



**The Role of Gwandu Emirate Council in Promoting Educational Access and Literacy in Rural
Communities, 2005-2015**

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Abstract

This study examines the role of the Gwandu Emirate Council in promoting educational access and literacy in rural communities within Kebbi State, Nigeria, between 2005 and 2015. Traditional institutions have historically played a critical role in shaping socio-cultural norms and community development in northern Nigeria. This research explores how the Emirate Council leveraged its authority, legitimacy, and community networks to enhance enrolment, reduce out-of-school children, and improve literacy outcomes among both children and adults. The study highlights the Council's strategies, including community mobilisation, advocacy for girl-child education, establishment of adult literacy centres, school infrastructure development, and mediation of local conflicts to create safe learning environments. Using primary and secondary sources of data and analytical method of historical reconstruction, findings indicate that these interventions led to a significant increase in student enrolment, a reduction in dropout rates, improved literacy levels, and positive economic, social, and security impacts. However, the Council's efforts were constrained by challenges such as socio-cultural resistance, gender biases, inadequate school infrastructure, teacher shortages, poverty, security threats, and limited financial and institutional capacity. The study concludes by recommending multi-dimensional strategies to overcome these challenges, including strengthened collaboration with government agencies, enhanced community sensitisation, targeted support for female education, capacity-building for teachers, and sustainable resource mobilisation.



Introduction

Traditional institutions across many regions of the world have long played an important role in shaping cultural values, community development, and social mobilisation, including efforts to expand educational access. In Malaysia, traditional leadership structures particularly village heads and *adat* (customary) authorities have been instrumental in supporting community-based schooling, encouraging parental participation, and partnering with government agencies to reduce dropout rates in rural areas.¹ Similarly, in Morocco, traditional leaders and local councils have historically contributed to literacy promotion through mosque-based learning, community mobilisation for girls' education, and collaboration with national literacy campaigns and in the Kingdom of Eswatini, chiefs and traditional councils continue to influence local educational participation by allocating community land for school construction, mobilising labour contributions, and enforcing by-laws that encourage school attendance.² Ghana also provides a notable example, as chiefs and traditional councils play central roles in community sensitisation, provision of school infrastructure, and mediation between educational authorities and local populations, especially in northern and rural regions.³

These global experiences demonstrate that traditional institutions remain relevant actors in contemporary educational development, particularly in areas where government presence is limited. This pattern is equally evident in Nigeria, where traditional rulers have historically served as intermediaries between the state and local communities. In northern Nigeria, emirs, district heads, and ward heads often lead advocacy for child enrolment, promote the integration of Qur'anic and Western education, and support adult literacy initiatives. Their moral authority and deep-rooted cultural legitimacy make them critical partners in addressing challenges such as low enrolment, gender disparities, and resistance to formal schooling.

Within this broader Nigerian context, the Gwandu Emirate Council stands out as one of the most influential traditional institutions in Kebbi State. Between 2005 and 2015, the Emirate played a significant role in promoting educational access and literacy in its predominantly rural

¹ Olatunji, Tijani Suleman, Ali Aminu, and Dirisu Faridah Edith. "The Role of Traditional Rulers in Socio-Political and Economic Development of Local Government Areas in Nigeria." *International Journal of African Sustainable Development Research* 7, no. 2 (2025)6

² Olatunji, Tijani Suleman, Ali Aminu, and Dirisu Faridah Edith. "The Role of Traditional Rulers

³ Olatunji, Tijani Suleman, Ali Aminu, and Dirisu Faridah Edith. "The Role of Traditional Rulers



communities.⁴ Through community mobilisation, advocacy for school enrolment, engagement with governmental and non-governmental organisations, and support for school infrastructure, the Emirate Council worked to improve educational participation among children and adults. Examining its contributions during this period provides valuable insights into the continuing relevance of traditional governance structures in advancing rural education and literacy in contemporary Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

To facilitate a clear understanding of this study, it is essential to clarify the key concepts that underpin the research. These concepts provide a framework for analysing the role of the Gwandu Emirate Council in promoting educational access and literacy in rural communities. The main concepts include educational access, literacy, rural communities, and traditional institutions.

Educational Access

Educational access refers to the opportunity for individuals, regardless of gender, socio-economic status, or location, to participate in formal education.⁵ It encompasses the availability, affordability, and acceptability of educational services.⁶ In the context of rural communities under the Gwandu Emirate, educational access includes the physical presence of schools, availability of teachers and learning materials, social acceptance of schooling, and the ability of children and adults to attend without significant barriers. Factors such as distance to schools, cultural attitudes toward education, economic constraints, and gender norms influence access. Promoting educational access requires addressing these barriers to ensure that all children and adults have the opportunity to participate in learning.

Literacy

⁴ Omligbe, John O. "The Roles of Traditional Rulers in Fostering Peace in Nigerian Communities." *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 5, no. 3 (2025): 397–408.

⁵ Adejare, Taiwo. "The Challenge of Rural Education: Issues of Environment and Shortage of Educators in Nigeria." *The Universal Academic Research Journal* 6, no. 1 (January 2024): 48–52.

⁶ Ewa, Moses Apie. "Making Access to Primary Education Sincerely for All in Nigeria." *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis* 6, no. 3 (March 2023). 45.



