

Untangling Custom, Faith, And Gender Inequities: The Transformative Power of Social Studies Education in Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract- Gender inequality in Edo State remains deeply woven into the threads of custom and religious belief, shaping everyday realities from family structures to public leadership. While cultural identity and faith traditions provide belonging and meaning, they also sustain power hierarchies that limit women's and girls' opportunities. This paper interrogates the intersection of custom, faith, and gender inequities in Edo State and positions Social Studies education as a transformative pathway for reshaping entrenched norms. Drawing on theories of social learning, African womanism, and cultural relativism, the study explores how socialisation patterns, ritual practices, and selective religious interpretations reproduce gendered power relations. It further argues that Social Studies—through its civic, reflective, and value-oriented curriculum—offers a strategic avenue for fostering critical consciousness, gender-sensitive attitudes, and equitable social behaviour among young people. The paper outlines practical classroom strategies, policy considerations, and community-based interventions essential for leveraging Social Studies as an engine of gender justice. Ultimately, it calls for a harmonisation of tradition and progressive values to create a more inclusive Edo State where cultural pride coexists with gender equality.

Keywords: *Gender Inequality, Custom and Religion, Social Studies Education, Edo State, Gender Equity*

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender relations in Nigeria have always danced between the echoes of ancient customs and the rhythms of modern aspirations. Nowhere is this tension more pronounced than in Edo State, a cultural crossroads where heritage, spirituality, and identity shape everyday life. Across communities from the royal traditions of the Bini kingdom to the communal ethos of Esan and Afemai society's customs and religious beliefs continue to regulate who does what, who speaks, who inherits, who decides, and ultimately, who thrives. While these traditions possess

beauty, wisdom, and historical depth, they also preserve patterns of inequality that disadvantage women and girls. This paper confronts that delicate intersection where culture, faith, and gender meet and sometimes collide.

Anchoring the analysis is the conviction that education, especially Social Studies, can serve as a liberating force. Social Studies is not merely a subject; it is a civic compass designed to develop reflective citizens capable of questioning norms, challenging injustice, and reimagining society. In a state where many gendered expectations are inherited uncritically, the classroom becomes more than a learning environment it becomes a quiet rebellion against harmful norms and a seedbed for social transformation.

1.1 Background to the Study

Edo State sits at the intersection of tradition and modernity, where cultural pride remains strong, yet global influences constantly reshape values. Historically, gender roles in the region have been defined through customs, rites, religious doctrines, and community expectations. Practices such as male-only inheritance, widowhood rituals, male dominance in leadership spaces, and restrictive interpretations of religious texts create structural barriers for women.

Yet, paradoxically, Edo communities also hold stories of powerful women warriors, traders, priestesses, and queen mothers suggesting that inequality is not destiny but a distortion of fuller historical realities. The contemporary struggle for gender equality in Edo State therefore requires peeling back layers of inherited beliefs, reinterpreting tradition, and confronting how culture has been selectively framed to favour patriarchal control.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite national and international commitments to gender equality, Edo State continues to grapple with visible and invisible inequalities. These range from domestic decision-making imbalances to barriers in education, economic opportunities, political participation, property rights, and freedom of expression. Research consistently shows that these inequalities are not random—they are actively reinforced by customs and religious teachings that have been passed down generations without interrogation.

The core problem is not that Edo people value tradition; the problem is that some traditional practices limit human potential. And because many beliefs are treated as sacred, challenging them can provoke resistance. Schools where young minds form expectations about society—remain one of the few safe spaces where harmful norms can be questioned systematically. However, Social Studies education in Edo State has not been fully harnessed to achieve this transformative role.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This paper aims to expose how customs and religious beliefs contribute to gender inequities in Edo State and to examine the potential of Social Studies education to dismantle these inequities. Specifically, it seeks to:

- Analyse the cultural and religious structures that shape gender roles in Edo communities.
- Examine the mechanisms through which these beliefs reproduce inequality.
- Demonstrate how Social Studies can challenge stereotypes, promote equity, and foster critical citizenship.
- Propose strategies for integrating gender-responsive content and pedagogy into Social Studies curriculum and teaching practices.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study matters for several reasons:

a. Educational Significance: It reveals how schools remain powerful institutions in shaping attitudes toward gender, equality, and fairness. By positioning Social Studies as a toolkit for societal transformation,

the study strengthens the civic mission of education in Edo State.

b. Cultural Significance: Rather than demonising tradition, the discussion promotes a balanced view one that appreciates heritage while boldly critiquing elements that undermine human dignity. It encourages culturally rooted reform rather than imported activism.

c. Policy Significance: Insights from this study can guide curriculum planners, teacher-training institutions, and education policymakers in integrating gender-responsive teaching into Social Studies.

d. Social Significance: By challenging harmful norms, the study contributes to women's empowerment, improved family relations, and inclusive community development.

1.5 Research Questions

The study is driven by questions that confront the heart of the problem:

1. How do custom and religious beliefs shape gender roles and inequalities in Edo State?
2. Through what processes do these beliefs continue to be transmitted across generations?
3. In what ways can Social Studies education challenge harmful norms and promote gender equity?
4. What strategies can teachers and policymakers adopt to make Social Studies more transformative?
5. What barriers might impede the use of Social Studies education to advance gender equality in Edo State?

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study focuses specifically on Edo State, examining its cultural groups—Bini, Esan, and Afemai and the prevalent religious systems including Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. The analysis centres on schools, the Social Studies curriculum, teachers, and learners at both primary and junior secondary levels. While some examples may have broader national relevance, the lens remains uniquely Edo in order to provide depth rather than generic commentary.

1.7 Operational Definitions

- Custom: Time-honoured practices, rituals, and expectations guiding social behaviour within Edo communities.
- Religion: Belief systems and spiritual doctrines (Christianity, Islam, Traditional Religion) influencing moral and gender norms.
- Gender Inequity: Unfair treatment of individuals based on socially constructed roles, leading to power imbalances.
- Social Studies Education: A multidisciplinary school subject focused on citizenship, cultural understanding, and social problem-solving.
- Transformative Education: Teaching that challenges harmful assumptions and promotes critical consciousness.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Understanding the intersection of custom, faith, and gender inequity requires unpacking the key concepts that sit at the heart of this discourse. These terms—often used loosely in public conversation—carry specific academic meanings that shape how we interpret social realities. This section clarifies these concepts to avoid ambiguity and to ground the discussion within a solid theoretical framework.

2.1 Custom and Tradition

Customs refer to established patterns of behaviour within a community, passed down across generations. In Edo State, custom embodies the lived soul of society—rituals, rites, communal expectations, marriage practices, inheritance norms, and everyday social interactions. Tradition, often intertwined with custom, represents the historical continuity of these behaviours.

2.1.1 Key Characteristics of Edo Customs

- Collective Ownership: Customs are not individual choices; they belong to the community and derive legitimacy from collective acceptance.

- Historical Depth: Many Edo customs trace their origins to ancestral practices, giving them a sacred and respected aura.
- Prescriptive Power: Customs often dictate gender roles, determining what is “appropriate” for men and women.
- Resistance to Change: Because customs are linked to identity, any attempt to alter them may be perceived as a threat to cultural stability.

2.1.2 Gendered Nature of Customs

Customs in Edo often reinforce patriarchal structures. Examples include:

- Male-preference inheritance norms
- Widowhood rites that subject women to ritual restrictions
- Expectations of female domesticity
- Male-dominated leadership in traditional councils

These practices collectively frame gender relations and contribute to inequality.

