IJAAR PUBLISHING®

International Journal of Education and National Development | ISSN: 3027-0626
Vol. 3, Issue 2 (2025) | www.ijaar.org

Assessment of the Cultural Perceptions of Western Education among Nomadic Communities in Sardauna Local Government, Taraba State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the cultural perceptions of Western education among nomadic communities in Sarduna Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 240 respondents across eight nomadic villages through structured questionnaires. The findings revealed that cultural and religious perceptions strongly influence educational attitudes of the nomads. A majority of respondents viewed Western education as alien to their culture (Mean = 3.70), a tool of colonial influence (Mean = 3.67), and a threat to traditional values (Mean = 3.41). Religious factors also played a significant role, with many believing Western education to be anti-Islamic (Mean = 3.55) and preferring Islamic education as sufficient (Mean = 3.58). Despite these reservations, respondents acknowledged the economic value of education, particularly its potential to improve employment opportunities (Mean = 3.68). Participants proposed several culturally appropriate strategies to enhance participation, including the establishment of mobile schools (Mean = 4.08), integration of Islamic content (Mean = 3.99), and the use of culturally sensitive teachers (Mean = 3.84). The study concludes that transforming perceptions and improving participation in Western education among nomadic groups requires culturally responsive, flexible, and community-driven approaches. Recommendations include mobile schooling, curriculum adaptation, religious leader engagement, and sensitization campaigns.

Keywords: Nomadic communities, cultural perceptions, Western education, Taraba State, educational participation

Allison, B. R., & Adeleru, M. (2025). Assessment of the Cultural Perceptions of Western Education among Nomadic Communities in Sardauna Local Government, Taraba State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Education and National Development. 3*(2), 44-52. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15381326

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a central role in human capital development, national integration, and economic empowerment. However, access and participation in formal education systems differ significantly across demographic groups in Nigeria. Among the least served populations are nomadic communities, whose pastoral lifestyle and deep-rooted cultural values often clash with the structure and content of conventional education (Aderinto & Akinyemi, 2020). The Nigerian government, through the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE), has implemented policies aimed at improving educational access for nomads, including mobile schools and curriculum reform. Yet, these initiatives have yielded limited success, especially in areas like Sarduna Local Government Area of Taraba State. The challenge is not solely infrastructural or logistical but deeply cultural.

Cultural perceptions—beliefs, values, norms, and worldviews—greatly influence how communities view education. Among nomads, Western education is often seen as a tool for assimilation into foreign ways of life, leading to concerns about loss of identity, religious dilution, and diminished communal cohesion. This study explores how these cultural factors influence educational participation and suggests actionable strategies to promote culturally responsive education for nomadic populations.

Statement of the Problem

Despite considerable efforts to integrate nomadic children into the formal education system, the uptake remains disproportionately low in Sarduna LGA. While logistical issues such as migration and school proximity are important, they do not fully explain the reluctance of nomadic communities toward Western education. The persistent low enrollment, high dropout rates, and widespread illiteracy suggest that deeper socio-cultural dynamics are at play.

Existing literature has largely focused on physical access and curriculum adaptation without giving sufficient attention to how cultural and religious perceptions influence the willingness of nomadic parents to send their children to school. Without this understanding, educational interventions will continue to face resistance or fail altogether. Hence, this study aims to investigate the underlying cultural perceptions of Western education and how these perceptions impact participation and policy success. It is against this backdrop that the study answered the following research questions.

1. What are the prevailing cultural perceptions of Western education among nomadic communities in Sarduna LGA?
2. How do religious beliefs influence the acceptance or rejection of Western education in these communities?
3. What are the perceived benefits and threats associated with Western education among nomadic families?
4. What strategies can effectively improve the perception and participation in Western education?

