**Socio-Cultural Barriers to Female Progression into Tertiary Education in Ghana: Exploring options to enhance female leadership quality**

# ABSTRACT

Socio-cultural barriers remain a significant obstacle to female progression into tertiary education in Ghana, particularly in Ghanaian rural districts. This study explores the socio-cultural practices that hinder female students from advancing to attain higher education. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm and employing qualitative case study design, the research engaged 20 participants, including female senior high school graduates who could not make it to the tertiary institution, parents, teachers, counsellors, and Ghana Education Service officials. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and analysed through thematic analysis to uncover pattern narratives. Findings reveal that poverty, lack of role models and inadequate support systems are among the social factors impeding female students’ educational progression into tertiary level. Additionally, cultural practices such as gender roles, early child marriage, gender stereotype, cultural rites and misinterpretation of societal norms, perpetuate exclusion and reinforce systemic barriers to higher education for females. The study concludes that addressing these barriers requires a multi-faced approach, involving community sensitization, enforcement of child rights marriage laws, expand scholarship opportunities, and mentorship programs for girls. These strategies are imperative for unlocking women’s potential to contribute meaningfully to community and national development through their quality leadership.

**Key Words:** Socio-cultural, Barriers, Female education, Progression, Tertiary Education, Quality leadership

# INTRODUCTION

Education has been acknowledged as a key component of a country's socioeconomic development. Therefore, while the nation strives to meet its educational objectives, providing high-quality education is a top priority. Researchers also hold the view that education should be used to give citizens the knowledge, values, skills and abilities they need to change their society and end inequality (see Kimani et al. 2013; Ibrahim, 2018). The beneficiaries of high-quality education are thus better equipped to lead the development of human capital for the nation's economy and adjust to its changing needs. Therefore, education helps to provide effective leadership to achieve national growth and development.

The Right to Education Initiative (2022) asserts that education is a human right rather than a privilege. Since education is a human right issues, everyone is legally entitled to it, regardless of their background. Therefore, it is the responsibility of states to uphold, honour, and fulfil the right to education for all citizens of their nations, regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, or religion. This means that all obstacles, including social and cultural ones, must be eliminated to allow all citizens to enter and leave educational institutions without difficulty.

The Beijing Platform of Action (1995), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and other conferences acknowledged the necessity of improving women's position and looked closely at the historical inequalities and unequal treatment of women in society. They have established important policies that promotes the rights of women. These policies aim to remove barriers that prevent women from participating in political activities, education, and other fields (Karam, 2010). They also support women's empowerment, ensure women's human rights, and achieve gender parity (Asare, 2017).

For the benefit of their children, families, and entire countries, women's education is essential as it helps in reducing newborn and maternal mortality, increased life expectancy, decreased fertility rates, and increases in health, nutrition, literacy, and economic growth are all benefits of females' educational engagement (Rugh, 2000). Okorie (2017) contends that women are heavily responsible for the process of nation-building, highlighting their role in creating peaceful homes and bringing up well-educated, polite children. Sub-Saharan Africa is said to have the lowest gender parity in education score, despite the obvious advantages of female education (Neltoft, 2021).

In Ghana, notable progress has been made in advancing girls’ education at various levels, as evidenced by near-universal enrolment in primary education and increasing completion rates in secondary school. At the Senior High School level, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) shows that Ghana has reached 0.99 in 2020/2021 academic year, indicating that for every 100 boys enrolled, there are 99 girls (Agbenyo, 2021; Kenyona and Rodriguez-Santos, 2024; Eicher et al., 2024). However, a significant gap remains in female participation at the tertiary level, with rural areas such as the Kpandai District lagging far behind the national averages. Despite a gross enrolment ratio of 21.58% for females in tertiary education as of 2023, socio-cultural barriers continue to hinder girls’, particularly in the rural areas, pregression into higher education.

