Education

Compulsory School Attendance in Nigeria: What are the Reasons for Wastage amongst Pupils?

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Abstract
The study investigated reasons for wastage amongst primary and secondary school pupils in Nigeria, where free and compulsory school attendance policy is implemented. Five questions (four (4) answered and one (1) hypothesized) were raised to direct the thrust of study whose population comprised all the students in 1,831 schools (1516 primary schools and 315 junior secondary schools) in Edo State. Edo State was used as a case study because it is a typical microcosm of Nigeria. Collection of data for the study was done with a questionnaire named "School Children Reasons for Constituting Wastage to Schools Questionnaire, REDROQUE" administered on all the school pupils that constituted the study sample. Administration of the questionnaire lasted for thirteen (13) weeks (the entire first term of 2005/2006 school year) after which 27,054 pupils' responses (or 91.07 percent) out of 29,707 were found useable for analysis. The results of analysis show that the problems of inadequate teachers; teachers' poor attitude to work; poverty; bullying unstable school calendar; poor supervision of teaching and learning including parents' wish are the significant reasons for wastage. The findings revealed further that male, old, poor and urban - resident pupils rate the reasons for wastage significantly higher than other categories of pupils. Based on the findings, it was concluded that the problems of unstable school calendar; poor supervision of teaching and learning; inadequate teachers and facilities make the enforcement of free and compulsory school attendance policy in Nigeria to be impossible. It was therefore recommended among others that adequate teachers and learning facilities be provided in schools. Scholarships and bursary awards should also be provided to identify indigent students to mitigate their private cost of schooling.

Introduction
Nigeria is a very great country with a land mass of 923,768 sq km, and inhabited by people that are estimated to be over 130 million. In addition, the country is endowed with diverse natural resources such as vegetation, minerals, wildlife etcetara. Paradoxically, the country is poor and not developed, as about 54 percent of the population lives below $2 per day (ICAN Report, 2004). The poverty in Nigeria is so serious that people engage in risky ventures (like armed robbery, prostitution,

thurgery, advance fee fraud, kidnapping to mention many but a few) that are anti-development mainly for the purpose of survival. Determined to reverse the trend, government in 1977 identified and accepted education as *instrument par excellence* for effecting national development. Consequent upon this, a new National Policy on Education (NPE) was formulated with the import to empower every Nigerian for self reliance through the acquisition of critical skills and knowledge.

In order to give Nigerians access to education particularly at the basic education level, education has been made free and compulsory since 1999. This marks the beginning of the deliberate efforts to boost enrolment in the Nigerian school system (Adeyemi, 2001; Aghenta, 2001; Baike, 2001; Obanya, 2001 and Taiwo, 1982). For example, school enrolment in 1980/81 increased from 13,777,973 to 16, 801,593 in 2000/2001 at the primary level while at the secondary level, it increased from 2,063, 371 to 6,482 and 714 within a period of two decades. At the tertiary education level, enrolment similarly increased from 147,130 in 1980/81 session to 812, 036 in 2001/2002 school year (Federal Ministry of Education Report, 2004).

Increase in number of students registered in schools not withstanding, students soon after enrolment withdraw and then drop out of school eventually to constitute wastage. Several others that continue school attendance spend extra student year(s) before they are able to complete schooling. These repeaters also constitute wastage to the schools because they use the same resources (teachers, facilities and equipment) twice or more before they are able to progress from one grade level to another. In addition, repeaters occupy spaces thereby making it impossible for new entrants to have access. These incidences of wastage (repetition and dropout) from observation are excersabated by the numerous problems that characterize the Nigerian educational system.

There is the problem of inadequate provision of educational inputs at all levels. Available requisite facilities such as classrooms; laboratories; libraries and; workshops from observation are not only inadequate but ill-equipped. Most of these facilities in different parts of the country were provided prior to the launching of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in 1986. The implementation of SAP policies that have continuously depleted the value of the country's currency, the naira has made it to be increasingly difficult to finance the provision and maintenance of available facilities hence their various stages of dilapidation. The situation appears to be sordid as several classrooms lack roofs, windows, doors and furnitures for both teachers and students. In some schools, classroom walls are even observed to be falling apart, a situation that makes the teaching- leaning process to look frightening. It is even more worrisome as students from observation willfully vandalize already dilapidated educational facilities with reckless abandonment at the slightest provocation.

