Need for Differential Interventions toward Addressing High Out Of School Children (OOSC) Rates in Nigeria

Johnbosco Emezie, U.
Department of Political Science and International Relations,
Istanbul Aydin University, Turkey

Abstract
The paper explores issues surrounding the high rates of out of school children (OOSC) in developing regions and within Nigeria, and analyses the challenges to expanding access of school-aged children to basic education in Nigeria in the context of the inequalities and differences in the conditions of education in Nigeria. Using qualitative method, it examined evidence from crucial literature on out of school children from studies and publications of organisations relevant to the out of school children challenge. The research began with a conceptual explanation of out of school children, and then made a foray into the condition of inequality in opportunities and access to schooling for children of different zones and states in Nigeria. It criticised the existing policies/strategies for reducing the OOSC burden, highlighted the need for case by case approach to solving challenges related to the OOSC problem in Nigeria, suggested particular policies that should match issues specific to different zones and states in the country and concluded that the pattern of addressing Nigeria's OOSC challenges as if they uniformly apply to every part of the country, is perhaps the most inhibiting factor towards eradicating the problem of out of school children in Nigeria. Recommendations where then made on possible ways of implementing differential policy interventions towards addressing high out of school children rates in Nigeria. The study recommended that Non-governmental organisations should be encouraged to support the efforts of government and international donor agencies.

Keywords: Differential interventions, high rates, school children

Introduction
Increasing access to schools for majority of the world's population has been a strong objective that recurs in various agenda and platform of global governance around human development for several decades. There is a consensus around the need to ensure a world where all people are imbued with basic numeracy and literacy skills, as well as fundamental skills and competencies necessary for improved living. This vision has driven important goals and programmes like the Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among others.

The gap between rhetoric and actionable policy is reflected in the phenomenon of out-of-school children. In 2018, 258.4 million children, adolescents and youth were out of school, representing one-sixth of the global population of this age group (UIS, 2019).

One of the most recent estimates for out-of-school children puts the number at 264 million children and youth who are excluded from education, 61 million of which are of primary school age, 62 million of lower secondary school age, and 141 million of upper secondary age. In the

midst of perceptible differences in the numbers of out-of-school children reported by governments and/or by different agencies owing to differences in ideological underpinnings, methodologies and data sources, available statistics suggest an acute need to address the challenge of widening access of a reasonable fraction of the world's population to education through policy (UNICEF, 2018, p.6).

The challenge of eradicating illiteracy and ignorance is most acute in Africa due to the continent's comparative traditional disadvantage in education and human development. Both colonial-era and post colonial policies have thus given considerable attention to education in all its ramifications and at all levels (Okonkwo, 2000). In recognition of the role of early education in laying a solid foundation for human development, lots of African countries have been working hard to improve children's access to basic education. However, despite well-thought-out actions and policies aimed at correcting the significant educational imbalance, it is estimated that "32.6 million children of primary-school age and 25.7 million adolescents are still not going to school in sub-Saharan Africa. More worrisomely, at over 10.5 million, Nigeria has the highest number of children out of school in the world" (Ezeugbor and Anozie, 2019) .

Though the number of children, adolescents and youth who are excluded from education fell steadily in the decade following 2000, UIS data show that this progress has basically stopped in recent years; the total number of out-of-school children and youth has declined by little more than 1 million per year since 2015.

The continuing incidence of illiteracy and ignorance, shown in the persistence of the OOSC phenomenon in Nigeria despite ambitious efforts to eradicate the problem, is an indictment of the existing policy measures for addressing the OOSC phenomenon in the country. As articulated by various analysts, most educational policies in the country's history leaves much to be desired especially in terms of their content, or the presence of political and or administrative will for their implementation (Anyaogu, 2016; Ezeugbor & Anozie, 2019). These developments strongly suggest a failure of the policy approach for widening access of majority of Nigeria's children of school-going age to education. There is thus a felt need to recalibrate the policy approach, mainly through championing a case-by-case approach to analysing the educational conditions of specific populations and localities, and applying solutions which respond to specific situations and conditions.

Concept of Out of School Children

The term "Out of School Children" measures the percentage of primary-school-age children who are not enrolled in primary or secondary school. In addition to this, children in the official primary age group that are still in pre-primary education are considered out of school.

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UNESCO-UIS, 2015) defined out-of-school children as "children of primary or lower secondary school age who are not enrolled in primary or secondary education," (p.21) including "a small number of children in pre-primary education and in non-formal education (NFE)" (p.21). Out-of-school children are also categorized into those who have never been to school, despite having the appropriate age to enroll, or those who dropped out for various reasons.