2.2 Religion and Belief Systems

Religion in Edo State is a powerful social force. The population is primarily Christian, with a significant presence of Islam and a persistent, influential foundation of African Traditional Religion (ATR). Belief systems here operate as both spiritual anchors and moral compasses.

2.2.1 Functions of Religion in Edo Society

- Moral Regulation: Religion defines what is right or wrong, shaping social expectations.
- Social Cohesion: It builds communal identity and solidarity.
- Legitimation of Authority: Religious leaders often wield social and moral influence.
- Gender Socialisation: Many religious teachings—especially through sermons, scriptures, and ritual obligations—reinforce traditional gender norms.

2.2.2 Gender Implications

Religious doctrines, particularly when interpreters adopt patriarchal lenses, can:

- Justify male dominance in families and leadership
- Define femininity around submissiveness and domesticity
- Limit women's access to spiritual authority (e.g., priesthood restrictions)
- Silence critiques of gendered injustice by framing tradition as divinely sanctioned

Thus, religion becomes both a source of comfort and a subtle architect of inequality.

2.3 Gender Inequality and Gender Equity

Gender inequality refers to unfair disparities between males and females resulting from socially constructed roles rather than biological differences. In Edo State, these disparities manifest in education, economic participation, decision-making power, and access to resources.

2.3.1 Forms of Gender Inequality in Edo State

- Educational Gaps: Early marriage and economic barriers affect girls disproportionately.
- Economic Marginalisation: Women dominate petty trade but remain underrepresented in formal employment and land ownership.
- Political Underrepresentation: Very few women hold leadership roles at the community or state level.
- Cultural Restrictions: Expectations around behaviour, dress, and speech reflect unequal power relations.

2.3.2 Gender Equity

While “equality” suggests identical treatment, equity acknowledges different needs and seeks to distribute resources fairly. For Edo communities, promoting gender equity means removing structural disadvantages faced by women while respecting culturally positive practices that do not harm human dignity.

2.4 Social Studies Education

Social Studies is a multidisciplinary field combining history, geography, civics, anthropology, economics, and sociology to help learners understand human society. In Nigeria, and particularly in Edo State, Social Studies aims to prepare learners for responsible citizenship.

2.4.1 Core Components of Social Studies

- Values Education: Promoting fairness, empathy, cooperation, and justice.
- Critical Thinking: Encouraging students to question assumptions and analyse social issues.
- Cultural Understanding: Examining local customs, traditions, and belief systems.
- Civic Responsibility: Teaching learners to participate in community development.

2.4.2 Relevance to Gender Issues

Because Social Studies engages directly with social norms and cultural practices, it is uniquely positioned to:

- Challenge gender stereotypes
- Promote the dignity of all persons
- Encourage inclusive decision-making
- Empower learners to identify and resist harmful norms

In essence, Social Studies is both a mirror reflecting society and a lamp illuminating new possibilities.

2.5 Transformative Education

Transformative education refers to pedagogical approaches that inspire learners to critically examine their beliefs, question societal norms, and adopt more equitable worldviews.

2.5.1 Features of Transformative Education

- Critical Consciousness: Learners become aware of societal inequalities and their root causes.
- Dialogue-Based Learning: Safe spaces where students openly question cultural and religious assumptions.

- Action Orientation: Education empowers learners to participate in social change.
- Personal Reflection: Students interrogate their own biases and experiences.

2.5.2 Transformative Potential in Edo State

Given the deep-rooted nature of gender norms, transformation cannot occur through mere instruction. It requires:

- Engaging learners emotionally and intellectually
- Incorporating real-life case studies from Edo culture
- Connecting classroom lessons with community realities
- Positioning learners as agents of change rather than passive recipients

2.6 Intersection of Custom, Religion, and Gender

This concept captures how cultural norms and belief systems interact to shape gender relations. In Edo State:

- Custom provides the behavioural template
- Religion provides the moral justification
- Gender norms provide the outcome

Together, they create a powerful ecosystem of beliefs that sustain inequality unless deliberately challenged. Understanding this intersection is crucial because gender norms do not arise naturally—they are socially engineered and maintained.

2.7 Operationalisation of Concepts for This Study

- Custom: Practices and norms upheld in Edo communities that shape gender roles.
- Religion: Doctrines and belief systems influencing moral and gender-based expectations.
- Gender Inequity: Structural and cultural disadvantages imposed on females.
- Social Studies Education: Curriculum and teaching practices aiding critical understanding of society.

- Transformative Education: Pedagogical approach that challenges harmful beliefs and promotes equity.

III. THE EDO STATE CONTEXT: CULTURE, FAITH, AND GENDER NORMS

Edo State stands as one of Nigeria's most culturally vibrant regions, a place where history, ritual, and belief systems converge to shape human behaviour. Gender relations in Edo society are neither accidental nor uniform—they emerge from a long interplay of tradition, spirituality, colonial influence, and modern pressures. This section explores these dimensions in depth, showing how deeply embedded customs and religious frameworks continue to script gender expectations today.

3.1 Overview of Edo State's Sociocultural Landscape

Edo State, located in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone, is home to three major ethnocultural groups: the Bini (Edo), the Esan, and the Afemai (Etsako, Owan, Akoko-Edo). Each group possesses distinctive dialects, rituals, and sociopolitical traditions, yet they share a common cultural foundation rooted in reverence for ancestors, communalism, and respect for hierarchical authority.

3.1.1 The Bini Cultural Framework

- Historically governed by the revered Oba of Benin, Bini society is structured around monarchy, lineage, and age-grade systems.
- Gender roles are clearly defined, with men historically dominating war, leadership, and public administration while women engaged in trading, arts, and domestic roles.
- Customs such as male primogeniture (first son inheritance) and the centralisation of male authority in traditional institutions shape modern expectations.

3.1.2 The Esan Sociocultural Setting

- Esan communities traditionally emphasise communal labour, farming, and kinship networks.

- Despite examples of strong women in Esan folklore, patriarchal structures dominate decision-making, inheritance, and land ownership.
- Marital norms often position women as caretakers and moral guardians of the family.

3.1.3 *The Afemai Ethnic Sphere*

- Among the Afemai groups, traditions blend ancestral worship, Islamic influences (in some areas), and well-defined gender divisions of labour.
- Women play major roles in agriculture and trade, yet men still control land, property, and political authority.

3.1.4 *Shared Cultural Features*

Across Edo ethnic groups, certain commonalities form the backbone of social life:

- Deep respect for elders
- Strict age-grade roles
- Centrality of marriage and fertility
- Male dominance in leadership
- Strong spiritual worldviews

These features interact to define gender behaviour, ultimately shaping inequality.

3.2 *Customs and Cultural Practices Influencing Gender Roles*

Customary norms in Edo State shape gender identity from birth. These norms explain what is “expected” of a man or woman, determining their duties, opportunities, and behavioural boundaries.

3.2.1 *Inheritance and Property Rights*

- Most Edo communities practice patrilineal inheritance, automatically privileging male heirs.
- Women rarely inherit ancestral land weakening their economic independence.
- Even widows may face displacement or “property stripping” after a husband’s death.

3.2.2 *Marriage and Family Expectations*

- Marriage is often considered a rite of passage for women, reinforcing ideologies of femininity tied to domestic roles.
- Bridewealth practices reinforce male authority by symbolically “transferring” a woman from her natal home.
- Wives are culturally expected to be obedient, loyal, and sacrificial.

3.2.3 *Widowhood Practices*

While modern Edo has softened many harsh rituals, some practices persist:

- Restrictions on movement during mourning
- Ritual cleansing
- Oath-taking to “prove innocence” of a husband’s death
- Loss of property or control over children

These practices reflect embedded views of women as secondary within kinship structures.