There is also the problem of acute shortage of teachers in many schools. For instance, only 429,075 teachers out of 514,750 (i.e.79 percent) needed at the primary and secondary school levels by year 2001 were available (Universal Basic Education Report, 2002). Apart from the fact that additional 85,675 teachers were required,

those that were available were not evenly distributed a situation that made many schools to lack teachers (Pessu, 2004). This probably explains why some schools are observed to have teacher-students ratios that exceed 1:40 prescribed by government policy. Such abnormal teacher-students ratios no doubt make teaching leaning activities difficult to manage.

Even though facilities and teachers are observed to be in short supply, available time for teaching is also grossly observed to be inadequate. For instance, Aghenta (2001) observed that students are not able to utilize more than 30 percent of the normal time allocated to teaching and leaning because of frequent strikes. Teachers and other school support staff embark on frequent strikes to force employers pay salaries, fringe benefits and other entitlements. Even when entitlements are paid, strikes are embarked upon to force government provide basic teaching and leaning facilities.

Instability in school calendar arising from these frequent strike actions has also made management of the school system problematic. For instance, schools were closed unceremoniously because teachers under the auspices of Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) embarked on twelve different nationwide strikes within a spate of six academic sessions, 1994/95 to 1999/2000 (NUT Report, 2002). Since then continued cases of strikes have been reported in different parts of the country. In Anambra State for example, the schools remained closed for 13 months while in Oyo, Lagos and Plateau States schools were closed for 3 months, 2 months and 8 months respectively between 2001 and 2002 alone. Recently, the nationwide strike under the auspices of Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) over hike in price of petroleum products forced all schools to be closed again for more than 2 weeks in the first team of 2003/2004 school year. These frequent strikes no doubt, cause instability in the academic calendar of the schools. In addition to creating crises in the management of schools, the problem has observably devastated public image of the Nigerian school system. Alli (2004:28) aptly described the image of the public school system thus

...In the public school system, effective money donating Parents Teachers Association (P.T.A) is virtually non existent. In fact, in today's Nigeria, it is the poorest of the poor or those in rural areas that still patronize the public schools.

Supervision and inspection are very important management functions that can only be effectively performed when money, men and materials are adequately provided. These vital management functions are either lacking or poorly carried out in the schools. The reason for this is the constraint imposed on school administrators by scarcity of funds to promptly reward teachers and provide basic teaching facilities. Meaningful teaching and leaning do not seem to take place in the schools as students are often sighted loitering during school hours while several others allegedly engaged in secret cult activities. The situation appears to be worrisome, as some stakeholders have expressed concern over observed deteriorating conditions in the schools. Nwadiani (2003:6) succinctly described the situation as ...
... it does appear that our educational system has collapse. Children are not leaning and teachers care not teaching. All the inputs into the educational system are scare

except students resulting in an environment that is very unconducive foe teaching and leaning.

Students that are discontented with the school system could drop out of schools and many that are unable to cope with the rigours of hard-learning could fail and repeat classes. For instance, 29,622, 017 students (or 42.2 percent) out of 70,150,580 that enrolled in both primary and secondary schools in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria between 1990 and 1999 drop out of schools (NDDC Report, 2002). Report from Kaduna State according to Bahago and Waila (2000) also show that 11,655 pupils out of 72207 (i.e. 16.14 percent) that enrolled in primary schools in 1995/96 school year alone dropped out of schools. In addition to this, report also show that all the 15,329 Nigerians repatriated from different countries between 1995 and 2000 dropped out of schools at various levels and at different times (Nigeria Immigration Service Report, 2003).

The situation seems to be very frightening especially with the emergence of new statistics. Out of 17.0 million children in Nigeria that enroll in primary schools every year, not more than 18.2 percent are able to make it to secondary school level. Only about 800,000 (or 25 percent) of the pupils enrolled in secondary schools are able to proceed to tertiary institutions. The statistics further showed that of the number that enroll in tertiary institutions, only about 150,000 (or 18.75%) eventually graduate (Federal Ministry of Inter-Governmental Affairs, Special Duties and Youth Development Report, 2004).

The above problems have negatively impacted on the students that they constitute wastage to the schools (Igbineweka, 2005; Adeyemi, 1998 and Nwadiani 1993). However, there are a couple of unanswered questions on why students constitute wastage to schools even when attendance is made free and compulsory.

The questions that need to be answered include:
- are the reasons for students' wastage in schools where attendance is free and compulsory significant?;
- do male and female pupils significantly differ in rated reasons for wastage?;
- do old and young pupils significantly differ in rated reasons for wastage? and;
- do urban and rural resident pupils significantly differ in rated reasons for wastage?;
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The need to answer these questions set the objectives for this paper that is hoped to be relevant for educational policy formulation, review and implementation.

