

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Strategies for Promoting Gender Equality in Basic Schools in Nigeria

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<https://doi.org/10.54908/iljs.cisp2026.10.01.023>

Abstract

The discourse on gender equality has increasingly gained traction among education policymakers over the years. This study examined effective strategies for promoting gender equality among basic school pupils in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo state, Nigeria. Descriptive design was employed in this study. The study population consisted of all basic schools in rural communities in Ibadan, Oyo State. A sample of 150 teachers was selected for this study, using probability random sampling techniques. Data gathered in the survey were analysed using percentages, mean, and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The findings revealed a significantly poor perception of gender inequity at the basic school level, with teachers observing high incidences of unequal treatment between boys and girls. Consequently, the study outlined strategies to address these issues, including emphasising education on gender equality, enforcing protective laws, ensuring equal access to leadership roles, and promoting gender-equitable school policies and activities.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Inclusive Education, Education for All, Basic Education.

Introduction

Gender equality is a concept that entails the principle and practice of all individuals having equal access to rights and responsibilities. It can also be described as a situation in which there are no inequalities between males and females in the fulfilment of their rights as human beings. The magnitude and effects of gender awareness have made gender equality highly relevant today, prompting educational centres to prioritise its treatment throughout the school year (Ruiz, 2018). In recognition of this, many organisations and institutions

have adopted essential dates, such as 8th March (International Women's Day) and 25th November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women), as days of activism and reflection on the movement (Beyene, Chojenta, & Loxton, 2021). Through these foundations, students can learn to reject any form of discrimination and abuse and internalise the values of equality (Abellán, 2014). The Education for All Programme (Al-Jazeera, 2015) has prioritised investing in achieving parity and equality between genders, an idea supported by educational values and the Sustainable Development Goals (Brehim & Boyle, 2018).

Gender equality is Goal number five in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, equality should not be treated as merely a democratic principle, but it must be treated as an essential and compulsory goal of educational organisations, schools, public institutions, and institutes (Barrett et al., 2019). Thus, for these values to be effectively transmitted to students, it is essential that teaching be approached carefully in order to ensure absolute equality in the classroom and beyond. Gender equality is an issue of great importance in the formal education system, as equal opportunities for both men and women are essential for achieving parity (Badri, 2015).

Gender equality can be emphasised or minimised in schools (Morawski, 2014). School is where students spend much of their time, and where socialisation occurs. Teachers and classmates are sources of learning about children's gender differences, attitudes, and behaviours. Mägi et al. (2019) stated that education is one of the central institutions that should be investigated to advance gender equality and equal opportunity. It is an effective method for altering society's perceptions and empowering the generation yet unborn. UNESCO (2009) highlighted that there continues to be widespread gender bias in school textbooks and curricula using stereotypical imagery or language.

In schools where formal knowledge is dispensed, stereotypical roles for both sexes are unconsciously taught and learned by the students. Moreover, an online discussion on gender sponsored by UNESCO revealed that teachers significantly impact whether harmful gender stereotypes are upheld or challenged in the classroom. Participants stated that by routinely asking for boys rather than girls or designating classroom activities along traditional lines, like having girls clean, teachers frequently unintentionally promote divides between boys and girls in school. Furthermore, the UNESCO report on Gender and Empowerment Measure (GEM) by Kate Redman indicated that less than

15% of countries include phrases such as “gender empowerment” or “gender-sensitive” in their curricula. While half mention “gender equality,” indicating that gender bias is still a severe issue.

The Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (2007) stated that a high-quality education depends on gender equality in the classroom. If schools adopt top-notch gender-equitable curricula and teaching methods, students will be inspired to attend class and enjoy their time. According to Burger (2022), children may suffer if instructors’ activities are not intentional and do not come from an environment of equity. One strategy to challenge gender norms is to allow students of different sexes to collaborate, especially in primary school, when children often prefer to choose friends and playmates. To prevent this, teachers should build a mixed-gender group that promotes successful cross-gender teamwork. This strategy enables children to learn new words, exhibit desired behaviours, and contribute to co-creating non-traditional gender roles.

Securing a gender-sensitive classroom does not revolve around the control of the classroom teacher or academic community members. The Scottish Executive Social Research (2006) clarified that parental involvement in gender-related issues contributes to the success of gender initiatives. Schools must emphasise the importance of parental participation since parents are an essential component of all programmes, and are responsible for the success of each project. Parents were frequently explicitly singled out, particularly those fathers who support their child’s literacy and reading development. Sellnow (2018) contended that to promote gender equality in the classroom, teachers must involve all students in all activities. By working together in groups of two to five students to achieve objectives, students may begin to respect diverse perspectives and approaches to a topic, case study, or issue.

