ISA Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISAJAHSS)

Homepage: https://isapublisher.com/isajahss/
Email: office.isapublisher@gmail.com
Volume 2, Issue 6, Nov-Dec - 2025 ISSN: 3049-1827

Exploring Thematic Concerns of Nigerian Female Writers about Girls' Education in Tertiary Institution: A Case Study of Students of the English Department of Osun State College of Education, Ilesa

Akinyeye Clara Olajumoke

Department of English, Osun State College of Education, Ilesa

Received: 15.09.2025 | **Accepted:** 18.10.2025 | **Published:** 18.11.2025

***Corresponding Author:** Akinyeye Clara Olajumoke

DOI: *10.5281/zenodo.17642431*

Abstract **Original Research Articles**

This study explores the thematic concerns of Nigerian female writers on girls' education with a focus on tertiary institutions, using a case study of Osun State College of Education Ilesa. A field research approach was adapted to examine real – world experiences that validate, mirror, or challenge the themes represented in selected literary texts. The methodology adapted an explanatory sequential mixed method design structured in two phases: a quantitative stage that identifies broad trends and a qualitative stage that explains and deepens the interpretation of those results, (Creswell & Plano Clerk, 2018). The literary analysis centred on Buchi Emecheta's Second Class Citizen, Stella Dia Oyedepo's Brain Has No Gender, and Maryam Bukar Hassan's "Peace Begins with Me" to identify recurring issues limiting girls' education in tertiary institutions. Guided by the cultural studies framework, the research uncovered how cultural norms and proverbial sayings embed oppressive structures that constrain female empowerment and access to education. The findings revealed financial constraints and sexual harassment as the major challenges limiting girls' education in tertiary institution in Osun State. The study recommends policy reforms, stronger institutional support, effective punitive measures against offenders, and financial interventions from government and humanitarian organizations to foster gender equity in education..

Keywords: Girls' Education, Cultural Studies, Nigerian Female Writers, Gender Equity, Tertiary Institutions, Patriarchy.

INTRODUCTION

Education is believed to be the major agent of women's liberation and empowerment with which women activists like Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Hafsat Abiola Costello, Oby Ezekwesili, Aisha Yesufu, Joy Okei Odumakin, and Ngozi Okonjo – Iweala were empowered to express themselves, assert their rights to be heard and influence history due to the form of western education that they were privileged to receive. Although, there are women with little or no western education like Gambo Sawaba, Madam Tinubu, Alimatu Pelewera, Nana Asmau who impacted the nation, thus demonstrating that lack of formal education does not constitute a barrier to significance livelihood, but these ones are few among the multitude of women whose progresses have been stunted due to lack of the benefits of formal education. Babatunde Fafunwa, a Nigerian former Minister of Education, views education as "… a process of transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth and for disseminating of knowledge either to ensure social control or guarantee rational direction of the society" (p.17). Emmanuel Yoloye, a leading educational psychologist, captures the importance of formal education aptly as he describes it as "… a weapon for combating ignorance, poverty and disease, as a bridge between confusion and comprehension…"

(p.190)

The assertions from these academic gurus confirm the need of formal education for all and sundry. If Nigerian females are to contribute meaningfully to nation – building and communal progress in this advanced technological age, as nature ascribed moulders and nurturers of future leaders, they need more quality education than the ones accorded to Madam Efunroye Tinubu, Folorunso Alakija, Nana Asmau, and Ladi Dosei Kwali among others. The necessity of upholding the five main national goals of education, as the foundation of building a democratic nation founded on the principles of: freedom, equality and justice goes without gainsaying that Nigeria can only achieve its intent of "a dynamic economy, egalitarian society, strong and self – reliant nation with a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens" (NPE, 2014) when the female gender is given her dues at all levels.

Nigerian female writers' stance on gender inequality

The position of women in Nigerian societies that showcases inequalities, disillusionment, inferiority, limited life opportunities, sub – standard living conditions cannot be better expressed than in the agonising, heart – rending rhetorical question in prayer form of a female protagonist in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* who desperately asks "God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage? (p.153). The Nigerian female writers across the nation's six geo – political zones believe that the most corrective measure that can deter societal retrogression and promote female liberation, identity, self – discovery, social justice and activism is education as a tool for necessary social change.

Avid writers that explore and analyse such thematic concerns, advocating for a more inclusive and empowering educational environments for Nigerian female students in tertiary institutions are many, prominent among them are found in literary genres such as novels, short stories, drama texts, and poetry to create awareness of gender discrimination which exclude girls from quality education and social mobility. Stella Dia Oyedepo's *Brain Has No Gender*, Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, and Maryam Bukar Hassan's "Peace Begins With Me" poetry for social change are tools utilized by these writers to advocate for worthy living, not mere physical existence for all females.

The few listed above disclose female voices on gender disparity abhorred by all, their writings indicate general disapproval of female marginalization and advocation for the vulnerable, weaker human vessels whose voices have not been listened to by Nigerian policy makers. It is expected that policy makers who would want to adhere to the principle of an "egalitarian society" would explore every avenue to awaken and rightfully inform Nigerian young minds of their moral obligations to curb the evil trends embedded in gender inequalities. Recommending the literary texts that will engender fairness, equity and justice in the youth as they intellectually develop is what an exposure to such literary texts and others of such thematic preoccupation can bring about.

This study will, therefore, explore the concerns of the Nigerian writers through their recurring themes on girls' education, challenges facing female education in tertiary institutions and profer solutions to the incessant negative image of women in terms of self – discovery and assertion, empowerment and advocacy to ensure a holistic definition of womanhood in Nigeria using Osun State as a case study.

Statement of the Problem

Gender discourse has been an integral part of tertiary education's curriculum in Colleges of Education and Universities in Nigeria. But non – inclusion of gender studies in the overall syllabi of non – language related disciplines limit the exposure of Nigerian tertiary institution students to what constitute the development of the affective domain. The traditional gender biases inculcated in the average male remains inherent even when such a person is supposedly educated. Thus, that which could have served as a means of a transformation remains a tool of marginalization which can only be a disservice to an inclusive and progressive society in the country.

