

## CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN BENDE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Out-of-school children pose a menace to the society and such menace needs to be properly eliminated if national development is to be optimized. It was the aim of this study to investigate the causes of out-of-school children, its consequences and strategies to improve educational opportunities for out-of-school children using a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study which served as the sample size was made up of three hundred and twenty-four (324) primary school teachers in public primary schools in Bende Local Government Area of Abia state. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. A researcher-made questionnaire titled Out of School Children Questionnaire (OSCQ) with thirty-two (32) items and three clusters was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by specialist in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation. Also the reliability was determined through a test-retest method and calculated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation which yielded a coefficient of .81. Data obtained from the study were statistically analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The result of the study showed that the teachers accepted the causes of out-of-school children, consequences of out-of-school children and strategies to improve educational opportunities for out-of-school children with the item statements having a mean value greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. The hypotheses which tested the significance of sex difference in teachers' perception found it not statistically significant. Based on the findings the following recommendation among others was made: government should monitor how allocation made to the education sector is being utilized so as to ensure adequate management.*

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**Keywords:** Out-of-school children, Teachers, Education, Society

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### Introduction

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme from its inception aimed to provide a chance for children to gain from the well-structured, planned and arranged experience of the school – which inculcates knowledge and skills relevant in adjusting in the society as well as solve its ever emerging problems. Adeyinke (2014) asserted that education exposes a person to knowledge and ideas thereby saving them from ignorance. It protects the wellbeing of the child and increases their survival rate through greater health awareness (Esu, 2022). Through education or formal school training man is empowered to improve their standard of living as well as protect the environment (Darma, 2022). It is worthy to note that despite the launching of the UBE and other related programmes and policies which protects the educational interest of the child as a right and not a privilege, there are still a good number of children who are out of school in Nigeria. Ogunode and Chinwuba (2022) posited that the Nigerian basic education is faced with a lot of problems which include its inability to provide quality and accessible basic education for her children of school age. They also noted an increase in the number of out of school children over the years with 69 percent of such children being from the north. Voannews (2021) reported that the country has over 18.5 million out of school children. This is not surprising as a cursory look confirms the numerous children of school age who spend their time racing after cars to sale their wares, helping their parent sale goods in the market, are apprentice in some business areas, some beg on the streets during school hours, while most times the girls are forced into early marriages or housekeepers by their caregivers.

Before delving into the causes and consequences of out-school-children, it is important to understand its concept. The term “out-of-school children” refer to individuals within the

childhood age who are not enrolled into any school or formal educational programme. Ojelade, Aiyedun and Aregebesola (2019) asserted that out of school children are young children within the age of 1 to 12 that are roaming the street without access to functional educational system. They are pupils who are not privileged to be enrolled in school or dropped out from the educational system due to factors such as poor school records, lack of sponsors among others (Ikiyei, Donkemezuo, Munesuote & Seribofa, 2022). The issue of out-of-school children in the country continues to thrive despite the attempts of the government and non-government agencies to curtail its occurrence. It is based on this that its causes and consequences are being investigated with the aim of making suggestions that may go a long way in curbing it. The causes of out-of-school children are numerous and most times overlap. However effort is being made by conceptualizing these causes into factors which operate independently or jointly to influence the child's enrollment and retention in school; therefore we consider the home-factor, the school-factor, the society-factor and child-factor. Beginning with the home factor, the home is the basic unit of the society and therefore provides the ground for socialization. It is the home which directs the path of the child towards conforming with the norms of the larger society and greatly influences what the child ends up to be in their adulthood. Within the home, the parents are responsible for the training of the child, though other adults such as extended families, siblings and domestic workers may influence the child's behavior in one way or the other. Yet the parents occupy a pivotal position in affairs of the growing child.