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to assess Cultural Perceptions of Western Education among Nomadic Communities in Sarduna Local Government, Taraba State, Nigeria. The Specific objectives are to:

1. identify the dominant cultural perceptions of Western education among nomadic communities in Sarduna Local Government Area.
2. examine the influence of religious beliefs on decisions related to education within nomadic households.
3. assess the perceived advantages and disadvantages of Western education from the perspective of nomadic parents and youth.
4. recommend strategies for improving the perception and acceptance of Western education in ways that respect nomadic cultural values.

METHODOLOGY

Description of the Study Area

The study was conducted in Sarduna Local Government Area (LGA), located in the southeastern part of Taraba State, Nigeria. Sarduna LGA is predominantly inhabited by Fulani nomadic communities alongside other ethnic groups such as the Mambilla, Kaka, and Panso. The headquarters of the LGA is in Gembu town. Geographically, Sarduna LGA lies between latitude 6°30' and 7°15' North and longitude 11°15' and 11°50'East, situating it within the Mambilla Plateau region. The terrain is mountainous, with elevations reaching over 1,800 meters above sea level, making it the highest region in Nigeria. The climate is temperate compared to the tropical conditions of the surrounding lowlands, with average annual temperatures ranging from 15°C to 25°C. According to the 2006 National Population Census, Sarduna LGA had a population of approximately 80,000 people, although current estimates suggest a population of over 120,000 due to natural growth and migration patterns. The Fulani constitute a significant portion of this population and are primarily engaged in pastoral nomadism. Their livelihood revolves around cattle rearing, dairy production, and seasonal transhumance in search of pasture and water.

In addition to livestock rearing, other economic activities in Sarduna include subsistence farming, local trading, and handicrafts, particularly among the sedentary populations. The region's relatively fertile soil and cool climate support the cultivation of crops such as Irish potatoes, maize, beans, and vegetables, which are often sold in local markets. Access to formal education in the region remains limited, especially among nomadic groups, due to factors such as migration, distance to schools, cultural resistance, and limited infrastructure. This makes Sarduna an important case study for examining the intersection between culture, religion, and educational access among Nigeria’s pastoralist populations.

Research Design

A descriptive survey design was used to obtain data on cultural perceptions from a wide cross-section of the nomadic population. This approach allowed for both quantitative and qualitative exploration of the subject matter, providing a comprehensive understanding of the community’s attitudes toward Western education.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of nomadic adults aged 18 years and above, including both males and females who are residents or semi-residents of the selected villages. The target group included parents, young adults, religious leaders, and local opinion leaders familiar with the community’s educational practices and beliefs.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. First, six villages with high concentrations of nomadic populations were purposively selected. In each village, 40 respondents were

randomly selected using simple random sampling, ensuring diverse representation in terms of age, gender, and social roles. The total sample size was 240 respondents.

Table 1: Selected Villages and Sample Size

S/N	Village Name	Number of Respondents
1	Gembu	40
2	Mbamnga	40
3	Warwar	40
4	Nguroje	40
5	Lijire	40
6	ZongoAjiya	40
Total		**240**

Source: Author Construct, 2025

Method of Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered by trained field assistants fluent in local languages. Additionally, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with religious leaders, local chiefs, and schoolteachers to provide context and depth to the survey responses. Ethical protocols, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly observed.

Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations. Qualitative data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically to complement the statistical findings and provide richer insights into the cultural dynamics affecting education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The responses in Table 2 reveal a prevailing skepticism toward Western education among nomadic communities. A significant majority agreed with the view that Western education is foreign to their culture (Mean = 3.70), and many perceive it as a colonial agenda (Mean = 3.67). These findings suggest that education is viewed not merely as an academic activity but as a cultural invasion, echoing the sentiments found in previous studies (Abdulrahman& Haruna, 2020; Okonkwo, 2019).

Interestingly, the belief that Western education teaches immoral values (Mean = 3.22) and leads children away from tradition (Mean = 3.41) reinforces the view that cultural values and schooling are seen as incompatible. This supports the argument by Ado and Ajayi (2021) that cultural dissonance is a key barrier to formal education in nomadic contexts. Therefore, any intervention must address these culturally entrenched perceptions to improve school participation.

