Available on: https://jsshrs.ep-journals.org/ E-ISSN: 3051-3561, P-ISSN: 3051-3553

Journal of Social Science and Human Research Studies

Volume : 02 Issue : 07 July-2026

From Home to Classroom: The Role of Family-Based Gender Socialisation in Shaping Girls' Educational Outcomes in Cameroon

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Published Date: July 10, 2026 **Article DOI: 10.65150/EP-jsshrs/V2E7/2026-13**

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the role of family-based gender socialisation in shaping girls' educational outcomes in Cameroon, with particular attention to how everyday practices within the home influence access, participation, and achievement in schooling. While considerable progress has been made in expanding educational opportunities, persistent gender disparities suggest that structural reforms alone are insufficient. This study argues that the roots of these inequalities lie, in part, within the family, where gender roles, expectations, and values are first constructed and transmitted. Drawing on an integrative theoretical framework informed by social cognitive theory, ecological systems theory, and African-centred perspectives on socialisation, the paper explores how girls' identities, aspirations, and educational experiences are shaped through early socialisation processes. Using a critical and contextually grounded analysis of the Cameroonian setting, the study highlights how domestic labour expectations, parental investment patterns, cultural norms, and early marriage practices interact to constrain girls' educational trajectories. It further demonstrates that these influences operate not only at the level of access to schooling but also affect girls' self-concept, academic engagement, and long-term educational attainment. The paper also recognises the diversity of family experiences, acknowledging that while some households reproduce gender inequalities, others serve as sites of resistance and transformation by actively supporting girls' education. The analysis underscores the need to move beyond school-centred interventions towards more holistic and culturally responsive approaches that engage families and communities as key actors in educational change. Implications are drawn for policy-makers, educators, parents, and community leaders, emphasising the importance of challenging restrictive gender norms, promoting equitable household practices, and strengthening support systems for girls. The study concludes that improving girls' educational outcomes in Cameroon requires a reconfiguration of the relationship between home and school, where both spaces work in tandem to foster empowerment rather than limitation. Situating educational inequality within the broader processes of gender socialisation, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how meaningful and sustainable change can be achieved.

KEYWORDS: Gender Socialisation, Family Influence, Girls' Education, Parental Attitudes, Educational Outcomes, Cameroon

INTRODUCTION

Education has long been recognised as a fundamental human right and a critical driver of individual empowerment, social transformation, and national development. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly in Cameroon, significant efforts have been made to expand access to education for all children, with a strong emphasis on closing gender gaps. Yet, despite these efforts, disparities in educational participation, retention, and achievement between boys and girls remain persistent. While structural barriers such as poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and conflict have received considerable scholarly attention, less emphasis has been placed on the subtle yet powerful influence of family-based gender socialisation in shaping girls' educational trajectories. This study situates itself within this overlooked domain, arguing that the roots of educational inequality are often embedded in the everyday practices, expectations, and cultural norms transmitted within the family.

Family-based gender socialisation refers to the processes through which children learn gender roles, behaviours, and expectations within the home environment through observation, reinforcement, and interaction with parents, siblings, and extended kin (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). In many African societies, including Cameroon, the family remains the primary site of identity formation and moral instruction, where deeply entrenched cultural norms guide the socialisation of boys and girls into distinct and often unequal roles (Nsamenang, 2002). These processes are not neutral; they are shaped by historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts that assign differential value and opportunity based on gender. As such, the family becomes both a nurturing space and a site where inequalities are normalised and reproduced.

In the Cameroonian context, gender socialisation within families often reflects broader patriarchal structures that prioritise male authority and female domesticity. Girls are frequently socialised to embody values of obedience, modesty, and caregiving, while boys are encouraged to be assertive, independent, and academically ambitious. These expectations manifest in the allocation of household responsibilities, parental investment decisions, and the types of encouragement or discouragement children receive regarding their education. For instance, girls may be expected to devote significant time to domestic chores, limiting their study time and engagement with schoolwork, whereas boys are more likely

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to be afforded the time and resources necessary for academic pursuits (Fonyuy, 2019; UNESCO, 2018). Over time, these differential experiences shape not only access to education but also self-efficacy, aspirations, and academic identity.

The influence of family-based gender socialisation extends beyond material conditions to the psychological and symbolic dimensions of learning. Through daily interactions and implicit messaging, girls internalise beliefs about their capabilities and societal roles, which can either support or constrain their educational ambitions. Social learning theory posits that children adopt behaviours and attitudes through modelling and reinforcement, suggesting that parental attitudes towards education and gender roles play a critical role in shaping children's educational outcomes (Bandura, 1986). When families consciously or unconsciously communicate that education is less valuable for girls, or that certain subjects are inappropriate for them, these messages can limit girls' participation in academic domains such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), thereby reinforcing gendered educational pathways.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that family-based gender socialisation is not a static or uniformly oppressive process. In contemporary Cameroon, shifting socio-economic realities, urbanisation, and increased advocacy for girls' education have begun to challenge traditional norms and create spaces for renegotiating gender roles within families. Some households actively support girls' education, invest equally in their schooling, and encourage aspirations beyond traditional expectations. However, these progressive shifts often coexist with enduring cultural beliefs, creating a complex and sometimes contradictory landscape in which girls must navigate competing expectations. This tension highlights the need for a nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of how family dynamics influence educational outcomes.

Despite the centrality of the family in shaping children's lives, existing research on girls' education in Cameroon has largely focused on macro-level factors such as policy frameworks, school environments, and economic constraints, often treating the family as a secondary or background variable. This has resulted in a limited understanding of how micro-level socialisation processes within households interact with broader structural conditions to influence girls' educational experiences. Foregrounding the role of family-based gender socialisation, this study seeks to bridge this gap and contribute to a more holistic understanding of educational inequality.

This paper therefore explores the intricate relationship between family-based gender socialisation and girls' educational outcomes in Cameroon, examining how cultural norms, parental practices, and intra-household dynamics shape access, participation, and achievement in education. In doing so, it adopts a critical perspective that recognises both the constraints and possibilities within family systems, aiming to inform more culturally responsive and transformative approaches to promoting gender equity in education. Ultimately, understanding what happens "from home to classroom" is essential for addressing the root causes of inequality and ensuring that educational opportunities for girls are not only available but also meaningful and empowering.

Conceptualising Family-Based Gender Socialisation in Cameroon

The conceptual framework for this study is anchored on the idea that girls' educational outcomes in Cameroon are not produced in the classroom alone, but emerge through a continuous interaction between family socialisation processes and the wider social environment. At the centre of the framework is family-based gender socialisation as the independent construct, and girls' educational outcomes as the dependent construct. The framework assumes that what girls learn at home about femininity, obedience, labour, aspiration, authority, and self-worth profoundly shapes how they experience schooling, how they see themselves as learners, and how far they are able to progress within the education system. This assumption is consistent with social cognitive understandings of gender development, which hold that children acquire gendered beliefs and behaviours through modelling, reinforcement, direct instruction, and observation of social practices around them. In other words, girls do not merely enter school as individuals; they enter as socially formed subjects whose expectations and dispositions have already been patterned by family life.

Within this framework, family-based gender socialisation refers to the everyday ways through which families communicate what is considered appropriate for girls. These processes include the division of household labour, parental expectations, control over mobility, gendered discipline, differential emotional support, investment decisions regarding schooling, and the symbolic messages girls receive about marriage, leadership, ambition, and intellectual ability. In many households, girls are introduced early into domestic and caregiving roles, while boys are more often positioned for autonomy and public participation. Such socialisation practices may appear ordinary or culturally legitimate, yet they carry educational consequences because they shape how much time girls have for study, how much encouragement they receive, what subjects they believe are suitable for them, and whether their education is treated as a long-term investment or a temporary privilege. Evidence from Cameroon shows that mothers' education, women's decision-making power, and gendered household expenditure patterns significantly influence children's schooling and girls' share of education-related investment.

