

Education, Women Empowerment, Gender Equity: A Post-Mortem Analysis for Poverty Eradication in Cross River State-Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between education, women's empowerment, gender equity, and poverty eradication in Cross River State, Nigeria, using Structuration Theory as its theoretical framework. The study emphasizes education as a critical instrument for empowering women by enhancing their knowledge, self-confidence, skills, and capacity to participate meaningfully in poverty eradication efforts. Key initiatives examined include Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE), the National Gender Policy, education, and mentorship programmes. The study sought to establish the relationship between education, women's empowerment, gender equity, and poverty eradication in Cross River State. Both primary and secondary data were utilized. Relevant literature was reviewed, while a field survey was conducted across three selected communities. A population of 125 respondents was studied using stratified and purposive sampling techniques. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis, while the hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings indicate that education, gender equity, and women's empowerment positively contribute to poverty eradication in Cross River State. The study therefore recommends increased investment by government and relevant organizations in equitable access to education, women's economic empowerment, and holistic empowerment programmes that enhance women's participation in social and economic development.

Keywords: Education; Women's Empowerment; Gender Equity; Poverty Eradication; Cross River State; Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a crucial socioeconomic factor in development and an important instrument for women's empowerment, particularly in poverty eradication where gender inequalities remain pronounced. Women's empowerment encompasses efforts to increase women's access to education, decision-making opportunities, productive resources, and economic opportunities, thereby enhancing their capacity to contribute to community development and household well-being. From this perspective, education serves as an important entry point through which societies transmit knowledge, values, skills, and competencies that enable individuals to participate effectively in social and economic activities.

Education is also recognized as a fundamental human right that should be accessible to all individuals, irrespective of gender, age, or social status. This right is reflected in major international and regional human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Okowa (2011) and Subrahmanian (2002), among others, emphasize the relationship between education, women's empowerment, gender equity, and poverty eradication as important dimensions of social transformation. In Nigeria, the 1999 Constitution recognizes education as an important instrument for national development and directs government to promote educational opportunities and eradicate illiteracy (FRN, 1999, Section 18). The constitutional commitment underscores the responsibility of government at different levels to expand access to education and strengthen educational development.

In Cross River State, women continue to experience significant socioeconomic challenges, including financial constraints, poverty, restricted access to education, limited access to productive resources, and inadequate opportunities for economic participation. Addressing these challenges through targeted interventions is essential for inclusive development and long-term poverty reduction. Women's empowerment has been associated with improvements in household welfare, economic productivity, social participation, and community development. When women have greater access to education, financial resources, healthcare, and productive opportunities, households and communities can benefit from improved economic productivity and living conditions (UNDP, 2021; World Bank, 2022). These benefits can generate wider social effects through knowledge acquisition, skills development, agricultural activities, entrepreneurship, and small-scale businesses.

However, women continue to face barriers that constrain their economic and social advancement. These include cultural restrictions, limited ownership and control of land, inadequate access to finance, and exclusion from economic opportunities (Alkire et al., 2013). FAO (2020) further highlights the importance of improving women's access to productive resources in agriculture and other economic activities. Such interventions can strengthen women's productive capacity and contribute to household income, food security, and poverty reduction.

Education is therefore a fundamental socioeconomic, political, and cultural instrument for women's empowerment and poverty eradication. Nevertheless, gender disparities in educational access and attainment continue to limit women's participation in socioeconomic and political activities. UNESCO (2022) emphasizes the continuing importance of addressing gender disparities in education, particularly among disadvantaged and rural populations. Similarly, Klasen and Lamanna (2009) argue that factors such as early marriage and restrictive gender norms can contribute to girls' educational discontinuation and reinforce intergenerational cycles of poverty and dependency.

Gender inequality also intersects with health outcomes. Women in disadvantaged communities may experience barriers to healthcare, reproductive health information, and essential health services. These challenges can adversely affect women's well-being and their capacity to participate fully in household and community development. Improving access to healthcare, reproductive health education, and other essential services is therefore important for advancing gender equity and improving the socioeconomic conditions of women and their communities (WHO, 2021).

Despite national and international initiatives aimed at promoting women's empowerment and gender equity, rural women in Cross River State continue to face challenges, including inadequate healthcare services, restricted access to education, cultural constraints, economic marginalization, and limited participation in decision-making processes (UN Women, 2020). Government interventions, including Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) initiatives and the National

Gender Policy, have been introduced to address some of these challenges. However, questions remain concerning their implementation, accessibility, awareness, and effectiveness, particularly among women in rural communities. Weak implementation mechanisms, sociocultural resistance, and limited awareness may constrain the benefits of such programmes.

