



ASSESSMENT OF INPEDIMENTS TO PUPILS ENROLMENT AND RETENTION AT THE BASIC EDUCATION LEVEL IN NORTH-WEST ZONE, NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

Basic education is fundamental for individual and societal development. However, Nigeria faces significant challenges in ensuring pupils enrolment and retention more especially in the northern region. This paper examines the impediments to pupils' enrolment and retention at the basic education level. The objective of the study was to identify the causes and consequences of low school enrolment and retention in north-west zone, Nigeria and also determine strategies that can help overcome those challenges. A mixed methods research design was adopted for the study. The study obtained data from 70 principals, 140 teachers, 70 students, 28 youth who had dropped out of school, 35 youths that had never been to school, 7 ministry of Education officials, 14 SBMC members, 34 Parents and 14 Area Education Officers (AEO), using questionnaires, focus group discussions and interview guides. Findings from the study indicated that poverty, insecurity, parental level of education, early marriage were some of the leading causes of low enrolment and retention while some of the consequences revealed by the study include: increase in crimes and social vices, limits individuals' opportunities for skilled employment and better-paying jobs, reinforces gender inequality thereby limiting the girl-child empowerment and potential contributions to society and lower participation in democratic processes while some of the strategies that can enhance enrolment and retention identified are: Incentivizing parents to keep their children enrolled in locations with high level of low enrolment, Enhancing security in and around schools, Implementing specific interventions to address the unique barriers faced by girls.

Keywords:

Impediment, Enrolment, Retention and Basic education.

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Introduction

Education is pivotal to socio-economic development globally and most of the scientific and technological breakthrough witness is from the knowledge based economies who devoted both human and material resources in seeking and advancing knowledge. Thus, schools serve as reservoirs of knowledge and incubators of innovation and creativity for meaningful contributions to national development. It's in the realisation of the significance of education in developing economies that nations globally have put in place policies aimed at enhancing access to quality education. In Nigeria, the Universal Basic Education policy was put in place in order to provide access to affordable education for all school age going children irrespective of ethnicity, religion, social status and geographical location. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) also emphasized that "access to basic education is a driving force for development of economies. Thus, many countries globally have put in place policies that promotes enrolment of children in schools in order to prepare them for useful living and meaningful contributions to the socio-economic development of the nations in general. Hence, basic education in Nigeria is free and compulsory for all citizens within the age range of 5-16 years.

However, despite efforts made globally for enrolment of school age children in school, it was estimated that 244 million children and youth between the ages of 6 and 18 worldwide were out of school in 2021, of which 118.5 million were girls and 125.5 million were boys UNESCO (2022). In cases where they were enrolled, there was a challenge of low pupil retention in schools. Hence, enrolment and retention of pupils in schools has remained a global challenge more especially in developing nations and some minority groups in developed nations (Global Monitoring Report, 2015). In sub-Sahara Africa alone, the statistics of out of school children in 2021 was 98 million (UNESCO, 2021). In Nigeria UNICEF (2022) reported that 19.7 million children did not have access to education. Recent statistics indicated that 30% of pupils in Nigeria drop-out of primary school and only 54% transit to junior secondary schools (Lawal, 2018). The researcher explained that the reasons for this has been attributed to child labour, poverty, early marriage for girls and Boko haram insurgency. UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS, 2022) also reported that between 2000 and 2022 Nigeria had witnessed a staggering 36.5% increase in the number of out of school children. The northern region of Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children compared to southern region and the disparity was amounting to 15% (UNESCO 2022). Girls are more likely than boys to be out of school in Nigeria, with a rate of 30% compared to 22%. The leading causes of low enrolment and retention in Nigeria are poverty, conflict, gender discrimination, and lack of access to quality education. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on education in Nigeria, with millions of children being forced to stay home from school.

