

KIU Journal of Education (KJED)

Volume 3 Issue 2

Page 21 - 30

October – November 2023

<https://www.kjed.kiu.ac.ug>

Awareness on universal basic education policy and out of school children phenomenon in Nigeria

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Abstract

Basic education policy in Nigeria is free, universal and compulsory for the first nine years of schooling. The policy envisaged a drastic reduction in the reluctance of parents/guardians towards basic education in parts of Nigeria where the pursuit of qur'anic education remained predominant. So far, the free education programme had yielded less than desirable results as the number of Out of School Children (OOSC) remain largely and increasingly unacceptable, thus necessitating a study that investigated stakeholders' perspectives on the extent to which awareness and the participation in schooling amongst school age children has been achieved. Hence, the level of awareness and how stakeholders' perspectives may be impacting on universal basic education policy implementation vis-à-vis out of school children phenomenon in Nigeria were examined. In fulfilling the objective of the study, the respondents' perspectives were obtained through a multi-stage sampling technique. The selection of the state was purpose driven; hence purposive sampling of Kano State, and within Kano metropolis, North-western Nigeria, all the four Local government within the metropolis namely: Taurani, Fegge, Nasarawa and Kano Municipal Council were Local Education Authorities -LEAs were purposively selected. Further, 30 facilitators of qur'anic schools who were selected from each of the 4 LEAs in Kano metropolis amounting to 120 facilitators (respondents) that were sampled, and a structured questionnaire was administered to them. Findings revealed a high level of awareness of stakeholders on the consequences of non-schooling. However, it was inferred that the aged facilitators of the qur'anic schools could affect the effort and process of integrating basic education programmes into the qur'anic schools thus exacerbating the exclusion of children from the formal education worsening OOSC phenomenon. Recommendations were made as follows: that qur'anic school, class-size, class-management and facilitations processes should be standardised, to enhance curriculum integration and inclusiveness. Moreover, enlightenment of stakeholders be intensified.

Keywords: Out-of-School Children, basic education policy, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Accessing basic education in recent times, in Nigeria had supposedly widened, as basic education policy in Nigeria stipulated free, universal and compulsory learning for the first nine years of basic schooling. Right from inception the policy envisaged a drastic reduction in the reluctance or unwillingness of parents/guardians towards western-type basic education. To drive the point home the policy was launched in September 1999, in Sokoto the seat of Islamic caliphate in Nigeria. In this part of the country, the pursuit of qur'anic education remained predominant to the exclusion of formal schooling in some instance.

So far, the free education policy had yielded less than desirable results as the number of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) remain largely and increasingly unacceptable, thus necessitating a study that investigated stakeholders' perspectives on the extent to which awareness and the participation in schooling amongst school age children has been achieved. The present level of awareness and how stakeholders' perspectives may be impacting on universal basic education policy implementation vis-à-vis out of school children phenomenon in Nigeria was examined.

A fundamental global target in basic education, tagged Education for All -EFA; was aimed at having all school age children enrolled in school by the year 2000AD which eventually became an unaccomplished mantra. Meanwhile, the Universal basic Education -UBE Policy, since inception had envisioned the concept of universality which aptly depicts compulsory, free and all-inclusiveness, is not performing to expectations. It was envisaged that there should be non-exclusion circumstances, even as enrolment soared, over two decades ago. However, there were clear emerging indications

that learning outcomes in basic schools may not be qualitative enough (Orji, 2022). Perhaps, the basic school sub-systems were either not well, equipped, staffed or organized in such a way that children can be helped to learn, this is very worrisome. While it is worrisome that greater percentage of those in the public basic schools may not be receiving qualitative basic education (Orji, 2021), it is much worrisome that about 20 million others were excluded from formal education system, thereby indicating the possibilities of some avoidable consequences of having about 20 million school-age children out side the school system (UNICEF 2022). This scenario then necessitates a search for an evidence-based and actionable policy initiative. This may help to ensure that the ideals and policy objectives of basic education programme and the attainment of the global development agenda with particular reference to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4) be not imperilled (Obanya, 2000; FRN-NPE, 2014; Shehu, 2018). The Human Capital Index (HCI) an average score of about 0.56 indicating that age 18 a child born today will only be 56% as productive as they ought to be. This level of productivity is anchored on the fact that a child would be under benchmark of complete education and full health, World Bank (2019).

