a substantial portion is accounted for by the predictors.

With 4 degrees of freedom for regression and 295 for residual, the model is well estimated, and the relatively large F-value suggests that the explained variance is significantly greater than the unexplained variance. Overall, the ANOVA results confirm that the model is robust and statistically reliable, supporting the conclusion that the predictors collectively play a significant role in explaining variations in housing vulnerability.

Table 6: Coefficients (Regression Output)

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.214	0.321	—	3.78	0.000
Construction Material Quality	-0.438	0.072	-0.401	-6.08	0.000
Proximity to Floodplain	0.367	0.065	0.352	5.65	0.000
Community Preparedness	-0.291	0.058	-0.276	-5.01	0.000
Government Support	-0.198	0.061	-0.182	-3.25	0.001

Construction Material Quality (β=-0.401)
Strongest predictor better materials significantly reduce vulnerability
Floodplain Proximity (β=0.352)

Increases housing risk significantly Community Preparedness (β=-0.276)
Reduces disaster impact and recovery time Government Support (β=-0.182)
Moderate but significant effect

Government Intervention Effectiveness
Table 7: Policy Effectiveness

Policy Measure	Effectiveness (%)
Relocation programs	60
Material subsidies	55
Drainage projects	50
Building regulations	45

Table 7 evaluates the effectiveness of various government policy measures aimed at reducing housing vulnerability. The results show that relocation programs are perceived as the most effective intervention, with an effectiveness rating of 60%. This suggests that moving households away from high-risk flood-prone areas significantly reduces exposure to hazards.

Material subsidies follow closely with 55% effectiveness, indicating that government support in providing or subsidizing quality building materials contributes meaningfully to improving housing resilience. Drainage projects have a moderate effectiveness level of 50%, reflecting their role in

reducing flood risk through improved water management systems. However, their impact may be limited by maintenance issues or inadequate coverage.

Building regulations are rated as the least effective at 45%, despite their importance in ensuring safe construction practices. This relatively low effectiveness supports the assertion that weak enforcement remains a major challenge, as noted by UN-Habitat (2020). Without proper monitoring and compliance, regulatory frameworks fail to achieve their intended outcomes. Overall, while government interventions show moderate effectiveness, the findings highlight that implementation and enforcement gaps—particularly in building regulations—significantly constrain their impact on reducing housing vulnerability.

Discussion

The findings confirm that housing vulnerability in Kaduna Metropolis is shaped by both structural deficiencies and socio-economic factors. The prevalence of substandard construction materials significantly increases susceptibility to climate hazards, consistent with previous research (Oladokun & Proverbs, 2016). Community-based adaptation strategies play a critical role in enhancing resilience. However, their effectiveness is limited by financial constraints and lack of institutional support. Government interventions, while beneficial, are hindered by weak implementation and enforcement mechanisms.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that housing resilience in Kaduna Metropolis is influenced by a complex interplay of physical, social, and institutional factors. While community initiatives provide a foundation for adaptation, sustainable resilience requires stronger policy frameworks and improved infrastructure.

Recommendations

- Enforce building codes and zoning regulations (IPCC, 2021)
- Promote resilient construction materials (UN-Habitat, 2020)
- Strengthen community participation (Adger, 2009)
- Improve policy implementation
- Invest in climate-resilient infrastructure

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

GENDER EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between gender, education and skill development in university education in Rivers State. The study adopted a correlational research design to investigate the relationship between Gender Education and Skill Development in University Education in Rivers State. The population of the study comprised 3,282 female teaching and non-teaching staff across the seven tertiary institutions in Rivers State, including the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University (RSU), Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE), and other state-owned tertiary institutions. Using a 10% sampling proportion, a sample size of 328 respondents was selected for the study. Data were collected using a researcher-made questionnaire titled Gender Education and Skill Development in University Education Questionnaire (GESDUEQ). The validity of the instrument was established through expert judgment and its reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.71, indicating acceptable internal consistency and confirming that the instrument was reliable for the study. The administration of the instrument was carried out by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants. Data collected were analysed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The statistical analysis was carried out with the aid of SPSS version 27.0. The findings revealed that gender participation, gender-responsive curriculum, and gender empowerment significantly relate to skill development in university education in Rivers State, indicating that inclusive gender education enhances students' skill acquisition. In conclusion, gender education through participation, curriculum, and empowerment positively influences skill development in Rivers State University education. It is recommended that universities promote gender-inclusive policies, responsive curricula, and empowerment programs to enhance skill development among all students.

Keywords: *Gender, Education, Skill, Development, University.*

Introduction

University education occupies a central position in the social and economic development of any nation. It serves not only as a platform for the transmission of knowledge but also as a critical space where individuals acquire the competencies, attitudes, and practical skills required to function effectively in an increasingly complex and competitive world. Hulten (2018) affirmed that education and skill development are indispensable drivers of economic growth, particularly in an information-driven era where the ability to think critically, solve problems, and adapt to changing circumstances determines individual and national prosperity. In this regard, universities bear a profound responsibility — not merely to award certificates but to genuinely equip graduates with the skills that translate into meaningful contributions to society and the economy.

Within the Nigerian context, and particularly in Rivers State, the role of university education in skill development has attracted growing scholarly and policy attention. Ekezie and Owo (2019) noted that universities in Rivers State possess significant potential for vocational and professional skill development, though this potential remains largely unrealised due to inadequate resources and institutional challenges. Similarly, Adebisi (2014) observed that Nigeria's National Policy on Education articulates ambitious goals for higher education and skills development, yet implementation continues to lag behind expectation. The gap between policy intention and practical outcome underscores the urgency of examining how universities in Rivers State are managing the skill development mandate, and more specifically, how gender shapes access to and outcomes from that process.

Gender education emerges as a particularly vital dimension of this conversation. Across Nigeria and much of sub-Saharan Africa, gender disparity in education remains a persistent and deeply rooted challenge. While progress has been made at various levels of schooling, women and girls continue to face structural, cultural, and economic barriers that limit their full participation in educational opportunities, especially at the higher education level. Ajala and Alonge (2013) argued that gender issues in education are not peripheral concerns but central to the project of national development, as no society can reach its full potential when a significant portion of its population is excluded from quality education. The education of women, in particular, has been shown to generate multiplier effects across health, poverty reduction, civic participation, and intergenerational learning.