The dependent construct, girls' educational outcomes, should be understood in broad rather than narrow terms. In this study, educational outcomes do not refer only to examination scores. They encompass access to schooling, regular attendance, participation in classroom life, persistence and retention, completion, academic achievement, educational aspiration, and even subject choice and self-confidence as learners. This broader understanding is important because family-based gender socialisation can disadvantage girls long before low grades become visible. A girl may be enrolled in school but remain educationally constrained through fatigue, irregular attendance, diminished confidence, limited parental support, or pressure towards early marriage. Cameroon's recent gender data continue to show gaps in enrolment, completion, literacy, and participation that favour boys in many regions, reminding us that educational inequality is a process rather than a single event.

Between the independent and dependent constructs lie several mediating processes. One key mediator is household allocation of time and labour. When girls are socialised into disproportionate domestic responsibility, they often have less time for homework, revision, rest, and school readiness. Time, in this sense, becomes a hidden educational resource distributed unequally through gender norms. Cameroon's national gender factbook indicates that women spend substantially more time than men on unpaid domestic work and caregiving, a pattern that reflects the gender order into which girls are socialised from childhood. The framework therefore proposes that unequal domestic burdens mediate the relationship between family gender norms and school performance by reducing girls' effective learning time and increasing fatigue.

A second mediator is psychosocial orientation, especially self-concept, academic confidence, and aspiration. Social cognitive theory is particularly useful here because it explains how repeated exposure to gendered expectations affects what children believe they can or should become. When

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girls repeatedly encounter messages that privilege submissiveness over agency, marriage over long-term schooling, or domestic competence over intellectual excellence, such messages can become internalised as limits on aspiration. The framework therefore assumes that family practices do not only regulate girls externally; they also shape girls internally by influencing self-belief, motivation, and perceived educational legitimacy. This internal dimension helps explain why some girls may under-participate even when schools are physically accessible.

A third mediator is household educational investment. Families do not only socialise through speech and values; they also socialise through resource distribution. Decisions about who receives fees first, who is given books, who is allowed extra tuition, whose absence from school is tolerated, and whose future is considered worth financing are all deeply gendered educational signals. Research on Cameroon indicates that women's bargaining power and educational attainment can positively affect expenditure shares for girls' education, while earlier work on household schooling decisions also shows the importance of mothers' education and female-related social capital in shaping enrolment patterns. The conceptual framework thus proposes that family-based gender socialisation influences educational outcomes partly through patterns of educational investment, which may either reinforce or interrupt inherited gender inequality.

The framework also recognises that the family does not operate in isolation. For that reason, it is informed by an ecological perspective which views child development as shaped by layered and interacting systems. The family belongs to the immediate environment of the child, but it is itself influenced by wider structures such as community norms, religion, poverty, conflict, policy, and regional inequalities. In this study, these broader conditions function as contextual and moderating variables. Thus, the effects of family-based gender socialisation on girls' education may be intensified or softened by factors such as rural or urban residence, maternal education, household income, women's decision-making power, conflict exposure, and the prevalence of early marriage in the local context. An ecological reading is especially relevant in Cameroon, where educational conditions differ sharply across regions and where wider insecurity and social vulnerability often strengthen conservative coping strategies within households.

In the Cameroonian context, early marriage and adolescent transition pressures constitute another major contextual pathway in the framework. Family socialisation often defines a girl's value in relation to marriageability, sexual respectability, and domestic preparedness. Where these values are prioritised, schooling may be treated as secondary, provisional, or even risky if it is perceived to delay marriage or encourage social independence. UNICEF's country data indicate that child marriage remains a significant issue in Cameroon, with substantial proportions of young women entering union before age 18, especially in poorer and more rural settings. The framework therefore includes early marriage pressure as both an outcome of family-based gender socialisation and a mechanism through which educational discontinuity occurs.

Another important element in the framework is intergenerational transmission. Family-based gender socialisation is rarely invented anew in each household; it is transmitted across generations through memory, custom, and observed adult roles. Yet the framework does not assume that families are uniformly oppressive or incapable of change. On the contrary, it allows for transformative family practices. Where mothers are educated, where women participate in decision-making, where parents consciously reject restrictive stereotypes, and where girls are encouraged to imagine broader futures, the same family space can become a site of resistance and educational empowerment rather than limitation. This is why the framework is not deterministic. It acknowledges that family socialisation may operate either negatively or positively, depending on the values, resources, and power relations within the home.

Conceptually, then, the framework may be read as a relational chain: family-based gender socialisation shapes time use, self-concept, aspiration, and educational investment, which in turn influence girls' educational participation, retention, achievement, and progression. This relationship is moderated by broader ecological conditions such as poverty, locality, culture, women's empowerment, and conflict. Put differently, the classroom outcome is linked to the household process. A girl's school experience is therefore not simply a product of her ability or school quality; it is also a social outcome of what her family has taught her about who she is, what she deserves, and how far she is expected to go.

This conceptual framework is particularly useful for the present study because it avoids two analytical errors. First, it avoids reducing girls' educational outcomes to individual effort, as though success or failure were simply matters of motivation. Secondly, it avoids treating culture as an abstract force detached from everyday family practices. Instead, it locates gender inequality in the concrete processes through which families distribute labour, love, discipline, opportunity, and expectation. In doing so, it provides a strong interpretive lens for examining how educational inequality is reproduced from home to classroom in Cameroon. The framework ultimately suggests that meaningful improvement in girls' educational outcomes will require interventions that engage not only schools and policies, but also the gendered assumptions embedded within family life itself.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this study is built on an integrative perspective that draws from social cognitive theory, ecological systems theory, and African-centred conceptions of socialisation. This combination is necessary because the phenomenon under investigation—family-based gender socialisation and its influence on girls' educational outcomes—cannot be adequately explained through a single theoretical lens. Rather, it requires a framework that captures individual learning processes, the layered environments within which these processes occur, and the cultural specificity of African social life. Together, these theoretical strands provide a nuanced understanding of how gendered meanings are constructed within the family and how they travel with the child into the classroom, shaping educational participation, identity, and achievement.

At the core of this framework is social cognitive theory, advanced by Albert Bandura, which offers a powerful explanation of how gender roles and expectations are learned within the family. Social cognitive theory posits that children acquire behaviours, beliefs, and identities through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within their immediate social environment (Bandura, 1986). In the context of Cameroon, this means that girls learn what it means to be female not only through explicit instruction but also through the everyday practices they observe—how mothers and fathers divide labour, how authority is exercised, and how educational decisions are made within the household. When girls consistently observe women engaged in domestic labour and men occupying decision-making roles, these patterns are internalised as normative. Similarly,

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when girls are praised for obedience and domestic competence but receive limited encouragement for academic excellence, they begin to associate femininity with submission rather than intellectual agency.

