



Attitude of Street Children towards Acquiring Basic Education in Selected Local Government Areas of Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the attitude of street children towards attending basic education in Niger State. The study drew 228 sample respondents from the population. Data was collected using an attitude scale. The study's findings reveal that a good number of the children showed interest in going to school if there is school situated in their community. Also, a substantial number agreed they would be willing to quit begging and go to school if all their financial needs were met. The study concludes that if the government can extend its attention to the rural areas other than concentrating only on the towns and cities by providing access to education and giving some palliatives to these street children, there is a likelihood that the majority of them would quit the street and embrace basic education. The study recommends that the Niger State and local governments should create a special fund to prosecute the education of these street children. There is also the need to conduct a survey of street children population through a synergy by both the local and state governments. This would assist in determining where schools should be located.

Keywords: Attitude, Basic Education, Street Children, Niger State.

Introduction

The issue of street children has become an issue of concern to governments, organisations and academia worldwide. This has been established by the fact that there has been a series of discussions and literature on this global threat to development. Falooore & Asamu (2010) argue that over the last five decades, the issue of street children has become a recurring decimal the world over, with serious implications for the survival of these children.

There have been views expressed by various scholars that have produced volumes of literature on street children. For instance, Richter (1998) defines street children as those young people who have been abandoned by their families, schools, and immediate communities, before they are sixteen years of age, and have drifted into a nomadic street life. In his own view, Cosgrove (1990) also defines a street child as any individual under the age of majority whose behaviour is predominantly at variance with community norms, and whose primary support for his/her development needs is not from the family. This definition suggests that street children are no longer under the tutelage of parents which consequently results in deviance.



The United Nations Organisations (2012) defined the term 'street children' to include any boy or girl... for whom the street in the widest sense of the word... has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults. There are different categories of street children. There are those who have lost bearing with their family and got themselves into a street family. There are also those who still reside within the family but take to the street to fend for themselves and the family. They go about their usual daily activities by getting money to meet their needs. They often do not have the education and basic skills necessary to deal with the risk factors and cope with adversity (Habtamu & Aridam, 2016).

Literature has proven that the issue of street children is global, although the prevalence varies from one country or region to the other. These children engaged in various activities that are menial in nature, which is precipitated by poverty. Consequently, Nigeria is not an exception as it is a common phenomenon as these children are found in major towns and cities in all states, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

Street children are children who spend a significant portion of their time living, working, and surviving on the streets, often lacking parental care and supervision (UNICEF, 2019). These children are exposed to various forms of exploitation, abuse, and neglect, which hinder their overall development, including educational attainment (Kimani-Murage et al., 2014). Despite the government's efforts to provide free basic education through initiatives such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, street children in Niger State continue to face significant barriers in accessing and embracing education.

Attitude plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's behavior and actions, including their willingness to engage in educational activities (Ajzen, 1991). The attitude of street children towards acquiring basic education encompasses their beliefs, perceptions, and expectations regarding formal education. Understanding these attitudes can provide valuable insights into the underlying factors that either facilitate or impede their educational endeavors.

Several factors contribute to the formation of street children's attitudes towards education. Socioeconomic challenges, such as poverty, limited access to resources, and inadequate living conditions, can shape their perceptions of the value and relevance of education (Owusu-Ansah & Owusu, 2018). Additionally, experiences of stigma, discrimination, and marginalization within the education system can negatively affect their motivation and engagement (Gall et al., 2016).

.In Nigeria, specifically in selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Niger State, the attitude of street children towards acquiring basic education remains an important area of investigation. To get rid of this incidence of street children, the government at various levels had put in place different rehabilitation programmes. One of these is the promotion of the Almagiri education by the federal government, where existing 'Almagiri' schools were rehabilitated and new ones built where necessary. Free school uniforms and other kit items, meals and a conducive instructional environment were provided to encourage them to go for basic education. Besides, several literacy centres were established under the basic Non-Formal Education (NFE) to expand access to these children.