Abraham et al. (2025) further added that gender disparities in skill acquisition directly translate into unequal employment outcomes for Nigerian youth, with women disproportionately disadvantaged. This reality makes the question of gender-responsive university education not merely an equity concern but a practical imperative for sustainable development. Tuki (2025) also found that education plays a significant role in shaping attitudes toward gender equality in Nigeria, suggesting that universities have both the opportunity and the responsibility to model and promote gender-inclusive practices.

In the context of this study, Gender Education and Skill Development in University Education in Rivers State is examined through three interconnected dimensions: participation, curriculum, and empowerment. These three dimensions collectively capture the structural, pedagogical, and transformative aspects of how gender intersects with skill development in the university setting. Participation addresses the extent to which women and other gender-marginalised groups are meaningfully included in university education. Curriculum examines whether the content and structure of university programmes reflect and respond to the realities of gender diversity.

Empowerment considers the degree to which university education translates into genuine agency, confidence, and capacity for women graduates to navigate professional and social life. Together, these dimensions provide a robust and holistic framework for understanding and advancing gender-sensitive skill development within university education in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Gender education and skill development in university education remain critical concerns for sustainable national development, particularly in Rivers State, Nigeria, where structural inequalities continue to shape educational outcomes. Despite policy commitments to inclusive education, significant gaps persist in how universities manage gender-responsive participation, curriculum design, and empowerment of students, especially women. The problem lies in the persistent gender disparities that undermine equitable skill development within university education in Rivers State. Women continue to face systemic barriers to meaningful participation, and university curricula frequently fail to reflect gender-sensitive approaches that would equip all students with relevant and transferable skills. Institutional responses to these challenges have remained largely inadequate, with universities often treating gender concerns as peripheral rather than central to their educational mandate. The disconnect between policy intention and practical implementation has created a situation where many female graduates leave university without the full complement of skills and confidence needed to compete effectively in the labour market and contribute meaningfully to national development. The gap in existing literature relates to the limited empirical attention given specifically to how universities in Rivers State are addressing gender education and skill development through participation, curriculum review, and empowerment. This study, therefore, seeks to fill that gap by providing contextually grounded evidence to inform policy and practice.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine the relationship between gender education and skill development in university education in Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

i. **Examine the relationship between gender education and skill development in terms of participation in university education in Rivers State.**
ii. **Determine the relationship between gender education and skill development in terms of curriculum design and implementation in university education in Rivers State.**
iii. **Assess the relationship between gender education and skill development in terms of empowerment in university education in Rivers State.**

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

i. To what extent does gender education relate to skill development in university education in terms of participation in Rivers State?
ii. To what extent does gender education relate to skill development in university education in terms of curriculum design and implementation in Rivers State?
iii. To what extent does gender education relate to skill development in university education in terms of empowerment in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

i. There is no significant relationship between gender education and skill development in university education in terms of participation in Rivers State.
ii. There is no significant relationship between gender education and skill development in university education in terms of curriculum design and implementation in Rivers State.
iii. There is no significant relationship between gender education and skill development in university education in terms of empowerment in Rivers State.

Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964)

Human Capital Theory traces its intellectual origins to the Chicago School of Economics in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Theodore W. Schultz (1961) pioneered the concept, arguing that investment in people, particularly through education and health, yields returns comparable to physical capital. Gary S. Becker (1964) later formalised the theory in his seminal work Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, establishing it as a cornerstone of labour economics and development studies (Ashar et al., 2022). Together, Schultz and Becker repositioned the human person as a productive asset whose capacity could be deliberately cultivated through systematic investment. The theory posits that individuals and societies increase productivity by investing in education, training, and health. It treats human beings as repositories of productive capacity that can be developed and deployed in labour markets, assuming that nations prioritising human capital formation gain measurable advantages in productivity and competitiveness (Saka, 2020). It holds that gender disparities in educational access represent an inefficient underutilization of human capital that retards economic growth, with returns measurable through wages, employment rates, and productivity indices (Akunede et al., 2022; Alika & Aibieyi, 2014, as cited in Ashar et al., 2022).

As a strength, Awogbemi (2023) confirmed a significant positive relationship between human capital development and economic growth in Nigeria, validating the theory's core proposition. However, the theory has been criticised for inadequately accounting for structural barriers such as patriarchy and poverty that prevent women from accessing university education regardless of their willingness to invest (Akunede et al., 2022), and for assuming meritocratic labour markets rarely found in Nigeria's constrained economy. Human Capital Theory is directly relevant to this study as it underscores the economic and social value of investing equally in the education of both male and female university students in Rivers State. It provides a framework for understanding how gender-inclusive participation in university programmes, curriculum designed to develop marketable skills, and deliberate empowerment initiatives collectively enhance individual productivity and contribute to the sustainable development of Rivers State.

Conceptual Clarification

Gender Education

Gender education refers to the deliberate process of creating learning environments, policies, and curricula that recognize, respect, and respond to the diverse needs of male and female learners. It involves fostering gender-sensitive institutional cultures that challenge deeply entrenched stereotypes, eliminate discriminatory practices, and ensure equal access, participation, and safety for all students within educational settings. Ajala and Alonge (2013) argued that gender issues in basic and higher education are central to national development, affirming that equitable educational participation for both male and female learners produce outcomes that benefit society broadly.

Updating curricula to eliminate gender stereotypes is central to gender education, as biased content and teaching practices frequently reinforce social inequalities that limit learners' aspirations and academic choices. Tuki (2025) affirmed that education remains one of the most significant determinants of attitudes toward gender equality in Nigeria, suggesting that gender-responsive curricula have the potential to reshape deeply held social norms and broaden opportunities for female learners in university settings. Furthermore, Aina et al. (2024) noted that gender differences significantly influence literacy skills acquisition among learners, underscoring the importance of designing educational environments and facilities that are intentionally inclusive and responsive to the learning needs of both boys and girls. In the context of Rivers State universities, gender education therefore represents a foundational strategy for achieving equitable skill development, dismantling structural barriers that have historically disadvantaged female students, and fostering the kind of inclusive academic culture necessary for sustainable human capital growth and regional development.

Skill Development

Skill development refers to the systematic process of acquiring, enhancing, and refining competencies, knowledge, and abilities that enable individuals to function effectively in professional, social, and economic contexts. It encompasses both technical and transferable skills cultivated through formal education, training programmes, and experiential learning opportunities within higher education institutions. Dunne, Bennett and Carre (2000) described skill development in higher education as a purposeful process through which students acquire competencies that prepare them not only for employment but for lifelong learning and active participation in a knowledge-driven society.

