

**OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NIGERIA CAUSES AND WAY FORWARD**

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**Abstract**

*One of the major problem facing Nigeria as country is how to address the problem of out of school children. Every year the population of out of school children keeps increasing. It has been observed that there is 20 million out of school children. This paper examined the causes responsible for out of school children in Nigeria among other things the paper discussed are: concept of out of school children, and the paper suggested the way forward for the eradication of the problem .*

**Keyword:** Basic Education, out of school children, insecurity, schools, funding

**Introduction**

The Nigerian government is politically and legally committed to free, compulsory, and universal basic education under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004, which also earmarks fiscal resources to the UBE program – yet, basic education remains the weakest link in the education chain. The Nigerian education system can be described as a “1 -6-3-3-4” system: one year of pre-primary school, six years of primary followed by three years of junior secondary education, which together comprise basic education; the next three years are senior secondary education, followed by four years of tertiary education. A pre-primary year has been introduced recently, and is considered part of basic education. The Nigerian basic education is faced with many problems and one of the problem is the inability to provide quality and accessible basic education for her children of school age. Report from UNICEF (2022) observed that about 18.5 million children, the majority of whom are girls, do not have access to education in Nigeria, a figure up sharply compared with 2021, the U.N children's fund says about estimated 10.5 million children were out of

school in Africa's most populous country. "Currently in Nigeria, there are 18.5 million out-of-school children, 60% of whom are girls," (Voannews 2022; UNICEF 2022).

United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2022 stated that: "Nigeria has about 20 million out-of-school children. Globally, the organization submitted that there are 244 million children and youth between the ages of 6 and 18 worldwide (who) are still out of school. The organization also revealed that India, Nigeria and Pakistan have the highest figures for out-of-school children globally" (Raliyat, Umma, & Aisha, 2022) Nigerian out-of-school children figure has oscillated between 10.5 million and around 15 million for more than a decade, with the situation growing worse due to the degenerating security situation in the country. The Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report (2020) indicated that sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the most children and youth out of school with 98 million children and young people excluded from education. It is also the only region where this number is increasing; out-of-school rates are falling more slowly than the rate at which the school-age population is growing. "The region with the second highest out-of-school population is Central and Southern Asia with 85 million. The top three countries with the most children and youth excluded from education are India, Nigeria and Pakistan." Data compiled by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in partnership with the Global Education Monitoring Report, showed that Nigeria has about 20 million out-of-school children, placing it second after India, a nation with over one billion population. Pakistan comes third. The three countries have the highest figures for out-of-school children globally (Raliyat, Umma, & Aisha (2022) Nigeria is home to about 20 million out-of-school children with 33 per cent from the northeast which is the highest proportion of its school-age children that are out-of-school. This was followed by North-central with 26 per cent; North-west with 25 per cent; South-south, with 24 per cent; South-west with 22; and South-east with 19 per cent. It is imperative to discuss the causes of out-of-school children and the social implications in Nigeria (Leadership paper, 2022). This paper is aimed to examine the causes responsible for the significant rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria, and suggests the way forward.

### **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) cited in Jacob and Chinwuba (2022). 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.

### **Causes of Out-of-School Children in Nigeria**

There are many causes responsible for out-of-school children in Nigeria. According to Jacob, Chinwuba (2022) and Ogunode Adanna and Ayoko (2024) Some of the causes

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

### **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. The corrupt practices at the administrative level of basic Education are among the factors that are responsible for the shortage of funds for the administration of Basic education in Nigeria. Shortage of funds for the internal administration of primary schools in the country is caused by the administrative corruption in the administrative offices and ministries in charge of primary school administration.

### **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. This position is attested to by Ololube (2016) and Ogunode, Josiah & Ajape (2021) who claimed that Nigerian educational institutions are plagued with corruption and this is hindering development in the sector. 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. Adegboyega (2019) observed that transparency International documented that "66 percent of the money Nigerian governments allocate to education was stolen by corrupt officials.

### **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. Ogunode (2020a) posited that some states government in Nigeria have failed to domesticate the Child Rights Act 2003, most of them are in the North, the region that hosts the largest number of out-of-school children. Nigeria domesticated the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of a child by passing the Child's Right Act (CRA), but the law is not enforced. 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).

