

## Chapter 19

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# Assessing the Effectiveness of Affirmative Action Policies in Promoting Girls' Education in Kwara State: A Detailed Account of Girl Child Education in Vulnerable Communities in Ilorin Metropolis

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### Abstract

The Nigerian National Policy on Education assures an equal educational opportunity to all children irrespective of religion, tribe or gender. This policy remains largely on paper as a wide gap still exists in children's access to education, particularly on the basis of gender, and particularly in Northern Nigeria. The girl child in Kwara State, as one of the Northern states in Nigeria, faces several barriers to education, including poverty, early marriage, and cultural beliefs that prioritise boys' education. To address these challenges, the Kwara State Government has implemented several affirmative action policies aimed at promoting girls' education. This research study, therefore, assesses the effectiveness of affirmative action policies in promoting girls' education in Kwara State, with a focus on a vulnerable community in Ilorin Metropolis. This study used a case study research design. The population comprises female children in vulnerable communities. Isale Gambari community was sampled. 14 parents and two community heads were engaged. Focus group discussions (FGD) and key informant interviews (KII) were used to collect data. The data were interpreted, and the finding reveals that there is little awareness of the policies; the policies are yet to contribute to girl child enrolment and retention in schools, cultural beliefs, parent education

and financial status as negative influence on a child's education, there is no known policy provided that promotes the education of a girl child, amongst others. It was therefore recommended that effort should be made to further implement the policies in vulnerable communities.

**Keywords:** Affirmative Action Policies, Education for All, Girl Child Education, Out of School Children, Vulnerable Children

## Introduction

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping societies and empowering individuals, yet around the world, gender disparities persist, depriving countless girls of their right to education. In Kwara State, Nigeria, the challenge of ensuring equal access to education for girls remains a pressing concern, particularly in vulnerable communities within the Ilorin Metropolis. In response to this issue, affirmative action policies have been implemented, aiming to address the historical barriers and discriminatory practices that hinder girls' educational opportunities. This chapter delves into a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of these affirmative action policies in promoting girls' education, shedding light on the experiences and outcomes within the unique context of vulnerable communities in Ilorin Metropolis. This study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders invested in the pursuit of gender equality in education.

Education is widely recognised as a fundamental human right and a key driver of individual empowerment and societal development (UN, 2015). However, despite global efforts to achieve gender equality in education, gender disparities persist, particularly in many developing countries. Girls continue to face significant barriers that hinder their access to quality education and limit their opportunities for personal and professional growth (UNESCO, 2020). Gender disparities in education have far-reaching consequences, affecting not only the individual girls but also their communities and societies. Research has consistently shown that educating girls has a multiplier effect, leading to improved health outcomes, reduced poverty rates, and increased economic productivity (World Bank, 2018b). Moreover, educated women tend to have fewer children, which contributes to lower population growth and improved family well-being (Gibson et al., 2019). Thus, ensuring equal access to education for girls is not only a matter of human rights but also a critical strategy for achieving sustainable development.

However, in Kwara State, Nigeria, gender disparities in education persist, particularly in vulnerable communities within the Ilorin Metropolis.

Factors such as poverty, cultural norms, early marriage, and limited access to educational resources contribute to the marginalisation of girls in these communities (Olanrewaju & Adebisi, 2021; Uwaifo, 2018). Recognising the urgent need to address this issue, affirmative action policies have been implemented to promote and support girls' education. Affirmative action policies are deliberate interventions that seek to redress historical discrimination and provide targeted support to marginalised groups (Adeyemi & Aromolaran, 2020). These policies aim to remove barriers and create opportunities for under-represented individuals, including girls, in the educational sphere. By implementing initiatives such as scholarship programmes, gender-sensitive curriculum development, and community engagement, affirmative action policies strive to increase girls' enrolment, retention, and completion rates in schools. This is because the importance of education in empowering individuals and shaping societies cannot be overemphasised.