In the university context, skill development is increasingly recognized as a critical bridge between academic training and labour market relevance. Parker (2012) asserted that graduate education must be deliberately structured to cultivate research, analytical, and professional skills that equip students to meet the complex demands of contemporary workplaces. This perspective is particularly significant in Nigerian universities, where the gap between graduate competencies and employer expectations remains a persistent challenge. Adebisi (2014) further affirmed that Nigeria's National Policy on Education recognizes skill development as a fundamental objective of higher education, emphasizing the need for universities to move beyond knowledge transmission toward the deliberate cultivation of practical, vocationally relevant, and entrepreneurial competencies that enhance graduates' employability and productive contribution to national development.

Gender Education and Skill Development in Terms of Participation

The relationship between gender education and skill development in university education in terms of participation reflects the degree to which male and female students are actively engaged in learning processes, programmes, and activities that build their competencies and productive capacities. Participation in university education goes beyond physical enrollment to encompass meaningful involvement in classroom interactions, laboratory sessions, fieldwork, seminars, and skill-based training programmes. When gender education principles are effectively applied, they create conditions that encourage equal and active participation of all learners regardless of sex, thereby maximizing the skill development potential of the entire student population. Abraham, Alami, Gabriel and Abdulazeez (2025) affirmed that gender disparities in skill acquisition among Nigerian

youth are significantly shaped by unequal patterns of participation in education and training programmes, with female students frequently underrepresented in technically oriented and professionally demanding disciplines.

In Rivers State universities, socio-cultural norms and institutional practices have historically constrained female participation in certain academic programmes, limiting their access to skill development opportunities that their male counterparts enjoy more freely. Croke, Goldstein and Holla (2023) demonstrate that gender norms constitute a significant structural barrier to equitable participation in skill-focused training programmes in Nigeria, reinforcing the argument that deliberate gender education interventions are essential to achieving inclusive and productive participation in university education in Rivers State.

Gender Education and Skill Development in Terms of Curriculum Design and Implementation

The relationship between gender education and skill development in university education in terms of curriculum design and implementation concerns the extent to which academic programmes, course content, instructional materials, and teaching methodologies are structured to reflect gender equity principles while simultaneously building the skills of all learners. A gender-responsive curriculum is one that consciously integrates the experiences, needs, and perspectives of both male and female students into the design, delivery, and assessment of learning, ensuring that no group is systematically disadvantaged by the content or structure of academic programmes. Willison (2018) argues that curriculum frameworks in higher education must be critically examined and redesigned to embed research and professional skill development pathways that are accessible and relevant to all students across gender lines. In the context of Rivers State universities, curriculum design that ignores gender dynamics risks perpetuating stereotypes that channel male and female students into narrowly defined academic and career pathways, thereby restricting the breadth of skill development achieved across the student population. Adebisi (2014) affirmed that Nigeria's national education policy recognizes the centrality of curriculum reform to skill development in higher education, emphasizing that effective implementation requires institutions to adopt inclusive, practically oriented, and gender-sensitive instructional approaches that equip graduates with competencies relevant to the demands of a rapidly evolving labour market and society.

Gender Education and Skill Development in Terms of Empowerment

The relationship between gender education and skill development in university education in terms of empowerment concerns the capacity of educational experiences to equip male and female students with the confidence, agency, knowledge, and competencies necessary to make meaningful choices, exercise leadership, and contribute productively to their communities and the broader economy. Empowerment through education is understood not merely as the acquisition of skills but as the transformation of learners' self-perception, aspirations, and ability to navigate and challenge structural inequalities that may otherwise limit their potential. Edokpolor and Chukwuedo (2018) affirmed that technical and vocational education grounded in gender-sensitive principles produces graduates with stronger lifelong career-specific human capital, demonstrating that empowerment outcomes are significantly enhanced when skill development programmes deliberately account for gender considerations.

In Rivers State universities, empowerment through gender education is particularly significant for female students who contend with patriarchal social structures, limited economic resources, and

cultural expectations that frequently undermine their academic confidence and professional aspirations. Obananya (2022) noted that skill acquisition programmes embedded within entrepreneurship education in Nigerian public universities contribute meaningfully to student empowerment by equipping graduates with practical competencies that enhance their economic independence and self-sufficiency. These findings collectively reinforce the argument that gender-responsive university education in Rivers State must prioritise empowerment as a deliberate outcome, integrating skill development initiatives that build the agency and productive capacity of all students equitably.

Review of Related Empirical Studies

Abraham et al. (2025) conducted a study on gender disparities in youth skill acquisition and employment outcomes in Nigeria. The study examined how gender influences access to skill development opportunities and the subsequent effects on employment prospects among Nigerian youth. Findings revealed that female youth consistently experience significant disadvantages in skill acquisition due to entrenched cultural norms, limited institutional support, and unequal access to technically oriented training programmes. The study further established that these disparities translate directly into unequal employment outcomes, with women disproportionately concentrated in low-skilled and informally structured occupations that offer limited prospects for career advancement and economic independence. The study demonstrated that deliberate policy interventions targeting gender equity in skill acquisition are essential to reversing these inequalities and maximizing the productive potential of Nigeria's youth population. This study implies that universities in Rivers State must develop targeted gender-responsive skill acquisition programmes that actively address the structural and cultural barriers limiting female students' participation in professionally and technically demanding disciplines, thereby improving their long-term employment outcomes.

Edokpolor and Chukwuedo (2018) investigated the relationship between technical and vocational education and training and students' lifelong career-specific human capital, with particular attention to gender considerations for sustainable development. The study, conducted among technical and vocational education students in Nigeria, found that gender significantly influences the nature and depth of career-specific human capital developed through vocational training programmes. Male students were found to have greater access to technically intensive training opportunities, while female students were more frequently directed toward traditionally feminine vocational pathways that offered narrower skill development outcomes. The study concluded that gender-sensitive restructuring of technical and vocational curricula is essential to ensuring that all students, regardless of sex, develop the career-specific competencies necessary for sustainable economic participation and personal empowerment in a competitive labour market. This study implies that curriculum designers and university administrators in Rivers State should critically review and reform skill development programmes to eliminate gender-based tracking, ensuring that female students have equal access to high-value technical and professional training that enhances their human capital and long-term career prospects.

