OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NIGERIA: A CREATION BY SOCIETY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NATION BUILDING

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ABSTRACT: *Education is a major key to the development of any nation. The realization that education is an engine room to the advancement of both industrial and technological growth of nations has propelled the leadership and citizens of many nations to consider the training of their younger generations with seriousness. The school is a formal institution vested with the responsibility to ensure that children are properly trained in the methods, ways and means for the future progress of the society. In Nigeria, there are educational policies put in place in line with other international institutions to ensure that all children at least acquire the basic level of education. Presently, there are millions of children that lack access to basic education. These children are referred to as out-of-school children. The real statistical figure of these children appears obviously shady. With the rapid explosion of the number of out-of-school children, Nigeria has been described globally as the country with the largest population of such children. It is on record that one out of every child that is excluded from formal education in Africa is a Nigerian child. There are many reasons that evidently might be responsible for lots of these children being out-of-school. Among them are poverty, ignorance, insecurity, corruption, the devaluation of education and knowledge in the social system, materialism and many more. No one can expect to reap what he/she did not give or sow, subsequently the aftermath of leaving out these children without completing their education had multiple negative consequences to the child, the society and the country at large. For one, such children might become ready crop of adults later in life to serve in menial positions of responsibilities with low salary grades; experience marital instabilities due to their economic status and therefore become ready tools that could be ignorantly manipulated by the political elite in the society. They may also raise families without birth control, thereby extending a vicious cycle of people living in poverty and low self-esteem. Beyond being easily exploited, most of them become known for anti-social vices, such as cultism, criminals with tendencies as armed robbery, drug addicts, rapists, kidnapers, hoodlums, and sex workers (prostitutes). The implications of all these to nation building is stagnation and general insecurity to life and property. The article then proffered some likely suggestions that can assist the society to overcome some of these psychosocial challenges once taken into consideration.*

KEYWORDS: Creation, Implications, Nation-Building, Out-of-School Children.

INTRODUCTION

The critical roles education plays in the socio-economic and political development of any nation can never be over emphasized. Education is the pivot upon which the quality of a country's human capacity development is enhanced. From every indication, the economic and technological advances recorded in every nation is tied to the educational attainment of its citizens globally. It is obvious therefore that the survival of any organized nation depends on the quality of education of its population. Beyond the production of a capacity of think-tanks for the advancement of the people, education creates room for better health and nutrition, thereby helping to improve hygiene. It also assists societies to experience a higher child survival rate and provides an avenue for a greater sense of health awareness (Esu, 2022). Again, education as submitted by Adeyinka (2014) is a tool for liberating the individual from the shackles of ignorance to the world of ideas, knowledge and imagination. Internationally, education is accepted as a fundamental tool of human development, and an essential element for the preparation of an informed individual. There is no gain saying that education is power. Education helps to moderate social tensions in society. It emancipates the minds of men to be creative and enables them to think without limitations. A well-educated person, according to Ikiyei (2014), is generations ahead of the poorly educated ones. Education also creates an opportunity for the child to become an asset to the society, while the absence or mal-education of the child prepares that child to grow up in most circumstances as a burden to that community.

In modern societies, the school is generally accepted as the place where children are sent to by their parents to acquire formal education which prepares the growing child to assume adult responsibilities later in life. Yes, a child could also acquire informal education by passing through an apprenticeship scheme to actualize their future. The school is a place where teachers who are professionally trained are given the responsibility to train children from varied backgrounds about academic knowledge, provide an opportunity for children to meet and interact with other children beyond their immediate environment and from that point learn to cooperate more with other children outside their neighborhood. The school teaches children life and survival skills from which they will develop themselves for sustainability in the future. The school is a creator of self-actualization and a director to the growing child as they are being prepared to chart a course for their future aspirations. The school is a place where talents are discovered, nurtured and empowered for their future well-being. Out-of-school children certainly may not benefit from this empowerment process which the school provides. Research according to Darma (2022) indicates that education or formal school training had enabled man to improve in agricultural productivity, assisted women and girls to enhance their status and wellbeing, ensure a better protection of the environment, supported man in reducing unchecked population growth rate and, without doubt, enable them to utilize a variety of skills for the improvement of their standard of living. All of these implies that schooling vis-à-vis education is a means for the creation of human happiness. A builder for a healthier society, a provider that enhances man with skills and information to be more self-confident, education also enables an efficient and productive workforce, and indeed a holistic personality. The school is an organ of the society that enables man to, through the knowledge acquired, be better prepared to make genuine choices concerning the type of life human beings are expected to lead. The place of the school then corroborates the position of Mohammed, Quadri and Yshifumi (2021). Development globally is also often a qualitative measure of the literacy rate and the productive capacity of skilled labor, level of technology, education and so on.