3.2.4 *Leadership and Public Participation*

- Traditional institutions are overwhelmingly male-led.
- Titles, chieftaincy positions, and community leadership roles often exclude women.
- When women participate, it is often in supportive or ceremonial capacities.

3.2.5 *Ritual and Spiritual Roles*

- Some roles (e.g., priestesshood, midwifery) elevate women spiritually, but these do not translate into political power.
- Ritual restrictions place women as “impure” during menstruation or childbirth, reinforcing perceived inferiority.

Together, these customs construct a social order where inequality appears culturally “normal.”

3.3 Religion as an Architect of Gender Norms in Edo State

Religion in Edo State operates like a dual-edged sword—offering moral grounding while reinforcing patriarchal structures.

3.3.1 Christianity

- The dominant religion in urban and rural Edo communities.
- Many denominations preach female submission through selective biblical interpretations (e.g., Ephesians 5:22).
- Leadership positions such as pastor or elder are predominantly male.
- Church teachings often emphasise women's roles as homemakers, caregivers, and peacekeepers.

3.3.2 African Traditional Religion (ATR)

- Strong emphasis on ancestors, deities, and spiritual forces.
- Many rituals assign women subordinate roles, often excluding them from sacred spaces.
- Some deities like Idia (the famed Queen Mother) reflect female greatness, showing the dual nature of ATR.

3.3.3 Islam

- Present in some Afemai communities.
- Reinforces social structures such as male leadership (Imamship) and gender-segregated roles.
- Emphasises modesty norms that restrict women's public expression.

3.3.4 How Religion Reinforces Inequality

Across all faiths:

- Moral teachings legitimise male authority.
- Scriptural interpretations rarely challenge patriarchy.
- Religious leaders often protect tradition from “modern interference.”

- Women's voices are underrepresented in decision-making spaces.

Religion thus becomes a powerful cultural script guiding gendered behaviour.

3.4 Interaction of Socioeconomic Realities with Culture and Religion

Gender inequality in Edo State is not solely cultural or religious. It thrives because socioeconomic challenges amplify its effects.

3.4.1 Education

- Girls in rural areas face higher dropout rates due to early marriage, poverty, domestic labour, and cultural expectations.
- Some families prioritise boys' education because they are viewed as future breadwinners.

3.4.2 Employment and Economic Power

- Women are active in petty trading and agriculture, yet men dominate lucrative sectors and formal employment.
- Limited access to credit, land, and financial capital traps many women in low-income roles.

3.4.3 Poverty and Cultural Compliance

- Poverty increases reliance on custom as a safety net, making families reluctant to challenge patriarchal norms.
- Economic vulnerability makes women more dependent on male authority.

3.4.4 Urban–Rural Divide

- Urban areas are more progressive, with greater exposure to rights activism.
- Rural communities remain tightly bound to traditional gender expectations.

Thus, gender inequality persists through the combined weight of culture, religion, and socioeconomic constraints.

3.5 Case Studies and Lived Realities in Edo Communities

To ground the discussion, we explore real-life patterns commonly observed across Edo State.

3.5.1 The Widow Displacement Scenario

Widows in parts of Esanland have reported being denied access to farmland or being forced out of their marital homes a scenario justified by custom and accepted by religious leaders.

3.5.2 The Girl-Child Domestic Burden

In Afemai communities, girls are often saddled with domestic chores that reduce school attendance, reinforcing beliefs that formal education is more necessary for boys.

3.5.3 The Male-Dominated Village Council

In many Bini villages, community meetings and decision-making councils exclude women entirely or limit them to symbolic representation.

3.5.4 Children's Early Socialisation

Children grow up hearing phrases like "You're a woman, behave yourself," or "Boys don't cry," imprinting gender roles early into their identity formation.

These examples demonstrate how cultural norms seep into everyday life, creating a lived environment that normalises inequality.

3.6 Summary: The Cultural-Religious Blueprint of Gender in Edo State

This section makes one fact clear: gender norms in Edo State are not accidental—they are deliberately constructed and reinforced through:

- Customs
- Rituals
- Religious teachings
- Social expectations
- Economic pressures

Together, they form a cultural-religious blueprint that places men in positions of authority and women in

roles of service. Understanding this blueprint is crucial for identifying how Social Studies education can challenge and transform these inherited scripts.

IV. PATHWAYS THROUGH WHICH CUSTOM AND FAITH REINFORCE GENDER INEQUITIES IN EDO STATE

Gender inequality in Edo State does not grow in a vacuum. It persists because cultural norms and religious doctrines flow through several social pathways, subtly but powerfully shaping the way people think, act, relate, and judge. These pathways operate like invisible pipelines, transmitting patriarchal values from one generation to the next. This section explores those channels with depth and clarity.

4.1 Socialisation Processes in Families and Communities

The family is the first ideological classroom, and children absorb messages long before they can question them. Socialisation operates through stories, chores, discipline, expectations, and language all soaked in tradition.

4.1.1 Gendered Childhood Expectations

- Girls are assigned domestic chores early, embedding the belief that caregiving is their natural destiny.
- Boys receive more freedom, mobility, and authority, preparing them for leadership.
- Phrases like "*A woman's place is in the home*" or "*A man must lead his house*" are taught as unquestionable truths.

4.1.2 Role-Modelling

- Children watch their mothers serve and their fathers command.
- They observe how elders treat women as subordinates, normalising inequality as tradition.

4.1.3 Sanctions and Reinforcements

- Girls who challenge norms are labelled disrespectful or stubborn.
- Boys who show emotional vulnerability are mocked as weak.

Thus, inequality becomes socialised long before adulthood.

4.2 Religious Teachings and Interpretations

Religion shapes attitudes powerfully because it functions as divine authority. In Edo State, interpretations of Christianity, Islam, and ATR often reinforce gender hierarchies.

4.2.1 Selective Use of Scriptures

- Verses on female submission, silence, and obedience are emphasised, while passages on mutual respect and equality are downplayed.
- Leaders often portray patriarchy as God's will, making resistance appear sinful.

4.2.2 Male Dominance in Religious Leadership

- Churches, mosques, and shrines are dominated by male clergy.
- Women's voices are limited to auxiliary roles—choirs, support groups, catering teams.
- When power is gendered, doctrine becomes a mirror of inequality.

4.2.3 Ritual Exclusions

- Women are sometimes barred from sacred spaces during menstruation.
- Certain religious duties are considered spiritually "unsafe" for women to perform.

4.2.4 Spiritual Narratives on Purity and Modesty

Women are often framed as temptresses, morally fragile, or spiritually inferior — narratives that justify control.

4.3 Linguistic Symbols and Cultural Narratives

Language carries ideology. Proverbs, stories, idioms, songs, and praise names embed messages that shape gender identity subtly but forcefully.

4.3.1 Proverbs

Edo and Esan proverbs often encode bias, such as:

- "The hen does not crow where the cock is present."
- "A woman's wisdom ends in the kitchen."

These sayings portray leadership as masculine by destiny.

4.3.2 Folktales and Myths

- Women are often portrayed as jealous, deceitful, or weak.
- Male heroism is glorified; female heroism is marginalised.

4.3.3 Naming Practices

Certain names reflect authority for boys (e.g., *Omuada*, *Osazuwa*), while girls' names emphasise virtue, humility, and gentleness.

4.3.4 Ritual Songs and Praise Poetry

Songs at ceremonies reinforce roles like:

- A bride as property
- A woman as a helper
- A man as protector and provider

Language becomes a cultural script that shapes identity.

4.4 Institutional and Structural Reinforcement

Beyond homes and temples, institutions also serve as engines of inequality.

