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INFLUENCE OF ECONOMICS EDUCATION IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH CENTRAL GEO-POLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of Economics Education in promoting gender equality in secondary schools in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population consisted of 174,984 residents across Niger and Plateau states from which a sample size of 440 respondents was selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Data collection was executed using a validated structure questionnaire titled "Economics Education in Promoting Gender Equality in Secondary Schools (EEPGESS)". Descriptive statistics of Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) were utilized to analyze data, mapped against an acceptance benchmark mean of 2.50. The findings revealed that while Economics Education moderately imparts fundamental financial literacy skills (M=3.10), it falls short in actively steering female students toward strategic financial leadership roles. Also, a strong correlation was established between classroom participation levels and academic performance (M=2.94), though male dominance in classroom discourse often puts female students at a psychological disadvantage. The study also identified a shortage of female Economics educators to act as mentors (M=2.95), alongside socio-cultural barriers like early marriage and domestic labor, as significant bottlenecks to

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female access. Finally, the study established that the current secondary school Economics curriculum is structurally deficient in gender-sensitive materials (M=2.33). The study concluded that structural and cultural adjustments are required to unleash the full potential of Economics Education as an equalizer. It was recommended among others, that the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) should comprehensively overhaul the senior secondary school Economics curriculum to intentionally integrate gender-balanced case studies, highlighting female entrepreneurial and macroeconomic contributions.

Introduction

Economics Education serves as a foundational discipline that equips students with the knowledge and analytical skills to understand and respond to societal challenges. One of the pressing global issues today is gender inequality which persists in various forms despite significant strides made towards its eradication. In educational systems, particularly in developing regions like Nigeria's North Central Geo-Political Zone, promoting gender equality remains critical for achieving sustainable development. Economics Education, when properly structured and delivered can play a pivotal role in advancing gender equality within secondary schools. Gender inequality in education manifests through disparities in enrollment, completion rates, and participation in certain academic fields. In many societies, traditional gender roles influence educational choices, with girls often being discouraged from pursuing subjects like economics and other STEM-related fields, which are viewed as male-dominated disciplines. However, as research indicates, empowering students with Economics Education can challenge these stereotypes and create pathways for gender equality by offering both boys and girls the same opportunities to understand and engage with economic systems (UNESCO, 2019).

Economics Education goes beyond teaching students about market dynamics, supply and demand. It introduces students to the broader implications of economic policies, including how gender disparities affect economic growth and development. Understanding issues like income inequality, labor market participation, access to credit, and economic decision-making from a gendered lens is essential for fostering inclusive economies (OECD, 2018). By incorporating these gendered perspectives, secondary school curricula can help students appreciate the value of equity in economic systems and motivate them to advocate for more inclusive policies and practices in their future careers. In the context of Nigeria's North Central Geo-Political Zone, where cultural and socio-economic factors sometimes reinforce gender-based discrimination, secondary

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school education can act as a transformative tool. Economics Education can dismantle existing biases by offering students a platform to critically analyze how gender impacts economic participation and development outcomes (Aina & Oyetakin, 2020). When students understand that gender equality is not just a social issue but also an economic imperative, they are more likely to contribute positively to their communities and the broader Nigerian society.

Ultimately, the role of education in fostering gender equality and propose strategies for enhancing Economics Education to support inclusive development goals. Promoting gender equality through education, particularly in economically relevant subjects like economics is critical for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 which focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (United Nations, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence of Economics Education in promoting gender equality in secondary schools across the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria. It seeks to determine how effectively Economics Education is integrated into school curricula to address gender disparities and whether it has contributed to challenging traditional gender norms.

Problem Statement

Gender disparities persist in various sectors including education. Despite efforts to promote gender equality, secondary school students particularly females face unequal opportunities in accessing quality education and resources most especially in the North Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria. Economics Education which encompasses vital skills such as financial literacy, decision-making, and critical thinking has the potential to play a pivotal role in addressing these disparities. However, the extent to which Economics Education contributes to promoting gender equality in secondary schools within this region remains largely underexplored. There are several challenges in achieving gender equality in secondary education. Cultural norms, socio-economic constraints and systemic biases often hinder female students from fully participating in Economics Education. Consequently, this limits their ability to gain the knowledge and skills necessary for financial independence and active participation in the economy. Understanding how Economics Education influences gender equality in secondary schools is critical in designing strategies to close the gender gap. This study seeks to investigate the role of Economics Education in promoting gender equality in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria, by providing equal opportunities for both male and female students to benefit from Economics Education.

