RESEARCH PROJECT

Advancing Education Solutions: Research for Scaling Education Innovations in Emergencies and Fragile, Conflict and Violence-affected areas of Burkina Faso, Ghana and Nigeria

Comprehensive Analysis of Education in Emergencies and Accelerated Education Programs in Nigeria

BY:

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TABLE OF CONTENT

ACRONYMS

AENN - Addressing Education in Northeast Nigeria

AEP - Accelerated Education Programme

AGILE - Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment

DFID - Department for International Development (DFID)

DHS - Demographic and Health Surveys

ECR - Education Crisis Response

G4G - Girls for Girls Initiative

HOHVIPAD - Horn of Hope Vision for Peace and Community Development of Nigeria

INEE - Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies

IRC - International Rescue committee

KABHUDA - Kanem Borno Human Development Association

LGA - Local Government Area

MICS - Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey

FMOE - Federal Ministry of Education

NBS - National Bureau of Statistics

NEDS - Nigeria Education Data Survey

NHF - Nigeria Humanitarian Fund

NMEP - National Malaria Elimination Programme

NPC - National Population Commission

OOS - Out of School

OOSC - Out of School Children

UBEC - Universal Basic Education Commission

UIS - UNESCO Institute for Statistics

UN-OCHA - United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

WASH - Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

WDI - World Development Indicators

WFP - World Food Programme

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Introduction

Nigeria faces one of the most severe education crises in West Africa, particularly in fragile, conflict, and violence-affected (FCV) areas, where insurgency, terrorism, and social instability have significantly disrupted access to quality education. The out-of-school situation in Nigeria has been an issue of concern as the country has the highest rates in Sub-Saharan Africa and the world at large with an estimate of approximately 19.5 million out-of-school children (UNESCO, 2022). While out-of-school figures for Nigeria vary by year and source, the consensus remains the same: progress has slowed, and in some places reversed, as insecurity, poverty, political instability and demographic constraints exceed incremental gains in access and learning (Education Cannot Wait, 2024).

UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022 defines out-of-school as the number of school-age children, adolescents and youths who are not enrolled or attending school during a given academic year. According to Okoh et al. (2020), out-of-school context falls under three categories, including i) De-schooling, which involves leaving western and formal education to attend other forms of education e.g islamic schools. This form of education does not usually involve the teaching of numeracy and literacy skills. ii) Drop out, this includes children who dropped out of school before completion at either primary, junior secondary or senior secondary level. iii) Not in school, this covers school age children who do not attend any form of formal schooling due to certain factors.

The stated categories above are due to several factors including child marriage, early pregnancy, distance to school, conflict, quality of school infrastructure, availability of qualified teachers, poverty, religious and cultural reasons. Evidence from research shows that these barriers hinder a child's access to quality education. In Nigeria, the out of school problem is concentrated, but not confined to the Northern part of the country, where conflict, displacement, and attacks on schools have disrupted education for over a decade. The North-eastern and North-western regions are particularly vulnerable, with states such as Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe suffering the most severe impacts. Schools have been targeted in violent attacks, leading to the abduction of students and teachers, further discouraging school attendance. Communities still recovering from violence face school closures, teacher shortages, and a frayed safety net as some international aid contracts wind down, compounding risks for the most vulnerable learners.

This meta-analysis report presents the most recent available data on Nigeria's education sector and the out-of-school situation using quantitative data from multiple sources. Given that this comprehensive analysis is targeted at obtaining programmatic outcomes, the following information search process will be adopted. Firstly, a literature search on the Out of School Children (OOSC) situation in Nigeria will be conducted. This will be followed by the retrieval of reports, assessments, research, and evaluations from implementers of education innovations. The purpose of this review is to obtain a deeper understanding of their implementation strategies, outreach, and impact of their projects in improving access to education in Nigeria. The information provided will be used to draw data on enrolment, retention and transition rate of beneficiaries of various education innovations. Finally, the information search is supplemented by conducting an online research for empirical evidence on the OOSC situation in Nigeria using the following search engines. Google Scholar, PubMed, Web Science Core, ERIC, and WorldCat. In addition, databases such as the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), the World Development Indicators (WDI), and UNICEF database are also used to draw data on the OOSC rates.

This comprehensive analysis report is structured as follows: Section 1 provides an overview of fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV) in Nigeria. Section 2 provides information on the mapping of educational disruptions and out-of-school children (OOSC) rates in Nigeria, at both national and regional Levels with datasets from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), Federal Ministry of Education (FMOE), Nigeria Education Data Survey (NEDS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), and Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). This section will also give a brief overview on the UNESCO out-of-school model framework and the adapted conceptual framework on education in emergency, fragile, conflict-affected, and violence-affected areas. Section 3 provides information on the gender, social inclusion, and equity landscape in Nigeria's education sector. Section 4 explores Nigeria's policy environment and existing Education in Emergencies (EIE) frameworks. Section 5 and 6 provides information on the availability of various education innovations (including, AEPs, G4G, SEL, REPs, and other innovations) and their impact/effectiveness. Section 7 examines the long-term sustainability of education innovations, exploring both government and donor financing. Section 8 and 9 gives an insight on the demand and supply barriers that hinders access to education in Nigeria and also discusses the research gaps and data limitations. Finally, section 10 concludes the research and provides recommendations from the findings.

1.   Overview of Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV) in Nigeria

Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV) remain major threats to global development, peace, and security (Centre for International Cooperation, 2025). The World Bank identifies them as part of the limitations to its efforts in ending extreme poverty, predominantly in Low and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) like Nigeria.

Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV) are interconnected terms that have multi-dimensional impacts on one another. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2018), fragility is the combination of exposure to risk and inadequate coping ability of states and communities to manage, absorb, or mitigate threats. It is the ineffectiveness of public and governance institutions in fulfilling their governance and service provision functions. According to the World Bank report, as cited in Oseghale (2024), a fragile state is a low-income country characterised by weak state capacity and/or weak state legitimacy, leaving citizens vulnerable to a range of shocks.

In Africa, the African Development Bank (AfDB) understands fragility as a condition where countries are subject to pressures that threaten to overwhelm their capacities to manage them, hence creating risks of instability. Fragility poses serious threats as states with weak administrative capacity breed instability, which in turn creates safe niches for terrorists, jeopardises institutional quality, and condemns millions to poverty. It also collaborates with other distresses, such as food insecurity, climate change, and macroeconomic challenges, posing serious risks to development.

In the same vein, conflict is a result of fragile states and can lead to either peace, violence, or aggravated fragility. The World Bank shows the potential of conflict to exacerbate existing fragility in states, such as worsening food insecurity, as 75% of acutely food-insecure people live in Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations (FCS).[1] Jointly, Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV) are critical development challenges that threaten poverty reduction and shared prosperity. They are also not confined to borders; hence, instability caused by fragile states can force displaced people to move into neighbouring communities, leading to more incidents of conflict and violence across regions.

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[1] Include countries where access to basic services, such as education and infrastructure, is minimal and worsened by the absence of security and rule of law.

In Nigeria, the socio-political climate of recent times has been characterised by the incidence of Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV). Nigeria ranks 15th in the World Bank's 2025 score of countries that are experiencing extreme cases of conflict and violence worldwide.[2] In the same vein, the 2024 Fragility Index for Nigeria, compiled by the Fund for Peace, stands at 96.6%, indicating that the country still suffers from weak institutional and governance structures. These FCV situations are marked by the frequent occurrences of electoral violence, Islamic fundamentalists, Boko Haram insurgency, Intra-Muslim conflict, farmer-herder conflict, banditry, kidnapping, insecurity, sexual violence, killings, and sectarian clashes, to mention but a few (Christian & Festus, 2024; Adibe et al., 2022; Mununyi, 2021). Consequently, instability and displacement of Nigerians have significantly increased affecting education, health, and the economy. In 2021, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reported that approximately 3.9 million people were already displaced in Nigeria, with 2.1 million being internally displaced. This statistic is worse for Nigerians who reside in states directly affected by the Boko Haram attack, such as Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe (BAY) states.

Unfortunately, these FCV attacks have adverse effects on education, growth, per capita income, and household welfare, widening poverty incidence, gaps, and severity in these states (Odozi & Oyelere, 2019; Adedeji & Adeniyi, 2021). In education, the Boko Haram insurgency (Ngare, 2012), which is a jihadist militant organisation based in North-Eastern Nigeria, precisely in Borno and Yobe states of Nigeria, is responsible for the destruction of educational infrastructure, the displacement of communities, and widespread disruption in learning for millions of children. The World Bank describes this impact as affecting secondary schools, with up to 10 primary schools for each secondary school, displacing over 16 million persons, and hindering education for 2 million children of school-going age in Nigeria.

Nevertheless, scholarly explanations exist for the drivers of FCV in Nigeria. The majority attribute it to the fragility of the Nigerian government and its institutions (Christian & Festus, 2024; Aina, 2024; Adibe et al., 2022). However, Aina (2024) offered a unique perspective on the sub-national fragility of Nigerian states as a factor enabling FCV by examining their increasing debt levels and declining Internally Generated Revenue figures. Other drivers include poverty, climate change, illegal mining, and poor governance (Ifesinachi, Adibe &

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[2] For full list of countries, check the World Bank Group FY25 List of Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations.,

Wogu, 2015; Odoh & Chilaka, 2012, as cited in Adibe et al., 2022; Akinyetun, 2022; Ogbonnaya, 2020).

Hence, to address Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV) from the lens of its detrimental effect on education in Nigeria, strategies should focus on implementing safe, inclusive, and accessible learning environments for Nigerian students, such as the Accelerated Education Programme (AEP).

2.   Mapping of educational disruptions and out-of-school children (OOSC)

This section maps the educational disruption and OOSC across both demographic and geographic strata using systematic literature review and data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey [MICS] (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] & UNICEF, 2022). According to the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF] (2022), 1 in 3 children were out-of-school in Nigeria, representing about 15% of the world's Out-Of-School Children (OOSC) population. The total OOSC rate was reported to be 24.9% with 24% for males and 25.8% for females of lower secondary school age in 2021. Among children of primary school age, the figures were higher at 25.2% for males, 26.1% for females, and 25.6% in total. The North East, North West, and North Central are the three most OOSC-prone zones in Nigeria. These make up the Northern region, beset by climate-related and terrorist related violence (Salkida, 2024). Furthermore, the North East is the most conflict-exposed region (NBS & World Bank, 2018). Although the South South is also conflict-exposed, OOSC rates were lowest for primary school-aged OOSC, perhaps because the violence in these areas isn't targeted at schools and involves mostly cultism (NBS & World Bank, 2018), which can coexist with schools. Across genders, the OOSC rate for women dominated in all regions except from the south west for children of primary age and the south south and south west for children of junior secondary school age. This perhaps reflects cultural biases towards girl education amongst persons from different zones.

