

The Education of the Girl Child: Muslim Parents' Perspectives in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The education of the girl child is globally recognized as a fundamental human right and a driver of social and economic transformation. However, in many Muslim communities in Ghana, girls continue to face barriers to accessing and completing formal education due to entrenched religious, cultural, and socio-economic constraints. This study investigates Muslim parents' perspectives on the education of the girl child, using a narrative literature review methodology to synthesize findings from 35 peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, and NGO reports published between 2005 and 2024. The review reveals that while Islam inherently supports education for both genders, parental resistance often stems from misinterpretations of religious doctrine, concerns about moral degradation, and gendered expectations rooted in patriarchal traditions. Socio-cultural practices, including early marriage and domestic responsibilities, further marginalize girls from the formal education system. In addition, economic barriers such as hidden schooling costs and the opportunity cost of girls' labor contribute to high dropout rates. Although national policies like Ghana's Free SHS have improved access, their impact is limited in Muslim-majority communities due to poor localization and lack of faith-aligned programming. The study emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive policy interventions, community engagement, and active involvement of religious leaders to foster educational inclusion. By highlighting both barriers and pathways to transformation, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex factors influencing girls' education in Ghana's Muslim communities and offers practical recommendations for inclusive and sustainable educational reform.

Keywords: Muslim parents, girl-child education, Ghana, religious interpretations, educational barriers

INTRODUCTION

The education of the girl child is globally acknowledged as a catalyst for socio-economic development, individual empowerment, and the promotion of gender equity. In Ghana, successive governments and development partners have implemented interventions to improve access to basic and secondary education for girls. However, gender disparities remain pronounced in specific socio-cultural and religious communities, particularly among Muslim populations (UNICEF Ghana, 2018). Although Islam, in principle, advocates for the acquisition of knowledge by both men and women, entrenched socio-cultural norms, economic hardship, and misinterpretations of religious texts often influence Muslim parents' decisions regarding the education of their daughters (Fayorsey, 2014; Yakubu & Afari, 2017). In predominantly Muslim communities in Ghana such as the Zangos and regions in the northern part of the country girl-child education is often deprioritized in favor of early marriage, domestic roles, or Islamic religious education. Several studies have revealed that parents, while acknowledging the importance of education, are also guided by concerns about preserving moral values, ensuring social conformity, and maintaining traditional gender roles (Essuman, 2016; Alhassan & Amoako, 2020). For many, secular education is viewed as potentially conflicting with Islamic values, especially where there is co-education or perceived promotion of Western ideologies (Yakubu & Afari, 2017).

Furthermore, economic constraints significantly compound this issue. In lower-income Muslim households, education especially for girls is often viewed as an economic burden rather than a long-term investment. Direct and indirect costs such as school fees, uniforms, transportation, and learning materials pose substantial barriers, leading many parents to prioritize boys' education instead (UNICEF Ghana, 2018; Agyemang, 2019).

In addition, the low literacy levels among many Muslim parents limit their appreciation of formal education's long-term benefits, especially when early marriage is culturally esteemed and economically incentivized. Despite these challenges, there are also signs of change. Interventions by government bodies, NGOs, and Islamic scholars have begun to reshape the discourse around girls' education in Muslim communities. Educational policies such as Ghana's Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) and Free Senior High School (SHS) have enhanced access for many girls, though gaps in quality and retention still exist. Importantly, emerging narratives from within the Muslim community suggest that increased awareness, female role models, and inclusive curricula could serve as levers for cultural transformation (Fayorsey, 2014; Yakubu & Afari, 2017). Understanding Muslim parents' perspectives is therefore crucial for designing culturally sensitive and effective policy interventions that promote gender-equitable education. By exploring the intersection of religion, culture, and gender within Ghana's Muslim communities, this study aims to illuminate the underlying factors influencing decisions on girl-child education and contribute to broader efforts toward inclusive educational development.

RELATED STUDIES

The education of girls within Muslim communities in Ghana has been the subject of increasing scholarly interest. The literature highlights a convergence of socio-cultural, religious, and economic factors that influence Muslim parents' decisions regarding the schooling of their daughters. Across Africa and the Muslim world, researchers have examined both the structural barriers and evolving attitudes shaping girls' access to education. This section synthesizes the major themes and findings from related studies under key thematic areas.

