

Women's Empowerment in Ondo State, Nigeria: Using Education, Partner's Attitude, Culture & Religion and Political Participation

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Abstract:

Women's empowerment is a major concern in most developing countries, including Nigeria. This is because human development evolves when there is development of people, their freedom, their opportunities, and their participation in those activities and events that shape their lives better. Women's empowerment is about the enhancement of the status of women economically, socially, and politically in our society. It concerns women's freedom to make decisions that affect their lives. This includes the right to economic engagements of their interest, the right to spend their income freely, the right to inheritance and to own property, etc. In most developing countries, women are relegated to the background, even as many of them strive to meet the needs of their children and family members. The paper examines the impact of education on women's empowerment in Ondo State. It further examines the impact of partner's attitude, culture and religion on women's empowerment. Finally, it investigates the impact of political participation of women on women empowerment in Ondo state. The research methodology relies on a mixed-method approach. Thus, it entails using well-structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews with respondents. Descriptive statistics such as simple percentages, tables and chi-squares through SPSS 26.0 were used to analyse data gathered during the fieldwork. Findings from the study reveal that women empowerment is a multifaceted process and is determined by the level of education, cultural and religious values, attitude of the husband, and political participation. The study recommends that access to quality education by women in the society should be enhanced. Community engagement and sensitization initiatives are crucial in addressing the contribution of restrictive cultural and religious norms to the disempowerment of women. The religious and community leaders should be engaged to discuss and re-define cultural and religious texts with a positive meaning for gender equality.

Keywords: Empowerment, Development, Political Participation, Education, Attitude, Culture and Religion.

Introduction:

Economic development and women's empowerment are intricately interlinked. Whereas women empowerment accelerates the process of development, economic development helps in

toning down inequality between men and women. Empowerment is observed to be one of the major concerns when addressing the issue of human rights and development (Tripathi, 2011). Awan and

Igbal (2015) noted that women empowerment means making women self-dependent, giving them freedom, and access to opportunities. Women empowerment is a burning issue and women cannot be said to wait any more for their equality and empowerment in the society (Awan, 2015).

At the World summit for Social Development in Copenhagen (1995), gender equality was recognized as a prerequisite for the achievement of productive employment, promotion of social integration and poverty eradication, expansion of productive employment and reduction of unemployment.

Women in Nigeria are predominantly engaged in agriculture and are much less likely than men to be engaged in professional, technical, and managerial fields. Furthermore, the National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS, 2013) noted that women lag behind men in educational attainment, literacy, and exposure to mass media, all of which are critical contributors to women's empowerment and exert considerable influence on strengthening women's position in the household and in society in general. The same goes for Ondo State which is a subset of the larger Nigeria. However, the issue of women empowerment is not limited to Ondo State but a general evidence of serious gender inequality in Nigeria, perhaps due to patriarchal nature of African/Nigerian society. Employment, particularly employment for cash, and control over how earnings are used are important indicators of empowerment for women. It is true that the number of women in employment is growing; yet it is another thing entirely to know who determines how the women's income or cash is spent (NDHS, 2013). There is a rising concern and appeal towards women empowerment, these are anchored by international frameworks such as the Beijing Platform of Actions cited in the United Nations Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (1995) and The Convention on The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979). Nigeria is a signatory to these international laws and conventions, underscoring its commitment to

gender equality and women's rights. Moreover, studies have shown that empowering women significantly impacts economic growth.

According to the World Bank (2023), countries with greater gender equality were more likely to grow economically. This is because when women are empowered to participate fully in the economy, they can contribute more effectively to their families and communities. This relationship is further supported by Neelmani and Sudeshna (2023), which indicates that increasing women's participation in the workforce and decision-making processes can lead to more sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Educational attainment is closely linked to women's ability to access better job opportunities and participate in decision-making processes at home and in the community (Mutyalu, 2019). This educational empowerment can break the cycle of poverty and enable women to contribute more significantly to economic development.

Policies enhancing women's access to education, healthcare, and economic resources are crucial for achieving gender equality and fostering sustainable development (Chenai, and Li-Ming, 2021). Gender equality and women's empowerment are crucial drivers for sustainable development. The World Bank's Gender Strategy for 2024-2030 emphasizes the importance of closing gender gaps to unlock trillions of dollars in economic potential. The strategy aims to accelerate gender equality by promoting women's economic agency, autonomy, and well-being, addressing the structural barriers that hinder their progress (World Bank, 2023). UN Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy also highlights the necessity of enabling women's economic agency and autonomy. This strategy outlines a transformative approach to achieving women's economic empowerment by providing a rights-based framework and identifying gaps in current global efforts. It stresses the importance of local, national, and global collaborative efforts to improve the lives of women and girls (United Nations Development Programmes, UNDP, 2024). Recent reports have shown that significant progress

is needed to achieve gender parity. The Global Gender Gap Report 2023 by the World Economic Forum reveals that it will take another 131 years to close the global gender gap at the current rate. This underscores the urgent need for policies and initiatives that promote women's participation in the workforce and decision-making processes (World Economic Forum, 2023).

