

COUNTERING THE PERCEIVED INCIDENCES OF OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN ON SOCIO-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NSUKKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

In their previous study, it was discovered that there are high incidences of out of school children in Nsukka Education zone. Consequently, this present study investigated perceived strategies for countering the high incidence of out of school children in Nsukka Education Zone. One research question and hypothesis guided the study. The geographical scope of the study was Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State. The study employed descriptive design. The population of the study was 250 and 50 research subjects were sampled. The instrument used for data collection was structured questionnaire developed by the researchers titled 'Parent-teachers perceived impact of incidence of out of school children on socio-cultural development questionnaire' (PTPIIOSCSCDQ) which has an overall reliability index of 0.74. The instrument was face validated by experts from University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The researchers visited the sampled schools in Nsukka LGA to collect the data. The questionnaire was completed and collected back immediately thereby ensuring a 100% return. The data collected for the study were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study revealed that the strategies to lower the number of out of school children as perceived by parent-teachers in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state include improving free and compulsory education at urban and rural areas, targeted poverty alleviation programs. There was no gender influence in the responses parent-teachers on perceived causes, impacts and strategies to lower the number of out of school children in Nsukka local government area. The educational implications of this study were that it underscores the need for increased educational access and the reduction of out-of-school children and the study recommends that government should implement policies that promote universal education, such as increasing funding to the education sector, building more schools, and recruiting more teachers to cater for the increasing number of children seeking education.

Keywords: Out of school children, socio-cultural development, parent-teachers, gender.

Introduction

Incidence of out of school children is one of the age-long issues and problems grappling many countries of the world. Out-of-school children are those who have not yet begun any formal education. Ojelade, Aiyedun and Aregebesola (2019) defined out-of-school children as little children aged 1 to 12 who are not enrolled in school and are out on the streets without access to a working educational system. UNESCO (2022) viewed out of-school children as the proportion of children and young people in the official age range for the given level of education who are not enrolled in pre-primary, primary, secondary, or higher levels of education. This indicator aims to measure the proportion of young people in a nation or area who are supposed to be attending school but are instead totally excluded from it. The term out-of school children according to Salman and Ibrahim (2023) is a nonattendance of the school of school-age children for some established factors.

Children who are not in school can be between the ages of 6 and 11. Children who are not enrolled in school despite being of school age do so because their parents and the government have failed to provide them with an easily available, high-quality education. Out-of-school children can equally refer to children who are of school age but do not attend for a variety of known reasons. Operationally, out of school children refers to the proportion of children in the official age range for the given level of education who are not enrolled in pre-primary, primary, secondary levels of education in Nsukka LGA.

Indeed, the causes of high number of out-of-school children in Nigeria and globally are complex and multifaceted which has resulted to increase in crime rate, illiteracy, poverty, among others among the Nigerian society (Raliyat, Umma & Aisha, 2022). These in turn result to having illiterate citizens which can affect socio-cultural development in Nigeria, including Nsukka. The incidence of out-of-school children is Sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria particularly indicated that in 2021, there will be 98 million people who are not enrolled in school, a 20 million rise since 2009. Although only 0.3 percentage points per year in the 2010s, out-of-school rates among children in primary school have been steadily falling, leaving one in five children unenrolled (UNESCO, 2022). However, the biggest issue is with teenagers and adolescents, whose out-of-school rates have remained constant since 2010 at 33% and 48%, respectively. UNESCO opined thus “In Nigeria, out-of-school rates among adolescents and youth of secondary school age have hardly changed in 20 years with the result that the out-of-school population in this age group increased by 61%, from 6.3 to 10.1 million. The number of out-of-school children of primary school age also increased by 50% from 6.4 to 9.7 million, as the out-of-school rate has remained constant at 28% since 2010.” Since the 1970s, numerous federal and state government initiatives to increase access and enhance the quality of education delivery have seen success in some areas, including an overall rise in the junior secondary school (JSS) level gross enrollment ratio (GER) and the net and gross enrollment ratios (NER) for female students (Olusegun, 2019). These efforts may have contributed to the recent decline in the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria from 10.5 million to less than 9 million, according to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). Nigeria has the highest percentage of out-of-school children in the world notwithstanding this development. It is important to remember that the majority of OOSC reside in rural areas and come from low-income families (Chinedum Nwoko, 2015).

Efforts to address this issue include initiatives to increase access to education, improve the quality of education and address the root causes of exclusion (UNESCO, 2022). The issue of out-of-school children is a major global challenge and unfortunately despite these efforts in addressing the incidences of out-of-school children the consequences of this incidence seem to persist. This number has increased due to pandemic which have disrupted education systems and exacerbated existing inequalities. The consequences of being out of school can be severe, including reduced opportunity for social and economic advancement, increase vulnerability to exploitation and abuse and the perpetuation of intergenerational poverty. Addressing the issue of out-of-school children requires a concerted effort from the government, civil society organisation and the international community to ensure that all children have access to quality education. This will improve the socio-cultural development in Nigeria.