In the Ghanaian rural communities especially in Kpandai district, these barriers are particularly pronounced, stemming from deeply entrenched gender norms, early marriages, poverty, and limited parental support for girls’ education. Factors such as preference for boys’ education, societal expectation around domestic responsibilities, and cultural practices that prioritizes marriages over education exacerbate the issue. Girl in the district face additional challenges such as long distance to school, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of role models in higher education, which collectively reduce their likelihood of pursing tertiary education.

While initiatives by the Ghana education Service and organizations like UNICEF aim to address these challenge, little research has focused on exploring the socio-cultural factors specific to rural areas in Ghana. Understanding these localised factors therefore is critical for designing effective interventions to enhance female preogression into tertiary education.

By using qualitative approach, this research seeks to examine the socio-cultural barriers impeding female progression into tertiary education in rural Ghana and propose evidence-based solutions for addressing the challenges so that it will not undermine the efforts and gains made at achieving gender equality and inclusive development.

**1.1 Research Question**

The question guiding this study is:

1. What are the socio-cultural practices obstructing female student’s progression into tertiary education in rural Ghana?

# 2 METHODOLOGY

## 2.1 Research Paradigm

This study was grounded on interpretivism, a paradigm that believes that understanding the beliefs, motives, and reasoning in important in explaining evidence gathered about a phenomenon (Nickerson, 2022). This paradigm is associated with qualitative techniques that prefer in-depth understanding of social interactions over quantities and places higher premium on people’s views, motives, and reasoning. This paradigm is useful for this research as it allowed for a detailed exploration of the factors that pose challenges to female student’s progression into tertiary education, particularly in rural communities in Ghana. The researchers also believe that various members of a society have different views on the same “objective reality” and that they have different motivation or their behavior (Alharahshel and Pius, 2020).

## 2.2 Research Design

This study utilized a case study research design. Yin (2018) justified the choice of case study design by arguing that case research is most suitable where the phenomenon under study is broad and complex and, therefore, best captured in context where it occurs. The design allowed the researchers to understand the phenomenon being studied by engaging with the participants in their sociocultural setting. Effectively, a case study research approach facilitated in-depth understanding about the obstacles of the female students' progression to the tertiary levels. This was achieved through interacting with the participants individually within their sociocultural context. By gathering participants' ideas, emotions, and experiences, the design was more able to address the "how" and "what" research questions (Yin, 2018).

## 2.3 Research Approach

The research approach for this study was qualitative research approach. Qualitative research approach emphasise understanding the meanings people or groups ascribe to a social or human issue (Cresswell, 2014). This approach gives more holistic insights into the phenomenon being studied (Trcy, 2018). Tsadidey (2018) asserted that qualitative research aims to understand a particular research problem from the perspective of those who are affected. This assertion has influenced the choice of this approach for the study.

## 2.4 Population

The study participants included female senior high school leavers in the Kpandai district of the Northern Region who had completed school within the last three years but were not in a position to pursue further tertiary education. The study’s population also included their parents, teachers, counselors, and District Education Directorate officials.

## 2.5 Sampling Procedure

Snowball and criterion purposive sampling methods were employed to select 20 participants in the study. They included 12 female senior high school graduates, 4 parents, 2 counsellors and 2 Ghana Education Service Staff. The criteria for the selection of students involved completion of senior high school for a minimum of three years, possessing excellent grades for postsecondary education, having shown interest in pursuing tertiary education, and consenting to participate in the study.

They were identified by employing the snowballing method. The researchers identified a female respondent who was willing to answer; who was a student to one of the researchers. She directed the researchers to another female student of similar status. This was continued until the required number of respondents were obtained. All the students who were found using the snowball technique were contacts through which the parents were found and contacted. The parents were selected based on the fact that they had daughters who completed senior high school, had grades that could earn her a degree from a university but were not supported to attend tertiary level of education and were also interested in participating in the study.