Considering that the school and indeed education has multiple benefits to offer to society, the question as to why some children should be identified as 'out-of-school children' (OOSC) is difficult to accept in the 21st century setting and in particular, a nation as Nigeria that is endowed with multiple human and material resources. According to the United Nations, out-of-school children are yet to be enrolled in any formal schools excluding pre-primary education. The definition further pegs the age range for out-of-school children as those between 6 -11 years. They are a category of young people who are within the age bracket of attending primary or secondary schools but are not engaged in learning whether in non-formal education, nor are they enrolled within the formal education system. These categories of children also include those children living with disabilities that are not engaged in either formal or non-formal educational endeavors (UNESCO, 2014). Globally, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2015), for example, only 9 percent of out-of-school children come from wealthy households, whereas that figure tiptoed to 31 per cent for children from poor households. In the same vein, only 12 percent of out-of-school children are settled in urban areas compared to 23 per cent of those from rural areas. This is evidence of severe disparities based on household economic standing and geographic location. Out of school children are pupils who have never been privileged to enroll as students or who dropped out of the system as a result of poor academic records, lack of sponsors, employment or being disillusioned with the educational system. They are kids who leave school without completing their course of study (Amede, 2022).

It is no longer news that Nigeria is known as the most populated black nation in the entire world; what is difficult to accept but is now a fact, is that Nigeria is also being ascribed with statistical evidence as the home with the largest number of out-of-school children in the West African sub-region. Researchers like Odeyemi in the Guardian Newspaper (2021) opine that for every five (5) out-of-school children in Africa, one is a Nigerian. The country is in dire need for a situation to 'right the wrongs' because an idle young population without a legacy of literacy and any viable skills bequeathed to them portends a serious challenge to that nation. The inherent challenges which the nation is finding difficult to tackle are multifarious. The first Premier of the Western region, Awolowo as cited by Gbenga in The Guardian (2020) warned the political leaders many years ago that "the children of the poor you failed to train will never let your children have peace". Gbenga also cited Mallam Aminu Kano as saying that "Nigeria will know no peace until the son of a nobody can become somebody without knowing anybody". Nigerians must note that if your neighbor is hungry, your chicken is not safe. It would be appropriate to maintain that while there could be many underlying reasons for the nation drifting to its present level of insecure state, the out-of-school children may not be possibly exonerated from the complexities of the spate of security challenges the nation is experiencing. No region or state in Nigeria can strictly beat her chest and say confidently that they are not contending with this hydra-headed monster known as out-of-school children. This not with-standing, the northeastern part of the country is by far the worst hit by this man-imposed damage on herself. The Nigerian nation has degenerated so much to the extent that fear and anxiety are the hall-marks of household names that Nigerians live with presently, due to the sophisticated crime rates and horrific happenings bedeviling the citizens daily.

The education sector had, on its own part over the years, put in place a number of measures and policies with the intent of ensuring or cushioning and providing equal playing ground that all Nigerian children can enjoy a right to free/compulsory primary education. To make this project work, governments at different levels had built public schools within trekable distances

for the children to attend. Although the government had supported the education sector at the federal, state and local governments at different instances, these measures put together by the government to reduce the statistics of out-of-school children had created even further gaps. The trend had pressured the Federal Government into the establishment of the Nomadic Education Commission with the intent to cater for the immigrant herdsmen; Educationi, the Fishing PortEducationn to take care of the immigrant fishing populations along the riverine settlements/communities and the river basins in the Lake Chad areas; however, something desperate most definitely still needs to be done. In most states of the Federation, there are also special schools for the disabled children. The country is a signatory to the 'Education for All' convention, entered into in the United States of America and an active partner to the Sustainable Development Goals of which, child literacy is uniquely enshrined. Although these policies of the government are quite laudable, in most cases policy implementation appears to be either inefficient, poor or weak. Nigeria is currently being described globally as the nation with the highest number of out-of-school children globally. This assertion may not go down well with those in positions of leadership, however, it is a wakeup call for a nation with the kind of per-degree and resources as Nigeria (Daily Trust, 2022).

As Chukwumerije (n.d.) would capture the situation poetically, a country that pretends not to see its young ones lying fallow (idle) certainly will reap the outcomes of her lukewarm attitude in no distant time. Nigeria is experiencing a variety of social challenges presently and out-of-school children might as well constitute part of the cumulative tensed situation the country is struggling hard to contend with. Chukwumerije's submission may not be far-fetched when he frankly states that education helps to moderate social tensions in society and in a country like Nigeria, attempts at neglecting the education of the young ones is like asking for trouble. In other words, keeping young children out-of-school is a guarantee for trouble and a subtle means of investing in a crisis for Nigeria. This paper intends to identify some of the likely consequences and menace that could be averted if the nation can contain and reduce the high rate of out-of-school children roaming the streets. The conclusion is that some of the security challenges will be drastically reduced once, if children of school age are given the opportunity to attend schools and to be meaningfully engaged either in the formal school setting or encouraged to learn a skill through the informal sector, as against the present prevailing scenario where in these children are allowed to stray aimlessly. Nigerians, especially the political class should be aware that protecting their material resources without investing in education, is like stealing the future from the growth of their children whom they (the elite/politicians) are thinking of accumulating their ill-gotten-wealth for. It should be noted that only quality education can help societies to contribute sophisticated ideas and advance new concepts which must be testable. Until this is done, Nigeria will live in uncertain times.