The case of Niger State is not an exemption as these boys and girls flood the major roads and towns of the state. The Niger State further invested further efforts by providing Quranic education for these



children to depopulate the streets. However, this has not yielded a significant result either, judging by the existing clusters of these street children all over the state. It is very discouraging to note that rather than the number of these children reducing, it is increasing by the day. The situation has become worrisome, especially when the future of these children is considered. Also, in line with the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) at Jomitten, Thailand, in 1990 with the target of the year 2000 as the year when everyone would have had access to basic education that would make him or her solve her immediate problems. It is against this background this study seeks to investigate the attitude of street children towards the acquisition of Basic Education in selected local Governments in Niger State. Thus, the study examines what is the attitude of street children towards acquiring Basic Education? What are the factors preventing street children from embracing Basic Education? What are the measures that can influence street children to embrace Basic Education?

Methodology

Descriptive research method was acquired to gather first hand data from the respondents to formulate rational and sound conclusions and recommendations for the study, but more importantly for its simplicity and ease of analysis.

However, the population of this study encompasses all street boys and girls in of Niger State. A sample size of 228 respondents taken from the three (3) Local governments in Niger state, which include Mokwa, Lapai, and Lavun Local Government Areas. The researchers used a combination of random, accidental and cluster sampling techniques to sample the population, which involved street children in the chosen local Government areas. In this regard, the sample selected is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Distribution of sample population

s/n	Local governments	Sample Population
1.	Mokwa	98
2.	Lapai	70
3.	Lavun	60
<i>Total</i>		228

The instrument used for the survey is the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into four (4) parts. Section 'A' provides the researcher with demographic information about the respondents; Section 'B' contains items of research question 1; Section 'C' contains items of research question 2; and Section 'D' contains items of research question 3'.

The first draft of the questionnaire for this research was presented to 3 specialists in the areas of literacy, Social Work and Sociology, all from the Department of Continuing Education and Community Development and Sociology, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University Lapai, for validation. Minor corrections were made and corrections were administered before administering the questionnaire to the sample.

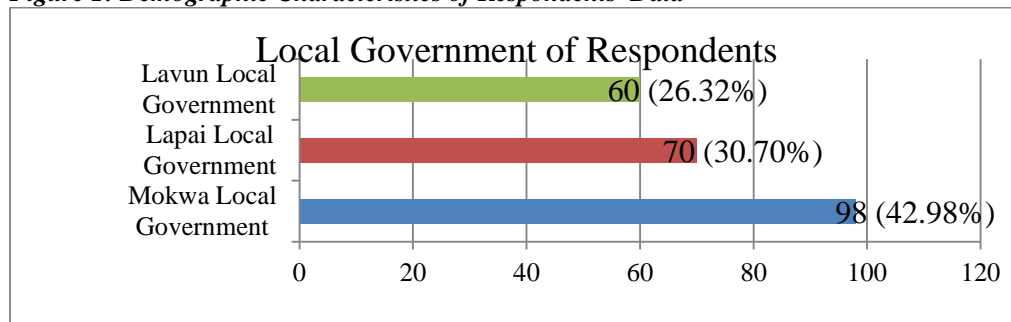
A reliability test was conducted using 35 street children from Paikoro Local Government area of Niger State. The result produced a coefficient of 0.68 at a 0.05 significant level. The researchers, with the aid of two research assistants, administered the instrument to the respondents in clusters by asking questions from the questionnaire. The research assistants were also on the ground in the collection of data as they visited the designated areas where the respondents were.



The researcher analyzed the questionnaire using frequency distribution and percentages. The responses received were quantified and tabulated. Each table was analyzed and percentages were worked on and presented in the results and discussion sections.

Results

Figure 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents' Data



From the Figure 1 above, a total of 228 respondents were randomly selected from three local governments in Niger state. 42.98 percent of the respondents were from Mokwa local government which is 98 of the respondents, 30.70 percent of the same population were from Lapai local government and the remaining 26.32 percent of the population were from Lavun local government, making a total of 100 percent.