Literacy is the ability to read, write, and comprehend written texts, enabling individuals to communicate effectively and function productively in society.⁷ In this study, literacy encompasses both basic literacy skills for children and adult literacy, including numeracy and functional literacy relevant for daily life and economic participation. The Council's literacy initiatives focus not only on acquiring the technical ability to read and write but also on fostering lifelong learning, critical thinking, and the application of knowledge in social, economic, and civic contexts. Literacy is therefore both a personal skill and a social tool for empowerment, community development, and socio-economic participation.

Rural Communities

Rural communities refer to settlements characterised by low population density, limited infrastructure, predominantly agricultural livelihoods, and reduced access to social services such as education, health, and technology.⁸ In Kebbi State, rural communities under the Gwandu Emirate are often geographically dispersed, with poor road networks, limited access to electricity, and high levels of poverty. These conditions create structural barriers to educational access and literacy development. Understanding the specific characteristics of rural communities is crucial because strategies that work in urban areas may not be effective in these contexts. Rurality also influences social norms, governance structures, and resource mobilisation, all of which affect educational participation.

Traditional Institutions

Traditional institutions are socio-political structures rooted in historical, cultural, and religious practices, often led by chiefs, Emirs, or elders who exercise authority over communities.⁹ These institutions mediate between government policies and local populations, resolving disputes, mobilising resources, and shaping societal norms.¹⁰ In this study, the Gwandu Emirate Council is the focal traditional institution, whose leadership and influence are leveraged to promote

⁷ Adedokun, M. O. "Education, Sustainability and Community Development in Nigeria." *International Journal of Educational Studies* 3, no. 3 (2020): 88–96.

⁸ Nwachukwu, Paul. *Community Development and Rural Education in Northern Nigeria*. Abuja: Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2016.

⁹ Chukwuemeka, Nnamdi. "Traditional Rulers and Community Development in Nigeria." *Journal of African Political Studies* 15, no. 3 (2018): 78–95.

¹⁰ Garba, Mohammed. "Traditional Institutions and Social Change in Northern Nigeria." *International Journal of African Studies* 9, no. 1 (2020): 12–29.



educational access and literacy. The Council's authority enables it to influence parental attitudes, facilitate school development, mediate conflicts, and encourage social participation in education initiatives. Traditional institutions therefore function as critical agents of community development, especially in rural contexts where formal state presence is limited.

A Brief History of the Gwandu Emirate Council

The Gwandu Emirate Council is one of the most prominent traditional institutions in Northern Nigeria, with a history deeply rooted in the political, religious, and intellectual developments of the Sokoto Caliphate.¹¹ Its origins trace back to the early nineteenth century during the Sokoto Jihad led by Sheikh Usman ḍan Fodio. The jihad, which began in 1804, sought to reform Islam, eliminate corruption, and establish just governance among the Hausa states.¹² Upon the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, the expansive territory required a structured administrative system. Consequently, the Caliphate was divided into the eastern and western administrative spheres.¹³ The western section was entrusted to Abdullahi ḍan Fodio brother, close ally, and chief legal adviser of Usman ḍan Fodio who established his capital at Gwandu, thereby laying the foundation of the Gwandu Emirate.¹⁴

Abdullahi ḍan Fodio's leadership shaped Gwandu into an important centre of political authority and Islamic scholarship. As the Amir al-Gharb (Commander of the West), he exercised authority over a vast territory encompassing present-day Kebbi State and extending into Niger, Benin, Kwara, and parts of Burkina Faso.¹⁵ His rule emphasised justice, Islamic legal reforms, promotion of Qur'anic education, and regulation of trade and taxation.¹⁶ Gwandu quickly emerged as a hub of jurisprudence, attracting scholars and strengthening the intellectual prestige of the Caliphate.

The fall of the Sokoto Caliphate to British colonial forces in 1903 resulted in a significant

¹¹ Boyd, Jean. *The Caliphate and the Emirates of Northern Nigeria: Historical Perspectives*. Ibadan: University Press, 1971.

¹² Abubakar, Hassan. *Traditional Governance and the Evolution of the Gwandu Emirate*. Kano: Bayero University Press, 2018.

¹³ Abubakar, Hassan. *Traditional Governance and the...*

¹⁴ Abubakar, Hassan. *Traditional Governance and the...*

¹⁵ Abubakar, Hassan. *Traditional Governance and the...*

¹⁶ Abubakar, Hassan. *Traditional Governance and the...*



reconfiguration of the Emirate's administrative functions.¹⁷ Through the indirect rule system, the British preserved the Emirate's hierarchical structure; Emir, district heads, village heads, and ward heads but subordinated it to colonial authority. While territorial control and military functions were removed, the Emirate retained influence in local governance, land administration, customary justice, and religious leadership. This colonial arrangement cemented the Emirate's relevance by allowing it to mediate between colonial administrators and local communities.

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, the Gwandu Emirate Council continued as a respected traditional authority within the newly created Northwestern State, and later within Kebbi State formed in 1991.¹⁸ Although modern state structures increasingly assumed administrative responsibilities, the Emirate maintained significant moral authority and cultural influence. Over the years, it expanded its role into areas such as community mobilisation, peacebuilding, and socioeconomic development. Through its network of district and village heads, the Emirate facilitates communication between government agencies and rural communities, supports local conflict resolution, and plays a stabilising role during periods of political or social tension.