Student wastage is however not perculiar to the Nigerian school system as several authors have reported varying rates of student wastage in different educational systems all over the world (Arulampalam;Naylor and Smith 2003, Passi, 1998; Brimer and Pauli, 1971; Brown, 1994; Cloonan 2000; Carron and Ta'Ngoc (1996) Fitzcharles, 2000 and; Galleta- Bruno 1995). Other researchers have in addition given diverse reasons for the incidence of wastage in the school system. One of such reasons is poverty. According to Ravallion and Wodon (2001); Deustsch (1998); Alderman, Behrman, Ross and Sabot (1995); Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics

(1998); Basu (1998); Bhatty (1998) and Chiswick and Koutromanes (1996) increase in private cost of schooling predisposes school children to repeat class (es) and or drop out of schools. In Nigeria, Obanya (2000) reported that previous attempts to introduce or increase tuition fees in Nigerian schools often leads to several students dropping out of schools. Other reasons given are inadequate available facilities (Paxson and Schady, 2001); inadequate teaching time (Leonard, 2003); academic incompetence (Payne, 2000) and unfavourable school climate (Purkey and Smith, 1983). Home background according Yasuyuki and Lokshin (2001); Yorke (2000) and Vinod, Wang and, Xibo (2001) is another factor that could positively or negatively impacts a pupils decision to continue school attendance.

Methodology

The population of the study that adopted the descriptive survey design comprised all dropouts and repeaters in 1831 schools (1516 primary schools and 315 junior secondary schools) where attendance is true and compulsory. The scope of the study was limited to Edo State part of Nigeria for two (2) important reasons. Edo State is so strategically located that it serves as the gate way to the different parts (North, South West and East) of country, a situation that makes it possible for every ethnic group in the country to be represented in the state as residents. The second reason for the choice of Edo State as a case study is the allegation that it is one of the Nigerian states were basic school- aged children are trafficked abroad (Europe, America and other parts of Africa) for prostitution and child labour come from.

Collection of data for the study was done with a questionnaire named "School Children Reasons for Constituting Wastage to School Questionnaire (REDROQUE)". The purpose of the questionnaire was to ask pupils that repeated class (es) and those that dropped out of schools to rank their reasons for doing so in order of importance. REDROQUE comprised two sections, A and B. Section A elicited background information (sex, age location and socioeconomic status) on pupils that repeated grade level(s) and dropped out of schools. The section B contained ten (10) perceived reasons for student wastage Respondents were instructed to rate the reasons for grade repetition and dropout on a 5- point Likert scale. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics was used to obtain the reliability coefficient (r =.80) for REDROQUE that was pilot tested on 50 identified pupils that dropped out and repeated grade level(s) in neighboring Ondo State of Nigeria via the test- retest technique. In addition, the questionnaire was validated by two (2) independent experts in the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), a research institute empowered by Act of Parliament to conduct and disseminate research findings in education.

Research assistants (1831 school Head teachers and 104 trained personnels that administered oral vaccines during the house -to- house immunization exercise that coincided with the study period in Edo State were used as research assistants. For the administration of the research instrument, 1831 Head teachers in the chosen schools were employed as research assistants. The Head teachers were considered appropriate because they were able to identified repeaters in the different grade levels while the trained personnels for immunization vaccine administration traced

students that dropped out of schools to their homes. At the end of the administration of the research instruments that lasted for 13 weeks, that is the whole first term of 2005/2006 school year, the responses of 27,054 pupils (i.e. 91.07 percent) out of 29,707 that responded to the questionnaire well useful for analysis.

The data collected to answer the only research question for the study were analyzed using weighted mean. To determine the reason(s) that were significant 3.0 which represents the midpoint in a 5-point Likert scale was set as critical value. Finally, the hypotheses raised for the study were tested using the t-test statistics.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Question one

Are the reasons for students' wastage in schools where attendance is free and compulsory significant?

Data collected to answer question 1 were analyzed using weighted mean and standard deviation. The result of analyses is shown in table 1.