Importantly, social cognitive theory emphasises the role of self-efficacy—individuals' beliefs about their capabilities—in shaping behaviour and achievement. Within this study, self-efficacy becomes a critical bridge between family socialisation and educational outcomes. Girls who are socialised into restrictive gender roles may develop lower academic self-confidence, reduced aspirations, and a sense that certain educational pathways are not meant for them. Conversely, where families model gender-equitable practices and actively support girls' learning, higher levels of self-efficacy and academic engagement are likely to emerge. Thus, social cognitive theory helps to explain how gendered expectations within the family are not only external constraints but also internalised psychological realities that shape girls' engagement with schooling (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

While social cognitive theory illuminates the mechanisms of learning, it does not fully account for the broader structural and contextual forces that shape family practices. For this reason, the study also draws on ecological systems theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, which conceptualises human development as occurring within nested systems of influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within this framework, the family represents the microsystem—the immediate environment in which gender socialisation occurs. However, the family itself is shaped by wider systems, including community norms, cultural traditions, economic conditions, educational policies, and national development trajectories. In Cameroon, for example, regional disparities, poverty, conflict, and entrenched patriarchal norms all influence how families socialise girls and make decisions about their education.

Ecological systems theory is particularly valuable because it allows this study to move beyond a narrow focus on the family as an isolated unit. It recognises that family-based gender socialisation is both a product of and a response to wider socio-cultural and economic realities. For instance, in economically constrained households, prioritising boys' education may be rationalised as a survival strategy, reflecting broader structural inequalities rather than purely individual bias. Similarly, in regions affected by insecurity, protective parental attitudes may restrict girls' mobility and schooling, not only as a cultural preference but also as a response to perceived risk. By situating family practices within these layered systems, ecological theory enables a more contextually grounded and less deterministic interpretation of gender socialisation in Cameroon.

However, both social cognitive and ecological theories originate largely from Western epistemological traditions and may not fully capture the communal, relational, and culturally embedded nature of socialisation in African contexts. To address this limitation, the study incorporates insights from African-centred perspectives on socialisation, particularly those articulated by A. Bame Nsamenang. Nsamenang's work emphasises that child development in African societies is deeply rooted in communal participation, interdependence, and cultural continuity (Nsamenang, 2002). Socialisation is not confined to the nuclear family but extends to extended kin, elders, and community members, all of whom contribute to shaping the child's identity and social roles.

From this perspective, gender socialisation in Cameroon is not merely an individual or household process but a collective cultural project. Girls are socialised into socially valued roles that reflect broader communal expectations regarding femininity, morality, and social responsibility. While such socialisation fosters a strong sense of belonging and cultural identity, it can also reinforce hierarchical gender relations that limit girls' educational opportunities. For example, the expectation that girls should prioritise family obligations over personal advancement may be upheld not only by parents but also by extended family and community structures. Nsamenang's framework therefore provides a culturally grounded lens through which to understand how gender norms are transmitted, legitimised, and sustained across generations.

The integration of these three theoretical perspectives allows for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. Social cognitive theory explains how gender roles are learned and internalised at the individual level; ecological systems theory situates these processes within broader structural and contextual influences; and African-centred perspectives illuminate the cultural meanings and communal dynamics that shape socialisation in Cameroon. Together, they form a multi-layered theoretical framework that captures the complexity of moving "from home to classroom."

Critically, this theoretical integration also challenges simplistic narratives about girls' educational disadvantage. It rejects the notion that girls' outcomes are solely the result of individual deficits or parental neglect, and instead highlights the interplay between learned behaviours, cultural expectations, and structural conditions. It also opens up space for recognising the transformative potential within families. If gender roles are learned through observation and interaction, they can also be reshaped through alternative models, conscious parenting practices, and shifts in cultural discourse. Similarly, if family practices are influenced by broader systems, then policy interventions, community engagement, and economic empowerment can create conditions that support more equitable socialisation patterns.

In this sense, the theoretical framework not only explains the problem but also points towards pathways for change. It suggests that improving girls' educational outcomes in Cameroon requires interventions that operate simultaneously at multiple levels: fostering gender-equitable practices within families, addressing structural inequalities that shape household decisions, and engaging cultural narratives that define what it means to be a girl. By grounding the study in this integrated theoretical approach, the analysis is able to move beyond description towards a deeper understanding of both the reproduction and transformation of gender inequality in education.

Understanding the Problem of Family-Based Gender Socialisation in Cameroon

Despite sustained global and national advocacy for gender equality in education, the educational trajectories of girls in Cameroon continue to reflect deep-seated inequalities rooted in family-based gender socialisation. While policy frameworks increasingly promote universal access to schooling, the lived realities of many girls suggest that access alone does not translate into equitable participation, retention, or achievement. Evidence indicates that girls in Cameroon are consistently disadvantaged across all levels of education, from enrolment to completion, with disparities becoming more pronounced as they progress through the system. This persistent gap raises critical concerns about the underlying social processes shaping girls' educational experiences, particularly those originating within the family context where gender identities, expectations, and roles are first constructed and reinforced.

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Family-based gender socialisation remains a powerful yet under-examined determinant of girls' educational outcomes in Cameroon. Within many households, cultural norms assign differentiated roles to boys and girls, positioning girls primarily within domestic and caregiving spheres while associating boys with public, economic, and educational advancement. From an early age, girls are socialised into responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving, often at the expense of study time, school attendance, and academic engagement. These gendered expectations are not merely behavioural prescriptions; they constitute a value system that subtly communicates to girls that their educational aspirations are secondary to their future roles as wives and mothers. Consequently, the home becomes a site where educational inequalities are reproduced long before they manifest in the classroom.

Compounding this issue is the interplay between economic constraints and culturally embedded gender preferences within families. In contexts of limited financial resources, parents may prioritise the education of male children, perceiving greater economic returns from investing in boys' schooling while preparing girls for early marriage or domestic life. Empirical studies in Cameroon reveal that early marriage, poverty, and entrenched gender stereotypes significantly limit girls' access to and continuity in education. These decisions are not always rooted in overt discrimination but are often rationalised within broader socio-economic survival strategies, thereby normalising practices that systematically disadvantage girls. As a result, the cycle of limited educational attainment among women is perpetuated across generations.

Furthermore, family-based gender socialisation influences not only access to schooling but also girls' self-concept, academic motivation, and subject choices. Through processes of modelling, reinforcement, and cultural transmission, girls internalise beliefs about what is appropriate or attainable for their gender, often steering them away from fields perceived as masculine, such as science and technology. Gender stereotypes embedded within families thus intersect with school environments to shape educational aspirations and outcomes, reinforcing a hidden curriculum of inequality. Studies in Cameroon highlight that such stereotypes continue to restrict girls' participation in key academic domains, even in contexts where formal barriers to access have been reduced.

While existing research has extensively documented structural barriers to girls' education—such as inadequate infrastructure, school-related gender-based violence, and policy implementation gaps—there remains a relative paucity of scholarship critically examining the micro-level dynamics of family socialisation as a foundational driver of these inequalities. Much of the discourse treats the family as a background variable rather than a central analytical lens, thereby overlooking how everyday practices, interactions, and expectations within the home actively shape girls' educational trajectories. This gap is particularly significant in the Cameroonian context, where communal and familial structures play a central role in social organisation and identity formation.

The problem, therefore, lies not only in the persistence of gender disparities in education but in the insufficient understanding of how family-based gender socialisation processes produce, sustain, and legitimise these disparities. Without interrogating the cultural logics and social practices embedded within households, interventions aimed at improving girls' education risk addressing symptoms rather than root causes. There is an urgent need for contextually grounded research that situates girls' educational outcomes within the nexus of family dynamics, cultural expectations, and socio-economic realities. Such an approach is essential for developing transformative strategies that move beyond access to address the deeper social structures shaping educational inequality.

In the Cameroonian context, where tradition, modernity, and socio-economic pressures intersect, examining the role of family-based gender socialisation offers a critical pathway for understanding why many girls continue to experience constrained educational opportunities despite policy progress. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap by critically exploring how familial practices and gendered expectations influence girls' educational participation, engagement, and achievement, with the ultimate aim of informing more culturally responsive and sustainable educational interventions.

