Predisposing Factors to Life on the Streets: the Case of Out-Of-School/Street Children in Nigeria. Implications for Non-Formal Education

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Abstract

Education is the key to national development and no development can take place without first developing the citizenry of the country, out-of-school/street children inclusive. The phenomenon of out-of-school/street children in Nigeria has not abated despite the concerned efforts of international agencies and governments to combat the menace. This paper focuses on the precipitating factors to life on the streets with a view to analyzing how non-formal education can be implemented to meet the educational, economic and cultural needs of out-of-school/street children in Nigeria. The study confirms parental poverty, bad state of Nigerian economy, declining interest in schooling, gender preference, migration, unsuitable family environment, child abuse and neglect as major predisposing factors to life on the streets. As the lifestyles of out-of-school/street children are antithetical to the goings on in formal education system, this paper recommends the use of non-formal education which activities can be located close to the life and work of the clientele as the best option for meeting the educational needs of out-of-school/street children. It is believed that this will not only encourage them to learn better and behave well, it will further encourage the participation of others in difficult circumstances to join the non-formal education programmes to be sponsored by government.

Key words: Predisposing factors, out-of-school/street children, non-formal education

1. Introduction

The concept of out-of-school/street children is used to explain children and youths that dropped out from formal school system and retire to life on the streets. They are supposed to be in school but as a result of one reason or the other stay out/away from the school system. UNESCO (2005) highlighted the following individuals as people that fall within this group: street hawkers of all sorts and refugee youths, prisoners, out-of-school girls and boys, Almajiris found especially in the northern parts of Nigeria, street beggars, children at the Qu'ranic schools, children with special needs (physically challenged group), etc. These highly mobile children sometimes extend their roaming the major streets in cities and markets to car parks, recreation centres, entertainment sports and so on. As they roam about, many hawk in foodstuffs such as pure water, galla peppered meat, sweets, apples, soft drinks including zobo drinks, bitter kola among others. According to Akpama and Inaja (2006:216), in order to survive, "these victims of exclusion subsist on scavenging, begging, hawking, prostitution or theft" as their main source of income.

Ebigbo (1986) identified two categories of street children namely: children on the street and children of the street. According to Ebigbo, children on the street go there to trade or hawk their goods and still rendering menial services to some residents in such streets for a morsel of food and thereafter return to their homes or families at night. They make up the largest group. On the other hand, children of the street have the street as their home where they eat, sleep, play and make friends; they never go back to their parents; in most cases they are abandoned or driven away by poverty in their family or by their family, while in other case they themselves have decided to leave for good. Chukwuma and Aniekwe (2011), point out that this pitiable situation of out-of-school/street children alert the interest and attract the attention of many Non-Governmental and international organizations which get involved in the rehabilitation, rescuing and returning of street children. Such NGOs include the Child Life-Line, Child Project Galilee Foundation, Kingi Kids and the Samaritans. For example, the Child-Life-Line (CLL), a voluntary charitable organization works in Lagos for the care, education and rehabilitation of out-of-school/street children (UNESCO, 2005). According to Chukwuma and Aniekwe (2011), presently the UBE seems unworkable in the country for it has not been able to stop the high rate of drop-outs in many parts of the country. UNESCO (2007) corroborates this observation when it emphatically stated that the street children phenomenon in Nigeria is gradually assuming alarming proportion, particularly in urban areas.

Current statistics of street children or specifically those out of school are not readily available unlike enrolment figures for the in-school children. However, relying on statistics compiled from world bodies like

Oxfan Uk, UNFPA and Action Aid as reported in Falase (2006:236) an insight into the situation in sub-Saharan Africa, can be revealing. (See Table 1 below).

Table 1: Children Out of School in Sub-Saharan Africa – (In Millions)

Nigeria	7.0
Ethiopia	7.0
Sudan	3.9
DRC	3.5
Kenya	2.4
Ghana	1.5
Mozambique	1.5
Burkina Faso	1.3
Tanzania	1.2
Niger	1.2
South Africa	1.1
Mali	1.0
Cote D'Ivoire	1.0
Total	**33.6 million**

Source: Country Data for World Education Forum. In Falase, (2006)

One pertinent question is: where are those children that are out of school? In fact, the answer is that many of them are on the streets of their various countries and have constituted what Falase (2006) calls "street children phenomenon". For a country like Nigeria which is desirous of mobilizing all her citizens/human resources for national development, relevant educational provisions must be extended to out-of-school/street children in order to salvage them with their intent to remain out-of-school. Until this is done, Nigeria cannot claim to be supporting its international commitment at the 1990 Jomtien Conference on Education for All (EFA). In view of this, the non-formal education option is considered as a virile strategy for providing educational opportunity for out-of-school/street children in Nigeria.