The government might have done their own part by making provisions for children to attend school irrespective of family status and gender; still the parents control to a large extent how their child utilizes such opportunity. The parents are not just trainers but also models to their children and therefore the child's life from an early stage revolves around their behavior and demands. They teach the child what is right and wrong, valuable and not; and so doing inculcates family values and traditions into the child who upholds them and tends to direct their behavior in ways that preserve and demonstrates such value. Ayoko (2022) rightly observed that the initial decision for the child to attend school and being educated depend on parental attitude, cultural and religious beliefs. This is why a parent who does not value education is less likely to enroll their child into school even though doing so might cost them nothing. In some cases this may be due to fact that the parents themselves did not benefit from the school system and their lack of education makes them feel that their children will also be better-off without it. They may rather than enroll their children into school, engage them in helping them with their 'blue collar' jobs in order to make ends meet. Their petty businesses become the most important aspect of living and schooling of the child becomes a trivial issue. Butt, Qaisar and Shiraz (2020) posited that children are prevented from enrolling in schools by supporting parents to earn a living through activities such as farming, trading and hawking. Also the family economic status hampers the enrollment of children in school. It is true that provision for a free education is made for the child to attend school; there are still some school materials which are the sole responsibility of the caregivers such as school uniforms, writing materials and textbooks. Ogunode, Chinwuba and Ayoko (2022) asserted that school financial commitments hinder many parents from sending their child to school; and the proposed increase in poor people from 89.0 million in 2020 to 95.1 million in 2022 means that more parents would not be able to send their children to schools and would rather engage them in making money for the family (Ogunode & Chinwuba, 2022).

Also feeding of the child within the school may not be covered in the provision for free education in some parts of the country; therefore a hungry child is not likely to attend school as the basic need (feeding) is not sufficiently met. According to Eke (2006) good feeding is crucial for brain development; it is then expected of a child whose nutritional status is poor (due to poverty) not concentrate at school and in most cases leave schooling and begin to look for ways to earn a living so as to feed properly. This can lead the child to begging for alms, helping traders in the market and also doing domestic works for others just to get paid. The issue of family income level can make some children get withdrawn from school so that a few

can attend which in most cases may be the eldest among the children. This is done in hope that once the child (eldest) finish schooling and is gainfully employed – would assist in training the younger siblings in school. But for the mean time while the eldest child goes to school, the younger ones while away their time at home or on the streets. This is mostly the case in large size families where the income made by parents may not be able to cater for the needs of all the children. For the girl-child the scenario tends to be different. They are most times given out as domestic servants and to marriages so as to lessen the burden of the parents.

After the home, the school – one of the crucial social institutions is of great influence on the child's education. The school is the environment next to the home where the child spends quality time and the teachers are the caregivers of the child away from home. It is crucial to understand that the structure of the school and the attitude of the teachers can lead to further enrollment or withdrawal of children from school. Some schools might lack the basic structures for teaching and learning which might make learning unbearable for the learners. This is as a result of poor funding of the education sector. For instance, a school with lack of good chairs, a leaking roof and depilated walls might make it a weary task for the child to go to school; also teachers' attendance in such schools may become so poor that it makes no difference for the child to be at home. Ogunode and Stephen as cited in Ogunode, Iyabode and Olatunde-Aiyedun (2022) observed that the budgetary allocation for the educational sector is below its UNESCO recommended 26% for developing countries like Nigeria, thereby making it inadequate. Apart from the school structure, its teachers can also affect the child's enrollment and retention in school. Aggressive behaviors by the teachers as well as excessive use of physical punishment on a child can instill fear in the child. Such fear can make the child abscond from school during lesson period and drop out of school in general. They in line with dropping out from school - instill fear on their junior ones yet to be enrolled in school - which makes them perceive the school as an unsafe environment; therefore truancy is initiated without even experiencing the school environment. Bullying and other antisocial behaviors experienced by the child can affect their attendance to school. A child who is a victim of bullying may on several occasions dodge entering the school premises after being safely dropped off by their parents at the school gate; while the parents take their leave with the notion that their child is safely learning within the school environment may not know that such a child is roaming the streets during the school hours. The society is duly represented by the government which oversees the organization and order of activities so as to ensure improved standard of living as well as development of the nation. Therefore when things go awry in the society, the government is first looked up to for intervention. The most prevalent societal issue which causes out of school children is insecurity. It is no longer news to the indigenes of Nigeria, on the security situation of the nation. Scores of news on the various media of information has been dominated by crimes perpetuated against the citizens of the nation which ranges from kidnapping to shootings in public places and robbery amongst others. These security challenges facing the nation has skyrocketed to an insurmountable height which if nothing is done to salvage the situation, the citizens would be left with no choice but to abscond from any outdoor activities. This would subsequently cripple the county's social, economic and education sectors among other things that can follow this happenstance.

