

REINTEGRATING OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN INTO BUSINESS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The education system in Nigeria faces a major challenge of out-of-school children, who for many reasons are unable to pursue formal education. This study aims to explore the opportunities and challenges of reintegrating these children into business education in Nigeria. Through a literature review, the study identifies various factors that hinder the reintegration of out-of-school children into business education, such as lack of adequate funding, infrastructure, and poverty. However, the study also highlights potential solutions such as government funding, vocational training programs, and community support. The findings of this study contribute to the ongoing discussion on the education system in Nigeria and provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders in developing effective strategies to address the issue of out-of-school children and promote business education in the country.

Keywords: Business education, Out of school children, Opportunities, Challenges

1. Introduction

Education provides the foundation for improving the quality of a country's human capability development. From every indication, economic and technical advancements in each nation are linked to the educational attainment of its citizens worldwide (Altbach et al., 2019). Previous studies revealed that many young people encounter difficulties accessing or finishing conventional primary and secondary schools, either because they never enrolled in or attended school or dropped out early (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). According to the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization

(UNESCO), in 2022, there are 244 million children and youth aged 6 to 18 worldwide who are still out of school (Unicef, 2021). Similarly, UNESCO further maintained that Nigeria has approximately 20 million out-of-school children, second after India, and Pakistan was placed in third position worldwide (Ogunode et al., 2022). In Nigeria, 33% of out-of-school children are from the northeast, followed by northcentral with 26%, northwest with 25%, south-south with 24%, south-west with 22% and south-east with 19% (Banko et al., 2023). The United Nations defines out-of-school children as children who have not yet enrolled in any official education, except pre-primary education, and their age range is six to eleven (UNICEF, 2016). Similarly, Out-of-school children are also classified as those who have never been to school, despite having the appropriate age to attend, or those who dropped out for various reasons. In modern communities, school is usually acknowledged as the place where children are sent by their parents to obtain formal education, which prepares the growing kid to assume adult duties later in life (Field, 2010; Redding, 2000). Thus, the school provides learners with life and survival skills that will help them develop into sustainable individuals in the future. Again, the school provides an environment where children's talents are identified, developed, and empowered for their future well-being (Barry et al., 2017). Thus, children who are out of school may certainly not benefit from this empowerment plan the system provides.

Business education offers a practical and marketable skillset that can be beneficial for out-of-school children (Wang, 2012). It teaches entrepreneurship, financial management, and other essential skills that can help these children support themselves and their families (Amagir et al., 2018). Additionally, it can also contribute to the country's economic growth by creating a new generation of entrepreneurs. Business education is a branch of education that teaches the skills and operations of the business industry (Faridi et al., 2017; McFarlane, 2014). Higher education and secondary education are two levels at which business education is offered. The term business education describes how people are developed and trained in the skills and know-how required for success in the business sector (Marques & Albuquerque, 2012). This entails emphasizing leadership, innovation, personal growth, and corporate strategy. Its goal is to equip people to handle the rigors of contemporary business and adjust to shifting societal norms (Muff et al., 2013).

From the preceding discussion, there exists a problem of out-of-school children in Nigeria, particularly in the three geo-political zones of the north. Similarly, reintegrating them into business education will certainly provide an opportunity for economic growth and sustainability. Despite the potential benefits, some challenges need to be addressed for the successful reintegration of out-of-school children into business education. These challenges include limited access to resources, lack of funding, and a lack of trained educators. To overcome these challenges, it is crucial to establish partnerships between the public and private sectors and invest in training programs for educators. Furthermore, it is essential to create a supportive and inclusive environment for out-of-school children. This can include offering scholarships, providing mentorship opportunities, and implementing flexible learning options. Additionally, the curriculum should be tailored to meet the specific needs of these children, incorporating practical and hands-on learning methods.