The choice of authorities as respondents was based on their willing to participate and their knowledge of the challenges that confront female girls when trying to access tertiary education. The chosen individuals were presumed to have sufficient information and expertise to provide detailed information about female education at the tertiary level.

## 2.6 Research Instrument

Semi-structured interview was the main instrument used to gather data in this study. The instrument was developed according to the research question, which guided the study. Demographic information about the respondents made up the first part of the instrument. The second part of the instrument looked at the sociocultural factors that limits female students’ progression into tertiary education. With the application of the instrument, the research team was able to gain clarity by employing follow-up questions and probing the responses of interviewees so that they could gather more information about their experiences and feelings. Additionally, it allowed the researchers to be flexible in the manner in which the concepts were investigated because it encouraged the respondents to develop their ideas and explain the concerns of the researcher detail (Denscombe, 2017).

## 2.7 Data Collection

The researchers explain the study's purpose to the participants and establishing what they were required to offer. Permission was sought from all the participants, and consent was given prior to recording the interviews. The data recorded were transcribed immediately after each session for analysis. Before collection of actual data, pilot testing was conducted on the data collection tool. Pre-test consisted of a preliminary mini-trial with a small group of respondents to detect issues such as ambiguity, confusion, or bias in the tools. Pilot testing was based on conducting an interview using the interview guide to determine whether it had the ability to generate the required data. Through this process, issues with the tools were detected and dealt with before the deployment of the main study.

## 2.8 Data Analyses

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data obtained in this research as a aiming at identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) gathered during the data collection (Nowell, Norris, & Moules, 2017). At the initial stage, the data was read several times to get familiarized with the content of the data (Creswell, 2014). Since there was a great deal of qualitative data, sufficient time was spent reading the content carefully so that a proper understanding was gained. Trends that were identified in the process were recorded, and text passages containing important details related to the research themes of the study were coded. The second stage of the analysis was undertaken to categorize the codes identified earlier into workable groupings. After the formation of categories, codes were then assigned to the data for further analysis. Previously chosen codes were then put into thematic areas that responded directly to the questions asked during data collection. Qutations were attributed to interviews and focus group members using codes instead of the respondents’ real names of positions. For example, 'SP' represented student participants, 'PP' represented parent participants, and 'GP' represented GES officials. In addition to making it simpler to categorize the data by participant groups, this coding system also allowed for participant anonymity.

## 2.9Ethical Considerations

Respecting the rights of the participants and making sure that the ethical concerns were addressed were crucial elements of this study. Before data collection, ethical clearance was provided by the University for Development Studies, Tamale. All participants of the study gave their clear consent prior to data collection. Data was organized so that accurate data was not attached to an individual or an institution, thus upholding anonymity and confidentiality of the individual or institution. Codes in this research replaced actual names to ensure participants' confidentiality. The views of the participants and their information were kept confidential because their privacy mattered most. The participants were made fully aware of their right to withdraw from study at any point if they wanted to, and the same was communicated to them before involving themselves in it. The rationale for these ethical steps was the preservation of the participants' rights, privacy, and overall well-being while undergoing the study.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

## 3.1 Social Factors Obstructing Female Students’ progression into Tertiary education

This research was set out to explore the social factors hindering female student’s ability to progress into tertiary education. Interviews from respondents revealed that social factors such as poverty and economic constraints, early marriages, gender stereotypes, lack of role models and inadequate support systems are among the key social related factors hindering the female student’s ability to progress into tertiary education, limiting their ability to realize their long-term ambition. The following presents excerpts of narratives from the key informants on the social factors obstructing female students’ progress into tertiary education.

