

Overcoming Barriers To Nomadic Girls Education In Nigeria: Pathways To Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the persistent barriers to nomadic girls' education in Oyo State, Nigeria. Nomadic girls are faced with a lot of problems from cultural norms, house chores, preference of boy's education, unfriendly school environment, lack of facilities, lack of female role model and mentors. All these problems have hindered nomadic girls' access and completion in education, thereby depriving them of their contribution to national and sustainable development. Human Capital Theory provided the framework. A mixed-methods of (QUAN and qual) was employed in the study. The research focuses on nomadic communities in Oyo State. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 200 participants, including nomadic girls, parents, school teachers and heads, while key informant interviews (KII) was conducted to elicit information from stakeholders. Findings revealed that early marriage, seasonal migration, household chores, and lack of infrastructure significantly limit nomadic girls' educational access. Despite these challenges, stakeholders strongly support nomadic girls' education. Preferred interventions include mobile schools, flexible academic calendars, free learning materials, and female teachers who will act as role models and mentors. The study is therefore significant because it has brought the precarious situation of the nomadic girls to the fore and has also recommended solutions to the challenges to enhance sustainable development especially, in Oyo State and Nigeria as a whole. Educating nomadic girls promotes gender empowerment, reduces poverty, delays early marriage, and enhances community health thereby contributing to Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: Nomadic Girls' Education, Sustainable Development, Educational Barriers, Cultural Norms

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a fast-growing country with a government that is highly involved and interested in providing educational opportunities for all its citizens. However, one of the most daunting challenges of the federal government is ensuring equitable access for all Nigerian citizens, regardless of gender. In ensuring that all citizens enjoy equitable access to education, the federal government launched the Nomadic education in 1986 to cater for the nomads. Nomads are groups of people who move from one geographical location to another in search of their means of livelihood and survival. These groups contrast with the settled or sedentary population living in villages, town and cities, who are tied to fixed locations by agriculture, employment, housing, and social and cultural factors [1].

There are three groups of nomads in Nigeria; they are the migrant fishermen, the migrant farmer and the pastoralist. The pastoralists are the most incessant of these groups, this is because they constantly move from one geographical location to another in search of fodder for their cattle. Osokoya [2] and [3] put the pastoralist nomadic population at about 9.3 million and the literacy level of the group at 2.0, out of the 9.3 million population, 3.1 million are children of

school age. Hence, the government cannot afford to be unbothered about their education or social welfare. The government has been exploring every possible way to keep nomadic children in school, this is moreso in order to fulfill its obligation to Education for All (EFA) goals, and several other declarations the government has signed, from the Jomtien conference on education in 1990 to the Ministerial Review meeting at Bali, Indonesia in 1995. These declarations and commitments got the federal government on its toes towards ensuring that every Nigerian child has access to education. Another drive towards equitable access to education is the federal government launch of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in 1999. The programme would ensure the literacy, numeracy and manipulative and life skills of every Nigerian citizen of school going age, the objectives of the education was to lay a strong foundation for lifelong learning [4]. Nigerian Constitution sees education as a right of every child, also, the government is interested in both access and completion of its citizens in education. As early as 1986, the then head of state, General Ibrahim Babangida launched a programme for the nomadic children to cater for their literacy and numeracy, this was possible because, the Meyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN)

clamoured for the education of their children, and more importantly, the government must be seen to be following its commitments at ensuring education for all citizens [5].

Nomadic education like all other types of education in the country aims at incorporating the right types of value and attitude for the survival of the individuals and Nigerian society, it also aims at training the minds of the nomads to understand the world around them particularly, training in scientific and critical thinking. In addition, recipients of nomadic education should acquire appropriate skills, abilities and competencies needed for a worthwhile living society [6].

