

Strategies for Improving Educationally at-risk Children in Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme in Secondary Schools in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study investigated strategies for improving educationally at-risk children in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme in secondary schools in Ukwu West Local Government Area of Abia State Nigeria. The design for the study was a survey carried out ex-post facto. Three research questions guided the study with one null hypothesis. The population comprised of 1,220 Junior Secondary School Students and their 500 teachers. A stratified proportionate random sampling technique was used to generate a sample of 120 students and 50 teachers for proper representation. The instruments for data collection were questionnaire and interview Schedule structured by the researcher. The questionnaire was structured alongside four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) =4, Agree (A) =3, Disagree (DA) =2 and Strongly Disagree = 1 respectively. Mean rating and percentage were adopted in analyzing the data while Person Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) Statistic was used for reliability of the instrument realizing a reliability coefficient of 0.77 indicating the reliability of the instruments. Test re-test was carried out using the students and teachers outside the actual population proving its internal consistency. The findings showed that hawking, working as bus conductors and serving as maids and baby nurses among others were factors putting children educationally at-risk. Recommendations among others include that government at all levels should make adequate provision for the successful funding, implementation and sustaining of UBE in Nigeria and that strategies identified for improving the educationally at risk children be adopted by government at all levels.*

Key words: *Educationally at-risk, UBE, Strategy and Children.*

1. Introduction

Traditional and Islamic systems of education were prevalent in Nigeria before the introduction of western system of education by the Christian Missionaries (Ifeanyi, 2004). Traditional education was indigenous and informal. This mode of learning takes place in the evening after parents' farm work. As the children mature, some were handed over to master's tradesmen. In this system of education, each child in the family had the opportunity of receiving education free.

With the advent of Western system of formal education, a number of schools sprang up as institutions where children were expected to be educated. Formal education became accessible to some but not to others. In the latter case, several reasons were responsible for this among which are inability of the parents to send their children to school because of financial constraints.

In realization of education for all, the government of Nigeria made bold attempts through

implementation of UPE in 1976, which was to provide free education for all primary school age children. However, it failed because of financial constraint. It was followed by Universal Basic Education (UBE) which was launched in September 30, 1999 and implemented in some states of the federation. It was adopted as a tool for reducing drastically the incidence of dropout from formal education as well as eradication of mass illiteracy. In spite of this lofty idea of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as enshrined in the National policy of Education (2013) that education should be free and compulsory for all children. Still children from indigent parentage are not benefiting as required. These children lose out on education. On this premise, these indigent children are described as educationally at risk.

Provision of formal education is one thing and its full utilization is another. Oguntosin (1997) states that formal educational provision cannot compensate for an impoverished home environment nor offset the effects of inadequate parental care and support. This is true because many children live in unfavourable physical and harsh economic conditions. Their parents cannot provide them with the basic needs - physiological needs (food, cloth, shelter). According to Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs (1954) as cited in Ibiam (2015), when the basic physiological needs are not met, invariably, other higher needs would be stunted. To augment family's meager income, parents send their children on street hawking / trading. Ekwe (1986) and Obiweiuozo (1993) found that parents or guardians use their children as bigger guides while Jinadu (1985) estimated that about 80,000 children in the age 8 - 14 years' work, as domestic servants in the country and that most of them are girls. Some others according to Government Communication and Information System (GCIS, 2006) give out their female children out in early marriages while others engage in child trafficking within a country or internationally. It is also noted that many children were engaged in agricultural labour. These categories of children lose out on education.

Child labour according to (Ekwe, 1986:17) is any work carried out by children which endangers their health or safety; the work meddles with or prevents or slows down children's educations. It also keeps them from play and any other activities necessary for their development. GCIS (2006) defined child work as exploitative when it interferes with a child's schooling and is harmful to his or her health. It is not restricted to paid work; it often involves children working in their own homes, at school, or in a family business without any pay. This one is more rampant these days.

Child labour is not limited to Nigeria, it is a global phenomenon. Ragui, Levison and Zibani (2001) on effect of child work on school enrollment in Egypt, found that work has a disproportionate effect on girls whether in the labour force or in the household, is more likely to keep them from enrolling in or attending school. Also, Canagarajah, Sudharshan and Nielsen (1999) research on child labour and Schooling in Africa (Cote d' Ivoire, Ghana and Zambia) found that poverty and household composition are also an influence. Some of the children are used as nurses for old people in villages. Radible (2006) from Botswana, noted that children more especially the girl child, are forced into child labour as they are forced to take care of sick relatives and their young siblings. He noted that some of the children end up leaving school. Such categories of children are educationally at risk.