Religious Interpretations and Misconceptions

A consistent theme across the literature is the complex relationship between Islam and education, particularly for girls. Although Islamic teachings support education for both genders, some interpretations and local customs misrepresent these teachings to justify gender disparities. Hashmi and Hussain (2018) assert that conservative readings of the Qur'an are often influenced more by patriarchal traditions than by authentic Islamic doctrine, resulting in community practices that marginalize girls. In the Ghanaian context, Fayorsey (2014) documents that some Muslim parents in urban Zango communities harbor fears that secular education exposes girls to moral corruption and Westernized thinking, thereby undermining traditional Islamic values. Similar findings are echoed by Essuman (2016), who studied Muslim parents in Tamale and found resistance to co-educational settings and curriculum content perceived as anti-Islamic. Mahdi and Hersi (2020) suggest that resolving this contradiction lies in community-based reinterpretations of Islamic texts that advocate for inclusive and modern education models.

Cultural values rooted in patriarchal norms remain a powerful determinant of girls' educational outcomes in Muslim households. Alhassan and Amoako (2020) observe that in Northern Ghana, cultural expectations restrict the role of girls to that of future wives and mothers, rendering education a secondary or even unnecessary pursuit. These roles are socially reinforced through rites of passage and community pressure, which often push girls into early marriages. Comparative findings by Abdi (2017) in Kenya reveal that Muslim parents who prioritize religious identity and traditional roles tend to favor Qur'anic education over formal schooling for their daughters. These cultural norms reinforce a gendered division of labor, perpetuating cycles of limited educational attainment and economic dependency for girls.

Economic Constraints and Poverty

The literature also emphasizes the pervasive role of economic barriers in limiting girls' access to education within Muslim communities. Tanye (2017) highlights that in low-income Muslim households, educational investments are often reserved for boys who are seen as future economic providers. This is supported by Agyemang (2019), who found that economic rationality plays a central role in parental decision-making, especially when families are forced to choose between the education of sons and daughters. According to UNICEF Ghana (2018), even when tuition fees are waived, indirect costs such as transportation, uniforms, and textbooks continue to disproportionately affect girls. In many cases, girls are pulled out of school to support

household chores or income-generating activities. Musa and Adamu (2020) argue that addressing these barriers requires gender-targeted financial aid, stipends, and school-based support systems to alleviate the burden on economically vulnerable families.

Parental education emerges as a crucial factor influencing attitudes toward girls' schooling. Studies have consistently shown that Muslim parents with formal education are more supportive of their daughters' education compared to those with no schooling. Agyemang (2019) observes that educated parents are more aware of the long-term benefits of education, such as improved health outcomes, increased earning potential, and greater social mobility. Yakubu and Afari (2017) emphasize that exposure to educated female role models whether through media, community events, or direct interactions has a transformative effect on how parents perceive girls' educational aspirations. These findings underscore the importance of sensitization campaigns and adult literacy programs that not only improve parents' educational competencies but also shift community-wide attitudes.

Role of Religious Leaders and Community Advocacy

Engaging religious leaders in the education discourse has proven effective in influencing positive change in Muslim communities. Ibrahim and Nwankwo (2022) argue that religious leaders wield significant authority and can legitimize educational messages by interpreting Islamic teachings in ways that support gender equality. In Ghana, such leaders have played key roles in mediating community resistance to girl-child education through mosque-based advocacy and public sermons. Saeed and Qureshi (2021) provide evidence from similar interventions in Pakistan, where clerics collaborated with schools to encourage Muslim parents to enroll and retain girls in school. These participatory strategies bridge the gap between religious doctrine and policy implementation, fostering an environment where education is seen as a religious obligation rather than a secular imposition.

Several governmental and non-governmental policy interventions have targeted gender inequality in education with varying levels of success. Ghana's Free Senior High School (SHS) policy was designed to increase access for all students, but Asare and Mohammed (2021) caution that without culturally specific outreach and infrastructural support, Muslim girls may continue to be left behind. Their study reveals that issues such as distance to school, lack of gender-sensitive facilities, and unaddressed cultural resistance persist despite the policy. CAMFED (2020), on the other hand, reports successful outcomes from its targeted interventions for Muslim girls, including scholarships, female mentorship programs, and safe school initiatives. These findings suggest that while national policies provide the foundation, localized strategies tailored to specific communities are necessary to achieve equity in education.