To examine time-based trends in the distribution of OOSC children, we look to the Net Attendance Ratio (NAR). The NAR can be viewed as the opposite of the OOSC ratio (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2025). The 2015 Nigerian Education Data Survey (NEDS) (National Population Commission, 2015), shows that primary school NAR increased from 63% in 2010 to 67% 2015. This implies an OOSC rate of 37% in 2010 and 33% in 2015. This might

be reflective of efforts to curtail the impacts of violence and other FCV issues. Compared with the NBS & UNICEF (2022) results, there has been a decline in the OOSC rate in general. Across genders, we find a NAR of 68% and 66% for males in 2015 and 2010, respectively and 65% and 61% for females in 2015 and 2010, respectively. Thus, depicting that the OOSC rate has reduced across genders, even though the reduction in the OOSC or the increase in the NAR is greater for males than for females. A critical issue in the push for more gender sensitive Education-in-Emergency programmes. For children of lower (junior) secondary school age, a similar case was found. The NAR increased from 33% to 40% between 2010 and 2015, implying a decline in the OOSC from 66% to 60%. Through the gender lens, the NAR for secondary education was 33% for both genders in 2010 increasing to 39% for males and 40% for females, perhaps due to the increased efforts in targeting female children in OOSC reduction efforts. Going beyond the formal education OOSC rates, only 12% of children who do not attend formal education attend non-formal education in 2021 (NBS & UNICEF, 2022).

2.1.   School attendance among children of primary school age

We next approach the situation more critically using the tables from the MICS. Table 1 below highlights the situation of school attendance among children of primary school age in Nigeria. The overall picture is one of progress, but also of deep inequality that cuts across geography, socio-economic status, and cultural lines. Nationally, the net attendance rate (NAR) is 68.4%, suggesting that nearly seven in ten children of primary school age (6–11 years) are in school. Yet this seemingly positive statistic conceals the harsh reality that more than one in four children (25.6%) remain out of school, a figure that translates into millions of children denied access to what is widely recognised as a foundational right to education and a basic stepping stone for human development.

The gender pattern at this level appears balanced, with boys at 68.7% and girls at 68.0%, suggesting that exclusion is not yet strongly gendered at the primary level. However, this surface equality is deceptive. When gender interacts with other factors such as poverty, rural residence, and ethnic background, girls' vulnerabilities become more visible. For instance, in many rural northern communities, cultural norms and household responsibilities disproportionately limit girls' chances of enrolment and retention, even when the statistics appear to suggest parity.

The urban–rural divide provides one of the clearest illustrations of educational inequality due to violence. In urban areas, over 81.6% of children attend school, and only 10.9% are excluded. Rural communities, by contrast, record a much lower attendance rate of 59.6%, with more than a third (35.4%) of children left out altogether. One principal reason for this rura-urban disparity is the ruralisation of violent conflicts (Ochogwu, 2024). For rural communities prone to climatic and scarcity related issues and with weak state presence, the violence would disrupt educational activities with the reinforcing increased recruitment (Onuoha, 2014) .

Age-specific patterns add another layer to this complex picture. At the official school entry age of six, fewer than half of children (48.8%) are enrolled, showing that many begin school late. By age eleven, enrolment climbs to over 81%, but this delayed start compresses learning into fewer years, leading to higher risks of repetition, early dropout, and incomplete primary education. In FCV affected areas, children have disrupted education and face more problems in moving (West African Regional Office of Plan International [PLAN WARO] et al., n.d.) Delayed entry is particularly prevalent in rural areas, where household decision-making is influenced by poverty, cultural practices, and in some cases, limited awareness of the importance of early enrolment.

Poverty is perhaps the single strongest predictor of exclusion. Among children from the poorest households, only 39.3% attend primary school, while almost 58% are completely out of school. In sharp contrast, among children from the richest quintile, nearly nine in ten (88.3%) are enrolled, and just 5.5% are excluded. Poverty, which can be caused by floods and conflicts (Bih, 2025), impacts the highest on OOSC rates.

Regionally, OOSC rates are higher in the North East and West followed by the North Central. Not surprisingly, the North East is the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency and home to the BAY (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe) states (Osisioma, 2022). In the North Central Ojewale (2021) records instances of criminal activities amongst others, with Banditry in the North West (Ojewale, 2024). From the Nextier database (Nextier SPD, 2022), Zamfara, Kaduna, Borno, Benue and Niger were the top 5 most violent Nigerian States. Unsurprisingly, Zamfara and Kaduna are in the North West, Borno is in the North East and Benue and Niger are in the North Central geopolitical zones. The high rankings of the North East relative to other geopolitcal zones suggests its critical situation which fits squarely with its high level of OOSC rate or education disruption. The North Central and the North West follow in behind at moderate risk

while the Southern regions are relatively low risk. This follows a similar distribution to the OOSC rates or educational disruptions across these regions.

Combined these numbers paint a clear picture: while access to primary education in Nigeria has expanded, it remains highly unequal, structured by poverty, place of residence, and regional differences. The children most at risk of being left behind are the rural poor, particularly in the northern zones, and while boys and girls face broadly similar exclusion at the national level, the interaction of gender with poverty and culture means that girls from the poorest rural households carry the heaviest burden of exclusion. Interestingly, all these dismal statistics can be tied to or encouraged by FCV incidence.