Ekezie and Owo (2019) assessed agricultural education resources for vocational skills development of students in universities in Rivers State, South-South Nigeria. The study evaluated the availability and adequacy of instructional resources, equipment, and facilities used in agricultural education programmes and their implications for vocational skill development among university students. Findings indicated that inadequate resource provision significantly undermined the quality of

vocational skill development in agricultural education, with students lacking sufficient access to practical training equipment and modern instructional materials necessary for effective skills acquisition. The study further noted that resource inadequacies disproportionately affected female students, who already faced additional socio-cultural barriers to full participation in agricultural and technically oriented university programmes in Rivers State. This study directly implies that improving the quality and equity of resource provision in Rivers State universities is a prerequisite for effective gender-inclusive skill development, and that institutional investment in adequate instructional facilities must be accompanied by deliberate gender-sensitive policies that ensure female students benefit equally from available vocational training opportunities.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design to investigate the relationship between gender education and skill development in university education in Rivers State. The population comprised 3,282 female teaching and non-teaching staff across seven tertiary institutions in Rivers State, including the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, and other state-owned tertiary institutions. Using a 10% sampling proportion, a sample size of 328 respondents was selected to ensure representativeness while keeping the study manageable. Respondents were drawn from selected institutions based on accessibility and institutional spread. Data were collected using a researcher-made instrument titled the Gender Education and Skill Development in University Education Questionnaire (GESDUEQ), which consisted of two sections. Section A elicited demographic information, while Section B contained items measuring the dimensions of gender education participation, curriculum, and empowerment and their relationship with skill development. Section B was structured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Very High Extent to Very Low Extent. Validity was established through expert judgment by specialists in Educational Management and Planning, who evaluated the instrument for clarity, relevance, and alignment with study objectives. Reliability was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.71, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The instrument was administered by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants. Of the 328 questionnaires distributed, 295 representing 89.9% were successfully retrieved and found valid for analysis, while 33 representing 10.1% were excluded due to non-return or improper completion. Data were analysed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient at a 0.05 level of significance with SPSS version 27.0.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does gender education relate to skill development in university education in terms of participation in Rivers State?

	Gender Education	**Participation**
Gender Education Pearson Correlation	1	0.614**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	295	295
Participation Pearson Correlation	0.614**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
N	295	295

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The result of the correlation analysis revealed a coefficient of r = 0.614 with a significance value of p = 0.000. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 significance level, this indicates a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between gender education and skill development in university education in terms of participation. This shows that when gender-sensitive practices are promoted within university settings, the level of participation of both male and female students in skill development programmes is meaningfully enhanced across tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Hypothesis One: H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between gender education and skill development in university education in terms of participation in Rivers State. The hypothesis test revealed r = 0.614, p = 0.000 < 0.05, which confirms a statistically significant relationship. Since the significance value is well below 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that gender education contributes significantly to skill development by fostering inclusive participation that ensures both male and female students in Rivers State universities have equitable access to skill-building opportunities and academic engagement.

Research Question 2: To what extent does gender education relate to skill development in university education in terms of curriculum design and implementation in Rivers State?

	Gender Education	**Curriculum Design**
Gender Education Pearson Correlation	1	0.638**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	295	295
Curriculum Design Pearson Correlation	0.638**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
N	295	295

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The result of the correlation analysis revealed a coefficient of r = 0.638 with a significance value of p = 0.000. Since the p-value is far below the threshold of 0.05, the result confirms a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between gender education and skill development in university education in terms of curriculum design and implementation. This means that the more gender-responsive university curricula are designed and implemented, the greater the skill development outcomes achieved among students in Rivers State tertiary institutions.

Hypothesis Two: H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between gender education and skill development in university education in terms of curriculum design and implementation in Rivers State. The hypothesis test revealed r = 0.638, p = 0.000 < 0.05, showing a statistically significant relationship. Because the significance value is less than the 0.05 level, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that gender-sensitive curriculum design and implementation significantly enhance skill development in university education, ensuring that learning content, instructional strategies, and programme structures equitably serve the developmental needs of all students in Rivers State.

Research Question 3: To what extent does gender education relate to skill development in university education in terms of empowerment in Rivers State?

	Gender Education	Empowerment
Gender Education Pearson Correlation	1	0.627**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	295	295
Empowerment Pearson Correlation	0.627**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
N	295	295

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The result of the correlation analysis revealed a coefficient of r = 0.627 with a significance value of p = 0.000. Since the p-value is far below the 0.05 threshold, the analysis indicates a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between gender education and skill development in university education in terms of empowerment. This implies that gender education initiatives that prioritize learner agency, confidence, and equal opportunity significantly strengthen the empowerment outcomes of skill development programmes within Rivers State universities.

Hypothesis Three: H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between gender education and skill development in university education in terms of empowerment in Rivers State.
The hypothesis test revealed r=0.627, p =0.000 < 0.05, showing a statistically significant relationship. Since the significance value is well below 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that gender education significantly contributes to empowerment as a dimension of skill development, equipping students particularly female learners with the competencies, confidence, and agency necessary for productive participation in academic and professional life across tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings
Gender Education and Skill Development in Terms of Participation
The finding that gender education has a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship with skill development in terms of participation in Rivers State universities aligns with existing empirical evidence on the centrality of inclusive participation to equitable skill acquisition outcomes. This finding confirms that when universities deliberately adopt gender-sensitive practices, the breadth and quality of student participation in skill development programmes improve considerably for both male and female learners. Abraham et al. (2025) corroborates this finding by establishing that gender disparities in skill acquisition among Nigerian youth are fundamentally rooted in unequal patterns of participation in education and training programmes, with female students consistently underrepresented in technically oriented disciplines. Similarly, Croke et al. (2023) demonstrate that entrenched gender norms constitute significant structural barriers to equitable participation in skill-focused training in Nigeria, affirming that deliberate institutional interventions are necessary to achieve inclusive engagement. Together, these studies reinforce the present finding that participation is a critical pathway through which gender education influences skill development outcomes in university education. This finding implies that university administrators and policymakers in Rivers State must prioritize gender-inclusive participation strategies, including targeted enrolment drives, mentorship programmes, and the elimination of discriminatory institutional practices, to maximize the skill development potential of all students regardless of sex.