In Nigeria, the Nigeria for Women Program Scale Up by the world World Bank aims to enhance women's livelihoods by improving their economic opportunities. This program provides financial support, training, and resources to help women in Nigeria become economically independent and resilient (World Bank, 2023). The importance of education in women's empowerment cannot be overstated. Educational attainment is closely linked to women's ability to access better job opportunities and participate in decision-making. For instance, initiatives like the Skill Council's training programs in India have enabled women to pursue careers in science and engineering, challenging traditional gender roles and contributing to economic growth (UNDP, 2024). Moreover, partnerships with civil society organizations and women's networks play a crucial role in advocating for women's rights and gender equality. These collaborations help amplify women's voices and influence policies that promote economic empowerment and gender-responsive governance (UNDP, 2024).

In Ondo State, efforts to empower women through education, cultural change, and economic opportunities can significantly improve their quality of life and the state's overall development.

Therefore, achieving women's economic empowerment requires a multifaceted approach that includes education, economic opportunities, and supportive policies. By addressing these areas, countries can make significant strides towards gender equality and sustainable development, ensuring no woman is left behind.

Statement of the Problem:

In Ondo State, women constitute almost half of the total population of the state which is 3, 441, 024,

comprising of 1,761, 263 males and 1,679,761 females (Ondo State Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Despite their significant population, women in the state face substantial discrimination and mistreatment rooted in longstanding cultural and societal norms. These practices had entrenched gender inequality, giving women a lower status than men in social, cultural, religious, economic, and political spheres. They are deprived of the right of making decisions in family, education, and control over their income and assets (Awan, 2015). In Ondo State, there is perceived inverse relation between female population vis-à-vis women empowerment.

Empowerment will assist women in the society to actively participate in local politics and this will help to remove the limitations being a woman placed on them by our patriarchal society. It will empower and encourage women to be able to raise their voice in the family and speak with courage in front of their male colleagues. It will help women not only to be very much active in their household tasks but to have appreciable involvement in the decision-making process in the local politics on account of their enhanced socio-economic status. It is therefore imperative that women and men in the society should be given equal opportunity in their quest for economic, social and political development in order to reduce the gap of inequality in human and economic development. Furthermore, women aspirations regarding quality and adequate representation in politics and other spheres of life could be weakened by the prevailing patriarchal society values which stereotyped women and relegate them to the background in most aspects of human engagements. Women's empowerment can lead to their increased representation in politics and other life spheres, challenging the patriarchal values that stereotype and marginalize them.

Reducing gender inequalities in Ondo state will require the combination of education, economic empowerment, and policy change. These strategies will enable Ondo state and Nigeria in general to achieve greater progress towards gender equality

and sustainable development by allowing women to participate in such development. This study critically examined the impact of education, partner's attitude, religion and culture and political participation on women's empowerment in Ondo state.

Literature Review:

In this session, we reviewed literature on women's empowerment, impact of education, culture and religion, partner's attitude, political participation, theoretical framework and empirical review.

Women's Empowerment:

Empowering women is a crucial problem on a worldwide scale, since it is acknowledged to be necessary for gender equality and sustainable development. Closing the gender gap and enhancing women's well-being requires economic empowerment of women. Resources, jobs, time, security, and rights are the five main factors that have been identified as being crucial to accelerating women's economic empowerment (UNDP, 2023). Having access to finance is essential for women to launch or grow their businesses, but there is a \$1.7 trillion funding deficit for female-owned firms worldwide. Equality in access to technology, knowledge, land, and financial resources can greatly increase women's economic possibilities and advance society. Furthermore, women can enter the workforce and innovate if the digital divide—which affects 2.7 billion people—is addressed (Soharwardi, Khan, and Khalid, 2014). One essential component of empowerment is still employment. Despite advancements, 60% of women worldwide are employed in unorganized industries, frequently for low pay and no security. Women's engagement in the workforce can be increased by providing high-quality jobs, encouraging pay transparency, and guaranteeing fair compensation. It was estimated that closing gender gaps in employment could increase global GDP by 20% (Stocki, Hassan, Ranganathan, and Hache, 2024). Another area that needed reform was the care work, which was primarily occupied by women. Women are less likely than men to