The blueprint specifies the short and long-term objectives of nomadic education. The recipients of the programme will be able to read, with the comprehension of those things that affect their occupational rules such as directions tax receipts, instruction on health and animal treatment, they will also be able to read and understand national newspapers, magazines, simple voting instructions, write legible and meaningful letters, as well as do simple calculations. The long-term objectives will be that recipient of nomadic education will acquire functional knowledge and skills for raising a healthy and well-adjusted family, this functional education will no doubt increase quality of life of the nomads and fully prepare them for adequate responsibilities in a democratic state [7]. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all especially, in literacy, are essential life skills. However, EFA goals have a serious implication for the African nations. Despite several initiatives and launch of different programmes, the migrant folks are still having their children either on the streets or in their business of cattle rearing or generally hawking cattle products to support their families, the general problem being faced by the sedentary group is even more pronounced in their lives. Nomadic girls have consistently faced a lot of challenges that other sedentary groups are facing, this includes the defective policy execution, cultural problem, low self-esteem, poverty, personal household factors, preference for the boys education over girls, quality and relevance of the curriculum, inadequate female role model, socio-political problem, inadequate funding, unfriendly school environment and most importantly, early marriage [8].

Kayode-Olawoyin [9] reported that attitude of some nomadic parents are not favourable to western education, these problems and more have been associated to the girl child education, for the nomadic girls the problem becomes more complex because of cultural practices of nomadic parent, and usually

these parents do not want to send their girls to school, it is saddening to note that what was observed with the sedentary group is also seen repeating itself with the nomadic group. There is girl-child pregnancy, incidence of dropouts and the attitude of the nomadic parents towards their female children where they prefer their boys' education to their girls. They believe that if nomadic girls access education, they may not marry early in life. Osokoya [10] identified some factors that keep girls from studying or assessing education, such factors include, lack of developed confidence to work in a male dominated environment, the sociological factors women are made to believe, they do not possess the essential qualities and skills to become anything in life.

The negative attitude to girl education most especially, in the traditional community where parents believe that the place of the girl child is in the kitchen, a woman is socialized to accept the traditional roles of raising children and maintaining the welfare of the family, so educating her therefore, need not to go beyond preparing her for such roles of motherhood and of being a wife [11]. This then means, raising or educating the girl-child properly will mean preparing her for motherhood and house chores. Every member of the society is expected to have the same rights to education, and it is true for the girl-child she is entitled to her human right to education, and not be seen as weak, she should exercise and enjoy this right, some of the right of the girl-child stated by the People's Movement for Marriage Education include, right to freedom from discrimination based on gender, age, race, colour, language and ethnicity or the state of the girl-child, right to equal access to food and nutrition, right to freedom from cultural practices and traditions harmful to the girl-child including female genital mutilation, right to education, free and compulsive primary education, and freedom from all types of discriminations, right to information about the health, sexuality and reproduction, protection, and physical and mental[12].

Meroyi [13] asserts that the quality and quantity of education available to Nigerian girls may invariably determine the development and pace of Nigerian families and the nation at large, what the Nigerian girls are today and what they will become tomorrow depend on what plans Nigeria as a country has for the girl-child. To achieve sustainable development according to [14], Nigeria is screaming for patriotic citizens to develop their potentials politically, economically, socially, and technologically, The actualisation of this is dependent on the provision of functional education for all, especially, the girls who are future mothers and teachers of their children, it is no longer acceptable that any group would be nursing the feeling that the right place for women is in the kitchen, it is in line with this background that the

paper tries to look at how the society or the country can overcome the challenges that are keeping nomadic girls away from education and also suggest possible solutions to keeping them to enjoy the benefits that are accrued to being educated. The researchers tried to look at the situation of nomadic girls and also proffer possible solutions to overcoming the challenge of nomadic girls in Oyo State, Nigeria. Against this background, this paper investigates how the society and government can overcome the persistent barriers preventing nomadic girls from accessing education and suggest actionable solutions. This study focuses specifically on nomadic communities in Oyo State.