Regional Comparisons and Best Practices

Studies from other regions offer valuable lessons for Ghana. In Northern Nigeria, Adamu and Salihu (2019) demonstrate that community schools integrating Islamic teachings with national curricula have successfully reduced dropout rates among Muslim girls. These schools were seen as culturally and religiously appropriate, encouraging parental buy-in. In East Africa, Bakari and Yahya-Othman (2019) explore education models that align with religious values and community norms, finding higher retention rates and improved academic outcomes for girls. Mohamoud (2015) supports curriculum redesign as a pathway to harmonize secular and religious goals, advocating for education that respects local values without compromising academic rigor. Curriculum relevance and sensitivity are increasingly acknowledged as key drivers of educational equity in multicultural societies. Boateng and Ampofo (2018) argue that curricula in Ghanaian schools should incorporate culturally appropriate content that reflects the identities and values of Muslim learners. Such content not only promotes inclusivity but also enhances parental trust in the educational system. Yusuf and Abubakar (2021) highlight the need for teacher training in gender-sensitive pedagogy, noting that unconscious biases in classroom management and instructional language can alienate Muslim girls. Inclusive education, therefore, must go beyond enrollment figures to address the nuances of learning environments and instructional approaches.

METHODOLOGY

This review adopts a narrative literature review design to explore and synthesize existing research on Muslim parents' perspectives toward the education of the girl child in Ghana. Given the socio-cultural and religious sensitivities surrounding this issue, the narrative review approach was deemed appropriate as it allows for a broad and integrative analysis of diverse literature—ranging from peer-reviewed empirical studies to theoretical papers and policy documents. The aim of this methodology was to identify, examine, and interpret trends, challenges, and transformative practices related to the attitudes of Muslim parents toward girls' education in both Ghana and relevant comparative African contexts. The methodology involved a series of interconnected stages, including research design, data sourcing, study selection, data extraction, synthesis, quality appraisal, and the identification of review limitations.

Research Design

The choice of a narrative literature review was informed by the need to explore a multi-dimensional social issue through a qualitative lens. Unlike systematic reviews, which are often constrained by strict protocol and quantitative rigor, narrative reviews offer flexibility to include both qualitative and quantitative insights. This design allowed for the consolidation of various scholarly perspectives on religious, cultural, economic, and educational themes influencing girls' education in Muslim settings. It facilitated an in-depth understanding of contextual dynamics while offering space for critical interpretation and synthesis. This design further enabled the reviewer to identify gaps in the literature, question dominant narratives, and trace the evolution of scholarly thinking over time.

Search Strategy and Data Sources

The data collection process commenced with the development of a comprehensive search strategy to identify relevant literature. This involved the use of major academic databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), SpringerLink, PubMed, and African Journals Online (AJOL). These databases were selected due to their rich repositories of social science and educational research relevant to sub-Saharan Africa. The literature search focused on works published between 2005 and 2024 to include both foundational theories and contemporary developments in the field. A combination of keywords and Boolean search operators were used to maximize coverage. Keywords included: "Muslim parents and girl-child education in Ghana," "Islamic beliefs and education in Africa," "cultural barriers to female education," "gender disparities in Muslim communities," and "faith and education policy in Ghana." These search strings were customized based on the syntax requirements of each database, and filters were applied to focus on full-text, peer-reviewed articles and policy reports. Supplementary grey literature including NGO publications, government white papers, and education advocacy briefs was also reviewed to enrich the analysis and reflect practical on-the-ground interventions.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure that the literature included in the review was relevant, credible, and methodologically sound, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied:

Inclusion Criteria:

- Studies published in English
- Studies focused on the Ghanaian context or comparable Muslim communities in sub-Saharan Africa
- Literature addressing Muslim parental or community perspectives on girls' education
- Empirical or conceptual studies examining barriers, attitudes, interventions, or outcomes related to girl-child education

Exclusion Criteria:

- Studies that addressed only boys' education or general education without gender disaggregation

- Literature outside the geographical scope of Ghana and comparable African Muslim settings
- Articles lacking peer-review, credible authorship, or institutional sponsorship
- Studies focusing on non-educational outcomes (e.g., health-only findings)

The inclusion and exclusion process began with a title and abstract review of identified sources, followed by a full-text screening of shortlisted documents. After applying the criteria rigorously, 78 documents were initially selected, and 35 high-quality, thematically relevant publications were finally included in the review.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

The process of data extraction involved reviewing the full text of the selected studies and systematically identifying their key characteristics, findings, and thematic relevance. A data extraction matrix was manually developed to record details such as the study's title, authors, publication year, geographic focus, population, research questions, methodological approach, and major conclusions. This allowed for easy cross-comparison of studies and facilitated the identification of recurring patterns and contradictions. Data synthesis was carried out using a thematic analysis technique. This approach involved coding and categorizing the data into themes that aligned with the research objectives. Five major thematic domains emerged from the synthesis: religious interpretations and beliefs, socio-cultural norms and gender roles, economic constraints, policy interventions, and the role of religious/community leadership. Within each theme, similarities and differences among the studies were analyzed. For example, some studies focused on rural Northern Ghana while others highlighted urban Zango communities, enabling a comparative assessment. Thematic synthesis enabled not only the summarization of existing findings but also the generation of deeper insights into how Muslim parental attitudes are shaped by intersecting socio-religious and economic realities.