4.4.1 Traditional Councils

- Leadership is heavily male-dominated.
- Women's representation is tokenistic or ceremonial.

4.4.2 Customary Courts

- Decisions often rely on patriarchal interpretations of tradition.
- Women face barriers in claiming land, inheritance, or custody.

4.4.3 Educational Systems

- Curricula sometimes reflect outdated gender roles.
- Past textbooks portrayed women as cooks, cleaners, and caregivers while men appeared as lawyers, engineers, and chiefs.

4.4.4 Workplaces and Markets

- Gendered segregation of labour persists.
- Women occupy the “unpaid” end of labour, such as subsistence farming or informal petty trading.

These structures sustain inequality even when individuals wish to challenge it.

4.5 Economic Dependencies and Poverty Dynamics

Economic vulnerability strengthens gender inequality. Culture and faith are easily weaponised when poverty limits options.

4.5.1 Dependence Reinforces Obedience

Women who depend financially on husbands or male relatives have limited bargaining power in family decisions.

4.5.2 Marriage as Social Security

Where economic survival is tied to marriage, women face pressure to accept oppressive norms.

4.5.3 Cultural Gatekeeping

Elderly family members often discourage girls from pursuing education or independence, arguing that “a woman's success threatens her marriage.”

4.5.4 Religious Endorsement of Economic Roles

Some religious groups preach that men are ordained providers and women caretakers, restricting women's economic aspirations.

4.6 Power Dynamics in Decision-Making

In Edo State, decision-making authority follows a predictable pattern: men lead, women follow.

4.6.1 Household Decision-Making

- Men control many family choices: finances, children's schooling, property use.
- Women's opinions are often “consultative” rather than decisive.

4.6.2 Community Leadership

- Important matters—land disputes, security, village administration—are handled by male elders.
- Women may be allowed to speak only when invited or through male proxies.

4.6.3 Religious Governance

Women rarely hold doctrinal authority. Decisions affecting women are often made without women.

4.6.4 Political Processes

Custom and religion influence electoral choices, leading communities to prefer male candidates.

4.7 Rituals, Rites, and Symbolic Practices

Rituals are powerful because they communicate values in sacred, emotionally resonant ways.

4.7.1 Initiation Rites

- Male initiation often glorifies bravery and leadership.
- Female initiation emphasises grooming, domesticity, modesty, and sexual purity.

4.7.2 Rites of Passage

Rituals surrounding puberty, marriage, and childbirth present masculinity as strength and femininity as service.

4.7.3 Spiritual Restrictions

- Certain rituals forbid female participation.
- Women may be excluded from mask festivals or secret societies.

4.7.4 Widowhood Rituals

Restrictions placed solely on women reinforce beliefs about female inferiority and male authority.

4.8 Gendered Moral Expectations

Moral standards are rarely equal.

4.8.1 Sexual Morality

- Women face heavy scrutiny over modesty and chastity.
- Men's misconduct is easily forgiven or ignored.

4.8.2 Behavioural Expectations

- Women are expected to be soft-spoken, humble, and self-sacrificing.
- Men are praised for assertiveness and ambition.

4.8.3 Blame Culture

In cases of domestic conflict, women are often blamed for "not being submissive enough."

These double standards entrench inequality deeply.

4.9 Intergenerational Transmission of Norms

Gender inequality is resilient because it is taught, retaught, rewarded, and sanctified across generations.

4.9.1 Cultural Memory

Stories, rituals, and elders' teachings anchor patriarchy in collective consciousness.

4.9.2 Religious Socialisation

Young people are raised to see gender roles as divine mandates.

4.9.3 Family Expectations

Parents police gender boundaries based on their own upbringing, reproducing the cycle.

4.9.4 Community Enforcement

Members who question norms risk social backlash, stigma, or exclusion.

Thus, inequality becomes a cultural habit passed forward like inheritance.

4.10 The Invisible Machinery of Inequality

The pathways outlined show that inequality is not merely a product of culture or faith it is the result of how both are practiced, enforced, interpreted, and transmitted. Custom provides the social rules. Religion provides the moral cover. Institutions provide the enforcement. Poverty provides the dependence. And families provide the training grounds.

V. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN EDO STATE

Social Studies education stands as one of the most potent antidotes to entrenched cultural bias, religious misinterpretation, and inherited gender inequality. In a society like Edo State where tradition and spirituality frame daily life Social Studies becomes the intellectual scalpel that carefully dissects harmful norms while preserving the cultural essence that enriches community identity. This section analyses the multiple pathways through which Social Studies education contributes to gender justice, examining curriculum content, pedagogical strategies, teacher competence, and school-community collaboration.

5.1 Social Studies Curriculum as a Tool for Challenging Gender Bias

The curriculum is the backbone of educational transformation. In Edo State, an intentionally structured Social Studies curriculum functions like a mirror and a window: a mirror reflecting societal realities, and a window offering learners a vision of a fairer world.

5.1.1 Curriculum Content Addressing Gender Stereotypes

A robust curriculum includes:

- Lessons on human rights and gender-based rights
- Case studies highlighting women's historical and contemporary achievements in Edo State
- Topics addressing inequality, discrimination, and civic responsibilities
- Discussions on cultural practices e.g., widowhood, inheritance, early marriage—and their implications for equity

By confronting stereotypes in the classroom, learners start to recognise how inequality is socially constructed rather than natural or divinely mandated.

5.1.2 Integration of Gender-Sensitive Themes across Topics

Gender equity should not appear as a one-off lesson but be embedded across units:

- Family life education
- Civic participation
- Cultural heritage
- Governance and leadership
- Social justice issues

This infusion approach slowly recalibrates learners' worldviews and replaces patriarchal assumptions with inclusive perspectives.

5.1.3 Promoting Critical Cultural Understanding

Social Studies encourages students to:

- Question the fairness of customs
- Evaluate the logic behind religious restrictions
- Recognise the humanity in both men and women
- Analyse the historical roots of discrimination

This critical orientation builds a generation capable of reinterpreting culture through the lens of modern values.

5.2 Pedagogical Approaches that Foster Gender Sensitivity

The classroom is not just a space for teaching facts it's a social laboratory where biases can be dismantled and attitudes reshaped. The effectiveness of Social Studies depends heavily on teaching strategies that promote dialogue, reflection, and empathy.

5.2.1 Participatory and Interactive Learning

Methods such as:

- Role-plays
- Simulations
- Group debates
- Problem-solving tasks
- Reflection journals

...allow students to confront gender issues experientially. For example, reenacting community decisions where women are excluded helps students feel the injustice firsthand.

5.2.2 Inclusive Classroom Practices

Teachers model equality by:

- Ensuring equal speaking time
- Avoiding gendered classroom tasks (e.g., boys carrying chairs, girls cleaning boards)
- Encouraging mixed-gender learning groups
- Creating safe spaces for girls to express themselves

These practices challenge unspoken norms that usually go unquestioned.

5.2.3 Critical Thinking and Values Clarification Methods

Since inequality thrives on unquestioned beliefs, teaching must prompt students to:

- Reflect on why certain customs exist
- Examine whether they still serve societal good
- Distinguish between culture and cultural abuse
- Consider alternatives that preserve identity without harming dignity

Values clarification fosters moral maturity, a key ingredient for gender reform.

5.2.4 Transformative Pedagogy

This is where the teaching becomes revolutionary:

- Teachers guide students through analysing real-life gender injustices
- Students investigate community practices and interview elders
- Classroom projects focus on proposing solutions
- Learners reinterpret cultural knowledge through equity-based lenses

Transformative pedagogy doesn't just inform it reshapes consciousness.