Individual child's development and future livelihood and national development as well may be affected if such learning crises remain persistent. Non-participation in basic education is a precursor to poor human capital formation crisis and is recognised, as possible means of that may undermine sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction effort, World Bank, (2019). These informed the need for awareness on the factors that drive exclusion from basic education, with particular emphasis on factors that most exacerbate the OOSC phenomenon. This the

starting point in curtailing the future costs of present inaction.

The present observed low HCI score arising from learning crisis occasioned by poor learning and may further exacerbated by poor participation in basic schooling process with the resultant increasing number of children outside the formal schooling system. All these may be sustaining a vicious circle of poverty, as at present in Nigeria, a widening gap between the poor and the rich, Kraay, (2018). It is possible that the problem of OOSC may entrench social and economic structural inequalities responsible for or manifesting in form of widening gaps between the poor and rich, D'Souza, Gatti, & Kraay. (2019). The purpose of having a formal educational privilege is for a better livelihood which is not becoming a reality among many in developing world and particularly Nigeria where multi-dimensional poverty has increased become an issue of concern to all stakeholders (Singh & Mukherjee, 2018; NBS-MICS 2021).

The need to get children into former learning environment can not be overstressed. The issue of school age children exposed to basic education programme were found to become better citizens, less prone to juvenile delinquencies and crime, (Akinbote, Oduolowu, & Lawai, 2001; August, 2012; Tarallo, 2019). It is also reported that those who had basic schooling were more likely to earn more wages, pay more taxes, and were found to be less dependent on government for other gratuitous programmes, supportive remedial academic and non-academic schemes, (European Commission 1997). The challenges of having children out of schools would not have escalated if at the time formal education was introduced the direct involvement of governments in ensuring that no child would be left behind (Fsnfunwa 1974; Babalola, 2010; Shekarau, 2014;). This study

therefore focused on current challenge in Nigeria can be traced to the poor acceptance of the formal schooling process particularly in northern part of the country in the colonial era and this had resulted in many consequential effects present day Nigeria, (Fafunwa 1974; Danjibo, 2011; UNICEF 2022).

2. Statement of the Problem

Retaining school age children in the formal school system constituted a challenge to formal education system, thus constituting an impediment to the expected achievement of the global developmental agenda/goals, particularly, tagged (SDGs 4). While the menace is reducing in the southern part of the country there is a palpable phenomenal surge in recent times, in the number of children not presently in school. Recent estimates show that the OOSC is real and the manifestation of the phenomenon are appearing to be a problem in north Nigeria, though, there are wide regional discrepancies; with a clear geographical and some instances gender disparities alongside regional lines too.

The issues at stake specifically involved complete absence of children at the formal school settings. Though governments have shown commitment and willingness to adopt intervention through UBE programmes that addressed the challenges. The interventions and efforts not withstanding, emerging indications from the National Bureau of Statistics NBS- Multiple Indicators Clusters Survey, (MICS-2021) had shown incidences of OOSC which decreased in some instances, as in the case of south eastern Nigeria, where the percentage of OOSC, according to MICS (2016), was (11.3%) but had decreased 9.1% in MICS (2021). There was a regional decline, however, on state-by-state consideration Anambra (6.6%) and Abia (6.6%) states, collectively, had the lowest rate while

Ebonyi State had the highest rate (21.4%) in 2016; however, in 2021, the rate had reduced further in Abia to (2.9%) and even a greater reduction in Ebonyi (3.5%) but the rate had rather worsened in Anambra (21.3%) according to NBS- (MICS 2016 & 2021). The incidences of reduction as in Ebonyi, and worsening cases of OOSC, in many northern states particularly, Kano State and some others in the south as observed in Oyo State, necessitated an empirical investigation into the phenomenon. Again, the challenge of sustainability of the observed reductions in incidences of OOSC in some states generated genuine concern and informed this study.