In contemporary Kebbi State, the Gwandu Emirate Council is recognised as one of the central pillars of traditional governance.¹⁹ It is headed by the Emir, supported by district heads, ward heads, advisers, and palace officials who collectively shape local administration. Beyond its ceremonial duties, the Council contributes actively to development initiatives, including education, public health campaigns, environmental conservation, and agricultural programmes. Its influence is particularly strong in rural areas where traditional authority remains the most accessible and trusted governance structure.

Gwandu Emirate Council, Educational Access and Literacy in Rural Communities, 2005–2015

¹⁷ Smith, Robert Sidney. *Kingdoms of Northern Nigeria: Gwandu and the Sokoto Caliphate*. New York: Humanities Press, 1980.

¹⁸ Smith, Robert Sidney. *Kingdoms of Northern Nigeria: Gwandu and the Sokoto...*

¹⁹ Smith, Robert Sidney. *Kingdoms of Northern Nigeria: Gwandu and the Sokoto...*



Between 2005 and 2015, the Gwandu Emirate Council played a central and transformative role in promoting educational access and literacy across rural communities within its jurisdiction in Kebbi State.²⁰ This decade was characterised by increasing national awareness of the challenges facing basic education in northern Nigeria, particularly in regions with strong traditional governance structures. Rural communities in the Gwandu Emirate faced obstacles such as low school enrolment, high dropout rates, poor infrastructure, limited teacher availability, and persistent adult illiteracy. Traditional cultural attitudes, especially toward girl-child education, further complicated the situation. Against this backdrop, the Gwandu Emirate Council emerged as a powerful and influential ally in mobilising communities, complementing government programmes, and facilitating social change in favour of education.

The most significant role of the Emirate Council during this period was advocacy and community sensitisation. As an institution with deep cultural legitimacy and long-standing authority, the Emirate served as a bridge between modern governance and traditional society. Through the Emir, district heads, village heads, and ward heads, the Council regularly communicated the value of formal education to rural households. Community meetings, palace announcements, mosque gatherings, Friday sermons, and cultural events were used as platforms to address the misconceptions that previously discouraged many parents from sending their children particularly daughters to school.²¹ The Council's advocacy focused on harmonising Islamic knowledge with Western-style education, reassuring parents that formal schooling did not conflict with religious values. These campaigns contributed to changing mindsets and increasing acceptance of education in communities that had historically been skeptical of modern schooling.

Beyond advocacy, the Gwandu Emirate Council actively supported the improvement of educational infrastructure. Infrastructure deficits represented one of the greatest barriers to educational access in rural Kebbi State, where many communities lacked classrooms, furniture, water supply, and adequate sanitation facilities. During 2005–2015, the Emirate played a vital role in mobilising community labour, local contributions, and partnerships with governmental

²⁰ Salisu Aliyu, 80 Community Leader, interviewed in Birnin Kebbi on November 21, 2025

²¹ Salisu Aliyu, 80 Community Leader, interviewed in Birnin Kebbi on November 21, 2025



and non-governmental organisations to build or renovate school structures.²² The Council facilitated the allocation of land for new schools and encouraged traditional leaders to lead communal efforts—often involving voluntary labour known as *gandu* to construct classrooms, repair roofs, clear school surroundings, and maintain basic facilities.²³ These interventions significantly improved the physical environment of schools, making it easier for children to attend classes and reducing the burden of long-distance travel.

The Emirate Council also collaborated with government education agencies such as the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), the Kebbi State Ministry of Education, and various development partners. Through these partnerships, the Emirate helped attract resources into rural communities, including textbooks, chalkboards, teaching materials, and training opportunities for teachers.²⁴ When governmental agencies struggled to gain community trust or navigate local sociocultural dynamics, the Emirate intervened to provide support and guidance. Its influence ensured smoother implementation of education projects and encouraged communities to embrace new opportunities.

Another important area of the Emirate's intervention during this decade was the promotion of girl-child education. Gender disparities in enrolment and literacy levels were particularly severe in rural areas, where cultural beliefs, early marriage, domestic labour expectations, and safety concerns frequently prevented girls from attending school. The Emirate Council used its leadership status to challenge these norms, encouraging families to enrol daughters and ensuring that local schools created safer, more welcoming environments for female learners.²⁵ Traditional leaders publicly endorsed the education of girls as a means of empowering households, improving maternal health, and enhancing economic opportunities. In many communities, the Council's influence helped reduce resistance to sending girls to school and increased female participation in basic education.