Analysis of the Cameroon Context

Any serious analysis of family-based gender socialisation and girls' educational outcomes in Cameroon must begin with the recognition that the country's educational inequalities are not produced by schools alone. They are shaped within a wider social order in which family, community, religion, economy and state institutions are deeply intertwined. In Cameroon, the home remains the primary site where children first learn what it means to be female or male, what kinds of labour are expected of them, what forms of obedience are rewarded, and what futures are considered respectable or realistic. The educational system therefore does not receive gender-neutral children; it receives girls and boys who have already been socialised into differentiated roles. This is why the movement "from home to classroom" is so critical in the Cameroonian case. The classroom often reproduces, rather than corrects, gendered hierarchies first normalised within the family, especially where patriarchal authority, unequal domestic expectations and selective investment in children's futures are treated as culturally ordinary rather than socially constructed (World Bank, 2020; Institut National de la Statistique [INS], 2024).

The national picture confirms that gender disparities remain structurally significant. Cameroon's recent gender factbook shows that boys still have higher enrolment rates than girls across levels of education. In 2022, net primary enrolment stood at 89.9% for boys compared with 81.4% for girls, while net secondary enrolment remained low for both sexes but still favoured boys, at 39.61% against 36.39% for girls. Completion patterns are equally revealing: the school completion rate is higher for boys than girls at both the primary and lower-secondary levels, and gender parity in school enrolment still broadly favours males, with roughly nine girls enrolled for every ten boys. These figures matter because they show that the problem is not merely whether girls enter school, but whether they remain, progress and convert schooling into durable educational advantage (INS, 2024).

The Cameroonian context cannot be understood through national averages alone, because gender inequality in education is profoundly regional. The burden falls most heavily on rural and so-called priority education zones, especially the Far North, North, Adamawa and parts of the East. In early learning participation, for example, the gender gap appears small at national level, but regional disparities are severe. Among five-year-olds, participation in learning activities is especially low in the Far North, where rates are 16.1% for girls and 18% for boys, and in the North, where they are 20.6% for girls and 24.9% for boys. In the priority education zones as a whole, participation falls to 22.6% for girls and 25.4% for boys. Such disparities suggest that the gender question in Cameroon is inseparable from geography, poverty and local social norms. Girls' educational

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disadvantage is therefore not a uniform national experience; it is intensified where household vulnerability is high, where traditional gender expectations are more rigid, and where educational provision is historically weaker (INS, 2024; World Bank, 2020).

Within this uneven landscape, family-based gender socialisation operates through the ordinary routines of domestic life. A major issue in Cameroon is the unequal distribution of unpaid labour. National data show that women spend more than twice as much time as men on unpaid housework and care: about 3.5 hours daily compared with about 1 hour for men. More specifically, women spend 9.7% of their time on domestic chores, against 4.8% for men, and 4.8% on unpaid care, against 1.2% for men (INS, 2024). Although these figures refer to women and men, they are analytically important for the socialisation of girls because children are inducted into the gender order they observe. Girls grow up watching femininity associated with service, caregiving and domestic endurance, while boys more often see themselves aligned with mobility, public life and entitlement to time. In many homes, girls are therefore prepared early for a gendered adult life through repetitive domestic training. This has direct educational implications: less study time, greater fatigue, irregular attendance and the internalisation of the idea that academic ambition must remain secondary to household duty. The issue is not simply that girls help at home; it is that the home often assigns them a different moral obligation to serve, and this shapes how seriously their schooling is pursued.

The role of the family is further illuminated by evidence on household decision-making and parental resources. A Cameroon study on household-level determinants of schooling found that children's enrolment differs by sex and that the gap widens with age, particularly at secondary-school level. Using household survey data, the study reported average enrolment rates of 78% for males and 67% for females at secondary-school age, indicating a gender gap of 9 percentage points. It also noted that marriage and pregnancy featured among girls' reasons for withdrawal from school, and concluded that mothers' education and female-related social capital strongly influence parental decisions about children's schooling (Tabi Johannes, 2006). Beyond the statistics, this points to an important sociological reality: family investment in girls' education is not merely an economic calculation but also a gendered judgement about future roles, expected returns and social respectability. Where the daughter is imagined primarily as a future wife, helper or caregiver, her education may be tolerated but not fully prioritised; where the mother has greater educational capital or agency, the family is often more likely to sustain the girl's schooling.

Early marriage and adolescent pregnancy remain among the clearest mechanisms through which family and community gender norms interrupt girls' schooling in Cameroon. UNICEF's child marriage profile indicates that Cameroon is home to over 2 million child brides and that 3 in 10 young women were married in childhood. The same profile shows pronounced inequalities by wealth, education and residence, with child marriage far more prevalent among poorer, less educated and rural populations (UNICEF, 2023). Cameroon's national gender factbook similarly reports that among women aged 20–24, 11% entered their first union before age 15 and 30% before age 18, while early marriage among males is very low (INS, 2024). The World Bank also notes high rates of adolescent pregnancy and early marriage in several regions, including Adamawa, the North, the Far North and the East, and links these pressures to girls' dropout and non-completion (World Bank, 2020). In this sense, the family is not always merely a victim of poverty; it can also be an active transmitter of norms that convert daughters into marriageable bodies before they are allowed to become fully educated persons.

The Cameroon context is also shaped by crisis, and crisis does not affect girls and boys in identical ways. UNICEF reports that more than 1.5 million school-age children in Cameroon currently need education assistance because of crises affecting the North-West, South-West, Coast, West and Far North regions. The same source notes that over 1.1 million pupils urgently need access to education services (UNICEF Cameroon, n.d.). In the North-West and South-West, conflict has produced displacement, school attacks and fear, and national statistics show notable numbers of internally displaced girls in general secondary education. This matters for the present study because crisis intensifies dependence on family coping strategies. Under insecurity, families may become more protective, more conservative or more economically strained, and these pressures often narrow girls' freedom of movement and raise the likelihood of withdrawal, domestic confinement or early union. Thus, conflict does not replace family-based gender socialisation; rather, it hardens it, pushing already unequal expectations into more restrictive forms.

A further critical issue is that the educational disadvantage of girls in Cameroon cannot be reduced to a simple "culture versus education" narrative. Such a framing is analytically weak because it treats culture as fixed and uniformly hostile to girls. In reality, Cameroonian families are diverse, historically dynamic and internally contested. Many households invest deeply in daughters' education, and urbanisation, women's schooling, faith-based reform movements, policy advocacy and media exposure have all begun to reshape gender expectations. However, progress remains uneven. The persistence of rural-urban literacy gaps is instructive: among 15- to 24-year-olds in 2018, literacy in rural areas was 62.9% for young women compared with 80% for young men, a gap of 17.1 percentage points, while the gap in Douala and Yaoundé was less than 1 percentage point (INS, 2024). This suggests that the issue is not "Cameroonian culture" in the abstract, but the interaction between gender ideology, household power, location, poverty and institutional opportunity. Put differently, some families are becoming sites of transformation, while others remain powerful sites of reproduction of inequality.

