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## **Out-Of-School Children in South-West Nigeria: A Concern to Stakeholders**

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### **Abstract**

The growing number of children that is seen in the streets of south-western part of Nigeria while their counterparts are in schools receiving formal education has become a concern to stakeholders in education. It is now a common thing to see school age children involved in menial jobs like bus conducting, street hawking, house helping and even begging for alms in the streets while their peers are in regular schools. In order to curb this trend, the study therefore investigated the phenomenon of out-of-school children in South West, Nigeria. The study was guided by three research hypotheses. It is a descriptive survey research in which 1200 out-of-school adolescents were randomly selected from the six states that comprises the South-West region of Nigeria. The study discovered that the six predictor variables (lack of finance, single parentage, separated home, peer pressure, truancy and others) contributed significantly to the criterion variable (out-of-school children). The study also revealed that gender is related to the choice of career of out-of-school children. The study also discovered that gender has a significant contribution to out-of-school children rate in Nigeria. It was therefore recommended that relevant stakeholders should assist out-of-school children to return to school. Also, children who are not interested in schooling should be aided to learn one trade or the other.

### **Introduction**

#### **Background to the Study**

The growing number of children that is seen in the streets in south west Nigeria while their counterparts are receiving formal education has become a concern to stakeholders in education. It is now a common thing to see school age adolescents involved in menial jobs like bus conducting, street hawking, house helping and even begging for alms in the streets while their peers are in regular schools. The phenomenon of out-of-school children is worrisome and it portends serious implication for the national development and the well-being of the nation. Children are said to be the leaders of tomorrow. If children are to play their role well as leaders of tomorrow, then they ought to be exposed to proper and formal education, after-all, education is no doubt a vehicle of self actualization and a factor that brings about national development.

Although there is no consensus on how out-of-school children is defined, Global Partnership for Education (2013) defines out-of-school children as “children who do not have access to school in their community” or “children who enrolled but do not attend school” or “children who drop-out of the educational system”. Also, according to Muoghalu (2010), out-of-school children are children who left the confines of the school before completing their studies for reasons other than death and without transferring to any other school. Muoghalu further stated that, Out-of-school children include adolescents aged 10-19 years that have never been to school or have left school before completing their studies. Therefore, out-of-school children may be referred to as children who may have intentionally withdrawn from school or forced to leave school before completing their studies, as a result of adverse social-economic circumstances beyond their control.

Out-of-school children seem to be common to the under-developed economies than the developed ones. The negative impact of this is therefore more devastating in third world countries like Nigeria, where many families are battling for survival in the midst of adverse socio-economic circumstances. According to Toko (2012), chief among factors responsible for out-of-school children are:

1. Lack of interest (loss of interest in schooling)
2. Lack of education support from parents (may be as a result of low socio-economic status)
3. Outside influence on a child (friends and peer pressure from other school drop-out, family and others outside relationship can influence a child to be out-of-school)
4. Special needs (children <sup>require</sup> special attention due to some disabilities)
5. Financial problem (family poor financial status)
6. Drug and alcoholic abuse (a child on drug will rarely complete high school)
7. Depression and physical illness
8. Physical abuse (children that are victims of domestic violence, such as physical, verbal and sexual abuse tends to drop-out of school)
9. Teen pregnancy
10. Alternative lifestyle (some children may regard education as not important)

Similarly, Muoghalu (2010) also identified some reasons why children drop out from school as poverty, teenage pregnancy, gender unfriendly class room culture, early marriage, lack of security both in and outside the school,

child abuse, drug/alcohol abuse, negative social practices and attitudes, competing demands on their lives, irrelevant and rigid social curriculum, very poor academic achievement, school phobia, juvenile delinquencies etc. Corroborating this, Uwakwe and Emeke (2004) found out in their study that such factor as parental neglect, societal neglect, poverty, low return in education, insufficient time to devote to learning and the absence of political-will are influential contributors to boys' out-of-school rate in Nigeria. They further asserted that out-of-school children go to the streets where some of them become either deviants or street urchins in various kind of street trading. Evidence from research (Muoghalu, 2010., Balfanz & Herzog, 2005., Neild & Balfanz, 2006., Alexander, Entwistle & Horsey, 1997.) shows that most out-of-school hold negative attitudes toward themselves, have a history of low school grades, failure and absenteeism. However, inadequate finances and low level Intelligence have been reported to be two major contributors to out-of-school phenomenon.

