

APPRAISAL OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN (OOSC) AND THE IMPLICATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper makes a case for checkmating the rate of out-of-school children (OOSC) in Nigeria. According to the paper, statistics reveals that the number of OOSC in Nigeria is on the increase. The paper also notes that the dropout rate is equally on the increase. The paper provides a statistics of both OOSC and drop out rates and notes that majority of these children came form extreme poor families and rural dwellers. The paper finds out that the problem of OOSC is more severe in all states of the three geopolitical zones of the north. The paper also shows the enrollment pattern of primary schools in the south-east geopolitical zone from 2009-2008 which reveals marginal increase or total decline. The paper opines that this situation is a threat to the stability of the nation. Some of the causes of OOSC are also discussed by the paper. The paper finally discusses how to rescue OOSC so that they can be useful to themselves and to the nation.

Education is considered to be a prime catalyst to development. This explains why governments and private sectors of many vibrant economies invest much on the development of education. It is because of the role that education plays in national and individual development that Horace, in 1845, championed universal education so as to safeguard democracy in America. He dreaded the havoc the ignorant mob can wreck in America and regarded education as the best guarantee to social, political and economic stability (Nwangwu 2003). In the same vein, Henry in 1851, looked upon school as one of the agencies for the amelioration of the conditions of poverty that produced crime and danger of revolt. He regarded education as a great purifying influence which under effective political and economic system will produce upon a continent an ideal society (Nwangwu 2003).

However, the education that one has in mind in the above context is functional education. A functional education system is that which takes global, social, economic, political and technological trends into consideration and ensures productivity of work force by equipping the work force with the relevant knowledge and skills (Ngunan 2010). This is because there is a positive correlation between the investment in the education of the work force (human capital development) and the productivity of the workforce. In other words, the more a worker acquires education the more his productivity increases, and the more his standard of living improves.

However, statistical facts available demonstrate that Nigerian government does not recognize the impact of education to national and individual development. This is because no serious attention has been given to the development of education for many decades now. Nigeria is yet to comply with the United Nations directive that 26 percent of the country's annual budget should be allocated to; education. Added to this include the inadequate number of teachers, poor and inadequate teaching and learning facilities and high rate of out-of-school children to mention a few. The focus of this paper is an appraisal of out of school children and its implications to national development.

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Out-of-School Children (OOSC)

The draft report of a study on out of school children in Nigeria sponsored by UNICEF, UNESCO, United Nations Institute of Statistics (UIS) and the Federal Ministry of Education for the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) shows that out of 35.6 million of Nigerian children aged between 6 and 14, 10.1 million were not in school as at 2008. According to the report, while 12,531,414 boys and 12,130,673 girls aged 6 – 11 ought to be in primary schools, 3,366,138, about 26.9 percent and 3,932,679 or 32.4 percent of boys and girls respectively were not in school. In other words, of 24,662,087 children 7,298,817 were not receiving formal education in the country three years ago. Equally 200,630 and 168,795 of the total boys and girls respectively dropped out-of-school.

The World body also noted that as at that date, out of 10,912,131 boys and girls aged 12-14 who ought to be in junior secondary schools, 2,834,903 were not. A total of 625,993 dropped out of school. A break down of these figures showed that 5,543,223 boys were supposed to be in junior schools. About 1,308,779 were not while 324,576 dropped out. Of 5,368,908 girls, 1,526,124 were not in school, while 301,417 had dropped out. The report noted that the drop out rate was higher in junior secondary schools than in the primary categories. A good number of the school children came from the extreme poor families and rural dwellers, thereby making it more of poverty and rural phenomenon. The report observed that the problem of out-of-school children in both primary and junior secondary schools was more severe in all states of the three geopolitical zones in the north than in the south. The report grouped the factors that kept the children out of schools as economic, socio-cultural and supply side barriers and bottle necks (Abimboye, 2011).

Similarly, primary school enrolment in the South-East geopolitical zone has been on the decline. Statistics released by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) reveals either marginal increase or total decline in school enrolment. Table 1 below shows primary school enrolment in South-East geo-political zone from 2001-2008.

