



OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

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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 design for this research was descriptive survey and the method of collecting the data was through the use of questionnaire data were sourced from print and online publications. The paper identified causes of out-of-school children in Nigeria to include; poor funding of education, corruption, banditry, kidnapping, poor implementation of the Child Rights Act, insecurity problems, lack of political will to address the challenges, high rate of poverty, and high fertility rate. Through a comprehensive review of literature, policy analysis, and empirical evidence, this paper provides insights into the implications and potential strategies for the Out of School Children. 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. Finally, the paper recommended among other things that the federal, state and local governments should come up with programs to address the implications 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, implications, and way forward



Introduction

The term "out of school children" is a non-attendance of the school of school-age children for some established factors. Out of school children are the children in the official primary school age range who are not enrolled in either primary or secondary. 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. 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 legally 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 northern region, known to be severely affected by the Boko Haram insurgency. In addition, only 61 percent of children between the ages of 6 to 11 years attend primary school regularly (UNICEF, 2018). The rising cases of Out of school children have been attributed to the lack of political will by the government in promoting quality education in most developing countries, heightened insecurity, and the prevalent poor socio-economic conditions. As expected, the burden of Out of School Children such as the shortage of skilled manpower, high level of illiteracy, and crime are more felt in sub-Saharan Africa.

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).

In the Nigerian context, out of school children are prevalent in both rural and urban settings, but rural areas, and isolated or deprived areas in general, consistently show higher numbers of out-of-school children (World Bank, 2019). These children are spread across the country in varying proportions. This situation is of concern to the Federal Government of Nigeria as noted in the Nigeria Education Ministerial Plan (2018-2022) which outlines several strategies targeted at bringing children back to school. In spite of these strategies,

The number of out of school children remains significantly high. This insight note aims to provide an overview of the most recent data on out-of-school children in Nigeria, including breakdowns by socioeconomic and other demographic indicators. This will be followed by suggestions of possible interventions, prime of which is the Accelerated Education Programme (AEP), and other interventions which could serve to strengthen the existing laid out strategies by the government in addressing the Out of School Children problem in Nigeria.

This paper is aimed to examine the factors responsible for the significant rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria, its social implications and suggests the way forward.



Concept of out of School Children in Nigeria

According to the United Nations (2023), out-of-school children refer to children who are yet to be enrolled in any formal education, excluding pre-primary education, this is a recent revised definition. 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.

The Factors Contributing to High Number of Out of School Children in Nigeria

There are a number of factors that contribute to the incidence of Out of School Children recorded across low- and-middle-income countries like Nigeria. These factors include but are not limited to early/child marriage, economic barriers, security challenges, shortage of skills and manpower, high level of illiteracy, 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, 2014)

Inappropriate Funding in the Education Sector in Nigeria

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 (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.

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, and 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 2013 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.

Insecurity Problem

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 pregnancy 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. 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 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 on the effective implementation of primary school education policies is the rising 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. National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN 2012) served 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, 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 effected 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.

Bad International Image

The high out-of-school in Nigeria is capable of giving the country a bad international image as a country with a high concentration of children that are not in school. Nigerians in different parts of the world will be faced with questions such as; what is your country doing to address the problem of out-of-school children? In every international conference in education, it is Nigeria's name

that rings bell when it comes to school dropout or children that are out of school.

The ways forward of Out-of-School Children in Nigeria

In order to find a lasting solution to the challenges of out-of-school children in Nigeria, across the Federal, State and Local Government levels, efforts have been made to address the challenges of Out of School Children 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 challenges.

Accelerated Education Programme

Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) is a widely used education innovation to address the education needs of Out of School Children globally (Menendez et al., 2016) which has shown potential to bring about a significant reduction in the number of Out of School Children in Nigeria. According to the Accelerated Education Working Group 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).

The potentials of this programme in reaching the Out of School Children are witnessed in its characteristics and design



which include: a flexible education model; use of compressed/accelerated and context suited curriculum; admission of the overaged; certification and mainstreaming of completers as well as cost effectiveness. Up to five (5) AEPs have been funded and implemented by international development organizations in Nigeria since 2014. These interventions have witnessed a remarkable enrolment and resulted into post intervention transition of Out of School Children back into the formal education system, proving a viable education innovation for reaching Out of School Children. Given the behemoth population of the Out of School Children, a state-led scaling-up of this intervention with dedicated funding from the government is therefore necessary for an appreciable nation-wide impact.

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.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the concept of out-of-school children in Nigeria, the social implications. 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 that the social implications of out-of-school children include security challenges, a potential shortage of skilled manpower, a bad international image, a high level of illiteracy and high socio-economic and dependency rate. 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 sensitization, economic intervention, improved security, as well as legal enforcement would be a holistic approach.

Recommendations

Based on the implications identified in the paper, the following recommendations were made;

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 and NGOS should provide adequate security by addressing the issues causing insecurity problems in our community.
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 enrolment

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