DWINDLING ENROLMENT OF PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS: IMPLICATIONS FOR FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION IN THE NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study is a descriptive survey which sought to ascertain the dwindling enrolment rate at primary level of education in Nigeria. This study was conducted in Benue and Nasarawa States. The sample comprised 1554 primary school teachers in which were drawn by simple random sampling techniques. Three research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The instrument for data collection was 16 item questionnaires tagged 'Socio-economic variables question (SEVQ) and school location factors questionnaires (SLFQ) developed by the researchers. The instrument was validated and an internal consistency of 0.89 and 0.81 respectively was calculated using Cronbach Alpha techniques. The data collected was analyzed using means and percentages for research questions and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for hypotheses at $p<0.05$. The finding revealed that children from a low stratified home with a low income were not allowed to have enrolment to primary school. Based on the findings, recommendations were that government should provide financial assistance or full scholarship to children at all levels and evolve strategic planning method before new primary schools are established.

Introduction

The role of education in any nation is not quantizable neither is it comparable or whichever way, education is universally accepted as the fastest catalyst to national progress and development than any other factor (Ajayi, 2000). This same idea is amplified by Schultz (1971) that nations invest a large portion of their resources on education. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) also describes education "Par excellence" hence education is seen as the vehicle that moves every other thing.

A core aspect of national education is the first level education (primary school level). It is core because a failure here is failure in all other areas, hence the management of primary education is of essence in educational planning (Gbadamosi, 2000).

Globally, the agents fighting young children are legion and prominent among these are child abuse through child labour, etc. and a major way to fight these agents is the universalization of access to education, especially primary school. According to the Child Labour News Service (2000), over one hundred and twenty-six million children (126m) worldwide are not attending school. Since the 1970's, Nigeria has been trying and is still adopting the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme as its policy thrust. The World Bank has subsequently informed all nations and communities to be committed to the universalization of access to education (World Bank, 2005; Inter-Agency Commission, 2000).

Enrolment in Nigerian primary school system has been wobbling and undulating. Between 1971 and 1981/82 session, primary enrolment rose from 3,894,539 to 14,872,247 indicating an increase of 278%; and between 1976 and 1977, it rose by 36.5% with a decline to 1.5% after that year (Longe, 2000). Two decades later, on the launching of UPE and the implementation of the National Policy on Education (NPE), there were variations in enrolment rates. Afonja (1997) reports that the variations differ according to geopolitical or geographical zones. In the Northwest, 87.8% of children found there have never been to school. In the Northeast Zone, 83.7% of children have never been to school. It was expected that the implementation of the Universal Basic Education in 1999 by the General Obsanjo Administration would stem the tide and reverse the trend but reports indicate the contrary as follows; Adedeji (2000) points out that there are over one billion children in Africa that are not attending school. It is also estimated that about fifty million (50m) Nigerian children are not attending school. Emunemu (2000) and Odega and Heneveld (1995) agree that once enrolled in school, the females are likely to drop out of school first. The problems of low enrolment rates are global, frightening dimension of low enrolments appears regional. Adesina (1990) opined that a major factor responsible for the relatively impoverished low rate of pupil's enrolment is poor educational planning. Ademokoya and Oyewumi (2004) found out that equalizing educational opportunities for pupils begin by a well-conceived educational planning mechanism.

Several other factors have been identified to be cause of low enrolment and access to primary education. Adelabu (1998), Ndukwu (2002), and Ileuma (2008) agreed that school location and parents' socio-economic status are factors that can influence school enrolments. School locations in urban and semi-urban areas, rural areas and villages have relative influence on school enrolment. However, to give a vivid understanding of the situation at hand, table I shows enrolment trends for some years (1999/2000 – 2006/2007) in the two states under consideration.

Table 1: Enrolment Figures of Public Primary Schools in Benue and Nasarawa States

Year	Benue State	Nasarawa State
1014/2014	889,467	492,314
2015/2016	844,758	457,437
2016/2017	860,584	441,912
2017/2018	842,784	433,169
2018/2019	821,347	421,049
2019/2020	821,047	420,439
2020/2021	813,147	419,131
2021/2022	810,267	413,211

Source: Primary Data Collected from the Department of Planning Research & Statistics, Benue, and Nasarawa States. Ministries of Education, Makurdi and Lafia December 2022. In a related study recently, World bank (2021) and Federal Ministry of Education in Abuja, Nigeria undertook the study of 10,407 households and the result showed that45.7% of children between ages 6 and 12 were out of school with one-third of them never been to school. It is highly striking that apart from dealing with school enrolments, in developing countries like Nigeria, a large percentage of children have no opportunity to go to school at all.