Theoretical framework

This work adopted the "Life Chance Theory" which was advanced by Max Weber, a German sociologist. According to Bello and Mohammed (2017), the theory emphasized that all human beings have opportunities and are endowed with the potential to improve their quality of life. However, the way and manner an individual is provided with the required incentives to achieve his or her goals may determine the level of education the person attains. The Life Chance Theory is a hypothetical conception which postulates how the life of an individual might turn out to become. The main implication of the theory is that the opportunities and requisite resources a person is privileged to interact with in the course of life explains the length at which success or failure in life may be attained. In real terms, the theory means that life is a game of

chance and the earlier one is exposed to and attain their life goals especially through education, the better the chances of the individuals' increased socio-economic status and growth. Education is a catalyst for socio-economic well-being of an individual. Bello and Mohammed then reiterated from Max Weber's position that schooling could insure a person's comfort in the areas of real estate ownership, creates room for advances in meaningful lifestyle, makes way for an improved standard of living, among other variables of an individuals' life chances and well-being, including improved health and longevity. Summarily, the theory implies that with quality education a child acquires from going through the processes of school, the probability of that child raising the quality of his life chances increases. The reverse is also possible where the child drops out of school without completion.

Out-of-school Children: A Creation by Society

Every child has a potential that once adequately nurtured by the society and its institutions, it will become qualitatively fulfilling. The child is a product of the society into which it is born into. The depth of a tree is determined by the depth of its roots. Only few children will grow above the type of training and educational system that they are being exposed to and the circumstances that are prevalent at the disposal of the child while pursuing their education. In Nigeria, a combination of factors might be responsible for children not enrolling at schools at all or dropping out of school a short while later. These school dropouts and those who are not privileged to attend schools at all or engage in any meaningful skills that can prepare them for a better future, are all collectively described as out-of-school children. Again, no one can specifically point out the total number of children who are not engaged in the formal school sector today in Nigeria. The above notwithstanding, most authorities believe that there are more than 10 million Nigerian children who are out-of-school (Ihejirika, 2013). These figures have been strongly disputed by the Minister of Education, Adamu Adamu (The Guardian, 2021). One vital question begging for answers from the education authorities is, should any child be left out of school? The argument as to whether there is only one child that is out-of-school may not be necessary or hold water. It is the duty of every responsible government to ensure that the upcoming generations measure up to the standard it requires through adequate implementation of the curriculum; furthermore, education is the right of every child.

In saner societies, according to Mohammed and others, no child is deprived of sound and qualitative education no matter the circumstance. Citing Yekeen, they submitted that, children no matter their geographical location, place of birth and circumstance are entitled to quality education. It is therefore heartbroken to imagine that of all five (5) out-of-school children globally, one (1) is a Nigerian. No thanks to the Nigerian Minister of Education, Adamu Adamu, who had also admitted that with the massive increase in the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria, the country had fallen short of the Education For All (EFA) goals and the Millennium Development Goals for providing education for all children which is a universal human suffrage (Worldmeters, 2019; Edema, 2021). Surprisingly, more than 95% of the reasons why children drop out of school appear to be reasons beyond their own (children) control and traceable to the ineptitude of the government and the entire adults within that society. In other words, it is the weakness or lack of commitment of the society rather than the child in question. The child is born into a society that requires them to become responsible citizens in the future. A critical observation as to why children drop out of school had revealed that poverty, religio-cultural practices, unemployment, lack of planning, corruption especially among the political class and elites, insecurity in the school environments (which could be either from an external or internal context), lack of commitment on the part of the teachers and

school administrators, poor learning environments, lack of basic instructional materials, lack of parental supervision of their wards, the perceived devaluation of education by society, exposure to the internet as well as peer influence that might have contributed to the high rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria (Mohammed, Quadri & Yoshifumi, 2021). Some of these factors are considered one after the other briefly:

1. Poverty

The Nigerian economy is really at its wits-end and most families are extremely finding it difficult to even eat three square meals a day. The inflation rate is biting hard on the majority of the citizens and this has affected every other aspect of the peoples' perception about life. Most Nigerians may be aware of the importance of education to the future of their children, yet they lack the financial capacity to send their children to schools. The government might announce that primary and secondary schools are tuition-free (in terms of fees officially), however, in many public schools, the administrators still impose lots of levies on the school children to pay. For instance, parents are subtly made to pay admission fees, sports levies, labor dues (even in federal government colleges); the school authorities may prepare uniforms but the parents are made to pay/buy for their wards. Additionally, the school feeding policy of the present Federal Government initiated by the President Mohammadu Buhari administration (which is laudable) appears to be a scam or non-functional in most states. The school feeding programme's success is appearing suspicious in that in 2020, a better half of the world nations were on "lockdown" due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Surprisingly, the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs still announced that it utilized over 500 million naira of taxpayers money to feed school children when all schools were indeed "closed" (Adebowale, 2020). An average Nigerian family especially in the rural areas are living in abject, unimaginable and pitiable circumstances in the midst of squalor cum poverty; in view of these, most people (parents) see sending their wards to school is an added burden to the already over stressed family income/budgets.

