

**BASIC EDUCATION AND OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NIGERIA
CHALLENGES AND THE POSSIBLE INTERVENTION**

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Abstract

Nigeria has the largest number of out – of – school children in the world it is estimated that one in every five out – of – school children around the globe is in Nigeria. Even though basic education is free and compulsory in the country about 10.5 million children aged 5 to 14 years are out of school. About 50 percent of these children live in the north region. This paper examine out of school children in Nigeria and factors that contribute to the incidence of out of school children such as early child marriage, economic barriers, conflict, socio-cultural norms and lack of inclusive policies practices in school. Lastly, the paper give out some recommendations as a way of tackling the problems that is both governmental and non-governmental efforts are necessary to tackle the current situation through the use of education innovation such as the accelerated education programme, combined with their conventional interventions such as rebuilding and expanding of infrastructures, more enrolment sensitization, Economic intervention, improved security and legal enforcement.

Keyword: *out-of-school children, Basic Education, accelerated education programme, insecurity, children, funding*

Introduction

In 2015, all United Nations Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which outlines a blueprint to address global challenges across a broad range of themes including poverty, health, education, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. The Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, otherwise referred to as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Unfortunately, an approximated 263 million children remain out of school around the world. This number includes children who never started formal schooling and children who started school but later dropped out (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2016).

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).

For instance, in West Africa, Nigeria accounts for 45 per cent of out-of-school children. Over the years, the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria has increased from 10.5 to 13.2 million and 69 per cent of these numbers are from the north. Majority of the children undergoing traditional Arabic School under the almajiri system in the hands of local teachers are left unkempt, as their parents dumped them in Kano from other parts of the north, with little or no care. Expectedly, these innocent kids roam the streets begging to survive. In the southern part of Nigeria is the problem of out of boy children, who drop out in the South East and South South zones, and the so-called “area boys” (loosely organized gangs of mostly male street children and teenagers) in the South West. Report by Premiumtime (2021) indicated that with 33 per cent, the North-east had the highest proportion of its school-age children out-of-school. This was followed by North-central with 26 per cent; North-west with 25 per cent; South-south, 24 per cent; South-west with 22; and South- east with 19 per cent. This problem of out of school children is causing a social problem and educational crisis in the basic education in Nigeria. These out of school children in Nigeria are caused by many factors. This paper aimed to discuss the factors responsible for the out of school children in Nigeria.

Basic Education

According to NPE 2004, The universal Basic Education programme which was formally launched in 1999 is an educational programme of the federal Government of Nigeria. It is an effort of the government to provide a universally free, compulsory and continuous 9 years basic education for its citizens. To get the programme started, the Nigeria educational Research and development council (NERDC) developed the new 9 year basic education curriculum for distribution.

Basic education shall be of 9-year duration comprising 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education. It shall be free and compulsory. It shall also include adult and non-formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary education levels for the adults and out of school youths.

The specific goals of basic education shall be the same as the goals of the levels of education to which it applies (I.e. primary education, junior secondary education and adult and non-formal education).

This being the case, the goals of primary education are to:

- a) Include permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively;
- b) Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- c) Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
- d) Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child;
- e) Develop in the child the ability to adopt to the child's changing environment;
- f) Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity;
- g) Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locally.

Concept of Out of School Children

Out of school children are aged school children that are supposed to be in schools but are not in schools due to parental failure and governmental failure 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 that the government and the parents have fails to provide quality basic education for.

Factors contributing to high number of OOSC in Nigeria

There are a number of factors that contribute to the incidence of OOSC recorded across low- and-middle-income countries like Nigeria. These factors include but are not limited to early/child marriage, economic barriers, conflict, socio-cultural norms, and lack of inclusive policies/practices in schools. However, these factors or barriers can be categorised into two, i.e., demand and supply barriers. These barriers could lead to one or all of these situations: 1) delayed enrolment of an eligible school aged child, 2) a child who will never attend school, 3) a child who will attend school but later drop out.

1. Demand Barriers

Demand barriers are considered to be decisions made by household members that affect a child's access to quality education. There are several factors that could affect the demand

for education. Some of these factors include: early/child marriage, low household income, child labour, religion, culture, etc. (UNICEF, 2014). Table 1 and 2 below highlights barriers that could prevent a child from ever attending school or dropping out of school, across 3 years (i.e., 2004, 2010, 2015). The findings from Table 1 and 2 below are based on the 2015 Nigerian Education Data Survey (NEDS) report.

2. Supply Barriers

The Supply rationale connotes that schools are the key drivers of education access, quality, and retention. Supply barriers that could potentially affect a child's access to education include but are not limited to lack of infrastructure, conflict/insecurity, lack of qualified teachers, language of instruction, and distance to school (UNICEF, 2014).

Factors Responsible for High Out of School Children in Nigeria

There are many factors responsible for the high number of out of school children in Nigeria. Some of these factors would be considered; ineffective educational planning, poor funding, inadequate educational institutions, poor implementation of policies and programme, political instability, corruption, insecurity, high rate of poverty and high population rate (Olamoyegun, Olatunde-Aiyedun & Ogunode, 2022).