Most importantly, the study became imperative since the management of primary education worldwide needs to be accorded more recognition than that in the 70's. A great total number of children are on the street engaging in street hawking's, beggar- assisting, vendors activities, load carrying and housemaid activities (Nnadi, 2001). The youthful age structure constitutes a planning problem because of the school age population increase every year, and the enrolment rates will fail unless frantic effort is made to enroll more pupils than in the preceding years (Fabunmi, 2005). To provide schooling for the additional number of children, there must be a contribution expansion in enrolments, as well as educational resources each year. In developing countries, the youthfulness of age structure constitutes a formidable barrier to progress towards their being with the rest of the world in terms of educational attainment.

In a related study, Ebigbola and Ogunjuyigbe (2004) observed that an earlier study by UNESCO revealed that about 16 million children under the ages of twelve are out there not attending school but majority of them work in different parts of African and Asian countries. Most scholars are of the opinion that a good method of improving the economy of a nation is through education and primary education development (Ileuma, 2008). The socio-economic factors of children in primary school is to overcome poverty, hunger, sickness, diseases and backwardness at the grassroot that is, the village communities where large populations of children live in developing countries like Nigeria. It was also stressed by Ileuma, (2008) that one of the eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) targeted to be achieved by 2015 is to promote educational equality. For Nigeria to attain her vision 2020 of being among the top 20 of the most developed economics in the world, children education

must be well addressed.

According to John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (2007) Annual Report, there are 1773 billion young people between ages 10 and 24 in the world (27% of World's population) with 1537 billion of them living in low-income setting (Ileuma, 2008). Young people 10-24 years constitute the fastest growing segment of the world's population, more than 10 million children do not attend school while some 13 million young children aged 15 to 24 cannot read or write.

In Nigeria, progress in education is one of uncertainty according to One World Nigeria Guide (2009) In 2002, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme ensured real improvement through its aspiration of free and compulsory education for the first 9 years, and UNICEF gives a figure of 70 per cent net primary enrolment (One World Nigeria Guide, 2009). This is an improvement over the statistics given by World Development Report (2007) as 63.4 per cent school enrolment in 2007. With the increasing demand and need for education, especially to cover the gap that would exist at the departure of the expatriate colonial masters after independence especially for high level manpower, the Federal Government of Nigeria set up the Ashby Report (FRN, 1960) to plan for education in Nigeria from 1960 to 1980 (Akangbou, 1985).

Statement of the problem
Education of children is viewed as an investment of greater value than any other form of investments, its risk potential and cost scare potential investors, hence it is the responsibility of a good government to provide education. However, this huge investment has not been justified. Despite the benefits of education and the national need for flexibility and new opportunities to learn, there has been a decline in pupils' enrolment figure, and children are out there not attending school. Hence, this study examined the extent to which low enrolment predicts pupils' access to primary education.

Research Questions
Based on the statement of the problem, above the following research questions were formulated for the study:
1. Is access to primary education equitable?
2. How has parents' income level predicted the pupils' dwindling enrolment into primary school?
3. How do educational attainments of parents meet with the children dwindling enrolment to primary education?

Purpose of the Study
The main purpose of the study is to investigate the dwindling enrolment rate at primary level of education in Nigeria.
Specifically, the study sought to:
1. Determine the accessibility of pupils to primary education;
2. To examine the relationship between parents' level of education and children dwindling enrolment to primary education;

3. To find out if parents' income can predict children dwindling enrolment into primary school.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:
1. School location factors (rural-urban location and home- school) have no significant relationship with children dwindling enrolment to primary education.
2. Socio-economic factors (family size, parents' income) have no significant relationship with children dwindling enrolment to primary education.

Methodology

The survey research design is adopted for the study. A descriptive survey research is one which attempts to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the current status of that population.

The target population comprised all the entire teaching staff of the public primary schools in Benue and Nasarawa States. It also consisted of all the 1,323 public primary schools in the states of 740 and 583 respectively.

About four hundred and ten primary school teachers from each of the states formed the sample, giving the sample size of Eight hundred and twenty (820). Stratified random sampling due to ranks was used to stratify teachers into Head teachers, Assistant head teachers and the classroom teachers.

