

CURBING THE MENACE OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN TARABA STATE NIGERIA: STAKEHOLDERS' VIEW

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Abstract

Despite implementing the Universal Basic Education Programme (UBE) since year 2000, Nigeria is still grappling with over 18 million out-of-school children. This paper examined stakeholders' view on how to curb the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State, Nigeria. Three research questions and one null hypothesis guided the study. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of this study consisted of all principals and teachers in all the primary and junior secondary schools in Taraba State, Parents under the auspices of Parent-Teachers Association (PTA) or School-Based Management Committee (SBMC), and staff of State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB). Stepwise random sampling technique was used to select 5 primary and 5 junior secondary schools from each senatorial zone of Taraba State; giving a total of 30 schools. 10 teachers and principals were randomly selected from each school, stratified along male and female. 5 parents were randomly selected from each sampled school under PTA/SBMC; then 20 persons were randomly selected from SUBEB; all stratified along male and female. In all, a total of 470 respondents participated in the study. The instrument used for data collection was researcher-developed questionnaire titled "Curbing the Menace of Out-of-School Children Questionnaire (CMOSCQ)" on a modified four-point Likert scale. The precision and internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach reliability method which gave rise to a coefficient ranging from 0.79 - 0.84. The instrument was face validated by two experts from the Faculty of Education, Taraba State University, Jalingo; with a validation index of 0.87. The data collected were analyzed using percentage scores, mean, and standard deviation. T-test statistic was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the analysis revealed that stakeholders are of the view that out-of-school children pose serious security threat, so basic education should be made more attractive by government through certain incentives, so as to encourage greater enrolment. It was recommended that the State government should acquire school buses and improve the instructional facilities, invest in school infrastructure, provide adequate security, hire and pay qualified teachers handsomely in primary and junior secondary schools in the State as part of the incentives that will motivate both parents and their wards, and thus curb the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State, if bridging the education gap is envisaged in the nearest future.

Keywords: Out-of-school children menace, education for all, universal basic education programme, stakeholders.

Introduction

Basic education can be seen as the means through which the citizenry of a nation could be transformed from mere human population to human resource. In other words, education has remained a social process in capacity building and maintenance of society for decades; it is a weapon for acquiring skills, relevant knowledge and habits for surviving in the changing world. It is a general knowledge that education is very vital to the pace of social, political and economic development of any nation. Despite the combined efforts of the Nigerian

government, international development partners and non-governmental organizations to tackle the pervasive issue of out-of-school children in Nigeria, the country is still struggling to find solutions. Despite dedicated campaigns and collaboration between stakeholders, the number of out-of-school children continues to be a persistent challenge.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) cites that the total of out-of-school children (OSC) in the nation is more than 20 million whereas the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) states it is slightly above 10 million. According to UNESCO, the data is based on those aged six to 18 years, ranging from primary one to senior secondary school three, while UBEC's figure is related to those aged six to 11. Whatever numbers one looks at, the reality remains that Nigeria has one of the highest number of out-of-school children in the world. A 2022 UNESCO report noted that approximately 20 million Nigerian individuals of its approximately 200 million population are not enrolled in school. This amounts to 20 percent of Nigeria's entire population and is more than the overall population of various countries in Africa. The report said there are 244 million children and youth between the ages of six and 18 worldwide who are still out of school and "the region with the second highest out-of-school population is Central and Southern Asia with 85 million." The top three countries with the most children and youth excluded from education are: India, Nigeria and Pakistan.

But the Federal Ministry of Education in an unpublished response tagged, "UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2022) and the Phenomenon of Out-Of-School Children in Nigeria," said "Though UIS has attempted to justify the methods used in arriving at the 20 million figure, the fact remains that this report is capable of misinforming the public, misrepresenting the actual situation of the out-of-school children in Nigeria and underrating the significant efforts made by the government in addressing the out-of-school children challenge." While noting that it's the responsibility of states and local governments to provide primary and secondary education in Nigeria, the report said, the federal government has been working closely in partnership to develop the sub-sector generally and address the out-of-school children challenge. "The federal government provides financial and technical assistance to the states and local governments as part of its intervention in the delivery of Universal Basic Education (UBE) which covers primary and junior secondary".