Table 1: **Mean Scores of Perceived Rated Reasons for Wastage in Schools**

S/n	Perceived Reasons for Wastage	N	_ x	S.D
1.	Ill health	27054	1.8826	1.3247
2.	Inadequate teachers	27054	3.1022*	1.5818
3.	Inadequate facilities	27054	2.1364	1.3550
4.	Failure in examination	27054	2.6608	1.2910
5.	Parents' wish	27054	3.0082*	1.1838
6.	Teachers poor attitude to work	27054	3.8151*	1.2258
7.	Poor supervision of teaching and learning	27054	3.1921*	1.4527
8.	Unstable school calendar	27054	4.6401*	1.3106
9.	Bullying	27054	3.3665*	1.5176
10	Poverty	27054	3.3154*	1.4120

*significant

As shown in table 1, seven (7) reasons (inadequate teachers; parents' wish, teachers' poor attitude to work; poor supervision of teaching and learning; unstable school calendar; bullying and; poverty) are significant while only three (3) reasons (ill health; inadequate facilities and; failure in examination) are not significant

Hypothesis One

Reasons for wastage are not rated to be significantly different by male and female pupils.

To test hypothesis one, the mean rating for both male and female pupils were computed. Thereafter, the t- test was applied to test the difference between the two means. Result of the analysis is shown in table 2

Table 2: **Rated Mean Difference of Male and Female Pupil's Reasons for Wastage**

Source of difference	N	$\bar{X}$	S^2	Cal- t	Crit-t
Male Pupils	8387	29.27	0.8713	10.32	1.96
Female Pupils	18667	37.11	0.4409		

P > 0.05; df 27052

Since the computed t (10.32) is greeter than the critical t (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance the null hypothesis which states no significant difference in the rated reasons for pupils' wastage by male and female pupils is rejected. It shows therefore that male and female pupils significantly differ in the rated reasons for wastage.

Hypothesis Two

Old and young pupils will not significantly differ in rating reasons for wastage.

The mean rating for old and young students' reasons for wastage were computed and t-tested. The result of analysis is shown in table 3

Table 3: **Rated Mean Difference of Old and Young Students Reasons for Wastage**

Source of difference	N	$\bar{X}$	S^2	Cal t.	Crit t
Old Pupils	9022	41.97	0.2601	8.40	+1.96
Young Pupils	18032	37.94	0.2100		

P >0.05; df 27052.

Since the calculated t- value (8.40) is greater than the critical t value (1.96) as shown in table 3, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that old and young pupils significantly differ in rating perceived reasons for wastage. Old and young students were respectively defined as pupils aged 11^+ and 11 years below.

Urban and rural pupils will not significantly differ in rating reasons for wastage.

Hypothesis Three

Result of the t-test analysis is shown in table 4.

Table 4: **Rated Mean Difference of Urban and Rural Pupils Reasons for Wastage.**

Source of Difference	N	$\bar{X}$	S^2	Cal - t.	Crit - t
Urban Pupils	15941	38.01	0.1011	4.42	+1.96
Rural Pupils	11113	35.99	0.3628		

P> 0.5; df 27052

As shown in table 4, computed t value (4.42) is greater than the critical t (1.96). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected, meaning that urban and rural pupils significantly differ in the rating of reasons for wastage. The higher mean value of 38.07 indicates that urban pupils rate the reasons for wastage higher than rural pupils. Urban pupils were operationally defined as children that attend schools located within major towns and cities while rural pupils were defined as those that attend schools located outside major town and cities.

Hypothesis Four

Wealthy and poor pupils will not significantly differ in rating reasons for wastage.

Students whose parents' per capita income is ₦240,000 (two hundred and forty thousand naira) (i.e. $1678. 32 at ₦143 to $1) and above were regarded as wealthy pupils while those that earn below #240,000 (i.e. $1678.32) per annum were considered as poor . The result of their responses analyzed with t-test is shown in table 5.

Table 5. **Rated Mean Difference of Wealthy and Poor Pupils Reasons for Wastage.**

Source of Difference	N	_ X	S^2	Cal-t	Crit-t
Wealthy pupils	4019	28.42	0.3632	4.68	1.96
Poor pupils	23035	31.09	0.3144		

P> 0.05; df 27052

The data in table 5 shows that computed t-value (4.68) is greater than the critical t (1.96). Therefore, the hypothesis which states wealthy and poor pupils will not significantly differ in rating reason for wastage is rejected. This means that wealthy and poor pupils differ in rating reasons for wastage. The higher mean (31.09) suggests that poor pupils rate the reasons for wastage higher than wealthy pupils.