The resultant effect of the security challenges will cause parents and guardians to withdraw their children from school there by lowering the attendance rate of students. Isah and Yakubu (2021) affirmed the burning of Gomari primary school in Maiduigiri on February 28, 2012 by insurgents. In same line, Igbinedion, Newby and Sparkes (2017), discovered that between 2013 and 2017, an estimated 943 out of 1,627 schools in Borno State have been closed due to the notorious attacks launched by this dreaded sect. When government fails on their part to address the issues on security - leading to this closure, the school is likely to have a permanent shutdown and children in such areas have no choice but to remain out-of-school. Aside insecurity, the value which the society attaches to education also affects subsequent enrollment of children to school. The formal education which was introduced in Nigeria from

the colonial days is perceived as a tool that certifies one capable of positively impacting the nation through gainful employment in occupations in line with one's profession. This is not the case anymore as the large number of unemployed graduates of the nation breeds the notion that education may not be what it seems to be. For instance the case of a graduate engaging in a menial work which no way relates what they studied in school may make those who are already out-of-school and engaging in these works feel the wiser. Also the flaunting of forged school certificates by illiterate persons just to gain their political or economic ambitions might portray schooling as an aimless journey; and the acquisition of certificates takes priority whether or not it is rightly deserved. Therefore people might refrain from going to school just to make enough money to buy the certificates later in life. Corrupt practices in the country have played a major role in crippling the implementation of programmes and policies devised to provide education for children thereby reduce out-of-school children. For example the report by the Independent Corrupt practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) that a misappropriated sum of one billion naira by six state universal basic education boards (SUBEBs) was yet to be returned (Allafrica as cited in Ogunode & Chinwuba, 2022). In the society also, some religious groups do not encourage formal education. The Quranic schools which utilize the Almajiri system propels the children to beg in the streets for alms. Therefore millions of children are thereby turned into street children without adequate care and successfully exploited by their masters (Ikiyei, Donkemezu, Munesuote & Seribofa 2022). In same line James and Abubakri (2024) posited that "many Moslems, especially in the Moslem dominated northern Nigeria regard education as a waste of financial resources and time" (p.112). The societal practice of gender inequality has provided more chance for the males to be formally educated than the female child. The notion that the girl-child will be married off into another family has made their training seem futile to the parents; and so education of the stationary male-child is seen as a good investment. The establishment of schools in areas distant from residents can hamper the child's going to school; therefore distance can be a barrier to education.

In the child-factor, the child's motivation to learn has to be considered in their enrollment to school. Does the child see education as an undertaking of value? Answer to such question is pertinent and would direct the path of the child towards attaining their educational goals. A child who perceives schooling as a waste of time would hardly stay in school even when all provisions for schooling are made; such a child would try various ways to stay out of school, like feigning ill, breaking school rules to get expelled or sneaking off from school premises during school hours. Also certain peers or friends a child keeps influence their decision to stay or leave schooling. This is because children tend to do things that conform to their peers so as to have a sense of acceptance and belonging. Disability also challenges the aspect of the child attending school. The self-consciousness of difference which can bring about ridicule from classmates can make the child unwilling to go to school. Sometimes the type of disability may make learning relatively impossible for the child even in the special schools designed for them. According to Li, An, Deng and Niu (2023), children with severe and multiple disabilities becoming out-of-school children is a rising phenomenon in developing countries. These disabled children find learning difficult to undertake (James & Abubakri, 2024).