2.Predisposing Factors to Life on the Streets

As the saying goes, there is no effect without a cause and vice versa. By this the author is alluding that if the economy of the nation has been well managed and people's economic, social cultural and educational needs met, there would have been little or no need for children to take to the streets. Okuwa (2008) admitted that although rich in natural resources, Nigerian has experienced rapid population growth and uneven economic development, resulting mainly in increasing poverty rate that has outpaced the Nigerian government's ability to provide adequate health, education and social services. Corroborating the above view, Akinpelu (2008) further explained that more than half of the Nigerian population cannot afford three (3) square meals a day, do not have access to quality healthcare, shelter, education and transportation, and suffer all the derivations and indignities that poverty brings on the poor.

The above horrible situation and its effects on children who leave poor conditions in the home to live on the streets is reflected in a study carried out by the University Village Association (UNIVA) in 1977 at Ibadan which showed that most of the children engaged in street trading were pushed to it by poverty. (See Table 11 below, extracted from Adebola (2006:40) which shows what led the street children to the situation they found themselves.

Table II: Reasons for taking up Life on the Streets

Factor	Frequency	%	Rank Order
Financial problem	193	77.2	1st
Death of parents	54	21.6	2nd
Personal decision	3	1.2	3rd
Total	**250**	**100.0**	

Source: Adebola (2006)

Those who went into street trading because of death of parents did so for lack of financial support. In fact most of the children support their poor parents with what they realize from what they do.

3. Bad State of Nigerian Economy (Unemployment Syndrome)

Poverty apart, unemployment problem in Nigeria continues to escalate at an alarming rate. The inability of the government to generate employment opportunities that can absolve the employable population of school learners worsens the situation. For instance, at the graduate level, thousands of Nigerian University graduates roam the streets in search of jobs which are hardly available. If such is the situation with university graduates, there is no hope for secondary school leavers who possess no entrepreneurial or vocational skills. This situation, according to Adebola (2006) has led to declining interest in school and has also adversely affected the priorities of the citizens. In the 1970s and 80s, for example, parents were borrowing money to send their children to school due to the hope that after schooling comes employment of the children who would in turn reward their parents. Today, this hope is lost because schooling is no longer a guarantee for employment. Even those who are already on monthly salaries cannot conveniently feed their families with their meager earnings in the face of high inflation in the country. As a result, most parents and even children themselves prefer to be apprenticed to a vocation or trade or go into buying and selling business to embarking on expensive schooling which has no guarantee of employment at the end.

4. Unstable Family Environment

Some children whose parents are consistently entrapped by marital discords are bound to be physically and emotionally distressed. Under this situation some of the basic needs of those children may be neglected hence they may resort to street life. Maduewesi (1990) listed other family circumstances to include loss of parent, disagreement within a polygamous setting, remarriage, divorce, separation or violence in the family as factors which could compel children to run to the streets. In relation to social change as a facilitator of the problem of street children, Maduewesi (1990) asserts that with the demands of modern living, it has become almost impossible for parents to effectively supervise their children. According to him, this ugly trend tends to expose children to the influence of significant others whose lifestyles could eventually predispose such children to street life.

5. Defective School System

Ngwu (2003) aptly describes the school-oriented or elitist education which has been in vogue in Nigeria as having disruptive effects on cultural values and attitudes, which impede development in many third world countries. The education system is often most alienated from the needs of the learners especially as not being capable of providing them skills that can enable them live sustainable life beyond school years. Accordingly, some children have found the Nigeria formal education system unstimulating, unchallenging and unenjoyable with inadequate infrastructural facilities and poorly trained and unqualified teachers whose teaching styles are not learner-centered. It is not surprising therefore that some children drop out of such unfriendly school environment at the least provocation and subsequently run to the streets to join their likes.

6 .Gender Preference:
In Nigeria some cultures prefer boys to girls when it is a matter of who goes to school. Such cultures believe that no matter how highly a girl is educated, she would end up in her husband's kitchen. Instances abound where girls are withdrawn from school to enable the male children continue schooling. Those girls are thereafter engaged in street hawking or engaged as house-helps to generate income for the family and thus help train the male children who, it is hoped, would replace the father when the later passes away.