Ineffective Educational Planning

Ineffective educational planning is a major factor responsible for the large out of school children in Nigeria. The educational planning system has failed over years to capture the actual population growth rate into the educational planning system of the country. One of the features of educational planning is projection and forecasting. Akpan (undated) opined that the educational planners in Nigeria sometimes underestimate the cost of education as a result of poor forecasting of students' enrolment (. For example the cost of UPE scheme in Eastern Nigeria in 1957 was greatly underestimated. This gave rise to poor implementation of the scheme. The number of pupils enrolled in the scheme was greater than the estimated figure. There were no classrooms for pupils to learn and the new schools established were not enough to accommodate the increase in pupils' enrolment. The government needed more funds for administration of the programme. All these happened because of poor prediction by educational planners.

Poor Funding

Poor funding of education is another factor responsible for the high number of out of school children in Nigeria. Funding is key in achieving educational objectives. Adequate funding will guarantee provision of adequate human and materials resources to meet up with the demand of the educational needs of the people. The history of educational financing in Nigeria for the past years is not encouraging. For instance Investigation by Punch (2021) showed that Nigeria did not allocate up to 15 percent of its annual budget to education in the last six years, just like those of the previous years. In 2016, the Federal Government allocated N369.6bn which amounted to 6.7 per cent of the national budget of N6.06tn to education, while in 2017, N550.5bn; representing 7.38 percent of the N7.29tn budget was allocated to the sector. In 2018, N605.8bn, out of N9.12tn budget, representing 7.04 per cent was allocated to education; in 2019, it was N 620.5bn, representing 7.05 per cent of the N 8.92tn budget. In 2020, N671.07bn of N10.33tn which amounted to 6.7 per cent was

allocated to the sector; while in 2021 the sector got N742.5bn of N13.6tn budget, representing 5.6 per cent.

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.

Poor Implementation of Policies and Programme

Poor implementation of educational policies and programmes designed to reduce the out of school children is another fundamental factor responsible for the high number out of school children in Nigeria. There are many policies and programmes such as Child Act Right with the broad objectives making education compulsory for all Nigerian child. Report from Ogunode (2021a) observed that some states government have not domestic the acts in their various states affecting the implementation of the law. The National feeding programme is another programme designed to promote child education and increase enrolment in the Basic schools. Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) observed that the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) is an educational policy with the aims of increasing primary school enrollment. The National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) in public primary schools is designed to reduce the out of school children in Nigeria. The programme started in 2003 and stopped. It was started in 2016 again. The implementation of the programme has faced many challenges. Ajemba, Ahmed, Ogunode and Olatunde-Aiyedun (2021) stated the problems militating against implementation of programmes in Nigerian public schools to include; identified inadequate funding, increase in population, corruption, poor monitoring and evaluation, lack of data to plan, delay in releasing money, inflation and insecurity problem as the challenges preventing the implementation of the programme.

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).

Corruption

Corruption is a major problem responsible for high out of school children in Nigeria (Ogunode & Stephen 2021). Corruption has penetrated all institutions in Nigeria including

educational institutions. Funds released for the implementation of programmes and policies aimed to reduce out of school children in Nigeria are been misuses and mismanaged and diverted into private pockets. A good example is the national feeding programme with a lot of funds diversion allegation and mismanagement ((Thewhistler, 2020). Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) submitted that corruption is a major problem facing the implementation of the national feeding programme in Nigeria. The funds released for the implementation of the programme is been looted and mismanaged by some officers handling the implementation across the federation. The former coordinator of the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme in Nigeria noted that government has suspended some officials of the programme in Benue and Niger States because some of them have taken money without the knowledge of government and even opened personal accounts where they had directed that some money for the programme should be lodged into, adding that those that were caught in the act were currently under investigations by the Economic And Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Insecurity

Another factor responsible for the problem of out of school children in Nigeria is insecurity especially in the Northern Nigeria. Insecurity in Northern part of Nigeria have led to school closure. Nigerian Tribune, (2021) reported that the inconsistence nature of school calendar in Nigerian educational system is no longer news. It is a common occurrence that one higher institution, secondary school or primary school is closed down due to internal crisis or attacks from bandits. Authorities in North-West, Nigeria had shut down more over 4,000 public primary schools across the state, and over 4,000 public secondary schools were among the closed down schools and over 300, 000 to 400,000 thousand students and pupils are at home after the incidence of Chibok school students' kidnap without considering the effects on the internal administration of the school especially the learners

High Rate of Poverty

The high rate of poverty among the Nigerians especially the women is another reason for the large out of school children in Nigeria. Many parents cannot afford to send their children to school because of the school fees and other financial commitment (Ogunode, Iyabode & Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022). World Bank (2022) noted that the number of poor persons in Nigeria will rise to 95.1 million in 2022. The number of poor people was 89.0 million in 2020 and would be 95.1 million in 2022. This would mean that 6.1 million more persons would have fallen beneath the poverty line between 2020 and 2022, a 6.7% increase. With the projected 2022 figures, the number of poor persons in Nigeria has had a four year increase of 14.7% from the 2018/19 figure of 82.1 million to the projected 95.1 million in 2022. The implication of this is that many parents would not be able to send their children to schools rather they will use them for trading and hooking to make money for the family.