The study aspires to identify the undervalued contributions of Nigerian female writers and call the attention of all to the importance of including and supporting gender studies as a general course for all undergraduates in all institutions. Such exposure will open progressive doors in human relationships, and the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that pertains to women wellbeing on quality education, decent work and economic growth and strong institutions expressed in goals 4, 5, 8, 16 respectively will become a reality in the state.

Objectives of the study

The specific objectives are to:

- Identify the recurring thematic concerns of the Nigerian female writers and the challenges facing female students in accessing quality education in Osun State tertiary institutions.
- Align the female students, union leaders, counselor, literary students and administrators' perspectives with the writers' concerns to establish how both connect to reveal the social realities of girls' education.

Research Questions

- What major themes do the Nigerian female writers explore in relation to female education in tertiary institutions?
- What perspectives do the study's stake holders – students and staff have on factors affecting girls' education and how do their opinions align with the writers' concerns?

Significance of the study

In view of the fact that the idea of female suppression is fast becoming obsolete, this study is of utmost importance to assert the right of women as a fraction of humanity that need to participate in nation – building. The study's attempt to address salient issues that limit their potentialities and useful contribution to societal development need a re – visit. This study will provide a platform for the voice, experiences and recommendations of Nigerian female writers on girls' education discourse and apply it to Osun State students' social reality as far as education is concerned.

Scope of the study

This study purposively examines the challenges confronting girls' education in Osun State, with particular attention to the constraints, aspirations, and other limiting factors that shape struggles for self – liberation, empowerment, and access to formal education. It focuses on relevant literary works published between 1974 – 2024 that thematically highlight the experiences of Nigerian female students in their pursuit of western education.

The scope of the study is clearly defined. It excludes male – authored texts, works by female writers beyond the Nigerian geographical space, and poetic renditions in the form of music or films. Similarly, texts that do not significantly foreground girls' education as a central theme fall outside the study's purview. To bridge the gap between fictional representation and lived reality, the study incorporates an empirical dimension. Students of the English Department, Osun State College of Education, Ilesa, will serve as a case study, thereby providing perspectives that ground the literary analysis in the lived experiences of female students in Osun State.

Cultural Studies theory

The reflective questions raised by Hooks (1990), Hall (1997), Ogundipe – Leslie (1994) and Adichie (2012) prompt every advocate of social progress to view the cultural studies framework as an indispensable tool for this research. Their three – fold challenges – "Whose stories are being told? Whose voices are being silenced? And how can we use culture not just to mirror society but to transform it?" – interrogate entrenched patriarchal hegemony, power relations, and the dynamics of intersectionality.

The field of cultural studies provides the critical tools to see culture as a space where meaning is constantly negotiated. Thinkers such as Anthonio Gramsci (1971), Stuart Hall (1997), Judith Butler (1990), and Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) affirm that culture reflects struggles over power, identity and belonging. These struggles reveal how daily practices reproduce

old inequalities while also creating opportunities for resistance and new possibilities.

Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony explains how gender inequality becomes normalized – where patriarchal control through law, custom, and ideology appears not only natural but reasonable. (Gramsci 1971, pp.12-13). For instance, the belief that a woman's "proper place" is in the kitchen circulates as common sense. Yet, this stereotype is increasingly challenged by articulate female voices whose creativity contests such assumptions (Ogundipe – Leslie, 1994, pp.27-28).

Stuart Hall expands this by demonstrating that representation is never fixed but flexible depending on who interprets meaning (Hall, 1997, p.61). Thus, the modern Nigerian woman may be portrayed either through patriarchal lenses as subordinate or through her own self – retrieval, liberated identity as a lawyer, doctor, engineer, or educator. Hall and Raymond Williams insist that culture is not only a "way of life" but also a site of ideological contestation (Williams, 1983, pp.87-88) – an axiom that resonates with the gendered power structures limiting women's empowerment while advancing male socio – political mobility.

As an interdisciplinary field, cultural studies therefore becomes a viable framework for critiquing societal attitudes toward women, especially as women's fiction provides a mirror for both diagnosis and transformation (Adichie, 2012, pp.12-13), Gramsci's hegemony, Hall's representation, Butler's gender performativity, and Crenshaw' intersectionality all contribute to a framework that confronts prejudice and works to correct historical imbalances. Thus, the initial reflective questions – whose stories are being told? Whose voices are being silenced? And how can we use culture not just to mirror society but to transform it? – become the guiding lens through which this study is analyzed.

Literature Review

The thematic concerns of Nigerian female writers have consistently revolved around the struggle for gender equality, access to education, and the dismantling of patriarchal structures that limit women's empowerment. By engaging with texts such as Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1974), Stella Dia Oyedepo's *Brain Has No Gender* (2001), and Maryam Bukar Hassan' poem "Peace Begins With Me" (2024), this review situates literary voices within the broader discourse of cultural studies. Using the cultural studies framework, the review interrogates how literature not only reflects but actively challenges societal ideologies that sustain female subjugation, while also noting gaps that the current study addresses.

Emechata and the Struggle for Liberation through Education

Hanane Sadouk and Lydia Bennouar (2019) in *Patriarchy, Gender Discrimination and Resistance in Buchi Emecheta's Second Class Citizen*, explore how patriarchal oppression and gender discrimination deny women their fundamental rights. For them, Emecheta underscores education as the most denied but also the most effective tool of liberation for women. Similarly, J. Farida and Vidya Dass (2020), *Critical Analysis of Buchi Emecheta's Selected Novels*, show how cultural norms and gender roles suppress women's agency, particularly in education. In *Second Class Citizen*, Adah's liberation emerges from her determination to pursue education despite societal pressures that confine Nigerian women to domesticity.