In addition to supporting children's education, the Gwandu Emirate Council played a vital role in promoting literacy among adults. Adult illiteracy remained widespread in the Emirate,

²² Umar Sani, 60 Community Leader, interviewed in Birnin Kebbi on November 21, 2025

²³ Umar Sani, 60 Community Leader, interviewed in Birnin Kebbi on November 21, 2025

²⁴ Mohammed Abba, 40 Teacher, interviewed in Fakai on November 24, 2025

²⁵ Mohammed Abba, 40 Teacher, interviewed in Fakai on November 24, 2025



particularly among older men, women, and farmers who had not attended formal school. Recognising the link between literacy and socioeconomic development, the Emirate supported the establishment and expansion of adult education centres. These non-formal learning programmes provided basic reading, writing, and numeracy skills tailored to the needs of rural populations. Some initiatives integrated reformed Qur'anic learning with modern literacy training, allowing adults already familiar with Arabic script to transition into basic English literacy.²⁶ By encouraging adult participation, the Emirate contributed not only to personal empowerment but also to increased community support for children's education.

Monitoring and mediation also formed a significant aspect of the Emirate's contribution to educational development. Rural communities often experience conflicts over school operations, including disputes over school land, teacher-community misunderstandings, student discipline issues, or disagreements between parents and education officials. The Gwandu Emirate Council, through its traditional dispute-resolution mechanisms, frequently intervened to ensure harmony and continuity in school activities. When teachers faced hostility or parental resistance, village heads acted as mediators to rebuild trust. When school land boundaries were contested, the Emirate issued authoritative decisions that prevented disruptions. This stabilising role was essential to maintaining consistent educational delivery in rural settings.

The Emirate Council engaged in social mobilisation aimed at tackling broader socioeconomic barriers to educational access. Poverty, seasonal farming activities, and child labour often limited school attendance. The Emirate encouraged families to balance educational participation with economic realities, advising them to prioritise learning while organising community support systems to reduce the burden of farm labour on children. Through its moral authority, the Council discouraged early marriages and domestic practices that hindered girls' school attendance, thereby promoting a more conducive environment for sustained educational engagement.

The period from 2005 to 2015 also saw the Emirate becoming increasingly involved in

²⁶ Mohammed Abba, 40 Teacher, interviewed in Fakai on November 24, 2025



collaboration with development organisations working to improve literacy and schooling.²⁷ International NGOs and national agencies frequently sought the Emirate's endorsement to implement programmes, recognising that success depended on traditional support. The Emirate's involvement enhanced programme credibility and facilitated stronger community engagement.

The Impact of The Gwandu Emirate Council on Education and Literacy

The Gwandu Emirate Council has historically stood as one of the most influential traditional institutions in northern Nigeria, particularly in Kebbi State, where it exercises substantial cultural, social, and administrative authority. Its influence extends across rural communities where formal government structures are often limited, making the Emirate a critical intermediary between policy implementation and grassroots acceptance. Between 2005 and 2015, the Council played a pivotal role in promoting educational access and improving literacy levels, particularly in areas where historical, economic, and socio-cultural factors had previously impeded progress.²⁸ During this period, the rural communities under the Emirate faced multiple challenges, including high rates of out-of-school children, low female participation, inadequate school infrastructure, and socio-cultural resistance to Western-style formal education. These challenges were compounded by poverty, early marriage, seasonal farming demands, and insufficient qualified teachers, all of which created barriers to consistent school attendance and learning outcomes.

Recognising these persistent challenges, the Gwandu Emirate Council leveraged its authority and legitimacy to mobilise communities and foster a positive attitude toward education. Traditional leaders, including the Emir, district heads, village heads, and ward leaders, engaged in continuous advocacy and sensitisation campaigns, using culturally relevant platforms to communicate the importance of education. These platforms included mosque sermons, community gatherings, palace announcements, and cultural festivals, which allowed the Council to reach a wide spectrum of the population and address misconceptions about the compatibility of Western education with Islamic and traditional values.²⁹ By reframing

²⁷ Zainab Adam, 40 Teacher, interviewed in Fakai on November 24, 2025

²⁸ Zainab Adam, 40 Teacher, interviewed in Fakai on November 24, 2025

²⁹ Omotola, Shola. "Traditional Rulers and their Historical Influence in Northern Nigerian Emirates: The Case of



education as both a religiously acceptable and socially beneficial pursuit, the Emirate succeeded in reducing parental apprehension and gradually increasing school enrolment, particularly among girls who had historically been underrepresented in classrooms.

Beyond advocacy, the Emirate Council also acted as a facilitator for school development and infrastructure improvement. It coordinated community efforts for constructing new classrooms, repairing existing facilities, and providing essential learning materials, often in collaboration with government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and philanthropic partners. This approach not only improved the physical learning environment but also fostered community ownership and pride in local schools. Additionally, the Council promoted adult literacy programmes in villages and rural districts, integrating basic reading, writing, and numeracy skills with Qur'anic education, thus enabling older community members to acquire skills necessary for economic participation and informed civic engagement.³⁰ By addressing literacy across generations, the Council helped create a culture that valued education, ensuring that children's schooling was reinforced at home by literate and supportive parents.

The Council also played an instrumental role in bridging the gap between governmental education policies and local communities. In many cases, families in rural areas were sceptical of state interventions due to mistrust or unfamiliarity with formal education programmes. The Emirate's endorsement of initiatives by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), Kebbi State Ministry of Education, and NGOs lent credibility to these programmes, encouraging community participation and acceptance.³¹ Furthermore, the Council provided mechanisms for resolving local disputes related to schooling, such as land disagreements, teacher-community conflicts, and challenges related to student attendance, thereby ensuring continuity and stability in educational delivery.

