

## GENDER EDUCATION CONCERN FOR OUT-OF CHILDREN CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Jamila Abdullahi Hamza, <sup>2</sup>Lubabatu Aliyu, <sup>3</sup>Amina Shehu Maimota

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Sa'adatu Rimi College of Education

[jamyabdulhamza@gmail.com](mailto:jamyabdulhamza@gmail.com), [lubabatualiyu7@gmail.com](mailto:lubabatualiyu7@gmail.com), [minamota538@gmail.com](mailto:minamota538@gmail.com),

### Abstract

*This paper examined the gender education for out-of children in Nigeria, the gender education challenges responsible for out-of-school children, the social implications of out-of-school children and suggested way forward. Secondary data were used in the paper. The data were sourced from print and online publications. The paper identified challenges gender education of out-of-school children in Nigeria to include; poor funding of education, corruption, poor implementation of the Child Rights Act, insecurity problems, lack of political will to address the problems, high rate of poverty, and high fertility rate. The paper also concluded that the social implications of out-of-school children include security challenges, shortage of skilled manpower in future, bad international image, high levels of illiteracy and high socio-economic and dependency issues. The paper recommended among other things that, emphasis should be laid on education for all not just the girl-child alone by the government and administrators. A child is child irrespective of the gender, creed, race or colour, the mindset of the people should also be changed against the notion that boys are better than girls, the federal, state and local governments should come up with programmes to address the problem of out-of-school children in Nigeria. Also, adequate funding should be allocated to the education sector at all levels of government.*

### Introduction

Education serves as a valuable tool that equips individuals with knowledge, skills, techniques, and information, enabling them to understand their rights and responsibilities towards their family, society, and country (Osagbovo & Hepzibah-Awulor, 2022). It has significantly contributed to enhancing the quality of life in various societies (Oluwatobi, 2016). Education plays a crucial role in various aspects, such as alleviating poverty, ensuring safety and security by combating crime, preventing wars and terrorism, promoting commerce and trade, maintaining law and order, empowering women, facilitating communication, and uplifting economically disadvantaged sections of society. One of its significant benefits is that education raises the standard of living and enables individuals to contribute to the development of their nation and society.

On the other hand, education is one of the fundamental human rights recognized by the United Nations, which means, education is a right that every child should have access to, irrespective of gender. However, in many parts of the world, including Nigeria. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with a population of over 200 million people. The country is rich in cultural diversity and has over 250 ethnic groups. Despite the cultural and linguistic diversity, the country is united in the pursuit of education. Education is highly

valued in Nigeria, and there is a widespread belief that it is the key to success. However, despite the efforts made by the Nigerian government to promote education for all, there are still significant gaps in the education of girls in Nigeria. In Nigeria, girls' education has been characterized by various challenges, including poverty, early marriage, gender discrimination, lack of adequate educational infrastructure, and insurgent activities. These challenges have contributed to low enrolment and high dropout rates among girls. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that over 16.8 million children are out of school in Nigeria, with girls accounting for more than half of the figure (UNESCO, 2024).

Furthermore, Northern Nigeria has the rate of out of school children which this has affected us greatly and has reflected in youths without jobs, increase in drug abuse and misuse by the youths and poverty. Looking at it through gender lenses, we have more out of school girls than boys, several reasons accrue to this, ranging from cultural and societal hindrances to poverty and lack of access to schools, and then the deadliest activities of kidnappers, bandits and Boko Haram in which has lingered for over 10 years using abduction of school girls for their fame and element of gaining world recognition by subjecting this young girls to various forms of violence, such as young brides, sex slaves, IED explosive agents among others. Kidnappers, bandits and Boko Haram target on schools girls is a deliberate and conscious action, which is aim at reminding the world of their objectives which include crippling the education system (western education to be precise) and in so doing deterring others who are aspiring to be in schools and change the world, this act of violence against school girls has affected those society and aspiring young girls, it has instilled fear in parents, community and other places at large.