Figure 2: Sex of the respondents

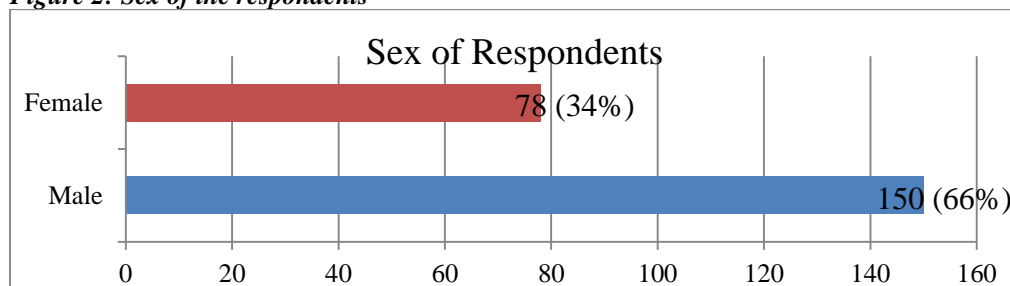


Figure 2 above represents the sex of the respondents. 66% of the total respondents were male, while the remaining 34% of the same study group were female making a total of 100%.



Figure 3: Age Distribution of Respondents

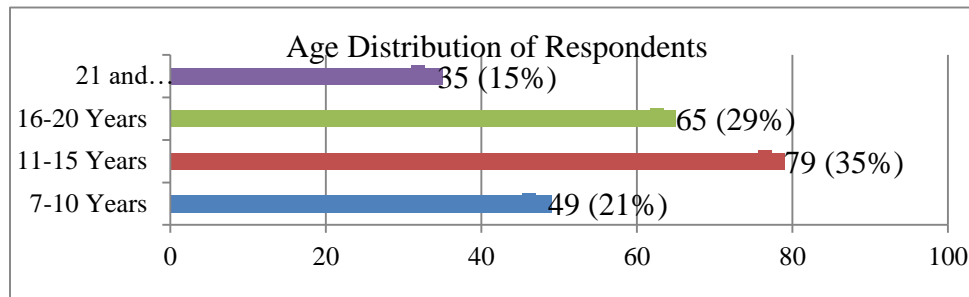


Figure 3 above represents the age distribution of respondents. It can be seen from the figure that 35% of the total respondents' falls between the age range of 11-15 years of age, 29% of the same study group falls between 16-20 years, 21% are within 7-10 years; while just 15% of the group is 21 years and above.

Research Question 1: What is the attitude of street children toward acquiring Basic Education?

The first objective was to investigate street children's attitude toward acquiring basic education. One hundred and fifty (150) males and seventy-eight (78) female street children responded to the questionnaires presented to them. The following were the responses as shown in the table below.

Table 2: Attitude of street children towards acquiring Basic Education

S/n	Statements	Yes	No	Total	Remarks
1.	Going to school is a waste of time	78 34.21%	150 65.79%	228 100%	Disagree
2.	It is difficult to learn under Western Education.	133 58.33%	95 41.67%	228 100%	Agree
3.	I prefer Islamic education to Western education	172 75.44%	56 24.56%	228 100%	Agree
4.	Do you think receiving Western education can make you?	119 52.19%	109 47.18%	228 100%	Agree
5.	Would you go to school if you had the opportunity?	149 65.35%	79 34.65%	228 100%	Agree
6.	Would you prefer schooling to begging if necessary things are provided for you?	167 73.25%	61 26.75%	228 100%	Agree
7.	I am in the street because I'm not catered for.	123 53.95%	105 46.05%	228 100%	Agree
8.	Would you choose being given money for food every day than going to school?	113 49.56%	115 50.44%	228 100%	Disagree
9.	Can you quit this begging and go to school if you are catered for?	149 65.35%	79 34.65%	228 100%	Agree



Table 2 above indicates that 150 of the respondents with 65.79% disagreed that going to school is a waste of time, while 78 of the respondents with 34.21% agreed that school is a waste of time. 133 of the respondents with 58.33% agreed that it is difficult to learn under Western education, while 95 of the same population with 41.67% disagreed. 172 of the total respondents with 75.44% agreed that they prefer Islamic education to Western education, while 56 of the same population with 24.56% are of a different opinion. 119 of the respondents representing 52.19% of the respondents agreed that receiving Western education can make them, while 109 of the respondents with 47.18% disagreed.