Another key factor accounting for low school enrolment and retention is that Africans generally tend to have large families with several children in addition to extended family members. Thus, the responsibility of catering for large family tends to put more pressure on their Children's education whereas most of the household income generated is spent on basic needs like food, cloth, shelter and health leaving very little or nothing to be channelled to

education. Overcrowded classes were also an issue identified affecting school enrolment and retention. This is because the discomfort associated with overpopulated classes makes it very hard for students to remain focused on the learning process while it also becomes strenuous for the teacher to manage the class effectively. Provision of adequate learning materials is another issue of major concern to both parents and the school managers. This is because in cases where instructional materials are very limited in supply, pressure is put on parents to provide for their young ones the necessary materials such as note books, text books and stationaries. In cases where parents cannot afford, they tend to withdraw their wards from the school or stop sending them to school. This problem contributes a lot to school dropout. Proximity is also another factor of great concern. Distance between home and school can also have a great impact on enrolment and retention. Yagana (2023) findings showed that the location of the school had great impact on how many girls enrol, retained and complete junior secondary schools. Yagana explained further that, due to remote location of most rural dwellers, they are most times constrained by distance to send their children to far away and high fee-parley urban schools.

Most schools, especially in rural areas are located some distance from the pupils' residence. In a research carried out by Adeyemi (2009), it was reported that factors effecting school enrolment in Nigeria are: culture, inadequate provision of schools in rural areas, illiteracy and poverty. Poverty is indeed one of the greatest threats to access to quality education globally. Abdulmumin (2021) cited in Yagana (2023) noted that although the UBE act emphasized free and compulsory basic education, there are charges for school uniform, books and transport that parents have to incur. That indirect cost of education can create barrier to school enrolment and retention. UNESCO is (2014) reported that in sub-Sahara Africa, 95% of children from high income families attend schools while only 31% of children from low-income families attend school. The study of Adolphus (2016) revealed that key factors affecting enrolment and retention in the region are culture related and they include pastoral life style, strong cultural values, negative attitude towards education, and engagement in domestic work. Others are socio-economic and environmental factors as impediments to school enrolment and retention. Similarly, studies shows that the educational background of parents can also has an impact on enrolment and retention. The study of Malelu, Gicholi and Mwenda (N.d.) also concluded that most of the learners dropped out of school due to initiation ceremonies, early marriages and poor parental perception towards education which ultimately affected the retention rate of learners in school. This means that the more educated a parent is, the higher the chances of their ward attending school and the lower the chances of their children dropping out from school. Also, children are forced to look after parent's animals instead of enrolling in schools. Therefore, home environment conditions such as household tasks, and negative attitude towards education from parents and other siblings may negatively influence a child's participation and retention in school.

Namukwaya and Kibirige (2014) confirmed that, most of the factors that influenced student retention were culture related, they included: pastoral lifestyle, strong cultural values, negative attitude towards education and engagement in domestic work. Similarly, Jama (2015) reported that in Somalia the most significant factor that affects the retention rates of female

students is early marriage and domestic labour. While Ndemba (2014) also indicated that cultural factors such as early marriages, cattle rustling among others had contributed to the poor retention of pupils in schools in Kenya. Fowler and Luna (2012) refer to student retention as students' continued study until successful completion. Furthermore, in many parts of Northern Nigeria, many children have stopped attending school as a result of the activities of Boko Haram insurgents targeting schools. In 2014, over 200 girls were abducted from Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok besides those who managed to escape or the ones later freed, many have not been found till date, (Grema, 2021 cited in Yagana 2023). This state of insecurity has forced parents to keep their wards at home.

In addition, Akresh (2008) points out that the decision to enrol and keep a child in school involves considering many variables, including parental beliefs and expectations about the value of schooling, the perceptions that parents hold on the relevance of what is taught at school to their felt survival needs also influence decisions on enrolment and retention in schools. Deficiencies in the link between schooling and the necessary skills for the local labour market was also found to be a significant factor in explaining school drop-out rates (Natriello, 2002).

Thus, for those challenges to be properly addressed, effective strategies must be implemented to enhance enrolment and retention in order to equip the young population with necessary skills and competence to optimally participate in nation building and contribute their quarter for the overall development of the nation. Okeke (2009) identified measures that can help enhance pupils enrolment and retention in primary schools to include: provision of adequate schools in both rural and urban areas, adequate awareness campaigns, school feeding programmes and also free admission and enrolment package consisting of the offer of admission accompanied with free uniform, books, stationaries and school bag.