In Nigeria, gender disparities in education are stark, particularly affecting girls. Approximately 50% of girls are not attending school at the basic education level, and nearly two-thirds of the country's out-of-school children (about 6.34 million) are girls. This situation is exacerbated by various systemic barriers including cultural and religious beliefs that uphold traditional gender roles, poverty, insecurity from conflict, and inadequate facilities to manage menstrual hygiene. The aim of this study is to review gender education for out-of-school children in Nigeria challenges and way forward.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Gender**

Gender is a critical factor in structuring the types of opportunities and life chances faced by individuals and groups, and strongly influences the roles they play within social institutions from the household to the state. Although the roles of men and women vary from culture to culture, there is no known instance of a society in which females are more powerful than males. Men's roles are generally more highly valued and rewarding than women's role (Ibrahim, 2004; Giddens, 2010).

#### **Education**

Fafunwa (1974) defines education as the transmission of positive values from one generation to the next, enabling younger individuals to develop attitudes, abilities, skills,

and behaviors that benefit society. Amaele et al. (2011) further define education as the holistic development of an individual child using appropriate methods and techniques based on their abilities and interests, aiming to meet the needs of society and enable the individual to contribute effectively to its improvement.

Education is the most crucial investment any country can make for its national development. Neglecting education leaves a country lagging behind in thoughts and actions. Education equips individuals to be useful to themselves and society, fostering productivity and the discovery and utilization of their creative abilities to accomplish specific tasks, achieve self-actualization, and contribute to community development (Abosede, 2020).

### **Out-of-school' children**

Concept of Out of School Children According to the United Nations, out-of-school children refer to children who are yet to be enrolled in any formal education, excluding pre-primary education. The age range for out-of school children is 6-11 years. Out-of-school children are school-age children that are supposed to be in schools but are not in schools due to parental and governmental failures to provide accessible quality education for them. Out-of-school children are young children in the age group of 1 to 12 that are roaming the street without access to a functional educational system (Ojelade, Aiyedun & Aregebesola, 2019). Out-of-school children are the children whom the government and the parents have failed to provide quality basic education for. The term "out-of school children" is a non-attendance of the school of school-age children for some established factors.

### **Challenges of gender education for out-of children in Nigeria**

There are many challenges responsible for out-of-school children in Nigeria. Some of the challenges include; poor funding of education, corruption, poor implementation of Child Rights law, insecurity problems, Lack of political will to address the problems, high rate of poverty, and high fertility rate.

### **Insecurity Challenges**

The high rate of attacks on educational institutions across the country is also responsible for a large number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. Ogunode (2020) and (Raliyat, Umma, & Aisha, 2022) observed that the spate of attacks on schools and abductions of students in the country have also contributed to the increase in the scourge of children not going to school. Raliyat, Umma, & Aisha, (2022) revealed that the situation had been growing worse due to the degenerating security situation in the country. Ten states are at the top of the log regarding Nigeria's 20 million out-of-school children. Kano State leads the pack while Akwa Ibom, Katsina and Kaduna follow closely. Other states that rank high on the list are Taraba, Sokoto, Yobe, Zamfara and Bauchi. Most of the states are the state where insecurity is high. For instance, Authorities in North-West, Nigeria had shut down more than 4,000 public primary schools across the state, and over 4,000 public secondary schools were among the closed-down schools. According to him, over 300,000 to 400,000 thousand students and pupils are at home after the incident of the Chibok school students' kidnap without considering the effects on the internal administration of the school,

especially the learners (Sabiu, 2021). The effects of the closure of schools on school administration in Northern Nigeria according to (Ogunode, Ahaotu & Obi, 2021 and Ogunode & Ahaotu, 2021), poor learning, poor quality of education, loss of interest in education, disruption of the academic calendar and learning loss were identified as the effects of the closure of schools on administration of schools in Northern Nigeria. Amnesty International's Seun Bakare says attacks and school closures signal severe threats to education in Nigeria. The recent wave of kidnapping continues to worsen the education crisis in Nigeria's North, a region known for low levels of literacy and enrollment, accounting for more than 70 percent of Nigeria's school dropouts.