pursue higher education or gainful employment because they devote three times as much time to unpaid caregiving. Putting money into care systems can boost economic participation, free up time for women, and create jobs (World Bank, 202). For women to be empowered, security—which includes protection from violence and conflict—was essential. Women are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence and instability, which limits their ability to engage in the economy. These effects can be lessened and economic empowerment can be encouraged by putting in place gender-responsive social protection programs and ensuring women's safety (UNDP, 2024). In order to bring about global action, the UN Secretary-General had stressed the necessity of international action to protect women's rights. She had called for investments in women's leadership and development. Achieving gender equality and empowering women globally required addressing systemic hurdles and implementing gender-responsive policies.

Impact of Education on Women's Empowerment.

Education is a fundamental pillar for empowering women, significantly influencing their socio-economic status and enabling them to exercise greater autonomy in various aspects of life. Many researches provide evidence of the role of education in empowering women across the world. Education provides women with the required skills and knowledge to engage in economic activities more productively. For example, free primary education in Uganda had increased women empowerment by promoting education opportunities for women and increasing their social and economic status and in governance (Jenson and Oster, 2009). Empowered women could take up higher paying employment, manage the family budget, and contribute to the eradication of poverty. Education also helps women become more critical thinkers and aware of their rights to seek change in unjust societal structures. According to a study, women who had greater levels of education were better able to express

themselves and knew their rights, which helped to reduce the prevalence of behaviours like early marriage and gender-based violence (Soharwardi, Khan, and Khalid, 2014). Furthermore, education raises women's leadership abilities and participation in politics and government. According to Sekah, Subburaj, and Shunmuya (2014), educated women took part in political activities, fought for laws that would promote gender equity, and held jobs that would alter society. In order to advance gender equality and improve education for socioeconomic progress, women were essential. Women's education is consequently essential to societies because it provides chances for the other half of the population to grow in a way that is more inclusive and sustainable.

Influence of Culture and Religion on Women's Status.

Religion and culture have a significant impact on whether or not women's empowerment is achieved. The roles that women played in society were greatly influenced by cultural norms and traditions (Okechukwu, Nebo, and Jude, 2016). Cultural norms in patriarchal nations frequently place women in subservient roles, which restricts their access to political, economic, and educational opportunities. For instance, cultural norms and customs severely impede women's advancement in the workplace and in public life in Nigeria, perpetuating gender disparities and limiting women's empowerment. (Ukachukwu and Rahimi, 2024). Three merged cultures, each with roots in Africa, Arabia, and Western Europe, have produced the sociocultural landscape of modern-day Africa. According to Njoh and Akinwumi (2012), the primary means of expressing these three cultures are the native African religions of Islam and Christianity, respectively. Religion can influence women's empowerment in two ways. Religious teachings can, on the one hand, offer moral guidelines that advance equality and respect. However, interpretations of religious texts can be used to support control over women's bodies and choices as well as gender inequity. Religious

concepts have frequently been construed in ways that uphold patriarchal standards, as seen by the exclusion of women from positions of religious leadership in some faiths.

Influence of Partner's Attitude on Women's Empowerment

A woman's empowerment is greatly impacted by her partner's attitude. An unsupportive or negative attitude will significantly hinder a woman's empowerment, but a supportive partner increases a woman's sense of self-worth, her capacity for making decisions, and her autonomy. Studies show that when males embrace good gender norms and share domestic tasks, women feel more empowered and are far more likely to participate in the economy and society outside of the home (Garrison-Desiny, Wilson, Munos, Mkuwa, Hobbs, and Morgan, R, 2021). These elements include empowering women to make decisions about family planning, go to school, and even pursue careers. A partner with a traditional or patriarchal mind-set, on the other hand, would discourage a woman from pursuing empowerment. There is a correlation between a decrease in intimate partner violence and women's economic empowerment. A woman's potential is realized when she has a supportive spouse who inspires her and acts as a catalyst for positive changes in her life. However, a dominating or unsupportive spouse significantly hinders a woman's advancement. (Olateju, Aminu, Shehu and Damole, 2017).