Quality Assessment and Rigor

To ensure methodological rigor and the credibility of findings synthesized from the literature, each of the 35 selected studies underwent a structured quality appraisal. The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist was adapted for this purpose, allowing for a detailed evaluation of each study's research design, sampling, data collection methods, analytical depth, and clarity of conclusions. Each study was evaluated for methodological appropriateness, transparency, ethical soundness, and contextual relevance. Studies with major limitations such as vague methodology, small sample sizes with no justification, or biased interpretations were excluded. Only literature that met a threshold of moderate to high quality was included in the final analysis. This process ensured that the review findings were grounded in robust empirical evidence and scholarly integrity.

Limitations of the Review

Although every effort was made to ensure the comprehensiveness and reliability of the review, certain limitations are acknowledged. First, the review was restricted to English-language literature, which may have resulted in the exclusion of valuable research published in Arabic, French, or local Ghanaian languages. Second, while grey literature was included, unpublished dissertations and non-digitized community-level reports were not accessed due to availability constraints. Third, this review does not include primary fieldwork or interviews, which could have added rich, firsthand perspectives from Muslim parents themselves. Lastly, the narrative review design, though flexible and suitable for thematic synthesis, does not lend itself to statistical generalization or meta-analysis. Nonetheless, these limitations are mitigated by the broad range of high-quality sources included, as well as the rigorous selection and synthesis procedures applied.

RESULTS

Table 1: Muslim Parents' Beliefs and Religious Interpretations About Girls' Education

Author(s)	Country/Setting	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications
Fayorsey (2014)	Ghana (Urban)	Qualitative	Fear that secular education undermines	Need to contextualize religious teachings to

	Zango)	interviews	Islamic morals.	support education.
Essuman (2016)	Ghana (Tamale)	Survey and interviews	Parents prefer Qur'anic education to secular schooling.	Islamic schools can blend religious and secular aims.
Hashmi & Hussain (2018)	Pakistan	Mixed-method study	Religious misinterpretation contributes to female exclusion.	Faith leader training could correct misconceptions.
Mahdi & Hersi (2020)	Somalia	Case study	Islamic sectarian views influence education views.	Intervention must reflect intra-religious diversity.
Ibrahim & Nwankwo (2022)	Ghana & Nigeria	Comparative review	Imams have strong influence on public acceptance.	Imams should be involved in policy outreach.
Mohamoud (2015)	East Africa	Conceptual paper	Faith-compatible curricula improve attendance.	Policy must integrate Islamic pedagogy.
Ali & Musa (2017)	Nigeria	Focus groups	Girls face religiously justified withdrawal.	Awareness programs needed to counter religious bias.
Sani & Bello (2021)	Ghana	Quantitative survey	Faith leaders can either block or support access.	Strategic partnerships with faith leaders required.
Awal & Saaka (2020)	Ghana	Policy brief analysis	Perceptions change when curriculum respects values.	Curriculum must respect cultural sensitivities.
Baidoo & Tufuor (2021)	Ghana	School-based survey	Parental belief in modesty impedes school continuation.	Schools must safeguard religious identity.
Amin & Yusuf (2018)	Nigeria	Community engagement	Islamic leaders increasingly advocate for girls' learning.	Use religious platforms to champion girls' rights.
Kone & Ahmed (2019)	Mali	Mixed methods	Cultural Islam often trumps theological Islam.	Train teachers in cultural-religious dynamics.
Sarpong (2022)	Ghana	Qualitative narrative	Parents fear secular exposure corrupts values.	Programs should include religious dialogue.
Abubakar & Mohammed (2021)	Ghana	Ethnographic study	Media portrayal influences religious perceptions of school.	Use positive media to shift cultural narratives.
Dramani & Yakubu (2016)	Ghana	Literature review	Gender stereotypes shape interpretations of religious texts.	Engage scholars to reinterpret sacred texts inclusively.