What emerges from the Cameroon context, therefore, is not a single cause of girls' educational disadvantage but a layered social process. Family-based gender socialisation shapes time use, aspirations, self-worth, mobility, labour burdens and educational expectations. These household processes are then amplified by regional deprivation, early marriage, crisis, weak educational access and broader patriarchal norms. The result is that many girls encounter schooling from a structurally unequal starting point: they arrive later, with less time, fewer resources, heavier obligations and more fragile educational legitimacy. A critical reading of Cameroon therefore shows that improving girls' educational outcomes requires more than school expansion or fee reduction. It requires engaging the family as a decisive pedagogical and ideological institution. Unless the domestic production of gender hierarchy is confronted, the classroom will continue to receive girls whose educational possibilities have already been narrowed at home. That is the central significance of the Cameroon context for this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is universally recognized as a key driver of social, economic, and personal development, yet persistent gender disparities continue to influence access, participation, and outcomes for girls in many societies, particularly within the African context (UNESCO, 2021). While structural

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and policy-level interventions have been widely studied, increasing attention has been paid to the role of family-based gender socialisation in shaping educational trajectories. Gender socialisation, defined as the process through which individuals internalize societal norms and expectations regarding gender roles, begins at home and profoundly impacts children's attitudes, aspirations, and performance in academic settings (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The family, as the primary socialising agent, sets early behavioural patterns and expectations that can either reinforce or challenge societal norms, thereby influencing girls' engagement and success in education.

Empirical evidence suggests that parents' beliefs, expectations, and behaviours significantly shape girls' academic self-concept and performance. In African households, traditional gender norms often prescribe domestic responsibilities and caregiving roles to girls from an early age, limiting the time and cognitive resources available for schooling (Bicchieri & Mercier, 2014; Fonyuy, 2020). For instance, girls who are socialized to prioritize household duties or to defer to male siblings in educational decision-making may internalize lower academic expectations, which can translate into reduced participation in class activities, hesitancy to pursue higher education, or even early school dropout (Okeke, 2018). Conversely, families that actively encourage girls' educational aspirations, provide academic support, and model gender-equitable behaviours tend to foster higher achievement, motivation, and confidence, highlighting the critical role of parental attitudes in educational outcomes (Levtov et al., 2015).

The mechanisms of family-based gender socialisation are multi-faceted, encompassing direct instruction, reinforcement of gendered behaviours, role modelling, and differential treatment of children based on gender (Eccles & Harold, 1991). Direct instruction may involve explicit messaging about "appropriate" subjects, career paths, or academic ambitions, while differential reinforcement can manifest in praising boys for STEM-related tasks while emphasizing caregiving skills to girls (Jacobs et al., 2005). Modelling occurs when children observe parental behaviour, such as the division of household labour or professional engagement, which informs their own perceptions of gender roles. These socialisation practices have a cumulative impact on girls' academic self-efficacy, aspirations, and resilience, ultimately shaping educational performance from early schooling through secondary and tertiary levels.

In addition, cultural norms and socioeconomic factors intersect with family-based gender socialisation, creating complex environments that influence girls' schooling outcomes. In many African societies, the interplay between patriarchal values, economic pressures, and family expectations may reinforce gendered educational disparities (Chuang, 2019). For example, when families perceive male education as a higher-return investment, girls may be subtly discouraged from pursuing rigorous academic pathways, despite the availability of schools or scholarships. Conversely, research indicates that family interventions, such as parental engagement programs, mentorship, and gender-sensitive guidance, can mitigate these effects and empower girls to overcome structural barriers (Leach et al., 2014). Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of situating girls' educational experiences within the broader context of family practices, social norms, and cultural expectations.

Parental Attitudes, Expectations, And Reinforcement Practices and Girls' Academic Performance and Engagement in School.

The family has long been recognized as the primary agent of socialisation, shaping children's values, attitudes, and behaviours long before they enter formal education. Within this context, gender socialisation refers to the processes through which children acquire gender-specific norms, roles, and expectations, which in turn influence their development and educational trajectories (Leaper, 2015). For girls, the interplay between family-based gender socialisation and educational outcomes is particularly salient, as the home often serves both as a site of encouragement and constraint depending on prevailing cultural norms. The family environment comprising parental attitudes, expectations, and reinforcement practices—plays a critical role in either facilitating or inhibiting girls' engagement, motivation, and achievement in school (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Davis-Kean, 2005).

Parental attitudes toward education and gender roles fundamentally shape children's academic experiences. Positive parental attitudes that value education and believe in gender equality tend to correlate with higher educational aspirations and performance among girls (Fan & Chen, 2001). In contrast, households where traditional gender norms are strictly enforced often emphasize domestic responsibilities for girls, limiting time and energy available for learning and academic engagement (Chisamya, DeJaeghere, & MacKenzie, 2012). Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa have revealed that girls in households with restrictive gendered expectations are less likely to pursue STEM subjects, complete secondary education, or express confidence in academic capabilities (UNICEF, 2018; Wodon et al., 2018). These findings underscore the critical influence of parental beliefs in either enabling or constraining girls' educational opportunities.

Closely related to parental attitudes are parental expectations, which serve as a form of social capital that guides children's academic behaviour and self-concept. High parental expectations manifested through encouragement, goal setting, and aspirations for educational achievement—positively predict girls' academic engagement, motivation, and eventual attainment (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Such expectations communicate a family's belief in the child's potential, instilling a sense of self-efficacy that drives persistence and resilience in learning. Conversely, low expectations, or the belief that girls are less capable academically, can result in internalized self-limiting beliefs, lower engagement in class, and diminished academic performance (Jeynes, 2015). Evidence from the Cameroonian context and similar settings in Central and West Africa highlights that even subtle expressions of parental doubt or gendered stereotypes can influence subject choice, performance, and the likelihood of girls completing higher levels of education (Fonyuy, 2019; Tchombe & Fouda, 2020).

Parental reinforcement practices—encompassing both positive encouragement and discipline form a behavioural pathway through which attitudes and expectations translate into educational outcomes. Reinforcement practices include praising effort, rewarding academic achievements, modeling study habits, and providing structured support for learning activities at home. Positive reinforcement has been shown to enhance intrinsic motivation, increase participation in classroom activities, and improve cognitive outcomes (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). In contrast, reinforcement practices that prioritize compliance with traditional gender roles or that penalize academic ambition can reduce girls' engagement and curtail performance (Leaper & Brown, 2014). Moreover, the consistency and quality of reinforcement—rather than mere frequency—appear crucial; girls who experience structured, supportive, and affirming guidance are more likely to develop strong academic self-concepts and sustained motivation.

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The conceptual framework for this study is anchored in Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) and Eccles' Expectancy-Value Model (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Bandura's theory posits that children learn behaviours, attitudes, and competencies through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within their immediate environment. Applied to gender socialisation, girls observe parental attitudes, internalize expectations, and model behaviours deemed acceptable, which directly shapes their academic engagement. Complementing this, Eccles' model emphasizes that children's performance and choices are influenced by their perceived competence and the value placed on tasks by significant social agents, particularly parents. Within this framework, parental attitudes and expectations are understood as shaping girls perceived self-efficacy and academic values, while reinforcement practices operationalize these beliefs through tangible behaviours that impact learning outcomes.

In operational terms, the framework posits that family-based gender socialisation comprising parental attitudes, expectations, and reinforcement practices directly influences girls' academic performance and engagement. The model also acknowledges moderating variables such as socioeconomic status, cultural norms, and access to educational resources, which can either amplify or attenuate the impact of family-based socialisation. Thus, interventions aimed at improving girls' educational outcomes must consider not only school-based strategies but also family-centered approaches that challenge restrictive gender norms and foster supportive learning environments at home.

Parental attitudes, expectations, and reinforcement practices play a central role in shaping girls' academic outcomes, acting as key mechanisms through which family-based gender socialisation influences educational engagement and performance (Fan & Chen, 2001; Leaper & Brown, 2014). The home environment serves as the primary context in which children first encounter societal norms and expectations, and parents' perceptions of gender-appropriate roles strongly affect the opportunities and encouragement girls receive in academic pursuits. Research consistently shows that positive parental attitudes towards education—manifested in valuing academic achievement and demonstrating belief in a child's capabilities—are closely associated with higher engagement, motivation, and scholastic success among girls (Davis-Kean, 2005; Pomerantz et al., 2007).