Gender Education and Skill Development in Terms of Curriculum Design and Implementation

The finding that gender education relates significantly and positively to skill development in terms of curriculum design and implementation is consistent with scholarly evidence emphasizing the transformative role of gender-responsive curricula in shaping equitable skill development outcomes within higher education. This result suggests that universities in Rivers State whose curricula are intentionally designed to reflect gender equity principles produce more balanced and comprehensive skill development outcomes across their student populations. Willison (2018) supports this finding by arguing that higher education curriculum frameworks must be critically examined and redesigned to embed skill development pathways that are accessible and relevant to all students across gender lines, affirming that curriculum structure directly mediates the relationship between gender equity and skill acquisition. Furthermore, Adebisi (2014) affirms that Nigeria's national education policy recognizes curriculum reform as central to skill development in higher education, emphasizing the need for institutions to adopt inclusive, practically oriented, and gender-sensitive instructional approaches that equip graduates with competencies relevant to a rapidly evolving labour market. This finding implies that curriculum developers and academic planners in Rivers State universities must systematically audit and reform existing programme structures to eliminate gender bias, integrate gender-responsive pedagogical approaches, and ensure that skill development content is equitably accessible and relevant to both male and female students across all disciplines.

Gender Education and Skill Development in Terms of Empowerment

The finding that gender education has a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship with skill development in terms of empowerment reinforces scholarly arguments that empowerment is both an outcome and a mechanism of effective gender-responsive university education. This result indicates that universities in Rivers State which embed empowerment principles into their gender education practices produce students particularly female learners who are better equipped with the agency, confidence, and competencies necessary for meaningful professional and social participation. Edokpolor and Chukwuedo (2018) support this finding by demonstrating that technical and vocational education grounded in gender-sensitive principles produces graduates with stronger lifelong career-specific human capital, confirming that empowerment outcomes are significantly enhanced when skill development programmes deliberately account for gender considerations. Obananya (2022) further establishes that skill acquisition programmes embedded within entrepreneurship education in Nigerian public universities contribute meaningfully to student empowerment by equipping graduates with practical competencies that enhance their economic independence and self-sufficiency, a finding that resonates strongly with the present result. This finding implies that Rivers State universities must intentionally integrate empowerment-focused gender education strategies into their skill development frameworks, including leadership training, entrepreneurship education, and confidence-building initiatives, to ensure that all students — and particularly female learners — graduate with the agency and competencies necessary for productive, self-directed, and economically meaningful participation in society.

Conclusion

Gender education, operationalized through the dimensions of participation, curriculum design and implementation, and empowerment, plays a pivotal role in shaping skill development outcomes in university education in Rivers State. When universities deliberately adopt gender-sensitive practices that promote inclusive participation, design curricula that challenge stereotypes and reflect the diverse needs of all learners, and implement empowerment-focused initiatives that build the agency

and confidence of students, particularly female learners, the quality and breadth of skill development are meaningfully enhanced. Gender education is therefore not merely a social imperative but a developmental necessity whose effective implementation in Rivers State universities is essential to producing skilled, empowered, and productive graduates. Achieving this requires sustained commitment from university administrators, curriculum planners, policymakers, and community stakeholders to collectively dismantle the structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that continue to undermine equitable skill development in Rivers State tertiary institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

i. University administrators should develop and implement gender-sensitive participation policies that ensure equal access to skill development programmes for all students regardless of sex.
ii. Curriculum planners should systematically audit and reform university programme structures to eliminate gender bias and integrate gender-responsive pedagogical approaches across all disciplines in Rivers State.
iii. Policymakers should establish institutional empowerment frameworks within Rivers State universities that deliberately equip female students with leadership, entrepreneurial, and career-specific competencies for productive societal participation.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON GENDER, GOVERNANCE, BUSINESS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February, 2026

ENHANCING INVESTMENT IN GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: FOCUS ON 21ST CENTURY SKILLS.

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Abstract
The developmental status of a nation lies on its ability to identify and provide the needs of its citizens irrespective of gender. Girl-child education is widely recognized in Nigeria as one of the most effective strategies for achieving sustainable development. Despite policy efforts, significant gaps in access to education and skill acquisition for girls still persist. This paper examines the current state of girl-child education in Nigeria, and its persistent barriers which among others include poverty, religion, cultural norms, and labour market demands. It also explored 21st century skills and their relevance to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). The paper explains how investment can be targeted to fostering innovation in the girl-child and break intergenerational cycles of poverty. It argues that to truly harness the potential of the girl-child for sustainable development, investment strategies must go beyond conventional measures of mass enrolment and literacy. The paper concludes that channelling investment into 21st century skills for girls, is building a generational asset to the family, society and the nation as well as liberation from ignorance and poverty. Key suggestions include developing gender-responsive curricula that integrate digital skills, investing in teacher training for modern pedagogies, provide inclusive and conducive pathways from school to labour market.

Keywords: *Girl-Child, Girl-child Education, Investment, Sustainable Development, 21st Century Skills.*

Introduction

The strength of every nation lies on the developmental attainment of its citizens. Education is generally acknowledged as one of the most important means through which a desirable developmental attainment can be achieved. There is no gainsaying that education of all people, irrespective of sex, age, race, colour, ethnicity and persons with disabilities, migrants, children and youth in vulnerable situations and other status stands as one of the most critical levers for sustainable development. However, in Nigeria, the aspiration to train the girl-child in line with the 21st century demands remain incompletely fulfilled. As the nation moves beyond the traditional goals of literacy and numeracy to meet the complexities of 21st century, it becomes imperative to encompass the acquisition of skills which prepares girls for a technology-driven, interconnected global economy. The current landscape of girl-child education in Nigeria like other developing countries has suffered persistent barriers that undermine progress in the integration of 21st century skills into education for sustainable development. In agreement.

Nigeria is currently facing a profound educational challenge that affects its female population disproportionately. Recent data shows that an estimated 7.6 million Nigerian girls remain out-of-school with about half of the population centred in the northern region of the country (UNICEF Nigeria, 2025). Going forward on the out-of-school population, as at July 10, 2025, the North-East and North-West zones recorded net attendance rates of female primary pupils of only 47.7% and 47.3% respectively, meaning that more than half of the girls in this area were not receiving formal education (News Agency of Nigeria, 2025). This is contrary to Islamic religion which commands both male and female to read, recite, think and contemplate as well as learn from the signs of Allah (Abdulrahman, 2018:339).