### 3.1.1 Poverty and Economic constraints

Poverty and Economic Constraint were found to significantly obstructs female students’ ability to progress into tertiary education through various interrelated factors. Many poor families often prioritize immediate survival needs over education. When resources are scarce, preference is often given to male children for schooling, as they traditionally seen as future breadwinners. The narratives below provide detail of how poverty and economic difficulty obstruct female students’ ability to progress into tertiary education. Student participants were very clear in the following excerpts:

*“After SHS, my parents said they couldn’t afford fees for tertiary, and since my brother also needed support, my parents chose to pay for … him instead” (FS 3)*

*“ …My parents asked me to find work and support the household because there was no money for school”* (FS 1)

*“…My father told me to learn a trade because it would cost less than paying for university” (FS 5).*

*“I was always reminded that education for girls is a luxury when the family is struggling financially” (FS 6)*

The parents’ views in the following clearly highlighted similar sentiments;

*“We had to choose between sending our son and daughter to school; we simply couldn’t afford both” (PR 3)*

*“…with so many mouths to feed, sending her to university was not an option” (PR 2)*

*“…so, it is not that we don’t value education for girls, but the financial burden is too much” (PR 1).*

GES officials

*“Most of the girls I counsel face financial hurdles that make them give up their dreams… Families prioritize boys’ education because society see them as future breadwinners” (CR)*

*“The free SHS Policy helped, but many families still can’t afford to send girls to tertiary institutions. So, we need more financial aid and scholarship programs targeted specifically at girls from low-income households …” (GES Official).*

The data above shows that financial barriers hinder girls’ access to tertiary education, especially in the context of financial scarcity. Most of respondents consistently stressed that families prioritize boy’s education over girls due to limited financial resources. This supports the works of Adu-Yeboah (2019) and Mwakio (2017) which revealed how financial barriers disproportionately affects girls, often leaving them out of higher education opportunities.

The data also suggest that families in low-income settings claim they adopt economic pragmatism approach where girls are asked to work and support or learn a trade instead of pursuing tertiary education. This support the work of Mahra and Shebi (2018) and Buvinic et al. (2020), who observed that in poor households, girls are often diverted towards income-generating activities or vocational training as cost-effective alternatives to higher education.

### 3.1.2 Lack of Role models

The lack role of role models in some of the communities demoralizes some of these girls from pursing their education to the tertiary level. In some of the narratives of the girls, they indicated that the absence of female mentors always make it impossible for them to convince their parents and husbands to allow them to go school. These narratives are presented below”

*“There are no women in my community who have gone to university, so it feels impossible for me too…”* (FS 10).

*“ … without examples, it is difficult to know what steps to take to achieve my dreams”* (SF 6).

Some parents buttressed on this issue when they stated that;

*“… we didn’t find educated women in our area, so we didn’t think it is necessary for our daughters to be educated …* (PR 2).

*“… if there were successful educated women in our community, maybe we would have been motivated to send them to university …”* (PR 1).

GES officials;

*“… lack of … female role models makes girls doubt their potential to succeed. We need programmes that can bring successful women into schools to inspire young girls…”* (CR).

*“The absence of educated women in leadership position is a barrier to girls aspiring to attain higher education. Perhaps we need to introduce mentorship programmes with female professionals so that we could bridge the gap”* (GES official)

The narratives above highlight a significant barrier to girls’ pursuit of highlight education. Scholars like MacCallum and Beltman (2002) and Gladstone and Cimpian (2021) argue that role models serve as a source of self-efficacy, providing individuals with a tangible example of what is achievable. The absence of educated women in some of these communities reinforces a sense of impossibility, as evidenced in the statement of FS 10. Girls in this regard, struggle to visualize a pathway to success. This aligns with Kearney and Levine (2020) research which suggest that exposure to role models positively influences students’ career aspirations.

### 3.1.3 Inadequate Support System

Inadequate systems to support access to information regarding academic programmes affects female students’ ability to access tertiary education. In this research, some of the girls narrated that their inability to access information regarding scholarships and selection of academic programmes affected their ability to access higher education. Some of the respondents narrated these issues in the following excerpts:

*“… I didn’t know where to get information on scholarship or funding opportunities. After SHS, there was no one to guide on how to apply to university… that resulted in my marriage (FS 1).*

*“…Without support it is easy to give up on your dreams of further education” (FS 5)*

The narratives highlight absence of accessible information and guidance regarding scholarship and funding opportunities. This negatively affects girls who may lack social capital or mentorship to navigate through the process of applying for tertiary. Without guidance students often delay or abandon higher education, which contribute to early marriages.