Against this background, there is a need to examine the relationship between education, women's empowerment, gender equity, and poverty eradication in Cross River State. A retrospective assessment of these relationships can provide insight into the extent to which existing interventions have contributed to improving women's socioeconomic conditions and reducing poverty. The study therefore examines the nexus between education, women's empowerment, and gender equity and their contribution to poverty eradication in Cross River State. It also considers the socioeconomic challenges confronting women and their implications for poverty reduction. The findings are expected to provide useful evidence for strengthening existing empowerment programmes and informing policies aimed at increasing women's participation in education, economic activities, decision-making, and community development.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Education remains an important pathway to women's empowerment and poverty eradication, yet significant gender and socioeconomic disparities persist in Cross River State. Women, particularly those in rural communities, may experience limited access to education because of poverty, inadequate financial resources, cultural beliefs, early marriage, household responsibilities, and other socioeconomic constraints. These barriers can limit women's acquisition of knowledge and skills and consequently reduce their opportunities for meaningful participation in economic, social, and political activities.

The challenges confronting women also extend beyond education. Limited access to land, credit facilities, and other productive resources constrains women's participation in small-scale enterprises, agriculture, and other income-generating activities. Similarly, limited participation in decision-making, financial exclusion, and concentration in informal employment can reduce women's economic independence and capacity to contribute to household and community development. Inadequate healthcare services and limited access to reproductive health information may further affect women's welfare and socioeconomic participation.

Although the benefits of women's empowerment and gender equity are widely recognized, several factors continue to constrain their realization. These include restricted access to land and credit, patriarchal social structures, limited reproductive health education, inadequate healthcare services, sociocultural resistance, low awareness of empowerment programmes, and weaknesses in programme implementation. Consequently, the existence of policies and programmes does not necessarily guarantee that women, particularly those in rural communities, will experience meaningful improvements in educational access, economic opportunities, decision-making, and living conditions.

A major gap in the existing literature is the limited availability of localized empirical studies that simultaneously examine how education, women's empowerment, and gender equity relate to poverty eradication in Cross River State. Understanding these relationships is important for developing context-specific interventions that address the socioeconomic conditions of women and support sustainable household and community development. The study therefore seeks to provide empirical evidence on the contribution of education, women's empowerment, and gender equity to

poverty eradication while examining the socioeconomic challenges that may constrain these outcomes.

Ultimately, addressing gender disparities in education, decision-making, and access to economic opportunities is important for reducing the structural conditions that perpetuate poverty. Strengthening women's access to education and productive resources can contribute to improved household welfare, greater economic participation, and broader community development. This study consequently provides a retrospective assessment of these issues within the context of Cross River State, Nigeria.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between education, women's empowerment, gender equity, and poverty eradication in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine whether education, women's empowerment, and gender equity have a significant predictive effect on poverty eradication in Cross River State.
2. Determine the extent to which socioeconomic challenges have a significant predictive effect on poverty eradication in Cross River State.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Based on the objectives of the study, the following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H01: Education, gender equity, and women's empowerment do not have a significant predictive effect on poverty eradication in Cross River State.

H02: Socioeconomic challenges do not have a significant predictive effect on poverty eradication in Cross River State.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework: Structuration Theory

The study is anchored on Structuration Theory, developed by Giddens (1984), which explains the reciprocal relationship between human agency and social structures. The theory assumes that individuals are not merely passive recipients of social structures; rather, they possess the capacity to act, make choices, and influence the structures within which they operate. At the same time, social structures, including cultural norms, institutions, policies, and socioeconomic arrangements, influence individual behaviour and the opportunities available to different groups.

The theory provides a useful framework for understanding women's empowerment, education, gender equity, and poverty eradication. Women's ability to participate in education, economic activities, political decision-making, and community development is influenced by existing social structures, including patriarchal norms, cultural expectations, institutional practices, access to resources, and government policies. However, through education, skills acquisition, economic participation, and collective action, women can exercise agency and contribute to transforming these structures. Thus, women's empowerment can be understood as both an outcome of structural opportunities and a process through which women influence and transform the social structures

that constrain their participation.

Within the context of Cross River State, the theory is particularly relevant because persistent gender inequalities cannot be explained solely by individual characteristics. Educational opportunities, access to productive resources, cultural expectations, political institutions, and economic conditions collectively shape women's capacity to make choices and participate in development. The theory therefore provides a basis for examining how education and empowerment can strengthen women's agency while also addressing structural barriers to gender equity and poverty eradication.

Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is increasingly recognized as an important component of socioeconomic inclusion, sustainable development, and poverty reduction. In Cross River State, empowerment involves creating opportunities through which women can develop their knowledge, skills, economic capacity, and decision-making abilities. Undie and Undie (2004) define women's empowerment in terms of enabling women to exercise greater socioeconomic, political, and cultural control over their lives, make strategic choices, access resources, and participate in decision-making processes. This perspective emphasizes women's effective participation in political activities, community development, economic activities, and other spheres of social life.

Egunjobi (2005) views women's empowerment as a means of enabling disadvantaged women to realize their socioeconomic, political, and cultural potential. Women's empowerment can therefore contribute to poverty reduction, educational participation, economic independence, political involvement, community leadership, and the reduction of social inequalities. It also provides women with greater opportunities to participate in decisions affecting their households and communities.

Women's empowerment is essentially a process through which women acquire the capacity to make meaningful choices and translate those choices into desired outcomes. It involves providing women with equitable opportunities to participate in decision-making, access resources, acquire education and skills, engage in economic activities, obtain healthcare, and live free from violence and discrimination. Empowerment therefore extends beyond the provision of financial resources to include the development of capabilities and the removal of institutional and sociocultural barriers.

Gender Equity and Women's Political Participation

Gender equity in political participation is important because inclusive decision-making can provide opportunities for women's perspectives and interests to be represented in public policy and governance. Despite efforts to promote women's participation in political institutions, significant barriers remain, particularly in developing-country contexts. Ebong and Odock (2022) identify institutional, cultural, governance-related, and socioeconomic factors as important constraints on women's political engagement.

Similarly, Okeke (2021) observes that women in Nigeria continue to experience structural barriers associated with patriarchal norms, societal expectations, and financial constraints. These conditions can limit women's ability to contest political positions, participate effectively in political institutions, and influence public decision-making. Arowolo (2010), in a study involving Local Government Areas in Cross River State, used structured questionnaires and purposive sampling to examine women's empowerment and political participation. The findings indicated that women

remained underrepresented in political structures because of cultural gender roles, financial limitations, and prevailing stereotypes. Violence against women in politics also emerged as an important deterrent to political participation.

The challenges are not limited to Cross River State. Odejide (2019), in research conducted in Lagos, reported that women's political participation was constrained by fear of intimidation and inadequate leadership and mentorship opportunities. Tripp and Kang (2008) similarly observed that, even in African countries where gender quotas have been introduced, cultural resistance can constrain their effectiveness. These findings highlight the importance of combining formal institutional reforms with education, mentorship, financial support, and broader sociocultural change to strengthen women's participation in political and community decision-making.

Poverty Eradication

Poverty eradication refers to systematic efforts to reduce and ultimately eliminate the conditions that prevent individuals and households from attaining acceptable standards of living. It encompasses interventions aimed at improving access to basic necessities and opportunities, including education, healthcare, employment, infrastructure, food, water and sanitation, and other essential services. Poverty eradication therefore has socioeconomic, institutional, and developmental dimensions and requires the mobilization of resources and implementation of policies that improve people's productive capacity and quality of life.

In Cross River State, poverty eradication involves government and non-governmental interventions directed towards infrastructure development, employment creation, microcredit provision, skills acquisition, vocational training, education, and improved access to social services. Such interventions are intended to improve household income, strengthen economic participation, and enhance the well-being of vulnerable populations. National initiatives such as the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), together with more recent social and economic intervention programmes, reflect efforts to address poverty through employment, infrastructure, credit provision, transportation, and social protection.

However, poverty eradication cannot be achieved solely through income-based interventions. The persistence of educational, gender, health, and institutional inequalities can limit the ability of vulnerable groups to benefit from development programmes. Consequently, poverty reduction strategies need to address the structural conditions that restrict access to education, productive resources, employment, healthcare, and decision-making opportunities.

Education as an Instrument of Women's Empowerment

Education is widely regarded as an important instrument of social, economic, political, and cultural transformation because it enhances knowledge, skills, awareness, and human capabilities. Its contribution to development extends beyond individual learning to include improvements in productivity, social participation, innovation, and institutional development (Okoi, 2007).

Education at every level constitutes a process through which societies transmit knowledge, values, skills, and cultural practices to individuals and subsequent generations. Peters (1970) conceptualizes education as a process through which what is considered worthwhile within society is transmitted to individuals. In its broader sense, education encompasses enlightenment, learning, training, and the development of individual capabilities. The term is derived from the Latin *educere*, meaning "to lead out" or "to draw out," and *educare*, meaning "to bring up" or "to nurture" (Aremu

& Olakunsanmi, 2005).