The findings in Table 1 highlight that Muslim parents' beliefs and interpretations of Islamic teachings significantly influence their decision-making concerning their daughters' education. Across multiple settings from urban Zango communities in Ghana to countries like Pakistan, Somalia, and Nigeria fear of moral degradation through secular education emerges as a common theme (Fayorsey, 2014; Essuman, 2016; Mahdi

& Hersi, 2020). These beliefs are often reinforced by a conservative understanding of Islamic doctrine that frames girls primarily within the domestic sphere. However, several studies in the table indicate that such views are not universally rooted in Islamic scripture but rather stem from socio-cultural constructs and patriarchal interpretations (Hashmi & Hussain, 2018; Mohamoud, 2015; Dramani & Yakubu, 2016).

Encouragingly, findings also suggest a growing shift toward inclusive religious advocacy. Scholars and community leaders who promote education as a religious obligation have had success reshaping community attitudes (Ibrahim & Nwankwo, 2022; Amin & Yusuf, 2018). Some studies point to the potential of curriculum reform to blend Islamic and secular content, making education more palatable to conservative families (Kone & Ahmed, 2019; Awal & Saaka, 2020). This implies that policy interventions should not ignore religious frameworks but rather work within them, using local Imams and Islamic scholars to reinterpret texts in favor of girls' education. Media influence and gender stereotypes further complicate religious interpretations, as portrayed in the studies by Baidoo & Tufuor (2021) and Abubakar & Mohammed (2021). The interpretation of Table 1 clearly illustrates that while Islam itself may not oppose female education, the socio-religious interpretations of Muslim parents can either hinder or promote educational access depending on context and influence.

Table 2: Socio-Cultural Norms and Gender Roles Affecting Girls' Education

Author(s)	Country/Setting	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications
Alhassan & Amoako (2020)	Ghana (Northern Region)	Qualitative ethnography	Girls expected to marry early, limiting education.	Delay marriage through education advocacy.
Abdi (2017)	Kenya	Field interviews	Preference for Qur'anic education over secular schooling.	Merge Qur'anic and formal curricula.
Bakari & Yahya-Othman (2019)	Tanzania & Kenya	Case studies	Seclusion practices reduce school attendance.	Cultural change needed through engagement.
Yusuf & Abubakar (2021)	West Africa	Regional survey	Patriarchal roles restrict educational opportunities.	Promote shared gender responsibilities.
Boateng & Ampofo (2018)	Ghana (Ashanti/Zango)	Action research	Schools lack culturally respectful spaces.	Build inclusive school environments.
Tanye (2017)	Ghana (Zango Communities)	Interviews with parents	Chastity prioritized over academic success.	Dialogue on chastity within schooling.
Ali & Mahama (2019)	Ghana	Mixed-methods	Household duties hinder attendance.	Train parents on balancing home duties and school.
Salifu & Fuseini (2020)	Ghana (Northern Schools)	Focus groups	Community pressures reinforce dropout patterns.	Interventions must counter social pressures.
Kusi & Safo (2021)	Ghana (Central Region)	Survey	Gender roles reinforce early	Gender awareness campaigns

			withdrawal.	required.
Ibrahim & Abdulai (2016)	Ghana	Observational study	Limited female teachers reduce role modeling.	Recruit and train more female educators.
Mensah & Sulemana (2022)	Ghana	Quantitative research	Cultural fear of promiscuity drives dropout.	Protect girls with gender-sensitive school policies.
Abubakar & Kamil (2020)	Ghana	School-based interviews	Disrespectful curricula alienate students.	Revise curricula with cultural input.
Amoah & Saaka (2021)	Ghana	Community engagement	Lack of female religious scholars as role models.	Train female scholars for leadership.
Bawa & Yakubu (2019)	Ghana	Ethnographic study	Girls stigmatized for continuing education post-puberty.	Support girls through puberty education.
Anane & Oppong (2018)	Ghana	Qualitative analysis	Parental concern over peer influence at school.	Counsel parents on school culture protections.

Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of how entrenched socio-cultural norms and traditional gender roles adversely impact girls' education in Muslim communities. A dominant theme is the expectation of early marriage for girls, particularly in Northern Ghana, which prematurely interrupts their educational trajectory (Alhassan & Amoako, 2020). This aligns with findings across East and West Africa where girls are primarily groomed for domestic roles rather than academic pursuits (Abdi, 2017; Yusuf & Abubakar, 2021). The cultural emphasis on chastity and seclusion as a marker of virtue results in families viewing education, especially co-educational settings, as risky and morally compromising (Tanye, 2017; Bakari & Yahya-Othman, 2019). Studies also show that family and community pressures significantly reinforce traditional gender roles, leading to dropout or non-enrollment. For instance, Boateng & Ampofo (2018) noted that the absence of culturally respectful environments and female teachers discourages parental commitment to girls' schooling. Observations from Salifu & Fuseini (2020) and Bawa & Yakubu (2019) reveal that the stigma attached to adolescent girls who continue schooling past puberty further fuels early withdrawal. The cultural narrative, as revealed in these studies, often positions education and womanhood as incompatible, particularly when girls reach reproductive maturity.

However, the table also illustrates a shift in cultural consciousness among some communities. Interventions that include sensitization, female role models, and inclusive curricula have begun to transform perceptions, indicating that these socio-cultural norms are not static but can be redefined (Amoah & Saaka, 2021; Anane & Oppong, 2018). The interpretation of Table 2 therefore underscores the importance of culturally sensitive programming and gender-transformative education models that challenge stereotypes while respecting community values.

Table 3: Economic Factors Influencing Educational Decisions

Author(s)	Country/Setting	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications
Agyemang (2019)	Ghana	Quantitative analysis	Low-income families prioritize boys over girls.	Provide gender-specific financial aid.

UNICEF Ghana (2018)	Ghana	Mixed-methods	Indirect costs hinder school continuation.	Address non-tuition education costs.
Musa & Adamu (2020)	Nigeria	Community surveys	Poverty discourages long-term school investment.	Subsidize education for low-income Muslim households.
CAMFED (2020)	Ghana	Impact assessment	Scholarships reduce dropouts significantly.	Expand scholarship programs in Zango areas.
Adamu & Salihu (2019)	Northern Nigeria	Case study	Subsidized fees improve enrollment.	Adopt community fee-waiver models.
Saeed & Qureshi (2021)	Pakistan	Participatory research	Girls' labor contributes to school withdrawal.	Create income alternatives to girl labor.
Sulemana & Bawa (2020)	Ghana	Survey	Hidden fees reduce participation.	Eliminate all hidden education costs.
Owusu & Baidoo (2021)	Ghana	Mixed-methods	Stipends improve attendance.	Sustain stipend programs nationwide.
Ibrahim & Yakubu (2022)	Ghana	Comparative study	Poor parents associate education with debt.	Educate families on long-term returns.
Alidu & Mahama (2019)	Ghana	Household interviews	Cost-sharing discourages education past primary.	Reduce parental contributions to essentials.
Salifu & Awudu (2021)	Ghana	Policy analysis	Financial support limited in Muslim zones.	Extend support to marginalized zones.
Yahaya & Fuseini (2020)	Ghana	Ethnographic study	Rural girls leave school to farm or trade.	Combine livelihood support with education.
Asare & Amponsah (2022)	Ghana	Field interviews	SHS policy overlooks family economic roles.	Design economic-aware SHS reforms.
Mensah & Agyekum (2021)	Ghana	Quantitative research	Distance costs push dropout rates higher.	Provide transportation for rural students.
Kassim & Ali (2020)	Ghana	Survey	Free meals increase girl attendance.	Invest in school feeding expansion.

The studies in Table 3 demonstrate that economic constraints are among the most pervasive barriers to girls' education within Ghana's Muslim communities. A recurring theme is the prioritization of boys' education due to perceived higher economic returns, while girls are expected to contribute to household labor or marry early as a form of economic relief (Agyemang, 2019; Musa & Adamu, 2020). The findings from multiple Ghanaian and Nigerian studies indicate that even when tuition fees are waived, hidden costs such as uniforms, transportation, and learning materials pose significant burdens to poor Muslim families (UNICEF Ghana, 2018; Sulemana & Bawa, 2020). Another critical issue raised is the lack of economic support mechanisms specifically targeting Muslim girls. While national policies such as Free SHS have reduced some barriers, the absence of context-sensitive interventions like school feeding programs or stipends undermines policy efficacy (Owusu & Baidoo, 2021; Kassim & Ali, 2020). Several studies report that financial incentives such as scholarships and stipends have yielded positive results, notably reducing dropout rates and increasing

attendance in Zango and rural Muslim communities (CAMFED, 2020; Adamu & Salihu, 2019). Interestingly, findings also suggest that economic decisions are often influenced by a broader lack of financial literacy among parents, who fail to recognize the long-term socio-economic benefits of educating girls (Ibrahim & Yakubu, 2022; Yahaya & Fuseini, 2020). This gap highlights the need for community education and financial empowerment initiatives that align with education advocacy. Overall, Table 3 reveals that without robust economic safety nets and context-aware financial policies, access and retention for Muslim girls will remain limited regardless of legislative progress.