Raibhole Pradip Marotirao (2017) critiques Emecheta's portrayal of women as commodities within Nigerian cultural heritage, noting that Adah realizes "nobody is interested in her for her own sake, only in the money she would fetch and the house work she could do" (p.588). This portrayal captures the intersection of economic dependency and cultural oppression that education helps to break. Shiloh Jeya Jeevan (2024), in *Patriarchal Subjugation and Female Liberation in Buchi Emecheta's Second Class Citizen*, expands this discourse, arguing that Emecheta presents resistance, resilience, and education as women's strongest tools against subjugation. While Adah gains some financial independence, she is still "enslaved as the one laying the golden eggs" through her financial support, underscoring the complex entanglement between empowerment and burden.

Oyedepo and Theatrical Resistance to Patriarchal Norms

Stella Dia Oyedepo's drama also engages with education as a pathway to women's empowerment. Okolocha and Akhuemokhan (2023), in their study *The Violation of Women's Right*: Transformative Processes in Julie Okoh's *Edewede and Stella Dia Oyedepo's Brain Has No gender*, highlight how Oyedepo uses theatre to condemn forced marriage, preference for male children, and the denial of education to the girl – child. These practices are framed as barriers to societal development.

Similarly, Amaefula (2018) critiques Oyedepo's theatrical approach, particularly in *Rebellion of the Bumpy – Chested*, as bordering on radical feminism, but acknowledges her advocacy for complementarity – where both men and women collaborate in achieving gender justice. In *Brain Has No Gender*, Oyedepo frames education as the right path to liberation from ignorance, offering theatre not merely as representation but as social intervention.

Bukar Hassan and the Poetics of Social Justice

Maryam Bukar Hasssan brings a contemporary poetic voice into the discourse. Oladipupo (2021) underscores her promotion of social justice, youth empowerment, and cultural relevance, arguing that her spoken – word poetry serves as art for activism. Hassan's designation as a UN Global Advocate for Peace enriches her work, making her not only a literary but also a socio – political actor. Her rhetorical question – "if education is light, why did it for the girl child?" – Directly confronts the cultural denial of women's right. Through cultural studies, Hassan's poetry contests dominant ideologies that portray the world as solely male, demanding justice, reform, and advocacy for equity in Nigeria.

Culture as Problem and Site of Solution

Williams (1976) provides a theoretical anchor by defining culture as "ordinary, the range of expressions and representations which produced a whole society in its reflections upon itself" (p.7). This totalizing definition highlights how cultural norms, including proverbial sayings, shape gender expectations. For instance, Owomoyela (2025) documents Yoruba proverbs that reinforce patriarchal ideologies, such as *Obirin kii je Ikumolu* ("A woman cannot bear a warrior's appellation"), which restricts female authority. Similarly, northern proverbs collected by Uwakwe (1995) depict women as possessions without autonomy. These cultural idioms entrench gender inequality but also form the basis from which writers like Emecheta, Oyedepo and Hassan construct resistance.

Okechukwu (2025) further argues that gender representation in Nigerian literature can foster critical thinking and support inclusive social outcomes. Literature becomes both a mirror and a tool for reimagining society. Thus, cultural studies provide an enabling lens to analyze not only how culture sustains patriarchal hegemony but also how it offers a platform for interpreting and transforming gender roles.

Points of convergence and Gaps in Scholarship

Across the reviewed literature three major points of convergence emerge. First, education is consistently framed as the central tool for women's empowerment. Second, literature is never merely representational; it intervenes by challenging silence, advocating reform, and addressing communities and policy makers directly. Thirdly, culture emerges as both a barrier and a potential solution, since proverbs and cultural practices entrench inequality but can also be contested and reframed toward justice.

Nevertheless, gaps remain. While Emecheta's and Oyedepo's works have received global critical engagement, Hassan's poetic activism is yet to enter academic corridors where it could influence research and policy debates. Moreover, most existing studies remain interpretive, with limited engagement in combining literary analysis with empirical realities. None of the reviewed works directly connect cultural ideologies with field – based experiences of students in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. It is within this gap that the present study situates itself. By bringing together literary analysis and field research from the Osun State College of Education, Ilesa, the study demonstrates how the thematic concerns of Nigerian female writers – particularly around education, cultural oppression, and gender empowerment –

continue to resonate in the everyday struggles of female students.

Research Design

The study will adopt a mixed method approach that entails the collection and analysis of quantitative data through structure questionnaires, but unlike conventional explanatory sequential approach that often employs interviews or focus groups in the qualitative phase, this study will engage in the literary analysis of relevant texts as its interpretive component because the selected texts embody the cultural, ideological, and experiential contexts that frame participants' responses, thus offering a richer lens, through which to understand the statistical trend.

Population of the study, Sample and Sampling Techniques

The study population and sampling consist of all female students across all academic programmes offered in the Department of English. These include the NCE, Sandwich Degree, and full – time Degree students mentored academically by the Osun State College of Education Ilesa. Questionnaires will be administered to health workers, union leaders, college counselors, academic advisors, and administrators. The quantitative data will address sub – themes such as access to education, institutional support, and experiences of bias, provisions for health and mental care, and issues of safety.

From this population, a representative sample of students will be selected using stratified random sampling, ensuring that each programme (NCE, Sandwich, and Degree) is proportionately represented. For the qualitative aspect, the literary texts themselves are purposively sampled based on their thematic relevance to girls' education, gender equity, and empowerment.

This multi – level sampling strategy ensures that both quantitative and qualitative data are collected from diverse, relevant, and representation sources, thereby enhancing the validity and depth of the study whereby the dramatist Stella Dia Oyedepo contribute to the tradition of socially committed theatre in Nigeria, Buchi Emecheta is a confirmed pioneer of Nigerian women's writing in diaspora, while Maryam Bukar Hassan is a contemporary performance poet whose poetic imagery and rhythm immensely serve as the feminine voices for dignity, equity and empowerment.