The major policy thrust that covers the OOSC issue is captured in the primary level of schooling, and by the provision for nomadic education in the country's foremost education policy. The National Policy on Education (NPE) defines primary education as education given to children between 6 and 12 years old, which aims to:

1. Inculcate permanent literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively;
2. Lay a solid basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking;
3. Promote patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity;
4. Instill social, moral norms and values in the child;
5. Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the changing environment; and
6. Provide opportunities for the child to develop life manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capability.

In the same vein, Nomadic education is seen as "the first six years of Basic Education provided to the children of the disadvantaged nomadic population in the country. The nomads are classified into three groups namely (1) the nomadic pastoralists (2) the migrant fisher folks (3) the migrant farmers." The goals of nomadic education are to:

a. Provide the nomads with relevant and functional basic education; and
b. Improve the survival skills of the nomads by providing them with knowledge and skills that will enable them raise their productivity and levels of income and also participate effectively in the nation's socioeconomic and political affairs (FRN, 2013).

Overview of Inequality in the Nigerian Basic Education Landscape

In spite of the high incidence of out of school children in Nigeria, it would be erroneous to regard the entire country as a monolith when analysing and proffering solutions to the out of school children menace in the country. Research and observation backed by reliable data reveal that there is a large degree of variation in the country's out of school children profile. Generally, comparisons by zone and state point to a country with two education scenarios. On the one hand are the southern zones and states where "almost all children enter formal school at some point, and those that are out of school, in the majority of cases, are dropouts." In contrast, in the northern zones and states on the other hand, "substantial percentages of primary and junior secondary-aged children are not in formal school (although a large proportion attends non-formal education Quranic schools) (UNICEF, 2012).

This division into two major education zones can however be deceptive when it hides subtle or substantial intra-zonal differences that require contingency policy approach. For instance, in spite of the existence of low out of school rates in the Southern part of Nigeria, the region also has its fair share of the problem of out of school children. The Nigerian Bureau of Statistics Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (2016/2017), informs that "Akwa Ibom State has the highest rate of out of school children in the South Southern part of the country with about 132, 617 children out of school and Edo State having the lowest rate of out of school children in Nigeria with 79,446 children out of school. In the South western part of Nigeria, Oyo State has the highest number of out of school children with over 400,000 students out of school. This data was collected by *StatiSense*, a renowned data consulting firm, relying on the figures put forward by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics. Lastly, Ebonyi is leading the ugly pack in the South East with over 151, 000 out of school children as at 2017.

Available statistics from the South East and South South zone show little in the way of gender inequality. In four of the five states in the South -South zone the Male Advantage indicator is actually negative, which means that girls are less likely to be out of school than boys. In fact, the differences are not very large, so in effect boys and girls have similar rates of school participation in this region. The document notes that this is another reminder of the importance of addressing issues of inequality on a zone by zone, or state by state basis, and it proves that the overall advantage for males in Nigeria is not uniform throughout the country (UNICEF, 2012, p.23).

Identification of differences in the out of school condition across states, zones and parts of a country have huge implications for policy, and failure to take this issue into cognizance might well be the missing link in Nigeria's efforts to expand access of school-age children and adolescents over the years. This is equally true of the out of school situation between countries and regions. According to..........

classification of out-of-school children by past and possible future school attendance yields important insights for policymakers. To be effective, policies must be tailored to address the different situations facing out-of-school children. If the majority of out-of-school children in a country attended but left school, interventions should focus on reducing the dropout rate. For children who are likely to attend in the future, the goal is to ensure earlier entry into the education system. The most challenging group of out-of-school children are those who are unlikely to ever attend school, often because of a perpetuating cycle linked to lack of access to education and poverty.

Similar conclusions can be drawn with respect to nomadic education in the country, which reflects efforts to force-fit outcomes form the programme along the lines of conventional schooling. A study of the outcome from nomadic education in the country by Federal Ministry of Education makes the following observations:

the conventional approaches such as the use of the orthodox school curriculum, permanent structures for schools, rigid formal school calendar and time schedules have failed to provide unhindered and equitable access to qualitative basic education for nomads and to boost literacy among them. The orthodox school curriculum is designed to suit the needs and experiences of the mainstream, permanently settled population. The curriculum derived from that background and its content draws from concepts, issues and illustrations that learners from there are familiar with and can relate to. Due consideration is not given to the peculiar circumstances and experiences of nomadic populations (FME, 2005, p.17).