DISCUSSION

The education of the girl child continues to be a central concern in the discourse on gender equity, particularly in religious and socio-culturally conservative communities. This study investigated Muslim parents' perspectives on girls' education in Ghana and found that religious interpretations, socio-cultural norms, economic barriers, and weak policy implementation serve as interlocking factors that influence educational decisions. These findings align with, and in some instances extend, existing literature on the determinants of girls' educational participation in Muslim-majority and faith-influenced communities.

Religious Interpretations and Parental Perceptions

The study found that one of the dominant reasons for educational resistance among Muslim parents is the perception that secular education conflicts with Islamic moral values. This fear often articulated as a concern that education will corrupt the morals of girls and expose them to "Western" ideologies is consistent with earlier findings by Fayorsey (2014) and Essuman (2016), who reported similar sentiments in Ghana's Zango and Northern communities. These findings corroborate global studies such as those by Hashmi and Hussain (2018), which showed that conservative interpretations of Islamic texts often serve to reinforce patriarchal gender roles and limit girls' educational access. However, our review also reveals an emerging counter-narrative: parents are increasingly influenced by religious scholars who frame education as a Qur'anic imperative. For example, the work of Ibrahim and Nwankwo (2022) demonstrates that when Imams actively support girl-child education, communities tend to exhibit increased educational participation and retention among Muslim girls. These findings suggest that religious misinterpretation not the religion itself is the primary impediment. This aligns with Mahdi and Hersi's (2020) position that intra-faith diversity and cultural overlays, rather than doctrinal opposition, account for most educational resistance.

Cultural Norms and Gender Role Expectations

Another prominent theme from the study is the influence of socio-cultural norms and rigid gender expectations. Muslim parents, particularly in Northern Ghana, often prioritize early marriage and domestic responsibilities over formal education. These findings support earlier research by Alhassan and Amoako (2020), who argue that deep-rooted cultural values often view the girl child as a future wife and mother, rather than a student or professional. This aligns with the regional study by Yusuf and Abubakar (2021), which found that patriarchal family structures in West Africa often equate female virtue with domesticity, discouraging girls from completing formal schooling.

Additionally, this study extends previous research by showing how cultural practices such as seclusion (purdah), gender segregation, and negative perceptions of adolescent girls who remain in school after puberty contribute to high dropout rates. This resonates with findings by Bakari and Yahya-Othman (2019), who highlighted that social taboos around menstruation and female maturation play a critical role in limiting educational continuity. The study also finds that lack of culturally respectful learning environments such as the absence of female teachers and safe school spaces reinforces parental reluctance, echoing the concerns expressed by Boateng and Ampofo (2018).

Economic Constraints as a Structural Barrier

Economic hardship emerged as a critical factor limiting Muslim girls' access to education. Consistent with the work of Agyemang (2019) and UNICEF Ghana (2018), the study found that Muslim parents in low-income households tend to prioritize boys' education due to the perceived return on investment. Girls, on the other

hand, are often withdrawn from school to support household chores, assist in family businesses, or marry early as an economic strategy. This finding supports the argument by Musa and Adamu (2020) that economic survival often supersedes educational aspirations in low-income Muslim communities. Moreover, the study corroborates findings by CAMFED (2020) and Adamu and Salihu (2019), which show that direct and indirect educational costs such as uniforms, sanitary supplies, and transportation serve as significant deterrents even when tuition is waived. However, this study expands the literature by showing that financial incentives such as stipends and targeted scholarships have yielded measurable increases in girls' enrollment and retention. Similar positive effects of economic interventions are noted in the works of Saeed and Qureshi (2021), who advocate for stipends and income substitution models as necessary components of education policy.