Even more, the prejudices that men dominate discussions while women speak more gently; or that she is self-effacing while he is a poor listener, can be stopped by including all students. Teachers must get to know every student if they want to engage them. To promote a gender-equal environment, it is also crucial that students are acquainted with one another and address one another by name. For instance, if changing the language of a true-or-false question makes it more straightforward for students to understand, this may be allowed. By putting concepts into practice, teachers can demonstrate to students that they value diverse perspectives and ways of knowing while inspiring them to continue learning throughout their lives. Additionally, Burger’s (2022)

research revealed that the educational system promotes traditional ideas on gender stereotypes and traditional gender norms. Most teachers engage in gender-stigmatising behaviours in the classroom and subscribe to gender stereotypes. Teachers deny harbouring any gender preconceptions that they are not aware of or supporting them.

The menace of out-of-school children has posed a significant problem to achieving global education goals. While governmental and non-governmental organisations have tried to rescue the situation through various policies and programmes, such interventions have made little progress. Several empirical studies have examined the possible causes of the persistent increase in the number of out-of-school children. However, none have considered the issue of gender equality and gender-related stereotypes that could make schools unsafe for students' learning. In the light of the foregoing, this study investigated incidents of gender inequality within schools for the purpose of evaluating the effective strategies for promoting gender equality among pupils in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo state.

Gender discourse acknowledges that gender equality encompasses more than simply ensuring an equal number of boys and girls are enrolled in school. However, literature suggests that education policies operate within a very narrow frame, focusing primarily on equal access to education, as measured by the enrollment rates of girls versus boys in schools. This is reflected in policies such as the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, and the Education White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education, among others. There is a lack of emphasis on ensuring that girls and boys enjoy educational experiences of equal quality after gaining access to school, and there is also a lack of emphasis on developing critical gender consciousness following access to education. This oversight and the limited view of gender equality to only educational access have created another systemic disparity in education. In no small measure, this has complicated the issue of gender inequalities. Beyond creating equal access to education, this study explored effective strategies for promoting gender equality among primary school pupils.

Female and male learners do not have the same experiences in school, and most of the consulted literature agrees with this. Girls are often taken advantage of, and they are socialised into certain gender-specific roles, which has been a major factor in determining the outcome of women's lives for

generations. UNICEF (2012) argued that girls are expected to take on the roles of *homemakers* and ‘child-bearers,’ which has led to a culture that has reduced the importance put on women’s educational attainment. Furthermore, gender inequities filter into the classroom in multiple and interrelated ways: through teachers’ attitudes about gender; the curricula in general and specifically, gender and sexual violence against girls; and learner vulnerability to unplanned, parenthood (Chikwiri & Lemmer, 2017). These factors deeply impact students’ career aspirations, achievements, and sense of agency. Although gender discrimination can be found in a classroom, a classroom is also a space where it can be dissected, viewed from several angles, and analysed from various perspectives, which could inform other views. Whether or not this happens is one of the factors that was considered in this study for determining effective strategies for promoting gender equality among primary school pupils.

Despite this, reflecting on the need for students to learn to reject any form of discrimination and abuse and internalise the values of equality is especially true when considering gender equality, as seen from both Kaba (2008) and Cretan & Turnock (2008). Kaba’s research showed that although African American women have experienced the most severe forms of both racism and gender discrimination, they are still becoming a model minority in terms of college enrollment rates and other life outcomes. On the other hand, Cretan and Turnock (2008) highlighted the case of Roma people in Romania, who struggle to integrate into mainstream society due to their identity, which implies separation from a modernising ethos. Therefore, this points to the need for students to learn about these issues to understand why certain individuals or groups are marginalised, discriminated against, or marked as “the other”. Students should also receive education on how to actively fight against such discrimination by internalising values of equality, such as respect for all individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or gender. Only then will students be able to reject any abuse and discrimination they may encounter truly truly.

Building on this research, literature revealed a lack of equality in classroom processes, school participation, and opportunities. Studies have shown that gender disparities in school activities start early, particularly among 12- or 13-year-olds, and these inequalities can continue into adulthood (Malavé, 2018; Beltrán et al., 2017; Guerrero-Puerta, 2017). Teachers can influence

individuals' students' habits and prevent gender inequality from forming. Addressing this issue requires synthesising the existing literature in an accessible and affordable way, and this study sought to do just that. In line with the foregoing, the study evaluated the effective strategies for promoting gender equality among primary school pupils.