Human Capital Theory underpins this study, to examine the barriers to nomadic girls' education in Nigeria and explore strategies for sustainable development. Human Capital Theory, as advanced by economists Theodore Schultz (1961) and Gary Becker (1964), posits that individuals and societies derive long-term economic and social benefits from investing in education, health, and training. Education is regarded as a form of capital that enhances productivity, income potential, and societal progress. According to this theory, the exclusion of any group, especially young girls in disadvantaged communities from educational opportunities represents not only a personal loss but also a collective reduction in national productivity and development potential.

Human Capital Theory is relevant in explaining the significance of investing in the education of nomadic girls as a catalyst for national development. Nomadic populations, especially the Fulani communities in Nigeria, have traditionally had limited access to formal education due to their migratory lifestyle, entrenched gender roles, cultural beliefs, and socio-economic marginalization. Educating girls in these communities can break intergenerational cycles of poverty, improve maternal and child health, reduce early marriage, and promote economic self-reliance, thereby contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities). Barriers to nomadic girls' education, such constant migration, gender norms and cultural roles, and lack of infrastructure are missed opportunities to develop human capital.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions guided the study;

1. What are the major barriers preventing nomadic girls from accessing and completing formal education in Nigeria?
2. How do parents, teachers, and school leaders perceive the importance of educating nomadic girls?

Table 2: Major barriers preventing nomadic girls from accessing and completing formal education in Nigeria

3. What types of interventions or innovations are needed to improve access to education for nomadic girls?
4. How can improving nomadic girls' education contribute to sustainable development in Oyo State?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design of survey type. The population of the study consist of all nomadic girls in Oyo State, a non-probability, purposive sampling technique was used to collect data for the study. Four research assistants and two Social Mobilisation Officers (SMOs) of the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Oyo State were involved in the collection of data, The SMOs of Iseyin and Atiba Local Government Areas (LGAs) were officially released to the researchers after an official letter of consent was collected from the SUBEB. Two local governments in the state (Iseyin and Atiba) where Fulani pastoralists are predominantly residing were purposively selected, all nomadic girls in the six migrant schools, school heads, teachers and parents of nomadic girls formed the study participants. The population of the study is made up of nomadic girls, head teachers, teachers and parents in Oyo State. Two instruments were used for data collection, the questionnaire containing 20 items was subjected to both content and face validity, experts in the area of test and measurement validated the instrument and corrections were effected as necessary. To ensure reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was employed, a pilot study was conducted with 20 respondents from nomadic schools different from the schools that were finally involved in the study, and the result yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.78 which indicates that the instrument will measure what it sets to measure. Key informant interviews were also conducted to gather information on challenges and possible solutions to nomadic girls' education. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentage, and bar chart while qualitative data were thematically analysed.

RESULTS

Table 1: Category of Respondents

Category	Number (n)
Teachers	60
School Heads	30
Parents	60
Nomadic Girls	50
Total	200

Research Question 1: What are the major barriers preventing nomadic girls from accessing and completing formal education in Nigeria?

Barrier	Teachers (%)	School Heads (%)	Parents (%)	Girls (%)
Early Marriage	65%	50%	55%	40%
Seasonal Migration	60%	70%	45%	30%
Household Chores	55%	–	60%	50%
Lack of School Materials	52%	–	–	58%
Cultural Beliefs	–	–	40%	–
Unsafe School Environment	–	–	–	20%
Distance to School	–	–	60%	–

Early marriage and seasonal migration are common responsibilities and lack of school materials more across all groups. Girls highlight household prominently.