Even though, the government of Nigeria is committed to achieving universal primary education by 2030. There is need to take further steps to address the challenges of low school enrolment and retention in order to achieve this goal. Thus, the thrust of this paper is to assess the impediments to pupils, enrolment and retention at the basic education level in North-west zone, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study was premised on Abraham Maslow's theory on human motivation (Maslow, 1943). Maslow (1954) postulates that people have tendencies towards their needs for certain things and those needs are divided into four in hierarchical order. The first and most basic level of needs are physiological needs such as the need for food water and shelter. According to Maslow if one is both hungry and thirsty, he would try to address those first as the most immediate need. Also man needs a comfortable place to rest and sleep than comes the second need which has to do with security and safety. Human needs to feel safe and secured all the time which encompasses the security of their lives, safety at work or centre of learning and also security of property. This is to say people want to feel safe at home, in school and at places of work. Both lives and property must be protected from any form of danger. The

theory of human motivation may be a plausible explanation for the enrolment and retention dilemma in northern Nigeria which has a high rate of poverty and insecurity. Hence, parents have to make choices on whether to send their children to school or not; amidst other social pressing needs.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the root causes of low school enrolment and retention at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria?
2. What are the consequences of low school enrolment and retention at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria?
3. What is the influence of school location factors on enrolment, retention and completion rate at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria?
4. What are the strategies that can be adopted to enhance pupils' enrolment and retention at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria?

Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the root causes of low school enrolment and retention at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria
2. Identify the consequences of low school enrolment and retention at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria
3. Determine whether school location factors that can influence enrolment, retention and completion at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria.
4. Determine the strategies that can enhance pupils enrolment and retention at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria

Research Methodology

A mixed methods research design was adopted for the study. The study obtained data from 70 school heads, 140 teachers, 7 Ministry of Education officials, 14 SBMC members, 34 Parents and 14 Area Education Officers (AEO), 70 students, 28 youth who had dropped out of school, 35 youths that had never been to school, using questionnaires and interview guides. The researcher designed questionnaire titled: Causes and Consequences of Low School Enrolment and Retention Questionnaire (CCLSERQ) which was validated by experts in Educational management. The instrument was pilot tested through test re-test method and a reliability index of 0.74 was obtained using Crombach Alpha Co-efficient at 0.05 level of significance. The study participants were purposefully selected because the varied categories would provide rich information on factors affecting enrolment and retention in those schools. Data was collected from head teachers, teachers, and Ministries of Education officials, SBMC, PTA and Parents using questionnaire and face to face interviews, while Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were employed to collect data from pupils, dropouts and youths not opportune to attend school. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis, which is a

method that involves comparing, contrasting and categorizing data in order to draw meanings and themes from the data. Open coding was employed in this case and the coding was done statement by statement to get the main ideas. This was followed by axial coding where ideas were grouped to form themes. SPSS was used to compute mean, percentages and standard deviation using the quantitative data collected. An adapted four-point Likert scale with the Mean of 2.50 and above was used for acceptance, while below 2.50 was used for rejection.

Result

Research Question 1: What are the causes of low school enrolment and retention at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria?

The answer to this research question is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Summary of Mean and SD for Responses on Causes of Low School Enrolment and Retention at Basic Education Level in North-west, Nigeria

S/N	Test Items on causes of low school enrolment and retention at basic education level	N	Mean	Std.Dev.	Decision
1	Pervasive Poverty often forces parents to prioritize basic needs over education,	279	2.97	0.82	Accepted
2	Traditional norms in some communities still favour early marriage for girls, leading to their withdrawal from school at a young age	279	2.82	0.90	Accepted
3	Cultural and Religious Misconceptions	279	2.79	0.83	Accepted
4	Insurgency, banditry, and kidnaping in several Northern states have led to a general fear of sending children to school due to safety concerns	279	3.04	0.96	Accepted
5	Insufficient classrooms, furniture, learning materials (textbooks, stationery) discourages school enrolment and attendance.	279	3.00	0.75	Accepted
6	The distance children have to trek to reach the nearest school can be long and substantial and unsafe, especially for younger students.	279	2.87	0.85	Accepted
7	Lack of Parental Education and Awareness	279	2.93	0.82	Accepted
8	Opportunity Costs of Education	279	2.80	0.90	Accepted
Total			2.90	0.85	Accepted