5.3 Teacher Competence and Gender Awareness

Teachers are the moral and intellectual architects of the learning environment. In Edo State, the teacher's mindset can either reinforce patriarchy or dismantle it.

5.3.1 Teachers' Knowledge of Gender Issues

Teachers must understand:

- The historical roots of patriarchy in Edo State
- How culture influences daily behaviour
- The impact of religion on gender expectations
- Legal frameworks on gender rights in Nigeria

A knowledgeable teacher teaches boldly; an uninformed one unconsciously reinforces bias.

5.3.2 Teachers as Role Models

Students observe how teachers:

- Treat male and female learners
- Distribute responsibilities
- Respond to gender-based bullying
- Uphold fairness in assessments

An equity-aware teacher becomes a living lesson in equality.

5.3.3 Professional Development and Gender Training
Workshops and retraining programmes equip teachers to:

- Identify subtle biases in textbooks and teaching
- Use gender-responsive methodologies
- Engage with cultural issues sensitively
- Promote inclusive classroom culture

This continuous learning ensures that teachers remain socially conscious.

5.4 School–Community Partnerships for Gender Equity

Transforming gender norms requires synergy between the school and the society. Social Studies is at its best when classroom lessons ripple into community awareness.

5.4.1 Engaging Families and Traditional Leaders

Schools collaborate with:

- Parents
- Chiefs
- Women leaders
- Religious authorities

This ensures that gender-equity messages reinforced at school are not sabotaged at home.

5.4.2 Community-Based Projects

Learners may undertake:

- Surveys on gender roles in their communities
- Sensitisation campaigns
- Cultural exhibitions that highlight women's contributions
- Debates involving community leaders

Such engagement makes students active participants in social change.

5.4.3 Strengthening School Governance Structures

PTAs, school boards, and committees should:

- Include women in decision-making
- Encourage girls' leadership roles
- Respond promptly to gender-based violence

School governance becomes a microcosm of an equitable society.

5.5 Using Social Studies to Promote Rights Awareness and Citizenship

Gender justice is fundamentally a rights issue. Social Studies equips learners with the civic consciousness needed to resist and reform discriminatory norms.

5.5.1 Human Rights Education

Learners study:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Nigeria's Constitution
- Child Rights Act
- Gender provisions in national policies

This knowledge empowers students to recognise when rights are violated.

5.5.2 Building Active Citizenship

Social Studies nurtures qualities like:

- Advocacy
- Community participation
- Democratic engagement
- Volunteerism

Active citizens challenge inequality instead of normalising it.

5.5.3 Gender Advocacy Skills

Students learn to:

- Speak against injustice
- Support victims of discrimination
- Join youth networks
- Engage policymakers respectfully

This creates a pipeline of young gender champions.

5.6 Social Studies as a Long-Term Strategy for Cultural Transformation

Change does not happen overnight. But Social Studies plants seeds that grow into new cultural norms over time.

5.6.1 Changing Mindsets Gradually

Children exposed to equity-based education eventually:

- Become parents who raise balanced children
- Reject harmful customs
- Question abusive interpretations of religion
- Promote fairness in workplaces and communities

5.6.2 Reinventing Culture through Knowledge

Instead of erasing traditions, Social Studies helps learners:

- Distinguish valuable customs from oppressive ones
- Preserve cultural identity while modernising harmful practices
- Celebrate women's roles in historical Edo society
- Build pride in a culture that evolves toward fairness

5.6.3 Building a Gender-Just Future

Through Social Studies, Edo State develops:

- Future leaders with equitable mindsets
- Communities that value women's contributions
- Institutions aligned with global development goals
- A generation ready to rewrite cultural narratives

VI. CHALLENGES TO THE USE OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN EDO STATE

While Social Studies education holds immense potential for reshaping mindsets and dismantling gender injustices, several obstacles weaken its transformative power. These challenges do not arise from the discipline itself but from entrenched societal structures, institutional weaknesses, and classroom-level limitations. Understanding these barriers is essential for proposing workable solutions and reimagining the path toward equity.

6.1 Deep-Rooted Cultural Beliefs and Resistance to Change

Culture in Edo State is not merely tradition it is identity. So, any attempt to question gender norms is often perceived as an attack on communal heritage.

6.1.1 Patriarchal Customs with High Social Approval

Practices such as:

- Male-only inheritance
- Male-dominated decision-making structures
- Widowhood rites
- Expectations of female domestic submission ...are deeply embedded.

Most people, including youth, grow up believing these practices are “normal,” which makes it difficult for Social Studies lessons to gain traction.

6.1.2 Social Sanctions against Non-Conformity

Learners who challenge customs risk:

- Being labeled disrespectful
- Facing mockery from peers
- Clashing with family expectations
- Feeling alienated in their communities

Fear of backlash stops many students from questioning gender-biased norms, even when they intellectually disagree.

6.1.3 Cultural Misrepresentation of Equality

Some community members interpret gender equality as rebellion or moral decay—believing it encourages women to become “disobedient” or “too bold.” This misunderstanding creates tension for Social Studies teachers attempting to promote progressive thinking.

6.2 Religious Conservatism and Patriarchal Interpretations of Faith

Religion speaks loudly in Edo State. So loudly, in fact, that it often overshadows curricular messages.

6.2.1 Scriptural Misinterpretation Supporting Subordination

Many religious groups use selectively interpreted scriptures to justify:

- Male superiority

- Women’s silence in public spaces
- Female economic dependency
- Restrictions on women’s leadership

These doctrinal interpretations counteract Social Studies lessons and create cognitive dissonance for learners.

6.2.2 Religious Leaders’ Influence

Spiritual authorities wield massive influence, especially over:

- Family values
- Gender expectations
- Decision-making norms

If these leaders are not equity-oriented, they inadvertently become opposing forces to Social Studies objectives.

6.2.3 Fear of “Moral Decline” Narratives

Some religious communities interpret gender equality as:

- Disrespect for divine order
- Imported Western ideology
- A threat to family stability

This mindset discourages parents from supporting classroom discussions on gender fairness.

6.3 Structural Challenges within the Education System

Even the best curriculum cannot thrive in a weak educational system.

6.3.1 Outdated Curriculum Content

Many Nigerian Social Studies syllabi:

- Lack current gender topics
- Do not include real-life case studies
- Avoid culturally sensitive issues
- Present gender as a peripheral subject

This leaves teachers without strong curricular backing for equity-centered lessons.

6.3.2 Overloaded Curriculum and Time Constraints

Teachers often teach Social Studies alongside multiple subjects, leaving little time to explore gender issues deeply.

6.3.3 Insufficient Teaching Materials

Most schools lack:

- Updated textbooks
- Gender-sensitive learning aids
- Visual materials depicting women in leadership
- Locally relevant examples

Teaching gender equality becomes an uphill task without adequate resources.

6.4 Teacher-Related Limitations

Teachers are central to transformation, yet many face constraints that limit their impact.

6.4.1 Teachers' Personal Biases

Teachers are products of the same culture they are expected to critique. As such, some hold beliefs such as:

- Girls should speak softly
- Boys should lead
- Women belong in domestic spaces

These biases seep into classroom interactions consciously or not.

6.4.2 Lack of Professional Training on Gender Sensitivity

Most teacher training programmes:

- Avoid deep discussions on gender equity
- Provide minimal training on gender-responsive pedagogy
- Do not emphasise challenge-based teaching

A teacher cannot teach what they do not fully understand.

6.4.3 Fear of Cultural or Parental Backlash

Some teachers prefer to “avoid trouble” by:

- Skipping sensitive topics
- Diluting discussions
- Avoiding examples seen as culturally provocative

This cautious approach hinders transformative learning.