Impact of Political Participation of Women on Women's Empowerment

Women's political empowerment through engagement in politics is essential for the advancement of society. Allowing women to participate in political processes guarantees that they may influence the path toward achieving gender equality and their overall well-being. Women who participate in politics have more sway over policy decisions and resource allocation, directly affecting their lives and those of their communities. For example, studies have shown that in local councils where women were in charge,

more drinking water projects were put in place, leading to an increase in public safety (UNDP, 2015). Furthermore, women have frequently taken the lead in promoting causes like social welfare, reproductive rights, and gender-based violence that would otherwise be readily disregarded by laws governed by males. Even with all of the advancements that have been made, women are still underrepresented in governmental positions. For instance, as of 2023, women hold only 26.5% of parliamentary seats globally, with notable regional variations in this allocation. More than 66% of women serve in parliaments in nations with statutory gender quotas, indicating the success of these policies in advancing gender equality in the allocation of political power. For instance, because of stringent gender quotas, nearly 50% of the members of the parliament in Rwanda and Cuba are women parliamentarians. (Stocki, et al, 2024)

Theoretical framework:

The Empowerment approach developed in the mid-1980s is a relatively new approach in women and developmental discourse. The origin of the empowerment approach derived less from the research of the First World women, and more from the emergent feminist writings and grassroots organizational experience of Third World women" (Moser, 1993). Empowerment is related to the world power. Power can be defined as control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. Material assets can be physical, human or financial; intellectual resources are knowledge, information and ideas; and control over ideology signifies the ability to generate, propagate, sustain and institutionalize specific sets of beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour (Moser, 1993). Thus, power accumulates to those who control or are able to influence the distribution of material resources, knowledge and the ideology that govern social relations in both public and private life. The extent of power held by individuals or groups is proportionate to the number of kinds of resources they can control, and the extent to which they can shape prevailing social, religious or political ideologies. This control is in turn relative to the

power of decision making (Batliwala, 1994). Empowerment approach comes from women group who seek to empower themselves through greater self-reliance. Women seek to influence their own change and the right to determine their own choice in life. It seems from the empowerment view that women need appropriate resources to achieve self-sufficiency. The concept of feminism can be viewed as a political, cultural and economic movement focused at establishing gender parity, gender mainstreaming and legal protection of women. Thus, this study will be based on this theory.

Empirical Review:

A study by Makate and Makate (2016) explores the causal effect of increased primary schooling on child mortality and women's empowerment in Malawi. They found that better access to education greatly enhances women's capacity for making decisions in their homes and has a favorable impact on the health of their children. There is an evident correlation between educational achievement and empowerment, since women who have higher levels of education are more likely to have a say in their health and the health of their children (Jenson and Oster, 2009). Similarly, Jensen et al (2009) examine how women's status is affected by cable television in rural India. According to their finding, women's autonomy and decision-making capacity can increase when they are exposed to new knowledge and role models via television, which can change their views and behaviours. This demonstrates even further how media and essential information access can contribute to women's empowerment (Thao, 2023). Similarly, Kırdar, Dayıoğlu, and Koç (2018) explored how mandatory education policies affect adolescent pregnancy and marriage in Turkey. According to the findings, increased education prevents early pregnancy and delays marriage, creating opportunities for women's personal and economic advancement (Murat, Meltem, and Ismet 2018). Irshad, Sudha and Shebir, (2022) also noted the multifaceted influence of education on women's empowerment. This is due to the fact that education

raises women's and girls' social status, economic prospects, and health advantages. The total number of women and girls who can access and hence benefit from inspiring initiatives in education makes access to education a policy issue.

Methodology:

Regarding the pursuit and accomplishment of the goals of this research, the survey approach was applied in combination with focus groups for this study. A total of 900 respondents were sampled using purposive random sampling technique from the 18 selected towns in the nine local governments of Owo/Akoko south west/Ose (On-do district), Akure north/Akure south/Ondo west (Ondo central senatorial district), Irele/ Oke Igbó/Ile Oluji/ Okitipupa (Ondo south senatorial district). Two communities had been randomly selected from each of the local governments. The data collection method was a mixed-method approach. It involves using a structured questionnaire, focused group

discussion, and personal interviews of respondents in the selected communities.

Location of the Study:

This study was conducted in Ondo State. The state comprises 18 local government areas (LGAs) and is located in the Southwestern zone of Nigeria. The state lies between longitude 4 "30" and 6" East of the Greenwich Meridian, 5" 45" and 8" 15" North of the Equator. This means that the state lies entirely in the tropics. Ondo state was bounded in the North by Ekiti/Kogi States, in the East by Edo State, in the West by Oyo and Ogun States, and in the South by the Atlantic Ocean. It had a land mass of 14,788,723 Square kilometers with a population of about 3,441,024 comprising 1,761,263 males and 1,679,761 females (as of 2006). According to Ondo State bureau of Statistics (OSBS, 2009, the state was mainly Yoruba-speaking; other Nigerians and foreign nationals also reside in Ondo State.