Table 1 is a summary of descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation conducted to assess the participants' perception of the causes of low school enrolment and retention at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria. The data analysis revealed an average response mean score of 2.90 (N=279, Mean=2.90, SD=0.85) indicating that all the suggested causes of low school enrolment and retention identified in the instrument were accepted to be

causes of low enrolment and retention among basic education schools in North-west Zone, Nigeria. The analysis further revealed that basic education schools in North-west Zone, Nigeria are seriously challenged in terms of school enrolment and retention. The causes have been identified by the participants in the study and the results are presented from the highest to the lowest in order of hierarchy as follows: Insurgency, banditry, and kidnaping in several Northern states have led to a general fear of sending children to school due to safety concerns (Mean=3.04, SD=0.96); Insufficient classrooms, furniture, learning materials (textbooks, stationery) discourages school enrolment and attendance (Mean = 3.00, SD = 0.75); Pervasive Poverty often forces parents to prioritize basic needs over education (Mean = 3.97, SD = 0.82); Lack of Parental Education and Awareness (Mean = 2.93, SD = 0.82); distance children have to trek to reach the nearest school can be long and substantial and unsafe, especially for younger students (Mean = 2.87, SD = 0.85); Opportunity Costs of Education (Mean = 2.80, SD = 0.90); Traditional norms in some communities still favour early marriage for girls, leading to their withdrawal from school at a young age (Mean = 2.82, SD = 0.90); Cultural and Religious Misconceptions (Mean = 2.79, SD = 1.83).

Research Question 2: What are the consequences of low school enrolment and retention at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria?

The answer to this research question is presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Summary of Mean and SD for Responses on Consequences of Low School Enrolment and Retention at Basic Education Level in North-west zone, Nigeria

S/N	Test Items	N	Mean	Std.Dev.	Decision
1	High rate of underemployment	279	2.85	0.96	Accepted
2	Lower participation in democratic processes	279	2.96	0.82	Accepted
3	It limits individuals' opportunities for skilled employment and better-paying jobs	279	3.00	0.89	Accepted
4	Contribute to higher level of illiteracy	279	2.92	0.85	Accepted
5	High rates of unemployment	279	2.95	0.90	Accepted
6	Involvement in social vices and criminal activities due to lack of education	279	3.07	0.93	Accepted
7	Early marriage for girls can hinder access to basic education, reinforces gender inequality thereby limiting their empowerment and potential contributions to society.	279	2.97	0.88	Accepted
8	It prevent individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds from improving their socio-economic status.	279	3.00	0.82	Accepted
Total			2.96	0.88	Accepted

Table 2 presents a summary of descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation conducted to assess participants' opinion on the consequences of low enrolment and retention among basic education schools in North-west Zone, Nigeria. The data analysis revealed an

average response mean score of 2.96 (N=279, Mean=2.96, SD=0.88) indicating that all the suggested consequences of low enrolment and retention identified in the instrument were accepted to be consequences of low enrolment and retention found among basic education schools in Zamfara state. The analysis further revealed that basic education schools in North-west Zone, Nigeria are seriously challenged in terms of enrolment and retention, the consequences of such have been identified by the respondents in this study and the results are presented in hierarchical order from the highest to the lowest as follows: Involvement in social vices and criminal activities due to lack of education (Mean = 3.07, SD = 0.93); It limits individuals' opportunities for skilled employment and better-paying jobs (Mean = 3.00, SD = 0.89); It prevent individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds from improving their socio-economic status (Mean = 3.00, SD = 0.82); Early marriage for girls can hinder access to basic education, reinforces gender inequality thereby limiting their empowerment and potential contributions to society. (Mean = 2.97, SD = 0.88); Lower participation in democratic processes (Mean = 2.96, SD = 0.82); High rates of unemployment (Mean = 2.95, SD = 0.90); Contribute to higher level of illiteracy (Mean = 2.92, SD = 0.85); High rate of underemployment (Mean = 2.85, SD = 0.96).

Question 3: What is the influence of school location factors on enrolment, retention and completion rate at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria?