2. Religio-cultural practices

Another challenge which society has created against the growth of the child is the religious and cultural norms being strongly adhered to by some tribes/sections of the country. In Northern Nigeria for instance, where the Islamic religion is being practiced, alms-giving is seen as a sacred principle. Alms-giving is one of the five pillars of Islam. Children who are sent to the Quranic clerics for Islamic studies are sent out by their teachers to ask for support in the streets. This system is known as the Almajiri system. Millions of children have been turned out as "street children" roaming to beg for alms without adequate care and guidance. The children are being exploited by a lot of their masters and are indeed without real care and protection. The highest number of such Almajiri children are reported to be in Bauchi State, followed by Kano, Katsina, Zamfara among others. In the Southern part of Nigeria, Rivers state is reported to be taking the lead of children living out-of-school. These out-of-school children have little or no one to fend for them and have constituted a myriad of security and national shame to the Nigerian state (Ezegwu, Adedokun & Ezegwu, 2017). In their gullibility, these street children are used as tools to commit mayhem in most communities due mainly to their ignorance and irrational submission to those who have indoctrinated them.

Some obnoxious cultural practices appear to die-hard in sub-Saharan Africa. In most rural communities in the sub-region, the majority of the people still see and adhere to the patriarchal systems. They will appreciate sending the male child to school rather than their female child.

There still appears to be a strong sentimental feeling that the girl-child will be married out to another family while the boy-child will stay back home to bring up the name of the family (Ikiyei, 2019). Invariably, many potentially brilliant female children are forced into either early marriage, others are forcefully married out even before puberty especially in the Northern parts of the country. In other settings, girls especially from states like Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers and the Ogoni tribes in Rivers State are notedly being sent out-of-school by their parents to go and serve people as "house-helps" or domestic servants for paltry sums of money which the same parents or caregivers will collect directly from those with whom they leave the care of their children to. It is significant to state that some parents had lost their beloved ones to child traffickers' in many instances due to such obnoxious practices. Furthermore, the inhuman treatment and agony some of these children undergo is despicable and criminal. Beyond being shabbily treated, these classes of children in most cases lose their self-esteem, become unproductive and a continuous liability to society due mainly to the treatment/trauma they had been subjected to. They are abused physically and emotionally in the homes where they serve as house helps rather than being at school.

The case of the boy-child may not be exceptionally different in some climes like the southeastern region. Rather than send the boy-child to school, parents here perceive that the economic fortunes of the male children may not be much when they finally graduate and enter the civil service with their academic certificates. Subsequently, the male child is encouraged either to join in the businesses or trades of their parents at a tender age without acquiring any basic education. This trend had left most young Igbo children as street hawkers and hustlers exposed to exploitation, unnecessary hazards such as road accidents and easily swayed to committing crimes like indulging in ritual killings all in a bid to amass wealth through whatsoever illegitimate methods just to be considered as relevant stakeholders in their respective communities (Akinwumi & Unaeze, 2013).

3. Lack of Planning

There is an adage that those who fail to plan, have planned to fail. Invariably, any society that its members refuse to plan for their younger generations is likely sitting on a proverbial gun powder waiting to explode. About sixty (60) percent of Nigerian entire population is reportedly made up of youth. Maximining this youth population for sustainable development is fundamental. It will not be out of place to emphasize that at no point had the policy makers implemented the nation's educational policies and developmental plans holistically. For example, in 1976, General Olusegun Obasanjo introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme. The UPE scheme was remarkably considered a success story between 1977 – 1979. However, the scheme's impact began to wither as from the early 1980s with the change of government to democracy under the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). One bitter experience in Nigeria which the policy-makers appear to find difficult to correct is that there is no continuity with any policies of a previous administration no matter how laudable the policy may appear to be. Most times, those in positions of authority hardly realize that governance is a continuum and that it is still the same state resources that a previous administration expended in the implementation of that project. Every new administration assumes that completing a predecessors' project is a waste or not a plus to their own administration. Invariably, there are lots of uncompleted projects dotting every available space in the country. Nigerians may also plan to control their population in line with the realities of time. Due to lack of planning, even the National Bureau of Statistics may not be precise about the population figures in the country. Under such lack of planning, it becomes extremely difficult to ascertain what would be the

relevant needs for the education of the children in schools. It is also apt to unequivocally maintain that when a school system is disorganized or incoherent, it creates enough room for the ruling class to systematically have the opportunity to manipulate the downtrodden.