Socio-cultural development refers to the significant contributions of the society to individual personal growth (Obiwuru, 2017). It places emphasis on how living cultures and developing individuals interact. It implies that social interaction has a major role in how people learn. Socio-cultural development focuses on how cultural beliefs and attitudes affect how education and learning take place, in addition to how adults and peers

affect individual learning (Vygotsky, 1978). It is the difference between a child's actual developmental level as determined by their capacity for independent problem-solving and their level of potential development as determined by their capacity for independent problem-solving while being guided by an adult or working with more advanced peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Any role in the socio-cultural development of a kid plays out twice, or on two planes: first, the social plane, and then the psychological plane. It first manifests through social interaction before emerging as an individual accomplishment. Socio-cultural developments around the world allow students and schoolchildren to communicate effectively in the environment, which leads to socialization process (Guryanov et al., 2019). The importance of social and cultural interaction contributes to children literacy and education and transmitting cultural elements in the individual. Social cultural development implies analyzing individual development and learning in the context of social practices. It focuses on changes of behavior over time specifically on changes that occur as individual mature from infancy to childhood, to adolescent and finally to adulthood. Socio-cultural developments play a vital role in shaping social development and functioning and drive forces for decision-making in any given society (Mumin et al., 2021). Understanding how these forces manifest and operate is key for children, national and societal development. From the foregoing, parent-teachers have roles to play in socio-cultural development of children.

Parent-teachers can be viewed as teachers who are parents that teach in different level of education. Parents are referred to as the people that birthed the child. Teacher can refer to a student's classroom instructor as well as a mentor or another member of the teaching staff (Rubio-Codina & Saavedra, 2015). Parent-teachers primarily focus on the educational aspects of schooling conditions and school children. They highlight cultural practices that help develop intellectual abilities while supporting children to exercise their independence and accountability in a comfortable but challenging and managed learning environment (Lasne, 2018). Parents-teachers are capable resources for children learning and development and helps children attain greater growth in the society. In essence, a strong parent-teacher partnership may increase student and family engagement in the classroom and support successful results for children and their social and cultural development. Based on a sample of kindergarten parents from a variety of racial and educational backgrounds, Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, and Aupperlee (2009) discovered that greater parental involvement was linked to better parent-teacher relationships as indicated by a number of characteristics, including trust, warmth, and communication. Parental trust in educators is a crucial part of the parent-teacher connection to take into account (Forsyth, Adams, & Hoy, 2011). Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, and Aupperlee (2019) reported that good parental involvement was linked to better parent-teacher relationships as indicated by a number of characteristics, including trust, warmth, and communication. This implies that parents who are teachers contributed significantly to the socio-cultural and general intellectual development of children. The impact of out-of-school children on socio-cultural development maybe be influenced by gender.

Gender refers to the social roles, behaviors, expectations, and identities that societies assign to individuals based on their perceived sex (Naz Chaudhry, 2012). It is the biological differences between males and females and a social construct that varies across cultures and time periods. Gender disparities may exist in access to education, which can result in different experiences and outcomes for boys and girls who are out of school. Naz and Chaudhry (2012) reported that gender biases can create barriers to education for both boys and girls. In some cases, cultural norms and traditional expectations may prioritize

boys' education over girls'. Girls may face challenges such as early marriage, household chores, or cultural beliefs that limit their educational opportunities.

Despite the expected contributions and importance of education to the sustainability of development of individual and nations, it is disheartening to see increasing number of youngsters of school age flocking the street without formal education. This is evident in big numbers of children parading along the streets of Nigerian including Nsukka Local Government. Any sort of absence from school has clear negative effects on kids and society (UNESCO, 2020). Effort has been made by the Nigerian government and international organisations to address the issues of out-of-school children, including initiatives such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program and the girls education projects (GEP). However, progress has been slow and there is still a long way to go to ensure that all children in Nigeria have access to quality education (Ojelade, Aiyedun & Aregebesola, 2019). Given the efforts of the government at all levels in implementing the universal basic education program, it is easy to assume that all children are enrolled and attending school. However, this kind of assumption might not give the benefits of knowing the true state of things as they relate to out of school children in Nigeria, Enugu state and Nsukka LGA particularly. These therefore, necessitate the study to investigate parent-teachers perceived impact of incidence of out of school children on socio-cultural development in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State.

Statement of the Problem

Children missing school are becoming more prevalent every day. The sustainability of the benefits made by the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is being highlighted globally, making this scenario more concerning. Inevitably, if many kids are not at school today, it will be hard to maintain the heights previously gained by EFA in Education, several youngsters are spotted during school hours either with their bowls for begging, hoes for farming, or even just idly hanging around rather than flocking towards the school gate for studying. These usually impact social balance and socio-cultural development. One of the stakeholders who directly feel the first experience of out of school children is teachers. Teachers feel the declining number of school children attendance as the children resort to other activities such as business compounding the incidence of being out of school.