The answer to this research question is in table 3 below:

Table 3: Summary of Mean and SD for Responses on influence of school location factors of Low School Enrolment and Retention at Basic Education Level in North-west zone, Nigeria

S/N	Test Items on the influence of school location factors on enrolment, retention and completion rate.	N	Mean	Std.Dev.	Decision
1	Long distances, coupled with poor transportation infrastructure, make it difficult and sometimes unsafe for children to travel to school daily. This directly impacts enrolment and increases dropout rates.	279	2.84	0.95	Accepted
2	Inadequate infrastructure, including classrooms, furniture, learning materials, and basic amenities like water and sanitation in schools in rural locations affects both enrolment and the retention rate.	279	3.01	0.87	Accepted
3	The fear of attacks, kidnappings, violence and also the psychological trauma due to those factors can affect enrolment and attendance.	279	3.05	0.90	Accepted
4	Lack of safe routes to school deter enrolment and attendance, particularly for girls.	279	2.89	0.95	Accepted
5	Locations with lower levels of parental	279	3.00	0.96	Accepted

	education often have lower enrolment and retention rates.				
6	Certain traditional practices prevalent in specific localities, such as early marriage for girls, can directly lead to their withdrawal from school.	279	2.98	0.96	Accepted
7	Interpretations of religious beliefs might influence attitudes towards formal education, affecting enrolment and retention, particularly for girls	279	2.92	0.94	Accepted
8	Climate-related disasters like droughts or floods can impact agricultural livelihoods, increasing poverty and indirectly affecting families' ability to send and keep their children in school.	279	2.94	0.88	Accepted
Total			2.95	0.96	Accepted

Table 3 above is a summary of descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation conducted to assess participants' perception of the influence of school location factors on enrolment, retention and completion rate at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria. The data analysis revealed an average response mean score of 2.95 (N=279, Mean=2.95, SD=0.96) indicating that all the suggested responses on the influence of school location factors on enrolment, retention and completion rate at basic education level identified in the instrument were accepted to be the factors school location factors that can influence enrolment, retention and completion rate at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria. The analysis further revealed that enrolment, retention and completion rate in basic education schools in North-west zone of Nigeria is influenced by certain school location factors as identified by the participants in the study and the results from the findings are presented from the highest to the lowest in order of hierarchy as follows: fear of attacks, kidnappings, violence and also the psychological trauma due to those factors can affect enrolment and attendance (Mean=3.05, SD=0.96), Inadequate infrastructure, including classrooms, furniture, learning materials, and basic amenities like water and sanitation in schools in rural locations affects both enrolment and the retention rate. (Mean=3.01, SD=0.87), Locations with lower levels of parental education often have lower enrolment and retention rates (Mean=3.00, SD=0.96), Certain traditional practices prevalent in specific localities, such as early marriage for girls, can directly lead to their withdrawal from school (Mean=2.98, SD=0.96), Climate-related disasters like droughts or floods can impact agricultural livelihoods, increasing poverty and indirectly affecting families' ability to send and keep their children in school (Mean=2.94, SD=0.88), Interpretations of religious beliefs might influence attitudes towards formal education, affecting enrolment and retention, particularly for girls (Mean=2.92, SD=0.94), Lack of safe routes to school deter enrolment and attendance, particularly for girls (Mean=2.89, SD=0.95), Long distances, coupled with poor transportation infrastructure, make it difficult and sometimes unsafe for children to travel to school daily. This directly impacts enrolment and

increases dropout rates. (Mean=2.84, SD=0.95).

Research Question 4: What are the strategies that can be adopted to enhance pupils' enrolment and retention at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria?

The answer to this research question is in table 4 below:

Table 4: Summary of Mean and SD for Responses on Strategies that can Enhance School Enrolment and Retention at Basic Education Level in North-west zone, Nigeria