4. Corruption among the Political Class and the Elite

The most fundamental problem bedeviling Nigerian society is corruption. The level of moral decadence in the country is unimaginably high and the concept of corruption is almost becoming a norm. Billions of naira that should have been invested into education and other socioeconomic sectors such as health care, technological innovations and building of industries are swindled by organized cartels and syndicates. A recent example is the ongoing strike of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which began in the month of February, 2022. For over seven months running, the Federal Government has not been able to address the issues properly with the excuses that there are no funds. However, only recently the Accountant General of Nigeria was alleged to have singlehandedly embezzled close to two hundred billion naira. Nigeria is one country where presidential aspirants from the major political parties are purchasing their nomination forms for as much as one hundred million naira each but the public Universities are on strike for legitimate demands on the need for revitalization of the educational sector (Banjo, 2022). With weak institutions that could hardly probe corrupt political officials and their sources of income, the political class are at liberty to enrich themselves by looting the public treasury empty without being questioned. This is a major bane to the future growth of education, and by extension the other sectors of the economy. Nigeria is like a fattened cow, being milked by those who ordinarily are expected to protect its existence. Honesty and integrity have since become laughable phrases. Those who are hardworking and diligent appear to be ignoble. Corruption is virtually (openly being) celebrated in broad-daylight. Under the aforementioned circumstances, attending schools for donkey years only to become endless job seekers is an abnormality. The young ones are copying from the corrupt attitudes of the elders, after all, the child is a product of the environment. Huge sums fraudulently siphoned are supposed to be used for the educational and other social needs of the society.

5. Insecurity

Another obvious factor that has made Nigeria a leading headquarter of out-of-school children in the world is the rising spate of insecurity in the country. Presently, there is the terrorists' threat in the North with Boko Haram and the ISWAP (Islamic State in West African Province) causing lots of destruction of lives and properties in the entire Northern region; unknown gunmen and IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafria) agitators in the Eastern regions and the Niger Delta militants in the Southern parts of Nigeria; there is actually no part of the country that can be considered safe. Odeyemi (2021) had stated that in the Northern part of the country, not less than 600 teachers have been murdered in Borno state, at least more than 19,000 teachers are displaced and well over 1,200 schools completely destroyed. It could be recalled that Nigerians woke up on 14th day of February, 2014 with the shocking news from Chibok Girls Secondary School in Borno state that about 276 innocent female students preparing for their final year examinations have been kidnapped (Nwadiani, 2016). As we speak, only a handful of those girls were recovered. That incident was followed by the case of the Dapchi Girls Secondary School incident in Adamawa State wherein Leah Shaibu (a Christian female girl had since been held captive allegedly because of her faith) and then just in 2021, the Bethel Secondary School invasion in Kaduna where over a hundred innocent school students were taking into captivity.

Furthermore, during the 2021 West African School Certificate Examination section, a Catholic Priest was killed in the East for not obeying the "sit at home order" declared by IPOB, and for allowing the school in the church premises to write English Language which is a compulsory subject on that day. In a situation such as the examples cited above, there is certainly a threat and serious menace to human security, and the dignity of life. People will prefer that their children stay safe at home with them rather than send them to school to either be killed, kidnapped or trafficked by men of the underworld. The fears experienced from insurgencies according to Umaru and Terhemba (2014) is one reason why the number of out-of-school children had skyrocketed in Nigeria. It must also be pointed out in clear terms that insecurity, hunger, terrorism, poverty and disease have a lot in common. Either of these terms could be divorced or separated from the other. McCawley in Umaru and Terhemba (2014) had emphatically stated that severe poverty may expose citizens to every form of unsecure circumstances. The poor according to these scholars are relatively at higher risks exposed to domestic violence, crime, sickness and unemployment.

These security threats had forced many children out-of-school. The children forced out are now among millions of others denied their fundamental right to education and disadvantaged for life except something urgent is done to rehabilitate them. A graphic survey as captured by Gambo (2017) indicated that 85 percent of the children in Borno state do not attend schools due to insecurity. The damage which these figures alone could mean for the future of the Nigerian child could better be imagined in a technological age where the rest of the world had left us behind.

6. The Perceived Devaluation of Education by Society

The society had placed little or no value on the pursuit of education in Nigeria. Most people believe that education and educationists can hardly make it in life. The perception that education is not empowering anybody again in a society that has become highly materialistic is quite alarming. It is unarguable that with the way the school curriculum is designed, schooling does not make one successful or prosperous. A society where university graduates seek for job placements until their youthfulness is wasted is a pointer to how debased education could be in Nigeria. Many young people would prefer to cut corners to achieve their ambitions rather than waste their youthful years going to schools. The society, especially the political class in most states of the federation, had preferred to recognize the "area boys" (hoodlums and school dropouts) whom they empowered with political appointments. Other young people will prefer to use the internet to defraud unsuspecting members of the society and ride big cars. Nigeria is one country where a man's source of income is rarely questioned. Under such a scenario, anything goes. Schooling and education are downplayed, as what society wants to see is "money". Dubious elements are therefore publicly celebrated.