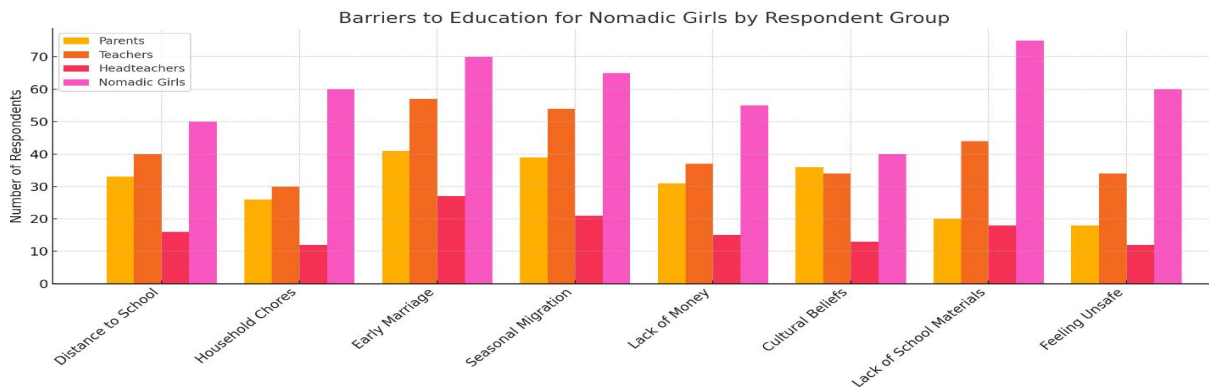


Figure 1: A grouped bar chart that vividly illustrates the perceived barriers to nomadic girls’ education in Nigeria as identified by Teachers, School Heads, Parents, and Nomadic Girls.

Research Question 1: Major Barriers Preventing Nomadic Girls from Accessing and Completing Formal Education

Data from the four stakeholder groups revealed multiple, intersecting barriers:

Early marriage was identified as a primary obstacle by 65% of teachers and 55% of parents, aligning with cultural practices that prioritize domestic roles for girls over schooling.

Seasonal migration was another prevalent factor (60% of teachers and 45% of parents), underscoring the mobile lifestyle of nomadic communities, which makes consistent schooling difficult.

Household responsibilities and chores were strongly reported by girls themselves (50%) and by parents (60%), suggesting that girls' time is heavily consumed by domestic labor.

Distance to school, lack of learning materials, and insecurity were highlighted, especially by nomadic girls, many of whom reported feelings of **unsafety**, missing school for 1–3 days a week, or lacking basic school supplies.

These findings illustrate that both structural and socio-cultural barriers contribute to low attendance and dropout among nomadic girls.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

How do parents, teachers, and school leaders perceive the importance of educating nomadic girls?

Sample Output:

Stakeholder	Very Important	Important	Not Important
Teachers (n=60)	80%	15%	5%
Parents (n=60)	70%	20%	10%
School Heads (n=30)	90%	10%	0%

All stakeholder groups agree on the importance of educating nomadic girls, with school heads showing the highest support.

Research Question 2: Stakeholders' Perceptions of Educating Nomadic Girls

Across all stakeholders, there was broad consensus on the importance of educating nomadic girls:

80% of teachers and 90% of school heads rated education as “**very important**” for the future of nomadic girls. Among parents, 70% believed girls should receive equal educational opportunities as boys. Teachers and school heads frequently cited the link between girls' education and improved decision-making, reduced early marriage, and economic mobility.

This shared perception across groups suggests fertile ground for community-level mobilization and policy support. However, 10% of parents still viewed girls' education as less important, citing traditional roles, financial constraints, or religious justifications.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

What types of interventions or innovations are needed to improve access to education for nomadic girls?

Intervention	Frequency (n=200)	% Mentioned
Mobile Schools	140	70%
Flexible Calendar	120	60%
Free Learning Materials	135	67.5%
Feeding Program	95	47.5%
Female Teachers	80	40%
NGO/Community Partnership	100	50%

The most favoured interventions are mobile schools and free learning materials. Nomadic girls expressed a strong preference for schools that follow their family (80% answered “Yes” in Q13).

Research Question 3: Interventions and Innovations Needed

Stakeholders identified several priority interventions: Mobile schools (70%), flexible school calendars (60%), and free learning materials (67.5%) were the most frequently recommended solutions.

Parents supported innovations such as feeding programs and female teachers, seeing them as safety and trust-enhancing factors.