## 3.2 Cultural Factors Obstructing Female Child Progression into Tertiary Education

The data gathered revealed that the progression of female child’s progression into tertiary education is hindered by a deeply rooted cultural practices and believe systems. Themes such as traditional gender roles, cultural rites or norms, perceptions regarding empowered women, gender stereotype and early marriage emerged as the key cultural factors obstructing female child’s progression into tertiary education. The following are narratives from the affected girls, their parents, counsellors and Ghana Education Official showing how the cultural factors obstruct female child’s progression beyond secondary school education.

### 3.2.1 Traditional Gender roles

The data gathered revealed that traditional gender role affects the girl child’s progression into tertiary education. These traditional gender roles prefer the education of boys at all times to that of girls. Many families believe that prioritizing male child’s education is more likely to provide financial support to the family than that of female child. This limits girls’ access to educational resources, making their progression to tertiary education less likely. Again, gender roles in many communities within the Region, traditional expectations often place a disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities, such as cooking, cleaning, and care given, on female children. this reduces the time girls can dedicate to their studies, impacting their progression into tertiary institution. The following narratives showcased how traditional gender roles obstruct female child’s progression into tertiary education:

“… *my parents expected me to help them with household chores… after SHS, they didn’t want me to go school anymore. They believe my future is in marriage, not education” (FS2)*

*“Even though I did well in school, I was always told that my primary duty was to take care of the home, … I was discouraged from pursuing further studies” (FS 7).*

*“My father … has always preferred and believed in my brother because of his believe that I will end up marrying” (FS 1).*

Parents views are presented in the following excerpts:

*“… she is expected to learn how to cook and take care of her siblings after school, not to go further” (PR 5).*

*“… When you have to choose between a girl child and boy child’s education to tertiary, of course you have to choose the boy. Because, for boys they are the future managers of the house, they will protect your legacy. But for girls they will end up in another man’s house, using your investment on another man’s family” (PR 2)*

*“In many communities, we see many girls who complete SHS but stay at home because cultural expectations restrict their ability to pursue tertiary education. Parents prefer the boy’s education because of the believe that girls are supposed to marry, be in the kitchen or learn domestic chores …” (GES official)*

The above narratives suggest that young girls’ ambitions to tertiary education are obstructed by an entrenched traditional gender roles which place and restrict the girl child to the kitchen, matrimonial home and household chores instead of going to the tertiary education. These findings support the works of Nartey et al. (2023) and Heise et al. (2023) which highlights how cultural and religious norms sustains gender inequalities in education.

### 3.2.2 Perception on Empowered Woman

It was found that the negative perception many community members have on women who have gone to university and are empowered. These issues affected the decision of some parents to support the idea of their female children going to school, particularly to tertiary level. Excerpts of the narratives highlighting how these perception affects female child’s progression into tertiary education are presented below;

*“…[T]hey … say I wouldn’t get a husband to marry if I was too educated because the men will be afraid of me”* (FS 7*).*

*“There is fear in the community that educated girls might become too independent and challenge traditional family roles. Some families therefore discourage further education because of this believe”* (CR*).*

*“… There is a perception in some communities that educated women are difficult to marry or don’t conform to traditional gender roles, which contributes to the reluctance to support higher education for girls.”* (GES official*).*

The narratives above highlights how patriarchal fear of women empowerment through education affects the ability of young girls’ progression to tertiary institutions. The believe that education diminishes parental and societal control of women. The idea that educated women are “difficult to marry” or that men are “afraid of them” is rooted in cultural norms that prioritize women’s roles as wives and mothers over their professional and personal development.