In a nutshell, Okoh, Emenike, Doma and Akinsola (2020) had pinpointed that changes in the family structure and income had also resulted in the upsurge of out-of-school children in Nigeria. Okoh and his colleagues opined that relationships with parents due to changes in family structure, lack of teacher support, motivation, school performance, drug usage and abuse, distance of school location, in addition to the factors earlier discussed are likely reasons for out-of-school children syndrome in Nigeria. They also maintained that the Nigerian borders are relatively poorly secured. This implies that a lot of children could be immigrating from neighboring countries (Niger Republic, Chad, Mali, Sudan among other countries within the African sub-region) as a result of insecurity and famine without check. All these constitute the

menace of out-of-school children in Nigeria. Other factors could be due to the death of a parent; sicknesses; early marriages; teenage pregnancies; child labour; unattractive school environment, proximity or distance of school from the home of the child; poor academic performances; lack of interest by the child; etc.

Implications to Nation Building

Children who do not complete their school programmes may have multiple implications for the individuals themselves, society and the nation at large. Out-of-school children may live with a social stigma for the rest of their life for not being able to complete their education. They may be seen by society as "never-do-wells" except they struggle to acquire some form of informal education. Many who could not complete their education may grow to become permanent liabilities to their relatives and society as they have fewer opportunities of employment in a digital society today. The deficiency will affect all aspects of human life as there will be vacancies in several areas that demand skills acquired through education at school. Some authorities have found that there exists a relation between participation in required training courses, work-based development activities and job satisfaction. Children who do not attend school are often exposed to violence and menial jobs. Further, even when they are employed, the tendency that they would be placed on far lower salaries than their contemporaries is glaringly inevitable. The implication of these circumstances could translate into marital instability at home between spouses due to inadequate finances for the household. An unsettled marital situation no doubt may lead to domestic violence with its dear consequences that may culminate to divorce and cases of single parenthood. Going further, the young people who are school drop-outs are more likely to embark on illegal and risky behaviors and ventures that may put their lives in danger. They may be more prone to criminal tendencies, such as cultism, armed robbery, kidnappers, political thuggery, ritualists and prostitutes, drugs abusers, and gamblers (the Nairabets and Betnaija syndrome addicts). These classes of people may also be easily exploited by human traffickers due to their poor and ignorant conditions. For example, most of the crisis brewing in some parts of the nation are believed to be masterminded by the elite and political class who use these out-of-school children and adolescents as their foot soldiers to commit atrocities among the unsuspecting public (Aghedo & Eke, 2013). This category of people may face more psychological issues such as depression and are more likely to report greater levels of stress both of which have been likened to deficits in parenting behaviors.

Unemployability

The Nigerian state is saturated with lots of graduates that are being turned out on a yearly basis from the higher institutions of learning. Due to the quality of education/curriculum received from these tertiary institutions, most of these graduates had only acquired cognitive knowledge without any vocation skills. The government civil service is overburdened with most of the employees almost redundant. In a scenario such as this, graduates who are expected to be productive, now sit at home constituting an additional burden and liability to their parents. In the light of the above, one can begin to imagine the agony and predicament of the out-of-school children in Nigeria who have not even perhaps attended or obtained primary school leaving certificates. For one, they have little or no experience to call their own to meander through the hazards of a welfareless society where there is a clear divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots". Such children progress in life to become political thugs, extremely violent criminals, social misfits and in some cases paranoids, ready to unleash vendetta on the society

for their lack of support and care for them. They will not develop trust or be empathetic in a society that never protected them while growing up. These children will never trust anyone and therefore capitalizes on any opportunity to unleash their venom on the society that they considered to have destroyed their future. These out-of-school children may find it difficult to survive even in adulthood as they may likely raise families with multiple instances of marital instabilities and disaffection along the line.

Out-of-school children are most likely to become a major burden to society. Since more of them are unemployable, they are perpetual liabilities to their relatives and society. For example, in the area of reproductive health, out of ignorance, it is evidenced that those who are less educated tend to have more children as compared to the better/higher educated ones. The implication here is that they constitute more challenges to the issues of family planning. Out-of-school children could affect a child's upbringing as many baby mothers will lack the knowledge to raise their children efficiently. Teenage mothers due to lack of knowledge, exposure and experience have a lot of influence on the upbringing of the child. This would imply that both the child and the mother would suffer a lot (Okoh and others). Invariably, they may also constitute and contribute to more of child and mother's mortality in sub-Saharan Africa. The situation may also translate to the level of life expectancy among those living in poverty since they may have little or no access to modern medical facilities. The Editorial of the Guardian (28 October, 2018)) explains that a bleak future awaits Nigeria unless the issue of out-of-school children is addressed because there is a link between education and development. Citing Nelson Mandela, the editor stated that "an educated, enlightened and informed population is one of the surest ways of promoting the health of a democracy". Essentially, education is a leverage, it makes citizens have choices, strengthens the office of the citizens, and develops critical minds needed to question daily bearers and brings them to account, which is essential for social justice. Nigeria is a very highly indebted country, with an excuse that the money so borrowed was to be invested in infrastructure. Surprisingly, this does not reflect in the building of the minds that will use them (the infrastructure) patriotically. Essentially, untrained children will filter away the nation's wealth. This argument may be understood much better when illustrated with a rich father who acquired a lot of property for the children without developing the children's characters. It is likely that these children will lavish the wealth of their father even before his death. That is the situation Nigeria and its half educated people without character appear to be experiencing.