6.5 Student-Related Challenges

Students, though young and curious, are heavily influenced by their environment.

6.5.1 Internalised Gender Stereotypes

Many learners enter the classroom:

- Believing girls are naturally weaker
- Accepting that men must dominate
- Viewing women's leadership with suspicion
- Thinking women's education is less important

Undoing these beliefs takes time and sustained engagement.

6.5.2 Peer Pressure and Social Policing

Boys who show gender-sensitive attitudes may be mocked as “soft,” while girls who question norms may be teased as “too forward.” Peer pressure silences many voices.

6.5.3 Limited Exposure to Gender-Equitable Role Models

When learners rarely see women in:

- politics
- science
- religious leadership
- community governance

...it becomes harder to normalise equality.

6.6 Parental and Community Resistance

Even if schools do everything right, community resistance can undermine progress.

6.6.1 Misunderstanding Educational Goals

Some parents fear that Social Studies is teaching children to:

- Disobey cultural elders
- Abandon traditional practices
- Challenge parental authority

Thus, they discourage teachers from addressing sensitive gender topics.

6.6.2 Strong Control over Girls' Lifestyles

Families often limit girls':

- Social mobility
- Leadership opportunities
- Voice in decision-making

This reduces the practical impact of classroom lessons.

6.6.3 Community Norms That Reinforce Inequality

Local associations, age groups, and traditional councils often operate within patriarchal frameworks. These systems can counterbalance progressive ideas learners acquire in school.

6.7 Socio-Economic Barriers

Poverty is not gender-neutral; it shapes which ideas children embrace.

6.7.1 Economic Prioritisation of Boys' Education

Families with limited resources often prioritise boys, making it difficult for Social Studies messages on equality to find real-world expression.

6.7.2 Labour Burdens on Girls

Heavy domestic chores:

- Reduce girls' study time
- Limit classroom participation
- Reinforce stereotypes

This makes gender equality appear impractical to students.

6.7.3 Early Marriage Pressures

In some communities, early marriage overshadows girls' educational ambitions, making classroom lessons feel distant from reality.

6.8 Weak Legal and Policy Implementation

Policies don't change society practice does.

6.8.1 Poor Enforcement of Gender Laws

Despite existing policies against:

- Discrimination
- Child marriage
- Gender-based violence

...implementation remains weak.

6.8.2 Limited Awareness of Gender Policies

Many teachers, parents, and students are unaware of:

- The Child Rights Act
- Gender mainstreaming policies
- Human rights provisions in the constitution

Lack of awareness reduces collective accountability.

6.8.3 Political Hesitation

Government officials often avoid confronting cultural issues to maintain popularity. This political timidity delays reforms that would support Social Studies pedagogy.

6.9 Systemic Gender Bias in School Environments

Schools sometimes mirror the very inequalities they aim to eradicate.

6.9.1 Male-Dominated School Leadership

Heads of schools are disproportionately male. This reinforces the idea that leadership is a male achievement.

6.9.2 Tolerance of Gender-Based Bullying

Girls often endure:

- Mockery
- Harassment
- Discrimination

...which goes unchecked due to weak disciplinary systems.

6.9.3 Gendered Subject Streaming

The belief that boys are better at science and girls at arts still persists in some schools, contradicting the message of equality taught in Social Studies.

VII. STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN EDO STATE

Promoting gender equality in Edo State through Social Studies education requires more than good intentions;

it demands coordinated strategies that tackle cultural, religious, institutional, and pedagogical constraints simultaneously. This section outlines multi-dimensional approaches aimed at strengthening curriculum frameworks, empowering educators, transforming school culture, mobilising community stakeholders, and aligning the educational system with gender-responsive values. These strategies collectively position Social Studies as a transformative force capable of reshaping attitudes and dismantling discriminatory norms.

7.1 Curriculum Reform and Enrichment

A relevant and equity-oriented curriculum is the foundation for meaningful change.

7.1.1 Infusing Gender-Sensitive Content across Units

Curriculum developers should ensure that gender concepts appear:

- In topics on family life
- In discussions on citizenship
- In lessons on culture and religion
- In units on national development

This thematic integration allows learners to see gender equality as a central social issue rather than a peripheral idea.

7.1.2 Using Locally Relevant Case Studies from Edo State

Examples may include:

- Women leaders in Edo history
- Analysis of cultural practices around inheritance
- Local stories of women in entrepreneurship
- Documented cases of gender-based discrimination

Contextualising content makes gender issues tangible and relatable.

7.1.3 Updating Learning Materials

Textbooks should:

- Portray women in diverse roles
- Avoid reinforcing stereotypes
- Highlight women's contributions to society

Learners absorb powerful messages from illustrations and narratives—updating these is essential.

7.1.4 Emphasising Human Rights Education

A strong human-rights framework helps students recognise gender equality as a constitutional and moral obligation, not a Western intrusion.

7.2 Strengthening Teacher Capacity and Professional Development

Teachers are the main drivers of transformation; empowering them creates ripple effects across generations.

7.2.1 Intensive Gender-Responsive Training Programmes

Training should cover:

- Gender concepts and equity principles
- Strategies for managing controversial topics
- Methods of handling classroom biases
- Practical skills for transformative pedagogy

Workshops can be held at state, zonal, or school levels.

7.2.2 Mentoring and Peer-Learning Platforms

Establishing teacher networks encourages:

- Sharing of lesson plans
- Joint problem-solving
- Classroom innovation
- Accountability on gender issues

Experienced teachers can mentor newly qualified ones.

7.2.3 Promoting Teacher Self-Reflection

Teachers can engage in:

- Reflective journals
- Peer observations
- Value clarification sessions

These help them recognise and correct personal biases.

7.3 Introducing Transformative and Inclusive Pedagogy

Pedagogy is the engine room of Social Studies. Transformative teaching makes the classroom a battleground where harmful norms lose their power.

7.3.1 Participatory Learning Approaches

Using:

- Group debates
- Role-plays
- Simulations
- Case-study analysis
- Storytelling
...creates emotional engagement and sparks critical thinking.

7.3.2 Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

Students investigate real gender issues, such as:

- Girls' school-dropout rates
- Child marriage patterns
- Women's underrepresentation in leadership

PBL encourages discovery, agency, and activism.

7.3.3 Promoting Inclusive Classroom Culture

Teachers should:

- Assign leadership roles to girls
- Encourage boys to take up non-traditional tasks
- Address sexist jokes or comments promptly
- Ensure equal academic expectations for all

This normalises equality within classroom dynamics.

7.3.4 Use of Audio-Visual and Digital Media

Videos, documentaries, and interactive content:

- Spark conversations
- Highlight women's achievements
- Challenge stereotypes

Digital media is particularly powerful for Gen Z and Gen Alpha learners.

7.4 Enhancing School Governance and Institutional Support

Schools must embody the values they teach.

7.4.1 Gender-Balanced Leadership

Encouraging more women to serve as:

- Principals
- Vice-principals
- Heads of departments

...helps dismantle biases and provides students with role models.

7.4.2 Establishing Gender-Responsive School Policies

Schools can develop policies that:

- Prevent gender-based harassment
- Promote equal opportunities in sports and clubs
- Encourage girl-friendly facilities

Equity must be written into the school's operational framework.

7.4.3 Formation of Gender Equality Clubs

These clubs help students:

- Advocate against discrimination
- Plan sensitisation programmes
- Carry out community outreach

They create youth ambassadors for gender justice.

7.4.4 Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Schools should track:

- Classroom participation patterns
- Incidence of gender-based bullying
- Teacher responsiveness to gender issues

Data informs progressive decisions.

