**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 for female students’ progression into tertiary institutions. The study concludes that addressing these barriers requires a multifaceted approach, involving community sensitization, enforcement of child rights marriage laws, expanding 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 issue, 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 (see Ashraf & Kumar, 2020).

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 promote 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 (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, progression 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. Girls 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 pursuing tertiary education.

While initiatives by the Ghana education Service and organizations like UNICEF aim to address these challenges, 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 progression 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 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework, Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice Toward Female Leaders (Eagly and Karu, 2022) as contextualized in this research focuses on gender stereotypes barriers for women participation in leadership roles. This theory has been instrumental in the analysis of the data. The central argument of the theory is that prejudice arises when there is an incongruity between the stereotypes associated with women and the attributes necessary for successful leadership.

Socio-cultural norms in many African countries including Ghana are deeply rooted in traditional beliefs that see women as primary caregivers, homemakers, and supporters rather than individuals that take part in decision making or lead (see Tsoka, 2010). These ideas are learnt at an early stage of the child’s socialization and are reinforced through community norms, educational practices, religious leaders, and family upbringing.

The theory also argues that when educational opportunities are open to both male and female, this will create an opportunity for all regarding leadership skills. Negative cultural perception and expectations affect the full participation of the female in tertiary education. When girls are taught that they should be modest, submissive or respectful, they are unlikely to speak up in class, or take leadership roles in school context or compete academically.

**1.2 Research Question**

The question guiding this study is:

1. What socio-cultural practices hinder female students’ progression into tertiary education in rural Ghana?

# 2 METHODOLOGIES

## 2.1 Research Paradigm

This study was grounded on interpretivism, a paradigm that believes that understanding the beliefs, motives, and reasoning is important in explaining evidence gathered about a phe nomenon (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 allows 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 a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research approach emphasizes 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. Snowball was used because it was difficult to identify and access the pregnant learners or teenage mothers. 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 willingness 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 limit 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 in detail (Denscombe, 2017).

## 2.7 Data Collection

The researchers explained the study's purpose to the participants and established 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 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. Quotations 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.

**2.10 Limitations**

The research was conducted in six districts out of sixteen administrative districts in northern region of Ghana, even though there were no significant differences in participants responses and practices across the region. As a result of the small sample size generalising the research beyond the six districts where this research was conducted might not adequately give a balanced picture. This research has been a theory based one which potentially could minimise the limitations.

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 Constraints were found to significantly obstruct 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 are 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 the 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 affect girls, often leaving them out of higher education opportunities.

The data also suggest that families in low-income settings claim they adopt an economic pragmatism approach where girls are asked to work and support or learn a trade instead of pursuing tertiary education. This supports 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 of role models in some of the communities demoralizes some of these girls from pursuing their education to the tertiary level. In some of the narratives of the girls, they indicated that the absence of female mentors always makes it impossible for them to convince their parents and husbands to allow them to go the 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 scholarships or funding opportunities. After SHS, there was no one to guide me 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 the 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 contributes 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 deeply rooted cultural practices and belief systems. Themes such as traditional gender roles, cultural rites or norms, perceptions regarding empowered women, gender stereotypes 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 roles affect 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 a 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 institutions. 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 belief 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 a 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 belief 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 tertiary education. These findings support the works of Nartey et al. (2023) and Heise et al. (2023) which highlights how cultural and religious norms sustain gender inequalities in education.

### 3.2.2 Perception on Empowered Woman/ Gender Stereotype Gender Stereotype

It was found that many community members have. 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 highlight how patriarchal fear of women empowerment through education affects the ability of young girls’ progression to tertiary institutions. The belief 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 patriarchal society perpetuate gender inequality by disincentivizing educational attainment of girls.

It was also found that stereotypes associated with girl child education often affects the girl child’s ability to progress 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 parents highlight stereotypes against girls’ education. This phenomenon has affected their dream of having tertiary education. This deep seated belief system undermines girls’ potential and reinforces patriarchal society. The findings from the narratives align 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 pursuing non-traditional systems discourage girls from pursuing non-traditional careers, such as those of STEM fields.

### 3.2.3 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 discourage 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 narrative above shows that early marriage obstructs 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 supports the work of Msuya (2020) who argue that early marriage is one of the critical issues 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 challenges. 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.

**3.3 Quality Leadership – the female circumstances**

Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice Toward Female Leaders (Eagly and Karu, 2022) has been used to examine socio-cultural barriers and its impact on female students’ progression into tertiary education with a view to recommending possibilities for constructive change in Ghanaian communities as it affects leadership potentials of women.

The study identified socio-cultural factors including early marriages, the negative perceptions on women who have gone to university and are empowered, traditional gender roles in the society, inadequate role models among others. These cultural norms and biases always lead to stereotypes affecting the leadership roles of women in the communities (Thelma & Ngulube, 2024). Education has an impact on the future leadership of women; the inability to progress to the tertiary institutions may affect their quest for some leadership positions.

This research revealed that in the conservative rural communities, parents continue to prioritize male child’s education due to the belief that boys will become breadwinners and leaders and girls will be groomed for domestic roles. When girls aspire to pursue tertiary education in such an environment, which is an important step towards professional leadership, they face resistance or discouragement (see Tsoka, 2010).

Societal discrimination against women in the attainment of higher education often favours men in leadership roles and promotes unequal opportunities in life (Tsoka, 2010; Schwanke, 2013). In the face of these discriminatory practices women often suffer to attain tertiary education in order to experience better leadership roles. This study provides pointers/recommendations to enhance female progression into tertiary education.

# 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has shed light on the socio-cultural barriers that hinder women progression into tertiary level in Ghana (see also Ashraf & Kumar, 2020). 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.

Contribution: All authors worked, read and approved the final article

Ethical Approval and Consent

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.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Option 1:

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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