SUGGESTIONS

Every child is important and requires to be properly educated. Education is a right of every child. It is an inalienable right of all children to be educated for their innate potentials to be properly annexed and developed. Based on the impact of the challenges and significance of out-of-school children to national development, the underlisted suggestions are proffered as strategies that will help to reduce this menace from the streets of the cities in Nigeria and change the very embarrassing phenomenon.

1. For a start, there is a need for public enlightenment among the adult population on the need for adequate family planning policies. While it is the right of a citizen to give birth to any number of children they desire, it is also significant for members of the society to understand the dynamics or changing economic times and trends. Families should be

discouraged from engaging in polygamous marriages as part of effort to reducing the number of children they could afford to raise and fend for. There is a need to regulate and provide birth control measures; this will help to boost the standard of living among the populace of the nation. Countries such as China had adopted such measures and this has helped in the economic development of such societies.

2. Encouragement and provision of school-friendly environments, especially for the girl-child. Schools with hundreds of children do not have enough infrastructure. More than 80 percent of schools in Nigeria do not have adequate or separate toilets for male and female pupils. Portable water is an essential ingredient of life, but a handful of primary and secondary schools in Nigeria can boost portable water facilities. The classrooms are without enough seats for the pupils to sit and write. Children are forced to sit in some cases on bare floors or makeshift blocks while learning. Classrooms in most urban settlements are overpopulated and teachers are having a lot of trouble maintaining discipline in the classes rather than delivering the lessons. There is a need to create a friendly classroom environment, with the required modern equipment, such as electric fans, good classroom furniture, computers, modern chalkboards, spacious classrooms and properly ventilated rooms, etc. Provision of the state-of-the-art infrastructure that creates a conducive learning environment will help to assist children settle down in their classes. For example, the Lagos State Government under Babajide Sanwolu had just launched in June 2022, the hybrid digital caravan classrooms in Lagos state. In the school, both the teachers and students are provided with computers and other accessories. Replicating such infrastructure will help to promote learning and knowledge at a faster rate in this 21st century technology driven school system. Government attempts in recent times to introduce school feeding programmes is in the right direction. However, this school feeding programme should not be selective or only for a particular section of the country rather provision should be made for all children in primary and secondary schools.

3. Government should assist in improving the living standard of the average Nigerian family. Presently, the average family could barely afford three square meals. To be at pace with the current realities in terms of the economy, the government can provide soft loans for farmers, give grants to cooperative agricultural societies, consider workers welfare as a priority and improve on the health facilities/services for the ordinary citizens. Once these measures are taken, food security can be ensured and the family will be better for it. Provide strategies for poverty alleviation to uplift the standard of living of the average family.

4. The first obligation and responsibility of any responsive government is to provide adequate security for the lives and properties of her citizens. The level of violence and obnoxious activities taking place in the country had created fear among the citizens of the country. Schools have become soft targets for terrorists and bandits in the society. Government, the communities and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) including religious bodies should collectively consider security as the responsibility of all. Reducing violence in the school environments includes stopping the violation of the girl-child by even some school authorities, bullying, sexual harassment among others. A situation where some state governors are instructing their subjects to acquire arms for self-defense speaks volumes about the terrible security situation in Nigeria.

5. As already being demonstrated by some state governments such as Delta, Oyo and Sokoto, stringent laws should be passed and parents who dare object to sending their children to school for their selfish reasons should be punished. Education is a child's right and any parent who refuses to perform that right should be seen as an enemy of the future of the child. This way, parents will take their responsibilities to their children much more seriously. It will also be an avenue for parents to understand that given birth to children entails accepting some fundamental responsibilities as well. Parents who neglect their children's education should be made to understand that not given the child education is a form of negligence and child abuse.

6. The role of the school counselor should be strengthened in the school system. Presently, the counseling units in the schools are not adequately equipped to perform their obligations. Most schools do not have functional counseling units and qualified trained counselors to man the units. More students should therefore be encouraged/trained as counselors in the institutions of higher learning. Trained personnel should be allowed to carry out the assignment they are trained for without interference from their school headmasters and principals. Furthermore, the pupils/students of the schools should be taught to be assertive and ready to open up their personal and emotional challenges to the school counselors.

7. Training and re-training is important to teachers in service to enable them to be abreast with contemporary trends in teaching and learning. Employing seasoned and qualified professional teachers that will encourage/motivate the pupils to learn and remain focused in schools is imperative. A teacher can make or mar the future of the child. The level of his understanding of the child is important in the teaching and learning process. A teachers' understanding of his pupils' emotional state is essential in the keeping of the children at school. A teachers' character and teaching strategies can instigate the pupils to become truants and eventually drop out of school if it is not efficient and effective enough.