7.5 Strengthening School–Community Collaboration

Change cannot happen in isolation. Community involvement amplifies classroom influence.

7.5.1 Engaging Traditional Institutions

Dialogue with:

- Chiefs

- Elders
- Women leaders

...ensures that gender-sensitive ideas are not viewed as cultural threats.

7.5.2 Partnering with Religious Groups

Schools can host seminars featuring:

- Gender-friendly clerics
- Faith-based organisations
- Youth religious groups

This encourages reinterpretation of faith through inclusive lenses.

7.5.3 Parental Sensitisation and Education

PTA meetings and workshops should:

- Explain school goals
- Discuss harmful gender norms
- Promote equal value for girls and boys

Parents must see education as an ally, not an adversary.

7.5.4 Community-Based Projects Led by Students

Examples include:

- Debates in village squares
- Sketches on gender justice
- Awareness marches
- Interviews with local leaders

This connects school knowledge with community transformation.

7.6 Leveraging Media, Technology, and Youth Platforms

The digital age offers tools that complement Social Studies education.

7.6.1 Use of Social Media for Advocacy

Students can create:

- TikTok awareness videos
- Instagram campaigns
- WhatsApp discussion groups

These amplify gender-equity messages beyond school walls.

7.6.2 Media Literacy Education

Teaching students how to:

- Analyse gender portrayals in media
- Identify sexist stereotypes
- Challenge biased content

Media is a powerful teacher—students must learn to interrogate it.

7.6.3 Radio and Community Television Campaigns

Schools can partner with local stations to broadcast:

- Debates
- Interviews
- Short lessons

Edo's rural communities benefit especially from such outreach.

7.7 Policy Reinforcement and Government Support

Government is the backbone of systemic change; without strong policy enforcement, classroom efforts fade.

7.7.1 Implementation of Gender Policies

Government must ensure compliance with:

- Child Rights Act
- National Gender Policy
- Anti-discrimination laws

Schools should be supported with guidelines and supervision.

7.7.2 Funding for Teacher Training and Resources

Budgets should prioritise:

- Workshops
- Updated textbooks
- Classroom resources
- Digital learning tools

Funding unlocks capacity.

7.7.3 Integrating Gender Metrics into School Evaluation

Inspectors should assess:

- Gender participation rates
- Equity in leadership opportunities

- Teachers' gender responsiveness

This creates accountability.

7.8 Promoting Gender-Positive School Culture

A school's culture speaks louder than curriculum.

7.8.1 Zero Tolerance for Gender-Based Violence

Schools must:

- Enforce strict disciplinary action
- Offer counselling for victims
- Provide reporting channels

Safety is foundational to equality.

7.8.2 Celebrating Women's Achievements

Schools should mark:

- International Women's Day
- International Day of the Girl
- Achievements of local female icons

These celebrations counteract the silence around women's contributions.

7.8.3 Encouraging Equal Participation in Extracurricular Activities

Girls should be supported to join:

- Science clubs
- Sports teams
- Debate societies
- Leadership forums

This challenges stereotypes about "male" and "female" spaces.

7.9 Long-Term Cultural Reorientation Through Education

Social transformation is a marathon, not a sprint.

7.9.1 Intergenerational Dialogue Initiatives

Bringing together:

- Students
- Parents
- Elders

...helps bridge the gap between modern values and traditional expectations.

7.9.2 Sustained Advocacy Campaigns

Equity messages require repetition. Schools must run continuous programmes, not one-off events.

7.9.3 Empowering Students as Change Agents

Encouraging learners to:

- Challenge discriminatory practices
- Support peers
- Speak up in public forums

...establishes a culture of courageous citizenship.

7.10 Summary of Strategies

Reducing gender inequity in Edo State requires:

- Strong curriculum reform
- Empowered teachers
- Transformative pedagogy
- Inclusive school environments
- Active community partnership
- Government support
- Long-term cultural evolution

Together, these strategies reposition Social Studies education as a catalyst for reshaping belief systems and promoting a just, gender-balanced society.

VIII. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE, AND RESEARCH

The preceding analysis demonstrates that gender inequality in Edo State is sustained by a complex interaction of custom, religion, and socioeconomic structures, but it also reveals that Social Studies education holds substantial transformative potential. However, for this potential to be realised, deliberate action is required beyond the classroom. This section outlines the implications of the study for educational policy, teaching practice, community engagement, and future research, emphasising the need for systemic, sustained, and context-sensitive interventions.

8.1 Policy Implications

Public policy provides the structural backbone for educational reform. Without intentional policy

alignment, classroom-level innovations remain fragile and unsustainable.

8.1.1 Curriculum Policy Reform

Educational authorities at the state and national levels must:

- Mandate the integration of gender equality themes into Social Studies curricula at primary and junior secondary levels.
- Ensure that curriculum frameworks explicitly address culture, religion, and gender relations within local contexts such as Edo State.
- Periodically review Social Studies syllabi to reflect emerging social realities and human rights standards.

Such reforms move gender equity from optional discussion to institutional obligation.

8.1.2 Teacher Education and Certification Policies

Policies governing teacher education should:

- Make gender-responsive pedagogy a compulsory component of teacher training programmes.
- Require continuous professional development on gender issues for Social Studies teachers.
- Incorporate gender-sensitivity assessments into teacher certification and promotion processes.

This ensures that teachers are not only content-competent but also socially conscious.

8.1.3 School Governance and Accountability Policies

Government and school boards should:

- Promote gender balance in school leadership appointments.
- Require schools to develop and enforce gender-equity policies.
- Integrate gender indicators into school inspection and evaluation frameworks.

Accountability mechanisms give policy real teeth.

8.1.4 Legal and Child Protection Policy Enforcement

Existing laws such as the Child Rights Act and anti-discrimination policies must be actively enforced. Educational institutions should:

- Serve as early-warning systems for gender-based abuse.
- Collaborate with social welfare agencies and law enforcement.
- Be empowered to report violations without fear of cultural or political backlash.

Policy must move from paper to practice.

8.2 Implications for Educational Practice

Policy creates space, but practice fills it. Teachers, school administrators, and curriculum implementers play a frontline role in translating ideals into lived realities.

8.2.1 Classroom Practice

Social Studies teachers should:

- Adopt participatory, dialogical, and inquiry-based methods that encourage critical engagement with cultural norms.
- Use locally grounded examples from Edo State to discuss gender issues.
- Create safe classroom environments where learners can question traditions without fear of ridicule.

Practice that invites dialogue rather than dictation fosters genuine understanding.

8.2.2 School Culture and Administration

School administrators must:

- Model gender equity through leadership practices.
- Address gender-based bullying and harassment decisively.
- Support teachers who engage controversial cultural or religious issues responsibly.

A school cannot preach equality while practicing exclusion.

8.2.3 Teacher–Community Engagement

Teachers should extend learning beyond the classroom by:

- Organising community dialogues on gender and education.
- Collaborating with parents, religious leaders, and traditional rulers.
- Using culturally respectful language that reframes equity as shared progress rather than cultural erosion.

Education thrives when schools and communities move in step.

8.2.4 Learner Empowerment

Educational practice should aim to:

- Build learners' confidence to challenge injustice respectfully.
- Equip students with advocacy and communication skills.
- Encourage youth participation in civic and community initiatives.

Students must be positioned not just as learners, but as emerging citizens and reformers.

8.3 Implications for Community and Religious Institutions

Community and religious structures wield enormous influence in Edo State and must be actively engaged rather than sidelined.

8.3.1 Reinterpretation of Cultural Practices

Traditional institutions should:

- Re-examine customs that undermine women's dignity.
- Promote alternative interpretations that uphold justice and fairness.
- Revive historical narratives that recognise women's leadership roles in Edo society.