Education is widely recognised as a powerful tool for individual empowerment and social transformation. It equips individuals with knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities that enable them to navigate the complexities of life, make informed decisions, and contribute meaningfully to their communities (UN, 2020). The transformative potential of education extends beyond the individual, as it plays a crucial role in shaping societies and fostering inclusive and sustainable development. Education empowers individuals by expanding their horizons, broadening their perspectives, and enabling personal growth. Through education, individuals acquire foundational literacy and numeracy skills, which serve as building blocks for further learning and lifelong development (World Bank, 2018a). Moreover, education fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills, empowering individuals to engage actively in social, economic, and political spheres (UNESCO, 2015).

Educated individuals are more likely to secure employment and earn higher incomes, breaking the cycle of poverty and enhancing their overall well-being (World Bank, 2020). Education also promotes better health outcomes, as educated individuals are more likely to adopt healthy behaviours, access healthcare services, and make informed decisions regarding their own well-being and that of their families (Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2010). Education plays a pivotal role in shaping societies and driving social change. It serves as a powerful mechanism for promoting social cohesion, reducing inequalities, and fostering inclusive development (UNESCO, 2015). Education provides individuals with opportunities to acquire knowledge about their rights, participate in democratic processes, and advocate for social justice and equality (Santos, 2021). It also helps challenge

stereotypes, discrimination, and harmful social norms, paving the way for more inclusive and tolerant societies.

Furthermore, education contributes to economic growth and productivity by equipping individuals with the skills and competencies needed in the labour market (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2012). A well-educated workforce enhances innovation, technological advancement, and economic diversification, leading to improved living standards and sustainable development (OECD, 2019). Education empowers individuals by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities necessary for personal and professional growth. At the societal level, education drives social transformation, promotes inclusivity, and contributes to economic development. Recognising the immense significance of education, it is imperative to address the gender disparities and barriers that hinder equal access to education, particularly for girls in vulnerable communities.

The persistent gender disparities in access to education have far-reaching consequences for individuals and societies. When girls are denied education, their potential remains untapped, depriving them of opportunities for personal development, economic empowerment, and social participation (World Bank, 2020). The lack of education perpetuates cycles of poverty and limits girls' ability to break free from intergenerational cycles of disadvantage (UNESCO, 2003). Moreover, gender disparities in education hinder social progress and sustainable development. When a significant portion of the population is excluded from education, societies miss out on the diverse perspectives, talents, and contributions that women and girls can bring (UN, 2019). Gender disparities in education impede efforts to achieve other Sustainable Development Goals, such as eradicating poverty, promoting gender equality, and fostering inclusive economic growth (World Bank, 2018b). Addressing these gender disparities and ensuring equal access to education for girls is not only a matter of human rights but also a crucial strategy for social, economic, and political advancement. It requires concerted efforts from governments, communities, and stakeholders to dismantle barriers, challenge gender norms, and implement gender-responsive policies and programmes that promote girls' educational and empower them to reach their full potential.

Kwara State, located in North Central Nigeria, is known for its diverse population and rich cultural heritage. With Ilorin as its capital city, the state is home to various communities, each with its unique social, economic, and educational landscape. Understanding the context of Kwara State is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of affirmative action policies in promoting girls' education in vulnerable communities within the Ilorin Metropolis. Kwara State faces significant challenges in ensuring equal access to education,

particularly for girls. The state struggles with high poverty rates, limited educational infrastructure, and cultural norms that prioritise male education over female education (NPC, 2014; Olanrewaju & Adebisi, 2021). These factors contribute to the persistent gender disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes.

In the Ilorin Metropolis, vulnerable communities further compound the barriers faced by girls in accessing education. These communities often experience socio-economic disadvantages, including limited access to basic amenities, inadequate healthcare services, and low-income households (Uwaifo, 2018). The vulnerability of these communities makes girls more susceptible to dropping out of school because of financial constraints, early marriage, and societal expectations. The specific challenges faced by girls in vulnerable communities within the Ilorin Metropolis necessitate targeted interventions to promote their educational opportunities. Affirmative action policies, such as scholarship programmes, gender-responsive curriculum development, and community engagement initiatives, have been implemented to address these challenges and improve girls' access to quality education.