This study aimed to evaluate effective strategies for promoting gender equality among primary and secondary education pupils in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State. Specifically, the study:

1. investigated gender inequity among basic school pupils in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State.
2. examined the challenges of gender equality among basic school pupils in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State.
3. explored the strategies that can be employed to promote gender equality among basic school pupils in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State.

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The descriptive survey method is often used to collect information from a representative group, and based on this sample, inferences are drawn about the entire population's behaviour. The study population consisted of all teachers at basic schools in the Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State. Multi-stage sampling techniques were employed in this study. At the first stage, stratified sampling was employed to group the basic schools into LGAs. There are five LGAs in Ibadan Metropolis with about 1,576 basic schools. The researchers randomly selected thirty percent of all the basic schools. Random sampling techniques was used to select 473 basic schools and three teachers in each of the sampled schools. A total of 1,419 basic school teachers served as the participants for this study.

A researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Strategies for Promoting Gender Equality in Basic Schools (SPGEBS)" was employed for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into four sections: A, B, C, and D. Section A was used to collect demographic data from the respondents. Section B consisted of items that elicited information on gender inequity among primary school pupils. At the same time, Section C addressed the challenges of achieving gender equality among these pupils. Section D explored the strategies that can

be employed to promote gender equality in schools. The reliability of the instrument was determined by using a test-retest method with an interval of three weeks. The two scores obtained were correlated using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, and a reliability index of 0.81 was obtained. Mean and rank order were used to answer the research questions one - three.

Data Analysis and Results

Descriptive mean and standard deviation statistics were used to answer research questions 1-3.

Research Question One: What is the extent of gender inequity among basic school pupils in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State?

To answer this research question, the responses on the incidence of gender inequity among basic school pupils from the questionnaire were collated. The data collected were analysed using the summated mean. A cut-off point 2.50 was used as the baseline for answering the research questions, as the questionnaire was structured with a four-point response type. Therefore, items found with the mean scores equal or above 2.50 were affirmed while items with a mean score below 2.50 were remarked otherwise. The results are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Gender Inequity among Basic School Pupils in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State

Gender Inequity among Basic School Pupils	Mean	S.D.	Remark
I have on one or two occasions witnessed gender-based discrimination in my school.	3.55	.5344	Affirmed
I feel the male gender faces more inequality in my school	2.74	.5373	Affirmed
Girls in my school are discouraged from participating in sports and physical activities.	2.37	.5812	Disaffirmed
I have experienced or witnessed gender-based bullying in my school.	3.40	.5272	Affirmed

Both boys and girls have equal opportunities to participate in school events.	2.95	.8321	Affirmed
There are gender-specific clubs or groups in my school	2.31	.5649	Disaffirmed
Student have never been excluded from an activity because of their gender.	3.14	.7623	Affirmed
In the past, I have seen students discouraged from pursuing a subject or activity because of their gender.	3.17	.7628	Affirmed
Boys are sometimes discouraged from engaging in artistic and creative activities in my school.	2.88	.8456	Affirmed
I feel the female gender faces more inequality in my school	2.38	.6402	Disaffirmed
Weighted Mean Score	28.89		

Table 1 indicates that 150 respondents participated in this study. Responses to items that sought information on the extent of the incidences of gender inequity among basic school pupils in Ibadan metropolis revealed that the majority of the teachers perceived the extent of the incidences of gender inequity among basic school pupils in Ibadan metropolis as high because the benchmark weighted mean score (BWMS) stood at 25.0. Their weighted mean score (WMS) was 28.89, above the benchmark weighted mean score.

Research Question Two: What are the challenges of gender equality among basic school pupils in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State?

Responses to the challenges of gender equality among basic school pupils from the questionnaire were collated. The data collected were analysed using the summated mean. A cut-off point of 2.50 was used as the baseline for answering the research questions, as the questionnaire was structured with a four-point response type. Therefore, items found with the mean scores equal or above 2.50 were affirmed while item with a mean score below 2.50 was remarked otherwise. The summary of the results is as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: The Challenges of Gender Equality among Basic School Pupils in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State