It has been estimated in a recent research that more than 2 million children are in the streets in Nigeria either begging for arms or hawking wares (Muoghalu, 2010). Most of these children are out of school for one reason or the other. If this trend is not quickly nipped in the bud, it may result into involvement of some out-of-school children in social vices such as cultism, armed robbery, killings, maiming, arson, rape etc. They may readily yield to any anti-social behaviours for economic gratifications and associate themselves with such groups that constitute a menace to the society. Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010) identify the emergence of militant groups in Nigeria such as the Odua Peoples' Congress, Bakassi Boys, Boko-haram and the advent of Area Boys and Almajiris as a result of societal neglect of children and lack of education.

Several studies have also shown that children all over the world are usually faced with the dilemma of making a career choice decision in their lives (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; McMahan & Watson, 2005; Macgregor, 2007; Issa & Nwalo, 2008; Watson, McMahan, Foxcroft & Els, 2010). According to Bandura et. al. (2001) and Watson et al. (2010), each individual undergoing the process of making a career choice is influenced by such factors as the context in which they live, their personal aptitudes, and educational attainment. In their study, Watson et al. (2010) found that the majority of aspirations for career choice were for social type occupations followed by investigative type occupations, with boys aspiring more for investigative and girls for social type occupations. Therefore, one may correctly infer that the choice of career among adolescents may be linked to their gender. Corroborating this, Sax (1994) found that men who abandon career aspirations appear to be driven by financial concerns while women were more concerned with the social good of their career choice.

Conversely, Perry (2006) asserts that children career choice is influenced by life context, personal attitudes and educational attainment. In his study of career choice, Salami (1999) found that many young people made wrong career choices due to ignorance, inexperience, peer pressure, advice from friends, parents and teachers, or as a result of prestige attached to certain jobs without adequate vocational guidance and career counseling. Abe and Junaid (2012) investigated children's career aspirations in primary schools in the context of family, environment and gender. They found out that female children have higher business aspiration than males. They therefore infer that gender significantly influence career aspiration among primary school children. Corroborating this is Mendez and Crawford in Abe and Junaid (2012), who affirmed that girls had more restricted career aspirations than boys and they (girls) often opt for narrow range of occupational categories. It must also be made explicit here that another factor that may have contributed to females' preference for narrow range occupations may be as a result of the traditional African belief that, a male child is given priority than the female counterpart. This may also affect their choice of career. The females may regard some career as a lofty ambition and as a preserved for the male folks.

In his study, Spade (2001) found that gender difference in the learners' experiences starts at pre-school and continues throughout their educational careers. This implies that gender is one of the factors that may also contribute to out-of-school children rate. Jerald (2006) and Rumberger (2004) identified some background factors such as being a male, low economical status, African American or Latino as factors associated to out-of-school children rate.

Conversely, there has been a growing consensus that school factors such as grades, retention, attendance, and classroom behavior and engagement are better predictors of out-of-school children than fixed status indicator such as gender, race, and poverty. Emeke and Adegoke (2005) in their collaborative study showed that gender is one of the factors that contribute to the rate of out-of-school children. They identified some countries of the world that are faced with the menace of out-of-school boys, and the factors responsible for out-of-school children. Some of the countries so identified in their study are Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Mongolia. They claimed that the out-of-school children problem in these countries is due to the practice of having boys to look after family cattle, while their parents seek after wage earning work. They further argued that in some other countries like America and the Caribbean, factors that contribute to out-of-school boys' rate include the high repetition rate which is as a result of low performance. This has been reported by Brown (2001) as a factor that makes most boys that are so affected to disappear from school

after several repetitions. Emeke and Adegoke, citing UNICEF (2003), further identified Brazil, Australia, United Kingdom, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Columbia, Haiti and United Republic of Tanzania as some other countries that have had high rates of out-of-school children.