Meanwhile, a higher population of the respondents of 167 with 73.25% agreed that they would go to school if given the opportunity, while just 61 of the population with 26.75% disagreed. 123 of the respondents with 53.95% agreed that they are in the street because they are not catered for, while the remaining 105 with 46.05% disagreed. 115 of the respondents with 50.44% rejected being given money for food than going to school. In comparison, 113 of the same population with 49.44% agreed. 149 of the total respondents with 65.35% agreed to go to school and stop begging if they are catered for; In comparison, the remaining 79 with 34.65% of the respondents disagreed.

Research Question 2: What are the Factors Preventing Street Children from embracing Basic Education?

Table 3: Factors preventing street children from embracing Basic Education

S/n	Statements	Yes	No	Total	Remarks
10	Is your religion against going for Western Education?	179 78.51%	49 21.49%	228 100%	Agree
11	Are your parents against you going for Western Education?	112 49.12%	116 50.88%	228 100%	Disagree
12	Is there any school close to where you're living?	100 43.86%	128 56.14%	228 100%	Disagree
13	Would you prefer rearing cows to going to school?	89 39.04%	139 60.96%	228 100%	Disagree
14	Has anyone advised or given you opportunity to go to school before?	95 41.67%	133 58.33%	228 100%	Disagree
15	Do you think going to school would teach you against your culture (or ways of life)	147 64.47%	81 35.53%	228 100%	Agree
16	Do you think your community or village would go against anyone who wants to go to school?	109 47.81%	119 52.19%	228 100%	Disagree

Table 3 shows that 179 of the total respondents with 78.51% agreed that their religion is against going for western education, while 49 with 21.49% disagreed. 112 respondents with 50.88% disagreed that their parents is against them going for Western education, while 112 with 49.12% representing the minority agreed. 128 respondents with 56.14% representing majority of the respondents disagreed that there are no schools close to where they are living, while 100 with 43.86% of the respondents agreed that there are schools close to them.

139 respondents with 60.96% representing majority of the respondents do not prefer rearing cow than going to school, while 89 with 39.04% prefer rearing of cows than going to school. 133



respondents with 58.33% disagreed that they have been given opportunity to go to school, while 95 with 41.67% said yes (agreed). Majority of the respondents representing 64.47% (147) agreed that school will teach/change their ways of life, while 81 with 35.53% disagreed. 119 of the respondents with 52.19% disagreed that their community will go against them if they decide to go to school, while 109 with 47.81% agreed.

Research Question 3: What are the Measures that can influence street children to embrace Basic Education?

Table 4: Measures that can influence street children to embrace Basic Education.

S/n	Statements	Yes	No	Total	Remarks
17	Would you go to school if the government sites a school close to you?	200 87.72%	28 12.28%	228 100%	Agree
18	Would you like to go to school if the government provides you with all the things that you need?	208 91.23%	20 8.77%	228 100%	Agree
19	Can you go to school in another town where the government will give you house to live and feed you?	88 38.60%	140 61.40%	228 100%	Disagree
20	Do you think your parents will allow you to go to school if you have the opportunity?	117 51.32%	111 48.68%	228 100%	Disagree

Table 4 above shows that 200 respondents with 87.72% agreed to go to school if the government site school close to where they are living, while just 28 respondents with 12.28% disagreed. 208 respondents with 91.23% indicating the majority of the respondents agreed to go to school if the government provides all they need, while 20 with 8.77% disagreed. 140 respondents with 61.40% disagreed to go school in another town where government will provide house and food for them, while 88 with 38.60% are of different opinion. 117 of the respondents with 51.32% agreed that their parents would allow them to go to school if there is access in their locality, while 111 with 48.68% disagreed with the statement.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question one: What is the attitude of street children towards acquiring Basic Education?