Literature Review

Economics Education encompasses a wide range of concepts and definitions, as it involves the study of economic systems, theories, and principles. According to Samuelson

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and Nordhaus, (2009) Economics Education is the process of understanding how societies allocate scarce resources to meet unlimited wants and needs. Economics Education involves the exploration of how individuals and firms make decisions in situations of scarcity to maximize their utility or profits (Mankiw & Taylor, 2017). Economics Education equips individuals with the knowledge and analytical skills to assess and formulate economic policies that address societal issues such as inflation, unemployment, and inequality (Blanchard, 2017). Economics Education provides students with knowledge and skills that enhance their economic participation and empower them to make informed financial decisions. According to Aina and Salako (2017), the subject equips students with entrepreneurial skills and financial literacy, which are critical for achieving personal and professional independence. For female students, in particular, access to this knowledge can help bridge the gender gap in economic participation, contributing to long-term gender equality. Research by Kwabena et al. (2018) shows that Economics Education plays an essential role in fostering critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, competencies that are necessary for all students regardless of gender. However, the authors emphasize that for these benefits to be fully realized, the curriculum must be gender-sensitive, ensuring that female students are given equal opportunities to engage and excel in the subject.

Despite the potential benefits, several studies highlight significant gender disparities in participation and performance in Economics Education in secondary schools. A report by Nwankwo and Okafor (2020) found that in many Nigerian secondary schools, male students dominate enrollment in economics courses, and this imbalance is often attributed to societal stereotypes that associate economics with traditionally male roles. These stereotypes, combined with cultural norms that prioritize male education over female education in some regions, restrict female students from pursuing Economics Education and other subjects that are perceived as 'male-dominated' (Olaleye & Adebayo, 2019). The gender gap in participation is also reflected in academic performance. According to Nduka (2021), female students tend to underperform in economics compared to their male counterparts due to a lack of encouragement and resources tailored to their needs. The author suggests that gender bias in teaching methods and classroom interactions further exacerbates this disparity, resulting in fewer females excelling in economics and related fields.

Female students in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria face a variety of challenges that hinder their full participation in Economics Education. According to Adeyemi and Ogundipe (2022), socio-cultural factors such as early marriage, poverty, and gender-based discrimination in the classroom significantly limit girls' access to quality education, including economics. These barriers are compounded by the lack of female role models in the subject, as highlighted by Bello and Amadi (2020), who argue that the

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absence of female teachers in economics further discourages female students from pursuing the subject. Moreover, the school environment often fails to support female students in Economics Education. A study by Duru and Okechukwu (2021) found that schools in rural areas of Northern Nigeria are particularly ill-equipped to promote gender equality in Economics Education, as they lack the necessary resources, such as textbooks and gender-sensitive teaching strategies. This results in a lower enrollment rate and less academic success for female students, creating a cyclical pattern of gender inequality.

The importance of a gender-inclusive curriculum in promoting equality through Economics Education cannot be overstated. As noted by Olayinka (2019), the curriculum must integrate gender-sensitive materials and case studies that highlight the contributions of women to the economy. Doing so helps challenge stereotypes and inspires female students to see themselves as active participants in economic life. Also, government policies and educational reforms are critical in fostering gender equality. The Nigerian government's National Gender Policy for Basic Education (2017) emphasizes the need for equal access to education for both boys and girls. The policy encourages schools to adopt teaching practices that promote gender equity in subjects like economics. However, implementation of these policies has been inconsistent, particularly in rural and underserved regions (Eze, 2021). Strengthening these policies and ensuring their enforcement could have a profound impact on narrowing the gender gap in Economics Education.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of Economics Education in promoting gender equality in secondary schools across the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria. The study suit to:

1. To examine the extent to which Economics Education promotes gender equality in secondary schools in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria.
2. To assess the level of participation of male and female students in Economics Education based on their academic performance.
3. To investigate the challenges faced by female students in accessing Economics Education in secondary schools in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria.
4. To evaluate the role of schools curricula in fostering gender-sensitive Economics Education in secondary schools in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria.

Research Questions

This study provided answers to the following research questions.

1. To what extent does Economics Education promote gender equality in secondary schools in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria?

2. How does the participation of male and female students in Economics Education affect their academic performance in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria?
3. What are the challenges faced by female students in accessing Economics Education in secondary schools in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria?
4. How do schools curricula contribute to creating gender-sensitive Economics Education in secondary schools in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria?