There are limited empirical studies on out-of-school children in Nigeria, however Okoh, Emenike, Doma and Akinsola (2020) study investigated the enhancing factors and consequences of out-of-school children as regards sustainable development in North Central Geo-political zone, Nigeria. The study sampled 800 respondents from two states in the area. The findings revealed that poverty, child labor, teenage pregnancy and distance to school are the major causes of out-of-school children in the North Central Geo-Political Zone with menial jobs being its major implication. Smits and Huisman (2013) and Shehu (2018) studies attributed home factors such as parents' education and parents income as well as distance to school as causes of out-of-school children. In same line Adam and Bediako (2016) study linked the causes of out-of-school children to poverty, school related factors such as low academic

performance, punishment by teachers, depilated school building among others. Okoh et al. (2020) research findings proved that increase in crime, early teenage marriage for the female child and low income among others as consequences of out-of-school children. Vayachuta, Ratana-Ubol and Soopanyo (2016) study in same line asserted that out-of-school children are prone to antisocial behaviors which constitute nuisance in the society. In need for remedy to the situation Okoh et al. (2020) agreed in his study that violence in schools should be reduced as well as prosecution of parents whose children are not sent to school. The lack of empirical evidence on the issue of out-of-school children in Abia state created a gap which the study filled. It is often rightly said that children of today are the leaders of tomorrow. If these words are taken for what they actually mean, then adequate preparations ought to be made to safeguard the future of these children. On top of the list is educating them; this is because education is generally asserted to be the key to the success of every nation and any nation that jeopardizes with the education of its citizens lays the foundation for failure. These children are those who are believed to take up the mantle of leadership in the future and control the nation; yet they are the same children not receiving the formal education - crucial in equipping them for the task ahead. The researcher is therefore interested in discovering the causes of out-of-school children as well as its consequences on national development.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Specifically the researcher are prompted to investigate the following:

1. Causes of out-of-school children
2. Consequences of out-of-school children
3. Strategies to improve educational opportunities for out-of-school children

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised for the study:

1. What are the causes of out-of-school children?
2. What are the consequences of out-of-school children?
3. What are the strategies to improve educational opportunities for out-of-school children?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance

1. The perception of male and female teachers on the causes of out-of-school children does not significantly differ
2. The perception of male and female teachers on the consequences of out-of-school children does not significantly differ
3. The perception of male and female teachers on the strategies to improve educational opportunities for out-of-school children does not significantly differ

### **Methods**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design which aimed at assessing the teachers' perception of the variables under study. The population of the study consists of 324 teachers (83 males and 241 females) from 34 public primary schools in Bende Local Government Area of Abia state. Due to its population being manageable, the entire population was sampled in the study. The instrument used for data collection was self-constructed by the researcher and titled Out-of-School Children Questionnaire (OSQC) with thirty-two item statements. The instrument has two sections: A and B. Section A elicited information on demographic data of the respondents while section B sorted the response of the teachers to the items of the study with three clusters: cluster 1 – causes of out-of-school children with twelve items; cluster 2 – consequences of out-of-school children with ten items; Cluster 3 – strategies to improve educational opportunities for out-of-school children with ten items. The instrument also has a four point likert scale of Strongly Agreed – SA (4), Agreed – A (3), Disagreed – D (2) and Strongly Disagreed – SD (1). Before administration, the instrument was face and content



validated by specialists in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation. To ascertain its reliability, a test-retest method was utilized on teachers in primary schools in Owerri North L.G.A. Imo state on an interval of two weeks and its reliability calculated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation which yielded a coefficient of .81 which is acceptable. The permission of the school administrators and teachers were solicited and granted before the instrument was administered on the respondents and collected immediately after filled by the respondents. This ensured that no copy of instrument was lost. Data collected for the study were statistically analyzed using mean, standard deviation to answer the research questions and t-test to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The criterion mean of 2.50 was used. Therefore items which scored 2.50 and above were accepted while those that scored below were rejected.