Again, the Federal government, through the National Policy on Education made basic education compulsory and a fundamental right of every individual irrespective of gender, race, socio-economic background and geographical location (FRN, 2014). As the world speedily advances towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goals 4 & 5 which aim to ensure quality education for all and educational equality, adequate investment in girl-child education can catalyse remarkable progress, improve general health condition, economic growth and poverty reduction (United Nations, 2019; Williams et al, 2022). There is no gain-saying that education is capital intensive, however, it should be noted that investing in education triggers significant improvement on the quality of human input in the society. To this end, it becomes pertinent to discuss the prospects and challenges of the girl-child education in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications - Girl-Child, Girl-child Education, Investment, Sustainable Development, 21st Century Skills Girl-child is defined by many scholars as a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age; this period is made up of infancy, childhood, and the adolescent stages of development. The girl child is a young female individual, who would eventually grow into becoming a woman. The girl-child during this period is dependent on adult members of the family or immediate society to build and develop her personality and character. She learns by observation, imitation, memorization, repetition and mimicking. During this period, the girl-child is easily influenced and dependent on others to build her personality, character and career mostly through observation and imitation. (Jekayinfa and Akanbi, 2016).

Girl-child education is the process of imparting knowledge to a biological female offspring who is under the age of eighteen years. Going by the functionalist theory of education, we can say that

education of the girl-child is the process through which the child acquires knowledge for the right functioning in the society. The potentials of every individual are developed through education. Education leads the girl-child to know what, why, and how of things. It is geared towards developing the girl-child's abilities, attitudes, skills, knowledge and all forms of behaviour that can bring positive changes and sustainable development. To invest as related to this course means to put money into something or someone with the aim to make a profit. Investment therefore, is the act of putting ideas and resources together, building and nurturing it with the aim to make a profit and achieve a desirable result. Andrew (2019) provides the dictionary meaning of investment as something that is purchased with money that is expected to produce income or profit. Investment in education involves spending money to improve the quality of existing human resources. It is aimed at achieving progress and sustainable development.

Development is a change in the right direction. It is measured by the extent of economic, political, infrastructural and educational attainment or progress. National development has a strong bond with education, they are regarded as two sides of a coin. It is a general increase or positive change in a country's condition as a whole. Oke cited in Kingdom and Makare (2013:314) posits that national development is the "ability of a nation to satisfactorily provide the food and fibre that are needed by its people and industry". National development occurs when there is significant improvement in the life styles of the citizens. On the other hand, sustainable development is a global concept aimed at meeting the needs of present society without compromising the well-being of the future generations. The three key aspects of sustainable development are: 1. Economic growth, emphasising inclusive economic growth and developmental benefits for every society irrespective of geographical location. 2. Social Inclusion, focusing on equal participation of people on developmental process such as poverty, unequal access to education and health care. 3. Environmental protection, stressing the need to protect the ecosystem through proper management of the natural resources, reducing pollution and minimizing degradation of the environment (United Nations, 2015; World Bank, 2022; World Wildlife Fund, 2020). Sustainable development consist of 17 goals aimed at addressing global challenges with each goal having specific targets to be achieved by 2030. This paper as earlier mentioned is concerned with Goal 4 and Goal 5, especially Goal 5 which emphasizes gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. For more than two decades, the bell of 21st century skills has been sounding. It is simply defined as a shift from traditional norms to advanced technological transformation. It is a complex and dynamic period marked by rapid transformation across various dimensions of human life, technological advancements, globalisation and environmental challenges which when put together shapes the future profoundly (Castells, 2010; Friedman, 2005). 21st century skills include collaboration, information and communication technology (ICT) proficiency, problem solving, and creativity (Manafa & Onwuchulum, 2025). These skills encompass a blend of cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities which are necessary to achieve the development of the growing society.

The Need for Investment in the Girl-Child Education

Education is a tool for developing individual's abilities, attitudes, skills, knowledge and all forms of behaviour. It is through education that the girl-child acquires the required knowledge to function right in the immediate society irrespective of the prevailing circumstances. In the words of Oduro (2024:1), "one fundamental principle underlying the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as contained in the United Nation's 2030 Agenda, is to make life meaningful to everybody". Unfortunately, the prevailing circumstances in most Nigerian families or societies have placed investment in girl-child education on a secondary scale. Having realized the fact that the girl-child grows up to be a

woman/mother whose primary assignment will be to nurse or care for her offspring right from birth, it becomes a source of worry because we cannot give out what we don't have and no nation can rise above the educational attainment of its citizens. This is why both governmental and non-governmental agencies set upon themselves the task to ensure mass literacy. The Jomtien conference in 1990 – World declaration on the rights of the child to education articulated in Article I that: "every person, child, youth and adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet the basic learning needs". Article 3 of the above declaration paid attention to women and girls stating that no obstacle or discrimination shall hamper their active participation (Osaat and Legborsi, 2012). Apart from the world declaration at Jomtien, other international developmental partners as provided by Osaat and Legborsi also declared as follows:

i. Provision of fund for the support of mass literacy programmes in some selected states by UNDP.
ii. Provision of adult literacy and girls' education through the National Commission for Mass Literacy Adult and Non-formal Education (through education, radio programmes provision of supportive materials and creation of awareness).
iii. Provision of library books to primary schools by the World Bank.
iv. Promotion of more girls' enrolment in school by the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI).

Going on, Okojie (2011) cited in Osaat and Legborsi, (2012) explained the extent at which efforts have been made by the United Nations to improve the socio-economic well-being and advancement of women in their immediate societies. To this effect, the international women's year (1975), the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) the world conferences held at Mexco (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995) have contributed immensely to the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment. Again, in Nigeria, the National Policy on Gender 2007 which replaced the National Policy on Women, 2000 advocated the recognition of gender issues on education (Osaat and Legborsi, 2012). It was noted that the policy addressed gender issues so as to encourage national development. Girl-child education can go a long way to solve many nagging issues hindering socio-economic growth. Girl-child education is aimed at raising women who will be instrumental to societal development. It is commonly said that when you train a boy, you have trained an individual but training a girl-child is as well as raising a society and generation of disciplined and morally sound citizens. Women are creative in nature, they need adequate educational attention to be able to convey their talents and potentials. Both the male and the female have a quota to bring to the table both in the immediate family and the society at large. Imbalance from any side can cause some strains and hindrances in growth and development.

Girl-child Education and Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is about the learning needed to maintain and improve the quality of life of the people both in the present and future generations. Girl-child education and 21st century skills are geared towards the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attributes, attitudes and values necessary to navigate through challenges and as well shape the future. Education is an indispensable tool in the accomplishment of sustainable national development. A country cannot experience growth until it is ready to reorganize and readdress the level of education provision in a qualitative and quantitative manner (Udofia and Gberevbie, 2019).