Table 1: School attendance among children of primary school age (%)

	MALE			FEMALE			TOTAL		
	Net Attendance (adj.)	Early Child Education	Out Of School Children [A]	Net Attendance (adj.)	Early Child Education	Out Of School Children [A]	Net Attendance (adj.)	Early Child Education	Out Of School Children [A]
Total	**68.7**	**6.6**	**25.2**	**68**	**6.4**	**26.1**	**68.4**	**6.5**	**25.6**
Area									
Urban	81.6	8.1	10.9	81.6	8	11	81.6	8	10.9
Rural	60.3	5.5	34.5	58.8	5.3	36	59.6	5.4	35.4
Age									
6	47.9	21.1	31	49.7	18.9	31.4	48.8	20	31.2
7	64.9	9	26.2	63.4	9.5	27.1	64.2	9.2	26.6
8	71	3.8	25.3	69.2	3.8	27	70.1	3.8	26.2
9	78.2	2.2	19.7	77	2	21.2	77.6	2.1	20.4
10	74.1	0.9	26	73.2	0.8	26.8	73.6	0.8	26.4
11	80.7	0.5	20.9	81.7	0.6	20.1	81.2	0.5	20.5
Wealth Index Quintile									
Poorest	40	3.3	56.9	38.7	3.3	58.4	39.3	3.3	57.6

Second	63.5	5.1	31.9	61.8	5.3	33.4	62.7	5.2	32.7
Middle	76.3	8.9	15.2	77.3	7.6	15.4	76.8	8.2	15.3
Fourth	82.7	9.5	8.6	81.9	9.3	9.3	82.3	9.4	9
Richest	88.8	6.8	4.9	87.8	7.1	6	88.3	6.9	5.5
Geopolitical Zone									
North Central	71.7	7.9	20.9	72.1	7.3	21.1	71.9	7.6	21
North East	47.6	3.8	48.9	47.7	2.7	50.2	47.6	3.3	49.5
North West	57.6	3.4	39.4	55.7	3.4	41.2	56.6	3.4	40.2
South East	84.9	8.8	8.1	81.5	9.7	10	83.2	9.2	9.1
South South	85	10.7	4.5	86.7	9	4.7	85.8	9.9	4.6
South West	84.4	9.2	6.7	84.4	10.5	5.7	84.4	9.8	6.2

Source: National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] & UNICEF, MICS (2022).

Note: [A] The percentage of children of primary school age out of school are those not attending any level of education.

Figure 1. Mapping of FCV risk and OOSC rates for Primary Schools across geopolitical zones (%)

Source: Author's construct with data from NBS & UNICEF (2022)

2.2. School attendance among children of lower secondary school age

Table 2: School attendance among children of lower secondary school age (%)

	MALE			FEMALE			TOTAL		
	Net Attendance (adj.)	Attending Primary	Out of School [A]	Net Attendance (adj.)	Attending Primary	Out of School [A]	Net Attendance (adj.)	Attending Primary	Out of School [A]
Total	**46.5**	**29.9**	**24**	**48.8**	**25.8**	**25.8**	**47.6**	**27.9**	**24.9**
Area									
Urban	64.6	26.3	9.9	67.4	22.9	10.3	66	24.5	10.1
Rural	34.1	32.5	33.7	34.8	28.1	37.4	34.4	30.3	35.5
Age at beginning of school year									
12	34.2	41.4	24.6	37.9	37.7	24.5	36	39.6	24.6
13	47.2	29.6	23.5	49.9	24.2	25.4	48.6	26.8	24.5
14	61.3	15.9	23.9	60.8	13.3	27.8	61.1	14.6	25.8
Wealth index quintile									
Poorest	14.4	30.2	55.6	14.9	23.8	61.4	14.7	27	58.5
Second	31	37.8	31.2	32.2	33.1	34.6	31.6	35.6	32.8
Middle	50.1	35.3	14.8	50.9	33.8	15.9	50.5	34.6	15.3
Fourth	64.4	27.7	9.3	66.5	24	10	65.5	25.9	9.6
Richest	79.8	15.1	5.5	81.8	12.9	6.3	80.9	14	5.9
Geopolitical zone									
North Central	44.3	37.4	19.1	48.3	31.5	20.5	46.2	34.6	19.8
North East	25.9	29.1	45.7	27.1	24.2	49.5	26.5	26.7	47.6

North West	27.5	35.9	36.8	30.2	29.6	40.4	28.8	32.8	38.6
South East	74.5	20.8	4.7	69.6	21.9	9.8	72.1	21.3	7.2
South South	68.1	24.7	8.1	71.6	23.3	5.2	69.9	24	6.6
South West	67.6	23.1	9.6	72.9	20.2	7.4	70.2	21.7	8.5

Source: National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] & UNICEF , MICS (2022).

Note: [A] The percentage of children of primary school age out of school are those not attending any level of education.