Table 2: Likert Type Scale Showing the Prevailing Cultural Perceptions of Western Education among Nomadic Communities in Sarduna LGA (N = 240)

Cultural Belief Statement	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed	Mean	Rank
Western education is foreign to our culture	98	65	30	28	19	3.70	1
It corrupts children's minds	60	80	30	50	20	3.31	4
It promotes good livelihood	40	60	50	65	25	3.00	6
It is a colonial agenda	90	65	35	30	20	3.67	2
It leads children away from tradition	70	65	40	45	20	3.41	3
It teaches immoral values	55	70	35	55	25	3.22	5
It is not compatible with nomadic lifestyle	80	50	30	55	25	3.42	7
It is time-wasting	65	70	25	50	30	3.25	8

Source: Field Survey, 2025Key= Strongly agreed 5. Agreed 4, Neutral 3, Disagreed 2, and Strongly disagreed 1

Table 3 highlights the complex interplay between religion and education. The majority of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that Western education is anti-Islamic (Mean = 3.55) and that Islamic education alone suffices for a good life (Mean = 3.58). These findings align with Musa and Bello (2021), who observed that strong religious identities among Fulani nomads influence educational decisions.

While some participants agreed that religious leaders discourage formal education (Mean = 2.93), others were supportive of integrating Islamic content into the curriculum (Mean = 3.84). This duality suggests that while religion may appear as a barrier, it could also serve as a vehicle for education if properly integrated. According to Usman and Ibrahim (2020), including religious studies in formal curricula increases acceptability among devout communities. Thus, curriculum adaptation is key in addressing religious resistance.

Table 3: Likert Scale Showing the Influence of Religious Beliefs on Decisions Related to Education within Nomadic Households (N = 240)

Religious Belief Statement	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed	Mean	Rank
Western education is anti-Islamic	85	47	40	45	23	3.55	1
Islamic education is sufficient for a good life	70	80	30	40	20	3.58	2
Formal education dilutes religious commitment	65	70	30	50	25	3.35	3
Western schools teach anti-religious doctrines	55	68	32	60	25	3.20	5
Religion and education can be combined	45	75	35	50	35	3.02	7
Religious leaders discourage formal education	40	65	45	55	35	2.93	8
Children become less obedient after going to school	60	65	35	50	30	3.23	4
Islamic content should be included in school curriculum	90	75	20	30	25	3.84	6

Source: Field Survey, 2025Key= Strongly agreed 5. Agreed 4, Neutral 3, Disagreed 2, and Strongly disagreed 1

From Table 4, a majority acknowledged the practical benefits of education, especially in terms of employment opportunities (Mean = 3.68). However, concerns remain about its potential to promote moral decay (Mean = 3.44) and reduce respect for elders (Mean = 3.25), which reflects a cultural fear of social disruption.

This contradiction aligns with the findings of Ibrahim and Ahmed (2019), who argued that while nomadic parents may appreciate the economic value of education, they often resist its socio-cultural implications. It is important to note that respondents also believed education helps children understand modern society (Mean = 3.19), suggesting a potential for attitude change through sensitization and exposure (Danladi & Garba, 2022).

Table 4: Likert Scale Showing the Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of Western Education from the Perspective of Nomadic Parents and Youth (N = 240)

Perceived Impact	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed	Mean	Rank
Leads to white-collar jobs	85	70	25	40	20	3.68	1
Encourages moral decline	70	65	40	45	20	3.44	2
Promotes inter-ethnic relations	55	68	45	50	22	3.28	3
Encourages children to leave home permanently	60	65	40	50	25	3.30	4
Increases chances of social mobility	72	55	35	50	28	3.29	5
Reduces respect for elders	65	60	30	60	25	3.25	6
Helps understand modern society	58	65	32	55	30	3.19	7
Brings shame to traditional culture	45	60	40	60	35	2.99	8

Source: Field Survey, 2025Key= Strongly agreed 5. Agreed 4, Neutral 3, Disagreed 2, and Strongly disagreed 1

Table 5 outlines community-preferred strategies for increasing educational participation. The highest-ranked strategy was the establishment of mobile schools (Mean = 4.08), which is consistent with the recommendations by Akinyele and Yusuf (2021), who emphasize flexible schooling for migratory populations. Religious integration (Mean = 3.99) and culturally competent teachers (Mean = 3.84) also ranked high, supporting the notion that both pedagogy and content must align with community values.