The Challenges of Gender Equality among Basic School Pupils	Mean	S.D.	Remark
Girls and boys are not given equal opportunities to participate in all school activities.	3.60	.550	Affirmed
Some teachers treat students differently based on their gender	3.14	.558	Affirmed
Some school activities promote gender stereotypes that prevent gender equality.	3.63	.544	Disaffirmed
Traditional gender roles and stereotypes affect expectations and opportunities available to students.	3.50	.658	Affirmed
School-related violence can disproportionately affect girls and other marginalized groups, creating an unsafe learning environment.	3.72	.514	Affirmed
A lack of awareness and understanding of gender issues among educators and students may perpetuate discrimination and exclusion.	3.50	.586	Disaffirmed
Inadequate facilities, such as separate and safe sanitation facilities for girls, hinder their attendance and participation in school.	2.46	.563	Disaffirmed
Deep-rooted cultural and societal norms influence attitudes towards gender roles, resulting in unequal treatment of boys and girls	2.77	.797	Affirmed

As shown in Table 3, it was affirmed that the challenges of gender equality among basic school pupils are reflected through unequal opportunities of girls and boys to participate in all school activities; teachers treating students

differently based on gender; some school activities promotes gender stereotypes that prevent gender equality; traditional gender roles and stereotypes affects expectations and opportunities available to students; school-related violence can disproportionately affect girls and other marginalized groups, creating an unsafe learning environment; lack of awareness and understanding of gender issues perpetuate discrimination and exclusion; and deep-rooted cultural and societal norms influence attitudes towards gender roles resulting in unequal treatment of boys and girls. However, it was disaffirmed that inadequate facilities, such as separate and safe sanitation facilities, hinder girls' attendance and participation in school.

Research Question Three: What strategies can be employed to promote gender equality among basic school pupils in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State?

In order to answer this research question, responses on the strategies that can be employed to promote gender equality among basic school pupils from the questionnaire were collated. The data collected were analysed using the summated mean. A cut-off point of 2.50 was used as the baseline for answering the research questions since the questionnaire was structured in a four-point response type. Therefore, items found with the mean scores equal or above 2.50 were affirmed while item with mean score below 2.50 was remarked otherwise. The summary of the results is as shown in table 4.

Table 4: Strategies that can be employed to Promote Gender Equality among Basic School Pupils in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State

Strategies that can be employed to Promote Gender Equality among Basic School Pupils	Mean	S.D.	Remark
Educate boys and girls about gender equality and the importance of equal rights through the curriculum.	3.62	.547	Affirmed
Schools should enforce laws that promote gender equality and protect against gender-based discrimination and violence.	3.62	.624	Affirmed

Give equal access to both genders to participate in school students' leadership positions.	3.65	.481	Affirmed
Men and boys should be encouraged to be allies in promoting gender equality and to challenge harmful gender norms.	3.74	.444	Affirmed
Effective policies that would curb gender inequality in schools should be formulated.	3.71	.520	Affirmed
Sporting activities that promote gender equality should be encouraged.	3.60	.550	Affirmed
Sensitive cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality in school should be tackled.	3.54	.558	Affirmed

As shown in Table 4, it was affirmed that the strategies that can be employed to promote gender equality among basic school pupils include to educate students about gender equality and the importance of equal rights through curriculum teaching, enforce laws that promote gender equality and protect against gender-based discrimination and violence, give equal access to both gender to participate in school students' leadership positions, boys and men should be encourage to be allies in promoting gender equality and to challenge harmful gender norms, effective policies that would curb gender inequality in schools should be formulated, sporting activities that promote gender equality should be encouraged and sensitive cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality in school should be tackled.

Discussion

Findings from this study revealed that most teachers perceived the extent of gender inequity among basic school pupils in Ibadan metropolis to be high. A majority of the respondents revealed that they had witnessed one or two occasions of gender-based discrimination in their school, felt that the male gender faces more inequality in my school, experienced or witnessed gender-based bullying in their schools, seen students discouraged from pursuing a subject or activity because of their gender, and that boys are sometime

discouraged from engaging in artistic and creative activities in my school. This findings supported Leach and Machakanja's (2020) study which examined the abuse of junior secondary school girls by older boys, teachers and 'sugar daddies' in Zimbabwe, Ghana and Malawi, and found that there was a high level of sexual aggression from boys, which went largely unpunished in the schools, and some cases of teachers propositioning girls for sex. This behaviour was largely tolerated and normalised. All three educational systems were characterised by a reluctance to take action against either teachers or pupils. Teachers downplayed or dismissed the suggestion that some teachers had sex with their pupils, although both male and female pupils talked about teachers offering to give girls high grades or gifts in exchange for sex. At the same time, there was reluctance among girls to report incidents for fear of being blamed for having 'invited' the abuse, being ridiculed or victimised (e.g., a male teacher singling a girl out for beating in class because she turned him down, or threatening to fail her in tests and exams).