Therefore, the study aims to answer the following research question: how can out-of-school children be reintegrated into business education?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Out-of-school children

Out-of-school children are the children the government and the parents have failed to provide quality basic education (Ndanusa et al., 2021). The term out of school children refers to school-age children who do not attend school due to documented circumstances (Shanker et al., 2015). Thus, one in every five African out-of-school children is a Nigerian, despite the fact that basic education is officially free and compulsory in the country (Ogbonnia, 2020). Similarly, about 50% of the out-of-school children are from the northern region, known to be severely affected by poverty, the Boko haram insurgency, banditry, and other related security challenges (Bello, 2022). The severity of the impact of out-of-school children has prompted studies from both within and beyond Nigeria. Thus, past studies argue that, while there may be many underlying reasons for the country's current degree of insecurity, out-of-school children may not be impervious to the intricacies of the country's recent security challenges (Kanu et al., 2024; Sanchi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, evidence shows that no region or state in Nigeria can proudly claim that it is not battling with the hydra-headed monster known as out-of-school children (Ogba & Igu, 2019). Despite this, the northeastern region of the country has been affected the most by this man-made harm. The Nigerian nation has degenerated to the point where fear and anxiety are common names for Nigerians today, as a result of sophisticated crime rates and awful incidents that plague inhabitants on a daily basis (Babaita, 2020). Several reasons contribute to the prevalence of out-of-school children in low- and middle-income nations such as Nigeria (Adeleke & Alabede, 2022). These factors include, but are not limited to, early/child marriage, economic constraints, conflict, socio-cultural norms, and a lack of inclusive policies and practices in schools (Oyekan et al., 2023; Pourtaheri et al., 2024). Some studies categorized these factors into two: demand and supply barriers.

2.1.1 Demand barriers

Demand barriers can be described as decisions made by household members that limit a child's access to a quality education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Several factors may have an impact on educational demand. These factors include early/child marriage, low home income, child labor, religion, and culture (Beauty, 2018; Buzome et al., 2018). Previous research has indicated that labor shortages are the most significant demand barrier preventing children from attending school (Caarls et al., 2021; Sutchet et al., 2016). This suggests that among the children who do not ever attend school, the most common single reason mentioned is labor needs (Sutchet et al., 2016).

2.1.2 Supply barriers

The Supply argument suggests that schools are the primary drivers of educational access, quality, and retention. Lack of infrastructure, conflict/insecurity, a lack of trained teachers, language of teaching, and distance to school are all examples of supply barriers that may

hinder a child's access to education (Fernández et al., 2023; Játiva et al., 2022). Similarly, on the supply side, distance to school was the most common reason for children not attending school, followed by low-school-quality (Lincove, 2015). However, these parameters differ by location in Nigeria. For example, many children in the Northeast and some parts of the Northwest dropped out of school because of long-term security challenges (Abiodun et al., 2019; Kanu et al., 2024).

2.2 Business education

Previous research described business education in terms of a general orientation for a thorough understanding of business activities (Azevedo et al., 2012; Seethamraju, 2012). Others regard it as vocational training in specific business and office skills (Edet & Udida, 2019), while many other writers define business education as a stage that prepares students to teach business courses (Folorunsho & Adebayo, 2018). Thus, business education is for and about the business. Business education is an aspect of a comprehensive educational program that equips the recipient with the knowledge, skills, understanding, and attitude required to perform well in the business environment as a producer or consumer of goods and services (Is' haq, 2018). Furthermore, business education seeks to train graduates to meet the demands of a continually growing society (Garrett et al., 2016).

2.3 Underpinning theory

2.3.1 Life chance theory

The literature indicates that German sociologist Max Weber introduced the theory in the 1920s. Life chances theory is a sociological theory that describes an individual's ability to improve their quality of life (Miller, 1992). However, the way in which an individual is provided with the necessary incentives to reach his or her goals may influence the level of education attained. The theory's principal implication is that the opportunities and resources that a person is privileged to engage with throughout their lives explain the length of time it takes to achieve success or failure (Ikiyei et al., 2022). The proponents of the theory think that with quality education obtained through school processes, a child's prospects of improving the quality of his life opportunities grow (Maeroff, 1999). Thus, the theory is relevant in explaining how out-of-school children can be reintegrated into business education to improve the quality of their lives, through vocational training, entrepreneurial skills etc.

2.4 Reintegrating out-of-school children into business education: Opportunities

From the preceding discussion, studies have shown that there is a growing number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. This presents a significant challenge for the education system and the country's economic development. Many of these children come from low-income families and are unable to access education due to financial constraints and other related reasons. However, there is a potential solution to this issue - integrating these children into business education. The current study presents opportunities and challenges of reintegrating out of school children into business education.