The Nigerian Publishers Association (NPA, 2018) study established the number of out-of-school children, age 6 – 11 (Primary School-going age), at 10,193,918, regionally distributed as follows: North Central: 1,329,111, Northeast: 2,001,038, North-West: 3,490,671, South-East: 713,176, South-South: 1,208,183 and South-West: 1,451,740. Similarly, the figure of 6,192,081 was established for age 12– 14 for Junior Secondary School going age. "The 2018 NPA took cognizance of Nigeria's designated age bracket for universal basic education (primary and junior secondary, age six – 14) and did not extend to the senior secondary cadre (age 15 – 17) and the post-secondary school age of 18, which are both part of the UNESCO's 20 million figure."

In support of the report from NPA, UNICEF (2022) reports that 10.2 million children are out of school at primary school level, while 8.1 million at junior secondary school level. The report further states that 12.4 million children never attended school, while 5.9 million left school early. Nigeria out-of-school children population accounts for 15% of the global total. The report also states that only 1 in 3 children aged 36 – 59 months have access to ECCDE (Early Childcare Development Education) programme; also that 1 in 3 adolescents legible for senior secondary school are attending. More than 50% of girls are not attending schools in basic education level; 66% of all out-of-school children are in the Northeast and North-West. Going by the report of the NPA and UNICEF, one can see that Northeast is second highest in

out-of-school children with a figure of 2,0012,038, when distributed among the States under the North-East, Taraba is second highest behind Gombe State. If nothing is done, this will mean violation of children's right to education and increased risk of violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation and recruitment to extremist groups. The children will also miss opportunities for learning and skills development, which will lead to lack of access to meaningful employment, perpetuation of intergenerational poverty and inequality through loss of lifetime earnings. This is the reason why the crux of this paper therefore is to x-ray the ways to curb out-of-school children menace in Taraba State, through stakeholders' view, if bridging the education gap is envisaged in the nearest future.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was officially launched in September 1999. Its operations began in January 2000 while its enabling Act (Compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education Act No. 8 of 2004) was passed in 2004. It is Nigeria's home-grown response to the global EFA (Education for All) call for action in favour of basic education that came in the wake that followed the now famous EFA Jomtien Conference of 1990, a call that was renewed by the Dakar World Education Forum of year 2000. Its formal take-off also coincided with the coming into being of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) intended to be pursued world-wide from 2000 to 2015. UBE was conceived as a necessary first-step response to the myriad of challenges facing the nation's education system at the end of military rule and the inception of civil rule in 1999. It was therefore a contributory aspect of a new national democratic dispensation that should democratize access to education with strong focus on laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning for all. Its objectives go beyond the conventional literate paradigm while its scope covers education in a more comprehensive and holistic sense than mere schooling. Though the formal launch of UBE predated the Dakar World Education Forum of April, 2000, the programme had a conceptual link with Dakar and its objective and scope representing Nigeria's efforts at thinking globally for all. The concept of basic education could be seen as early childhood care and nine years of formal schooling. Policy to address educational needs of nomadic groups has been adopted at federal and state levels, but receives minimal financial and institutional support. In a related development, the National Policy on Education (2013) section 4 states that the government will provide functional basic education for adults and youth who have never had the opportunity of formal education.

Stakeholders in this context refer to the management staff, which represents government as the proprietor of these schools (primary and junior secondary schools) which include staff of State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), educational administrators, policy makers; principals and teachers, Parents under the auspices of Parents-Teachers Association, (PTA) or School-Based Management Committee (SBMC), students and the community, including those with an interest in educational system's success.

Theoretical Framework

The theory upon which the study was anchored is Charles Lindblom incremental theory of public policy. Charles Lindblom has been identified as the chief proponent of the incremental model. This is manifested in his "Decision Making in Taxation and expenditure in his description of budgetary process (Ngu, 2006:36). He and his disciple contended that policy making involves a continuation of past policies with very little and simple modification to suit new situation or changing circumstance, and posited further, that policy does not require radical and drastic changes, but rather design to meet new challenges very slowly and progressively. This theory is relevant to this study because out-of-school children menace are policy issues and quality is incremental in nature, hence the adoption of the incremental model. The UBE policy of the federal government is a deliberate action by government to empower the

Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to ensure that all children of school-going age are enrolled under basic education. This purposeful cause of action can thus, be understood within the context of distributive public policy, which have experienced changes and modifications to suit new situation and meet up present challenges such as Out-of-school children menace in Taraba State particularly and Nigeria as a whole.