8. Knowing that education is the right of the child, the government should ensure compulsory basic and free education at the primary and secondary school levels. At the level of the higher institutions, the government should subsidize the cost of educational fees. With reduced school fees, every child will have equal opportunities to attend schools.

9. Nigeria must put in place effective policies that enforce laws against early child marriages. A situation in which underaged (teenage) girls between ages 10-11 years old are forcefully given out into marriages either because of religious or cultural factors is condemnable. Parents who mastermind such child marriages should be severely sanctioned and punished by law. Every child irrespective of gender or status should aspire to fully annex their potentials instead of getting them disorganized through unpleasant circumstances that results in letting them end up as street children.

10. Sensitizing parents on the importance of education and the opportunities their children stand to miss for dropping out of school should be carried out by the Federal and State Ministries of Education. During such enlightenment campaigns, parents should be intimated about the opportunities awaiting their children and wards concerning governments desire and implementation of free education; they should be further exposed to various scholarship as well as support schemes within and outside their vicinities that could come to their aid.

11. According to Yusuff (2011), government alone cannot execute all the desires of the growing child in view of the population of children in need of education. Subsequently, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the communities themselves, faith-based groups, and public-spirited individuals are all enjoined to save children from darkness and ignorance. They could support the less privileged children by establishing educational foundations and scholarships schemes. Opportunities to empower the youth will serve as social security and help to galvanize those families living in poverty to improve their standard of living. Through such kind gestures and goodwill, the society can make education accessible to the children that are most vulnerable.

12. Out-of-school children should be encouraged to attend evening study programmes to make up for the deficiencies they may have suffered from. These "second chance programmes" should help to provide not only literacy but also skills such as tailoring, welding, photography, arts and craft development, film making, etc. Upon completion of these courses, the youth trained could indeed become self-reliant and employers of labor. Emphasis for education going by this principle equips learners with the agency, the competencies and the sense of purpose to shape their own lives and contribute to the lives of others within and outside their immediate environment. This implies that these children can indeed become the change agents for tomorrow as envisioned.

13. For the children in the North, there is a need to acquire both Quranic (religious) education and Western (secular) education. In that manner, the pupils will get a more balanced judgement when it comes to very topical issues that affects the security and need for an indivisible Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The entire essence of this expository paper was to examine the consequences that could emanate in society as a result of keeping children that are supposed to stay at school out of school by the individuals and the society at large. To imagine that in spite of the wealth of Nigeria, over 18 million children are not staying at school to learn is indeed a source of concern to any meaningful citizen. The central focus of education is to develop the minds of the younger generations to become productive and contribute their quota in nation building. The child is like a crop planted by the farmer. The farmer can only yearn for a bumper harvest if he or she nurtures its seedlings or crops with diligence. No nation can grow above the inputs which in real terms are the children that are abandoned or left uncared for today; Nigeria can only make meaningful development when its educational sector is adequately annexed. The reasons for children dropping out of school were enumerated in this work to include poverty, ignorance, religious and cultural barriers, lack of planning, corruption especially among the political class and above all, insecurity in most parts of the country. Beyond the wanton damage done on property, insecurity has also led to the death of over thousands of Nigerians including children and teachers. This is minus the number of school children that have been captured and taken as hostages by bandits and unknown gunmen. The fear of the unknown has made most parents scared of sending their children to school. This is in addition to the Almajiri system in the Northern parts of the country. In other to make ends meet, parents in some agricultural settlements like Asimabiri and Osekineke in Sagbama Local Government area of Bayelsa state, Nigeria, could make their children to stay out of school for weeks or more to help their parents

harvest either pepper or okro from the farms. They may as well be in the bush packing Ogbolo (bush mango) normally used for preparing "draw soup" (which is a local delicacy) and a major cash plant/money yielder for family sustenance. Others are school related reasons for children academic marginality. Out-of-school children has been part of the challenge to nation building in Nigeria as some of these teenagers will grow up to become endemic liabilities to the society. Apart from being unemployable or underemployed, they appear to constitute the bulk of ready tools for political thugs, criminals, hoodlums, sex workers (prostitutes) and many other vices that are anti-progress to nationhood. Some meaningful suggestions are equally proffered so that when applied will help to check attrition in schools and keep these vulnerable children in school. As Okorosaye-Orubite (2017) suggests: "Access to education should not only cover the formal setting, but also in the non-formal setting. This means that education facilities and services should be expanded to cover not only children of school age in formal schools, but also out-of-school children, youth and adults who missed education when they were of school age. Those who by virtue of their traditional occupations are not sedentary-nomads, migrant fisherfolks and itinerant farmers (farm labourers), as well as physically, economically, socially and psychologically vulnerable groups who should be provided for in the non-formal setting".

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