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Addressing the Crisis of Out-of-School Children in Nigeria and Analysing Government Interventions so far: Areas for Legislative Intervention

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Executive Summary

Nigeria is faced with the crisis of out-of-school children, which have both economic and social impacts on the country. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2024 report, Nigeria has approximately 18.3 million out-of-school children, comprising 10.2 million of primary school age and 8.1 million of secondary school age. This figure underscores the country's significant educational challenges, positioning Nigeria with one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children globally. The Nigerian government over the years has initiated schemes and policies towards improving the education sector and reducing the number of out-of-school children through increased budget allocation to education. To ensure smooth access to higher education, the Nigerian government signed into law the Student Loan Fund in 2024. Report by the NELFUND, so far over ₦32 billion has been disbursed to students. Despite all the measures, Nigeria still ranks 191 out of 208 countries in education ranking by countries and has a 59.57% literacy rate according to Veriv Africa report, 2024. Recent data from the National Bureau of Statistics revealed that Nigeria has the largest number of out-of-school children, with Kebbi and Sokoto States topping the list across Nigerian states with 67.6% and 66.4%, respectively.

Addressing the crisis of out-of-school children and to make improvements in the education sector, the brief recommends among others, the need for the Federal government to increase the budget allocation for education sector to the 15 percent recommended threshold of the GDP. This will help solve the problem of poor infrastructure and teacher/lecturers remuneration.

1. Introduction

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has decried the increasing number of out-of-school children in Nigeria, saying it is now 18.3 million¹. It noted that this alarming figure positions Nigeria as the country with the highest number of out-of-

school children globally. Nigeria has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, with only 59.57% of the adult population able to read and write². The rise in the number of out-of-school children poses economic and social impacts on the country as the government spends more on social

¹ Vanguard. (2024). Nigeria's Out of School Children. Retrieved from: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/05/nigerias-out-of-school-children-now-18-3m-unicef/>

² Verive Africa. (2024). Bridging the Literacy Gap in Nigeria. Retrieved from: <https://www.verivafrica.com/insights/bridging-the-literacy-gap-in-nigeria>

interventions and crime control. The Nigerian government is dedicated to changing the country's educational system by initiating policies and schemes to reduce to the barest minimum the number of out-of-school children in the country. The increased budget allocations to the education sector reflect its goal, which places education at the centre of the growth of its people and future economic success. The student loan scheme is also an initiative by the federal government to ensure smooth access to higher education in Nigeria. Despite all the government interventions, Nigeria still has one of the largest numbers of out-of-school children coupled with a very low literacy rate. The 2024 report by the National Bureau of Statistics revealed that Nigeria's out-of-school children are on the increase, with Kebbi State and Sokoto having 67.6% and 66.4% of the total population of schoolchildren aged 6-15 being out of school³. The brief addresses the crisis of out-of-school children in Nigeria, looking at government interventions so far and a need for legislative intervention in addressing the issues highlighted.

2. Content Analysis

About 18.3 million children in Nigeria are not in school, with 10.2 million of them being in primary school and 8.1 million being in secondary school, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2024 report. This statistic highlights Nigeria's serious educational problems and places the nation among the nations with the highest rates of out-of-school children. Nigeria's literacy rate was 62%, and the country was ranked 191 in the World Population Review's article on country-by-country educational rankings. Poor infrastructure and insufficient

money in the education sector are to blame for this. The 2024 report by the National Bureau of Statistics stated that Nigeria's out-of-school children are on the increase, with Kebbi State and Sokoto having 67.6% and 66.4% of the total population of schoolchildren aged 6-15 being out of school. This was attributed to the continuous insecurity that has ravaged educational institutions in the Northwest geopolitical zone and other parts of Nigeria, where schoolchildren are being kidnapped continually. The economic and social impact of out-of-school children in Nigeria are far-reaching, affecting national growth, security and stability.

3. Economic/Social Impact of Rise of Out-of-School Children in Nigeria

Nigeria is losing billions of Naira in potential GDP due to uneducated children who could have contributed to skilled labour markets⁴. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) global monitoring report suggests that failing to educate children could cost a country up to 5% of its GDP annually⁵. The Nigerian government over the years has spent more on social interventions and crime control, which takes a large chunk of money from the national treasury. It is noteworthy that a rise in out-of-school children increases crime rates and social instability in the country, as many of the children who are not in school, especially in the rural areas, are vulnerable to crime, drug abuse and recruitment into violent groups⁶. As reported by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) 2022, about 15 million Nigerian children are

³ Business Day (2024). Retrieved from: <https://businessday.ng/education/article/kebbi-sokoto-top-list-of-states-with-highest-number-of-out-of-school-children/>

⁴IMF. (2005). @ <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2005/>

⁵ UNESCO. (2024). Report of Out of School Children in Nigeria. Retrieved from: [https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/out-school-](https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/out-school-children-and-educational-gaps-cost-global-economy-10000-billion-year)

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⁶ Senthivel, A., et.al. (2024), "The ripple effect of school dropout: exploring the nexus between school dropout, deviance, and subsequent arrest amongst children in India", Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 136-149. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCRPP-03-2024-0015>