### **Early Child Marriage and Pregnancy**

Child marriage and pregnancy in Nigeria especially in the Northern part of Nigeria is another negative effect of children being out of school. When the girl child is not engaged in school, the next plan for her is to get married. The high rate of out-of-school girls in Nigeria is among the major factor responsible for child marriage and pregnancy. Charity, Emenike, Doma & Akinsola, (2020) found out in their studies that out-of-school syndrome among female children led to early teenage marriages and pregnancies, also pointed out that the impact of teen parenting on maternal education and the negative effects on income declining over time may make teen parents to be more resource constrained during their children's earliest years, a period critical for child development.

### **High Level of Illiteracy**

The problem of high out-of-school children in Nigeria can lead to high illiteracy levels in future if these children are not provided with educational opportunities. According to Raliyat, Umma & Aisha (2022), with Nigeria's population of 216 million, implies that almost 10 per cent of its people are headed for a lifetime of illiteracy. For a country with a literacy rate of just 62.02 per cent, all efforts should be geared towards achieving mass literacy, not nurturing another generation of illiterates.

### **Shortage of skilled Manpower in the Future**

The large out of school children in Nigeria can lead to a shortage of manpower in the future. When children are not provided with educational opportunities and meaningful skills, it will affect the country in the long run. A World Bank document entitled "Nigeria Development Update (June 2022): The Continuing Urgency of Business Unusual," revealed that with many children out of school in Nigeria, in years to come, there will be a lack of adequate and appropriate manpower in the future. Ndanusia, Abayomi, & Harada, (2021) opined that people with no skill set and lacking basic education are more likely to become a burden to society. Sequel to the unemployability of the uneducated youths who lack the ability of creativity and innovative ideas to subdue their environment, most of these Nigerians become redundant and unproductive. This is an unhealthy situation for development in any human society. The concomitant effect of a situation like this is an increase in the wave of criminal activities and crimes.

**Gender Bias**

The term "gender" is commonly used to distinguish between individuals based on the masculine/feminine dichotomy (Nakpodia & Urien, James, 2012). However, there is a prevailing sentiment to prioritize the girl-child over the boy-child due to the perception that girls are more vulnerable. This attitude often leads to unequal access to education for boys, as they are seen as already having advantages and are discouraged from attending school. Consequently, the boy-child may be more inclined to engage in truancy and prioritize other activities over education.

**Poor Performance in Examinations**

There are multiple factors that can contribute to the underperformance of boys in academic examinations. One such factor is the gender of the teacher, as it can influence the academic performance of the boy-child. Boys may find it easier to relate to and connect with male teachers, perceiving them as more approachable and understanding. This increased comfort level enables them to seek help and guidance from male teachers, ultimately leading to improved academic performance (Kaguamba, 2011). Another factor that can affect the performance of boys is their struggle with concentration and difficulty in comprehending information quickly. When faced with educational challenges, boys may opt for the easiest solution, which is to drop out of school, convinced that education is not meant for them.

**High Rate of Poverty**

The high rate of poverty among Nigerians is also responsible for out-of-school children. The rising poverty that forces parents to put children in the labour market and street hawking, and the breakdown in social and family life are some of the causes of the high rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria. This position was reaffirmed by Ogunode (2020) that many Nigerian parents cannot send their wards to school due to the high rate of poverty. Many basic schools in Nigeria pay some fees like examinations and PTA dues. Such fees are handled by households. When family resources are low, a family will have to choose one or two children to attend school while the others stay at home. Older children, orphans, and girls are most likely to be left out. Children are meant to go work for their parents because of poverty. Children are kept at home to help with domestic chores or care for siblings. Older children supporting younger siblings must work to have money for food and other needs. This is a major contributor to the out-of-school problem. The present economic situation in Nigeria is seriously affecting parents' readiness to send their children to school, thus, creating an increase in the total number of out-of-school children in Nigeria (Ndanusa, Abayomi, & Harada, 2021). Shehu, (2018) and Smits, & Huisman, (2013) discovered that most of the strong determinants of primary school non-attendance were due to household factors, with parental education and wealth being the most important. Also, Adam,

**Lack of Political Will to Address Out-of-School Problem**

The lack of political will to develop basic education at the state and local government level is also responsible for the out-of-school children. The state government and local

government that are in charge of the administration and management of basic education are not demonstrating any political will to develop the sector.