Table 1: Primary School Enrolment in South-East Geo-Political Zone 2001-2008

STATE	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Abia	731,611	671,595	277,443	387,937	395,386	296,556	176,885	176,885
Anambra	326,785	402,947	387,133	503,892	514,713	658,191	439,905	516,264
Ebonyi	365,307	346,829	415,939	446,661	444,132	410,923	400,208	401,862
Enugu	233,991	296,604	705,421	285,022	287,994	380,545	205,239	222,574
Imo	607,958	588,953	473,038	662,683	666,944	829,451	874,211	914,854
Total	226,5652	230,6928	225,8774	228,6195	230,169	257,5666	209,6448	223,2439

Source: UBEC 2006, Abuja.

The above statistics does not convey cherry news to stakeholders in education. This is because school enrolment represents the largest component of investment in human capital in most societies (Onuoha and Ifelumini 2008). In many other geopolitical zones, the story is the same. In a report released by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), it stated that Nigeria has the highest number of children out of school. According to the report:

Over half of these children are in the north of the country, with girls suffering the most with many receiving just six months of education in their lives. In the largely muslim north of Nigeria... attendance rates are below 50% at primary school and of those, only one in every three pupils is a female (Okulaja 2011: p. 2).

Appraisal of Out of - School Children (OOSC) and the Implication for National Development

It is axiomatic that education equips the recipient for a functional life with positive societal values, knowledge attitudes, competence and skills. Researches have shown that rapid socio-economic development of a nation has positive correlation with the quality and quantity of human capital in that nation. It is against this background that one feels that an army of out-of-school children and school drop out is a veritable threat to Nigeria as a nation.

This is why in the current transformation agenda of the federal government, education should occupy the front burner. This is because it is only through education that Nigeria can tackle effectively the issue of poverty and crime. The United Nations report on Nigeria's Human Poverty Index (HPI) is 41.6 percent and more than 70 percent of Nigeria is estimated to live below poverty line. This placed Nigeria among the 25 poorest nations in the world (Ekpu, 2011). In the same vein, the Presidential Committee on Security Challenges in the North East zone in its report noted that the remote and immediate causes of the current security challenges in the country include among others:

high level of poverty and illiteracy, massive unemployment of youths, both skilled and unskilled, existence of private militias that were established, funded and used by the politicians and individuals and then dumped after having been trained to handle arms ... presence of a number of *almajiris* who could easily be used as cannon fodders to ignite and sustain crisis ... (Chigbo 2011:17-18)

These are possible because the level of poverty is high and literacy rate is low. The danger in not checkmating out-of-school children effectively now is that with the advent of technology, in the next ten years or less, majority of emerging jobs will require those who possess specific skills and higher qualification. The implication is that this group will continue to be disadvantage in the sharing of the natural resources. This by extension is an invitation to violence and crimes.

On the economic sector, Nigeria will be having problems of attaining high productivity due to unskilled labour force. Scholars of human capital theory argue that people and organizations invest in education in order to increase their earnings and productivity. In the same vein, studies on human capital theories have shown that basic literacy enhances the productivity of workers in occupation requiring skills. According to these studies, the greater the provision of schooling, the greater of the stock of human capital in society and consequently, the greater the increases in national productivity and economic growth (Bablola 2003). Writing on the importance of education to an individual, Onuoha and Ifelumini (2008) noted that an individual gains up to 5-10 percent earnings per year of education. They observed that formal qualification (education) attracts large wage premiums in any country including Nigeria.

Causes of Out-of-School Children

UNICEF 2007 identified the following as causes of out-of-school children Household Income and Financial Circumstances.

Household income has been found to be a major factor in determining access to education as schooling incurs a range of costs, both upfront and hidden. Upfront costs include school fees while hidden cost include such things as uniforms, travel, equipment and the opportunity costs of sending a child to school. Croft cited in UNICEF (2007) linked household income to a number of factors such as when children start school, how often they attend, whether they have to temporarily withdraw and also when and if they drop out. A number of studies have shown a close link between poverty and out-of-school and/or dropping out of school. Statistical data as well as empirical research point that children from better off households are more likely to go to school and/or remain in school, whereas those from the poor family are more likely never attend or drop out of school.