One question has been how does this problem of out of - school affect the society especially the socio-cultural development of the society because teachers are major stakeholders who feel first-hand the absence of school children in their class room, it may be good to estimate how the teachers see the growing number of out- of- school children impact the socio-cultural development of our society. This study therefore ascertained the perceived impact of the incidence of out of school children from the perspective of teachers who in most cases are parents to some of the students experiencing being out of school.

Research Question

1. What are the strategies to lower the number of out of school children as perceived by parent-teachers in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state?

Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean score of parent-teachers perceived strategies to lower the number of out of school children in Nsukka local government area based on gender.

Method

This study employed descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. Mole (2019) defined descriptive survey as the type of research design which is aimed at collecting data from member of a given population on their views, opinions, attitudes among others on a phenomenon, event or practice in order to determine the characteristics, features or facts about the entire population. This design is considered appropriate because it allows for systematic collection of data from a large population to describe their characteristics, opinion, and behaviors regarding the opinion of parents-teachers on the causes of out of school children, the impacts on socio-cultural development as well as strategies to lower the number of out-of-school children Nsukka Local Government of Enugu State. The study was carried out in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. Nsukka Local Government is one of the seventeen (17) local governments in Enugu state. It is one of the most open and historical local government as it houses the prestigious University of Nigeria. The Ede-Oballa, Nsukka, Eha-Alumona, Okpuje, Opi-Agu, Edem, Umuabor, Opi, Opi-Agu, Okpaligbo, Okutu, Opkuje, Obukpa, and other communities are included in the Nsukka Local Government Area Council, which is located in the town of Nsukka. The choice of this area for the study was based on the fact that there exist many schools and still there seems to be increasing number of out of school children seen on the streets of Nsukka daily. The population of the study comprised all parent-teachers, from the 36 public secondary schools in Nsukka Local Government Area. The number of the parent-teachers collected from the Post Primary School Management Board (PPSMB), Personnel Department, Nsukka Zonal office.

The study utilized a sample size of 50 parent-teachers from 5 public secondary schools in Nsukka LGA. Multi-stage sampling technique was utilized. First, random sampling technique was used to select 5 secondary schools, while random sampling technique was used to select 10 parent-teachers from the 5 schools to serve as respondents for the study. Therefore 50 parent-teachers were used for the study. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled 'Parent-teachers perceived impact of incidence of out of school children on socio-cultural development questionnaire' (PTPIIOSCSCDQ), developed by the researcher based on extensive literature review. The questionnaire comprised two main sections. Section A elicited the information of the respondent, while section B was grouped into two clusters A, and B. cluster A addressed the information on causes of out of school children. While Cluster B addressed strategies that can be used to reduce the rising incidences of out of school children in Nsukka local Government Area of Enugu state. All items in Section B Cluster A and B were structured using a four-point Likert scale with response options of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Strongly Disagreed (SD), and Disagreed (D). The four-point scale was chosen to eliminate neutral responses and compel respondents to take definite positions on each item.

The instrument was face validated by three experts, two were from the Department of Social Science Education, and one was from the Measurement and Evaluation Unit in the Department of Science Education both from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The experts examined the items in terms of clarity of statement, relevance of the contents and sustainability of the rating scale adopted. The suggestions and inputs of the experts were incorporated into the final draft of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient method. A pilot study was conducted with 10 parents-teachers from Udenu LGA, which is different from the area of the study but has similar characteristics. The responses were used to compute the reliability of instruments. The internal consistency of the instrument yielded reliability coefficient of 0.75, and 0.743

for clusters A, and B respectively. The overall internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.74 was obtained and considered appropriate because the items were polychotomously scored.

The questionnaires were distributed and retrieved manually with the help of two research assistants. The respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study and the modalities to administer the questionnaire. The items on the questionnaire were duly explained to the respondents for easier understanding. The researchers ensured immediate collection of the filled questionnaire on the same day and enhanced 100% return. Data gathered from the study were analyzed and statistical analyzed in accordance with the research questions. Descriptive statistics of mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviations (SD) was used to answer the research question with criterion mean score of 2.50 and above for acceptance. T-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance

Results

Table 1: Mean ratings and standard Deviation on the strategies to lower the number of out of school children as perceived by parent-teachers in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state