Research Instruments: Structured Questionnaire, Literary Analysis Guide and Cultural Study Lens

Structured questionnaire was employed as an instrument to gather information from all stakeholders, and the selected texts, comprising prose, poetry and drama by Nigerian female authors, were analysed. It consisted of both closed and open – ended questions organised into sections covering demographic information, institutional perceptions gender equity, awareness of educational barriers faced by female students and the use of literature as a tool for shaping attitudes toward educational policies on gender discourse. The cultural study lens will be applied to interpret how the selected texts depict gender discrimination, female resistance and agency, education as a tool for liberation, and the ways in which negative cultural predispositions affect the educational progress of the girl – child.

Ethical Consideration

The study obtained informed consent from all participants and respondents regarding the purpose, nature, and scope of the research, which explored thematic concerns related to girls' education in tertiary institutions in Osun State tertiary institutions using students of English Department, Osun State College of Education as case study.

Diagram I

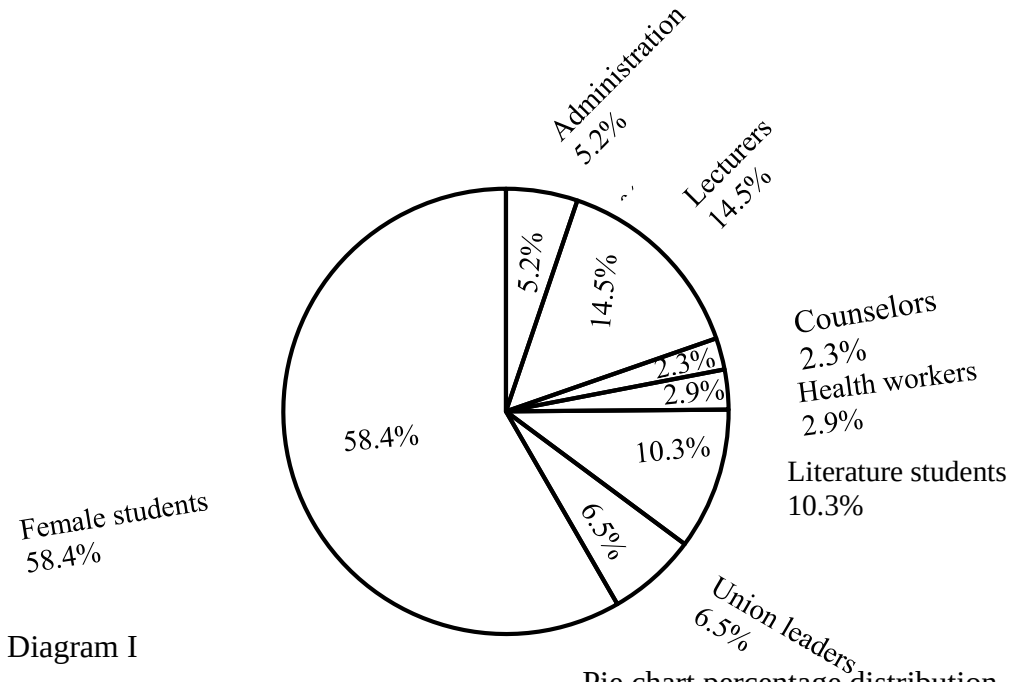


Diagram I

Pie chart percentage distribution on the total of 310 respondents.

Pie chart on Summary Formation of Respondents

Analytical Discussion on Pie Chart Distribution

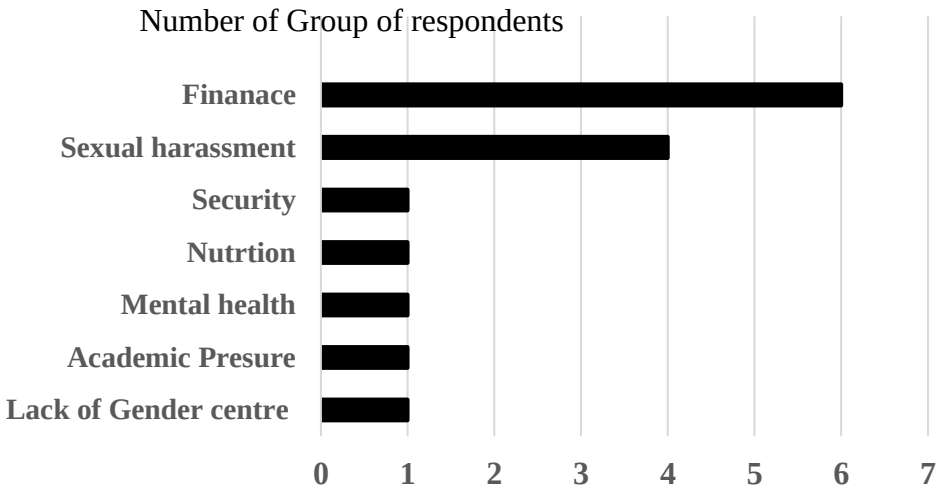
The pie chart above reflects 310 respondents on the survey carried out on the research topic. 58.4% are female students, a domineering figure that reflect their critical role in providing first – hand information on gender challenges in education. Significantly, 15.4% among them highlights challenges of gender awareness, indicating a gap in widespread awareness, all of them agreed on the importance for support and intervention for girls' education through scholarship, mentorship and advocacy, while their value for the intellectual voices of female writers' fiction for all schoolers is also fully registered.

The 14.5% of the respondents that form the academic staff evinced inclusivity of learning materials, and support financial provision for girls' education while recommending policy change in literary education that inform all learners on gender discourse. The 6.5% union leaders advocate for policy change that strengthens system reforms through gender studies centre. The 2.3% counselors unanimously agreed on the financial constrained of female students while suggesting gender centre provision. The 2.9% health workers opined for organised mental health talk and trained female staff to manage peculiar female health challenges.