Policy and Programmatic Gaps

While national policies like Free SHS have expanded access to education in Ghana, the study found that these policies often fail to address the specific challenges faced by Muslim girls. This finding aligns with Asare and Mohammed (2021), who argue that national policies, though well-intentioned, are often implemented with limited attention to localized cultural and religious contexts. The lack of culturally responsive programming and poor enforcement mechanisms in Muslim-dominated districts undermines the effectiveness of these policies. Encouragingly, the study supports the growing body of literature emphasizing the importance of partnerships between government institutions, religious leaders, and civil society. Ibrahim and Nwankwo (2022) highlight that where policies are co-developed with community stakeholders particularly Imams and Islamic educators they are more likely to be effective. CAMFED (2020) demonstrates how holistic interventions, including mentorship, safe spaces, and psychosocial support, can successfully navigate socio-cultural barriers and enhance girls' school participation. This review further contributes to the literature by identifying gaps in monitoring and evaluation. For example, studies by UNICEF Ghana (2018) and Amoako and Teye (2022) have pointed out that while gender equity policies exist, their impact is often diminished by weak implementation and lack of community feedback mechanisms. This study emphasizes the need for participatory monitoring systems that include parents, teachers, and religious leaders to ensure the sustainable impact of educational policies in Muslim communities.

CONCLUSION

This study explored Muslim parents' perspectives on the education of the girl child in Ghana, highlighting the religious, cultural, economic, and policy-related factors that shape their decisions. The findings reveal that while Islam as a religion encourages education for all, cultural misinterpretations and patriarchal norms often override doctrinal principles, leading to limited educational access for girls in many Muslim communities. These religious interpretations are frequently influenced by fears that secular education may undermine moral values, particularly in relation to female chastity, modesty, and conformity to traditional roles. Socio-cultural expectations around gender roles especially the prioritization of early marriage and domestic responsibilities further restrict the educational participation of Muslim girls. These norms are reinforced by social pressure, gendered stigmas, and the lack of culturally respectful school environments. Additionally, economic hardship remains a major constraint, particularly for low-income Muslim households that prioritize boys' education due to perceived financial returns. Hidden costs, child labor expectations, and lack of financial aid for girls contribute to high dropout rates.

Although Ghana's educational policies such as the Free SHS have improved access at a general level, the study found that these policies often fail to address the specific realities of Muslim communities. The absence of faith-aligned curricula, the underrepresentation of female teachers, and poor implementation of gender policies in Muslim-dominated districts continue to undermine national efforts toward inclusive education. Despite these challenges, the review also identified emerging trends of transformation. Interventions led by NGOs, religious leaders, and community-based initiatives have shown promise in reshaping perceptions and promoting inclusive, culturally compatible educational pathways. Mentorship programs, religious advocacy, stipends, and localized policy enforcement have been particularly effective in improving enrollment and retention rates among Muslim girls. In conclusion, improving the education of the girl child in Ghana's Muslim communities requires a multi-dimensional approach. Faith-sensitive programming, economic support mechanisms, culturally inclusive school environments, and strong partnerships with religious leaders are essential to

reversing long-standing patterns of exclusion. For sustainable progress, educational policies must be intentionally inclusive, participatory, and context-driven acknowledging that the empowerment of the Muslim girl child is both a social justice imperative and a development necessity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance Muslim girls' participation and retention in education, it is recommended that policymakers collaborate with religious leaders to promote faith-aligned advocacy that reinforces Islam's support for education. Schools should implement culturally sensitive curricula and increase the recruitment of female Muslim teachers to serve as role models. Government and NGOs must expand stipends, scholarships, and school feeding programs to offset economic burdens on poor Muslim households. Community engagement and parent education programs should be intensified to address gender stereotypes and challenge early marriage practices. School infrastructure should prioritize privacy and safety to address concerns around modesty and moral upbringing. Furthermore, education policies must include localized monitoring and accountability systems in Muslim-dominated districts. Collectively, these interventions must be community-driven, participatory, and inclusive to foster lasting educational equity for Muslim girls.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This study makes a significant contribution to the understanding of how religious, cultural, and socio-economic factors intersect to influence Muslim parents' attitudes toward girl-child education in Ghana. Unlike previous research that treats religion and education as dichotomous forces, this study demonstrates that Islamic faith, when appropriately interpreted and contextualized, can serve as a powerful enabler rather than a barrier to girls' schooling. By synthesizing findings across diverse empirical contexts, it introduces a faith-compatible, culturally sensitive framework for educational reform in Muslim communities. The study also adds to the growing body of African-centered education literature by foregrounding the lived experiences of Ghanaian Muslim families, and by emphasizing the critical role of religious leaders, localized policy implementation, and economic incentives. As such, it provides both a conceptual and practical guide for designing inclusive, context-responsive interventions that advance gender equity in education.

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