Table 1: Design outlay for selecting study area/location

S/N	Senatorial District	Local Government to be selected	Total number of Towns per Local Government	Towns to be selected per local government	Total
(1)	Ondo North	Akoko South West	Akungba, Supare.	2	6
		Ose	Ifon, Ijagba.	2	
		Owo	Owo, Usho.	2	
(2)	Ondo Central	Akure North	Ita-Ogbolu, Oba-Ile.	2	6
		Akure South	Akure, Ilara.	2	
		Ondo West	Ondo, Bagbe.	2	
(3)	Ondo South	Oke-Igbo/Ile Oluji	Ile Oluji, Oke-Igbo.	2	6
		Odigbo	Ore, Araromo Obu	2	
		Okitipupa	Odeaye, Okitipupa	2	
Total	3	9	18	18	18

Source: Author's computation

Data Analysis:

This session is critical in understanding the factors that influence women's empowerment in Ondo State, Nigeria. We used simple percentages and chi-squares through SPSS 26.0 to analyze the data gathered during the fieldwork. Chi-square tests were used to examine the relationships between various independent variables (education, culture and religion, partner's attitude, political

participation) and the dependent variable (women's empowerment). A well-structured questionnaire was used to gather data from 900 respondents from the selected towns within the three senatorial districts of the state. Chi-square test for independence is a statistical technique that is employed to test whether there exists a significant relationship between two nominal variables.

Objective One: Examine the Impact of Education on Women's Empowerment in Ondo State

The relationship between education and women empowerment in Ondo State is assessed using chi-square tests to establish if there is statistical link between levels of education and the different dimensions of women empowerment.

Independent Variable: Level of Education (No Education, Primary, Secondary, Tertiary)

Dependent Variable: Women's Empowerment (Low, Medium, High)

Hypothesis:

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no association between the level of education and women's empowerment.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is an association between the level of education and women's empowerment

Table 2. Contingency Table for Education and Women's Empowerment

Level of Education	Low Empowerment	Medium Empowerment	High Empowerment	Total
No Education	50(21.74%)	30(9.68%)	20(5.56%)	100(11.11%)
Primary	80(34.78%)	70(22.58%)	50(13.89%)	200(22.22%)
Secondary	70(30.43%)	90(29.03%)	90(25.00%)	250(27.78%)
Tertiary	30(13.05%)	120(38.71%)	200(55.55%)	350(38.89%)
	230(25.56%)	310(34.44)	360(40%)	900(100%)

Source: Author's computation

The result on Table 2 is quite robust and revealing. The result shows that 100 (11.11%) respondents had no formal education, 200(22.22%) had primary education, 250(27.78%) had secondary education and 350(28.9%) respondents had tertiary education. We also saw from the result that (21.74%) respondents experienced low empowerment, 30(9.68%) and 20(5.56%) respondents had medium and high empowerment respectively. Out of the 360 participants who experienced high empowerment, 200, 90, and 50 of them had tertiary, secondary and primary education, representing approximately 55.55%, 25.00% and 13.89% respectively. Only 20(5.56%) participants had no formal education. This shows that the more educated a woman is the more her access to empowerment opportunities.

Calculation of Expected Frequencies

We obtained the expected frequency using the formula below:

$$E_{ij} = \frac{(\text{Row Total} \times \text{Column Total})}{\text{Grand Total}}$$

For example, the expected frequency for the cell (No Education, Low Empowerment) is calculated as: $E_{11} = \frac{(100 \times 230)}{900} = 25.56$

We used the formula below to obtain the chi-square test statistic:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

Where O_i is the observed frequency, and E_i is the expected frequency. The chi-square statistic is calculated by summing up the chi-square values for all cells in the contingency table. We got the degree of freedom (df) for the chi-square test using the formula below: $df = (r-1) \times (c-1)$, where r is the number of rows and c is the number of columns. In this case: $df = (4-1) \times (3-1) = 3 \times 2 = 6$

The same formulas above were applied to other variables

Chi-Square Critical Value

The critical value for 6 degree of freedom is 12.59 at a significance level of 0.05. If the calculated chi-

square statistic exceeds this critical value, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Interpretation of Results:

The chi-square test resulted in p-value of 0.003 which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating a significant relationship between the level of education and women's empowerment (p<0.05). The result reveals a positive relationship between women's education and their empowerment. This implies that the more the level of education a woman attains the more access she has to empowerment opportunities. Women with tertiary education are more likely to be empowered when compared with women with no or small educational background. It underscores the significance of education in improving women's economic and social conditions.