The 5.2% representing the administrators identified financial constraints, pregnancy issues while supporting scholarship, mentorship and public lecture in gender balance as a means to translate gender sensitive insights. In essence, the policy change recommendation by literature students (10.3% of the respondents) and the lecturers (14.5%) reflect their awareness of the issues at stake and their voices to transform societal attitude to female education generally.

Diagram II

The diagram reflects the topmost three (3) identified barriers in survey.



The bar highlights the frequencies of the most significant barriers mentioned by the six groups of respondents. 83% of the identified challenges are economic and gender – related issues (10 out of 12), while other factors like infrastructure deficiencies, mental health, academic pressure, security and female mentorship are not considered to be utmost barriers to the pursuit of female academic success in the institution.

Finance, as the identified most critical hindrance is in consonance with previous findings in studies across Nigerian tertiary institution, this constrains is followed by sexual harassment, in a persistent gender – based threat, while security, nutritional deficiencies, academic pressure and non-availability of gender – centred are of equal – rank among the identified problems confronting female education in the institution. To sum up, financial constraints, gender – based barriers are of utmost priorities, while other also significant factors are visible problems that need to be addressed.

Literary Analysis

The textual analysis focuses on selected works by Nigerian female writers: Stella Dia Oyedepo's *Brain Has No Gender*, Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* as well as Maryam Bukar Hassan's "Peace Begins with Me". These works were deliberately chosen because they directly engage with central themes of the study, particularly the challenges and prospect of girls' education in Nigeria.

Binary Power Relations in Stella Dia Oyedepo's *Brain Has No Gender*.

Nigerian female writers such as Stella Dia Oyedepo and Zainab Jallo, to mention some, are not merely entertainers but truth – tellers and advocates for social transformation. Through their creativity, they enlighten society about the complex realities of women's experiences, particularly in relation to gender inequality in accessing quality education, unfair sexism in employment opportunities, and other forms of injustice.

As contemporary voices, their works issue a call for redress by depicting empathetic situations that force the girl-child into early marriage, subjective poverty, and domestic violence while struggling to navigate the literate world. For instance, Stella Dia Oyedepo's *Brain Has No gender* and Felicia Onyewadume's *Echoes of Hard Times* interrogate entrenched patriarchal power relations in Nigerian society. Oyedepo, in particular, condemns the society norms that equate gender with intellectual capability. The domestication of women, force and early marriages and age – incompatible unions are critically exposed

as the playwrights assert that intelligence and potential – rather than gender – are the true determinants of intellectual advancement and self – actualization.

Synopsis of Oyedepo's *Brain Has No Gender*

As the title suggests, the play underscores the idea that intelligence is not the exclusive property of any particular of sex. The female protagonist's father, Alani, embodies patriarchal beliefs that confine women to the kitchen, the bedroom, or perpetual male supervision. Guided by this mindset, the only daughter permitted an education, Osomo, is eventually forced into marriage with an eighty – year – old man, a decision motivated by her father's desire to enrich his purse and elevate his traditional status. Osomo is compelled to flee the octogenarian's house in order to become self – actualized, heard, and relevant in her own generation. Her father, Alani, abandons and causes the death of his female triplets and even involve extreme measures such as fetish rituals at midnight with Osomo as the carrier of the sacrifice, in his desperate quest for a male heir. The only daughter he allows to acquire formal education demonstrates outstanding intellectual ability with the potential to become a medical doctor. Yet Alani still attempts to withdraw her from school, forcing her into marriage with an aged man, thereby subordinating her future to cultural greed and patriarchal gain.

After eight years, Osomo returns to her family home as a qualified medical doctor. Osomo uses her expertise to treat the sick in her community, beginning with her own father Alani, now confronted with the consequences of his prejudice, regrets his hostility toward his daughter's ambition. In a dramatic reversal, he restores his wife to her rightful place in the household and decrees that all his daughters must attend school. He pleads for forgiveness and vows to embrace a new life style that recognises and upholds equal educational opportunities for both male and female children.

Binary Power Relations in Oyedepo's *Brain Has No Gender*

Binary power relations showcase opposing categories where one side is usually dominant and the other marginalized. In a patriarchal society like Nigeria, a male child is usually privileged while the female is consciously subordinated. Stella Dia Oyedepo uses the drama text *Brain Has No Gender* to critique this absurd human structure that assign more value, authority and legitimacy to one gender at the expense of the other one. In the play, Osomo's personal dedication to her ambition to become a medical doctor thrives. Although her father does all he could to frustrate her dreams but she overcomes the hurdles of being a girl – child where educational opportunity is gendered.

Alani, Osomo's father, narrates his ordeals in seeking for a male child:

… I have done un-imaginable things. There was a time I had to feast on the faeces of a pig seven days… At another time, I had to endure the creepy days… Inspite of all my efforts, my seven wives keep delivering female children (p.10).

His bigoted prioritization of male children over female is rooted in his Yoruba cultural root enshrines in the proverbial saying like "Kosi ni ilu, ilu baje, Baale ile ku, ile dahoro" (when the head of a household dies, the home becomes desolate). This is because in traditional Yoruba society, both the town and the household were organised around male authority. This cultural heritage makes fetish doctors capitalize on his desperation to become a father of male children. Ifalani, the Ifa priest dispossesses him of his material wealth, instructs him to "dance around the town with your friends and relations and when that fails to yield the expected result, the only daughter, Osomo, that he permits to attend school is mandated to carry the cleansing sacrifice. Unfortunately, his belief that "once you educate a woman, she can no longer be a good wife" (p.3) makes him to impose an aged suitor on the enlightened girl. Patriarchal culture permits a father to dictate whom the children will marry, so Alani wield this paternal ax not only to impose an octogenarian on a sixteen – year old, but to also frustrate her dream of self – actualization to become a medical practitioner.