7. Migration: A trend in out-of-school/street children phenomenon in Nigeria is the influx of migrants and refugees from neighbouring countries of Ghana, Republic of Benin, Togo, Niger Republic and Chad, to mention but a few. Some whole families from these countries are known to have migrated to Nigeria away from the difficult economic conditions of their countries only to worsen the ailing economy of the host country, Nigeria. It is not clear whether or not their children are included in the estimate for the UBE programme and since the UBE is not yet compulsory, they are unlikely to release their children to register in the formal school. Rather, according to Oyedeji (1980) they use their children to beg for alms to keep body and soul together. The appearance of most of those children is dirty, dressed in tattered oily clothes and looking unhealthy. According to Adebola (2006) those street children are extremely vulnerable to physical and emotional trauma; and among the vulnerable adolescent girls, it may result in sexual exploitation and exposure to a wide variety of highly infectious diseases. Any non-formal education arrangement by government agencies and NGOs must of necessity include the migrant street children whose number has remained on the increase since the last two decades.

8. Meeting the Educational Needs of Out-of-School/Street Children

The preceding component of this discourse focused on the predisposing factors which enhance the problems of street life. Extant evidence abound to buttress the assertion that life on the streets saps the energy of children and impedes the demands for academic excellence such as concentration and task performance in a formal setting. Since attempts to coerce out-of-school/street children to enroll in formal education system in various geo-political zones or states in Nigeria is not likely to produce universal results and is most likely to remain a mission impossible, we are forced to seek alternative ways of meeting their educational, economic and social needs as well as the needs of others in difficult circumstances. These needs can be met using non-formal education.

9. Non-Formal Education (NFE)

Non-formal education is seen as an alternative access to education for those who have missed the formal school system or dropped out of it. The UNESCO General Conference of 1976 described Non-Formal education as an overall scheme aimed at both restructuring the existing education system and at developing the entire educational potential outside the educational system. According to Oyedeji (1980), the phrase (NFE) is meant to cover all education outside the formal school system, but in practice some of the education outside the school system is formal in methodology and this duplicates the formal school system, such as the primary school equivalency or the General Certificate of Education evening classes.

Because of the conflict between the theory and practice of non-formal education, attempts have been made to give it more accurate interpretation. One of such attempt is by Ngwu (2003:18) who, after synthesizing the view points of other scholars about non-formal education avers that: Non-formal education is any planned and consciously organized general education and/or training activity outside the formal school in a particular society for illiterates, school leavers, drop-outs or adults as individuals or in groups for the purpose of raising their consciousness of their social situation and their standard of living, improving their individual or collective efficiency in their jobs or preparing them for self-employment, wage employment or further training within the existing education/learning system. It is clear from the foregoing that non-formal education programmes are designed to meet the specific needs of those victims of exclusion in their varied social settings.

Bown (1978:4-5) observed that non-formal education is important "because of the immediate practical utility of the learning it produces … and it is of value only to the degree it can help the individual … young or old, male or female … make practical changes in himself, his daily life, and his environment in accord with his own goals and wishes. With regards to what non-formal education is capable of offering, Thompson (1981:220) highlighted its characteristics to include:

(i)   Non-formal education is essentially practical, a process of learning by doing.

(ii)   Non-formal education may be direct learning experience adopting whatever methodology may be suited to the client as he/she is, whether literate or not.

(iii)   Non-formal education processes are flexible and will normally be available on a part-time or spare-time basis as and when the clientele is available, as far as often as may be required or possible.

(iv)   Many non-formal education activities may be located close to the life and work of the clientele.

It should be emphasized that in non-formal education, it is possible to bring three major factors together i.e. skills acquisition, mobilization and practice or engagement into close relationship; for the skills learned could be immediately applicable in the daily and circumstances of the client. A critical examination of the content,

characteristics and modus operandi of non-formal education approach shows that it lends itself easily as one of the major strategies to stem the ugly trend of out-of-school/street children whose lifestyles impede their effective participation in formal education setting.

10. Implications for Non-Formal Education

Major concentration of out-of-school/street children in Nigeria has gone beyond major streets of major cities such as Port Harcourt, Lagos, Benin, Calabar, Aba, Abuja, Kano, Kaduna, Ibadan etc. to market places in urban centers where hawking and begging of alms constitute their stock in trade. Government agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and interested international organizations need to carry out baseline surveys to determine the magnitude of the problem of out-of-school/street children for actions aimed at improving their lot. This should be followed by advocacy and mobilization strategies to reach and convince the out-of-school/street children on the need to improve their situations through learning and training in vocations of their choice. At the appropriate designated open spaces in the markets and besides major streets make-shift learning centres or mobile classrooms and workshops should be erected and equipped with training facilities. During registration, various categories among them such as the stark illiterates, the semi illiterates i.e. those who can speak and understand "pidgin" English, the drop-outs from both primary and junior secondary schools as well as those who possess some micro skills such as painting, dry-washing of clothes, floor and tile mopping, etc. should be identified and assigned to appropriate learning and training or retraining groups.