Education is particularly important for women because it can enhance literacy, employability, economic independence, self-confidence, leadership capacity, and participation in decision-making. It can also improve women's awareness of their rights and increase their capacity to access and utilize economic and social resources. Thus, education can serve as a mechanism through which women develop the capabilities required to challenge restrictive social structures and participate more effectively in household, community, and institutional development.

Eme and Ike (2017) emphasize the importance of education and gender equity as fundamental rights and argue that barriers limiting access to education and socioeconomic opportunities should be addressed. Government agencies, international organizations, and development partners have supported various educational and women's empowerment initiatives in Nigeria. These include organizations such as the British Council, USAID, KOICA, UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNDP, which have contributed to education, capacity development, policy implementation, and empowerment-related interventions.

Education, however, extends beyond formal educational institutions. It also occurs through non-formal and informal channels, including the mass media, households, religious organizations, peer groups, community organizations, and other social institutions. It is therefore a lifelong process through which individuals acquire knowledge, values, skills, attitudes, and competencies. For women, access to both formal and informal education can strengthen their capacity to participate in economic activities, community development, leadership, and poverty reduction.

NEXUS BETWEEN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, GENDER EQUITY AND POVERTY ERADICATION

Women's empowerment, gender equity, and poverty eradication are closely interconnected. Improving women's access to education, productive resources, finance, healthcare, employment, and decision-making opportunities can enhance their capacity to contribute to household welfare and community development. Conversely, persistent gender inequalities can limit women's economic participation and reinforce household and intergenerational poverty.

Natukunda et al. (2021) examined strategies and challenges associated with women's empowerment and identified community-based financial initiatives and group savings as important mechanisms for strengthening women's economic capacity. However, the study also noted that financial support alone may not provide sufficient empowerment where women lack training in leadership, financial management, and conflict resolution. This finding is consistent with Kabeer's (1999) argument that access to resources must be accompanied by the ability to exercise agency and make meaningful economic and social choices.

Women's empowerment can produce benefits that extend beyond individual women. Anderson and Eswaran (2009) found that greater female empowerment can influence household decisions concerning investments in education and healthcare, thereby generating longer-term benefits for household welfare. Similarly, Ogbonna (2010) identified educational assistance, material support, income-generating opportunities, community participation, and self-development as important dimensions of women's empowerment initiatives.

In Cross River State, these relationships are particularly relevant because women's participation in education, agriculture, small-scale businesses, community organizations, and other economic

activities can contribute to household income and local development. Education and skills acquisition can increase women's productive capacity, while access to finance and productive resources can enable them to translate acquired knowledge and skills into economic opportunities. Gender equity can further strengthen these outcomes by reducing institutional and sociocultural barriers to women's participation.

Despite these potential benefits, women's empowerment continues to face socioeconomic, cultural, and political constraints. These include limited access to credit, inadequate training opportunities, restricted access to productive resources, limited political influence, and sociocultural expectations that constrain women's participation. Natukunda et al. (2021) identified inadequate training and limited political influence as important barriers to women's leadership and empowerment. The World Bank (2018) similarly identified sociopolitical and financial barriers as constraints on women's participation in economic and social activities.

Cornwall (2016) argues for gender-sensitive policies and institutional reforms that can improve women's access to resources, strengthen financial inclusion, and challenge discriminatory structures. From the perspective of Structuration Theory, such interventions are important because they can modify the social and institutional structures that constrain women while simultaneously strengthening women's capacity to exercise agency. Consequently, education, women's empowerment, and gender equity should be considered complementary dimensions of poverty eradication rather than isolated interventions.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, GENDER EQUITY AND POVERTY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN CROSS RIVER STATE

Over the years, education, women empowerment, gender equity programmes have been designed to eradicate poverty. These initiatives aimed at enhanced development, growth and socio-economic and educational citizenship development. This is done by offering financial services in form of loans to low income earners and increasingly recognized as a tool for fostering gender equity and economic independence, legal rights, and leadership skills through grants, education, and job training.