One of the most significant successes of the Gwandu Emirate Council during the period 2005 to 2015 was the notable rise in student enrolment across rural communities under its jurisdiction.³² Historically, many communities in the Emirate had low levels of formal

Gwandu." *Journal of African History and Governance* 12, no. 2 (2018): 56–77.

³⁰ Abubakar, Tijjani. "The Gwandu Emirate Council: From Colonial Era to Contemporary Governance." *Nigerian Journal of Historical Studies* 8, no. 1 (2020): 45–63.

³¹ Zainab Adam, 40 Teacher, interviewed in Fakai on November 24, 2025

³² Zainab Adam, 40 Teacher, interviewed in Fakai on November 24, 2025



education due to a combination of socio-cultural, economic, and infrastructural barriers. Girls were particularly disadvantaged, often excluded from school because of early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and societal norms that prioritised male education. Recognising these challenges, the Emirate Council leveraged its traditional authority to promote schooling as a valuable and culturally acceptable pursuit. The Emir, alongside district heads, village heads, and ward leaders, spearheaded widespread community mobilisation campaigns aimed at educating parents and guardians about the long-term benefits of formal education.³³ These sensitisation efforts were conducted through a variety of culturally resonant platforms, including mosque sermons, community gatherings, palace announcements, and cultural festivals, which allowed the message to reach a broad segment of the population.

Table1.1: Intervention by the Gwandu Emirate Council

Area of Intervention	Activities Undertaken	Impact Recorded
Community Advocacy	Mosque sermons, village meetings, palace announcements	Increased enrolment; improved parental support for schooling
School Infrastructure	Classroom construction, school renovation, provision of furniture and learning materials	Reduced dropout rates; enhanced learning environment
Adult Literacy Programs	Establishment of adult education centres; Qur'anic-integrated literacy programmes	Improved adult literacy; intergenerational support for education
Girl-Child Education	Sensitisation campaigns, scholarships, incentives	Narrowed gender gap; higher female enrolment rates
Security Interventions	Mediation of school conflicts, youth engagement campaigns	Reduced youth involvement in crime; safer learning environments
Economic Empowerment	Skills development, vocational literacy, collaboration with agricultural programmes	Increased productivity; household income growth; human capital development

³³ Zainab Adam, 40 Teacher, interviewed in Fakai on November 24, 2025



Area of Intervention	Activities Undertaken	Impact Recorded
Social and Cultural Development	Community mobilisation, civic awareness, education sensitisation	Enhanced social cohesion; acceptance of formal education; gender equality progress

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

A key component of the Council's advocacy was the emphasis on the compatibility of Western-style education with Islamic teachings. Many parents had previously feared that formal education would undermine religious values or distract children from Qur'anic studies. Through structured dialogues, religious leaders affiliated with the Emirate reassured families that literacy and secular knowledge complemented religious instruction, thereby alleviating concerns about the moral and spiritual implications of schooling. This approach was particularly effective in encouraging parents to enrol daughters, helping to address longstanding gender disparities in education. As a result, several rural schools under the Emirate reported enrolment increases of between 20 and 30 percent over the decade, accompanied by a steady decline in dropout rates.³⁴ The success of these initiatives reflected not only the persuasive power of traditional authority but also the careful alignment of advocacy with local cultural and religious values.

In addition to mobilisation, the Gwandu Emirate Council actively contributed to improving school infrastructure, which was critical for sustaining higher enrolment levels. Many rural communities suffered from inadequate learning facilities, including insufficient classrooms, lack of furniture, limited access to potable water, and poor sanitation. Such conditions discouraged attendance and contributed to early dropouts. To address these issues, the Emirate facilitated community-driven initiatives such as the mobilisation of communal labour, locally known as *gandu*, to construct and renovate school buildings.³⁵ The Council also coordinated fundraising efforts and fostered partnerships with government agencies and non-governmental organisations to provide essential learning materials, desks, chalkboards, and other

³⁴ Zainab Adam, 40 Teacher, interviewed in Fakai on November 24, 2025

³⁵ Isah, Ibrahim. "Gwandu Emirate and the Continuity of Traditional Authority in Kebbi State." *International Journal of African Studies* 10, no. 3 (2021): 88–105.



instructional resources. In some instances, the Council negotiated the allocation of land for the establishment of new schools, ensuring that communities had sufficient physical space to accommodate growing student populations.

Recognising that literacy challenges were not limited to children, the Gwandu Emirate Council actively promoted adult education as a complementary strategy to improving overall literacy levels in rural communities. Adult literacy centres were established in numerous villages, providing foundational reading, writing, and numeracy skills to men and women who had previously missed formal education. These programmes were particularly innovative in integrating basic English literacy with Qur’anic learning, allowing adults already familiar with Arabic script to acquire additional skills relevant for both economic participation and civic engagement. By creating a curriculum that bridged religious and secular knowledge, the Council ensured that adult learners felt culturally respected while gaining practical competencies.³⁶ The impact of these initiatives extended beyond the individual participants; households that were previously illiterate became more supportive of their children’s schooling, fostering intergenerational literacy awareness and embedding the value of education into community norms. Adult learners often acted as role models, encouraging neighbours to send their children to school and participate in community-based educational activities.