At the national level, Emeke and Adegoke (2005) also identified some South Eastern states in Nigeria, such as Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States; and some Northern states like Kano, Kaduna and Niger state, as states embattled by the scourge of out-of-school children. They also identified Lagos in Nigeria as a state with high rate of out-of-school boys. Furthermore, Uwakwe and Emeke (2004) also identified parental neglect, societal neglect, poverty, low returns in education, insufficient time to devote to learning and absence of political-will as factors contributing to out-of-school children rate.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The increasing cases of out-of-school children in South-West Nigeria have been of increasing concern to stakeholders in education. It has become common thing to see school age children involving in menial jobs like bus conducting, street hawking, house-helping and even begging for alms while their counterparts are in regular schools. This however may portend serious challenges for these children and the nation. This study therefore investigated the phenomenon of out-of-school children in South West, Nigeria.

### **Hypothesis**

1. There is no significant influence of factors contributing to out-of-school children in South West Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between out-of-school children choice of career and their gender
3. There is no Significant Difference between Gender and out-of-school children.

### **Methodology**

The study is a survey research in which the variables in the study were used as they exist without manipulation.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

The sample of the study comprises of 1200 out-of-school children selected from the six states that make-up the South Western part of Nigeria. The accidental sampling technique was used to select participants in the study. The researcher selected participants from major motor-parks and market places where primary school age children are found hawking or trading during school hours.

### Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study were a questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) developed by the researcher. The questionnaire had three sub-sections – A, B and C. Section ‘A’ contained items of the respondents’ bio-data; section ‘B’ had items on factors contributing to out-of-school phenomenon among children; while section C had items on career choice of out-of-school children. The FGD is a structured interview on out-of-school children.

### Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using regression, chi-square and independent t-test analysis.

### Results and Discussion

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant influence of factors contributing to out-of-school children in South West Nigeria.

**Table 1: Model Summary of Factors Influencing Out-of-school Children**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta ( $\beta$ )		
(Constant)	-55.449	20.514		-2.703	.009
Lack of finance	1.487	.708	.227	2.100	.039*
Single parentage	.192	.486	.044	.394	.034*
Separated home	.672	.500	.140	1.344	.183
Peer pressure	1.733	.670	.273	2.587	.012*
Truancy	.247	.107	.239	2.295	.025*
Others	.345	.124	.224	4.222	.034*

**Table 1b: ANOVA of Factors Influencing Out-of-school Children**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	f	Sig.
Regression	2818.838	6	563.768	6.578	.000*
Residual	6342.149	1198	85.705		
Total	9160.988	1199			

The result from table 1 shows that among the six predictor variables of the study (lack of finance, single parentage, separated home, peer pressure, truancy and other), it is only "separated home" that shows to be a redundant variable in the model, that is, it has no significant influence on the criterion variable (out-of-school children). All other predictor variables, when considered on a relative standing to the criterion variable, indicated to have contributed significantly, and thus, they are influential. The value of t-ratio associated with these influential variables indicated that (lack of finance –  $\beta = .227$ ,  $t = 2.100$ ;  $P < 0.05$ , single parentage –  $\beta = .044$ ,  $t = .394$ ;  $P < 0.05$ , peer pressure –  $\beta = .273$ ,  $t = 2.587$ ;  $P < 0.05$ , truancy –  $\beta = .239$ ,  $t = 2.295$ ;  $P < 0.05$  and others –  $\beta = .224$ ,  $t = 4.222$ ;  $P < 0.01$ ).

Table 1b showing the ANOVA table, further reveals that the six predictor variables (lack of finance, single parentage, separated home, peer pressure, truancy and other) when combined, have a significant influence on the dependent variable (out-of-school children) –  $\{f(6, 1198) = 6.578, P < 0.05\}$ . Therefore, hypothesis 1 which claimed that there is no significant influence of factors contributing to out-of-school children in South West Nigeria was rejected because the result of the study shows that there was a statistical significant influence of factors contributing to out-of-school children in South West Nigeria. This result corroborates the findings of Uwakwe and Emeke (2004), who investigated the boy-child school dropout problem in Nigeria. They found out that some factors like parental neglect, societal neglect, poverty, low returns in education, insufficient time to devote to learning and the absence of political will; are influential contributors to boys' out-of-school rate.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant relationship between out-of-school children choice of career and their gender

**Table 2: Chi-square of out-of-school children Choice of Career by Gender**

Variables			$\chi^2$	Sig.
	Go back to sch.	Learn trade		
Male	500	160	27.840	.000*
Female	300	240		
Total	800	400		

The result from table 2 shows that the out-of-school female children would prefer to learn a trade, while their male counterparts would prefer to go back to school. The chi-square analysis -  $\chi^2 = (1198) = 27.840$ ;  $P < 0.01$ .



Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted because out-of-school children choice of career is related to gender. That is, the factor of being either a male or a female is related to out-of-school children career choice. The result also shows that out-of-school male children are willing to return to school as against their female counterparts who prefer trading. This result corroborates the findings of Abe and Junaid (2012), who investigated children's career aspirations in primary schools in the context of family environment and gender. They found out that females have higher business aspiration than males. They therefore infer that gender significantly influence career aspiration among primary school pupils. Also, Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) reported that gender is clearly one of the most powerful of all influences on vocational behaviour. Mendez and Crawford in Abe and Junaid (2012) also affirmed that girls had more restricted career aspirations than boys and they (girls) often opt for narrow range of occupational categories. It must also be made explicit here that another factor that may have contributed to females' preference for trade may be as a result of the traditional African belief that a male child is given priority than the female counterpart. The conventional African settings promote education for male children to the detriment of the female children. Some African parents are of the opinion that the female child is a "lost" to the family and that they end up in the kitchen. Hence, they considered all educational investment in the female child as a waste of financial resources. Another factor which may have contributed to girls preferring trading is the perception of some female children as being inferior to their male counterpart.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no Significant Difference between Gender and out-of-school children

Table 3: Showing the T-test of Gender and out-of-school children

Gender	Number	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Female	540	9.7185	3.4741	6.450	.000*
Male	660	7.2557	4.2182		

The result from table 3 reveals the independent t-test analysis of gender and out-of-school children. The t-calculated (6.450) was greater than the table-value of (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom (1198). This implies that males are more prone to be out of school than females. In fact, 56% of the out of school children sampled are males while, 44% are females. This means that there is a statistical significant

difference between the factor of being a girl or a boy and the rate of out-of-school children in southwest Nigeria. It is established by this study that, male children are prone to dropout from formal education than their female counterparts. The out-of-school boys' phenomenon has been identified by Emeke and Adegoke (2005) as a phenomenon that is common at both the global and national level. Emeke and Adegoke (2005) identified some countries of the world that are faced with the out-of-school boys' menace, and the factors responsible for out-of-school children. Some of the countries so identified in that study are Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Mongolia. Emeke and Adegoke claimed that the dropout problem in these countries is due to the practice of having boys to look after family cattle, while their parent seeks after wage earning work. They further argued that in some other country like America and the Caribbean, factors that contribute to boys' dropout from school include the high repetition rate which is as a result of low performance, and this has been reported by Brown (2001) as a factor that makes most boys that are affected to disappear from school after several repetitions. Emeke and Adegoke, citing UNICEF (2003), further identified Brazil, Australia, United Kingdom, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Columbia, Haiti and United Republic of Tanzania as some other countries that have had high rates of boys' dropout.

At the national level, Emeke and Adegoke (2005) also identified some South Eastern states in Nigeria, such as Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States; and some Northern states like Kano, Kaduna and Niger state, as states embattled by the scourge of male adolescent dropouts. They also identified Lagos in Nigeria as a state with high rate of out-of-school boys. Furthermore, Uwakwe and Emeke (2004) also identified parental neglect, societal neglect, poverty, low returns in education, insufficient time to devote to learning and absence of political will as factors contributing to out-of-school children rate.

## Conclusion

The study of out-of-school children was necessitated by the growing rate of this phenomenon in South West Nigeria. This concern becomes more germane because of the menace this children may constitute to the society if not nipped in the bud on time. The study has identified factors contributing to out-of-school phenomenon in South-West Nigeria. The issue of gender and the choice of career of out-of-school children were also considered. The findings reveal that out-of-school children disliked their present conditions and will not want to continue in it. Majority of these children will want to go back to school while some of them will prefer to learn one trade or the other.



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