Objective Two: Investigate the Impact of Culture and Religion on Women's Empowerment in Ondo State

Independent Variable: Cultural and Religious Influences (Low, Medium, High)

Dependent Variable: Women's Empowerment (Low, Medium, High)

Hypothesis:

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no association between cultural and religious influences and women's empowerment.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is an association between cultural and religious influences and women's empowerment.

Table 3. Contingency Table for Culture and Religion and Women's Empowerment

Cultural and Religious Influence	Low Empowerment	Medium Empowerment	High Empowerment	Total
Low	310(58.49%)	130(24.52%)	90(16.99%)	530(58.89%)
Medium	90(39.13%)	80(34.78%)	70(17.07%)	240((26.67%)
High	60(26.09%)	40(15.38%)	30(7.32%)	130(14.44%)
Total	460(51.11%)	250(27.78%)	190(21.11%)	900(100%)

Source: Author's computation

Table 3 above provides information about the influence of cultural and religious influence on women's empowerment. It provides that there is an inverse relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Thus, as cultural and religious interference increases, women's empowerment decreases. It can be seen from the table that women who reported that they were influenced by culture and religion had low empowerment experience. This means that the higher the cultural and religious interference or influence the less the empowerment. Respondents who had the lowest religious and cultural influence had the highest empowerment 310(58.49%) while the respondents with the highest religious and

cultural influence had the lowest empowerment 30(21.11%)

Calculation of Expected Frequencies

Using the formula for expected frequencies:

$$E_{ij} = \frac{(\text{Row Total} \times \text{Column Total})}{\text{Grand Total}}$$

For example, the expected frequency for the cell (Low, Low Empowerment) was calculated as:

$$E_{11} = \frac{(130 \times 230)}{900} = 33.22$$

We used the formula below to obtain the chi-square test statistic:

$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$ Where O_i is the observed frequency, and E_i is the expected frequency. The chi-square statistic is calculated by summing up the chi-square values for all cells in the contingency table. We also obtained the degree of freedom (df) for the chi-square test using the formula below: $df = (r-1) \times (c-1)$

Where r is the number of rows and c is the number of columns. In this case:

$$df = (3-1) \times (3-1) = 2 \times 2 = 4$$

Chi-Square Critical Value

The critical value for 4 degree of freedom is 9.49 at a significance level of 0.05. If the calculated chi-square statistic exceeds this critical value, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Interpretation of Results:

We p-value obtained is 0.045 which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating a significant negative relationship between cultural and religious influence and women's empowerment ($p < 0.05$). The result

reveals negative relationship between culture/religious influence and women's empowerment. This showed that women who were subjected to less restrictive cultural and religious practices had more access to empowerment opportunities. This result further confirms the need to overcome cultural and religious biases to empower women in Nigerian society.

Objective Three: Examine the Impact of Partner's Attitude on Women's Empowerment in Ondo State

Independent Variable: Partner's Attitude (Supportive, Neutral, Unsupportive)

Dependent Variable: Women's Empowerment (Low, Medium, High)

Hypothesis:

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no association between partner's attitude and women's empowerment.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is association between a partner's attitude and women's empowerment

Table 4. Contingency Table for Partner's Attitude and Women's Empowerment

Partner's Attitude	Low Empowerment	Medium Empowerment	High Empowerment	Total
Supportive	20(86.96%)	40(16.67%)	140(32.56%)	200(22.22%)
Neutral	70(30.43%)	80(33.33%)	100(23.26%)	250(27.78%)
Unsupportive	140(60.87%)	120(50.00%)	190(44.19%)	450(50.00%)
Total	230 (25.56%)	240(26.67%)	430(47.77%)	900(100%)

Source: Author's computation

Table 4 also provides information about partner's attitude on women's empowerment. The result shows that greater number of respondents were not supported by their partners. Out of the 900 respondents, half of them, representing 50% were not supported by their spouses, 250(27.78%) were indifferent or neutral and only 200(22.22) respondents were actually supported by their husbands. Participants who reported that they did

not get the support of their spouses, 140(60.87%), 120(50.00%) and 190(44.19%) experienced low, medium and high empowerment respectively while respondents who got the support of their partners experienced progressive empowerment from 20 to 40 and finally to 140 respondents. The higher the partner's support the higher the empowerment.

Calculation of Expected Frequencies

Using the formula for expected frequencies:

$$E_{ij} = \frac{(\text{Row Total} \times \text{Column Total})}{\text{Grand Total}}$$

For example, the expected frequency for the cell (Supportive, Low Empowerment) was calculated as:

$$E_{11} = \frac{(200 \times 230)}{900} = 51.11$$

Chi-Square Test Statistic

Using the formula for the chi-square statistic:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

Where O_i was the observed frequency, and E_i was the expected frequency. The chi-square statistic was calculated by summing up the chi-square values for all cells in the contingency table.