Statement of the Problem

Universal primary education has been a stated priority of every Nigerian government since its introduction in the seventies. The actual commitment of the different governments to the scheme, however, has varied substantially. Despite the combined efforts of the Nigerian government, international development partners and non-governmental organizations to tackle the pervasive issue of out-of-school children in Nigeria, the country is still struggling to find solutions; the number of out-of-school children continues to be a persistent challenge. The UBE Act (2004) and associated State UBE laws provide free and compulsory education for all Nigeria children. The Act dedicates 2% of Nigeria Consolidated Revenue Fund annually to UBEC, but this is not always used efficiently and or effectively. In fact, the World Bank posits that Nigeria is experiencing learning poverty in which 70 per cent of 10-year-olds cannot understand a simple sentence or perform basic numeracy tasks. Taraba State which was hit by insurgency, banditry and ethno-religious crises for the past ten years have be grappling with many schools closed down and increased number of out-of-school children. If this menace is not checked, it will lead to violation of children's right to education and increased risk of violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation and recruitment to extremist groups. The children will also miss opportunities for learning and skills development, which will lead to lack of access to meaningful employment, perpetuation of intergenerational poverty and inequality through loss of lifetime earnings. The thrust of this paper therefore is to examine stakeholders' view on how to curb the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State.

Purpose of the Study

Specifically, the purpose of the study is:

- To examine the expected roles of government and policymakers on curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State.
- To identify the role of parents on curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State.
- To determine the roles of other stakeholders in basic education in curbing the out-of-school children menace in Taraba State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

- What roles are government and policymakers expected to play in curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State?
- How do Parents play their roles in curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State?
- What roles are other stakeholders expected to play in curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State?

Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis guided the study and was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of teachers and parents on their roles in curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is associated with the fact that it seeks to assess stakeholders' view on how to curb the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State. It is hoped that the results so obtained from this empirical process will provide tangible evidence to key stakeholders so as to address the issue of out-of-school children in a collective and collaborative manner. It is also envisaged that the results might help the federal government through SUBEB and UBEC to strategize on how to modify the UBE Act to accommodate new strategies for dealing with out-of-school children menace in Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. According to Miles and Huberman (1984) "... a survey is a method for collecting information from a sample of people by the administration of a questionnaire. The population consists of all primary and junior secondary schools in Taraba State. Step-wise random sampling technique was used to select 5 primary and 5 junior secondary schools from each senatorial zone of Taraba State; giving a total of 30 schools. 10 teachers and principals were randomly selected from each school, stratified along male and female. 5 parents were randomly selected from each sampled school under PTA/SBMC; then 20 persons were randomly selected from SUBEB; all stratified along male and female. A total sample of 470 respondents participated in the study. The instrument for data collection was a 15-item researcher-developed questionnaire titled "Curbing the Menace of Out-of-School Children Questionnaire (CMOSCQ)". It comprised two sections, A and B; Section A sought biographic data of respondents such as, rank of respondent, sex and age; while section B comprised 15 items on the expected roles of stakeholders in curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State. The instrument rating was based on a four-point modified Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA, 4 points), Agree (A, 3 points), Disagree (D, 2 points), Strongly Disagree (SD, 1point). The precision and internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach reliability method which gave rise to a coefficient ranging from 0.81 - 0.86. The instrument was face-validated by two experts from the Faculty of Education, Taraba State University, Jalingo; with a validation index of 0.88.

The researchers administered the questionnaire directly to respondents through six research assistants. Out of the four hundred and seventy (470) questionnaires distributed, four hundred and forty-seven (447) copies were retrieved, which is 95% return rate, and adjudged by the researchers as significant for analysis. Mean, Standard deviation and percentages were used to answer the three (3) research questions. A Mean of 2.50 was adopted as the scale mean (agreement level) for the items. The t-test statistic was used to test the Null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. All tests were done using the latest version of SPSS.

Results

Research Question One: What roles are government and policymakers expected to play in curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State?

Table 1: Summary of Mean and Standard Deviation of stakeholders on the expected roles of government and policy makers in curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	M	STD	DEC.
1.	Government supports SUBEB to develop a State enrolment drive framework to increase enrolment into basic education through campaigns.	59	76	111	201	2.0	1.07	Disagree
2.	Government is mapping out out-of-school children in Taraba State and providing cash transfers to enable access to and retention in school	86	101	133	127	2.3	1.08	Disagree
3.	Government is implementing minimum standard on safe school in all the 16 local govt. area of the State.	81	97	128	141	2.3	1.09	Disagree
4.	Government is providing teaching and learning materials to improve quality of learning in formal schools in Taraba State.	98	104	123	122	2.4	1.11	Disagree
5.	Government is engaging traditional and religious leaders in the 16 LGAs to commit to reducing out-of-school children in Taraba State.	94	97	115	141	2.3	1.13	Disagree
Cluster Mean						2.3	1.10	Disagree
<i>Scale Mean = 2.5</i>								