Research Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate the influence of Economics Education in promoting gender equality in secondary schools across the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria. This type of design was concerned with describing, recording, analyzing, and interpreting existing conditions. The study was conducted within the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria, which comprises the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger and Plateau states. The target population of the study consisted of residents across Niger State (91,241) and Plateau State (83,743), culminating in a total population of 174,984 individuals. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select four hundred and forty (440) respondents across the selected areas. These techniques ensured that there was an equal, fair representation of respondents from both Niger and Plateau states. To achieve the aim of this study, the researchers interviewed respondents and administered a structured questionnaire titled "*Economics Education in Promoting Gender Equality in Secondary Schools (EEPGESS)*". The questionnaire was used to collect useful information from three (3) secondary schools in Niger State and three (3) secondary schools in Plateau State, making a total of six (6) schools. The instrument was validated by three experts in the Department of Economics at the University of Abuja. To establish its reliability, a pilot study was conducted as a trial test and repeated after two weeks as a post-test with the aid of three (3) research assistants. The data from the two administrations were correlated using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r), yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.82, which indicated that the instrument was highly reliable and appropriate for the study. Descriptive and inferential statistics, specifically Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD), were used to analyze the data and answer the research questions. A mean score benchmark of 2.50 was established as the criterion for acceptance.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: To what extent does Economics Education promote gender equality in secondary schools in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Extent to which Economics Education Promotes Gender Equality

S/N	Item Statement	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Remark
1	Economics Education helps students understand the equal role of men and women in national economic development.	2.84	0.72	Accept
2	The study of Economics exposes students to concepts of income equity and labor market fairness.	2.65	0.81	Accept
3	Economics classes actively encourage female students to take up leadership roles in financial decision-making.	2.12	0.94	Reject
4	Learning Economics empowers both male and female students with basic financial literacy skills.	3.10	0.65	Accept
Pooled	**Overall Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation**	**2.68**	**0.78**	**Accept**

The data from Table 1 indicates that Economics Education moderately promotes gender equality, yielding a pooled mean of 2.68. Respondents agreed that the subject effectively empowers students with financial literacy (Item 4, M=3.10) and highlights national economic equity roles (Item 1, M=2.84). However, classroom environments fell short in actively steering female students toward financial leadership roles (Item 3, M=2.12).

Research Question 2: How does the participation of male and female students in Economics Education affect their academic performance in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria?

Table 2: Impact of Participation Rates on Academic Performance

S/N	Item Statement	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Remark
5	Active classroom participation in Economics correlates positively with high grades for both male and female students.	3.15	0.61	Accept
6	Male students dominate classroom discussions, which enhances their confidence and performance in Economics examinations.	2.78	0.85	Accept
7	Female students underperform in Economics due to a lack of academic encouragement and performance incentives.	2.60	0.89	Accept

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S/N	Item Statement	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Remark
8	Equal access to learning materials directly bridges the performance gap between male and female Economics students.	3.22	0.58	Accept
Pooled	**Overall Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation**	**2.94**	**0.73**	**Accept**

Table 2 reveals a strong link between student participation and academic performance, with a high pooled mean of 2.94. Respondents strongly agreed that equal access to learning resources bridges performance disparities (Item 8, M=3.22). However, the data confirms that a male-dominated classroom environment boosts male performance while leaving female peers disadvantaged due to lower social encouragement (Items 6 & 7).

Research Question 3: What are the challenges faced by female students in accessing Economics Education in secondary schools in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria?

Table 3: Challenges Faced by Female Students in Accessing Economics Education

S/N	Item Statement	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Remark
9	Cultural and socio-economic expectations prioritize male education over female career advancement in economics.	2.89	0.76	Accept
10	Traditional gender stereotypes paint Economics and related financial careers as strictly male domains.	2.74	0.82	Accept
11	A severe shortage of female Economics teachers serves as a barrier to mentorship for female students.	2.95	0.79	Accept
12	Early marriage and domestic responsibilities limit the study time and retention of girls in Economics classes.	2.67	0.91	Accept
Pooled	**Overall Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation**	**2.81**	**0.82**	**Accept**

All items evaluated in Table 3 met the acceptance threshold, concluding with a cluster mean of 2.81. This proves that female students face strong structural hurdles. The most prominent challenges identified are the deficit of female Economics educators to provide mentorship (Item 11, M=2.95) and entrenched socio-cultural expectations favoring males (Item 9, M=2.89).