There are possibilities of negative consequences that are associated with having school age children remaining out of school, do not portend good for the individuals and the economy. It was the present situation that may result in future meagre jobs, more so, there could be other level of existential challenges experienced by the victims on gender-basis of flawed system during their lifetime, (Tarallo, 2019). Above all, individual progress, national development, may be affected. Consequently, the need for an inclusive and functional education system remained a necessity.

Stemming from the above, the prime objective of the study was to enable a proper understanding on the phenomenal exclusion of children from formal schooling vis-à-vis the stakeholders perspectives to this phenomenon. The specific objective was, to; ascertain the stakeholders' level of awareness on the challenges of children's exclusion from basic schooling.

1.1 Research Question

There was a lone research question raised as considered pertinent and guided the study:

i). What is the level of awareness among stakeholders on the challenges of children's exclusion from basic schooling; in Nigeria?

2. Theoretical review

Within the ambit of theoretical considerations for the study two theoretical perspectives were considered necessary for the study as discussed further below:

2.1 Social Exclusion Theory

In the contemporary social policy debates in OECD countries, the issues involved revolve around more evidential and existential issues. There were considerable debates about the detailed definition of the term which makes the concept somewhat confusing (Coleman, 1990). So, some of the vital understanding and possible insight into the concept may be lost to the extent that the whole idea about social exclusion may not continue to resonate with some aspect of present-day social and societal considerations. The exclusion of school age children from formal school systems in Nigeria may not actually fall under such ambiguous conceptualisation problems as the situation of OOSC is herein specifically concerned with the fact that the unschooled child, being wrongfully excluded. His livelihood and capacity to socially interact in the future was by a situation that bequeathed him with the 'inability to participate effectively in economic, social, and cultural life in the society. This situation further creates some characteristics, alienation and distance from mainstream society and future employment and livelihood may be affected in the long run. (Akinbote, Oduolowu & Lawai, 2001; Adamu, 2003; UNICEF 2014; Shehu 2018; Aliyu & Yahaya 2019). While the problem of exclusion may ultimately lead to unemployment, poverty askew livelihoods, it not about the individuals or the household in this

circumstance. It is about the exclusions that results socially disequilibrium. In this particular instance it is about the circumscribed individual development. The relationship that exists between the excluded individuals whatever role that polity and the society had played to maintain the unfavourable status quo. This complex web of imperceptible but extent relationship has been interrogated but through the various manifestations of the dynamics (magnitude and direction of the very questionable relationship) demands proper interrogation.

The intellectual debate about the exclusion processes and the seemingly aggravating factors that could possibly stand as barriers is on-going. The factors that incentivised the very disability of a school age child from accessing basic education could be well situated through proper interrogation too. In the latter case, it could very well be appreciated to prove a point that naturally and socially occurring barriers; by the fact that there are some physical or mental disability can generate a powerful barrier to the ability to interact with society. While it is certain that the state is saddled with responsibility or statutory obligations towards the very reduction or even an outright removal of the surmountable but existential barriers to schooling. However, when the exclusion is not naturally occurring (among non-disabled school age children) it is appropriately termed socially inclined barriers thus reducing school age child's capacity to linkup the society at large through formal education.

Therefore, the core of the problem being investigated is that many parents as a cultural antecedent reasons have rather enrolled their children and wards in Qur'anic schools, than in the formal schooling setting. Unfortunately, the effort towards integration of basic education curriculum to qur'anic education system is not yielding the

desired result, making the qur'anic school attendees are not officially in the formal education sense of the word. Other schools and schooling related factors such as distance of school location among many others could deter children from getting enrolled in schools. The exclusion of children in the formal education system is real in Nigeria according to (UNICEF 2014; Shehu 2018).

Being that some school age persons are inadvertently excluded from basic education and their exclusion is being negatively affected by some identifiable exclusion factors that may be gender related, stand out also the casual factors too for the out-of-school children phenomenon, (Singh, & Mukherjee, 2018; Tarallo, 2019). And to properly situate the crisis that may be precipitated by poor participation, these factors militating against educational participation, needed to be investigated. The profiles of excluded children alongside those factors had related the problem to inability of government to tackle socio-cultural issues of almajiri (informal qur'anic learning system) reckoned among the major contributing factors. Addressing, the problem associated with this kind of informal education is quite palpable and required political-will of the political office holders, (UNICEF 2014; Shehu 2018). The study essentially sought to unravel the level of awareness on universal basic education policy and how these level of awareness as perceived by qur'anic school facilitators may have aided the integration of Western type of basic education into the traditional qur'anic learning. It was envisaged that successful integration process could lead to a reduction in out of school children phenomenon in Nigeria which was intended to be actualized through a pragmatic fusion of the basic and qur'anic education curriculum such that the process will in due course engender increased participation in formal schooling.