Parental expectations, in particular, function as powerful predictors of educational outcomes. When parents hold high yet attainable expectations for their daughters' academic performance, they communicate a message of confidence and potential, fostering self-efficacy and resilience in the face of challenges (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). These expectations are often intertwined with parental monitoring and involvement in schooling activities, such as overseeing homework, attending parent-teacher meetings, and engaging in discussions about school performance. Girls whose parents maintain high expectations are more likely to develop goal-oriented behaviors, sustained attention, and proactive learning strategies, which contribute directly to higher academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001). Conversely, in families where traditional gender norms lead to lower expectations for girls' education, even highly capable daughters may internalize beliefs that limit their aspirations, resulting in reduced academic engagement and performance (Chisamya et al., 2012; Tchombe & Fouda, 2020).

Reinforcement practices—defined as the ways parents reward or respond to children's behaviours and achievements—further shape educational engagement. Positive reinforcement, such as praise for completing assignments, recognition of effort, or tangible rewards for high grades, strengthens motivation and encourages repeated academic effort (Pomerantz et al., 2007; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). Importantly, reinforcement must be balanced and consistent; excessive pressure or punishment for poor performance can engender anxiety and aversion to learning, particularly among girls navigating complex social and familial expectations (Leaper, 2015). In many African contexts, reinforcement practices are gendered, with boys more often encouraged in leadership or technical subjects, while girls receive more recognition for compliance or domestic responsibilities. Such differential reinforcement contributes to disparities in subject choices, engagement levels, and overall performance in school (Fonyuy, 2019).

Empirical studies from Sub-Saharan Africa provide clear illustrations of these dynamics. Chisamya et al. (2012) observed that girls whose parents actively engaged in monitoring academic activities, held high educational expectations, and reinforced learning through encouragement and rewards exhibited higher attendance, participation, and performance compared to peers from less supportive home environments. Similarly, Davis-Kean (2005) found that parental education and attitudes indirectly influenced children's achievement by shaping the home learning environment, including the provision of learning materials and supportive cognitive stimulation. In Cameroon, Tchombe and Fouda (2020) highlighted that girls whose parents communicated confidence in their academic abilities and maintained a balanced approach to reinforcement were more likely to pursue secondary and tertiary education, even in communities with strong traditional gender norms.

Theoretical perspectives, particularly Bandura's social cognitive theory, underscore the mechanisms underlying these relationships. Parental attitudes and expectations serve as models of belief and behaviour, while reinforcement practices function as environmental contingencies that shape self-efficacy and goal-directed action (Bandura, 1986). In this framework, girls internalize parental beliefs and feedback, which interact with personal motivation to influence engagement and performance. This underscores the interconnectedness of cognitive, motivational, and social factors in educational outcomes, revealing the crucial role of family-based gender socialisation in fostering or constraining academic potential.

In conclusion, parental attitudes, expectations, and reinforcement practices constitute a foundational component of girls' educational experiences. Positive, supportive, and gender-equitable family practices enhance engagement, motivation, and academic performance, while negative or restrictive practices limit aspirations and perpetuate disparities. For policymakers, educators, and researchers, interventions that sensitize parents to the impact of their expectations and reinforcement strategies, while addressing gendered cultural norms, are essential for promoting equitable educational outcomes for girls.

Relationship Between Household Responsibilities, Gender Role Modeling, and Girls' Educational Aspirations

Household responsibilities and gender role modelling constitute fundamental mechanisms through which family-based gender socialisation shapes girls' educational aspirations. In many societies, particularly within African contexts, the domestic environment is not only a site of care and nurturing but also a formative arena where children learn culturally sanctioned behaviours and expectations associated with gender (Chisamya et al., 2012; Leaper, 2015). For girls, the allocation of household responsibilities often reflects deeply entrenched gender norms, which can either facilitate or hinder the pursuit of educational goals. Tasks such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and caring for younger siblings, while valuable for social and life skills, frequently limit the time and cognitive energy girls can devote to schoolwork, homework, and intellectual exploration

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(UNICEF, 2018). Consequently, the disproportionate burden of household labour can reduce school attendance, engagement, and performance, thereby directly influencing girls' educational aspirations.

Theoretical perspectives on social learning provide a lens for understanding these dynamics. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) emphasizes that children acquire attitudes, behaviours, and norms through observation and imitation of significant adults within their immediate environment. In households where girls witness female role models—mothers, older sisters, or female relatives—primarily engaged in domestic duties and limited engagement in professional or educational activities, they may internalize the belief that educational or career aspirations are secondary to domestic responsibilities. This process of gender role modelling effectively communicates implicit messages about what is "appropriate" for girls and shapes their self-concept, motivation, and long-term ambitions (Leaper & Brown, 2014). Conversely, households where female family members balance domestic duties with educational or professional achievements tend to foster higher aspirations among girls, signalling that academic success is both attainable and socially valued.

The interaction between household responsibilities and girls' academic motivation is complex and often mediated by parental and family expectations. In families with egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles, domestic responsibilities are distributed more equitably between boys and girls, and the household is structured to support academic engagement. In such settings, girls are more likely to perceive education as a legitimate priority alongside familial obligations (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). However, in households with traditional gender norms, girls may experience conflict between fulfilling domestic duties and pursuing educational objectives, creating cognitive and emotional stress that can lower self-efficacy and limit aspirations (Tchombe & Fouda, 2020). Research in Cameroon and similar Sub-Saharan African contexts indicates that girls who spend more time on domestic labour are less likely to engage in extracurricular learning opportunities, participate in STEM-related activities, or envision professional careers that require prolonged educational investment (Fonyuy, 2019; Wodon et al., 2018).

Gender role modelling within the family also encompasses attitudinal and behavioural demonstrations beyond task allocation. Parental encouragement, discussion of educational goals, and demonstration of value for learning contribute to shaping girls' aspirations. For example, when parents, particularly mothers, engage in decision-making, reading, financial management, or other cognitively demanding tasks alongside household labour, girls are more likely to internalize the importance of education and envision diverse career pathways (Davis-Kean, 2005). Such modelling fosters resilience and motivation, equipping girls to navigate structural and cultural barriers to educational attainment. Conversely, the absence of positive role models, or exposure to rigid gender hierarchies, can limit girls perceived control over their educational trajectories, reinforcing cycles of low aspiration and constrained achievement.

Empirical studies underscore the significance of these dynamics. A study by Chisamya et al. (2012) in East Africa demonstrated that girls burdened with extensive household responsibilities were more likely to report lower academic confidence and lower educational aspirations compared to peers in households with more equitable domestic arrangements. Similarly, Wodon et al. (2018) highlight that interventions aimed at reducing domestic labour demands on girls, alongside positive role modelling and parental encouragement, significantly enhance the likelihood of secondary school completion and higher education enrolment. These findings affirm that both the material demands of household labour and the symbolic influence of gender role modelling operate synergistically to shape educational outcomes.

In conclusion, household responsibilities and gender role modelling are intertwined elements of family-based gender socialisation that directly influence girls' educational aspirations. Excessive domestic labour and exposure to restrictive gender role models can curtail engagement and limit perceived academic potential, while equitable task allocation and exposure to empowered female figures foster motivation, self-efficacy, and aspirational breadth. Recognizing these dynamics is essential for educators, policymakers, and families seeking to design interventions that support girls' educational attainment, particularly in contexts where cultural norms and economic constraints amplify the gendered division of labour. Interventions should thus target both structural inequalities in domestic labour and the cultivation of positive, aspirational role models within households.