S/N	Test Items on strategies that can be adopted to enhance pupils' enrolment and retention at basic education level	N	Mean	Std.Dev.	Decision
1	Incentivizing parents to keep their children enrolled in locations with high level of low enrolment. For instance, a monthly stipend could be provided for each child attending at least 75% of school days.	279	3.04	0.84	Accepted
2	Reducing the costs of essential learning materials (textbooks, uniforms, stationeries) for poor families.	279	3.00	0.92	Accepted
3	Enhancing security in and around schools, particularly in conflict affected areas	279	3.04	0.79	Accepted
4	Providing safe transportation options to alleviate parental concerns about distance and safety	279	2.98	0.95	Accepted
5	Launching culturally sensitive awareness campaigns to educate parents, caregivers and communities on the importance of education for both boys and girls.	279	2.89	0.95	Accepted
6	Engaging traditional and religious leaders as advocates for education to help address cultural misconceptions and promote a positive attitude towards schooling.	279	2.92	0.95	Accepted
7	Adapting the curriculum to make it more relevant to the local context, and offering flexible learning options to cater for diverse needs and interests.	279	2.68	0.96	Accepted
8.	Implementing specific interventions to address the unique barriers faced by girls, such as providing scholarships, safe transportation, female mentors, and raising awareness about the negative consequences of early marriage.	279	3.00	0.96	Accepted
9.	Increase School Feeding project to include day schools in order to incentivize	279	3.01	0.89	Accepted

attendance, and alleviate the burden of providing food for families struggling with poverty

Total	3.32	1.03
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Table 4 above is a summary of descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation conducted to assess participants' perception of the strategies that can be adopted to enhance pupils' enrolment and retention at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria. The data analysis revealed an average response mean score of 3.32 (N=279, Mean=3.32, SD=1.03), indicating that all the suggested strategies that can be adopted to enhance pupils' enrolment and retention at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria as identified in the instrument, were accepted to be the strategies that can be adopted to enhance pupils' enrolment and retention at basic education level in North-west Zone, Nigeria. The analysis further revealed that there are strategies that can enhance enrolment and retention rates as identified by the participants in the study and the results from the findings are presented from the highest to the lowest in order of hierarchy as follows; Incentivizing parents to keep their children enrolled in locations with high level of low enrolment. For instance, a monthly stipend could be provided for each child attending at least 75% of school days (Mean=3.04, SD=0.89), Enhancing security in and around schools, particularly in conflict affected areas(Mean=3.04, SD=0.84), Increase School Feeding project to include day schools in order to incentivize attendance, and alleviate the burden of providing food for families struggling with poverty(Mean=3.01, SD=0.87), Implementing specific interventions to address the unique barriers faced by girls, such as providing scholarships, safe transportation, female mentors, and raising awareness about the negative consequences of early marriage(Mean=3.00, SD=0.96), Reducing the costs of essential learning materials (textbooks, uniforms, stationeries) for poor families (Mean=3.00, SD=0.92), Providing safe transportation options to alleviate parental concerns about distance and safety (Mean=2.98, SD=0.95), Engaging traditional and religious leaders as advocates for education to help address cultural misconceptions and promote a positive attitude towards schooling (Mean=2.92, SD=0.95),Launching culturally sensitive awareness campaigns to educate parents, caregivers and communities on the importance of education for both boys and girls (Mean=2.89, SD=0.95), Adapting the curriculum to make it more relevant to the local context, and offering flexible learning options to cater for diverse needs and interests (Mean=2.68, SD=0.96).

Summary of the Qualitative Analysis

Thematic 1: Causes of Low enrolment and Attendance:

The findings from the qualitative data analysis reveal that pervasive poverty, coupled with the alarming insecurity stemming from insurgency, banditry, and kidnappings, creates a fundamental barrier, instilling fear and directly limiting families' capacity to prioritize education. Participants also highlighted that these issues are compounded by critical infrastructural deficiencies in schools, insufficient learning materials, and the challenging realities of long, unsafe distances to school. Furthermore, many participants explained that

deep-seated socio-cultural factors, including low parental education, traditional norms like early marriage for girls, and certain interpretations of religious beliefs, significantly impede school enrolment, attendance and completion rate.

Thematic 2: Consequences of Low Enrolment and Attendance

The participants of the qualitative study revealed that the consequences of these low enrolment and attendance are dire and far-reaching, extending beyond individual academic failure to profound societal detriment. Majority of the participants mentioned consequences such as increased involvement in social vices and criminal activities, severely limited opportunities for skilled employment, and the perpetuation of intergenerational poverty for disadvantaged individuals. Also, many participants mentioned that girls, in particular, face compounded disadvantages due to early marriage, which reinforces gender inequality and curtails their empowerment. Majority of the participants also maintained that low enrolment and attendance contribute to lower participation in democratic processes, high rates of unemployment and underemployment, and a higher overall level of illiteracy in the region.