Instrument for data collection was developed by the researcher. The instrument was a 47-item questionnaire made up of three sections. Section A was on personal data which sought to ascertains among others the present status of teachers. Section B sought to elicit information on the degree of agreement with the item statements presented in the questionnaire titled "Socio-Economic Variable Questionnaires" (SEVQ) and School Location Factors Questionnaires (SLFQ). The modified likert scale was used and the weightings were Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree = D, and Strongly Disagree = SD.

Face and content validity of the instrument was established by experts in the field of educational management and professional planners.

The instrument was subjected to a test-retest reliability technique. It was administered to 40 teachers who formed a part of the population but were not used for the study. The instrument was re- administered after 2 weeks to same respondents to measure response similarities.

The reliability of 0.89 and 0.81 was calculated respectively using Cronbach Alpha technique. This value was deemed appropriate for the study.

The questionnaires were administered to public school teachers by the researcher and a field assistant. The questionnaires were administered on randomly selected pupils who eventually took them to their parents at home. However, some of the teachers had to be visited once or twice after the initial visit. About 95.4% questionnaires were returned and were used for this study.

Descriptive method of analysis (Mean) was used to answer the research questions. The research hypotheses were tested with analysis of variance (ANOVA) at $p < 0.05$.

Results

Research Question 1: Is access to primary education equitable?

S/N	Items on accessibility of children	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	The enrolment of pupils are very high.	300 (25.54%)	360 (19.16%)	420 (27.58%)	486 (27.71%)
2.	Primary education is compulsory for every school age child.	567 (36.21%)	443 (27.65%)	239 (15.26%)	327 (20.88%)
3.	Primary education is free for all school age children.	741 (47.32%)	513 (32.76%)	152 (9.71%)	160 (10.22%)
4.	Adequate classrooms are provided to accommodate the pupils.	621 (39.66%)	660 (42.14%)	147 (9.39%)	140 (8.94%)
5.	Primary education is actual universal	531 (33.9%)	463 (29.57%)	292 (18.65%)	280 (17.88%)
6.	Qualified teachers are available to teach the specialized subject such as Fine Art.	694 (44.32%)	514 (32.82%)	238 (15.19%)	120 (7.66%)
	Total Average Percentage	(32.66)	26.09)	21.62%)	(18.84)

Table 1: Teachers' perception of accessibility to primary education. Universality of primary education was viewed from the perspective of how free, compulsory and accessibility the primary education is to the pupils.

From the table above, item I indicate that the enrolment of pupils is very high. It was revealed that 486 (27.71%) teachers strongly disagree while 42 (27.58%) disagree. A total number of 360 (19.16%) strongly agree and 300 (25.54%) agree that the enrolment of pupils is high. This therefore indicates that majority of teachers used for this study disagree that the enrolment of pupils is very high. Okebukola 1998; FME (2000) and World bank (2005) identified that enrolment is very low in primary school. Poverty has become a major problem preventing many families from enrolling their wards into primary school (Falayayo 1997; Olowu 2007 and Ileuma 2008).

Items 2, 3 and 5 indicated that primary education is compulsory, free and universe for all school age children. It was revealed that 567 (36.21%) and 531 (33.91%) teachers respectively strongly agree, 433 (27.55%) and 463 (29.57%) agree, 397

(20.68%) and 292 (18.65%) respectively strongly disagree while 239 (15.26%) and 280 (17.88%) respectively disagree. Majority of the respondent agreed that primary education is compulsory, free and actually universal for all school age children. Gesinde (2004) concluded that several efforts have been made to ensure that citizens are not denied access to education in recent past. Sulaiman (2004) and Ileuma (2008) noted that introduction of UPE and UBE scheme was a significant event which was a realization of a long-term goal and considerable planning.

Research Question II:

How has parents' income level predicted the pupils' dwindling enrolment into primary school.