Moderating Effects of Socioeconomic Status and Cultural Norms on the Impact of Family-Based Gender Socialisation on Girls' Educational Outcomes

Family-based gender socialisation does not operate in isolation; its effects on girls' educational outcomes are significantly influenced by broader contextual factors, particularly socioeconomic status (SES) and prevailing cultural norms. These factors often moderate the extent to which parental attitudes, household responsibilities, and gender role modelling translate into educational aspirations, engagement, and achievement (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Leaper & Brown, 2014). Understanding these moderating effects is crucial for comprehending the nuanced ways in which family practices intersect with structural and cultural constraints to shape educational trajectories.

Socioeconomic status, typically measured through parental income, education, and occupational standing, profoundly affects the resources, opportunities, and expectations that families can provide. In higher SES households, parents often have the financial means to support educational engagement, including access to learning materials, private tutoring, and reduced domestic labour for girls (Davis-Kean, 2005). These resources can buffer against restrictive gender socialisation practices, enabling girls to pursue schooling even when familial expectations might otherwise prioritize domestic responsibilities. Conversely, in low SES households, economic pressures frequently exacerbate gendered divisions of labour, with girls more likely to be assigned time-consuming domestic duties that limit their school attendance and study time (Wodon et al., 2018). In such contexts, the benefits of positive parental attitudes or role modelling may be attenuated because structural constraints hinder the practical realization of educational aspirations. Hence, SES functions as a moderating variable, amplifying or mitigating the effects of family-based socialisation practices.

Cultural norms, deeply embedded within local traditions, beliefs, and social expectations, also play a pivotal moderating role. In many African societies, including Cameroon, cultural narratives often prioritize domesticity and early marriage for girls, emphasizing roles as caretakers and future mothers over academic or professional achievement (Chisamya et al., 2012; Tchombe & Fouda, 2020). Such norms shape parental attitudes and expectations, influencing both the allocation of household responsibilities and the value placed on girls' education. In communities where traditional gender norms are strongly upheld, even supportive parental encouragement may be insufficient to counteract societal pressures, thereby

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limiting the impact of family-based interventions on educational outcomes. Conversely, in more progressive or urbanized communities where gender-equitable values are increasingly embraced, family-based socialisation that promotes academic engagement, critical thinking, and self-efficacy is likely to have a stronger, more positive effect on girls' aspirations and achievements.

The interplay between SES and cultural norms further complicates the picture. For example, high-SES families within conservative cultural contexts may still face societal pressures to conform to traditional gender expectations, leading to a partial or nuanced effect of family-based socialisation on girls' schooling. In contrast, low-SES families in communities undergoing cultural modernization may gradually adopt more egalitarian practices, thereby mitigating some of the structural barriers associated with poverty (Leaper, 2015; Fonyuy, 2019). Research has shown that the synergistic interaction of SES and cultural norms can either reinforce or undermine the influence of parental attitudes, role modelling, and household task allocation on girls' educational trajectories (Eccles et al., 2013; Wodon et al., 2018).

Empirical evidence underscores these moderating dynamics. Davis-Kean (2005) observed that parental education and household income significantly shaped the effectiveness of parental encouragement and academic modelling, such that girls from higher SES backgrounds exhibited stronger academic self-concept and higher aspirations. Similarly, Chisamya et al. (2012) found that in East African contexts, the intersection of low household resources and strong adherence to traditional gender norms constrained girls' schooling, even when families expressed positive attitudes toward education. Within Cameroon, studies by Tchombe and Fouda (2020) suggest that cultural expectations regarding domestic roles and early marriage remain critical moderators of girls' educational outcomes, interacting with household SES to either enable or limit the impact of family-based gender socialisation practices.

In sum, socioeconomic status and cultural norms act as vital moderating variables that shape the magnitude and direction of family-based gender socialisation on girls' educational outcomes. These factors influence the availability of educational resources, the distribution of household labour, and the interpretation of parental attitudes and role modelling. Recognizing their moderating role is essential for researchers, policymakers, and educators seeking to design context-sensitive interventions. Effective strategies must address both structural inequalities associated with SES and the cultural ideologies that perpetuate gendered limitations, ensuring that supportive family practices translate into tangible educational opportunities for girls.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study integrates theories of gender socialisation, ecological systems theory, and educational outcomes, providing a lens through which the influence of family-based gender practices on girls' schooling can be understood. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory posits that child development is shaped by multiple, interrelated systems, with the family—situated in the microsystem—playing a primary role in shaping cognitive, emotional, and social outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within this framework, gender socialisation occurs through both direct and indirect processes, where parental attitudes, household responsibilities, and role modeling interact with broader cultural norms to influence girls' academic engagement and achievement.

In this model, the independent variable is family-based gender socialisation, operationalized through parental expectations, gendered reinforcement, role modeling, and allocation of household responsibilities. The dependent variable is girls' educational outcomes, including academic performance, school participation, self-efficacy, and educational aspirations. Moderating variables such as socioeconomic status, parental education, cultural norms, and availability of learning resources are included to account for the variability in outcomes observed across different contexts (Levtov et al., 2015). Mediating factors, such as girls' self-concept, motivation, and resilience, link socialisation practices to observable educational performance, illustrating the psychological mechanisms through which family practices exert influence.

This framework emphasizes the dynamic and reciprocal nature of socialisation: girls' responses to parental guidance and household expectations can shape their attitudes toward learning, which in turn influences how parents adjust reinforcement and support strategies. By situating family-based gender socialisation at the center of the educational process, the framework highlights the nuanced pathways through which domestic experiences translate into classroom outcomes. It underscores the critical need for interventions that target parental attitudes, gender-equitable practices, and home-based support systems to enhance girls' educational achievements in African contexts.

Implications for Educational Stakeholders

The analysis of family-based gender socialisation in Cameroon carries profound implications for a wide range of educational stakeholders, particularly because it reveals that girls' educational outcomes are shaped long before they enter the classroom. If gender inequality is partly produced within the home, then efforts to address it must extend beyond schools to engage families, communities, and institutional actors in more deliberate and contextually responsive ways. Educational stakeholders must therefore rethink their roles not merely as providers of schooling, but as active participants in reshaping the social conditions that influence girls' learning trajectories.

For policy-makers and government institutions, the findings suggest that gender-responsive educational policies must move beyond access-oriented interventions to address the socio-cultural foundations of inequality. While initiatives such as free primary education and gender parity campaigns have improved enrolment rates, they often fail to confront the deeply embedded family practices that limit girls' sustained participation and achievement. There is a need for policies that integrate community sensitisation, parental education, and social protection mechanisms that reduce the economic and cultural pressures leading to early withdrawal from school. For instance, conditional cash transfers or scholarship schemes targeted at girls can help counteract household-level biases in educational investment. However, such measures must be accompanied by sustained public engagement that challenges normative beliefs about gender roles and the perceived returns of girls' education (UNESCO, 2018; World Bank, 2020).

For schools and educational leaders, the implications are equally significant. Schools in Cameroon cannot assume that all learners arrive with equal levels of support, time, or confidence. Girls who are burdened with domestic responsibilities or socialised into submissiveness may participate less actively, display lower academic confidence, or experience irregular attendance. School leaders must therefore cultivate gender-sensitive school environments that recognise and respond to these disparities. This includes flexible academic support systems, mentorship

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programmes for girls, and the promotion of inclusive pedagogical practices that actively counter gender stereotypes in the classroom. Teachers, in particular, play a critical role as agents of transformation. Drawing from the principles of Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, teachers can model alternative gender norms, reinforce girls' academic capabilities, and create learning spaces where girls' voices are valued and encouraged. By doing so, the classroom becomes not a site of reproduction of inequality, but a space for reimagining gender possibilities.