#### **Poor Implementation of the Child Right Act**

Another factor responsible for the high rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria is the poor implementation of the child right act which makes it compulsory for all children to go to school. Raliyat, Umma, & Aisha, (2022) submitted that some states have failed to domesticate the Child Rights Act 2003. Over the years, successive governments have adopted programmes to foster free, compulsory child education, culminating in the National Policy on Education 2004 and the passage of the Child Rights Act 2003 which mandates nine years of compulsory schooling for children. The United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) revealed that 31 states of Nigeria have so far enacted the equivalents of the Child Rights Act while the five states that are yet to domesticate the law are Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Kano and Zamfara (Ahmed-Gusau, 2022).

#### **Corruption**

Corruption in Nigeria is also responsible for out-of-school children. This position is also maintained by Ogunode & Stephen (2021) who submitted that the problem of out-of-school children in Nigeria is also caused by corruption in the administration of Basic education initiatives. Vanguard newspaper, (2020) reported that the sum of N1.83 billion released to Kwara state government in July 2016 as the state's share of UBE grant for 2014 and 2015 was returned to the Commission because the Kwara State Government reportedly "diverted" its N1.45bn counterpart fund which it had initially deposited with some banks.

#### **Poor Funding for Education**

Poor funding of education at all levels of education is responsible for a large number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. This position is supported by Ogunode & Stephen (2021) who observed that the budgetary allocation for the educational sector is inadequate and below the recommendation of UNESCO 26% for developing countries like Nigeria. The little funds released for the administration of Basic education are diverted by the officials and political office holders.

#### **Way forward**

In order to find a lasting solution to the challenges gender education of out-of-school children in Nigeria, the paper recommended the following:

- Emphasis should be laid on education for all not just the girl-child alone by the government and administrators. A child is child irrespective of the gender, creed, race or colour.
- The mindset of the people should also be changed against the notion that boys are better than girls.
- The federal, state and local governments should come up with a national policy to address the issue of out-of-school children in Nigeria.

- Government should build more Basic schools across the country and funding for basic education should be increased.
- The government should put in place adequate monitoring mechanisms for full implementations of educational policies and programmes designed and formulated to improve the enrolment of children in school.
- The government can use part of subsidy funds to provide instructional and learning materials for teachers and students across the country. 5. To prevent fund diversions, government should mandate various anti-corruption agencies in the country to monitor the funds allocated for the development of the UBE programme.
- The government should provide adequate security by addressing the issues causing insecurity problems in the country.
- The government should provide social security packages for the rural dwellers. This will help in increasing school enrolments of school going age children.
- The burden of cost of education should be reduced by eliminating school fees, providing cash transfers, and shifting sociocultural norms and beliefs that prevent school enrollment.

### Conclusion

This paper has critically looked at challenges and prospects of gender education for out-of children in Nigeria which include: poor funding of education, corruption, poor implementation of the Child Right act, insecurity problems, lack of political will to address the problems, high rate of poverty, and high fertility rate. In spite of the efforts made by Government and policy makers to reduce the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria, some factors are still militating against the success of some of these programme organised by Government and international agencies have been highlighted in this paper and must be addressed to achieve results. Government should take cognizance of issues such as; security challenge, corruption and poor plan implementation in order to prevent wastage in investments made towards achieving qualitative education for all genders in the country. This is necessary to reduce the level of illiteracy, poverty, drop-out and the inequality that exists in the society.

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