School Fees and Indirect Costs of Schooling

In this context, the focus is on schooling cost such as fees and other more indirect costs which impact on household decisions around access to education. Studies have shown that direct and indirect schooling costs are major factors in whether children should enroll and attend school. In the same vein, some researches have indicated that the cost of schooling including tuition fees is a major reason for dropping out. It is a fact that inability to pay tuition fees more often than not leads to under-enrolment and drop out and by extension limit attendance to school.

Income Shocks

How households deal with income shocks is equally a major factor in either maintaining schooling access or having access to education. Studies have shown that vulnerable households can withdraw children from school or prevent children from enrolling in a school as part of their coping strategy to deal with shocks to income, often in order to work, hawk or save on costs.

Child Labour

The most prevalent types of child labour appear to be domestic and household-related duties for girls and agricultural labour for boys. Observations have shown that this sort of labour does not necessarily in most cases impede educational access. However, studies indicate that forms of child labour create pressure on a child's time. For instance, children who combine work with school, depending on the nature and volume of work can have erratic school attendance, regular school absences.

Bereavement and Orphanhood

Bereavement amongst family members and in particular parents often makes children more vulnerable to non-enrolment, dropout, late enrolment and slow progress. Orphanhood often complicates the financial situations of poor households and increases the demand for child labour thereby necessitating either non-enrolment or drop out. Some countries have designed target support to assist orphans access education.

In a nutshell, studies have identified child labour, poverty, lack of sponsorship and adverse cultural challenges as some of the factors militating against access to child education in Nigeria.

Conclusion

We shall draw our conclusion by stating that without adequate basic education, Nigerian child is denied of a veritable link that allows him to have an opportunity in trade, white collar job or to go beyond his own village. The argument that education at the lower level is now free does not hold water in present Nigeria' This is because there are other variables that facilitate learning and knowledge acquisition that are financially demanding which are not covered in the current free education programme. These variables include uniform, transportation, feeding and text-books to mention few. It is against this background that Nigerian government should pay adequate attention on how to rescue out-of-school children and reduce drastically drop out rate. This will help Nigeria as a nation, enhance the standard of living of its citizens and reduce crimes.

Rescuing Out of School Children: The Way Forward

It is doubtful whether the aims of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be realized in this country judging with the number of out of school children. The Millenium Development Goals which include eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and realization of universal primary education by the year 2015 appear to be a dream in Nigeria unless something is done to checkmate the high rate of out-of-school children. These children need education in order to live a meaningful life, and Nigeria needs them to be educated for national development. National development according to

Nwangwu (2010) requires the formation of responsible human capital and social capital which requires true education, and continuing education, including adult education. There is need to tackle ~~the issue of Out-of-School Children with every amount of seriousness and commitment~~ *Appraisal of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) and the Implication for National Development* because both their future and that of Nigeria is put on the firing line. It is against this background that we cannot but agree with the President of the Global Campaign for Education (Okwasa 2011:2) when he said “if scientists can genetically modify food and NASA can send missions to Mars, politicians must be able to find the resources to get millions of children into school and change the prospects of a generation of children.”

There is urgent need for an integrated research and training activities to monitor and evaluate the rate of out-of-school children and dropout in the country. This approach will generate information that can be used to reduce to the barest minimum the rate of out of school children as well as dropout rate.

Active parents involvement in the affairs of education will enhance a reduction in the rate of out-of-school children and drop-out. When parents are integrated in the decisions that affect the education of their children, they will be most unwilling to allow their children to roam the streets while school is in session or to drop out of school.

Special attention should be given to economic disparities (low income households and wealthy income households). There is a widening gap between the poor and the rich in this country. Various studies have shown that a recurring factor that enhances out of school children and drop out rate is poor economic household status. This could be tackled by instituting welfare packages for low income households that will enable them to enroll and sustain their children in schools.

There is also need for increased emphasis on vocational school training for children. This will create opportunities for those children who may not cope with either specialized or comprehensive schools' curricula.

Wealthy private individuals and organizations can also assist in rescuing out-of-school children by offering scholarships to those who cannot go to school due to financial constraints and/or open schools that are meant for children from low income brackets.

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