Obviously, reduction in children's participation in basic education is replete with diverse implication that bothers on insecurity and societal cohesion. Hence, ascertaining the how awareness among segment of the critical stakeholders may be impacting on the prevalence of OOSC is needful as it offers the empirical basis for a renewed and refocused interventions in the basic education programme, in Nigeria.

3. Methodology

A survey research design was adopted for the study. The respondents were sourced through a multistage sampling procedure. At the first stage, the selection of the state was purpose driven; hence purposive sampling of Kano State, and at the second stage, the LGAs within Kano metropolis were purposively selected too, at the third stage four Local Education Authorities -LEAs namely Taurani, Fegge, Nasarawa and Kano Municipal Council were purposively selected too. Further, a structured questionnaire was administered to 30 facilitators of qur'anic schools who were selected from each of the 4 LEAs in Kano metropolis amounting to 120 facilitators who served as respondents that were sampled.

4. Results of the study

Table 1: Respondents Age by Categories

Age Categories	Frequency	Percent
Less than 35 years	22	19.1
35-60 years	35	30.4
61 years and above	58	50.4
Total	115	100.0

The respondents who were also the facilitators of the Qur'anic schools were largely those who were

61 years and above with a frequency count 58 (50.4%) followed by respondents who were between 35-60 years, totalling 35(30.4%) and those who were less than 35 years which accounted for by 22 respondents (19.1%). Specifically, the youthful and energetic population, were not very much involved in the facilitation of these Qur'anic schools.

The preponderance of aged persons, 61 years and above with a frequency count 58 (50.4%), as facilitators should be addressed. There is need to attract young persons who are exposed to, and grounded in, the nuisance of modernity and latest global trends. Certainly, these should be without compromise of religious values and moral virtues. Such young persons need to be recruited as facilitators at the qur'anic centres.

The present situation, those who were less than 35 years which accounted for by 22 respondents were 19.1% while those above 35 accounted for 80.9%. This finding corroborated the emphasis of some authors (Fafunwa 1974; Danjibo, 2011; UNICEF 2022) who had opined that the challenges and related issues in education.

Nigeria can be traced to the poor acceptance of the formal schooling process particularly in northern part of the country since colonial era and this had resulted in many consequential effects in present day Nigeria.

The challenges of children being excluded from basic education is not necessarily about what the basic education policy desired but a conflict of interest on how to marry the western type of education and the much-cherished qur'anic knowledge in the study area.

Ascertaining the level of awareness of stakeholders on the challenges of children's exclusion from basic schooling.

Table 2: Stakeholders' Vis-à-vis the OOSC Phenomenon

	Items on awareness & OOSC Phenomenon	VHE	HE	LE	VLE*
1	Low awareness among the populace of the contribution of formal education to children's moral and academic development, thus leads to OOSC phenomenon	35 (30.4%)	70 (60.9%)	8 (7.0%)	2 (1.6%)
2	Lack of understanding on how the option of Quranic education only could aids a child's exclusion from basic school thus increasing the OOSC phenomenon	60 (52.2%)	38 (33.3%)	12 (10.2%)	5 (4.3%)
3	Poor acceptance of the basic education policy and western education for total child development, leads to increased OOSC phenomenon	40 (34.8%)	65 (56.5%)	7 (6.1%)	3 (2.6%)
4	The worldview and aspiration of parents to have children with strong religious disposition and other related development, can lead to OOSC phenomenon	7 (6.1%)	18 (15.7%)	28 (24.3%)	62 (53.9%)
	In this age of modernity, emergent new trends in life as a contribution from formal education could affect children's religious and moral development	70 (60.9%)	35 (30.4%)	2 (1.6%)	8 (7.0%)