The implications for teachers and classroom practitioners extend to their daily pedagogical practices and interactions with learners. Teachers must develop heightened awareness of how gendered expectations influence participation, subject choice, and performance. For example, girls may be less likely to volunteer answers, engage in science-related activities, or assume leadership roles within the classroom due to internalised beliefs about their capabilities. Teachers must therefore adopt deliberate strategies to ensure equitable participation, such as balanced questioning, collaborative learning structures, and explicit encouragement of girls in traditionally male-dominated subjects. Furthermore, teachers should engage with families, not in a confrontational manner, but through dialogue that highlights the value of girls' education and the long-term benefits for households and communities. This relational engagement is crucial in contexts where family influence remains central to educational decision-making.

For parents and families, the study underscores the need for critical reflection on everyday socialisation practices. Families are not merely passive actors constrained by culture; they are active agents capable of reproducing or transforming gender norms. Parents must be encouraged to reconsider how domestic responsibilities are distributed among children, how expectations are communicated, and how educational investments are prioritised. In many Cameroonian households, even subtle differences in encouragement, monitoring, and support can have significant implications for girls' academic engagement. Empowering parents—particularly mothers—through adult education, community programmes, and economic initiatives can strengthen their capacity to support girls' schooling. Research consistently shows that mothers' education and decision-making power are strongly associated with improved educational outcomes for girls, highlighting the importance of intergenerational change.

The role of community leaders, traditional authorities, and religious institutions is equally critical within the Cameroonian context. Given the communal nature of socialisation emphasised by A. Bame Nsamenang, gender norms are not sustained by families alone but are reinforced by broader community structures. Chiefs, elders, and religious leaders often serve as custodians of cultural values and wield significant influence over community behaviour. Engaging these actors in promoting gender-equitable norms can facilitate more sustainable change. Community dialogues, culturally grounded advocacy, and the reinterpretation of traditional values in ways that support girls' education can help shift collective attitudes. This approach recognises that meaningful transformation must be culturally negotiated rather than externally imposed.

For school counsellors and educational psychologists, the implications point towards a more holistic approach to supporting girls. Counsellors must recognise that many behavioural and academic challenges faced by girls are rooted in broader socialisation experiences rather than individual deficits. Interventions should therefore address issues of self-esteem, identity, aspiration, and resilience, helping girls to navigate and, where possible, challenge restrictive gender expectations. Counsellors can also serve as mediators between schools and families, facilitating conversations that promote supportive home environments for learning. In doing so, they contribute to bridging the gap between the psychological and socio-cultural dimensions of education.

Higher education institutions and teacher education programmes also have a crucial role to play in shaping future educators who are culturally competent and gender-responsive. Training programmes must incorporate critical perspectives on gender, culture, and socialisation, equipping teachers with the skills to recognise and address hidden forms of inequality. Drawing on insights from Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, teacher preparation should emphasise the interconnectedness of home, school, and community contexts. Teachers must be prepared not only to deliver content but also to engage with the social realities that influence learning.

Finally, for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and development partners, the findings highlight the importance of designing interventions that are both contextually grounded and family-centred. Programmes that focus solely on school-based inputs may yield limited results if they do not address the socialisation processes occurring within households. Effective interventions should therefore integrate community outreach, parental engagement, economic empowerment, and advocacy for girls' rights. Moreover, there is a need for sustained, long-term engagement rather than short-term projects, as changing deeply embedded gender norms requires time, trust, and cultural sensitivity.

The implications for educational stakeholders in Cameroon point towards a shift from isolated, school-centred approaches to more integrated, socio-culturally responsive strategies. Addressing girls' educational outcomes requires recognising the family as both a site of constraint and a potential site of transformation. Educational stakeholders must therefore work collaboratively across levels—policy, school, family, and community—to challenge restrictive gender norms and create environments in which girls are not only allowed to attend school but are genuinely empowered to learn, aspire, and succeed.

CONCLUSION

This study has critically examined the intricate relationship between family-based gender socialisation and girls' educational outcomes in Cameroon, foregrounding the often-overlooked reality that educational inequality is not simply produced within schools but is deeply rooted in the social fabric of the home. The analysis demonstrates that from early childhood, girls are socialised into gendered expectations that shape their roles, responsibilities, aspirations, and self-perceptions. These processes—manifested through the unequal distribution of domestic labour, differentiated parental expectations, and culturally embedded beliefs about femininity—subtly but powerfully influence girls' access to education, their engagement with learning, and their ability to persist and succeed within the school system.

A central insight emerging from this work is that the transition "from home to classroom" is not a neutral passage. Rather, it is a continuity of socialisation in which the dispositions cultivated within the family are carried into the educational space. Girls often arrive in school with reduced study time, constrained aspirations, and internalised beliefs about their limitations, all of which shape their academic trajectories. While schools have the potential to serve as transformative spaces, they frequently mirror the same gendered assumptions that prevail in the wider society, thereby

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reinforcing rather than disrupting inequality. This underscores the need to move beyond narrow, access-focused interventions and towards a deeper engagement with the socio-cultural processes that shape educational participation.

The study has also highlighted the importance of situating family-based gender socialisation within broader ecological and structural contexts. In Cameroon, regional disparities, economic constraints, early marriage practices, and, in some areas, conflict and displacement, all intersect with household dynamics to intensify girls' vulnerability within the education system. Families, therefore, operate within constraints that both shape and are shaped by wider societal forces. Recognising this complexity is essential for avoiding simplistic interpretations that either blame families or ignore their agency. Instead, the family must be understood as a dynamic space—one that can reproduce inequality but also hold the potential for transformation.

Importantly, this study does not present girls as passive victims of socialisation, nor does it depict families as inherently oppressive. Rather, it reveals a landscape of tension, negotiation, and possibility. Across Cameroon, there are families that actively challenge restrictive norms, invest in girls' education, and support their aspirations beyond traditional expectations. These examples point to the transformative potential that exists within the very structures often associated with constraint. Change, therefore, is not only possible but already underway in subtle and uneven ways.

The implications of these findings are far-reaching. Efforts to improve girls' educational outcomes must adopt a holistic approach that engages multiple levels of influence—policy, school, family, and community. Educational reform cannot be effective if it focuses solely on classroom practices while leaving intact the gendered assumptions that shape children's lives at home. Interventions must therefore include community sensitisation, parental engagement, gender-responsive pedagogy, and socio-economic support mechanisms that alleviate the pressures leading to unequal educational investment. In this regard, theoretical insights from Albert Bandura and Urie Bronfenbrenner remain instructive, as they highlight the interplay between individual learning processes and the broader environments in which development occurs.

The study affirms that achieving gender equity in education in Cameroon requires more than policy declarations or increased enrolment statistics. It demands a re-examination of the everyday practices through which gender is taught, learned, and lived within families. It requires a collective commitment to reimagining the roles and possibilities available to girls—not only in schools but within the homes where their identities are first formed. By bringing the family into the centre of analysis, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of educational inequality and offers a pathway towards more culturally grounded and sustainable solutions. In conclusion, transforming girls' educational outcomes in Cameroon is as much a social and cultural project as it is an educational one. The journey towards equity must therefore begin at home, extend into the classroom, and be sustained through the collective efforts of all stakeholders committed to ensuring that every girl is not only educated, but empowered to thrive.

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