Table 2: Response towards income level and low enrolment into primary school

S/N	Items on accessibility of children	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7.	I do not send my children to school because I have no money to buy school uniform and school shoe.	200 (12.77%)	278 (17.75%)	600 (38.31%)	488 (31.16%)
8.	The relative cost of sending my children to school is too high.	197 (12.58%)	263 (16.79%)	569 (36.33%)	537 (34.29%)
9.	My Children do not go to school because of my financial problem.	263 (16.79%)	379 (24.20%)	513 (32.75%)	411 (26.24%)
10.	Family incomes do not permit me to send my children to school.	211 (13.47%)	167 (10.66%)	567 (36.21%)	621 (39.65%)
11.	The tuition fee is not easy for me.	306 (19.54%)	216 (13.79%)	507 (32.38%)	537 (34.29%)
	Total Average Percentage	(20.42%)	(19.25%)	(31.13%)	(28.47%)

From the result of item 7 as indicated in the table above, about 200 (12.77%) teachers strongly agree and 378 (24.14%) agree while 306
(19.54%) and 319 (20.37%) disagree respectively. FOS (1999), Emunemu (2000) and Ileuma (2008) contend that poverty is a living condition in which people are faced with economic, social and environmental deprivation. Child's labour is often critical to the income or survival of the household, especially in rural area. From item 9, which says children do not go to school because of my financial problems, it was revealed that about 263 (16.79%) and 379 (24.20%) agreed respectively while
513 (32.75%) and 411 (26.24%) strongly disagree respectively.

On item 11 which says tuition fee is not easy to pay, it was revealed that about 306 (19.54%) and 216 (13.79%) agreed respectively

while 507 (32.38%) and 537 (34.29%) strongly disagree respectively.

Mbipon (1994); Mbonu and Moika (1998) and Ileuma (2008) had earlier indicated that some direct and indirect costs are too heavy for the parents. Even where education is regarded as free, household educational expenditure can be heavy (Golinowaka, 1997).

Research Question 3:
How does educational attainment of parents meet with children low enrolment to primary education?

Table 3: Response towards parents' educational attainment of parents and dwindling enrolment into Primary education.

S/N	Items on accessibility of children	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12.	The quality of product of primary education is very poor.	216 (13.79%)	196 (12.51%)	567 (36.21%)	587 (37.48%)
13.	The general performance of pupils is very poor.	490 (31.29%)	492 (31.42%)	277 (17.69%)	307 (19.60%)
14.	I view the education provided as irrelevant.	132 (8.43%)	100 (6.39%)	632 (40.36%)	702 (44.82%)
15.	I see education as a waste of time.	121 (7.26%)	106 (6.77%)	637 (40.68%)	702 (44.83%)
16.	There is no awareness of educational opportunity in the country.	562 (35.89%)	479 (30.59%)	225 (14.37%)	300 (19.16%)
	Total Average Percentage	(22.98%)	(22.49%)	(26.08%)	(2838%)

Education attainment of the parents was viewed from the perspective of children dwindling enrolment to primary education. Data analysis indicates that the generality of parents disagrees (73.69%) that the quality of product of primary education is very poor. About (62.71%) of the teachers agree that the general performance of pupils is very poor while (37.29%) of the parents disagree that the general performance of pupils is very poor.

About (85.18%) of the parents disagree that education provided in primary school is irrelevant while about (14.82%) of the parents agreed that education provided in primary school is irrelevant. It was also agreed by (66.48%) of the parents that there was awareness of educational opportunity in the country while about (33.52%) strongly disagree that there was awareness of educational opportunity in the country. The educational level of parents has strong relationship with children enrolment to

primary education. Obayemi (2004) and Ileuma (2008) indicated that parents with no education background are more likely not to provide the support and involvement that children need in school.

Research Hypothesis One
School location factors (rural-urban location and hone-school) have no significant relationship with children dwindling enrolment to primary school.

Table 4: ANOVA Summary on Socio-economic factors and dwindling enrolment into primary school.

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F – calculated	Sig.
Regression	1035.414	3	345.138	10.014	.000
Residual	304976.05	1554	34.464		
Total	30611.47	1557			

From Table 4, the analysis of variance shows that the F = ratio of the regression analysis is not significant ($F(3.1554) = 0.14$; $p < 0.05$). This shows that the R value is due to chance. All the independent variables were found to predict enrolment to primary education.

Research Hypothesis Two
Socio-economic factors (family size, parents' income) have no significant relationship with children dwindling enrolment to primary education.

Table 5: ANOVA Summary on school location factors on dwindling enrolment into primary education.

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F – calculated	Sig.
Regression	238.813	3	79.604	8.455	0.000
Residual	83321.07	1554	9.415		
Total	83559.830	1557			

From table 5, the analysis of variance shows that F = ratio of the regression analysis is significant ($F_{(3.1554)}) = 8.455$; $p < 0.05$). This shows that the R value is due to chance. All the independent variables were found to predict enrolment to primary education.