It went ahead to articulate some of the differences between expectation and outcome which are itemized below for reasons of emphasis:
1. Learners from among the nomads have difficulty in understanding and relating. This makes learning content mostly incomprehensible.
2. The use of the orthodox curriculum therefore constituted a major disincentive to their participation in education.
3. Another impediment to the nomads' full participation in education using the conventional approach is the use of the rigid formal school calendar and time schedules. Learners are required to be in school at particular periods of the year and hours of the day. This rhythm has been carefully determined and established to suit the mainstream settled

population and does not give adequate consideration to the seasonal migrations and work rhythms of nomadic populations Federal Ministry of (Education 2005, p.17).

Thus, for the much-needed paradigm shift in the pattern of policy intervention towards combating the huge OOSC phenomenon in Nigeria to be achieved, "there is the need for flexibility in addressing problems related to out of school children, as the burden is not uniformly felt throughout the country." Analysis of the out of school situation in the country shows that certain factors like gender, wealth or family income level, and location (whether urban or rural) are strong predisposing factors for the out of school phenomenon. In most parts of the country, studies reveal that "boys fare substantially better in some states and zones; children in rural areas register lower rates of school attendance; and children from poorer homes are less likely to enter and finish school than children from wealthier homes, whereas in the South Eastern part of the country, there is no appreciable effect of gender, wealth and locational differences in access of school-age children to school (UNICEF, 2012).

Case for Differential Policy Interventions

Two levels of policy regimes control the design and implementation of policies for expanding access of school-age children to education: national level and global level. At the national level, there are governance systems and institutional settings for improvement of literacy. The National Policy on Education (2004) lays emphasis on Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education. There are Federal agencies that are responsible for formulation and implementation of adult and non-formal education policies. These include the Federal Ministry of Education, National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education, National Commission for Nomadic Education and the Universal Basic Education Commission (UNICEF & Action Plan, 2012).

The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education is responsible for the organisation, monitoring and assessment of the adult literacy practices in the country. The Commission adopted the decentralisation of its activities by the establishment of offices in the six geo-political zones of the country, the thirty-six States (including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja) and all the seven hundred and seventy-four local government areas (UNICEF and Action Plan, 2012).

At the global level, the World Bank, UNESCO, UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNDP all play notable roles in reducing the global OOSCE burden. The adoption of the six goals of Education for All (EFA) in Dakar brought a significant shift in the position of Nigeria on Adult and Non-Formal Education (UNICEF & Action Plan, 2012). The Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) was founded and launched in 2010. It aims to support governments to develop and apply innovative approaches to better estimate the number of children that are excluded from educational opportunities, identify who the children are, and to develop solutions to bring the children back to school (UNICEF, 2018).

A Critique of Existing Policies/Strategies for Reducing the OOSC Burden

Within a few decades of concerted action in the area of improving access to education for a majority of the world's children, considerable effort has gone into, and resources expended, for making education accessible and to create opportunities for schooling for all children and youth.

Remarkably, approaches to bring as many children as possible and young people into school have taken many forms, including grassroots lobbying for the importance of schooling, political declarations for universal access to education, introduction of school fees abolition initiatives, and/or pro-poor education financing frameworks, to mention a few." It can easily be seen that these are a sweep of strategies emanating from policies which address the OOSC menace as a problem with uniform features and challenges. That probably explains why, despite these efforts, too many children await the opportunity to access and participate in schooling (UNICEF, 2018).

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In a formative evaluation of the OOSCI carried out by UNICEF, fifty percent (20 of 40) of the countries that were reviewed in the study reported on governmental strategies and interventions that ensure universal access to basic education. The main strategies for making basic education accessible and equitable and of higher quality were quite conventional; (i) improving infrastructure and physical access to schooling facilities: (ii) developing institutional and individual capacities for education staff such as increasing the number of qualified teachers; (iii) providing school feeding programmes; and, (iv) increasing community participation in school governance (UNICEF, 2018, p.20).

Some of the barriers to reducing the out of school rates were found to be significant in some countries while being of little or no consequence in others. For instance, the review noted that safety and security is the largest barrier for staying away from school in Nigeria and the DRC, two populous conflict-affected countries with a large proportion of out-of-school children. Similar observations can be made for the barriers of personal physical characteristics, which affect individuals with disabilities in a very distinct and recognizable manner. Children from war-torn countries, or those from areas where the prevalence of serious diseases have created a sizeable population of people living with disabilities, must necessarily have greater need to surmount the challenges posed by disability to education. UNICEF (2018) correctly notes that for the latter profile of out-of-school children, it is important to have credible estimates to support advocacy, inclusivity and planning for children with disabilities. In the same vein, disparity in the prevalence of poverty, cultural inhibitions and geographical factors definitely impose unique challenges to specific areas battling with high out of school rates. It is therefore expected that the need for differential approaches to crafting policies and strategies towards combating the menace of high OOSC rates must take cognizance of the differences between zones within a country, and between countries.