Some of the notable programmes include:

- Education and mentorship
- Nigeria for Women Project (NFWP)
- Financial Support
- Renewed Hope Initiative
- Skill Acquisition
- High-Level Corporate Leadership for Gender Equity
- Nigeria for Women Programme Scale-Up (NFWP-SU)
- Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP)
- Women in Self-Employment Programme (WISE-P)
- Women's Technological Empowerment Centre (W.TEC)
- Bank of Industry Gender-Oriented Loan (Glow)
- Women Impacting Nigeria (WIN)
- Nigeria Women Trust Fund

- Empower Her Financial Literacy

In Cross River State, formal initiative programmes include skill acquisition, education and mentorship, financial support, high level corporate leadership, Bank of Industry Gender-Oriented Loans, and Nigeria Women Trust Fund. These initiative programmes aim to recognize that women empowerment leads to strong families, community and socio-economic well-being of women, foster self-confidence, leaders and knowledge with a target goal of reducing/eradicating poverty in order to achieve greater equity in educational sector.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the relationship between education, women's empowerment, gender equity, and poverty eradication in Cross River State. The study population was drawn from three selected Local Government Areas, representing the three senatorial districts of the State. The target population comprised women, girls, and representatives of educational institutions within the selected communities. Primary data were collected through an intercept survey using a structured questionnaire designed to obtain information on education, women's empowerment, gender equity, and poverty eradication.

An initial sample of 150 respondents was selected using a convenience sampling technique. Of the 150 questionnaires administered, 125 were properly completed and returned, representing the valid responses used for analysis. The remaining 25 questionnaires were excluded because they were incomplete or did not meet the requirements for inclusion in the analysis. Consequently, the 125 valid responses constituted the final sample for the study. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis. The hypotheses formulated for the study were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

ADMINISTRATIVE PERSPECTIVE: STRUCTURATION THEORY

The study is anchored on Structuration Theory, developed by the British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984). The theory explains the reciprocal relationship between social structures and individual agency. It recognizes that individuals' actions are influenced and constrained by existing social structures, while individuals also possess the capacity to reproduce, modify, or transform those structures through their actions.

Structuration Theory provides a useful perspective for understanding women's empowerment because women's socioeconomic, cultural, and political participation is shaped by the structures within which they live and work. These structures include cultural norms, gender roles, institutional practices, economic conditions, political arrangements, and access to education and productive resources. At the same time, women are active agents who can challenge restrictive structures through education, skills acquisition, economic participation, leadership, and collective action.

From this perspective, socioeconomic challenges affecting women cannot be adequately understood in isolation from the structures and institutions that produce or reinforce them. Society is continuously produced and reproduced through social practices, and individuals participate in this process through their everyday actions. Education and empowerment can therefore strengthen women's agency and enable them to participate in transforming structures that perpetuate gender inequality and poverty.

Applied to this study, Structuration Theory provides a framework for explaining the relationship between women's empowerment, gender equity, and poverty eradication. In many communities, traditional gender norms and patriarchal practices have historically restricted women's participation in decision-making, economic activities, political leadership, and community development. Such practices can reproduce inequalities by limiting women's access to education, productive resources, employment, and positions of authority.

Women's empowerment can contribute to the transformation of these structures by increasing women's capacity to make decisions, access resources, participate in public affairs, and exercise greater control over their socioeconomic lives. Empowerment therefore involves not only improving women's individual capabilities but also transforming institutional and social arrangements that reinforce gender discrimination.

The theory is particularly relevant to the study because gender equity requires changes at both the individual and structural levels. Education can enhance women's knowledge and skills, while empowerment can strengthen their capacity to exercise agency. At the structural level, changes in policies, institutions, laws, cultural practices, educational systems, political institutions, healthcare systems, and economic arrangements can create more equitable opportunities for women. The interaction between individual agency and social structures can consequently contribute to improved participation, greater socioeconomic inclusion, and poverty eradication.

CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION, WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, GENDER INEQUALITY AND POVERTY ERADICATION IN CROSS RIVER STATE

Despite various educational and women's empowerment initiatives in Cross River State, significant challenges continue to constrain their effectiveness. Aderinoye (2001) notes that some government empowerment programmes may experience implementation difficulties because of inadequate funding, weak implementation mechanisms, unrealistic programme objectives, and contextual factors such as environmental conditions, population characteristics, topography, and technological limitations. These factors can affect the accessibility, sustainability, and effectiveness of interventions designed to improve women's socioeconomic conditions.

Other challenges identified by Ogbonna (2010) include inadequate accountability, bureaucratic bottlenecks, inter-agency conflicts, corruption, and weaknesses in financial management. Such institutional challenges can contribute to the poor implementation or abandonment of potentially beneficial empowerment programmes. Heavy dependence on limited sources of funding can also constrain the ability of government and non-governmental organizations to sustain women's empowerment initiatives.