Vulnerable communities within the Ilorin Metropolis in Kwara State, Nigeria, present a distinct context characterised by socio-economic challenges that impact girls' access to education. These communities experience various factors that contribute to the marginalisation and limited educational opportunities for girls. Vulnerable communities in the Ilorin Metropolis often face high levels of poverty and limited economic resources (Olanrewaju & Adebisi, 2021). Economic constraints can prevent families from prioritising girls' education, leading to increased school dropout rates and limited enrolment. Inadequate educational infrastructure is a significant challenge in vulnerable communities. Schools in these areas often lack basic amenities such as classrooms, libraries, and sanitation facilities (NPC, 2014). The absence of proper facilities can discourage parents from sending their daughters to school and hinder the learning environment for those who do attend.

Affirmative action policies are deliberate interventions implemented by governments, institutions, or organisations to address historical and systemic discrimination, promote equal opportunity, and foster inclusivity for marginalised groups, including girls in the context of education. The purpose of affirmative action policies is to rectify the imbalances and barriers that hinder the full participation and advancement of disadvantaged individuals, particularly in areas where they have been historically under-represented. In the context of girls' education, affirmative action policies aim to address the gender disparities and discriminatory practices that

limit girls' access to quality education. These policies recognise the specific challenges and barriers faced by girls, such as socio-cultural norms, poverty, and limited educational resources. By providing targeted support and implementing strategies tailored to girls' needs, affirmative action policies seek to create an enabling environment that promotes their educational opportunities and improves their educational outcomes. It is clear that there exists a persistence of gender disparities in access to education, particularly for girls, both globally and in the specific context of Kwara State, Nigeria. Economic constraints, harmful gender norms and stereotypes, cultural practices, limited infrastructure, and inadequate educational resources contribute to the marginalisation of girls in vulnerable communities within the Ilorin Metropolis.

These gender disparities in education have profound implications for individuals and societies. Denied access to education, girls are deprived of opportunities for personal development, economic empowerment, and social participation. Furthermore, the exclusion of girls from education hampers social progress, sustainable development, and the achievement of broader development goals. Recognising the significance of education in empowering individuals and shaping societies, affirmative action policies have been implemented to promote and support girls' education. These policies aim to address historical and systemic discrimination, remove barriers, and create inclusive educational environments that enhance girls' educational opportunities and outcomes. However, the effectiveness of affirmative action policies in vulnerable communities within the Ilorin Metropolis needs to be assessed comprehensively. By critically examining the implementation, impact, challenges, and successes of these policies, the research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and inform evidence-based strategies to further enhance girls' education in Kwara State.

### **Statement of the problem**

Despite global efforts to promote gender equality in education, significant gender disparities persist, particularly in vulnerable communities within the Ilorin Metropolis of Kwara State, Nigeria. Girls face numerous barriers that hinder their access to quality education and limit their opportunities for personal growth, empowerment, and social advancement. The state of the problem is characterised by economic constraints, harmful gender norms and stereotypes, cultural practices, limited infrastructure, and inadequate educational resources. Economic factors, such as poverty and the cost of schooling, often prevent families from prioritising girls' education. Harmful gender norms and stereotypes perpetuate the belief that girls' primary role is within the household, leading to child marriage and the prioritisation

of boys' education. Cultural practices, such as gender-based violence and discrimination, further hinder girls' access to education and create hostile learning environments.

Additionally, vulnerable communities within the Ilorin Metropolis face limited educational infrastructure, including inadequate school facilities, these factors contribute to the marginalisation of girls, hindering their enrolment, retention, and educational outcomes. To address the state of the problem and promote girls' education in vulnerable communities within the Ilorin Metropolis, affirmative action policies have been implemented. These policies aim to address historical and systemic discrimination, remove barriers, and create inclusive educational environments that enhance girls' educational opportunities and outcomes. However, there is a need to assess the effectiveness of these policies and identify strategies for further improvement. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct research to assess the effectiveness of affirmative action policies in promoting girls' education in vulnerable communities within the Ilorin Metropolis.