Discussion of Results

The study revealed that seven reasons given for wastage (inadequate teachers; parents' wish; teachers poor attitude to work; poor supervision of teaching and learning; unstable school calendar; bullying and poverty were rated to be significant. There is no doubt that the high level of poverty in Nigeria that is rated 13th poorest nation in the world (World Bank Report, 2005) could be responsible for why such reasons are rated to be significant. This, for instance, is likely to explain why many parents wish their children and wards to repeat classes or withdraw from school for inability to finance private cost of schooling. On the part of school administrators, inability to promptly and adequately remunerate teachers may explain teachers' attitude to work and eventual trade disputes that often disrupt academic calendar of schools in Nigeria. The reason of bullying that is corroborated by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (1998), Deustsch (1998) and Koutromanes (1996) is also likely to be as a result of poverty, a strategy adopted by stronger students to intimidate the

weaker ones, when disposing them of their personal belongings. This is probably why Aluede (2003) and Vinod, Wang and, Xibo (2001) postulated that children from poor homes are more predisposed to violence in schools than their counterparts from wealthy homes.

The other three reasons that are not significant, particularly that of failure in extermination is not surprising. This is because the law that stipulates repetition for a pupil that fails to achieve a minimum level of academic performance is not enforced in many Nigerian schools. Several school children from observation withdraw from one school to another without approval whenever they fail promotion examination.

It is also the finding of this study that female pupils that repeat class(es) and drop out of schools rate the reasons for wastage higher than male pupils. The wish of parents for female children and wards to withdraw from school (that very often leads to withdrawal) and assist in baby- sitting or go into early marriage for economic reprieve for the family probably provide explaination for this finding supported by Yasuyuki and Lokshin (2001); Ravalion and Wodon (2001) and; Basu (1998). The situation in the recent past has become very worrisome as parents from observation withdraw female children from schools and get them trafficked abroad for prostitution or as baby-sitters.

Old pupils have been found to rate the reasons for students wastage higher than young pupils. This result is not surprising as several primary school leavers in Nigeria stop schooling at this level from observation. It needs not to be over emphasized that a situation were children do not go beyond the level of primary education, especially in a developing country like Nigeria will negatively impact on the formation of human capital, a *"sine qua-non"* for national development.

The finding that urban school pupils rate the reasons for wastage higher than rural school pupils is to be expected. The distractions and inconveniences (such as child labour; incessant threats to life and property: electricity power outage; endless search for portable water; ethnic/ religious violence etc) that characterize urban areas in Nigeria are the reasons why the finding did not come as a surprise. This view is consistent with that of Bhatty (1998), that the frequent use of children in urban areas for child labour could predispose such children to repeat classes or drop out of school more than other school children in rural areas.

It has also be show that poor students rate the reasons for student wastage higher than wealthy students. This is expected because the rate of poverty in the recent past in Nigeria seems to be high. An average Nigerian for instance lives on below $2 (i.e. ₦286.00 local currency) per day (Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria Report, 2004). It is difficult in the circumstance to afford even the private cost of school uniform, transport to and fro school; textbooks; stationery and school meals. The finding is therefore consistent with the argument of Igbineweka (2005) Arulampalam et 'al (2003) and Passi (1998) that poverty negatively impacts learning, and could get students frustrated out of schools. Additionally, the reports of higher wastage rates in developing countries by Carron Ta'Ngoc (1996); Brown

(1994) and Brimer and Pauli (1971) support this finding.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that majority of the reasons for wastage in schools where attendance is free and compulsory are rated to be significant. Female students rate the reasons for wastage in schools to be significantly higher than male students. It was also concluded that older students that are repeating grade level(s) or dropping out of schools for whatever reasons significantly rate wastage reasons higher than younger students. For the variable of location, urban school students rate wastage reasons significantly higher than children that attend schools located in rural areas. Students from poor homes also rate wastage reasons to be significantly higher than those from wealthy homes.

On the basis of the above findings and conclusion, the following recommendations were made. The reasons that are rated to be significant are the ones that students who repeat and dropout feel very strongly about. Stakeholders, particularly parents and school administrators should therefore ensure that students needs are meant. Parents should be mandated by school administrators to provide their children/wards with basic needs like uniform, books, stationery and school meals. The way this can be done is to request parents to endorse a declaration that they will adequately and promptly finance all their children private cost as a pre-condition for admission into schools. Similarly, school administrators are to ensure that available facilities and equipment are adequate in quantity and quality. Parents should be allowed to assess the status of adequacy of school resources whenever they wish to do so. Additionally, school administrators are to ensure that the school environment is conducive enough to motivate learning and regular school attendance.

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