We obtained the degrees of freedom (df) for the chi-square test using the formula below:

$$df = (r-1) \times (c-1)$$

Where r was the number of rows and c was the number of columns. In this case:

$$df = (3-1) \times (3-1) = 2 \times 2 = 4$$

Chi-Square Critical Value

The critical value for 4 degrees of freedom was 9.49 at a significance level of 0.05. If the calculated chi-square statistic exceeded this critical value, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Interpretation of Results:

The chi-square test resulted in p-value of 0.001 which is less than 0.05. we therefore rejected the null hypothesis, indicating a significant association between partner's attitude and women's empowerment ($p < 0.05$) in Ondo state. The result reveals that supportive partner's attitude is directly related to women's empowerment. With supportive partners, women were more empowered than women whose partners were unsupportive or indifferent.

Objective Four: Investigate the Impact of Political Participation of Women on Women Empowerment in Ondo State

Independent Variable: Political Participation (Low, Medium, High)

Dependent Variable: Women's Empowerment (Low, Medium, High)

Hypothesis:

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no association between political participation and women's empowerment.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is an association between political participation and women's empowerment.

Table 5. Contingency Table for Political Participation and Women's Empowerment

Political Participation	Low Empowerment	Medium Empowerment	High Empowerment	Total
Low	100(43.48%)	80(33.33%)	50(11.63%)	230(25.56%)
Medium	80(34.78%)	90(37.50%)	70(16.28%)	240(26.67%)
High	50(21.74%)	70(29.17%)	310(72.09%)	430(47.78%)
Total	230(25.56%)	240(26.67%)	430(47.77%)	900(100%)

Source: Author's computation

Table 5 above shows the result of political participation on women's empowerment. It reveals that greater number of respondents were politically exposed. From the total of 900 respondents, 430

participants, representing 47.78% were politically exposed while 230(25.56%) had low political exposure. Coincidentally, the same number of respondents with high political exposure

experienced high empowerment (47.78%) while those with low political exposure also experienced low empowerment benefits 230(25.56%). The result further reveals that the more a woman is involved in political decision making the more empowerment opportunities she gets.

Calculation of Expected Frequencies

Using the formula for expected frequencies:

$$E_{ij} = \frac{(\text{Row Total} \times \text{Column Total})}{\text{Grand Total}}$$
$$E_{ij} = \frac{E_{ij}}{E_{ij}}$$

For example, the expected frequency for the cell (Low Empowerment) was calculated as:

$$E_{11} = \frac{(230 \times 230)}{900} = 58.78$$
$$E_{11} = \frac{900(230 \times 230)}{900} = 58.78$$

Chi-Square Test Statistic

Using the formula for the chi-square statistic:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$
$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{E_i(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

Where O_i was the observed frequency, and E_i was the expected frequency. The chi-square statistic was calculated by summing up the chi-square values for all cells in the contingency table.

We got the degrees of freedom (df) for the chi-square test by using the formula below:

$df = (r-1) \times (c-1)$ $df = (r-1) \times (c-1)$. Where r is the number of rows and c is the number of columns. In this case:

$$df = (3-1) \times (3-1) = 2 \times 2 = 4$$
$$df = (3-1) \times (3-1) = 2 \times 2 = 4$$

Chi-Square Critical Value

Since the degree of freedom is 4, it leads us to the critical value which is 9.49 at a significance level of 0.05. If the calculated chi-square statistic exceeds this critical value, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Interpretation of Result:

The p-value obtained is 0.015 which is less than 0.05. We therefore rejected the null hypothesis, indicating a significant association between political participation and women's empowerment ($p < 0.05$). This means that there is a significant

relationship between political participation and women's empowerment in Ondo state. It stresses that greater political participation amongst women is positively correlated with women's empowerment. The more politically a woman is, the more likely she will be empowered.

Discussion of Findings:

Result from the first objective of the study shows that there is a positive correlation between higher levels of education and women empowerment. This is consistent with a number of studies showing that level of education is an important determinant for improving women's socio-economic status and empowerment. For example, a research on Uganda's free primary education initiative indicated that enhanced access to education had a positive impact on household women's decision-making power as well as the health of children. The same holds for (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO; studies show that formal education can help women to fight against and change oppressive social behaviors that prevent them from participating in economic and social activities (Makate, et al, 2016; UNESCO, 2023). When you educate a woman, you educate a nation.