I. Opportunities:

a. Vocational training and entrepreneurship

Over time, vocational and technical education has been a vital aspect of national development in Nigeria because of its significant effect on national industrial production and economic growth (Nwosu & Micah, 2017). Additionally, entrepreneurship education was introduced as a course at all levels and cross-tertiary institutions (Gámez Gutiérrez & Garzón Baquero, 2017). Thus, many studies described vocational education as the greatest force that can be used to bring about change and the most significant investment that a country can make for the rapid growth of its economic, political, sociological, and human resources (Marope et al., 2015). However, integrating vocational training and entrepreneurship into the curriculum allows students to develop expertise in various careers and become self-employed after graduation. Evidence shows that the goal of incorporating vocational training and entrepreneurial education into the educational curriculum is to gain vocational and technical skills, expose students to professional paths, and explore useable possibilities in the workplace (Pacho, 2015) (industry, agriculture, society, commerce, etc.). There is wisdom in reintegrating out-of-school children into vocational training and entrepreneurship. When out of school are reintegrated into vocational training entrepreneurship, it will help in orienting them toward innovation (Marope et al., 2015). It also develops the children's ability to anticipate future requirements through innovative thinking (Marope et al., 2015). Similarly, it promotes awareness about the importance of human capital in growth. It highlights the need for humans to change their values and attitudes to speed the development process (Marope et al., 2015).

b. Skill Acquisition for self-empowerment and economic empowerment

Skill is that ability, which enables someone to do something well, usually gained through training (Pont, 2003; Salas et al., 2012). The act of getting this skill and knowledge could be described as acquisition. These skills can be acquired either through teaching, training, retraining, practical experience and on-the-job training (Almeida et al., 2012). Through skill acquisition an individual could be empowered to develop capabilities and values for the benefits of the individual and that of the society. Skills acquisition requires the accumulation of different skills that enhances task performance through the integration of both theoretical and practical forms of knowledge (Ericsson, 2015). Skill acquisition helps in the transformation of knowledge and skills into creative venture; that the main aim of skill acquisition is to fight against unemployment among youths particularly the out of school children (Osita et al., 2022).

Similarly, skill acquisition is necessary for reintegrating out of school children, if they are to be involved in society and refrain them from engaging in social vices that put their lives in danger and turn them into threats to the society (Honwana, 2017). Thus, improving the overall economy. Literature revealed that economic empowerment involves the ownership of finances, investments, property, and obtaining an education (Duflo, 2012). Economic empowerment directly affects economic development, and vice versa (Doepke & Tertilt,

2019). Again, economic empowerment is the process of aiding individuals, particularly from low-income backgrounds, in getting the education, training, and job-related skills they need to support themselves and their families (Schmitt, 2023).

c. Bridging the gap between formal and informal education

Bridging the gap between formal and informal education in Nigeria can increase access to education, improve relevance and effectiveness, and provide opportunities for out of school children to reintegrate into business education system (Yasunaga, 2014). According to some experts' formal education is conceptualized to be a structured, streamlined, and systematic learning with specific standards taught by certified teachers (Larson & Lockee, 2019; Van Noy et al., 2016). To standardize formal education, all institutions, including schools, colleges, and universities, must adhere to certain parameters. Formal education in Nigeria is governed by organizations like the ministry of education and its education boards both at the state and federal level (Moja, 2000). Similarly, in Nigeria, pre-primary education is mandatory for all children from age five until they finish secondary school (Sulyman, 2022). Tertiary education is based on individual knowledge and financial abilities.

On the hand, informal education involves learning cultural values, norms, beliefs, and expected behaviors through participation in societal events and functions (Watkins & Marsick, 1992). Thus, this method of learning involves parents, family members, and neighbors. However, the main argument for informal learning is that it is a type of education that takes place outside of the traditional lecture or school-based learning structure (Jones & Dexter, 2016). As mentioned earlier, one common place for informal learning is home, thus, scholars were aware of the substantial impact that the home may have on learning, several educators sought ways to strengthen the connection between home and school (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). Therefore, the school-home model emerged as the most effective strategy for reintegrating out-of-school children, bridging the gap between formal and informal learning methods.

d. Enhancing employability and job creation

Previous research has shown that through business education, a significant number of participants are employed through job creation (Van Praag & van Stel, 2013). Thus, enhancing employability and job creation would be a game changer for reintegrating out-of-school children into business education in Nigeria (Sanji, 2018). Similarly, with 10.5 million children aged 5 to 14 years not attending school (Oyekan et al., 2023). However, childhood development is critical to the child's full and productive life, as well as the nation's progress (Irwin et al., 2007). Again, childhood is a key period of development in which children lay the groundwork for their future well-being, development, and learning (Allen et al., 2015).

