

OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NIGERIA, SOURCES, COMMON IMPLICATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

BY

BALA ZAKAR

(*NCE, B. ED, M. ED SOCIAL STUDIES*)

bzdh1976@gmail.com

08037700505/08058394225

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL STUDIES

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

JIGAWA STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION P.M.B 1002, GUMEL

AND

Ahmed mudi

(*NCE, B.ED, M. ED SOCIOLOGY*)

ahmedmahmud417730@gmail.com

+2347031612146

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL STUDIES

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

JIGAWA STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION P.M.B 1002, GUMEL

Abstract: This paper examined the concept of out-of-school children in Nigeria, the factors 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 paper identified causes 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 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.

Keywords: Out of School Children, Funding, Common implication, Society.

Introduction

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.

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 (Ogunade, Jegede & Adape 2022).

Concept of Out of School Children (OOSC)

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).

Factors contributing to high number of OOSC in Nigeria

According to Oyekan, Ayorinde, and Adenuga (2023) 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.

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, 2022).

This implies that out of the children who do not ever attend school, the largest single reason given for never attending school is labour demands. In 2015, 21 percent of children never attended school due to labour demands in their household.

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, 2022).

Other factors as responsible for out-of-school children in Nigeria are:

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. Raliyat, Umma, & Aisha (2022) observed that 26 of 36 states failed to provide the matching funds needed to access the N33.6 billion funding provided for rehabilitating basic schools and interventions in infrastructural facilities development, capacity building programmes and provision of learning-teaching materials by the federal government through the Universal Basic Education Fund between 2015 and 2021.

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. According to the report, corruption is commonplace in education systems across the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This affects education access, quality, inclusion and learning outcomes with devastating consequences, not only for national economic growth but also for the life chances of children, their families and communities.

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. Ogunode (2020) 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 (Gusau, 2022).

Insecurity Problems

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. 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 idlers.

Poor Implementation of the UBE Programme

The poor implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria is also responsible for the high out of school children. The UBE programme was designed to provide free and compulsory ten-year basic education for all Nigerian children. The policy of Universal Basic Education (UBE) which mandates the government at the state and federal levels to give compulsory, free and quality education to every child of school age has not been fully implemented in Nigeria due to many challenges. Ogunode (2020) identified the problem militating against the effective implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria to include: shortage of funds, shortage of infrastructural facilities, inadequate professional teachers, corruption, and poor implementation of the Child right act.

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 Musa (2019) and Ogunode (2020) that many Nigerian parents cannot send their wards to school due to the high rate of poverty.

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, 2022).

Social Implication of Out-of-School Children in Nigeria

The social implications of large out-of-school children in Nigeria include; security challenges, shortage of skills and manpower in future, bad international image, high level of illiteracy, high socio-economic and dependency and child marriage and pregnancy

Security Challenges

The high rate of out-of-children in Nigeria has led to insecurity challenges in many parts of the country especially the Northern part. Raliyat, Umma, & Aisha (2022) cited Rukayat-Garba that "20 million out-of-school children represent a grim future, one characterised by grave socio-economic and security consequences for Nigeria". According to Raliyat, Umma, & Aisha (2022), research has it that children who

are out of school are often used to perpetrate crime and other ills in society and also observed that this deficiency will affect all aspects of human life as there will be vacancies in several areas that demand skills acquired through education at school. Ndanza, Abayomi, & Harada, (2021) observed that this army of out-school children poses a potential threat to the society in future if nothing is done to arrest the situation. Evidence shows that virtually all indicted and arrested notorious kidnappers are not well educated. They have either basic education or no education at all.

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.

High Dependency burden

Ndanza, Abayomi, & Harada, (2021) observed that one other very serious implication is that it breeds poverty and imposes a heavy dependency burden on well-to-do relatives. To put education within the context of national development is to appreciate its utility as an engine of economic development, productivity, technology, employment opportunities and individual empowerment. The authorities cannot remain lukewarm or nonchalant to the fate of the out of school population in Nigeria without endangering her prosperity. The role of education is to unleash the potential of the Nigerian youth in creative thinking, and systematic skill-set to participate effectively in the fast-changing global market of ideas.

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. Omoewa, Hatch, & Sylla (2014) and Nguyen & Wodon (2023) 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, (2015) 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.

Conclusion and Possible Interventions

This paper discussed the concept of out-of-school children in Nigeria, the factors responsible for large out-of-school children in Nigeria and the social implications. 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. The paper also concluded that the social implications of out-school children include security challenges, a high level of illiteracy and high socio-economic and dependency rate.

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

➤ 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.

➤ Increased and improved educational infrastructure and resources

Overcrowded classrooms are an indicator of insufficient educational infrastructure to accommodate enrolled learners. In this regard, there is need for state of emergency to restore the educational institutions nationwide.

➤ Sensitization on the importance of education

It is necessary to sensitize 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. A

- 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. Moreover, government should provide social security packages for the rural dwellers. This will help in increasing school enrolments of school going age children.
- There is also need for government at all level to re – introduce school feeding programme. This if done will motivate the parents to send their children to school. As such, there is going to have increase in the enrolment across the nation.

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