Table 1 show that respondents disagree that government supports SUBEB to develop a state enrolment drive framework to increase enrolment into basic education; with a mean of 2.0 and standard deviation of 1.07. They also disagree that government is mapping out out-of-school children in Taraba State and providing cash transfers to enable access to and retention in school; with a mean of 2.3 and standard deviation of 1.08. They further disagree that government is implementing minimum standard on safe school in all the 16 local government areas of the State; with a mean of 2.3 and standard deviation of 1.09. Respondents further disagree that government is providing teaching and learning materials to improve quality of learning in formal schools in Taraba State; with a mean of 2.4 and standard deviation of 1.11. They also disagree that government is engaging traditional and religious leaders in the 16 local government areas to commit to reducing out-of-school children in Taraba State; with a mean of 2.3 and standard deviation of 1.13. With a cluster mean of 2.3 which is less than the scale mean of 2.5, it could be concluded that government and policy makers are not playing their roles adequately towards curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State.

Research Question Two: How do Parents play their roles in curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State?

Table 2: Summary of Mean and Standard Deviation of stakeholders on how Parents play their roles in curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	M	STD	DEC.
6.	Parents who do not enroll their wards into basic education are being prosecuted to serve as deterrent to others.	62	84	149	152	2.1	1.03	Disagree

7.	There are high-level women's group in all the 16 LGAs advocating for girls education and retention.	86	97	131	133	2.3	1.09	Disagree
8.	Poverty and economic hardship is causing Parents to force their children into child labour instead of enrolling them into schools.	148	129	86	84	2.8	1.10	Agree
9.	Attacks on schools and abduction of school children coupled with unsafe infrastructure and facilities are scaring parents from enrolling their children into schools.	154	138	73	82	2.8	1.10	Agree
10.	Parents due to social and gender norms, place a low value on girl child education, so stop them from attending school or dropping out.	123	162	88	74	2.7	1.04	Agree
Cluster Mean						2.5	1.07	Agree
<i>Scale Mean = 2.5</i>								

Table 2 show that respondents disagree that parents who do not enroll their wards into basic education are being prosecuted to serve as deterrent to others; with a mean of 2.1 and standard deviation of 1.03. They also disagree that there are high-level women's group in all the 16 local government areas in the State advocating for the girl-child education and retention; with a mean of 2.3 and standard deviation of 1.09. They however agree that poverty and economic hardship is causing parents to force their children into child labour instead of enrolling them into schools; with a mean of 2.8 and standard deviation of 1.10. They also agree that attacks on schools and abduction of school children coupled with unsafe infrastructure and facilities are scaring parents from enrolling their children into schools; with a mean of 2.8 and standard deviation of 1.10. They further agree that parents due to social and gender norms, place a low value on girl-child education, so stop them from attending or make the drop out; with a mean of 2.7 and standard deviation of 1.04. With a cluster mean of 2.5 which is equal to the scale mean, it could be concluded that parents are willing to play their roles towards curbing the menace of out-of-school children, but are constrained by poverty, economic hardship, insecurity and social norms; this means that parents are not playing their roles adequately.

Research Question Three: What roles are other stakeholders expected to play in curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State?

Table 3: Summary of Mean and Standard Deviation of stakeholders on what roles they can play in curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	M	STD	DEC.
11.	The communities in Taraba State establish Vigilante groups to serve as security to schools and the community at large.	102	89	145	111	2.4	1.09	Disagree
12.	The community organizes fund raising to assist in the provision of infrastructure and learning materials to improve quality of learning in their schools.	87	94	131	135	2.3	1.10	Disagree
13.	The community established peer education club for girls and boys to support girls' retention and transition.	78	89	137	143	2.2	1.08	Disagree

14.	Traditional and religious leaders are engaging their subjects on the need to enroll their children (boys and girls) into basic education.	115	121	120	91	2.6	1.08	Agree
15.	Political leaders and philanthropists in collaboration with the community provide scholarship and free education for indigent children at the community level.	95	103	135	114	2.4	1.08	Disagree
Cluster Mean						2.4	1.09	Disagree
<i>Scale Mean = 2.5</i>								