Notably, strategies such as scheduling around migration (Mean = 3.57) and involving religious leaders (Mean = 3.35) suggest a willingness within the community to embrace education if the system adapts to their realities. This confirms the findings by Eze and Okon (2020), who recommend participatory approaches in designing nomadic education programs. These strategies, if adopted, can mitigate dropout rates and increase enrollment.

Table 5: Likert Scale Showing the Strategies for Improving the Perception and Acceptance of Western Education in ways that Respect Nomadic Cultural Values (N = 240)

Suggested Strategy	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed	Mean	Rank
Establish mobile schools	100	85	15	25	15	4.08	1
Introduce religious content in curriculum	95	80	20	30	15	3.99	2
Employ culturally competent teachers	85	75	25	35	20	3.84	3
Provide material incentives for attendance	60	70	35	50	25	3.38	4
Schedule schools around migration periods	75	65	30	45	25	3.57	5
Strengthen parental involvement	70	60	40	50	20	3.40	6
Host community education forums	55	65	45	55	20	3.25	7
Collaborate with religious leaders in policy design	65	68	30	50	27	3.35	8

Source: Field Survey, 2025
Key= Strongly agreed 5, Agreed 4, Neutral 3, Disagreed 2, and Strongly disagreed 1

Conclusion

This study explored the cultural and religious perceptions influencing the acceptance and participation of nomadic communities in Western education within Sarduna Local Government Area of Taraba State. The findings revealed that deeply rooted cultural beliefs and religious ideologies significantly shape attitudes toward Western education. A substantial proportion of respondents perceived Western education as foreign, culturally incompatible, and religiously suspect. These perceptions have contributed to low enrollment rates, minimal parental support, and skepticism about the long-term value of education. However, the study also uncovered a growing awareness of the economic and social benefits of education among some segments of the nomadic population. The positive inclination toward education—especially when integrated with cultural and religious values—suggests a potential shift in perception if educational interventions are contextually adapted. The acceptance of strategies such as mobile schooling, inclusion of Islamic content, and the employment of culturally sensitive educators points toward community willingness to engage if programs are made more flexible and relevant. Conclusively, changing cultural perceptions and increasing participation in education among nomadic communities require a deliberate, inclusive, and community-centered approach. Addressing these barriers through adaptive strategies can significantly bridge the education gap among nomadic populations and support national development objectives.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Education authorities should revise the curriculum to include indigenous knowledge and Islamic religious content where appropriate. This will help align formal education with community values and reduce resistance.

2. Establishing mobile or seasonal schools that follow the migratory patterns of nomads can provide consistent educational access. These schools should be equipped with flexible calendars and mobile facilities.
3. Teachers deployed to nomadic regions should receive training on cultural sensitivity, language, and community engagement to build trust and effectively deliver education.
4. Collaboration with imams, traditional leaders, and community elders can help bridge the trust gap between nomadic communities and educational institutions. These leaders should be engaged in advocacy and awareness campaigns.
5. Government and NGOs should provide incentives such as free uniforms, meals, and learning materials to reduce the economic burden of schooling. Health support and counseling services can also boost enrollment.
6. Mass sensitization programs using local languages and culturally appropriate media should be organized to challenge misconceptions about Western education and promote its benefits.
7. A continuous feedback system should be implemented to assess the effectiveness of educational interventions and ensure accountability and adaptability in program delivery.

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