Table 2 results revealed that there is a general positive attitude of street children towards the acquisition of basic education. This result corroborates the findings of Mtonga (2011), who in his research 'On and off the streets' interviewed 20 street children on their perceptions about life in the street and going to school. Among them, 10 were boys and the rest 10 were girls. Mtonga (2011) found out that street children perceived education as important and life on the street as rough and dangerous. They felt hopeless and vulnerable about their situation. However, they had no other alternatives and choices but to live on the streets. In line with this, Koller & Hutz (2001) came up with findings that street children are seen as victims, because they do not have shelter, clothes, food, or adult protection; they have to work on the streets instead of going to school which they truly desire, but lack the opportunities due to their situations, and so on.

***Research Question 2: What are the Factors Preventing Street Children from embracing Basic Education?***

Results from Table 3 revealed that opportunities for western education are not available for these children to embrace and if given, they are likely to enroll for basic education, neither culture nor parents would prevent the children from receiving formal education, and street children are ready to go for basic education if their basic needs are met. Thus, the major factor preventing these children from going to school is that opportunities for Western education are not available for them and they are forced into the street to cater for their basic needs. This finding was supported by Salo (2009), who suggested that street children only need opportunities for them to attend school, such as a place where they could do their homework and where they could stay to attend school. Kopoka (2000) also said that street children cannot be motivated to educate themselves while they remain hungry or feel unloved and unwanted.

Research Question 3: What are the Measures that can influence street children to embrace Basic Education?

Results from table 4 reveals that the measures that can influence these children in going to school are that the street children are ready to go for basic education if their basic needs are met; most of the children prefer that school are cited or located close to their communities. If schools are situated in their locations, and their basic needs such as food, clothing, housing and others are to be met, they will enroll for school. This corresponds with Maslow (1954) who identified and classified human needs into five hierarchical levels (i.e., physiological, safety, social, Esteem, and self-actualization). Maslow (1954) stated that when the above needs of the child are unsatisfied, behaviour changes and this affects the desire for schooling. When a child is born, his physiology of growing up is considered, he ought to be accepted and the basic need should be provided, including education. Suppose the above theory observations are put into consideration. In that case, the problem of the street child will be taken care of, and will drastically reduce the incidence of drop-out and those children whose schooling period was interrupted for whatever reason.

Summary

The research findings indicate that street children generally have a positive attitude towards acquiring basic education and perceive education as important. The major factor preventing them from going to school is the lack of opportunities for Western education. They are forced to work on the streets to cater for their basic needs. However, if given the opportunity and their basic needs such as food, clothing, and housing are met, they are ready to embrace basic education. Measures that can influence them to enroll in school include the location of the school close to their communities and meeting their basic needs. The findings suggest that addressing the basic needs of street children is crucial for their education and reducing the incidence of dropouts.

The study revealed that most of these street children perceive that it is difficult to learn under the western educational system and that they prefer Islamic education. The study further revealed that the major factor preventing most of these children from embracing basic education is the fact that anyone has never given them the opportunity of going to school before, and if they are presented with such an opportunity, they will embrace it willingly. Finally, the study revealed that the measures that can influence these children in going to school is that if schools are sited in their locations and their basic needs such as foods, clothing, housing and others are to be met by whoever wants them to go to school.



Conclusion

From the findings of the research, it can be concluded that the attitude of street children towards acquiring basic education is positive and they only have negative perception about western system of education which they believed can make them. If proper sensitization and orientation campaigns are conducted for them about what Western education is all about, such perception can be effectively changed positively. It was revealed also that the major factor preventing street children from embracing basic education is the fact that educational access has not been provided in their localities, but if they are presented with such an opportunity, they will embrace it willingly. Finally, one of the key measures that can influence these children in going to school is if schools are situated in their locations and their basic needs such as food, clothing, housing and others are to be met by whoever wants them to go to school.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

1. Awareness and counseling programmes should be intensified to let the street children be aware of the possibility and importance of basic education.
2. The Niger state and local governments should create a special fund to prosecute the education of these street children.
3. A survey of street children population should be carried out by local governments. This would assist in determining the locations of schools.
4. Nomadic education should be run effectively to take care of those who would, at any cost, not part with their herds.
5. Monitoring, research and evaluation of the programmes should be intensified to afford sustainability.
6. Grazing fields should be created in different locations and each field with a mobile school and staff.

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