Additional challenges include policy discontinuity, ineffective communication, economic instability, and inadequate infrastructure. Where programmes are not adequately funded, monitored, communicated, and sustained, their intended benefits may not reach women who are most vulnerable to poverty and exclusion. Addressing these challenges therefore requires stronger institutional coordination, transparent resource management, sustainable funding, effective monitoring and evaluation, and policies that respond to the specific socioeconomic circumstances of women in rural communities.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE STUDY

The demographic characteristics of the respondents provide important contextual information for interpreting the findings of the study. Gender: Of the 125 respondents, 35 (28.0%) were male, while 90 (72.0%) were female. Female respondents therefore constituted the majority of the sample, which is relevant to a study focusing on women’s empowerment, gender equity, and poverty eradication. Educational Qualification: Respondents with Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) constituted the largest reported educational category, with 40 respondents (32.0%). This was followed by respondents with NCE/OND qualifications, comprising 35 respondents (28.0%), and those with HND/B.Sc qualifications, comprising 30 respondents (24.0%). The remaining 20 respondents (16.0%) belonged to other educational categories not specified in the original table. Age Distribution: Respondents aged 26–35 years constituted the largest age group, with 84 respondents (66.4%), followed by those aged 36–45 years, with 33 respondents (26.4%), and those aged 18–25 years, with 8 respondents (6.4%). These figures account for 125 respondents. Occupation: Farming was the dominant occupation, accounting for 62 respondents (49.6%). This was followed by respondents engaged in skills acquisition, with 25 respondents (20.0%), and civil servants, with 21 respondents (16.8%). The remaining 17 respondents (13.6%) were engaged in other occupations.

In summary, the demographic profile indicates that the study was predominantly represented by women and respondents within the economically active age group. The high proportion of respondents engaged in farming also reflects the importance of agriculture and rural economic activities to the socioeconomic context of the study. The findings suggest that interventions involving education, skills acquisition, access to productive resources, and entrepreneurship could be relevant to strengthening women’s economic participation and capacity for self-employment and poverty reduction in the study area.

TABLE 1: VARIABLE FREQUENCY %

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	MALE	35	28
	FEMALE	90	72
Education	SSCE	40	32
	NCE / OND	35	28
	HND / B.Sc	30	24
	B.Sc post graduate	20	16
Age Distribution	18 – 25 years	8	6.4
	26 – 35 years	83	66.4
	36 – 45 years	33	26.4
	46 – above	1	0.8
Occupation	Farming	62	49.6
	Civil Servant	21	16.8
	Skill acquisition	25	20.0
	Business/Market	17	13.6

Source: Research Fieldwork

Based on the foregoing analysis, the study concludes that Table 1 indicates that the respondents were predominantly middle-aged, had SSCE-level education, and were engaged in farming.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS ONE

To address the first specific objective, which seeks to determine whether education, women's empowerment, and gender equity positively predict poverty eradication in Cross River State, the following null hypothesis was formulated:

H01: Education, women's empowerment, and gender equity do not have a significant predictive effect on poverty eradication in Cross River State.

To test this hypothesis, respondents' responses to Questions 5–8 of the questionnaire were analyzed. The responses obtained from these items were summarized and subjected to appropriate statistical analysis, as presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: EDUCATION, WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND POVERTY ERADICATION

S/N	STATEMENT	DEGREE OF ACCEPTANCE				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
5.	Is the education, women empowerment and poverty eradication near to us	7 (5.6)%	9 (7.2)%	5 (4.0)%	54/85 (68)%	50 (40)%
6.	Has Government made any effort toward eradicating poverty?	5 (4.0)%	Nil	7 (5.6)%	44 (35.2)%	59 (55.2)%
7.	Is the effort efficient or effective?	9 (7.2)%	7 (5.6)%	6 (4.8)%	40 (32)%	53 (50.4)%
8.	Are women involve in the decision	7 (5.6)%	10 (8.0)%	4 (3.2)%	60 (48)%	44 (35.2)%

Source: Researcher field work

To empirically determine whether education, women's empowerment, and gender equity positively predict poverty eradication in Cross River State, the responses to Questions 5–8 of the questionnaire were analyzed. The responses are presented in Table 3.

STEP 1

The responses were analyzed based on the degree to which respondents agreed or disagreed with the statements presented in the questionnaire. The distribution of responses provides an indication of respondents' perceptions regarding the contribution of education, women's empowerment, and gender equity to poverty eradication in Cross River State.