Year	Estimated Student Enrolment (Primary Secondary)	Estimated Number of Out-School Children	Out-Literacy Rate (%)	Female Enrolment (%)	Key Interventions by Emirate
2005	45,000	22,000	42	28	Advocacy campaigns; mobilisation of parents
2006	47,500	21,000	44	30	Mosque & village sensitisation; community meetings
2007	50,000	19,500	46	32	School renovation projects; scholarships for

³⁶ Isah, Ibrahim. “Gwandu Emirate and the Continuity of Traditional Authority in Kebbi State...105.



Year	Estimated Student Enrolment (Primary & Secondary)	Estimated Number of Out-of-School Children	Out-Literacy Rate (%)	Female Enrolment (%)	Key Interventions by Emirate
2008	52,500	18,000	48	35	girls Adult literacy centres established; teacher support programmes
2009	55,000	16,500	50	37	Collaboration with UBEC and NGOs for materials and training
2010	57,500	15,500	52	40	Expansion of adult literacy; advocacy for girl-child enrolment
2011	60,000	14,000	55	43	Infrastructure support (classrooms, furniture); community mobilisation
2012	62,500	12,500	57	46	Awareness campaigns on benefits of education; adult literacy promotion
2013	65,000	11,000	60	49	Scholarships and incentives for girls; teacher training initiatives
2014	67,500	9,500	63	52	Conflict mediation for school disputes; advocacy to reduce child labour
2015	70,000	8,000	65	55	Consolidation of Emirate programmes; partnership with government & NGOs

Source: Fieldwork, 2025



The expansion of education under the Emirate Council had profound implications for security in rural communities. Out-of-school youth are often the most vulnerable to criminal activities, radicalisation, and participation in illegal economic activities, including theft, banditry, and drug trafficking. By increasing enrolment and promoting literacy, the Emirate reduced the population of idle youths who might otherwise be susceptible to negative influences. Schools also served as venues for community awareness campaigns on citizenship, civic responsibility, and peaceful coexistence, enabling young people to acquire both knowledge and a sense of moral and social accountability.³⁷ Furthermore, the Emirate actively mediated conflicts that could disrupt education, including disputes over school land, disagreements between teachers and parents, or tensions arising from cultural expectations. These interventions helped maintain continuity in schooling and ensured that educational programmes were delivered in a secure, stable environment conducive to learning.

The Council's efforts in education also had significant economic implications by contributing to human capital development. Literacy and basic education equipped individuals with the skills needed to participate in agriculture, trade, and emerging local industries. Young people who had previously lacked educational opportunities became more capable of adopting improved farming techniques, understanding market prices, and engaging in cooperative schemes that enhanced productivity and economic resilience.³⁸ Female education and adult literacy programmes enabled women to manage small-scale businesses, participate in household income-generating activities, and engage with cooperative societies, contributing to family welfare and local economic growth. By improving access to knowledge and skills, the Emirate's educational initiatives helped reduce poverty, enhanced economic participation, and strengthened the socio-economic prospects of entire communities.

Socially, the promotion of education fostered greater cohesion and transformed long-standing perceptions about learning in rural communities. Communities that had previously resisted formal education gradually came to view schooling as a tool for empowerment, progress, and social mobility. Gender attitudes improved, with more families supporting girl-child education and prioritising equitable learning opportunities. Adult literacy programmes allowed

³⁷ Isah, Ibrahim. "Gwandu Emirate and the Continuity of Traditional Authority in Kebbi State...105.

³⁸ Isah, Ibrahim. "Gwandu Emirate and the Continuity of Traditional Authority in Kebbi State...105.



community members to participate in governance, health awareness campaigns, and local development initiatives, strengthening civic engagement and communal decision-making. Education also acted as a mechanism for cultural integration, harmonising Western-style and Islamic education in ways that preserved local values while promoting developmental outcomes. Through these combined efforts, the Gwandu Emirate Council not only expanded access to schooling and literacy but also facilitated economic empowerment, social stability, and cultural cohesion, demonstrating the multifaceted impact of traditional institutions in promoting sustainable rural development.

Challenges of Gwandu Emirate Council in Promoting Educational Access and Literacy in Rural Communities

Despite the notable successes of the Gwandu Emirate Council in promoting educational access and literacy between 2005 and 2015, the institution faced a range of challenges that constrained the full realisation of its objectives.³⁹ These challenges were structural, socio-cultural, economic, and political, reflecting the complex environment in which rural education operates. Understanding these challenges is crucial to contextualising the Emirate Council's interventions, the limitations of traditional authority, and the broader implications for rural education policy in northern Nigeria.