Nomadic girls themselves overwhelmingly (80%) said they would prefer a school that moves with their families, indicating a strong desire for continuity in education despite mobility.

School heads and teachers requested more training, support from NGOs, and community involvement.

These findings point to a need for contextualized, adaptable education delivery models responsive to nomadic life patterns.

Research Question 4

How can improving nomadic girls’ education contribute to sustainable development in Oyo State?

Table 3: How improving nomadic girls’ education can contribute to sustainable development

Theme		Illustrative Quotes from Girls/Parents/Teachers
Gender Empowerment		"I want to become a nurse to help other girls like me"
Poverty Reduction		"If she finishes school, she can support the family better"
Reduced Marriage	Early	"Educated girls don't marry early like others"
Improved Community Health		"Education helps our children teach us hygiene and health"

Across all respondents, there is a strong belief that girl-child education leads to social and economic development. Aligning with SDGs 1, 4, and 5.

Possible Contributions Of Nomadic Girls’ Education to Sustainable Development

Respondents provided rich qualitative insights linking girls' education to multiple sustainable development goals (SDGs): nomadic girls aspired to become nurses, teachers, and midwives, showing how education can fuel personal ambition and economic empowerment. Teachers and parents emphasized the role of educated girls in reducing poverty (SDG 1), promoting gender equality (SDG 5), and improving community health (SDG 3). Thematic analysis revealed that girls’ education was viewed as a strategic investment in intergenerational progress, not just individual elevation. On the whole, improved access to education for the nomadic girls was consistently seen as a catalyst of social transformation and sustainable development in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Summary of Findings

The findings from this study revealed that barriers to nomadic girls’ education are early marriage, seasonal migration, domestic chores, poverty, and insecurity were leading causes of absenteeism and dropout. Nomadic girls experience school discontinuity due to lack of mobility-aligned education. The study also revealed stakeholders perceptions of nomadic girls education as teachers, school heads, and majority of parents strongly support girls' education. However, a minority still uphold traditional norms limiting girls’ schooling. Mobile schools and collapsible classrooms, teacher training, flexible academic calendars, and school feeding programme are seen as impactful. Nomadic girls prefer education system that can travel with their families. Education of nomadic girls is linked with improved health, delayed marriage, economic resilience, and reduced poverty.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that nomadic girls face multidimensional barriers ranging from cultural, geographic, economic, and institutional that hinder their consistent access to education. It is relieving to note that stakeholders, especially nomadic parents are willing to promote girls’ education. In most of the schools visited, classes held under the tree, some schools had just two or one classroom, there were land mass allotted to the schools without any structure. Government will need to do more in ensuring that structures are put in place for the nomads. Where there are no classrooms, one would not expect to have conveniences to support nomadic girls on their monthly cycle. Education is viewed by communities not just as a tool for literacy but as a pathway to transformation and a key to achieving Sustainable Development Goals in the nomadic societies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government should develop mobile school systems and provide quality learning materials for the migrant schools at the earliest possible time.
2. There is a great need to integrate flexible academic calendars that align with migration cycles of the nomads.
3. Government should provide gender-sensitive educational policies that delay child marriage and promote retention of girls.
4. Specialised teachers should be employed to teach in the nomadic schools to cater for their special needs and peculiarity.
5. Innovation in lesson delivery such as mobile or radio-supported schools, is essential for addressing mobility and cultural barriers
6. Government at all levels should facilitate specialised and in-service periodic training for teachers working in nomadic settings on culturally inclusive pedagogy.

7. Government should deploy female teachers in nomadic schools to encourage girl-child participation.
8. Government should implement school feeding programme and constantly distribute free learning materials to the nomadic school system, this will not only increase enrollment, it will aid retention and completion, thereby ensuring sustainable development.
9. Provide scholarships or conditional cash transfers to encourage continued attendance.
10. Since nomadic education is faced with daunting challenges, government should sponsor more research in the area of nomadic education, encourage further research on gender-specific needs and scalable models for nomadic education.
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APPENDIX