Figure 2. Mapping of FCV and OOSC rates for Lower Secondary School across geopolitical zones
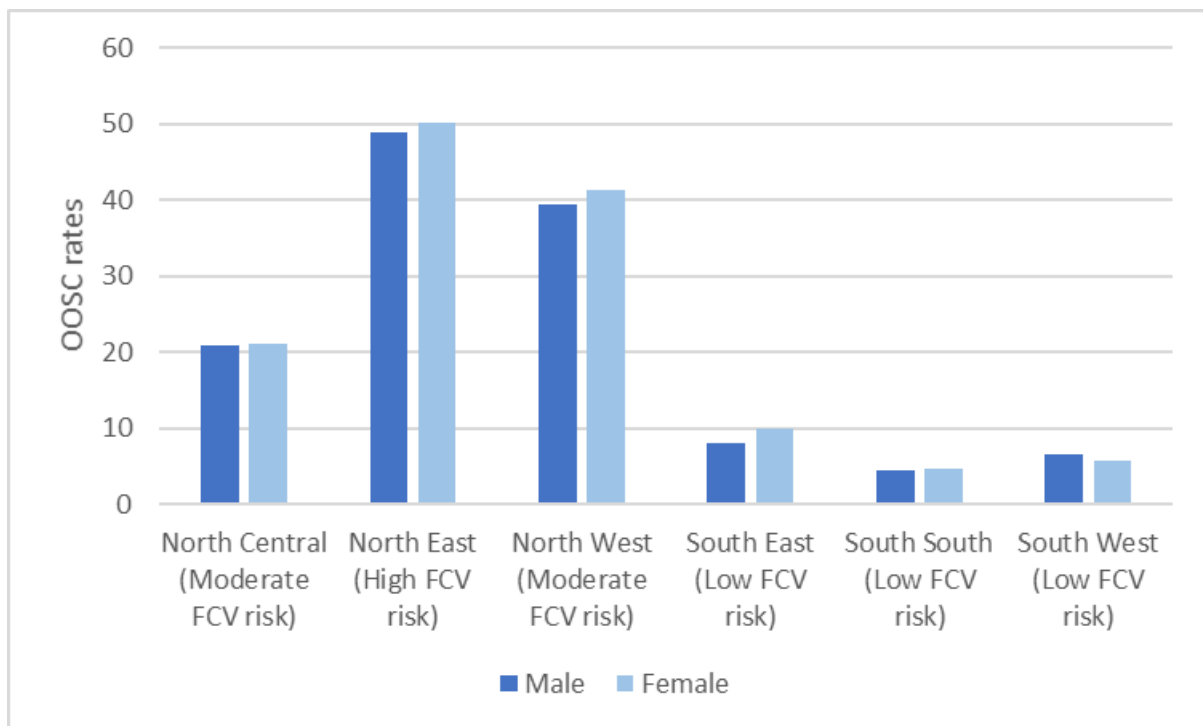
Source: Author's construct (NBS & UNICEF, 2022)

As children enter early adolescence, exclusion deepens and the fragility of the education system becomes more pronounced. Fewer than half (47.6%) of children of lower secondary school age (12–14 years) are enrolled in junior secondary, while nearly a quarter (27.9%) remain in primary school instead of progressing to the next stage. A further 24.9% are completely out of school. This means that for every four adolescents of the right age, only two are in junior secondary, one is still in primary school, and one is excluded entirely. Such inefficiency points

to systemic bottlenecks in the transition from primary to secondary education. One example of this systematic bottleneck is the level of fragility. Bagnall (2023), notes that poor emotional well-being would reduce the chances of primary to secondary school transition. This fits squarely with the fact that children in FCV affected areas, are emotionally negatively affected, with ramification even for children who go on with their educations (Olayinka and Ridwan, 2025)

Gender differences, while subtle, are revealing. Girls record a slightly higher NAR than boys (48.8% vs 46.5%), suggesting that girls who do transition are keeping pace with boys. Yet paradoxically, their out-of-school rate is also higher (25.8% vs 24.0%), underscoring that gender disparities cannot be assessed in isolation. Girls from wealthier or urban families may be advancing, while those from rural or poor households are more likely to be left behind.

The urban–rural divide is especially striking. In cities, 66.0% of adolescents attend junior secondary school, and only 10.1% are excluded. In rural areas, the picture is reversed: just 34.4% are in junior secondary, and more than one in three (35.5%) are out of school entirely. The rural disadvantage once again highlights the ruralification of violence (Ochogwu, 2024).

Age progression tells a story of slow transition and delayed entry. At age 12, only 36.0% are in junior secondary, while a larger share (39.6%) remain in primary school and 24.6% are excluded. By age 13, participation rises to 48.6%, but nearly a quarter (24.5%) are still out of school. By age 14, attendance improves further to 61.1%, yet 25.8% are excluded, showing that while transition improves with age, exclusion remains stubbornly high. This pattern reflects late school entry and grade repetition at earlier stages, which compresses the education cycle and prevents many from reaching the appropriate level at the right age. This may be as a result of FCV effects, disrupting educational activities, with continuation with the efforts of various Education-in Emergency (EiE) solutions.

The influence of wealth is decisive. In the poorest quintile, only 14.7% of adolescents are enrolled in junior secondary, while a shocking 58.5% are out of school. This contrasts starkly with the richest quintile, where 80.9% are in school and only 5.9% are excluded. This nearly 66 percentage-point gap between the poorest and richest underscores how access to education is mediated by income, with poorer households unable to afford school costs and often needing children to contribute to household labour or income. In the context of FCV prevalence, aside

from the issue of floods and violence causing poverty (Bih, 2025), it might also lead to more people joining the conflict due to disillusionment (Onuoha, 2014).

Regional disparities further expose structural inequalities. In the North East, barely 26.5% of adolescents attend junior secondary, and nearly half (47.6%) are out of school altogether. In the North West, the situation is similarly grim, with only 28.8% in school and 38.6% excluded. In contrast, the South East records a much higher NAR of 72.1%, with only 7.2% excluded, while the South South and South West also achieve rates close to 70%. These sharp contrasts confirm the findings of (Osisioma, 2022; Ojewale, 2021; Ojewale, 2024 and Nextier SPD, 2022), violent conflict patterns consistent with educational disruption patterns across the regions.