## Result

**Table 1: Mean and standard deviation scores of respondents on the causes of out-of-school children**

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D	Remark
1.	Parents low income	3.51	1.20	Accept
2.	Parents low educational status	3.23	1.11	Accept
3.	Loss of parents	3.54	1.21	Accept
4.	Bullying in schools	2.85	.98	Accept
5.	Teachers' aggression	2.91	1.00	Accept
6.	Lack of school facilities	3.01	1.03	Accept
7.	Disability	3.50	1.20	Accept
8.	Gender discrimination	2.78	.95	Accept
9.	Peers	3.85	1.32	Accept
10.	Insecurity	4.01	1.37	Accept
11.	Distance of school from home	2.53	.87	Accept
12.	High rate of unemployment	2.81	.96	Accept
<b>Cumulative Mean</b>		<b>2.92</b>	<b>1.11</b>	

Table 1 shows the mean score and standard deviation of teachers' response to the causes of out-of-school children. Based on the criterion mean, the cumulative mean of 2.92 shows that the items were accepted. Therefore the listed items are perceived by the teachers as the causes of out-of-school children.

**Table 2: Mean and standard deviation scores on the consequences of out-of-school children**

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D	Remark
13.	High rate of child trafficking	4.01	1.13	Accept
14.	Child marriage	3.58	1.01	Accept
15.	Child Labor	3.01	.84	Accept
16.	Gangs/Cultism	3.91	1.10	Accept
17.	Armed robbery/Fraudsters	2.89	.81	Accept
18.	Reduction in number of literate persons in the society	2.85	.80	Accept
19.	Increased poverty in the nation	3.23	.91	Accept
20.	Incompetent employees	4.11	1.15	Accept
21.	Prostitution	3.80	1.07	Accept
22.	Child abuse	4.21	1.18	Accept
<b>Cumulative Mean</b>		<b>3.56</b>	<b>1.00</b>	

Table 2 shows the mean score and standard deviation of teachers' response to the consequences of out-of-school children. Based on the criterion mean, the cumulative mean of 3.56 shows that the items were accepted. Therefore the listed items are perceived by the teachers as the consequences of out-of-school children.

**Table 3:** Mean and standard deviation scores on strategies to improve educational opportunities for out-of-school children

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D	Remark
23.	Government's improvement and monitoring of allocations made towards the education sector	4.09	1.14	Accept
24.	Introduction of foster care for children without parents	3.85	1.08	Accept
25.	Prohibition of bullying in schools and punishment of perpetrators	3.48	.97	Accept
26.	Regulation of punishment by teachers on students	2.83	.79	Accept
27.	Provision of learning aids for disabled children	3.53	.99	Accept
28.	Establishment of more schools in communities especially in rural areas	3.48	.97	Accept
29.	Implementation of the child right act	4.00	1.12	Accept
30.	Prohibition of child marriage	3.35	.94	Accept
31.	Prohibition of gender discrimination	3.02	.85	Accept
32.	Elimination of insecurity in the nation	4.12	1.15	Accept
<b>Cumulative Mean</b>		<b>3.58</b>	<b>1.00</b>	

Table 3 shows the mean score and standard deviation of teachers' response to strategies to improve educational opportunities for out-of-school children. Based on the criterion mean, the cumulative mean of 3.58 shows that the items were accepted. Therefore the listed items are perceived by the teachers as strategies for improving educational opportunities for out-of-school children.

**Table 4:** t-test for gender difference in teachers' perception of causes of out-of-school children

Gender	Mean	SD	t <sub>cal</sub>	Std Error	Df	p <sub>val</sub>	Decision
Male	33.97	12.85	1.25	1.70	322	.21	Not Significant
Female	36.09	13.53					

Table 4 shows the test for significance of sex difference in teachers' perception of causes of out-of-school children. According to the result, a t<sub>cal</sub> of 1.25 and a p<sub>val</sub> of .21 higher than .05 shows that the difference in perception of male and female teachers on the causes of out-of-school children is not statistically significant.

**Table 5:** t-test for gender difference in teachers' perception of consequences of out-of-school children

Gender	Mean	SD	t <sub>cal</sub>	Std Error	Df	p <sub>val</sub>	Decision
Male	34.95	8.96	.12	1.34	322	.91	Not Significant
Female	35.11	11.04					

Table 5 shows the test for significance of sex difference in teachers' perception of consequences of out-of-school children. According to the result, t<sub>cal</sub> of .12 and p<sub>val</sub> of .91 higher than .05 shows that the difference in perception of male and female teachers on the consequences of out-of-school children is not statistically significant.