Culture is not static; it evolves through conscious reflection.

8.3.2 Faith-Based Engagement

Religious leaders are encouraged to:

- Emphasise scriptural teachings that support mutual respect and human dignity.
- Discourage interpretations that legitimise abuse or exclusion.
- Collaborate with educators in promoting gender-sensitive moral instruction.

Faith and equity need not be adversaries.

8.4 Implications for Gender Advocacy and Civil Society

Civil society organisations and advocacy groups can leverage the findings of this study to:

- Design school-based gender sensitisation programmes.
- Develop culturally informed advocacy campaigns.
- Partner with educational institutions to support girls' education.
- Monitor the implementation of gender-related educational policies.

Education-based advocacy offers a sustainable pathway to reform.

8.5 Implications for Research

The study opens new directions for academic inquiry, particularly within African and Nigerian contexts.

8.5.1 Need for Empirical Studies

Future research should:

- Conduct classroom-based studies assessing the impact of gender-sensitive Social Studies pedagogy.
- Explore students' perceptions of culture, religion, and gender roles over time.
- Examine differences between urban and rural schools in Edo State.

Empirical evidence strengthens policy and practice.

8.5.2 Comparative and Longitudinal Research

Researchers are encouraged to:

- Compare Edo State with other Nigerian states to identify contextual similarities and differences.
- Undertake longitudinal studies tracking attitudinal change among learners exposed to transformative Social Studies education.

Such studies illuminate patterns of sustainable change.

8.5.3 Interdisciplinary Research Approaches

Given the complexity of gender inequality, future research should integrate perspectives from:

- Education
- Sociology
- Anthropology
- Religious studies
- Gender studies

This holistic approach enriches understanding and solutions.

IX. CONCLUSION

Gender inequality in Edo State is neither accidental nor isolated; it is the cumulative outcome of deeply embedded customs, selective religious interpretations, and long-standing socialisation processes that privilege one gender over another. These belief systems, while culturally meaningful, have often been weaponised intentionally or otherwise to legitimise exclusion, silence women's voices, and restrict access to opportunities. This study has demonstrated that such inequalities persist not because they are inevitable, but because they are learned, normalised, and reproduced across generations.

Within this context, Social Studies education emerges as a powerful corrective mechanism. As a discipline concerned with citizenship, values, identity, and social responsibility, Social Studies is uniquely positioned to interrogate harmful traditions while preserving cultural heritage. It provides learners with the intellectual tools to question injustice, the civic competence to participate meaningfully in society, and the moral grounding to balance tradition with equity.

The paper has shown that when Social Studies education is gender-responsive, context-sensitive, and pedagogically transformative, it can dismantle rigid gender stereotypes, promote critical engagement with cultural and religious norms, and nurture a generation of learners who view equality not as rebellion, but as social progress. However, this transformative potential can only be realised through deliberate curriculum reform, teacher empowerment, institutional support, community collaboration, and strong policy enforcement.

Ultimately, the pursuit of gender equality in Edo State does not require the abandonment of culture or faith; rather, it demands their reinterpretation through lenses of justice, dignity, and shared humanity. Education particularly Social Studies stands as the bridge between inherited traditions and a more inclusive future

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and arguments of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the role of Social Studies education in promoting gender equality in Edo State. These recommendations are organised thematically to address policy, pedagogy, institutions, community structures, and research.

10.1 Recommendations for Government and Policy Makers

1. Institutionalise Gender-Responsive Curriculum Reform: The Edo State Ministry of Education should mandate the integration of gender equality, human rights, and social justice themes into Social Studies curricula at all basic education levels. These themes should be clearly articulated, assessable, and contextually grounded in Edo cultural realities.
2. Strengthen Policy Enforcement Mechanisms: Existing gender-related laws and education policies such as the Child Rights Act and National Gender Policy should be strictly enforced within schools. Monitoring teams

should be empowered to sanction institutions that tolerate discriminatory practices.

3. Allocate Dedicated Funding for Gender Education Initiatives: Budgetary provisions should support teacher training, instructional materials, digital resources, and community outreach programmes focused on gender equity within Social Studies education.
4. Integrate Gender Indicators into School Evaluation Systems: School inspections should include measurable indicators such as gender participation rates, leadership representation, and responsiveness to gender-based issues.

10.2 Recommendations for Curriculum Developers and Educational Planners

1. Contextualise Learning Content: Curriculum materials should reflect Edo State's cultural realities, including traditional practices, religious diversity, and local gender dynamics. Local examples increase relevance and learner engagement.
2. Eliminate Gender Bias in Instructional Materials: Textbooks, illustrations, and learning activities should portray both males and females in diverse, non-stereotypical roles, including leadership, science, governance, and caregiving.
3. Embed Critical Thinking and Values Education: Curriculum frameworks should encourage dialogue, reflection, and ethical reasoning rather than rote memorisation of social norms.

10.3 Recommendations for Teachers and Classroom Practice

1. Adopt Transformative Pedagogical Approaches: Social Studies teachers should employ participatory methods such as debates, role-play, case studies, and problem-based learning to encourage learners to critically examine gender norms.
2. Promote Inclusive Classroom Interaction: Teachers must ensure equal participation, discourage sexist language, and assign leadership roles equitably among learners.

3. Engage in Continuous Professional Development: Teachers should regularly attend workshops and seminars on gender-sensitive pedagogy, cultural competence, and conflict-sensitive teaching.
4. Model Gender-Equitable Behaviour: Teachers' attitudes, language, and expectations significantly influence learners. Educators must consciously model fairness and respect.

10.4 Recommendations for School Administrators

1. Create Gender-Responsive School Environments: Schools should adopt clear policies against gender-based discrimination, harassment, and violence, supported by confidential reporting mechanisms.
2. Promote Gender Balance in Leadership and Activities: Female teachers and students should be encouraged to occupy leadership positions, while extracurricular activities should be open and accessible to all genders.
3. Establish Gender Equality Clubs and Programmes: Such platforms enable students to engage in advocacy, peer education, and community sensitisation activities.

10.5 Recommendations for Parents, Community, and Religious Leaders

1. Encourage Community Dialogue on Gender Norms: Traditional rulers, elders, and faith leaders should collaborate with schools to discuss harmful practices and promote inclusive interpretations of culture and religion.
2. Support Girls' Education and Participation: Parents and guardians should prioritise girls' education, discourage early marriage, and support equal opportunities for both boys and girls.
3. Align Moral Instruction with Human Dignity Principles: Religious teachings should emphasise justice, compassion, and mutual respect rather than rigid gender hierarchies.

10.6 Recommendations for Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organisations

1. Partner with Schools for Gender Sensitisation Programmes: NGOs should support teacher training, student workshops, and community outreach initiatives related to gender equality.
2. Provide Advocacy and Monitoring Support: Civil society groups should monitor policy implementation and advocate for inclusive educational reforms.

10.7 Recommendations for Researchers and Academics

1. Conduct Empirical and Longitudinal Studies: Future research should examine the long-term impact of gender-responsive Social Studies education on learner attitudes and behaviour.
2. Adopt Interdisciplinary Research Approaches: Combining education, sociology, anthropology, and religious studies will yield deeper insights into gender inequality dynamics.
3. Expand Research Beyond Urban Centres: Rural-focused studies are essential for capturing diverse experiences within Edo State.

The recommendations outlined above underscore the reality that achieving gender equality through Social Studies education requires collective responsibility. Government, educators, communities, and learners must act in concert. When properly supported, Social Studies education can transcend the classroom to become a vehicle for cultural reflection, social justice, and sustainable gender equity in Edo State.

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