To successfully reintegrate out-of-school children, there is need to involve stakeholders engage with government agencies, NGOs, private sector companies, and community leaders to create a supportive ecosystem. Moreover, government should provide mentorship through pairing out-of-school children with experienced professionals for

guidance and support. Government should also foster partnerships through collaboration with educational institutions and businesses to provide training and job opportunities. By prioritizing employability and job creation, government can empower out-of-school children in Nigeria to reach their full potential and contribute positively to their communities.

II. Challenges:

a. Lack of infrastructure and resources

Previous studies in the management literature revealed that lack of infrastructure and resources is a significant challenge for reintegrating out-of-school children into business education in Nigeria (Aiyedun et al., 2023; Akinyoade & Economics, 2019). The schools' infrastructure for supporting business and entrepreneurial education is deteriorating (Ben Hassen, 2022). Nigeria's education enterprises, particularly at the lower levels, suffer from a deplorable lack of infrastructure (Abdullahi et al., 2016). For example, the removal of government subsidies has resulted in a regular substantial increase in the pump price of petroleum products, raising operational costs for many enterprises and making them unprofitable and unviable (Virk et al., 2023).

Additional examples are inadequate classrooms and training facilities, limited access to technology equipment for teaching business education, like computers, internet, software etc. Moreover, there are insufficient equipment for practical skills training, limited accessibility for children with disabilities, inadequate funding for business and entrepreneurship education programs and lack of updated relevant business education curriculum.

b. Limited accessibility and affordability

Evidence shows that, limited accessibility and affordability are significant challenges for reintegrating out-of-school children into business education in Nigeria (Zickafoose et al., 2024). In many parts of the country, there is geographical barrier (urban/rural divides), thus, many out-of-school children in the rural areas found it extremely difficult to access and afford business education centres (Hawke, 2015). Similarly, even in the urban areas, there are limited number of schools and training centers with inadequate transportation options. Additionally, there is persistent insecurity in many conflict zones, for example, in some parts of all the six geo-political zones. Other affordability challenges include, high tuition fee, limited scholarships and financial aid, poverty and economic constraints as well as opportunity costs in terms of child labour and other family responsibilities.

Addressing accessibility and affordability challenges, Nigeria can create inclusive business education opportunities for out-of-school children, promoting economic empowerment and social mobility.

c. Curriculum relevance and adaptability

This also poses crucial challenges for reintegrating out-of-school children into business education in Nigeria. Previous studies indicated that there is an outdated curriculum content, limited focus on entrepreneurship and vocational skills and insufficient

incorporation of technology and digital literacy (Falloon, 2020). Other related challenges are, inadequate emphasis on soft skills and character development, inflexibility for diverse learning needs and limited teacher training and capacity building (Day, 2002). However, when curriculum and relevance and adaptability challenges are addressed, Nigeria can provide out-of-school children with relevant business education, enhancing their employability, entrepreneurship and economic prospects.

d. Teacher training and capacity building

Teacher training and capacity building formed an integral part of business education programs. Studies shows that, it poses critical challenges for reintegrating out-of-school children into business education in Nigeria. Evidence shows that, there are limited teacher training programs, inadequate business education expertise (Giwa, 2023; Marx et al., 2016), insufficient digital literacy and lack of pedagogical skills for diverse learners. Other relevant challenges include limited resources for continuous professional development, brain drain and teacher attrition and inadequate teacher motivation and incentives (Ladan, 2023).

Addressing teacher training and capacity building challenges, Nigeria can enhance the quality of business education for out-of-school children, improving their employability, entrepreneurship and economic prospects.

Conclusion

It is essential to create a supportive and inclusive environment for out-of-school children. This can include offering scholarships, providing mentorship opportunities, and implementing flexible learning options. Additionally, the curriculum should be tailored to meet the specific needs of these children, incorporating practical and hands-on learning methods.

The reintegration of out-of-school children into business education in Nigeria presents numerous opportunities for both individuals and the country as a whole. However, it requires a collaborative effort and strategic planning to overcome the challenges and ensure the success of this initiative. Through these efforts, government can pave the way for a brighter future for these children and the nation's economy.

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