The data support the findings of Zhou (2024) and Baten et al. (2021) which highlights how patriarchal norms often limit women’s educational opportunities, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. The findings also support the work of Nhien (2016), Atta (2015) and Bossu and Dawson-Amoah (2018) which reported cultural stigma surrounding educated women, highlighting that perception of educated women as “difficult to marry” are common in patriarchic society perpetuate gender inequality by disincentivizing educational attainment of girls.

### 3.2.3 Gender Stereotype

It was also found that stereotypes associated with girl child education often affects the girl child’s ability to progress to their education to the tertiary level. Some of the female students narrated the following in this regard”

*“People say education is wasted on girls because we will end up in the kitchen. They tell us to focus on learning how to cook and take care of our homes instead of thinking about school” (FS 3)*

*“My uncle told me not to dream too big because I am a girl. Even in school some of the teachers would say that girls shouldn’t aim for careers like engineering and law” (FS 8).*

*“In our society, women are expected to stay at home and support the family, not to be chasing papers. We think that educating boys brings more profit than girls because they expected to provide for their families” (PR).*

These narratives by the girls and the parent highlights are stereotype against girls’ education has affected their dream of having tertiary education. These deep seated believe system undermines girls’ potential and reinforces patriarchal society. The findings from the narratives aligns with UNICEF (2020) which revealed that societal norms perpetuate gender inequality by discouraging girls from aspiring to academic or professional achievements. These norms are often reinforced by families as narrated in parents’ statements prioritizing boys’ education over girls. It also supports the work of Hack (2019), Yeoward (2014) and Rubin (2017) which shows that gender biases within the education system discourage girls from pursing non-traditional systems discourage girls from pursuing non-traditional careers, such as those of STEM fields.

### 3.2.4 Early Marriages

Early marriages present significant challenges to female children’s progression to tertiary education, impacting their personal, educational, and socio-economic development. In this research, it was realized that early marriages often lead to the discontinuation of education even at the secondary level. Many girls are pressured to prioritize household responsibilities over academic issues, leaving them unable to meet the qualifications required for tertiary education. In some situations, husbands or in-laws discourages or to an extreme scenario outrightly forbid their continuation of education, considering it incompatible with their marital roles. Some of the excerpts of the narratives are presented below highlighting how early marriages affects progression into tertiary education:

*“… after SHS, I was pressured to get married instead of continuing my education. This posed serious impediment to my progression into tertiary, because my husband is not in support of the idea” (FS 1)*

*“ … I was engaged while in SHS, so after completing the SHS they came and promised that he will support me to tertiary, but later he (her husband) and his parents changed their mind and didn’t want me to continue” (FS 7)*

*“ I resisted marriage after SHS, But my parents said it was my only option since they couldn’t support me”.*

Some parents and education officials expressed similar sentiments in the following excerpts;

*“ … We arrange for her marriage because we couldn’t pay for her education, and it seemed like the best option for her future” (PR 2)*

*“Marriage ensures that the girl is taken care of, especially when we can’t afford her education” (PR 5).*

*“I have seen many cases where girls with academic potential are forced into marriage right after SHS in some cases with the promise of sending them to tertiary which didn’t materialize. Early marriages is actually one of the reasons why girls in rural areas don’t pursue tertiary education” (CR 1)*

*“… Cultural expectations around marriage still clash with the goals of female education in many communities across the district (GES).*

The narratives above shows that early marriage obstruct female students’ progression into tertiary education level, stemming from societal pressure, economic constraints, and cultural expectation surrounding early marriages. Many of the respondents such as FS1, FS7, PR 2 and PR 5 expressed how early marriage obstructed educational opportunities for girls. This support the work of Msuya (2020) who argue that early marriage is one of the critical issue undermining girls’ educational attainments in sub-Saharan Africa. In a patriarchal society, marriage is often seen as an alternative to education, particularly when families face financial challenge. Again, the promise of supporting the education of girls’ post-marriage, as narrated by FS7, often goes unfulfilled which support the findings of Sarfo et al. (2024), Epstein (2022) and Bonjeer (2017) that reported that promises of educational support in marriage are often not realized, leading to discontinuation of girl’s educational pursuits.