Another finding of the study revealed that the challenges of gender equality among basic school pupils are reflected through unequal opportunities of girls and boys to participate in all school activities. This include teachers treating students differently based on gender; some school activities promotes gender stereotypes that prevent gender equality; traditional gender roles and stereotypes affects expectations and opportunities available to students; school-related violence can disproportionately affect girls and other marginalised groups, creating an unsafe learning environment; lack of awareness and understanding of gender issues perpetuate discrimination and exclusion; and deep-rooted cultural and societal norms influence attitudes towards gender roles resulting in unequal treatment of boys and girls. However, it was disaffirmed that inadequate facilities, such as separate and safe sanitation facilities, hinder girls' attendance and participation in school. This finding corroborated Adeju's (2019) finding that the challenges of gender equality in schools are systemic and deeply rooted in society's cultural background. According to the author, these challenges and factors can affect the realisation of gender equality if they are not controlled. In unveiling the challenges, Adeju (2019) agreed with USAID (2008), UNICEF and UNGEI (2009), and IIEP (2011) that these challenges include: poverty, prohibitive religious practices and beliefs, traditional social-cultural practices, women's under-representation in key decision-making positions, increased violence against women, and limited infrastructure and amenities.

In addition, the study revealed that the strategies that can be employed to promote gender equality among basic school pupils include to educate students about gender equality and the importance of equal rights through curriculum teaching, enforcing laws that promote gender equality and protect against gender-based discrimination and violence, giving equal access to both gender to participate in school students' leadership positions, boys and men should be encourage to be allies in promoting gender equality and to challenge harmful gender norms, effective policies that would curb gender inequality in schools should be formulated, sporting activities that promote gender equality should be encouraged and sensitive cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality in school should be tackled. This finding is in tandem with the discoveries by Omotola (2018) that Gender inequality in schools is a widespread barrier to girls' attaining educational equity, which also brings with it many health risks. The authors suggested that addressing power imbalances between men and women is central to preventing gender inequality and violence, and this process must be deeply rooted in schools. Tolani (2019) placed emphasis on the fact that successful efforts to avoid gender inequality must include both boys and girls. The lives of girls/women and boys/men are intimately interwoven, and working only with girls is, at best, only half a solution. Framing the issue in the polarising language of girls versus boys, victims versus perpetrators, only exacerbates an already difficult situation and masks the complexity of the dynamics of gender and power. Working with girls and boys, sometimes together and sometimes separately, depending on the social context, is the only way to implement approaches that can truly reshape the construction of gender roles. This transformative approach is key to long-term success. Adeju (2019) also highlighted that gender inequality and violence have not been systematically confronted in the developing world, but several initiatives have been undertaken. These initiatives reflect a variety of approaches, including curriculum development, youth leadership, teacher training, advocacy, community involvement, and policy development. Larkin (2014) posited that a possible solution to gender inequality and violence against female students in schools is to organise symposiums, workshops, and seminars against the use of violence against female students.

Conclusion

The study examined the effective strategies for promoting gender equality among basic school pupils in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State, revealing a

significant perception of gender inequity at the basic school level, with teachers observing high incidences of unequal treatment between boys and girls. The challenges that were identified encompassed a broad spectrum of issues, from unequal participation opportunities in school activities to societal norms that perpetuate gender roles and stereotypes. These challenges contribute to an environment that can be discriminatory and unsafe, particularly for girls and marginalised groups. However, the study also outlined a comprehensive range of strategies to address these issues, emphasising the importance of education on gender equality, enforcement of protective laws, equal access to leadership roles, and promoting gender-equitable school policies and activities.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations were proposed to address gender inequity among basic school pupils in Ibadan metropolis. These recommendations aimed to create a more equitable educational environment where students can thrive without the constraints of gender-based inequality.

1. School authorities should implement comprehensive gender sensitivity training for teachers to ensure equitable treatment and opportunities for all students, regardless of gender.
2. Educational institutions should develop and integrate a curriculum that emphasises gender equality and the importance of equal rights, which could help dismantle traditional gender roles and stereotypes.
3. Schools should establish and enforce school policies that actively promote gender equality and protect students from gender-based discrimination and violence.
4. Educational institutions should create inclusive school activities and leadership opportunities that are accessible to all students, encouraging the participation of both girls and boys equally.
5. Teachers should engage boys and men in the conversation about gender equality, empowering them to become allies and advocates for change within their school communities.

6. Schools and educational institutions should promote sports and extracurricular activities that support gender equality, providing a platform for all students to engage and excel.
7. Educational institutions should address and challenge cultural norms and practices within the school environment that perpetuate gender inequality, ensuring a safe and supportive learning space for every student.

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