Similarly, reduced cultural and religious values were positively related to women's empowerment. This therefore implies that women who are subjected to lesser cultural and religious restrictions are more empowered. Religious and cultural beliefs also define the positions and roles of women which can either subdue or enhance women's empowerment. For instance, research shows that in areas where cultural dimensions are not very masculine, women are likely to access education and employment and hence experience higher levels of empowerment (Ukachukwu et al, 2024). Dealing with these cultural and religious factors is an important step toward achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

The result from the third objective of this study reveals that attitudes of partners toward women were positively correlated with women

empowerment. The partners of these women promoted participation in economic and social activities outside the home. This is echoed by a study that attests to the fact that positive spousal support increases women's self-esteem and decision-making capacities which are the fundamentals of empowerment (Garrison-Desiny, et al.2021). On the other hand, overbearing or neglectful partners hinders women's social mobility in a big way and points to the fact that strategies to improve gender equity at home are necessary. Furthermore, there is a positive correlation between a greater political involvement and the improvement of the status of women. There was more empowerment on the women who were more politically active. This emphasizes the need for political participation to better the status of women in society. Studies indicate that female participation in politics results in more democratic policy making and provides a more accurate reflection of gender-related problems, for example, sexual and reproductive health (UNDP, 2023). Elevated political involvement is also beneficial to women and to society at large.

Conclusion:

The time is now ripe for governments both at the state and national levels to introduce free tuition programme for all female children in primary and secondary schools. Government must also ensure that the girl child is not discriminated against in the student's loan programme being introduced by the President Bola Ahmed Tinubu' administration. Education has a great bearing on women empowerment; therefore, efforts should be intensified to increase access to quality education for women and girl-child in Ondo State. The governments and the NGOs should be involved in offering scholarships, construct more schools and also make the educational facilities more friendly to learners. Also, incorporating gender-sensitive course contents that deconstruct gender scripts can enhance empowerment. All forms of cultural and religious discriminations (female genital cutting and restriction of women to the 'other room') are inimical to women's social and economic

emancipation and are a violation to their rights. There must be open campaign against these discriminations which must be championed by the government. Community engagements and sensitization initiatives are crucial in addressing the contribution of restrictive cultural and religious norms to the disempowerment of women. The religious and community leaders should be engaged to discuss and re-define culturally and religious texts with a positive meaning for gender equality. It is important to use programs that focus on how equality between genders can be good for men as well as women as this will reduce the resistance to change.

Studies have shown that life expectancy is higher for women in Nigeria. Men must be encouraged to support their wives to work and be engaged in other productive activities if they want to live long. The present economic situation does not permit men to carry the family loads alone and it must not be encouraged any further. Favourable partner relations contribute to improving the status of women. Interventions that advocate for gender equality and men's involvement in raising children and contributing to household chores can lead to more constructive marriage. Beneficial approaches directed at the couple's communication and attitudes toward each other can also be helpful. Encouraging women to participate actively in politics is crucial. Gender quotas in political leadership roles and parties are examples of incentives. Priority should be given to training in relevant fields that would guarantee a woman's effectiveness in leadership and political engagement. It is also crucial to have a forum where women may discourse politics without fear of reprisal or condemnation. Governments should implement and uphold laws that promote gender equality and protect of women's rights. This entails enforcing equal pay laws, prohibiting gender-based abuse, and supporting work-life balance programs. There must be mechanisms for enforcing these policies as well as suitable channels for reporting infractions if we are to guarantee their efficacy. Economic empowerment is the main component of overall empowerment. Initiatives like microfinance

for women, vocational training, and business management education often improve the socioeconomic status of women. These programs should target issues that affect women's economic production, such as childcare and transportation.

The study's findings demonstrate that women's empowerment is a complex process that depends on a number of factors, including political engagement, spouse attitude, cultural and religious values, and educational attainment. Additionally, education has proven to be the most effective strategy for raising women's socioeconomic standing and empowering them. Women with higher levels of education had better economic circumstances and participated in decision-making. This explains why laws ensuring equal educational opportunities for women and girls are necessary. Culture and religion also had a big impact on women's emancipation. Less constrictive norms presented to women increased their likelihood of empowerment. Community education and outreach programs that promote gender equity and read religious texts in a more gender-equal manner can help to overcome these obstacles. The husband-wife dynamic is also essential to the emancipation of women. Men should be taught the benefits of gender equality and, in particular, great regard between sexual partners, which helps to explain this. Political involvement was one of the causes that pushed for women's empowerment. As a result, it's critical to support women's involvement in politics by putting in place policies like gender quotas, providing leadership development opportunities, and setting up forums where women can discuss politics without feeling intimidated.

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