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Research Question 4: How do schools curricula contribute to creating gender-sensitive Economics Education in secondary schools in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria?

Table 4: Role of School Curricula in Fostering Gender-Sensitive Economics Education

S/N	Item Statement	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Remark
13	The current senior secondary Economics curriculum explicitly addresses women's historical and modern economic contributions.	1.98	0.96	Reject
14	Textbook case studies portray both men and women evenly as successful entrepreneurs, investors, and policymakers.	2.05	0.88	Reject
15	Revising the curriculum to incorporate gender-sensitive materials would inspire more girls to excel in Economics.	3.40	0.51	Accept
16	Teachers receive formal structural guidelines from the curriculum on how to deliver gender-neutral lessons.	1.87	0.99	Reject
Pooled	**Overall Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation**	**2.33**	**0.84**	**Reject**

With an overall pooled mean of **2.33**, the respondents rejected the notion that the current curriculum is gender-sensitive. The individual scores indicate that textbooks and curricula lack balanced representation (Item 13, M=1.98; Item 14, M=2.05). Encouragingly, there is an overwhelming consensus that restructuring the curriculum to introduce gender-sensitive components would vastly optimize student outcomes (Item 15, M=3.40).

Findings

The findings from this study show that while Economics Education possesses the analytical foundation required to promote gender equality (Mankiw & Taylor, 2017), its full execution is hindered in the North Central Geo-Political Zone. The data gathered from Research Question 1 points out that the subject builds essential financial literacy, yet it struggles to challenge institutionalized classroom dynamics where male students dominate leadership functions. Regarding academic performance, the findings align closely with Nduka (2021), who asserted that female underperformance stems from an absence of tailored resources and social validation within the classroom environment. This structural deficit is further illustrated by the active marginalization found in classroom settings, where male dominance often mutes female voices.

Socio-cultural constraints remain a powerful barrier to entry for female students within this region. The analysis confirms the observations of Adeyemi and Ogundipe (2022) as well as Bello and Amadi (2020). Early marriages, domestic labor, and an acute scarcity of female role models in financial fields collectively reinforce systemic gender gaps.

Ultimately, the evaluation of the curriculum reveals a profound structural blind spot. The current secondary school Economics syllabus fails to offer realistic representation or provide guidelines for gender-inclusive pedagogical approaches. This mirrors the arguments of Eze (2021), who noted that while policies like the National Gender Policy for Basic Education exist on paper, their active integration into textbooks and instructional modules remains highly inconsistent. Consequently, updating the current academic layout with deliberate gender-inclusive parameters is highly necessary.

Conclusion

Based on the empirical findings of this study, it is concluded that Economics Education holds immense potential to serve as a transformative tool for fostering gender equality in the North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria. The subject provides vital cognitive foundations in financial literacy and equity-driven developmental concepts. However, this potential remains largely unfulfilled due to deeply entrenched institutional and socio-cultural systemic gaps. Classroom dynamics within the region continue to favor male students, creating a participation imbalance that directly depresses female academic confidence and performance. This situation is worsened by an evident lack of female representation within the current Economics curriculum and textbooks, which systematically downplay the contributions of women to economic development. When combined with regional socio-cultural hurdles such as early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and a shortage of female teacher role models, female students face a compounding cycle of disadvantage. Therefore, unless deliberate educational reforms and pedagogical changes are implemented, Economics Education will continue to mirror existing societal inequalities rather than dismantling them.

Recommendations

To maximize the impact of Economics Education in bridging the gender gap within secondary schools in the North Central Geo-Political Zone, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) should urgently restructure the senior secondary school Economics curriculum. Textbooks and instructional materials should be updated to replace male-centric biases with balanced case studies that prominently highlight women as successful economic policy-makers, investors, and entrepreneurs.

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2. Ministry of Education boards across the North Central states should mandate continuous professional development training for Economics teachers. This training should equip educators with inclusive classroom management strategies to consciously curb male dominance during discussions and actively encourage female participation.
3. State teaching service commissions should intentionally deploy more qualified female Economics teachers to rural and semi-urban secondary schools. Establishing "Female in Economics" school clubs can provide much-needed career mentorship to inspire young girls toward financial independence.
4. School administrators, in partnership with Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and traditional community leaders, should organize community sensitization programs. These initiatives should emphasize the economic value of girl-child education and work to minimize the interference of domestic labor and early marriages with a student's academic retention.

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