It is true that one of the sub objectives of UBE according the FRN (2013) is providing children with mid-day meals. What of the children's parents, their own food and children's breakfast and dinner as well as other necessary needs and facilities? All these boiled down to the

fact that the gap is still present. Parents and guardians may continue to engage the children in child labour if nothing tangible is done. Most of these children are their parents/guardians hands and feet, eyes and source of earning a living. However, it is established that having an educational attainment is the surest escape route from poverty. It is on this premise that the researcher deemed it fit to find out strategies for improving the educationally at-risk children in Ukwa West Local Government area of Abia state, Nigeria.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

In spite of the laudable emphasis laid on the importance of UBE programme and the pride of place it enjoys in the National Policy on Education stipulating free National education, children are still educationally at- risk in Ukwa West L.G.A by taking to cycliysting, working as bus conductors, grinding of cassava etc. because of the financial status of parents who cannot meet up with the payment of school fees introduced in the junior secondary schools. This makes parents unable to foot their children's bills in schools thereby sending their children to pawning, house maids whom their mistress and masters send to do one hawking or the other before going to school and sleeping very late at night which make them to be tired and dose in classes.

These children under go such problems as not going to school on time, chased out of classes because of non –payment of school fees on time, not studying at home, no relevant text books, slumbering in classes etc. With this, children drop out of schools after primary education to engage in mean jobs like cycling, mobile grinding of cassava, taking to pawning and female children early marriages, which are against the aim and objective of the UBE programme.

There are inadequate provisions of required resources in most of these schools, graduates come out to roam about the streets and constitute public nuisance. No funding of the programme as stipulated, parents are not involved and enlightened of the UBE programme and if possible make all secondary school students borders and provide food for them. Based on the forgoing the problem of this study posed as a question is; what are the strategies needed for improving the educationally at risk children in UBE programme?

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine the strategies for improving educational at-risk children in the UBE programme in secondary schools in Ukwa West LGA. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. identify the factors putting children educationally at risk,
- ii. examine the educational problems they encounter in schools, and
- iii. determine the strategies for improving the education of children at risk in the UBE programme.

1.4. Research Questions

- i. What are the factors identified as putting children educationally at risk?
- ii. What are the problems experienced by these children?
- iii. What strategies could be used for the improvement of educational at-risk children?

1.5. Research Hypothesis

Ho₁: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female teachers on the factors that make children educationally at-risk in the UBE programme.

1.6. Significance of the Study

The findings of this work will go a long way to improve the educationally at risk children in the UBE programme if actually implemented. It will make the parents to be aware and understand that they have the civic duty of training their children. Findings also will help the curriculum planners to re-shape the curriculum, empower the government to do their best to ensure the implementation by providing adequate manpower and materials needed for the implementation.

2. Methodology

The design of this study was descriptive survey carried out ex-post facto. The design was a survey carried out ex-post facto because the researcher cannot manipulate the independent variables. Three research questions guided the *study with one null hypothesis*. The population was 1720 comprising 1,220 Junior Secondary School Students and 500 teachers in the 7 (seven) Junior Secondary Schools in Ukwu West. A stratified proportionate random sampling technique was used to generate a sample of 120 students and 50 teachers giving a total of 170 for proper representation. The instruments for data collection were questionnaire and interview schedule structured by the researcher. The questionnaire for teachers structured alongside four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) =4, Agree (A) =3, Disagree (DA) =2 and Strongly Disagree = 1 respectively with 2.5 as the bench mark mean of acceptance. Interview schedule for students were employed to generate information from students about the problems they experience as regards their education. Mean rating and percentages were adopted in analyzing the data collected while t-test was used for the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The instrument was first subjected for validation by giving them to experts in the department of Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation for face and content validity. In order to ensure the internal consistency of the instrument, a test re-test was carried out using the students that were not used on the actual study. The researcher used the same set of teachers under the same condition and the computation was carried out using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC). This yielded reliability coefficient of 0.77 for all the clusters indicating that the instrument was reliable.

3. Result Presentation

Results of this study are presented in line with the research questions.

Table 1: Mean rating of teachers on factors that put children educationally at risk.

S/No	Item Description	No	Mean Rating	Decision
1.	Hawking / street trading	50	3.28	Accept
2.	Working as bus conductors (Drivers' assistants)	50	3.14	Accept
3.	Serving as domestic servants and baby nurses.	50	3.00	Accept
4.	Raising children by insane mothers	50	3.04	Accept
5.	Children malnourished and suffering from protein deficiency and related diseases.	50	3.29	Accept

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6.	Trafficking of children.	50	2.92	Accept
7.	Pawning of children.	50	2.98	Accept
8.	Barrow/truck pushing / Cyclizing & grinding	50	3.64	Accept
9.	Grinding cassava and alms begging	50	3.21	Accept
10.	Apprenticing in various crafts and trades	50	2.39	Reject
11.	Early female children marriage	50	2.81	Accept
12.	Farmers' children hunting	50	3.09	Accept
Pooled mean			2.82	Accept

Result presented in table 1 shows that teachers accepted that all the factors in the items 1 - 12 put children educationally at-risk with the exception of item 10. This is clearly indicated from their criterion of acceptance fixed at 2.5 and above. The only factor they disagreed with was the one, which states that children apprenticed in various craft and trades with a mean score of 2.39. The pooled mean of 2.82 which is above the bench mark of 2.5 indicated that the items put children educationally at-risk.

Table 2: Children responses to problems by experience.