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.

Possible Interventions

Across the Federal, State and Local Government levels, efforts have been made to address the problem of OOSC in the country. Recently, intervention attention has mainly focused on the conflict ravaged northeast where the basic education system has suffered a major disruption. A blend of interventions both by state and non-state actors is necessary to effectively fix the problem. A number of possible interventions as presented below should therefore be carefully considered.

Accelerated Education Programme

Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) is a widely used education innovation to address the education needs of OOSC globally (Menendez et al., 2016) which has shown potential to bring about a significant reduction in the number of OOSC in Nigeria. According to the Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG 2017), AEPs are flexible, age-appropriate programmes, run in an accelerated time frame, which aim to provide access to education for disadvantaged, over-age, out-of-school children and youth - particularly those who missed out on or had their education interrupted due to poverty, marginalisation, conflict, and crisis. The goal of Accelerated Education Programmes is to provide learners with equivalent, certified competencies for basic education using effective teaching and learning approaches that match their level of cognitive maturity (Boisvert, Flemming & Ritesh , 2017).

Increased and improved educational infrastructure and resources

Overcrowded classrooms are an indicator of insufficient educational infrastructure to accommodate enrolled learners. The Joint Education Needs Assessment (JENA) report for 2021, shows that across the 3 states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe (BAY), one in four schools share infrastructure. The average number of students per classroom in BAY states is 124, very high, considering also that just 60 percent of teachers have some form of qualification and 14 percent are volunteers (JENA, 2021). This situation leads to poor quality of education. Also, where there are no adequate seats and tables for learners or perpetual teachers' absence, parents tend to withdraw their children from school. The gains from the educational interventions that encourage enrolment should therefore be sustained by the provision of infrastructure like classrooms, furniture, toilets and sanitary facilities, potable water, etc. The comfortability of these infrastructures is also important. This implies that classrooms should be adequately ventilated; and furniture should be comfortable to sit upon for the learners.

Sensitisation on the importance of education

It is necessary to sensitise and re-orientate the people on the importance of education, particularly girls' education. Both a government-led effort through its agencies such as the National Orientation Agency and advocacies by the Civil Societies are crucial to realise this. Also, advocacy should be conducted on the passing of the Child Rights Act (2003) into law by the states of the Federation which are yet to do so. This will make the rights which include the right to basic education enforceable.

A blend of economic interventions for households

In societies where poverty is prevalent, child labour is often rampant. An economic intervention such as Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT) has often been used to incentivise enrolment. However, this sort of intervention has not always been sustainable, making it a short-term solution. In other words, beneficiaries of this intervention tend to drop out of school when the cash transfer programme stops. For a long-term impact, this intervention should be combined with conditional economic empowerment programmes for households who would commit to support their children's education if empowered. By setting up the households with viable income generating activities, they can sustain their children in school via these sources of income.

Improved security and safe spaces

Teaching-learning activities can only take place in a safe and secure environment. The government therefore needs to improve on the security infrastructures necessary to protect the schools. Gender based violence and child molestation in the school environment should also be prosecuted leveraging available legal framework for child rights protection and safeguarding. Where schools are located in security sensitive environments, the Save-Our-Souls (SOS) system of emergency response should be made available to alert the security personnel in case of an attack. In the northeast, where attacks on schools are rampant, the location of security posts within the schools would serve as a deterrence.

Recommendation

To address the above problems identified as factors responsible for large out of school children in Nigeria, the paper hereby recommended the following:

1. The federal, states and local government should take the issue of educational planning seriously and ensure adequate funds are provided for educational planning in the country
2. The government at every level should increase the funding of education especially the basic education.
3. The government should come up with school expansion plans for all forms of education especially the basic education. More Basic schools should be built across the country.

Conclusion

The combination of demand and supply barriers to educational access has led to and continues to contribute to the astronomical number of OOSC in Nigeria. Both governmental and non-governmental efforts are necessary to tackle the current situation. To successfully do this, the exploitation of education innovations such as AEP combined

with other conventional interventions such as rebuilding and expanding of infrastructure, more enrolment sensitisation, economic intervention, improved security, as well as legal enforcement would be a holistic approach. As access to education is tied to various factors like socioeconomic status, ethnicity, geographic region, and other factors beyond the control of households, the population of OOSC is spread unevenly across the country. Therefore, interventions and the type thereof must be applied across the country based on the gravity of the situation, with the most affected populations prioritized.

The following identified problems such as ineffective educational planning, poor funding, inadequate educational institutions, poor implementation of policies and programme, political instability, corruption, insecurity, high rate of poverty and high population rate can be solved, if the government can provide adequate funding for basic education, establish more basic schools, plan effectively for education, ensure policies are implemented and sustained, provide adequate security in the country and fight all forms of corruption in the educational administration in Nigeria.

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