## Research questions

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What is the awareness level of community members on affirmative action policies in promoting girls' education in Kwara State?
2. Have girl child enrolment and school retention increased in the last five years?
3. What are the factors influencing girl child education in the community?

## Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach which gathers qualitative data. Case study design was used to assess the current state of girls' education in Koroo afoju, isale gambari community in Ilorin Metropolis. Primary data sources were utilised to provide an in-depth understanding. The sample size comprised 14 participants and two key informants. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the vulnerable community within the Ilorin Metropolis, and the participants as well as the informants based on their direct involvement. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with stakeholders and parents or guardians, to explore their experiences, perspectives, and perceptions regarding girls' education. These qualitative methods allowed for a deeper understanding of the cultural, social, and economic factors influencing girls' education. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions. Themes and patterns related to barriers, challenges, and

effectiveness of affirmative action policies were identified. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. The research adhered to ethical guidelines in data collection, storage, and dissemination. The study's scope was limited to one community within the Ilorin Metropolis, and the findings may not be generalisable to the entire Ilorin or Kwara State or other regions.

## Results

Thematic analysis was used in answering the research questions from the collected data, mainly from key informant interview and focus group discussion participants, which were transcribed, arranged and studied before answering research questions.

**Research Question One:** What is the awareness level of community members on affirmative action policies in promoting girls' education in Kwara State?

On the awareness level of community members on affirmative action policies in promoting girls' education in Kwara State, all members in the two focus group discussions claimed some awareness of government efforts in ensuring that a girl child in the community goes to school and completes school. A participant in the second focus group claimed not to be aware of any policy by government to promote female education. Meanwhile the two key informants acknowledged efforts by government in promoting male and female education in the community. This shows that though members of the community are aware of policy from the government, the awareness amounts to little.

**Research Question Two:** Has girl child enrolment and school retention increased in the last five years?

On the girl child enrolment and school retention point, there has been an increase in the last five years. The participants from the two groups and the key informants are yet to see any significant increase in the enrolment of girl children and are also aware of cases of female pupils in the community who are now out of school for one reason or another. This implies that the policies are yet to contribute to girl child enrolment and retention in the community.

**Research Question Three:** What are the factors influencing girl child education in the community?

On the factors influencing girl child education in the community, participants agreed to the following as amongst other factors militating girl child education in the community: cultural beliefs; parent education; and financial status as the leading causes and factors having a negative influence

on child education in the community; also the participants noted that there were a significant number of beggars living in the community. This may be why they are not aware of the policy's provisions that promote the education of a girl child.

### **Discussion of findings, conclusion and recommendations**

Based on the findings, it appears that there is some level of awareness amongst community members regarding the government's efforts to promote girls' education in Kwara State. However, the extent of this awareness seems to vary within the community. During the focus group discussions, participants from the first group claimed to have some awareness of the government's initiatives aimed at ensuring girls' access to education and their completion of schooling. This suggests that these community members have some knowledge of the affirmative action policies and efforts in place to promote girls' education.

However, it is noteworthy that a participant in the second focus group expressed a lack of awareness regarding any specific government policy to promote female education. This individual's statement indicates that there might be gaps in disseminating information about affirmative action policies targeting girls' education within the community. Interestingly, both focus groups acknowledged the government's efforts in promoting education for both males and females in the community. This suggests that while community members are aware of broader educational initiatives, the specific focus on promoting girls' education might not be as widely recognised.