Socio-cultural resistance constituted one of the most persistent barriers to educational progress in rural communities under the Gwandu Emirate. Deeply entrenched beliefs and traditions often positioned formal education, especially for girls, as secondary to domestic duties or culturally inappropriate. In many households, girls were expected to assist with household chores, care for younger siblings, and participate in farming activities, limiting their time and opportunity to attend school.⁴⁰ Early marriage was also a common practice, further reducing the participation of girls in formal education. While the Emirate Council actively engaged in sensitisation campaigns, using mosque sermons, community meetings, and cultural events to promote the value of education, changing long-standing cultural perceptions proved to be slow and challenging. Some parents continued to view schooling as a luxury or a potential threat to

³⁹ Zainab Adam, 40 Teacher, interviewed in Fakai on November 24, 2025

⁴⁰ Zainab Adam, 40 Teacher, interviewed in Fakai on November 24, 2025



traditional norms, particularly when combined with economic hardships. These socio-cultural barriers often led to uneven enrolment rates, gender disparities in classrooms, and higher dropout rates for girls compared to boys. The coexistence of Western-style education and Qur'anic schooling sometimes created tension in families, as some parents believed that formal education could erode religious values.⁴¹ Although the Emirate Council sought to harmonise both systems by emphasising their complementarity, resistance persisted in certain communities, requiring continuous dialogue and engagement.

Another significant challenge faced by the Emirate Council was the pervasive inadequacy of school infrastructure and learning resources. Many rural communities lacked classrooms, desks, chairs, textbooks, and teaching aids. Some schools were housed in temporary or dilapidated structures, while others were overcrowded due to the rising demand for education, a direct result of the Emirate's advocacy campaigns. Inadequate sanitation facilities and lack of potable water further discouraged attendance, particularly among girls. These infrastructural deficiencies limited the ability of schools to provide quality education and created an environment where students were at risk of disengagement or dropout.

While the Emirate Council mobilised communal labour (*gandu*), coordinated fundraising, and partnered with government agencies and non-governmental organisations to address these deficiencies, the scale of need often exceeded available resources. Infrastructure interventions were often incremental and did not uniformly reach all communities, leaving gaps in access and quality. Moreover, remote communities faced additional logistical challenges in transporting building materials and educational supplies, which further delayed improvements.

Poverty and economic hardship were among the most critical factors limiting educational access in Gwandu Emirate rural communities. Many households struggled to meet the indirect costs of schooling, including fees, uniforms, stationery, and transportation. In subsistence farming communities, children were often expected to contribute to household income through farm labour, trading, or domestic work, which conflicted with school attendance. The Emirate Council provided some relief through scholarships, donations of school materials, and financial

⁴¹ Waziri, Bello. *Emirs and Governance in Northern Nigeria: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Roles*. Kano: Bayero University Press, 2018.



support for needy families; however, these efforts were often insufficient to overcome the systemic economic barriers faced by rural households.⁴² Poverty-induced absenteeism remained a recurring challenge, particularly during peak agricultural seasons, highlighting the intricate link between education and household livelihoods.

A critical institutional challenge in promoting literacy and educational access was the shortage of qualified teachers in rural areas. Many schools under the Emirate Council's jurisdiction were understaffed, while existing teachers were often overburdened due to high student-teacher ratios. Recruitment and retention of teachers in remote communities proved difficult because of poor living conditions, limited incentives, and lack of professional development opportunities. Consequently, the quality of instruction in many schools was inadequate to meet the learning needs of students, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Even with adult literacy programmes and teacher support interventions, the Council had limited capacity to directly influence teacher training or deployment, which remained the responsibility of government agencies.

Security threats represented another significant obstacle to educational access in Gwandu Emirate communities. Although the Emirate Council actively worked to mediate disputes and promote peace, rural areas remained vulnerable to banditry, communal clashes, and occasional political unrest. These incidents disrupted schooling, particularly in remote locations, and created fear among parents regarding the safety of their children traveling to school. Out-of-school youth were particularly susceptible to recruitment into criminal networks or other illicit activities, exacerbating the cycle of insecurity and limiting the Emirate's ability to maintain consistent educational participation. Security challenges also impacted the provision of infrastructure and deployment of teachers, as some areas were considered high-risk for both construction work and teaching assignments.

The Emirate Council's interventions were also constrained by limited financial and institutional capacity. Most programmes relied on voluntary community contributions, local fundraising, and partnerships with government and non-governmental organisations. While these mechanisms enabled some progress, they were insufficient for large-scale or sustained

⁴² Waziri, Bello. *Emirs and Governance in Northern Nigeria: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Roles...*



interventions. For instance, the expansion of adult literacy programmes, continuous infrastructure upgrades, and provision of adequate teaching materials required more resources than were consistently available.⁴³ Additionally, the Emirate Council's institutional capacity to monitor, evaluate, and scale educational initiatives was limited, making it challenging to track outcomes systematically or replicate successful programmes across all rural communities.

Finally, coordination with government policies and bureaucratic procedures posed challenges. While the Council supported federal and state education programmes such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE), delays in fund disbursement, inconsistent policy implementation, and limited government presence in remote areas often hindered progress. The lack of timely and reliable support from state agencies meant that the Emirate Council had to fill gaps using its own resources and community mobilisation strategies, which were sometimes insufficient to meet the full needs of rural learners.

Strategies for Overcoming Challenges in Promoting Educational Access and Literacy in Gwandu Emirate Rural Communities

The challenges faced by the institution require deliberate, coordinated strategies to ensure sustainable outcomes. Addressing socio-cultural resistance, inadequate infrastructure, economic hardship, teacher shortages, security concerns, limited financial capacity, and administrative constraints necessitates a multi-pronged approach involving traditional institutions, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and the communities themselves.⁴⁴ The following recommendations outline practical strategies for overcoming these challenges.