**Table 6:** t-test for gender difference in teachers' perception of strategies for improving educational opportunities for out-of-school children

Gender	Mean	SD	t <sub>cal</sub>	Std Error	Df	p <sub>val</sub>	Decision
Male	34.83	9.09	1.38	1.33	322	.17	Not Significant
Female	36.67	10.91					

Table 6 shows the test for significance of sex difference in teachers' perception of strategies for improving educational opportunities for out-of-school children. According to the result, t<sub>cal</sub> of 1.38 and p<sub>val</sub> of .16 higher than .05 show that the difference in perception of male and female

teachers on strategies for improving educational opportunities for out-of-school children is not statistically significant.

### **Discussions**

The researcher in this study aimed to investigate the causes and consequences of out-of-school children as well as strategies for improving educational opportunities for out-of-school children as perceived by the teachers. The result of the research question one which sought the causes of out-of-school children showed an acceptance of all the item statements with a mean greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. The perceived causes of out-of-school children include: parents' income, parents' low educational status, loss of parents, bullying in schools, teachers' aggression, lack of school facilities, disability, gender discrimination, peers, insecurity, distance of school from home and unemployment. This finding agrees with Smits and Huisman (2013) and Shehu (2018) studies which attributed household factors, parents' education and income as well as distance to school as most influential factors. In same line Adam and Bediako (2016) attributed the causes of out-of-school children to poverty, school related factors such as low academic performance, punishment by teachers, dilapidated school building among others.

The second research question investigated the consequences of out-of-school children. The consequences perceived by the teachers were all in agreement with the item statements with each mean scoring above 2.50. According to the study, consequences of out-of-school children include: high rate of child trafficking, child marriage, child labor, reduction in number of literate persons in the society, increased poverty in the nation, gangs/cultism, armed robbery, incompetent employees, prostitution and child abuse. This is in consonance with the study by Okoh et al. (2020) which attributed increase in crime, early teenage marriage for the female child and low income among others as consequences of out-of-school children. Vayachuta et al. (2016) study in same line with the findings of this study asserted that out-of-school children are prone to antisocial behaviors which constitute nuisance in the society.

The third research question sought the teachers' perception of strategies for improving educational opportunities for out-of-school children. The teachers' perception accepts all the item statements with a mean value greater than 2.50. The strategies according to this research include the following: government's improvement on allocation towards the education sector, introduction of foster homes which will cater for the children without parents, prohibition of bullying in schools, regulation of punishment by teachers on students, provision of learning aids for the disabled, establishment of schools in rural communities, implementation of child right act, prohibition of child-marriage and gender discrimination as well as elimination of insecurity. Okoh et al. (2020) agreed in his study that violence in schools should be reduced as well as prosecution of parents whose children are not sent to school as measures to be taken to remedy the situation of out-of-school children.

The study further tested the hypotheses formulated to ascertain if the teachers' perception on the various variables differ significantly by gender. The result showed no significant difference in the perception of male and female teachers on the causes of out-of-school children, consequences of out-of-school children and strategies for improving educational opportunities for out-of school children.

### **Conclusion**

The issue of out-of-school children in Nigeria despite the various provisions made by the government to ensure educational opportunities for all prompted this study. The causes and consequences of out-of-school children were ascertained through the teachers' perception. The result implicated the home, school, society and the child themselves as factors responsible for dropout from school and non-enrollment to school. The study also highlighted the consequences of out-of-school children which not only affect the individual but the society as a whole. Strategies were outlined which when adhered to, would improve educational opportunities for the child as well as save the nation from further damage.



## Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is an obvious need for the government to monitor how allocations made to the education sector is being utilized so as to ensure adequate management.
2. Parents should be sensitized through town meetings and other social gatherings on the need for proper education of their children
3. Children should be stimulated to attend school through providing activities that interest the child as well as make the school environment safe and accommodating.
4. Security of the nation should be ensured by the government through appropriate security agents
5. The school should be structured in a way that accommodates various child disabilities and also provision of materials that enhance their learning.
6. Psychologists and counsellors should be employed to handle behavioral problems that may lead to a child dropping out from school.
7. Poverty should be eradicated from the nation through improving the standard of living for families.

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