# 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has shed ligh on the socio-cultural barriers that hinders of women progression into tertiary level in Ghana. The findings indicate that gender stereotypes, child marriages, poverty, and the lack of suitable educational materials are major barriers to girls' advancement to the tertiary level. Furthermore, cultural values related to the status of women, coupled with poor support systems, have created a vicious cycle of underrepresentation and marginalization of women in the university. Various stakeholders at different levels such as families, communities, traditional leaders, government, and non-governmental organizations must be addressed by a multi-faceted intervention to solve these challenges. The research therefore recommended measures that must involve sensitization campaigns to help counteract negative cultural practices, law enforcement against child marriages, increased opportunities for scholarship to girls, community-based mentorship, role models, and support systems have the potential to change in altering society's attitudes and empowering young women to access tertiary education.

# REFERENCES

Adu-Yeboah, C. (2019). *Male prioritization over girls' education in the Gomoa East District of Ghana* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Education, Winneba).

Agbenyo, F., & Sarkpoh, F. (2021). Examining Gender-Based Inclusive Educational Interventions in the Kadjebi District, Ghana. *UDS International Journal of Development*, *8*(2), 637-655.

Atta, G. P. (2015). Education inequality: How patriarchy and policy collide in Ghana. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, *5*(7), 11-19.

Bart-Plange, V. G. (2019). *The value of social capital: Exploring how public senior high schools in the Central Region of Ghana respond to challenges and opportunities in the secondary education sector*. (Master of Arts Thesis, York University, Toronto, Ontario)

Baten, J., De Haas, M., Kempter, E., & Meier zu Selhausen, F. (2021). Educational gender inequality in Sub‐Saharan Africa: A long‐term perspective. *Population and Development Review*, *47*(3), 813-849.

Bau, N., & Fernández, R. (2023). Culture and the Family. In *Handbook of the Economics of the Family* (Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 1-48). North-Holland.

Bonjeer, T. (2017). *The Shaping of Higher Education Expectations among Adolescents in Ghana: Gender and Possible Selves* (Master's thesis, University of Oslo).

Bosu, R. S., & Dawson-Amoah, G. (2018). Female Access and Participation in Tertiary Education: Do Traditional Beliefs and Practices Matter? *Journal of Business Administration and Education*, *10*(2).

Buvinic, M., O’Donnell, M., & Bourgault, S. (2020). Women’s economic empowerment in West Africa: Towards a practical research agenda. *Center for Global Development Working Paper*, *557*.

Dubik, J. D., Aniteye, P., & Richter, S. (2022). Socio-cultural factors influencing teenage pregnancy in the East Mamprusi Municipality, Ghana. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, *26*(5), 120-130.

Eger, C., Miller, G., & Scarles, C. (2018). Gender and capacity building: A multi-layered study of empowerment. *World Development*, *106*, 207-219.

Eicher, T., Eskimez, R. K., & Newiak, M. (2024). *Effects of IMF-Supported Programs on Gender Inequality* (No. 2024/247). International Monetary Fund.

Epstein, C. F. (2022). *Woman's place: Options and limits in professional careers*. Univ of California Press.

Gladstone, J. R., & Cimpian, A. (2021). Which role models are effective for which students? A systematic review and four recommendations for maximizing the effectiveness of role models in STEM. *International journal of STEM education*, *8*, 1-20.

Hack, G. T. (2019). *STEM: Why We Should Care About Successful Females in Nontraditional STEM Careers* (Doctoral dissertation, Indiana State University).

Heise, L., Greene, M. E., Opper, N., Stavropoulou, M., Harper, C., Nascimento, M., ... & Gupta, G. R. (2019). Gender inequality and restrictive gender norms: framing the challenges to health. *The Lancet*, *393*(10189), 2440-2454.