*VHE: very high extent; HE: high extent; LE: low extent; VLE: very low extent

In fulfilling the specific objective; the stakeholders' perspectives were obtained which showed that on the item on the low awareness among the populace of the contribution of formal education to children's moral and academic development, thus leads to OOSC phenomenon had a frequency count of 35 (30.4%) for very high extent and 70 (60.9%) for high extent. Again, lack of understanding on how the option of Quranic education only could aids a child's exclusion from basic school thus increasing the OOSC phenomenon had a frequency count of 40 (34.8%) for very high extent frequency count of 65 (56.5%) for high extent. The issue of poor acceptance of the basic education policy and western education for total child development, as a precursor of OOSC phenomenon had the following very high extent and high extent frequency counts and percentages respectively 40 (34.8%) and 65 (56.5%). While the worldview and aspiration of parents to have children with strong religious disposition and other

related development, can lead to OOSC phenomenon to a low extent (24.3%) 62 and very I Finally, and significantly too, respondents acknowledged that in this age of modernity, emergent new trends in life as a contribution from formal education could affect children's religious and moral development to a high extent 70 (60.9%) and very high extent 35 (30.4%). This last item and response indeed corroborated the highlighted findings of Fafunwa 1974; Danjibo, 2011; UNICEF 2022). As it may possible that the older generation above 35 years old being about 80.9% had maintained the traditional hesitance towards modernity, and the emergent new trends in life as a contribution from formal education with the fear that such could affect children's religious and overall low extent (53.9%).

Table 3: Type of Education most Desirable for Children

Desirable Education	Frequency	Percent
a) Quranic school integrated with UBE curriculum	56	48.7

b) Western type, integrated with Quranic education	36	31.3
c) Quranic without any interface with western education	23	20.0
Total	115	100.0

Still on stakeholders' level of awareness vis-à-vis the OOSC phenomenon, respondents who affirm that the type of education most desirable for children could be Quranic school integrated with UBE curriculum had a frequency count of 56 (48.7%). This was closely followed by respondents' who were of the view that it should rather be Western type of education integrated with Quranic education, frequency count 36 (31.3%). Finally, some other respondents, who were as much as 23 (20.0%) had held on to the opinion that Quranic education should suffice as the form education given to children without further interface with western education.

The analyses carried out in attempt to ascertain the level of awareness of stakeholders on the consequences of a children's exclusion from schooling; the educational level of the facilitators of the qur'anic schools could affect the effort and process of integration UBE programmes into the qur'anic schools thus exacerbating the exclusion of children from the formal education worsening OOSC phenomenon. Though many of the facilitators and government officials were aware of the challenges of having school age children out of school. However, there is general low awareness among the populace of the contribution of formal education to children's moral and academic development, thus leads to OOSC phenomenon. Again, the lack of understanding on how the option of Quranic education only could aid a child's exclusion from basic school thus increasing the OOSC phenomenon, is worthy of proper attention.

Added to that is the poor acceptance of the poor policy as being capable of supporting qur'anic and western education for total child development, all these were found to be precursor to OOSC phenomenon.

5. Conclusion

The study was essentially to ascertain the level of awareness on universal basic education policy and how these level of awareness as perceived by qur'anic school facilitators may have aided the integration of Western type of basic education into the traditional qur'anic learning. It was envisaged that success of the integration process will help to curb the out of school children phenomenon in Nigeria of which it was found that awareness was high but did not translate to increased participation in formal schooling.

5.1 Recommendations

From the findings it is hereby recommended that:

- i. The preponderance of aged persons as facilitators should be addressed. There is need to attract young people who are exposed to, and grounded in the nuance of modernity and will not compromise Islamic religious values;
- ii. Facilitations and the participation of school age children in qur'anic learning centres should be standardized to enhance a seamless incorporation basic education curriculum side-by-side with qur'anic learning;
- iii. The classes in the qur'anic learning centres should be regularised in line with basic education policy and made to be more goal oriented towards an all-inclusive basic education without any child left behind;

- iv. Enlightenment programmes for stakeholders (opinion and religious leaders) should not be trivialised, while goal-oriented awareness efforts among stakeholders should be intensified.

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