Alani does not have the vision of a daughter who walks the corridor of power in the midst of male contemporaries. His world view is captured in the

Yoruba cultural saying "Omokunrin ni joogun ile baba re" (it is the male child who inherits his father's house). This reflection of traditional inheritance patterns favouring sons over daughters justifies his decision to marry off his daughters "as soon as they see their first period" (p.32). To him, the female child must not be intellectually liberated from male – defined limitations and gender roles. Fortunately, his plan to truncate a life destined to be useful is thwarted as providence places helpers along the daughter's route to become an asset medically.

Moreover, Alani's expectation of a voiceless daughter is ridiculous as he boasts "… she is a bastard if she doesn't obey me… How will she refuse a husband I have chosen for her?" (p.31). His paternal ego and dominance is so absolute that he does not see the need to either inform or involve the girl in the marriage plan before he gave his consent to the aged suitor. But an educated mind can no longer be caged, Osomo jettisons the ridiculous plan and flees to become a medical life wire who provides health care to her community later. Osomo affirms her medical pledge saying "I have resolved to devote the rest of my life to research in science to prove to the whole world that women too have got brains for scientific knowledge" (p.54).

Her misguided father eventually sees her as "a child in a million. A daughter who has done what a thousand sons cannot do" (p.52). Oyedepo's *Brain Has No gender* thus critiques the traditional mindset of a culturally imbued Nigerian parent who equalizes female education to challenging masculine pride and culturally allocated space. Osomo is able to resist stereotypes and assert her intellectual capacity thus dismantling the male / female binary in education. The playwright succeeded in proving to the patriarchal society that if given the chance, every girl – child is a potential academic success since cognitive capacity is not gendered.

Cultural Studies Theory in *Brain Has No Gender*

The play reflects the Yoruba cultural world view that prioritizes male children, as the male is regarded as indispensable pillar of order who ensures continuity, secures ancestral rite, and provides the stability needed within the family. A Yoruba proverb states " Omokurin nii je opa itage" (the son is the staff of support) which underscores the traditional belief that female children are considered temporary members of the family, whose primary role is to "bring wealth" as adages go "Omobirin leru iyawo, ti a fi n ra oko tuntun"; "iyawo rere lo n mu ori oko re ga" (A daughter is the bride – wealth with which a new farm is acquired) and (A good wife elevates her husband's fortunes) respectively. These two common adages among others stereotype women's role to enhance the household's financial status.

This domestic status is expected to be sustained from generation to generation until Oyedepo's creative work highlight insightful way that a female child can impact her family without being intellectually diminished. The single – handed determination of Osomo to cultivate her intelligence for societal progress leads to her father's submission and set as a pathfinder for other females. Oyedepo's creativity thus dispels societal tension around girls' education, challenged entrenched gender injustice and call for a cultural change that reshape gender discourse.

Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* as Agency and Resistance of Patriarchal Hegemony

Synopsis of Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*

The female protagonist, Adah, has an undaunted passion for western education which her parents are compelled to support after a corrective session with the police and warning to her mother, who had allowed the enrolment of a son in a fee – paying school while Adah could only peep through the classroom window. The early death of Adah's father might have ended her educational ambition, but through resilience and determination, she survives the hardship of living with an unsympathetic Uncle who preferred her domestic service over her learning. Adah secures a scholarship for post – primary education, which sustains her dream.

At sixteen, she marries Francis, partly due to her lack of a home and his ambition to further his studies. When Francis gains admission to study accounting in the UK, Adah joins him two years after he left Nigeria. However, the reality of their marriage in the so – called "civilized" country becomes a mirage. Francis, driven by cultural entitlement, views

himself as the overlord who must be pampered, protected, and provided for by his wife. For Adah, this is compounded by the harsh reality of racial discrimination that relegates non – whites to the status of Second – Class Citizen in Britain.

Determined to succeed, Adah rises above the waters of inferiority through her academic achievements and writing talent. She not only fends for her children's education but also bear the burden of rent, feeding, and healthcare for the family. Her dream of literacy, first nurtured at the age of eight is fulfilled as she engages in writing and begins to make her mark as a writer. Her plight reflects the Igbo cultural psychology that privileges men, declaring: "men never do wrong, only the women; they have to beg for forgiveness, because they are bought, paid for and must remain like that, silent, obedient slaves" (p.172).

Adah's attempt to break free from her status as a "Second – Class Citizen" is symbolized in her purchase of school exercise books to begin her creative writing. Her manuscript. The *Bride Price*, is burned by Francis, who insists: "I have read it, and my family would never be happy if a wife of mine was permitted to write a book like that" (p.189). This act becomes the last straw, especially as Adah recalls her colleagues' praise for the work. She leaves Francis's lodging and embraces the responsibility of catering for the five children alone.

Second Class Citizen as Agency and Resistance to Patriarchal Hegemony.

Igbo traditional norms that prioritizes male children serve as a mitigating force limiting girls' educational opportunities and socio – economic mobility. This dominant cultural ideology legitimizes the exclusion of women from decision – making bodies, access to health care and employment opportunities, and equal participation in education in Nigeria. Although the migrated couple no longer directly faces these institutionalized biases in Europe, Francis's ingrained cultural mindset remains unchanged. To him,

A woman was a second – class citizen, to be slept with at any time, even during the day, and if she refused, to have sense beaten into her until she gave in, to be ordered out of bed after he had done with her; to make sure she washed his clothes and got his meals ready at the right time. There was no need to have an intelligent conversation with his wife because you see, she might start getting ideas (p.183).

The subjugation that western culture does not impose on women living abroad is firmly reinforced by the Nigerian patriarchal norms in which Francis was born and bred. Adah, however, refuses to wallow in self – pity or abandon her childhood dreams of self – actualization through education. Instead, she asserts her right to be respected and proactively engages in literary development striving to overcome the initial challenges of creative writing. Thus, Adah, an exemplary Nigerian female resists patriarchal hegemony, female abuse and cultural oppression by using her writing skill to improve both her standard of living and the conditions of female identity through her intellectual and creative pursuits as emphasized by Molara Ogundipe's encouragement to women to surmount "The mountainous forces of patriarchy, tradition and colonial legacies (p.88).