Thematic 3: Strategies for Enhancing Enrolment, Attendance and Completion Rate

The participants from the focussed group discussions and interviews also provides a clear roadmap of actionable strategies to address these challenges. Prioritizing interventions such as incentivizing parents and enhancing security in and around schools as highly impactful. The participants also recommended expanding school feeding programs and specifically targeting interventions for girls, and also reducing the cost of learning materials. Finally, majority of the participants believed that engaging traditional and religious leaders, launching culturally sensitive awareness campaigns, and adapting the curriculum to local contexts are essential for fostering a positive and sustainable educational environment.

Discussion of Findings

First finding from the study indicated the key causes of low school enrolment and retention in North-west Nigeria with Pervasive Poverty as the most significant factor. This means that poverty often forces parents to prioritize basic needs like food and shelter over education, making it difficult to afford school fees, uniforms, or even lose the potential income their children could generate. This financial strain directly impacts both enrolment and the ability to keep children in school. Insurgency, Banditry, and Kidnapping are also safety concerns that were found to be major deterrent as indicated by the respondents in this study. This means that general fear of those security threats discourages parents from sending their children to school, lack of adequate infrastructure and resources were also shown to directly discourage school enrolment and attendance. Overcrowded classrooms. This is because uncomfortable learning environment, and the absence of essential materials like textbooks and stationery make schools less appealing and effective, contributing to poor retention. Lack of Parental Education and Awareness is another factor found to negatively impact enrolment and retention. This is because without sufficient awareness, parents may not prioritize schooling, or they might not be equipped to support their children's educational journey

effectively. The findings also revealed that long and unsafe distances to school, particularly for younger students, pose a considerable barrier to school enrolment and attendance. The study also indicated that traditional norms favouring early marriage for girls specifically impacts girls' retention in school, as they are withdrawn at a young age for marriage, truncating their education. Other causes are cultural and religious misconceptions and opportunity Costs of Education. Thus, for struggling families, these foregone benefits can be a significant disincentive.

Second finding from the study shows that, the respondents of this study identified several consequences of low school enrolment and retention such as: involvement in social vices and criminal activities. This was identified as the most significant consequence, indicating a direct link between lack of education and increased engagement in illicit activities. This suggests that without access to schooling, individuals, particularly youth, may be more susceptible to criminal behaviour, posing a significant societal risk. Limited opportunities for skilled employment and better-paying jobs is another consequence revealed by the study. This shows that low educational attainment severely restricts individuals' access to higher-skilled and more lucrative employment. This is because education is a key pathway out of poverty and when this pathway is blocked, individuals from already disadvantaged backgrounds find it exceedingly difficult to uplift their living standards, perpetuating intergenerational poverty. Early Marriage for Girls was also found to impact girl-child opportunity for school enrolment and retention. This means early marriage hinders their access to basic education, reinforces existing gender inequalities, and severely limits their personal empowerment and potential contributions to society. Another consequence revealed by the current study is lower participation in democratic processes. This may not be unconnected to the fact that a less educated populace tends to have lower awareness and engagement in civic duties, leading to reduced participation in democratic processes. The study further revealed the consequence of high unemployment rate, since many individuals lack the qualifications demanded by the job market. Higher rates of illiteracy within the population is another consequence indicated by the findings from the study. This can hinder communication, access to information, and personal development.

Thirdly, the research findings underscore that school location factors significantly influence enrolment, retention, and completion rates in basic education schools across Nigeria's North-west Zone. The study participants identified several key factors such as fear of attacks, kidnappings, violence, and psychological trauma. This factor emerged as the most critical school location influence. This is because the pervasive insecurity creates an environment of fear that directly impacts parents' willingness to send their children to school and subsequently affects enrolment and attendance, highlighting a severe threat to educational access and student well-being in these areas. The study further revealed that lack of essential infrastructure, including classrooms, furniture, learning materials, and basic amenities like water and sanitation, particularly in rural schools, significantly affects both enrolment and retention rates. Locations characterized by lower levels of parental education have also been found to have a profound effect on school enrolment and retention rates. This means that parents with less educational background may have less awareness of the importance of