Table 3 show that respondents disagree that communities in Taraba State establish vigilante groups to serve as security to schools and community at large; with a mean of 2.4 and standard deviation of 1.09. They also disagree that the community organize fund raising to assist in the provision of infrastructure and learning materials to improve quality of learning in their schools; with a mean of 2.3 and standard deviation of 1.10. They further disagree that the community established peer education club for girls and boys to support girls’ retention and transition; with a mean of 2.2 and standard deviation of 1.08. They however agree that traditional and religious leaders are engaging their subjects on the need to enroll their children into basic education; with a mean of 2.6 and standard deviation of 1.08. Respondents disagree that political leaders and philanthropists in collaboration with the community provide scholarship and free education for in indigent children at the community level; with a mean of 2.4 and standard deviation of 1.08. With a cluster mean of 2.4 which is less than the scale mean of 2.5, it could be concluded that basic education stakeholders are not playing their roles adequately towards curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of teachers and parents on their roles in curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State.

Table 4: Summary of t-test Analysis of Teachers and Parents on the roles of stakeholders in curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State.

Status of Respondents	N	\bar{x}	SD	df	Cal. t	Crit. t	Decision
Teachers	300	2.51	0.71	368	0.79	1.96	Accept
Parents	170	3.00	0.74				
Total	470						

Data in Table 4 show that the calculated t-value of 0.79 at 368 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance was less than the critical value of 1.96. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted. Thus, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of teachers and parents on the roles of stakeholders in curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that government and policy makers are not playing their anticipated roles adequately towards curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State. This finding is in agreement with Okoh, Emenike, Doma and Akinsola (2020), who identified that some of the major factors influencing basic school drop-out include: dilapidated school blocks, teachers’ attitude, school environment and infrastructure, among others. This

goes to show the lack of political will among political leaders and dearth or corruption in our system.

The findings of this study also reveal that parents are willing to play their roles, but are constrained by poverty, economic hardship, insecurity and social norms. Therefore, it was established that parents are not playing their roles towards curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State. This finding is in agreement with Ikiyei, Donkemezuo, Munasuote and Seribofa (2022), who posits that the reason why children drop-out of school is due to poverty, religio-cultural practices and insecurity in the school environment, among others. It is also in tandem with Adeleke and Alabede (2022), who opined that parents feel it is of no importance to enroll their children in school since this will not take them out of poverty in future.

The findings of this study further reveal that basic education stakeholders are not playing their roles adequately towards curbing the menace of out-of-school children in Taraba State. This finding agrees with that of Nzokurum (2023) who recommended that parents and other relevant stakeholders should not isolate themselves from the affairs of the school; rather they should work hand in glove with school management in the provision of facilities needed and security for UBE programmes in their locality. Security is everyone's business; education for all is the responsibility of all. Therefore, everything cannot be left for government to do.

Limitations of the Study

The decision about the use of stakeholders from Taraba State limits the feasibility of this study. Though it is quite possible for the views of stakeholders from Taraba State to be representative of many of their colleagues' views in other parts of Nigeria. The same cannot be said with any great confidence with regard to the views of all stakeholders in private primary and junior secondary schools across the country.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that government and policy makers are not helping basic education by not creating the framework for enrolment, providing security through safe school initiative, prosecuting defaulting parents and assisting poor parents with cash transfers. On the other hand, parents should ignore religio-cultural practices that prohibit them from enrolling their wards, especially girls into school. Communities should own basic schools within their localities by providing facilities, security through vigilante and encourage enrolment en-mass by declaring war against out-of-school menace. If this is not done, these children that are out-of-school pose a great social and economic threat to the larger society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Taraba State government should emulate Gombe State by creating the "Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA)" or Back to School Initiative; so as to mop up reasonable number of out-of-school children; and also establish more non-formal and formal girl-child learning centres in the State.
2. Taraba State should create an Education Task Force in the State to cover all the 16 local government areas. This task force would go round during school hours, any school-age child found on the streets, will be arrested and their parents prosecuted by special courts.
3. Taraba State government should have zero tolerance for out-of-school children by extending enrolment timing to cover through the year; and they should try to identify out-of-school children in the State and initiate cash transfer to indigent families. They

should also imbibe the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model for infrastructural development in schools; budgetary allocation to education should be increased.

4. Taraba State government should make basic education more attractive through certain incentives, so as to encourage greater enrolment; while other stakeholders should endeavour to assist government to eradicate the out-of-school children menace in the State by contributing their quota.

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