2.3. School attendance among children of upper secondary school age

Table 3: School attendance among children of upper secondary school age (%)

	Male				Female				Total			
	Net Attendance (adj.)	Attending Lower Secondary	Attending Primary School	Out of School A	Net Attendance (adj.)	Attending Lower Secondary	Attending Primary School	Out of School A	Net Attendance (adj.)	Attending Lower Secondary	Attending Primary School	Out of School A
Total	44.3	22.1	6.6	33.2	49.2	18.4	4.3	35.4	46.7	20.3	5.5	34.3
Area												
Urban	58.9	23.8	4.8	21.3	65.8	19.2	3	21.1	62.4	21.5	3.9	21.2
Rural	34	20.8	7.9	41.6	35.7	17.8	5.3	47	34.8	19.4	6.7	44.2
Age at beginning of school year												
15	31.4	30.1	10	30.8	35.1	26.9	6.8	32.5	33.2	28.6	8.4	31.6

16	47.9	21.1	5.8	31	54.5	17.5	3.4	30.4	51.2	19.3	4.6	30.7
17	58.2	12.1	3	38.8	61.8	8.6	1.9	44.2	60	10.3	2.5	41.5
Wealth index quintile												
Poorest	13.6	12.2	9.3	66.8	13.3	11.8	6.8	69.2	13.4	12	8.1	67.9
Second	28.2	25.5	9.3	40.2	30.3	21.1	6.1	46.2	29.2	23.4	7.8	43.1
Middle	48.5	27.2	7.2	22.8	50	26	4.6	26.4	49.2	26.6	6	24.6
Fourth	59.1	26	5	17.9	65.5	21.3	3.1	18.3	62.3	23.7	4	18.1
Richest	73.9	18.3	1.9	18.7	81.3	10.9	1.2	22.2	77.7	14.4	1.5	20.5

Source: National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] & UNICEF, MICS (2022).

Note: [A] The percentage of children of primary school age out of school are those not attending any level of education.

By the senior secondary stage (ages 15–17), exclusion reaches alarming and systemic levels. Barely half (46.7%) of adolescents are enrolled in senior secondary school, while over a third (34.3%) are entirely out of school. An additional 20.3% remain stuck in lower secondary, unable to transition upwards, showing how bottlenecks at earlier stages reverberate across the system and limit future opportunities. In effect, for every ten adolescents of upper secondary age, fewer than five are in the appropriate level, three are excluded altogether, and two remain behind in lower classes. The extent of children in an inappropriate level or out of school, might be as a result of the increase in FCV areas, especially at this level where recruitments to the conflict are being made (Onuoha, 2014).

Gender dynamics shift once again at this stage. Girls record a slightly higher net attendance rate (49.2%) than boys (44.3%), a reversal of earlier patterns in favour of male enrolment. This goes hand in hand with the suggestion of recruitment of children at this age, with men as the principal targets - even though women have increasingly been involved (Nwankpa, 2024) However, this apparent advantage is fragile. Girls remain at heightened risk of dropping out

due to pressures of early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and domestic responsibilities, especially in rural and poorer households. For many, enrolment does not necessarily translate into completion. Again, consistent with the implications of violence, as women and girls are married off as a coping mechanism (Meith et al., 2025; DiGiuseppe and Haer, 2022).

The urban–rural divide is even more pronounced at upper secondary. In cities, 62.4% of adolescents attend senior secondary, while 21.2% are excluded. In rural areas, only 34.8% attend, while nearly half (44.2%) are out of school entirely. This contrast highlights how living in rural communities not only reduces chances of entering school but also lowers the likelihood of progressing to higher levels, as limited school availability, insecurity, and economic pressures drive children out of the system. Perhaps the expanded rural-urban divide can be traced to the nearness to recruitment ages of violent groups (Onuoha, 2014).

Age progression exposes systemic inefficiency and delayed transition. At age 15, only 33.2% of children are in senior secondary school, while 31.6% are already out of school. By age 16, enrolment rises to 51.2%, but exclusion remains significant at 30.7%. At age 17, participation peaks at 60.0%, yet a staggering 41.5% remain excluded. This pattern suggests that while some adolescents catch up later (say due to Education-in-Emergency efforts), many are permanently lost to the system before completing secondary education.

The impact of wealth is even sharper at this stage. Among the poorest quintile, only 13.4% of adolescents are in senior secondary, while nearly 68% are excluded from schooling altogether. By contrast, among the richest households, more than three-quarters (77.7%) are enrolled, and only 20.5% are excluded. The nearly 65 percentage-point gap between the richest and poorest shows high levels of inequality which generally predicate violent conflict (Odusola, 2018). The poor who then lack the proper educational backgrounds would then engage in violent and criminal activities.

Geopolitical disparities mirror these inequalities. The North West records one of the lowest NARs at 29.1%, with nearly half (47.8%) excluded entirely. The North East fares little better, with only 26.5% enrolled and close to half out of school. By contrast, the South East achieves a much higher NAR of 70.1%, and the South South and South West both exceed 68%, with exclusion rates below 23%. This north–south divide reflects broader structural inequalities in Nigeria, which juxtaposes nicely with the fact that the North comprises the top five most FCV affected states.

Summarily, these figures paint a picture of an education system that narrows sharply as children grow older. By upper secondary, attendance is no longer the norm but the privilege of wealthier, urban, and southern children, while exclusion becomes the default reality for millions of rural, poor, and northern adolescents.