The acknowledgement of differences in the OOSC predicaments between countries and regions prompted an OOSCI South Asia Regional Study published in 2015 which, beyond reviewing the interventions aimed at ensuring that children enrol at the right age and stay in school but also focused on identifying factors that made the selected interventions effective.

This is a major attempt at a contextualization of interventions that culminated in recommendations for way forward for the region linked to the recommendations of the South Asia OOSCI Regional Study. It was done with the hope of being used as a starting point for dialogue on potential interventions and areas for further research. The document however could not go ahead to advocate for policy measures that would reflect a customised approach to dealing with the OOSC challenge within and between countries and regions.

Interventions in the OOCC phenomenon, especially when carried out by international bodies like UNICEF and World Bank, are often targeted at reaching areas of critical need and greater demand. Such interventions that aim at increasing the gender balance in access to school, or fighting cultural inhibitions to schooling (like those associated with early marriage and male advantage), are often emphasised in the North of the country, where these issues are predominant (UNICEF, 2015). Other proactive measures which aim at integrating Western education into the already existing Quranic education system, as well as adapting nomadic education to the challenges of modern productive lifestyles in the modern society, are being advocated. Common with these new awakening is the advice that each state or locality models itself to a pattern which proves most effective (Federal Ministry of Education, 2005; Amadi, 2015).

MATCHING POLICY WITH PROBLEM: CASE-BASED SOLUTION TO THE OOSC CHALLENGE

Socio-cultural Barriers and Bottlenecks

S/N	BARRIER/CHALLENGE	STATES AFFECTED MOST	REGION MOST AFFECTED	STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS
1	Too young to attend school	Lagos, Rivers, Edo, and states in the South East and South-South	South East, South West and South South	Lowering the primary school entry age for these areas
2	Early Marriage	Kano, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, Borno, Adamawa, etc	North East, North West and North Central	Ban on the withdrawal of girls from school for marriage purposes
3	Western education perceived as incompatible with Islamic Education	Kano, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, Borno, Adamawa, etc	North East/North West and North Central Regions	Intensive Advocacy, Sensitization and Mobilization of Religious and Traditional Leaders;
5	Large Family size:	Kano, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, Borno,	North East/North West and North Central Regions	Ban on Early Marriage

		Adamawa, etc		
6	Lower status accorded the Girl-child in the family.	Kano, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Jigawa, Niger, Kaduna, etc	North East/North West and North Central Regions	Establishment and growth of Female Teachers Trainee Scholarship Scheme (FTTSS) in Rural Communities;
7	Children with special needs including **OVC**	Mainly Kano, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Jigawa, Niger, Kaduna, etc	North East/North West and North Central Regions	
	Economic Demand Side Barriers			
8	Poverty of the Family	Most states in Nigeria	Mostly in the North East, North West and North Central zones	Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT);/ Funds from Debt Relief Grant (DRG);
9	Residence or Location	Most states in the North of the country and in riverine areas	North East, North West and South South zones	the shift system; that is the movement of the school as they move their cattle in search of pasture
10	Child Labour	Most states in	North West, North East,	Special Intervention Fund for Almajiri

		the country	North Central, South East, South West and South South zones	Education from MDG/FGN/ the shift system; that is the movement of the school as they move their cattle in search of pasture
	Pursuit for material Wealth by Youth	Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Abia, Ebonyi, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Edo, Ogun, Lagos,	South East, South West, South South	Improved content and delivery of vocational education/ Revision and Introduction of more Relevant School Curricula;
11	Limited employment opportunities for school leavers	Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Abia, Ebonyi, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Edo, Ogun, Lagos,	South East, South West and South South	Improved content and delivery of vocational education/ Revision and Introduction of more Relevant School Curricula;
Supply Side Barriers				
12	Inadequate Implementation of Pre-primary articulation Policy to public Primary Schools;	Most stares in the country	All the zones in the country	Increased Quality Teacher output for Basic Education by Colleges of Education;
13	Shortage of Teachers and Caregivers at all levels of Basic Education Schools;	Kano, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Jigawa, Niger, Kaduna, etc	North East, North West and North Central zones	Free and Compulsory Basic Education in Nigeria;
14	Safety/Security of the children;	Borno, Yobe, Zamfara, Kaduna	North East and North West zones	Teaching of self-defence strategies in schools/use of military drones for reconnaissance
15	Incessant and prolonged	All states in	North West,	Teachers Capacity