Ibrahim, M. G. (2018). Alternatives to School Exclusion in Ghana: Changing the Rhythm of Dealing With Truancy in Ghanaian High Schools. *SAGE Open*, *8*(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018805361

Kearney, M. S., & Levine, P. B. (2020). Role models, mentors, and media influences. *The Future of Children*, *30*(1), 83-106.

Kenyona, A. J., & Rodríguez-Santos, C. (2024). Education Matters: Exploring Education's Role in Human Development. *International Journal of Management Cases*, *26*(1).

Korkor, P. O. (2023). *Understanding the experiences of women leaders in Ghanaian senior high schools through phenomenological inquiry.* (Doctoral thesis, University of Canterbury).

MacCallum, J., & Beltman, S. (2002). Role models for young people: What makes an effective role model program. Australian Clearing House for Youth Studies. https://researchportal.murdoch.edu.au/esploro/outputs/report/Role-models-for-young-people-What/9 91005542451007891 Document Version: Published (Version of Record)

Mehra, R., & Shebi, K. (2018). of Girls and Women. United Nations Foundations Retrieved from <https://the3dprogram.org/content/uploads/2018/10/3D-Economic-Empowerment-Report-August-2018.pdf> accessed 03 23, 2025

Minniti, M. (2017). Female entrepreneurship, role models and network externalities in middle-income countries. In *The Routledge companion to global female entrepreneurship* (pp. 197-213). Routledge.

Msuya, N. H. (2020). Child marriage: An obstacle to socio-economic development in sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal for juridical science*, *45*(2), 43-73.

Mwakio, N. (2017). Overcoming obstacles to educational access for Kenyan girls: A qualitative study. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, *18*(2), 260-274.

Nartey, P., Bahar, O. S., & Nabunya, P. (2023). A review of the cultural gender norms contributing to gender inequality in Ghana: An ecological systems perspective. *Journal of international women's studies*, *25*(7).

Nhien, P. C. (2016). *Preventing and combatting women trafficking from Vietnam to China*. University of Northumbria at Newcastle (United Kingdom).

Right to Education Initiative. (2022). Right to higher education: unpacking the international normative framework in light of current trends and challenges.

Rubin, L. M. L. (2017). *PLTW Female High-School Students' Supports and Barriers in Choosing a College Degree* (Doctoral dissertation, Brandman University).

Rugh, A. (2000). Starting Now: Strategies for Helping Girls Complete Primary. Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education (SAGE) project, *Academy for Educational Development*.

Sánchez-Tapia, I., & Alam, A. (2020). Towards an Equal Future: Reimagining Girls' Education through STEM. *UNICEF*.

Sarfo, E. A., Yendork, J. S., & Naidoo, A. V. (2024). “I married because…”: Motivations to marry early among female spouses in child marriages in northern Ghana. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *166*, 107917.

Smith-Evans, L., George, J., Goss Graves, F., Kaufmann, L. S., & Frohlich, L. (2014). Unlocking opportunity for African American girls: A call for action for educational equity. *Thurgood Marshall Institute: Education Equity*, (1).

Teye, J. K., Darkwah, A. K., Thorsen, D., Abutima, T. K., & Boateng, D. A. (2025). Negotiating gender roles and power relations through the management of international migrant remittances in a patriarchal community in Ghana. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *60*(1), 36-50.

Yeoward, J. L. (2014). *Factors influencing the major satisfaction and leadership aspirations of men and women in traditional and nontraditional fields*. Illinois State University.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: design and methods* (Sixth edition). SAGE.

Zhou, Z. (2024). Addressing Gender Inequality in Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Barriers, Policy Reforms, and Cultural Shifts. In *2024 9th International Conference on Modern Management, Education and Social Sciences (MMET 2024)* (pp. 858-864). Atlantis Press.