schooling or face greater socioeconomic barriers to sending their children to school. The findings also indicated that traditional practices, such as early marriage for girls which is prevalent in specific localities directly lead to their withdrawal from school. This means that cultural norms impede girls' educational attainment. The findings from the study furthermore, indicated that climate related disasters like droughts or floods can impact agricultural livelihoods, increasing poverty within affected communities. This can indirectly affects families' ability to send and keep their children in school, as economic hardship often forces education to become a secondary concern. Other school location factors are lack of safe routes to school, long distances coupled with inadequate transportation infrastructure make daily travel to school difficult and sometimes hazardous for children, interpretations of religious beliefs in some specific locations also influences attitudes towards formal education, impacting both enrolment and retention, particularly for girls.

Fourth findings from the study revealed strategies that can enhance school enrolment and attendance such as Incentivizing Parents. This strategy, tied for the highest mean, suggests providing a monthly stipend for each child attending at least 75% of school days in areas with low enrolment and attendance. This direct financial incentive aims to alleviate poverty's burden on families and encourage consistent attendance. The findings also suggested enhancing security in and Around Schools. This emphasizes improving security measures, particularly in conflict-affected areas. Expanding the school feeding project to include day schools is also shown as a vital incentive for attendance by the respondents of the study. This not only encourages children to come to school but also helps alleviate the burden of providing food for families struggling with poverty. Implementing Interventions for Girls was another strategy indicated from the findings of the study. This focuses on specific interventions to overcome barriers faced by girls, such as scholarships, safe transportation, female mentors, and awareness campaigns against early marriage. Other strategies revealed by the participants are Providing Safe Transportation Options and reducing costs of learning materials. This means making essential learning materials like textbooks, uniforms, and stationery more affordable for poor families is a significant way to ease the financial burden and encourage enrolment and retention. The findings of the study also indicated engaging traditional and religious leaders as a strategy that can enhance school enrolment and attendance. This strategy emphasizes the importance of involving local leaders as advocates for education, their influence can help in addressing cultural and religious misconceptions and fostering a positive attitude towards schooling within communities. The participants also revealed that launching culturally sensitive awareness campaigns can enhance school enrolment and attendance. This finding suggest conducting campaigns that educate parents, caregivers, and communities about the importance of education for both boys and girls, while being sensitive to local cultures, is deemed important for shifting mind-set and increasing value for schooling. Lastly, adapting curriculum and offering flexible learning was another strategy that was revealed to have the potential to enhance both enrolment and retention rates. While ranked lowest, adapting the curriculum to be more relevant to the local context and offering flexible learning options are still considered valuable for catering to diverse needs and interests, potentially making education more appealing and accessible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research unequivocally demonstrates that basic education in the North-west Zone of Nigeria is severely compromised by a complex interplay of multifaceted challenges affecting enrolment, retention, and completion rates. Looking keenly into the findings from this study, there seems to be factors closely related and linked in affecting pupil's enrolment and retention in schools. The factors include: available environmental factors such as: security, school facilities, instructional materials, proximity, and socio-cultural and economic factors such as early marriages, domestic chores, pastoralism, parental income and negative attitudes towards education.

Ultimately, improving basic education in North-west Nigeria demands a holistic and integrated approach that tackles both the immediate barriers to access and the underlying socio-economic and cultural factors. Thus, successful implementation of these identified strategies is paramount for fostering individual potential, enhancing regional stability, and driving sustainable development in the North-west Zone.

Recommendations

1. Engage the community in income diversification projects so as to increase household income levels and hence encourage parents and guardians to enrol and retain their children in school.
2. Government should develop policies to monitor and enhance enrolment and retention ratios in public schools
3. Sensitization of the public more especially in rural communities on the factors that influence educational attainment with the objectives of increasing school completion and reducing the inequality in attainment.
4. Efforts should be made from government at all level to ensure that quality teachers with adequate facilities be made available to accommodate the increasing number of pupils especially in rural areas where pupils are seen sitting on the floor.
5. Government should make deliberate efforts to support children in rural areas with the needed books, uniforms and means of transportation so that parent will be motivated to allow their wards finish school even when they are not having money.
6. Since the increase retention rate is not significant enough, we suggest the building of perimeter fences and gates around all the public schools in kebbi state to at least curb the running away of pupils during break periods and also guarantee some level of security to them.

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