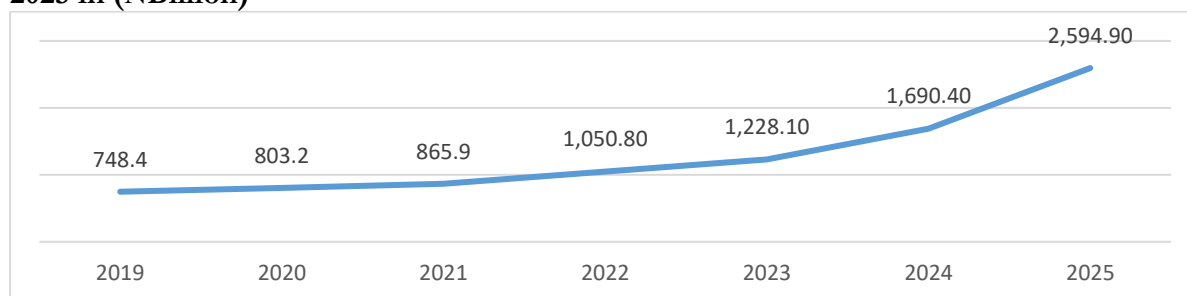
engaged in child labour, as this is attributed to lack of education⁷.

4. Government Interventions in reducing number of Out-of-School Children in Nigeria

The Nigerian government is committed to transforming its education system. Its vision places education at the heart of the development of its people and future economic success; this can be seen in the signing of the student loan bill in 2024. The Nigerian Education Loan Fund aims to

improve the education sector and ensure easy access to higher education. As of February 3, 2025, NELFUND has disbursed a total of ₦32.8 billion in student loans. Data from the Budget Office of the Federation revealed that ₦2.59 trillion was allocated to the education sector in the 2025 Federal Government budget as against the ₦803.2 billion allocated in the 2020 budget of the Federal Government of Nigeria. This is a 256.1% increase in budget allocation for education.

Fig. 2. Budget Allocations for the Federal Ministry of Education and UBEC from 2019 to 2025 in (₦Billion)



Source: Budget Office of the Federation (2025)⁸

Although Nigeria's budgetary allocations to education have continuously increased over the years, total spending as a percentage of the GDP still remain low at 7% as against the best practice of 15% threshold. Given the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, Nigeria is still lagging behind in terms of delivering equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030.

4. Factors Responsible for the Rise in Out-of-School Children in Nigeria

i. Low Budgetary Allocation: Although the budget allocation to education sector has increased over time, poor funding is still a major problem. The budget allocation, which

is currently at barely 7% of the GDP, falls below the 15% recommended threshold.

ii. Brain drain and shortage of qualified Teachers: the mass exodus of teachers and lecturers from Nigeria to other countries in search of greener pasture has led to the dearth of good and qualified teachers in the country. This has caused a big gap and a challenge to the education sector including high student-teacher ratio. In Ogun State, for instance, 1,500 teachers recently retired without being replaced⁹. The gap created by the retirement has further raised the already worse high students-teachers ratio in the state.

iii. Poor Technology use: According to the 4 (GII), Nigeria rank 98th out of 131

⁷ILO. (2022). Nigerian Child Labour Survey 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.ilo.org/publications/nigeria-child-labour-survey-2022>

⁸ Budget Office. (2025). Appropriation Act. Retrieved from: <https://budgetoffice.gov.ng/index.php/resource>

[es/internal-resources/budget-documents/2025-budget](https://internal-resources/budget-documents/2025-budget)

⁹Punch. (2020). @ <https://punchng.com/states-and-widening-shortage-of-teachers/>

countries on the Global innovation Index. Nigeria needs to improve and explore technology as this will aid in teaching and learning process.

iv. Insecurity: this is a threat to education in Nigeria. There has been increasing number of kidnapping of school children in Zamfara, Katsina, Niger, and Kebbi and Kaduna States. The insecurity situation within and around educational institutions in the country especially in the northern part has forced parents to take their children and wards out of schools. Internally Displaced Persons, (IDPs), including incidents of flood leading to obstruction of teaching and learning in the affected schools¹⁰. This has led to increase in number of out of school children in Nigeria.

5. Areas for Legislative Intervention

To address the crisis of out-of-school children and to make improvement in the education sector, the following recommendations are proffered:

- i. The National Assembly through its Senate and House Committees on Education (Basic and Secondary), may wish to advise the Federal government on the need to increase the budget allocation for education sector to the 15 percent recommended threshold of the GDP. This will help solve the problem of poor infrastructure and teacher/lecturers remuneration;
- ii. The National Assembly through its Senate and House Committees on Science and Technology, and

the Senate Committee on ICT and Cyber-Crime through its legislative oversight, may wish to engage with relevant stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, the Principals, Head masters, NUC, NUT, on the need to proffer a lasting solution to the problem of out-of-school children in Nigeria;

- iii. The National Assembly through its Senate and House Committees on National Security and Intelligence, the Senate Committee on Defence, and the Senate Committee on Army, organise a stakeholders session to address the current state of insecurity inherent in Nigeria's educational institutions and proffer solution.

5. Conclusion

Despite government interventions in reducing the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria through increased budget allocation and implementation of the NELFUND, Nigeria still has one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children, at 18.3 million. This figure underscores the country's significant educational challenges. The budgetary allocations still fall short of the international benchmark for spending in education, which is recommended for the 15% of GDP threshold. Poor funding, as well as poor infrastructure, are part of the challenges faced by the education sector in Nigeria. If the recommendations as outlined in the brief are implemented, Nigeria's literacy rate will increase, and the number of out-of-school children will be reduced to the barest minimum.

¹⁰Vanguard. (2024). <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/02/723->



[schools-closed-in-9-states-over-insecurity-idps-others-unicef/](https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/02/723-schools-closed-in-9-states-over-insecurity-idps-others-unicef/)

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