### **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 (2020a) and Musa (2019) 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 majority of children who drop out of school are young girls who come from poor and rural backgrounds (World Bank, 2010, 2011). Poverty and parental decision-making supported by cultural practice of the people remain two difficult challenges, which are viewed as common denominators for unequal access to education for the girl-child (Academy for Educational Development, 2002). In addition, Ayoko (2022) observed that the initial decision for a child to attend school and the chances of a child to become educated depend on the attitude, cultural and religious beliefs of the parents or guardian

### **High Fertility Rate**

The fertility rates of Nigerians are high. Due to religious and cultural factors, many Nigerians have more than one wife and they give birth to more children, especially in the Northern part of Nigeria. Ogunode, Jegede & Ajape (2021) observed that another big problem militating effective implementation of primary school education policies is the raising population of children enrolling on primary school education in Nigeria. Educating this high population required a lot of financial commitment to engage human and material resources. The population of Nigeria is rising every day and the cost of educating the huge teeming population is high. NOUN (2012) observed that the structure of Nigeria's population has always shown a large youth base. This is the group that requires education at all levels, and this gives rise to demand in excess of the capacity of education. Akpan (2000) stated that the increasing demand for education has given rise to the demand by parents and their children for educational opportunities. This, however, affects educational planning in Nigeria. There is no prospect that the rise in the country's population will ever slow down. Hence effective planning of education becomes difficult. The free and compulsory Universal Basic Education scheme, though aimed at eliminating or reducing illiteracy in the country, it has compounded the problem of increasing demand for education. The scheme provided that all children of school-going age should enroll in the basic education programme.

**Inadequate Educational Institutions**

Inadequate educational institutions especially the basic schools are responsible for the high number of out of school children in Nigeria. The educational institutions for all the forms of education are not adequate to meet up with the population grow rate of the country. For instance, Statista (2019) reported that public primary schools in Nigeria is 61,921, private 55,004 totaling 116,925. These public basic schools are not adequate to meet up with the millions of out of school children in Nigeria.

**Political Instability**

Political instability is another strong reason for the high number of out of school children in Nigeria. The Nigerian political system is characterized with political changes in government. The democratic system adopted by Nigeria permits four years elected government. Every government that comes to power has a political agenda and programme to implement and achieve for their tenure. Ogunode (2021b) submitted that political instability is another major problem preventing the effective implementation of educational policies in Nigeria. Political instability is one of the features of third world countries like Nigeria. Many educational policies have been put to hold due to changes in government or administration from one political party to another political (Ogunode, 2020).

**High Population Rate**

The high fertility rate among Nigerians is another factors responsible for the out of school children. Nigerian. Statista (2021) observed that in Nigeria, people aged up to four years old made up the largest age group: 8.3 percent of males and eight percent of females were less than four years old. Similarly, children aged 5 to 9 years held the second largest share of population. On the other hand, people aged 60 years and older represented a small part of population. Nigeria has one of the youngest population in the world. In whole Africa and in the world, Niger records the lowest median age. Nigeria ranked 18th (Aiyedun, Ogunode & Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2021). Ogunode, Jegede and Ajape (2021) observed that another big problem militating effective implementation primary school education policies is the raising population of children enrolling for the primary school education in Nigeria.

**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. The executive director, of the Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education (CHRICED), submitted that out-of-school children are posing a serious threat to the future of the country. He said, "We all know what it means to breed children who lack education and skills to compete in the current market economy that we are running globally". It appears that at the very early stage of our development in this country as a nation, education was taken into consideration in such a way that they were able to factor it in, knowing that some do not have the ability. If they are left behind,

those children that we are not able to train will pose danger to those that have the ability and were able to train their children. (Raliyat, Umma & Aisha, 2022) 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. Omoeva, Hatch, & Sylla (2004) and Nguyen & Wodon (2014) concluded that early marriage as a result of the girl child being out of school has a significant effect on the girl child's education. Hotz McElroy & Sanders, (2005) 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

### **Way forward**

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

1. The federal, state and local governments should come up with a national policy to address the issue of out-of-school children in Nigeria.
2. Government should build more Basic schools across the country and funding for basic education should be increased.
3. 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.
4. 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.
6. The government should provide adequate security by addressing the issues causing insecurity problems in the country.
7. The government should provide social security packages for the rural dwellers. This will help in increasing school enrolments of school going age children.
8. 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 discussed the concept of out-of-school children in Nigeria, the causes responsible for large out-of-school children in Nigeria. The paper identified causes of out-of-school children to 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. The paper also concluded by suggested way forward.

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