Emecheta's Adah also challenges Chandra Talpade Mohanty's portrayal of non – whites women as passive victims of racism. In *Second Class Citizen*, Adah emerges instead as an active agent who resists racial oppression aligning more closely with bell hooks' conception of racial resistance as she employs her creative skills to become a voice both for her gender and her race.

Cultural Studies Framework as a Tool for Exploring Girls' Education in Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*

Igbo cultural values exhibited in *Second Class Citizen* are central to understanding how Adah's and Francis's marital journey is shaped from its inception in Nigeria. In Igbo traditional norms, the wife and all her possessions belong to the husband. As the oral tradition goes, "Nwanyi bu nwunye, obughimmadu" (A woman is a wife, not a person) and "Agbogho anaghi ahu chi ya ruo mgbe O luru di" (A girl does not see her god until she marries). Both proverbs among others reduce a woman's destiny, possessions and self – realization to marriage which more or less reinforces patriarchal control.

This dominant cultural ideology transforms Francis into a caricature of a family head, one who fails to adhere to a vital cultural role in the same cultural heritage; "O bun woke na – ebu ulo" is the Igbo proverbs that sees men as the backbone of the household, attributing women's labour to a complementary role since the proverb means "It is the man who carries the house or family". But to Francis whose father's applause of his choice of a wife reinforces his dependency, he shamelessly informs his woman to, "… pay for me, look after yourself and within three years I'll be back…" (p.26). the foundation of this instruction is laid by the father who reminds him of the wife allegiance to her home, asking "…where will she take the money to? … (p.22). Such cultural hegemony overindulges Francis, turning him into a financial burden that Adah must carry until the marriage collapses.

Adah's marital role is narrowly defined: to finance her husband, shower his parents with gifts, supports her sisters – in -law's education, and care for her young children while "rotting in the process" (p.27). Francis thus relinquishes his traditional position of financial headship to affirm the adage that "Nwanyi bu isi ulo" (The woman is the head of the money)" is more of what is originally intended to mean in his family. For while men are often seen as providers, the culture accords the respect of seeing the wife as the true manager and sustainer of the household, but in this case, she is not just the manager but also the provider.

Even after joining Francis abroad, the marriage is further strained by racial prejudice in Britain, which Francis readily accepts, while Adah resists. Francis cultural expectation that a wife's mind must be subdued by her husband undermines Adah's pursuit of career, dignity, and academic progression. His repeated exam failures and refusal to work compel Adah to fend solely for her children. This attracts another cultural belief that "Okwa nne ka Okwa nna" meaning "a mother's position is greater than a father's" especially when the father is like the biblical Esau who does not attach any importance to his birthright. Francis's parasitic lifestyle even draws rebuke from fellow Igbo student, Mr Okpara, whose wife refuses such indulgence.

The weight of Adah's struggles grows heavier with the birth of her fifth child. Her husband insists that the marital ordinance is final, but Adah boldly counters his hypocrisy: "… was there a month when your father did not pay the rent, give food money, pay for all your school fees?... No, Francis, you broke the laws of our people first, not me…" (p.191). through such acts of defiance, Adah reclaims her agency and challenges patriarchal expectations.

Her fight for self – actualization further illustrates the cultural obstacles girls face among the Igbo – and by extension, in other Nigerian societies, particularly in the north, as reflected in Bukar Hassan poetry. Adah lies to raise money for her post – primary entrance form, endures homelessness while completing school, and loses the chance for tertiary education because as a single woman she had no secured lodging. Even her marriage, which once promised hope with a young and educated Francis, collapses under cultural expectations and parental interference. Adah's turn to literacy and advocacy becomes her milestone of resistance, showing how education can empower women against oppressive structures.

Through the cultural studies lens, *Second Class Citizen* reveals how entrenched cultural values not only shape but also hinder women's educational and personal growth. Emecheta demonstrates that dismantling these cultural norms is essential for bridging the socio – economic gap between men and women and for creating a society where girls' education is not a privilege but a right.

Poetry as Cultural Rebellion in Maryam Bukar Hassan's "Peace Begins with Me"

Maryam Bukar Hassan's "Peace Begins with Me"

They called it a man's world,

But I wrote my truth on a blackboard.

I counted dreams with numbers,

I measured freedom in books.

If education is light, why did it for the girl – child?

The thematic concern of gender equality is boldly articulated in the poet's rhetorical questions: "If education is light, why did it for the girl – child?"

This inquiry serves as an unequivocal resistance to patriarchal norms that suppress female empowerment through education. The speaker's reference to a "man's world" is contrasted with her demonstrated ability to write on the blackboard, thereby undermining societal assumptions about gendered intellectual capacities. Also, the poet does not only interrogate the morality of symbolizing education as "light" while denying it to women – who are the nurturers, foundation layers, and custodians of humanity's cradle – but also exposes the contradictions embedded in such cultural practices. The poem ultimately asks how a nation can aspire to progressive development while systematically dimming the intellectual light of half its population.

By applying cultural studies theory, Maryam Bukar Hassan challenges dominant cultural ideologies that restrict girls' access to education and enlightenment. Through her poetry, she interrogates the systemic denial that constructs the world as belonging solely to the male child while leaving the female underdeveloped and marginalized. The cultural lens provides an enabling framework for the poet's assertive voice to contest the patriarchal controls that sustain such inequalities. Ultimately, the poem becomes a call for justice, reformation and advocacy toward gender equity in Nigeria.