S/N	Item Statements	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Improving free and compulsory education at urban and rural areas can help reduce the incidences of out of school children	50	2.56	0.87	Agree
2.	Targeted poverty alleviation programs can reduce the rising incidences of out of school children	50	2.89	0.82	Agree
3.	Improving infrastructure and their accessibility can reduce the rising incidences of out of school children	50	2.76	0.45	Agree
4.	Gender responsive policies initiatives can help reduce incidences of out of school children	50	2.98	0.67	Agree
5.	Inclusive education systems can help reduce incidences of out of school children	50	2.67	0.86	Agree
6.	Community engagement and awareness can help reduce incidences of out of school children	50	2.56	0.43	Agree
7.	Teacher training and recruitment can help reduce incidence of out of school children	50	2.82	0.78	Agree
8.	Early childhood development program can help reduce incidences of out of school children	50	2.56	0.89	Agree
9	Flexible learning models can help reduce incidences of out of school children	50	2.56	0.67	Agree
10	Monitoring and accountability mechanisms can help reduce incidences of out of school children	50	2.89	0.76	Agree
Grand Mean		50	2.72	0.79	Agree

Table 1 shows the strategies to lower the number of out of school children as perceived by parent-teachers in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state. The mean scores of items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 are 2.56, 2.89, 2.76, 2.98, 2.67, 2.56, 2.82, 2.56, 2.59 and 2.89. These mean scores are above the 2.50 acceptance benchmark mean value for decision taking which implies that they are accepted. Therefore the strategies to lower the number of out of school children as perceived by parent-teachers in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state include improving free and compulsory education at urban and rural areas, targeted poverty alleviation programs, improving infrastructure

and their accessibility, gender responsive policies initiatives, inclusive education systems, community engagement and awareness, teacher training and recruitment, early childhood development program, flexible learning models and monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Also, the grand mean of 2.72 with standard deviation of 0.79 implies that the respondents agreed that the items on Table 1 are the impacts of out of school children on socio-cultural development as perceived by parent-teachers in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state.

Table 2: t-test analysis on the difference in the mean score of parents-teachers' strategies to lower the number of out of school children in Nsukka local government area based on gender.

Gender	N	Mean	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	15	2.59	1.23	49	0.61
Female	35	2.85			

The analysis on Table 2 shows that the t-cal 1.23 is not significant at 0.61 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, null hypothesis is not rejected. Thus, there was no significant difference in the mean score of parent-teachers perceived strategies to lower the number of out of school children in Nsukka local government area based on gender. This suggests that male and female parent-teachers had almost similar level of response on the strategies to lower the number of out of school children in Nsukka local government area.

Discussion

The findings revealed that improving free and compulsory education at urban and rural areas, targeted poverty alleviation programs, improving infrastructure and their accessibility, gender responsive policies initiatives, inclusive education systems, community engagement and awareness, teacher training and recruitment, early childhood development program, flexible learning models and monitoring and accountability mechanisms are the strategies to lower the number of out of school children as perceived by parent-teachers in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state include. This is in line with Oyekan, Ayorinde, and Adenuga (2017) who stated that improved security, good infrastructural development, inclusive education arrangements, teacher training and retraining, childcare policies can help reduce the menace of out of school children in the North-east Nigeria.

Findings shows that there was no significant difference in the mean score of parent-teachers perceived strategies to lower the number of out of school children in Nsukka local government area based on gender. This suggests that male and female parent-teachers had almost similar level of response on the strategies to lower the number of out of school children in Nsukka local government area. This is in line with Nwoke (2018) who revealed series of factors causing gender differences which are teacher, students and parent related. Based on the result, it was recommended that teachers should use innovative strategies in teaching to get both male and female students' interest and involvement in classroom activities.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that the strategies to lower the number of out of school children as perceived by parent-teachers in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state include improving free and compulsory education at urban and rural areas, targeted poverty alleviation programs, improving infrastructure and their accessibility, gender responsive policies initiatives, inclusive education systems,

community engagement and awareness, teacher training and recruitment, early childhood development program, flexible learning models and monitoring and accountability mechanisms. There was no gender influence in the responses parent-teachers on perceived causes, impacts and strategies to lower the number of out of school children in Nsukka local government area. This implies that male and female parent-teachers had almost similar level of response on the causes, impacts and strategies to lower the number of out of school children in Nsukka local government area.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the researchers recommended that:

1. Government should implement policies that promote universal education, such as increasing funding to the education sector, building more schools, and recruiting more teachers to cater for the increasing number of children seeking education.
2. The government should also prioritize the reduction of socio-economic challenges that hinder children's access to education, such as poverty, child labor, early marriages to prevent further increase in out-of-school children.
3. Teacher training programs should be implemented to enable teachers to handle children that have been out of school and to tackle some challenges that prevent children from getting an education.
4. Cultural education should be incorporated into the national curriculum to promote social and cultural diversity and inclusion within educational settings.
5. Schools should implement strategies to identify out-of-school children and provide them with appropriate support systems to catch up on missed education. Special programs should be put in place for re-integrated children into the school system.

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