These findings indicate that although there is some level of awareness amongst community members regarding the government's efforts to promote girls' education, the extent of this awareness may be limited. The lack of awareness expressed by a participant in the second focus group highlights the need for more effective communication and dissemination of information about the specific policies and programmes aimed at promoting female education within the community. To address this, it is crucial for the government and other stakeholders to enhance their efforts in raising awareness about affirmative action policies targeted at promoting girls' education. This can be achieved through community engagement programmes, workshops, public awareness campaigns, and active involvement of local leaders and influential members of the community. By increasing awareness and understanding of these policies, community members can become more actively involved in supporting and advocating for girls' education, thereby contributing to the success of the affirmative action initiatives. It is important to note that further research and exploration

of the community members' perspectives and understanding of affirmative action policies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the awareness levels and potential barriers to their effective implementation.

The findings revealed that the participants from the two groups and the key informants are yet to see any significant increase in the enrolment of girl children and are aware of cases of female pupils in the community who are now out of school for one reason or another. This implies that the policies are yet to contribute to girl child enrolment and retention in the community. There is a perception amongst participants from the two focus groups and the key informants that there has been no significant increase in girls' enrolment and retention in the community over the past five years. Additionally, they are aware of cases where female pupils have dropped out of school for various reasons. This suggests that the existing affirmative action policies may not have effectively contributed to addressing the issues of enrolment and retention of girls in the community.

The lack of noticeable improvements in girls' enrolment and retention despite the presence of affirmative action policies is a matter of concern. It indicates that there may be barriers or challenges that hinder the effective implementation and impact of these policies. These barriers could be multifaceted and include factors such as socio-cultural norms, economic constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and gender-based discrimination. Socio-cultural norms and expectations often prioritise male education over female education, leading to lower enrolment and higher dropout rates for girls. Economic constraints, including poverty and the associated costs of schooling, can further impede girls' access to education. Inadequate infrastructure, such as a lack of safe and well-equipped schools, can also contribute to low enrolment and retention rates. Moreover, gender-based discrimination and other social factors may discourage girls from pursuing education or force them to leave school prematurely.

To address these challenges and enhance girls' enrolment and retention, it is crucial to identify and address the specific barriers faced by girls in the community. This could involve implementing targeted interventions, such as providing scholarships, improving infrastructure, addressing cultural norms, and engaging the community in promoting girls' education. The findings suggest that there is a need for a comprehensive assessment of the existing affirmative action policies to identify gaps and areas for improvement. It is important to understand the reasons behind the limited impact of these policies and explore strategies to overcome the barriers that hinder girls' enrolment and retention.

Additionally, continuous monitoring and evaluation of the policies' effectiveness and outcomes are essential. This would allow for adjustments and adaptations to better align the policies with the specific needs and realities of the community, ultimately enhancing their impact on girls' enrolment and retention. By addressing the identified challenges and ensuring effective implementation of affirmative action policies, it is possible to create an enabling environment that promotes girls' education, increases enrolment rates, and improves retention, thereby fostering the educational empowerment and development of girls in the community.

According to the participants' views in the focus group discussions, several factors were identified as influencing girl child education in the community. These factors include cultural beliefs, parent education, and financial status. It is worth noting that these factors were highlighted as leading causes and negative influences on girl child education within the community. Additionally, the participants mentioned the presence of a significant number of beggars in the community. The existence of a large population of individuals living in poverty and relying on begging might contribute to a lack of awareness and understanding of government policies that promote girl child education. The focus and concern of these individuals may primarily revolve around meeting their basic needs, making it difficult for them to be informed about specific policies and provisions related to education.

To address these factors and promote girl child education, interventions should target changing cultural beliefs and norms through community engagement and awareness campaigns. Providing education and information to parents and guardians about the importance of education and its long-term benefits can also be effective in overcoming barriers. Additionally, efforts to alleviate poverty and improve economic conditions within the community can help to alleviate financial constraints that hinder access to education for girls.

Furthermore, it is essential to implement strategies that ensure that information about policies promoting girl child education reaches all segments of the community, including those living in poverty. Utilising various communication channels and working closely with community leaders can help to disseminate information effectively, ensuring that all community members are aware of the provisions and benefits of these policies. By addressing these influential factors and increasing awareness, communities can work towards creating an enabling environment that supports and prioritises the education of girls, thereby contributing to the overall development and empowerment of girls in the community.

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