Group A – The stark and semi illiterates: This group needs the basic learning skills of reading, writing and computation of figures and numbers. Emphasis should also be laid on speech training in English language to enable them communicate easily with other people. Since this programme is a non-formal education, the learners, under well-trained and qualified facilitators, can be led to acquire basic literacy skill within some reasonable period to enable them proceed to the next level of study which could either be non-formal or formal basis up to post-literacy level. In addition, other life saving skills like personal hygiene/health education and environmental education should be taught as well.

Group B – Dropouts from primary and junior secondary schools: Those in this category require remedial and continuing education programmes to enable them remedy their educational deficiencies. Remedying such deficiencies will enable some of them to continue their education either non-formally or formally. It will also enable those who have technical aptitudes to advance in technical and vocational training to enable them obtain jobs at completion of training or open small scale businesses of their own and become employers of labour. In all cases, government should provide stipends for their upkeep among other learner support services.

Group C – Those with micro skills such as barbing, painting, sign writing, dry-cleaning or carpet washing: If those with micro skills are provided with opportunity for functional literacy which implies a combination of literacy skills with further training on the vocation they already possess. According to Imhabekhai (2009), the desire and ability to read, write and compute materials in the vocation will motivate the learners or trainees for better participation. To him, Imhabekhai (2009), the utility of the skills brings about functionality and progress in the vocation or trade which could foster permanent literacy. At completion of training or retraining as the case may be, the cost of which is borne by the governments concerned, the children should be encouraged morally and financially and efforts made to procure important and vital tools and equipment needed in their various vocations or trades before reintegration into their families. This is like what UNICEF did in 1997 by providing a Vocational Training Centre in some markets in Ibadan, Nigeria for children in Especially Difficult Circumstances (CEDC). The strategy was effective as there were positive changes in the lives of the children. At the end, majority of the children were reintegrated into their families having gone through a vocational training of their choices. It is equally expected to have similar effects on out-of-school/street children in other parts of the country.

11. Recommendations

1.   For poverty to be a major underlying predisposing factor of out-of-school/street children in Nigeria, it is imperative for the government to improve the standard of living of the citizens by revamping the economy and by generating more job opportunities. If the socio-economic background of parents is improved, many would want their children to go to school rather than taking to street business, and child abuse and neglect which are fall outs of poverty of parents would be minimized.

2.   The on-going Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme Law of 2004 should be enforced to make it compulsory for children to remain in school and complete the nine (9) years basic education programme. This will tighten the loose knot through which children escape from school to the streets.

Parents who fail to send their children to school should be punished or imprisoned to serve as deterrent to other uncompromising parents or guardians.

3.   This study also perceives the need for Nigerian government to give a serious running battle to adult/parental illiteracy in the country. It is no exaggeration that without parental literacy, the UBE programme cannot be successful, at least the products who do not have a follow-up education cannot be permanently literate in an illiterate dominated environment. The recommendation is that adult literacy is better done through non-formal education since many adults resent the idea of being in a classroom situation. The effect of home background/parental education on progress and stability of children in school is a known fact. These recommendations, if implemented, will lead to accomplishment of governmental commitments to ensure universal access to education for all individuals, regardless of their nationality, age, physical condition, gender, circumstances and social status. This will also go a long way in checking the phenomenon of out-of-school/street children in Nigeria.

11 .Conclusion

The incidence of out-of-school/street children in Nigeria is on the increase. With the demands of modern style of living, it has become increasingly difficult for parents to effectively supervise their children who eventually are easily influenced by significant others whose lifestyles predispose such children to street life. However, the major predisposing factors of out-of-school/street children include parental poverty occasioned by bad state of Nigerian economy, loss of hope in formal education system which can no longer guarantee employment, family instability, migration, frustration, child abuse and neglect. In many instances, children and youth take to street life instead of remaining in unfriendly formal school environment or in unstable family environment as a way of the circumstances they find themselves. Since the lifestyles of out-of-school/street children do not conduse them to formal education, comprehensive and integrated non-formal/out-of-school education programmes at their various locale (major streets and markets) is implicated to enable Nigeria achieve the Education for ALL and the Millennium development goal of eradicating illiteracy by the year 2015.

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