Investing in a girl-child enhances and sustains national development. It is factual that the girl-child makes decisions based on her level of reasoning or mind-set. Such decisions could make or mar her. Invariably, she becomes a woman who raises her offspring according to her level of reasoning. In simple terms, when you educate a girl, you educate a whole nation. Every country today is faced with various challenges, but the sustainability is the ability to proffer sustainable solutions. Education is crucial in equipping the girl-child with proper proficiency to discover her capabilities and skills thereby boosting her level of self-confidence in order to see the challenges around her and make meaningful contributions in the search for solutions. The well-educated girl plays a crucial role in societal development. Education is the heart beat of every nation, it determines the quality of human capital development which will place Nigeria among top world economies.

Challenges to Investment in Girl-Child Education

Many African countries still experience inequality in education. Equal educational opportunities enable the citizens to participate and contribute meaningfully to the growth and developmental process of the nation. Investment in girl-child education is crucial for societal development. Over the years, Nigeria has made remarkable attempts to enhance girl-child education through policy and programme interventions, such as Gender Responsive Education Policies and Support Programmes (GREPSP), aimed at eliminating gender disparities in education access and completion. In addition, Girls' Education and Skills Partnership (GESP) programme is a collaborative training efforts designed to empower young women with digital and technical skills, enhancing employability and future readiness and relevance (Vanguard Nigeria, 2025). Despite the campaign for equal opportunities to education and its benefits, scholars have testified to challenges, such as:

1. **Resource Constraints:** The level of education of the young ones is always measured and determined by the economic situation of the immediate family. This is more noticeable in large families which suffer resource constraints. Such families place priority on immediate financial returns over long-term education benefits. The financial burden of payment of school fees, buying uniforms, books and other items for schooling may compel such categories of families to choose to keep the girls at home to help with domestic chores or contribute to the family income to help train the boys (World Bank, 2018). For example, it was earlier provided in this paper that the out-of-school population in the northern region of the country, as at July 10, 2025, in the North-East and North-West zones recorded net attendance rates of female primary pupils of only 47.7% and 47.3% respectively, meaning that more than half of the girls in this area were not receiving formal education. This can be attributed to resource constraint. According to Osokoya (2007), apart from keeping these girls at home for domestic chores, some of them are given out for domestic work in other homes in exchange for money or married off to relieve the family of the burden of spending money on them.
2. **Religion and Cultural Barriers:** Ogakwu and Isife (2016) submitted that obnoxious cultural practices and religious belief in some parts of Nigeria hinder full participation of the female offspring in outdoor activities. As a result the girl-child is encapsulated in inferiority status and by so doing the need to invest in their education becomes irrelevant. In such cases, the girl-child is confined to domestic duties, secluded from the men and waiting to be married out. In the northern states, the impact of Islamic religion on gender has hindered investment in girl-child education. Very few parents spend money to train the girl-child. More attention is given to the male offspring in the name of becoming the heir. Furthermore, Abdulrahman (2018) affirmed that Islamic religion which forbids boy-girl mixing up and playing together played high role in low level girl-child enrolment in schools. This religious belief is contrary to the Islamic system of education, which embraces the pursuit or acquisition of knowledge by all

Muslims irrespective of their sexes and commands. Both male and female are mandated to read, recite, think and contemplate as well as learn from the signs of Allah (the "Oyat"). Even at that, attempts have been made by the government and United Nations to eliminate gender discrimination, irrespective of religion, geographical location, and socio-economic background. Also, for the Muslims, provisions have been made for boys and girls to study in separate classrooms. Yet it looks as if the challenge has come to stay.

3. **Early Marriages:** From the report of UNICEF (2020). Traditional beliefs and cultural norms of getting girls married at the earlier stage of life has prioritised male children education over girls' schooling and completion The issues of early marriages can affect both boys and girls, but the effect is more on the girl-child. Uneducated girl-child goes into early marriage. Any community where early marriage is practiced, will not see the need to invest in such child because it is believed that the girl-child belongs to the man who marries her. Secondly, parents in such community will definitely see the bride price as economic enhancement. Some parents may not even wait for the girl to get to maturity before getting her betrothed to a man. Early marriage leads to premature motherhood and the withdrawal of girls from school
4. **Organization of schools:** This is another factor that hinders girl-child education. Parents who are under stringent religious and cultural policy may find it difficult to allow their female children attend mixed schools. Such parents will prefer to keep their female children at home, rather than go against their religion or culture. This is common in the northern part of Nigeria where Islamic religion dominates the society and forbids indiscriminate mixing of opposite sex (Abdulrahman, 2018). The alternative arrangement made by the government, religious organizations and concerned individuals for both sexes to study differently may not be affordable for some parents. Again, the distance and location may not be convenient or safe for parents to allow their female offspring to attend.
5. **Parental Literacy Rate:** The literacy rate or level of enlightenment of parents are significant factors influencing girl-child education. Literate parents recognise the long-term benefits of sending their daughters to school with the aim of getting a better job to improve socio-economic status irrespective of culture, religion or prevailing circumstances in the society (Bashir et al, 2018). The education she has received will become a light which must be kept burning from one generation to the other. Meanwhile, the illiterate parents might perceive education as unnecessary, especially for the girls. She is glued to the customs and tradition of her immediate environment. An educated woman might not pay attention to some insinuations that fly around the community such as: educated girls are morally corrupt, they are barren, will not accept parents' choice of husbands, will not be submissive to their husbands, not have time for domestic duties, not marry and so on. They may go as far as providing educational support at home or assist with their homework, while the illiterate may not understand what it takes to support their children's learning leading to poor performance and high rate of drop-outs (Davis, 2024).
6. **Labour Market Policy:** Labour market opportunity and policy is also a challenge, it is mostly tied to religious and cultural attitudes. Time and dresses required for the work always remain an issue when it comes to women. They are expected to take lesser sophisticated jobs to enable them return home early to take care of their husbands and children. Also, the dress code of the job may not be acceptable by the immediate society or religion. In addition, some jobs are hazardous in nature and as such cannot be taken up by women. For example, a typical Muslim

woman under the sharia law which mandates women and girls to cover themselves from head to toe may find it difficult to be employed or have a place in circular organisations. Generally, most women are not allowed by their husbands to take up jobs that will keep them away from the home for days irrespective of the financial returns it will bring to the family.

7. **Insecurity:** Insecurity is seriously becoming a cankerworm in Nigeria. It is a significant barrier to investment in girl-child education. Insecurity can manifest in various forms such as armed conflict, political power tussle, youth restiveness, violence, cult group activities, kidnapping, inter-communal war, flood, earth quake and so on. Each poses huge challenges to girls in having access to quality education. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) explained that conflict leads to a remarkable increase in dropout rates among girls, as families may prefer to send the boys to school in such unstable situation (UNICEF, 2016).