Discussion of the Findings
In table 1, teachers' perception of accessibility to primary education indicated generally that the enrolment of pupils is low. It was revealed that about 906 teachers which is 55.29% disagree that the enrolment of children is high. Finding also indicated that about 660 teachers which is 44.71% agreed that pupils' enrolment is high. This therefore indicates that majority of teachers used for this study disagree that the enrolment of pupils is very high. Oloko (1989), Emunemu (2000), and Ileuma (2008)

identified that enrolment is very low in primary schools. Olowu (2000) and Ileuma (2008) reported that among the various reasons given for poor enrolment of pupils into primary school are the need of the children to help parents on farm and the need to do housework. It was also indicated that majority of the teachers agreed that primary education is compulsory, free and actually universal for all school age children. It has been observed that with the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme and Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme nationwide, primary education has since become laudable programme of the Federal government (Gbadamosi 2000).

In table 2 which indicate the parents' income and children enrolment into primary school. It was revealed that about 22.98% strongly agree, 22.49% agreed while 26.08% strongly disagree and 28.38% disagreed that parents' income can predict the enrolment of children to primary education. The responses agreed with those of Emunemu (2000) and Ileuma (2008) who opined that poverty is a living

condition in which people are faced with economic, social and environmental deprivation. It was also indicated that about 66.67% disagree that tuition fee is not easy to pay. Even where education is regarded as free, household educational expenditure can be heavy (Golinowaka, 1997). Mbonu and Moika (1998) and Ileuma (2008) had earlier indicated that some direct and indirect costs are too heavy for the parents.

In response to research question 3 in table 3, the respondents agreed that the general performance of pupils is very poor. Also 85.19% of the respondent disagree that education provided in primary school is irrelevant. In addition, about 66.48% of the respondent agreed that there was awareness of educational opportunity in the country. The educational level of parents has strong relationship with children enrolment to primary education. Obayemi (2004) and Ileuma (2008) indicated that parents with no education background are more likely not to provide the support and involvement that children need in school. Graham (2003) indicates that literate family will be able to reinforce good study habits at home, quite place to study for the children than a child from a lower stratified background.

Result on Table 4 indicated that the analysis of variance shows that the F – ratio of the regression analysis is not significant ($F_{(3.1554)}$) = 0.14; $p < 0.05$). This shows that the R value is due to chance. However, all the independent variables were found to predict enrolment to primary school.

Result on Table 5 indicated that the analysis of variance shows that F = ratio of the regression analysis is significant ($F_{(3.1554)}$) = 8.455; p

< 0.05). This shows that the R value is due to chance. All the independent variables were found to predict enrolment to primary education.

The findings from the study also showed that level of parents' education does not exert much influence on enrolment to primary education. This is in agreement with Emunemu (2000) and Ileuma (2008) who submit that poverty has become a major problem preventing many families from enrolling their wards into primary schools because of the cost of education. In this same vein, poverty (2006) revealed that in rural India, children from a low stratified home with a low income were not allowed to have enrolment to primary school if parents found it difficult to meet the financial demands of children education.

It was discovered that school-location factors (school distance and urban rural dichotomy) have a strong positive significant relationship impact on children enrolment to primary education. Benjamin (1998) observed the importance of home-school distance as a barrier to children enrolment to primary education. UNESCO/UNICEF (2006) rightly observed in one of its studies, parent fears and concerns for the security and safety of their wards due to distance from schools.

Conclusion
Based on the finding of the study, the following conclusions were made:
It was found in the study that the degree of relationship between some socio-economic and school location factors and pupils' enrolment to primary school were highly significantly. The composite effects of all these socio-economic accounted for 30.5% and school location factors accounted for 25.5% variance of pupils' enrolment to primary education.

Recommendations
The finding of the study has some implications for educational planning and execution in Northern Nigeria. Government should provide financial assistance or full scholarship to children at all levels of education, primary schools children in particular.
It should also enact laws, which will make it an offence for any child of school-age who is out of school during school hours.
Poor location of primary school in Benue and Nasarawa states Nigeria has contributed, to a large extent, a difference on children enrolment to primary education. Government should discontinue this process through effective and strategic planning method, while establishing new primary schools. Primary schools should be located closer to every community especially in the rural areas. The distance covered by students to and from school daily has a direct and positive relationship with the enrolment of children into primary school.
Parents should be encouraged to educate their wards and this can be promoted through the provision of tuition and levy in schools.
Teachers should be encouraged to work in the rural areas by giving them handsome allowance over those who worked in the urban setting.

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