S/No.	Item Description	Yes		No		Total
		No.	%	No.	%	
1.	Do you go to school?	92	76.7	28	23.3	120
2.	Do you go to school on time?	40	33.3	80	66.7	120
3.	Are your fees and levies paid in good time?	21	17.5	99	82.5	120
4.	Were you driven out of school, last term for non - payment?	101	84.2	19	15.8	120
5.	Do you have recommended textbooks?	20	16.7	100	89.3	120
6.	Do you slumber in school at all? (Especially during class lessons)	41	34.2	79	65.8	120
7.	Do you live with your parents or guardian?	Par90	75	Gar30	25	120
8.	Do you live with a guardian, is he/she related to you?	17	14.2	103	85.8	120
9.	Do you ever study at home?	20	16.7	100	83.3	120
10.	Do you go to bed late (10-12 pm)?	110	91.7	10	8.3	120

A set of ten items in table 2 of the interview schedule for children were employed to generate information from students about the problems they experience as regards their education. The table shows 33.3% of children were identified in school, 66.7% of them was perpetual late comers while 82.5% of them did not pay their school fees in good time as well as 84.2% were driven out from school last term for non-payment of school fees and levies. 89.3% of children identified did not have recommended textbooks. 75% live with parents while 25% live with guardians as well as not related to them. 91.7% of them go to bed late at night - 10 to 12 pm.

Table 3: Strategies for improving the educationally at -risk children

S/No	Item Description	No	Mean Rating	Decision
1.	Govt. at all levels should pull their financial resources together to assist parents augment meager income.	50	3.10	A
2.	Handicapped and old parents/guardians should be rehabilitated in special old people's homes/centers.	50	3.08	A
3.	Cattle rearers should keep their cattle in a farm and food provided for the cattle as in poultry farm.	50	3.13	A
4.	Children in the secondary school should live in boarding house and for food to be provided for.	50	2.37	R
5.	Farmers should be encouraged and exposed to mechanized farming.	50	3.00	A
6.	The relative value of education (UBE) should be highlighted and widely publicized to disabuse the minds of the illiterate parents.	50	3.30	A
7.	Enhancing the conditions of school learners and, or graduates through provision of education for self- reliance, self-employment	50	2.98	A
8.	Parents and guardians should be deeply involved in the UBE enlightenment programme	50	3.28	A
9.	Rich people in the community should help indigent parents provide for their children.	50	2.22	R
10.	Children's right to education and their civil right to live and be provided for by their parents should be strongly pursued	50	3.29	A
	Pooled mean		2.97	A

Table 3 above showed the mean scores of teachers in the items ranging from 2.98 to 3.65. The positive scores indicate that teachers agree that the strategies would go a great extent to improve the education of children at risk. This was clearly indicated from their respective mean scores which were above the criterion of acceptance fixed at 2.50 and above. Items 4 and 9 had mean scores 2.37 and 2.22, respectively which are below the criterion of acceptance showing that those items do not improve educationally at –risk and so are rejected.

3.1. Hypothesis.

Table 4: Mean, standard deviation and t - test on the opinion of male and female teachers on the factors that make children educationally at risk.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	DF Degree of Freedom	Cal. t value	Critical value	Decision
Male teachers	18	3.24	0.25	49	1.16	1.18	Do not Reject H ₀
Female teachers	32	3.29	0.27				

3.2. Result and Discussion

From the results of the data analyzed, factors identified as putting children educationally at-risk include hawking / street trading, working as bus conductors (Driver's assistants), serving as domestic servants and baby nurses, pawning of children, cycling and grinding cassava; financial background of parents, non-funding of the programme by the government, non-involvement and enlightenment of the parents in the UBE also put children. The strategies identified as to improve the educationally at -risk children include; financing of resources to argument parents meager income, provision of rehabilitation centers, exposing farmers to mechanized farming and better crops, Parents and guardians should be deeply involved in the UBE enlightenment programme, and enhancing the condition of learners to be self-reliant and self-employed after school.

Supporting this, is Hideo and George (1999) a cape study in Tanzania, found that factors that increase children's working hours also decrease their hours of study and that hour of work are negatively correlated with studying ability. Such job that compels the children to walk up and down the street, make children physically worn out by the end of the day. Interactions with children revealed that they do a lot of domestic chores like peeling of cassava, uprooting cassava and frying of garri etc. before going to school and after school. They have no time to rest or for leisure. This is against the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the child (1999) which states that the child shall have the opportunity for play and recreation which should be directed to the same purpose as education, society and public authorities shall endeavor to promote the enjoyment of this ..., he shall in no case be caused or permitted to engage in an occupation or employment which would prejudice his health or education, or interfere with his physical or mental development.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study imply that, child labour has adverse effect on the life and education of the children involved. It endangers children's life, health and their opportunity to thrive in the world of education. To this end, the Global March against child labour should intensify their effort more than ever before to achieve total eradication of it.

5. Recommendations

Finally the study recommended that:

- government at all levels should fund the UBE programme for optimum improvement of educationally at risk-children,
- government adequate provision for the successful funding, implementation and sustaining of UBE programme in Nigeria.
- The identified improvement strategies for improving the educationally at- risk children be adopted by government at all levels. This would go a long way to enable the children concerned experience full realization of the importance of UBE programme.

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