	teachers' strike actions and low teacher Commitment	the country	North East, North Central, South East, South West and South South zones	Building;
16	Learner Unfriendly School Environment; (most pronounced is inadequate school infrastructure)	Most states in the country	North West, North East, North Central, South East, South West and South South zones	Establishment of Basic Education Intervention Fund in UBEC
17	Lack of Provision for the Education of special needs learners in Basic education;	Most states in the country	North West, North East, North Central, South East, South West and South South zones	Social Protection Measures for Children (Child Right Act 2003)
18	Non-availability of schools in some communities	Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Edo, Ogun, Kano, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Jigawa, Niger, Kaduna	North West, North East, North Central, South West and South South zones	Integration of Core subjects into Quranic Education in northern states/ Funds from IDPs.
Politics and Governance				
19	Weak or Non-existent Social Protection of Vulnerable Children	Most states in the country	All the zones in the country	Application of the Principles of Child Friendly School (CFS)/ Social Protection Measures for Children (Child Right Act 2003)
20	Politicization of Basic	Most states in	All the zones	Establishment of

	Education;	the country	in the country	functional School Based Management Committees in Basic Education Schools
21	Weak School level Governance;	Most states in the country	All the zones in the country	Improved Quality Assurance in Basic Education
22	Poor Financing of Education in Nigeria.	Most states in the country	All the zones in the country	State/LGA Education Sector Plan and Operational Plan (SESP-SESOP; LESP/LESOP)/ Loans from the World Bank

Conclusion

Analysis of out of school data within and between countries show that many areas have little or no similarity with one another in terms of the challenges they face and the things they are lacking in. In spite of this variability in the contributory factors for the out of school phenomenon, there has been a tendency towards the use of policy measures which prescribe solutions across board. The variation in disparities between states within the same zone has important implications for policy. It seriously highlights the limitations of "one size fits all" prescriptions." For example, according to UNICEF (2012) "in the North Central zone the issue of gender equity is very relevant in Niger and (to a lesser extent) Kwara and Nasarawa, but in the other states boys and girls fare about equal, and girls are even more likely to be in school in Plateau." The document very insightfully notes that this does not mean that gender equity is not a problem in Nigeria. Rather, it suggests "that policies need to be tailored to local conditions" (UNICEF, 2012, p.19).

The Out of School Children Initiative and other policies targeted, in whole or in parts, to eliminating the scourge of illiteracy and innumeracy which informed the Millennium Development Goals, Education for All, Nomadic Education, Universal Primary Education, and Universal Basic Education, etc, have been shown to produce mixed results at best, and colossal failures at worse. This review of the OOSC phenomenon in Nigeria suggests that these policies and programmes would produce greater positive results if efficient and effective use of time and resources are made by more targeted approach to designing and implementing OOSC policies.

Recommendations

The above table on matching policy with the exact location and features of OOSC issues is comprehensive in its articulation of the proper policy solution to the problem. The main recommendations of this study can therefore be sifted by a glance at the table in question. However, beyond pursuing the route of differential policy measures for specific OOSC menace which is the crux of this study, there is need to effectively implement most of the extant measures on how to raise the literacy and numeracy rates in the country, especially by carrying out basic education beyond the primary school age, in order to mop up the sizeable population of

those who could not be captured by the conventional school system at that age. To this end, the following recommendations as articulated by Nigeria and Action Plan International (2012):

1. Increasing the catchment age for "Universal Basic Education" to include early childhood care and education, the nine years of formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education, skills acquisition programmes and the education of special groups such as nomads and migrants, girl-child and women, almajiri, street children and disabled groups.
2. Ensuring that coordination and supervision of literacy classes are the sole responsibility of the local adult education officers, supervisors and literacy instructors who understand the challenges and solution to problems in their areas far better than officers in higher levels of educational administration.
3. The minimum number of literacy classes expected in any local government should be made flexible, to respond to unique needs.
4. In addition, non-governmental organisations should be encouraged to support the efforts of government and international donor agencies.
5. Examinations are conducted on the basic learning competencies, reading, writing and numeracy.
6. The agencies that run different adult and non-formal education programmes like Adult Basic Literacy Programme, Post Literacy Programme, Women Adult Education Programme, Distance Education Programme, Sandwich Programme, and Nomadic Education Programme, should be empowered for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

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