In this regard, Hassan's poetic resistance parallels Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, where Adah asserts herself against both Igbo cultural constraints and racial prejudice, and Stella Dia Oyedepo's *Brain Has No Gender*, where education is presented as the only means of dismantling patriarchal binaries. Together these texts demonstrate how female creativity – whether in poetry, prose, or drama – functions as an agency of resistance against cultural ideologies that silence or diminish women.

Cultural Studies Framework: Proverbs, Patriarchy, and Girls' Education in Hassan, Emecheta and Oyedepo.

Maryam Bukar Hassan's rhetorical protest – "If education is light, why did it for the girl – child?" – is a sharpe rebuttal to Hausa / Fulani local proverbs that have shaped gender relations in northern Nigeria. Proverbs such as "matar aure ta fi yar gata daraja" (a married woman is more respected than a pampered daughter) embodies cultural ideology that subordinate women's worth to marital status rather than intellectual or personal achievement.

In parallel, among Igbo speakers, one often hears "nwanyi bu a fia" (a woman is a market commodity), thus reducing women to transactional objects of bride price and child bearing, through Buchi Emecheta's *The Joy of Motherhood*, such cultural scripts highlight sacrifice and unfulfilled aspirations which both writers resist the fatalism of such cultural ideologies, while showing the destructive consequences of objectifying women.

In the same vein, Oyedepo's *Brain Has No Gender* challenges such oral Yoruba saying like "Obirin ki je kumolu" (a woman cannot be accorded a military chieftaincy at death) which perpetuate the belief that leadership capacities are exclusive to men. The playwright dismantles this assumption on stage and reinforce Hassan's conviction that education should never be dimmed for the girl – child. Taken together, the works of the trio demonstrate how cultural proverbs act as ideological tools of patriarchy across Hausa / Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba societies which the articulated voices of pan – Nigerian feminists are resisting through literary creativity.

Findings

The study revealed that patriarchal cultural norms, reinforced by proverbial wisdom continue to limit girls' educational opportunities. Empirical data from the field identified financial constraints and sexual harassment as the major barriers confronting female students in Osun State tertiary institutions.

Conclusion / Recommendations

The study calls for policy interventions to enforce punitive measures against harassment, institutional support systems to protect female students, and financial assistance schemes from government and humanitarian bodies. Such reforms are necessary to dismantle cultural and systemic obstacles and foster gender equity in Nigerian tertiary education.

REFERENCES

Adichie, C.N. (2012). *We should all be feminists*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Amaefula, C. (2018). *Ideological commitment and portrait of women in the plays of Stella Dia Oyedepo*. International Journal of Gender and Cultural Studies, 5(2), 44-59.

Butler, J. (1990). Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity. New York: Routledge.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of anti-discrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989 (1), 139 – 16 7.

Creswell, J.W., & Plano Clerk, V.L. (2018). Designing and conducting mixed methods research (3rd ed). SAGE Plublications.

Emecheta, B. (1974). *Second class citizen*. London: Alison & Busby.

Emecheta, B. (1979). *The Joys of Motherhood*. London: Heinemann

Fafunwa, A. B. (1974). *History of education in Nigeria*. London: George Allen & Allen Unwin.

Farida, J. & Dass, V. (2020). Deconstructing gender inequality: A critical analysis of Buchi Emecheta's selected novels. Internal Journal of English Literature and social sciences, 5(4), 1121 – 1128. https://doi.org//0.22161/ijels. 54.39

Federal Republic of Nigeria, Federal Ministry of Education. (2004). *National policy on education* (4th ed.). Abuja, Nigeria: Government Press.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison note books* (Q. Hoare & G. Nowell – Smith, Eds. & Trans.) New York: International Publishers.

Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices. London*: sage.

Hassan, M. B. & Akilimah, P. (2024). *Peace begins with me* (poem). United Nations Pease Keeping 75th anniversary collaboration. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2014/ amplifying message peace through poetry.

Hooks, b. (1990), *Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics*. Boston: South End Press.

Jeevan, R. S. J. (2024). Patriarchal subjugation and female liberation in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*. Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies, 12(1), 85-96.

Marotirao, R. P. (2017). A study of Women's life and her work reflected in Buchi Emecheta's novels. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, 4(9), 586-589.

Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders*: *Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press

Ogundipe – Leslie, M. (1984) *Women in Nigeria*. The Journal of African Marxists, 5, 87 – 93.

Ogundipe – Leslie, M. 1994). *Re-creating ourselves: African women & critical transformations*. Triton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Okechukwu, C. V. (2025). Exploring gender representation in Nigerian literature and its impact on education. Nigerian Journal of Gender and Development Studies, 8(1) 55-72.

Okolocha, H. O., & Akhuemokhan, S. T. (2023). The violation of women's rights: Transformative processes in Julie Okoh's *Edewede* and Stella Dia Oyedepo's *Brain Has No Gender*. *African Journal of Gender and Society*, 6(2), 74-88.

Oladipupo, A. (2021). The role of poetry in social justice: A critical study of Maryam Bukar Hassan's spoken word performance. Journal of Contemporary African Literature 3(1) 41-56.

Oyedepo, S. D. (2001). *Brain has no gender*. Ilorin, Nigeria: Delstar Publishers.

Sadouk, H., & Bennouar, L. (2019). Patriarchy, gender discrimination and resistance in Buchi Emecheta's Second Class Citizen (1974). International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies, 6(9), 9-15.

The Indigeneous proverbs (Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa / Fulani) are widely attested in community usage. They are used here as vernacular evidence collected in oral discourse with respondents / participants.

Uwakwe, O. (1995). Breaking Silence: writing as resistance in Buchi Emecheta's fiction. *Research in African Literatures*, 26(2), 75-94.

Williams, R. (1976). Key words: A vocabulary of culture and society. London: Fontana Press.

Williams, R. (1983). *Culture and society*: *1780-1950*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Yoloye, E. A. (1975). *Primary education in Nigeria*: *A survey of Policies, studies and projects*. Ibadan: University of Ibadan, Institute of Education.