The Benefits of Investing in Girl-Child Education

The benefits associated with girl-child education cannot be overemphasised. As they grow to become mothers and play major role in the upbringing of the young ones, there are many benefits in improving investment in the education of the girl-child. They include:

1. **Proper Raising of Future Leaders:** The mother is the first teacher of every child. From birth to 3 years, the mother remains the most influential and closest teacher. This stage is very crucial in the life of every individual child. The mother can only give to the child what she has, until the school age when she is exposed to a formal learning environment to learn from a teacher. Even at that the child returns home to spend the remaining hours with the mother. It is in this regard that Levi in Osokoya (2007) argued that educated women have all it takes to prepare their children to function effectively in the immediate society and beyond. Children are the future leaders in their respective fields, both the educated and uneducated acquire responsibilities as they grow. The responsibility could be domestic, administrative, religious, political and many others. The success story of whatever responsibility lies on the level of care and education provided to the individual child before the attainment of adulthood.
2. **Reduction of Infant and Child Mortality Rates:** Women with some level of education seek their children's welfare. They are better informed about their children's nutritional requirements and adopt improved sanitation practices. They know the what, why and how of pregnancy and take proper care. Even from the lactation period, they understand the child's feelings more than anyone else. They follow medical advice in the treatment of the child in case of any ailment.
3. **Reduction of Maternal Mortality Rates:** Women with formal education tend to have better knowledge about health care practices. They are less likely to fall victims of early or unwanted pregnancy. They tend to have adequate knowledge toward spaced pregnancies and seek pre and post-natal care. As earlier stated, they know the what, why and how of pregnancy, and take proper care of not only the child in the womb but of themselves as well.
4. **Increase in Women's Participation Rates and Earnings:** Two good heads, they say are better than one. Behind every successful man is a successful woman. The woman who earns some money will be able to assist her relatives and participate actively in the society. Education usually ushers individuals to full participation in socio-economic development. In a family where the man and the woman earn money, the financial status of such family will be higher than that of a family which depends solely on the man.
5. **Intergenerational Educational Opportunities:** It has been stated earlier that the girl-child grows to become a woman and a mother. When you train a girl-child you have automatically trained a nation and generations. The girl-child matures into womanhood and transfers the

knowledge and skills acquired to her offspring. By so doing, continuous transmission of knowledge is guaranteed. Her lineage remains educated and contribute wholesomely to sustainable national development.

6. **Builds Tenacity and Self-confidence:** The education of a girl-child helps build her confidence to explore and fully maximize her potentials despite all odds. Education also improves the individual's self-esteem and confidence to participate and contribute meaningfully in the immediate society and the nation. The educated girl-child grows into a responsible adult and agent of change in various spheres of development.

Integrating 21st Century Skills into Girl-Child Education for Sustainable Development

Educating the girl-child through the lens of 21st century skills fosters a generation of women who can tackle pressing global challenges. 21st century skills are empowerment tools that prepare individuals for meaningful participation in the society and labour market. These skills include:

1. **Digital Literacy and ICT Integration:** Adequate provision of digital tools and Information Communication Technology (ICT) resources and unfettered access for girls are crucial in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) education. These will serve as empowerment to entrepreneurship and encourage them to pay attention to subjects which address social issues and health, especially as related to girls. Such subjects include Arts, Sciences and Social Sciences (Beauchamp & Madan, 2016; UNICEF, 2025).
2. **Curriculum Development:** Integrate 21st century skills into the curriculum through project-based learning (PBL) that addresses real world Sustainable Development (SD) challenges. This is all about engaging students in projects that require collaboration for problem-solving. For example, girls can carry out teamwork on projects addressing specific issues in specific areas, thereby solidifying their thinking and teamwork abilities.
3. **Community Engagement:** Involving parents and members of the community in discussions about the value of educating the girl-child in accordance with the 21st century demands, especially in some parts of Nigeria where obnoxious cultural practices and religious beliefs hinder full participation of the female offspring in outdoor activities. This can create an enabling environment for parents in such aof the condition of learning, and also allow their female grown-up children to associate with women who are professionals in 21st century skills (Kirk & Winthrop, 2013; Sulivan et al, 2018).
4. **Teacher Training:** From the account of Ofoego and Ebebe cited in Osaat et al (2022), teachers are professionals who have a beneficial influence on individuals. This influence as a matter of fact is determined by their degree of knowledge. It is often said that no education system can rise above the level the teachers. Therefore, adequate and proper training of the trainer is very crucial for effective integration of 21st century skills in the education of the girl-child. All teachers need to be trained in the use of technology in education. This will enable them get girls familiarised with digital tools and resources in a way that they can learn from a distance if the condition is not favourable for them to learn on site perhaps due to the existence of any of the hindering factors, especially on security matters or national emergencies.

Integrating 21st century skills into girl-child education is crucial for personal growth and sustainable development. By embracing innovative teaching methods, engaging communities in discussing the education of the girl-child, and training the trainers, girls can be empowered to become proactive contributors to their immediate families, societies and global economy.

Conclusion

Investing in girl-child education, particularly through the lens of 21st century skills, is necessary for fostering sustainable development. A nation that seeks to sustain its developmental status must place priorities on the development and reformation of the minds of the citizens irrespective of gender, race, religion and culture, geographical location, and socio-economic status. When the girl-child is educated in line with the societal demands, she becomes an asset to the family and society In spite of the disadvantaged position of girls in many spheres of the Nigerian economy, they play active roles in the society as producers, processors and home managers, bearers of children, mothers and wives. They are invisible workforce and backbone of the family. Until the constraints which limit girl-child education and women advancement in the society are genuinely and widely addressed, the prevailing inequality in Nigeria's educational opportunity will continue to linger and hinder sustainable national development. She also yields some benefits such as increased productivity, development of skills, conscious of potentials and talents, improved quality of life and economic booster leading to long-lasting national development.

Suggestions

From the above discourse, the following suggestions are made

i. Government should eradicate and eliminate social and cultural forces that tend to ignite preferential attitude towards investment in girl-child education.
ii. There should be reformation of religious and cultural order regarding the derogatory position of women in the society.
iii. Government should put an end to gender discrimination in appointments and employment.
iv. Parents should give equal opportunity to the education of both boys and girls in the family no matter the prevailing circumstances.
v. National Orientation Agency should step up its enlightenment programme to cover gender discrimination which is still being practiced in some parts of the country.

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