2.4.   Non-formal education attendance

Table 4: Non-formal education attendance (%)

	Percentage attending non-formal education	Qur'anic/Madrasa/Islamic School	Trade/Craft/Apprenticeship	Basic Education/Literacy Course	Other
Total	12	35.8	0.5	0.3	0.1
Sex					
Male	11.9	36.2	0.5	0.4	0.1
Female	12.2	35.5	0.4	0.2	0.1
Age Group					
3-5	15.3	30.7	0.2	0.3	0
6-11	12.1	47.1	0.5	0.3	0.1
12-14	10.6	42.4	0.6	0.2	0
15-18	9.7	24.3	0.7	0.3	0.1
Area					
Urban	4.4	23.9	0.5	0.3	0.1
Rural	17.2	39.1	0.5	0.3	0.1
Wealth index quintile					
Poorest	28.1	43	0.7	0.3	0.1

Second	16.9	39.8	0.5	0.4	0.1
Middle	8.4	34	0.2	0.1	0.1
Fourth	2.7	15.8	0.1	0.4	0.2
Richest	0.7	6	0	0	0
Geopolitical zone					
North Central	3.2	10.7	0.2	0	0.1
North East	20.8	36.6	0.2	0.1	0
North West	27	54	0.8	0.5	0.1
South East	0	0	0	0	0
South South	0	0.3	0	0	0
South West	0.4	2.5	0.3	0.4	0.1

Source: National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] & UNICEF, MICS (2022).

Non-formal education is often positioned as a safety net for children excluded from the formal system. Yet, the data from Table 4 reveals that this safety net is both thin and unevenly distributed. Nationally, only 12.0% of children aged 3–18 who are not attending formal education participate in any form of non-formal learning. This means that nearly nine out of ten out-of-school children (88%) have no educational engagement whatsoever, leaving them highly vulnerable to lifelong illiteracy and social exclusion. Thus, even the non-formal education systems are not able to account for the out of school children. This creates the right circumstances for recruitment to criminal activities (Onuoha, 2014) as well as might be a result of these activities.

Among those who do participate, the vast majority (35.8%) are enrolled in Qur'anic, madrasa, or Islamic schools, highlighting the dominance of religious education, particularly in the

northern regions. By contrast, participation in other forms of non-formal learning is negligible: only 0.5% in trade or apprenticeship training, 0.3% in literacy courses, and 0.1% in other forms. This imbalance underscores that while religious schooling is a well-established alternative in certain contexts, structured non-formal programmes such as skills training or literacy interventions remain grossly underdeveloped and inaccessible for most Nigerian children.

Gender differences in participation are minimal at the national level, with 11.9% of boys and 12.2% of girls attending non-formal education. However, age plays a significant role. The youngest children (ages 3–5) record the highest participation at 15.3%, reflecting early exposure to Qur'anic schooling. By contrast, participation drops steadily as children grow older: 12.1% for those aged 6–11, 10.6% for ages 12–14, and just 9.7% for adolescents aged 15–18. This decline suggests that non-formal education is primarily an entry point for young children, with fewer opportunities for continuation as they age.

The urban–rural divide is again telling. Only 4.4% of urban out-of-school children engage in non-formal learning, compared to 17.2% of their rural counterparts. This stark contrast reflects the fact that Qur'anic schools and other community-based alternatives are far more prevalent in rural northern areas, while urban centres, despite hosting a greater concentration of excluded children, offer very limited non-formal pathways. The limited penetration of nonformal education, even in the rural areas where they are most effective, provides the basis for the ruralisation of violence (Ochogwu, 2024). Nonetheless, the prevalence of nonformal education may be as a result of efforts to bridge the education gap in these FCV-prone areas (Yeo, 2025).

Wealth further sharpens the picture. Children from the poorest quintile have the highest participation (28.1%) in non-formal education, compared to 16.9% in the second quintile, 8.4% in the middle quintile, 2.7% in the fourth, and just 0.7% among the richest households. In other words, participation in non-formal education decreases steadily with wealth, confirming that it is primarily a last-resort mechanism for the poor. Wealthier families overwhelmingly channel their children into formal schooling, while the poorest rely on Qur'anic schools as a substitute for formal education, even though these rarely equip children with the literacy and numeracy skills needed for broader life opportunities.

These findings highlight a troubling paradox: while non-formal education offers some engagement for the poorest and most marginalized children, it is far from sufficient to bridge the gap left by the formal system. For the majority of out-of-school children (nearly nine in ten

nationwide), no form of structured learning is taking place. This reality creates a ripe environment for the inculcation of wrong teachings, which would prompt violence, further encouraged by the fact that most of these are poor (Okolie, Onyema ,and Bassey, 2019).

3. Out-of-School Model Framework

The global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) launched by UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) provides an analytical framework that uses and analyses diverse data from administrative records and household surveys to derive comprehensive profiles of children who are not in school, count them, and identify the reasons for their exclusion from education. A Five Dimensions of Exclusion (5DE) Model has been introduced to build profiles of excluded children. The Model represents a broad, complex and equity-focused approach that profiles out-of-school children as well as those at risk of dropping out. The following are the five dimensions of exclusion;

- **D1: children not in pre-school:** represents the group of children who do not benefit from pre-primary education and who may, therefore, not be adequately prepared for primary education, placing them at risk of not entering into primary education or, if they do enter, at risk of dropping out.

- **D2: children not in primary school:** this includes children that are old enough to go to primary school but are not attending. This dimension is divided into three categories based on past or future school exposure: children who attended in the past and left school, children who are likely to never enter school, and children who are likely to enter school in the future (over-age children)

- **D3: children not in lower secondary school:** this includes children that are old enough to go to lower secondary school but are not attending. This dimension is also divided into three categories based on past or future school exposure: children who attended in the past and left school, children who are likely to never enter school, and children who are likely to enter school in the future (over-age children)

- **D4: children at risk of dropping out of primary school:** this includes children that are in primary school, regardless of their age but are at the risk of dropping out

- **D5: children at risk of dropping out of secondary school:** this includes children that are attending lower secondary school, regardless of their age but are also at the risk of dropping out

Dimensions 2 and 3 are calculated as the ratio between the number of OOSC in the official age groups and the total number of children in the official age groups. While dimensions 4 and 5 are calculated by estimating the percentage of individuals who dropped out of primary and lower secondary school. This exclusion model helps to understand the different forms of school exclusion and contributes to the analysis of the reasons behind such situations.