TABLE 3: EDUCATION, WOMEN EMPOWERMENT, GENDER EQUITY POSITIVELY PREDICTOR FOR POVERTY ERADICATION

ALTERNATIVE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
DISAGREE	28	22.4
AGREE	97	77.6
TOTAL	125	100

Source: Fieldwork

Table 3 shows that out of 125 respondents sampled, 28 representing 22.4% believe that Education, Women empowerment, gender equity can positively predict a postmortem analysis for poverty eradication, thereby failing to support a null hypothesis formulated while 97 (77.6)% held a converse view, i.e support for the null hypothesis. Statistically, the test was formulated using Z-score population test with the formula shown below:

$$Z = \frac{\bar{x} - p}{\frac{s}{\sqrt{n}}}$$

where:

Z = Z score calculated

n = Sample size

p = probability that H0 is true

$\bar{x}$ = supporting H0 respondent

S = Standard deviation

The hypothesis was tested with the formula 0.5 level significance.

TABLE 4: COMPUTATION OF STANDARD DEVIATION

ALTERNATIVES	x	$x - x^1$	$(x - x)^2$
Strongly disagree/ neutral / disagree	28	-45	2,025
Strongly agree / agree	97	45	2,025
Total	125	0	4,050

TABLE 5: THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES POSITIVELY PREDICTING THE POVERTY ERADICATION ANALYSIS

ALTERNATIVES	FREQUENCY OF MENTION	PERCENTAGE
UNACCEPTED	18	14.4
ACCEPTED	107	85.6
Total	125	100

From the table above, 107 respondents (85.6%) responded positively to the items measuring socioeconomic challenges, while 18 respondents (14.4%) responded negatively. This indicates that a substantial majority of the respondents perceived socioeconomic challenges as having a significant influence on poverty eradication in Cross River State, Nigeria. The result suggests that factors such as limited financial resources, inadequate access to productive opportunities, and other socioeconomic constraints are important considerations in efforts to reduce poverty in the State.

The statistical analysis of the socioeconomic challenge variables was further examined using the Z-score test. The computed result, including the relevant standard deviation and other statistical parameters, is presented in the table below.

ALTERNATIVES	x	$x - x^1$	$(x - x)^2$
UNACCEPTED	18	-34	1,156
ACCEPTED	107	34	1,156

The result implies that socioeconomic challenges have a significant influence on poverty eradication in Cross River State. Since the calculated Z-value (Z_c) is less than the tabulated Z-value (Z_t), the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, the study concludes that socioeconomic challenges have a significant predictive effect on poverty eradication in Cross River State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The main objective of the study was to determine the extent to which education, women's empowerment, and gender equity predict poverty eradication in Cross River State. The empirical

findings produced two major outcomes that provide a basis for interpretation and scholarly discussion.

Education, women's empowerment, and gender equity positively predict poverty eradication

The findings indicate that education, women's empowerment, and gender equity have a positive predictive effect on poverty eradication in Cross River State. The statistical analysis, including the Z-score test, provides empirical support for the relationship among these variables. The result suggests that improvements in educational opportunities, women's access to resources, and gender-equitable participation can strengthen women's socioeconomic capacity and contribute to poverty reduction. This finding is consistent with Egunjobi (2005), who emphasizes the importance of empowerment in promoting self-development, learning, and improved family welfare. Similarly, Ogbonna (2010) highlights the socioeconomic benefits of women's empowerment, including increased opportunities for self-employment, improved earning potential, enhanced productivity, and poverty reduction. The finding therefore reinforces the argument that investment in women's education and empowerment can contribute to improved household welfare and broader community development.

Socioeconomic challenges significantly influence poverty eradication

The second finding reveals that socioeconomic challenges have a significant predictive effect on poverty eradication in Cross River State. The result, supported by the Z-score analysis, suggests that poverty reduction cannot be separated from the socioeconomic conditions within which women and their households operate. This finding is consistent with the perspectives of Undie and Undie (2004) and Fafunwa (1971), who emphasize the importance of education, human behaviour, values, and social conditions in development. Challenges such as unemployment, poverty, inflation, food insecurity, inadequate funding, technological limitations, weak administrative systems, limited access to agricultural inputs, inadequate social amenities, and environmental constraints can restrict the capacity of women and households to improve their socioeconomic conditions. Addressing these challenges is therefore important for creating an enabling environment for education, women's empowerment, gender equity, and poverty eradication.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings have important implications for public policy and development planning in Cross River State. First, poverty eradication requires an integrated approach that combines education, women's empowerment, gender equity, employment creation, and socioeconomic development. Poverty is not only an income-related problem but is also associated with unequal access to education, productive resources, infrastructure, healthcare, employment, and decision-making opportunities.