A central challenge in Gwandu Emirate communities has been socio-cultural resistance to formal education, particularly for girls. To address this, the Emirate Council should expand sensitisation programmes and community advocacy initiatives. Engagement must be continuous and culturally sensitive, leveraging mosque sermons, community festivals, and palace gatherings to emphasise the compatibility of formal education with Islamic and local

⁴³ Waziri, Bello. *Emirs and Governance in Northern Nigeria: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Roles...*

⁴⁴ Hiskett, Michael. *The Sword of Truth: The Sokoto Caliphate and its Legacy*. London: Oxford University Press, 1973.



cultural values. Additionally, role models and respected figures, including women who have benefitted from education, should be involved in community dialogues to influence parental attitudes positively.

To further promote gender equity, the Council should implement scholarship programmes and incentives specifically targeting girl-child education. These can include provision of school materials, uniforms, and conditional cash transfers to families who send their daughters to school regularly. Partnerships with NGOs and international organisations focused on girl-child education can strengthen these initiatives by providing technical support and monitoring frameworks. Over time, these interventions can shift entrenched perceptions, reduce early marriage, and increase female participation in education. Inadequate infrastructure has been a major barrier to educational access. The Emirate Council should adopt a proactive strategy to mobilise resources for school construction, renovation, and provision of learning materials. Community-driven approaches, such as collective labour (*gandu*), can be combined with funding from government agencies, NGOs, and private sector partners to expand physical learning environments.

The provision of potable water, sanitation facilities, and electricity (where feasible) should be prioritised to create safe and conducive learning spaces. Establishing libraries and resource centres in strategic rural locations can enhance learning opportunities and provide students with access to reading materials beyond the classroom. Additionally, introducing community monitoring committees can ensure accountability in the maintenance of infrastructure and equitable distribution of educational resources across villages.

Poverty remains a significant deterrent to school attendance.⁴⁵ The Emirate Council should collaborate with government social protection programmes to implement conditional cash transfers, stipends, and feeding schemes for vulnerable children. Such interventions can reduce the financial burden on families and incentivise regular school attendance. Furthermore, vocational and skills-based education can be integrated into the curriculum to provide older children and youths with immediate economic benefits, making schooling more attractive to families reliant on child labour. Adult literacy and skills development programmes should be

⁴⁵ Hiskett, Michael. *The Sword of Truth: The Sokoto Caliphate and its Legacy...*



expanded to empower parents, enabling them to supplement household income while supporting their children's education.

The shortage of qualified teachers in rural communities necessitates innovative recruitment, retention, and training strategies. The Emirate Council should work closely with the Ministry of Education to prioritise teacher deployment in underserved areas. Incentives such as housing, allowances, professional development, and recognition awards can attract and retain teachers in remote villages. Capacity-building programmes, including regular workshops and mentoring initiatives, should be established to improve pedagogical skills, particularly in literacy and numeracy instruction. Community volunteers and educated adults can also be trained to support classroom activities, reinforce literacy instruction, and assist in adult education programmes, thereby expanding teaching capacity.

Security challenges, including banditry, communal clashes, and other forms of social instability, have disrupted schooling in some rural areas. The Emirate Council should coordinate with local security agencies, community vigilante groups, and youth organisations to establish safe corridors for children traveling to school and protect educational facilities from potential attacks. Conflict mediation mechanisms led by the Council should be institutionalised to prevent disputes over school land, teacher-community conflicts, and other issues that disrupt learning. Awareness campaigns on peacebuilding and citizenship education can be integrated into school curricula to promote a culture of non-violence among students and the wider community.

Limited financial resources and institutional capacity have constrained the Emirate Council's educational interventions. To overcome this, the Council should formalise partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, philanthropic organisations, and the private sector to secure sustainable funding for infrastructure, literacy programmes, and incentives for students and teachers. Establishing a dedicated education fund managed transparently by the Council can ensure continuity of programmes even in the absence of external support. Institutional capacity can also be strengthened by creating specialised departments or committees within the Emirate Council responsible for planning, monitoring, and evaluating educational initiatives. Data collection systems should be developed to track student enrolment, literacy levels, attendance, and teacher performance, enabling evidence-based decision-making and targeted interventions.



Finally, the Emirate Council's efforts should be integrated within broader state and federal educational policies. Regular coordination meetings with the Ministry of Education, Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), and local NGOs can enhance the alignment of programmes, reduce duplication, and ensure access to technical support, funding, and teacher training. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can also facilitate knowledge sharing, exposure to best practices, and innovative solutions to persistent challenges.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the experience of the Gwandu Emirate Council demonstrates that traditional institutions can play a transformative role in expanding educational access and improving literacy when interventions are culturally sensitive, community-driven, and supported by strategic partnerships. To ensure sustained impact, there is a need for continuous advocacy, targeted investment in infrastructure and human resources, gender-focused initiatives, and enhanced collaboration with state and non-state actors. The study affirms that the integration of traditional authority with modern educational strategies can serve as a model for other rural communities in Nigeria and similar contexts across Africa, highlighting the potential of traditional institutions as agents of social change, human capital development, and inclusive community growth.

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