Second, the effectiveness of empowerment programmes depends substantially on the quality of implementation. Weak implementation mechanisms, inadequate instructional materials, limited teaching and learning resources, unemployment, low household income, food insecurity, and inadequate infrastructure can reduce the effectiveness of policies intended to improve women's socioeconomic conditions. Aremu and Olakunsanmi (2025) identify factors such as beneficiaries' attitudes, low income, food insecurity, unemployment, and limited awareness as challenges that can affect development interventions.

Third, education policy should be responsive to the socioeconomic realities of rural communities.

Okoi (2007) argues that weaknesses in educational curriculum and implementation can contribute to socioeconomic disparities and differences in living standards. Educational programmes should therefore incorporate practical knowledge, vocational skills, entrepreneurship, digital literacy, agricultural development, and other competencies that can improve women's capacity to participate in productive activities.

The findings also indicate the need for greater investment in rural infrastructure and institutional capacity. Many rural communities remain constrained by inadequate roads, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, electricity, water supply, financial services, and productive infrastructure. Strengthening these facilities can improve access to economic opportunities and enhance the effectiveness of women's empowerment initiatives.

Furthermore, government at the federal, state, and local levels should strengthen collaboration in policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Effective coordination among government institutions, civil society organizations, development partners, and community-based organizations can improve the delivery and sustainability of empowerment programmes.

The study also underscores the importance of addressing gender disparities in education. Available evidence indicates substantial differences in literacy and educational opportunities between men and women in some Nigerian contexts. Such disparities can limit women's participation in economic activities, community leadership, and public decision-making. Policies aimed at improving women's educational attainment should therefore be integrated into broader poverty eradication and socioeconomic development strategies.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the relationship between education, women's empowerment, gender equity, socioeconomic challenges, and poverty eradication in Cross River State, Nigeria. The findings indicate that education, women's empowerment, and gender equity have a positive predictive effect on poverty eradication. The study also found that socioeconomic challenges significantly influence poverty eradication, demonstrating that women's empowerment cannot be considered independently of the economic, social, institutional, and environmental conditions in which women live and work.

Although various women's empowerment and poverty eradication initiatives exist, challenges associated with implementation, inadequate funding, weak monitoring mechanisms, institutional constraints, limited infrastructure, and unequal access to educational and economic opportunities may reduce their effectiveness. These challenges are particularly relevant in rural communities where women may have limited access to education, productive resources, finance, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

The study concludes that education should be treated as a central component of women's empowerment and poverty eradication. Equitable access to quality education can enhance women's knowledge, skills, confidence, economic participation, and decision-making capacity. Similarly, effective empowerment programmes can strengthen women's ability to participate in household, community, and economic activities.

The broader implication is that investment in women's education and empowerment can contribute to household welfare, community development, and national development. The often-used expression, "to educate a woman is to educate a nation," captures the wider developmental

significance of women's education, although sustainable poverty eradication also requires complementary interventions in employment, infrastructure, healthcare, finance, governance, and social protection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Improve access to education for women and girls.** Government should reduce financial, cultural, and institutional barriers that prevent women and girls from accessing quality education, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels. Targeted scholarships, financial assistance, adult literacy programmes, and community-based educational initiatives should be strengthened for disadvantaged women.
2. **Strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.** Government agencies and development organizations should establish effective monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure that financial resources and educational and empowerment interventions are implemented as planned and reach their intended beneficiaries. Transparency and accountability should be strengthened throughout programme implementation.
3. **Expand vocational and economic empowerment programmes.** Women should have greater access to vocational training, entrepreneurship development, financial literacy, cooperative and self-help groups, and appropriately designed microcredit schemes. These interventions should be linked to viable local economic opportunities to enhance women's participation in the labour market and income-generating activities.
4. **Improve rural infrastructure and social services.** Government should strengthen investment in rural roads, schools, healthcare facilities, electricity, water supply, digital connectivity, and other essential infrastructure. Improved infrastructure can enhance women's access to education, markets, employment, healthcare, and other productive opportunities.
5. **Promote gender-responsive policymaking.** Gender considerations should be integrated into education, employment, agricultural, social protection, and poverty eradication policies at federal, state, and local government levels. Women should also be adequately represented in community and institutional decision-making processes.
6. **Strengthen institutional coordination and programme sustainability.** Government institutions, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and development partners should improve coordination in the design, implementation, and evaluation of women's empowerment and poverty eradication programmes. This can reduce duplication, improve resource utilization, and promote programme continuity.

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