Figure 3: The Five Dimensions of Exclusion Model
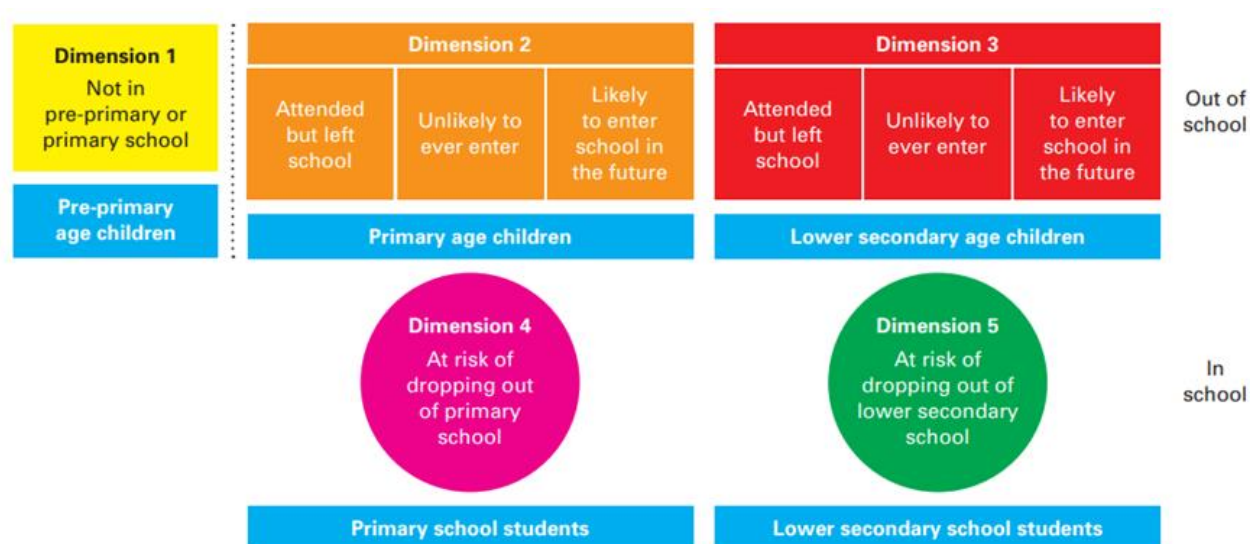
Source: UNICEF and UNESCO-UIS, 2011.

3.1.   Strengths and Weaknesses of Available Datasets

Table 5 below highlights the suitability of each of the available datasets to the five exclusion models. As shown in the table, all the available five datasets have relevant information on at least one of the five dimensions. However, the only data set that fits into all the five dimensions, is the MICS dataset. The MICS dataset contains relevant information that fits into all the five dimensions. Also, it provides information on the reasons for the OOS situation in Nigeria. Hence, this makes the MICS dataset a more reliable source for the analysis of the out-of-school situation in Nigeria. As such the MICS dataset is the major dataset used in this report, while the other datasets are used to support the findings from the MICS dataset.

Table 5: The Five Dimensions of Exclusion Model and OOSC Datasets in Nigeria

	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5
MICS	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
DHS	✗	✔	✔	✔	✔
UBEC	✔	✔	✔	✗	✗
NEDS	✔	✔	✔	✗	✗
FMOE	✔	✔	✔	✗	✗

Source: Author's observation/analysis

4. Gender, Social Inclusion, and Equity Landscape in Education

Education is a fundamental human right, and every child, regardless of their location or circumstances, has the right to quality education. However, in most African countries and Northern Nigeria, education is plagued by numerous structural challenges, which are reflected in the region's subpar education statistics. Some of these challenges include the occurrence of Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV) in the states, as well as regional insecurity, prolonged conflict, widespread poverty, natural disasters, climate change, attacks on schools, and the use of school facilities as refugee camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the BAY states.[3]

Consequently, Obasuyi (2022) revealed that education inequality was moderately high in Nigeria at 62.88%. UNICEF also reports that, in Nigeria, 10.5 million children are out of school. This corroborates the findings in the 2023 Nigeria Education Factsheet, which revealed

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[3] See the Humanitarian Action website

that about 83% of children in Nigeria are out of school across all levels of education, primary, junior, and senior secondary. The picture of these statistics is bleak for Northern Nigerian states, which have an average of 37%, 35.7%, and 44% of Out-Of-School Children (OOSC) at primary, junior, and senior secondary schools, respectively.[4]

Evaluating the gender, social inclusion, and equity landscape for education in Nigeria reveals that inequality in access to formal education favors males. Out-of-school children (OOSC) data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), as shown in Figures 1 and 2 above, indicate that females have higher out-of-school rates than their male counterparts in both primary and lower secondary education. UNICEF also reports in its 2022 education factsheet that approximately 7.6 million girls are out of school in Nigeria, with 48% of them residing in the Northeast and Northwest regions alone.

For children with disabilities, an UNFPA study shows that about 33 million Nigerians are disabled, of whom the majority are children. Unfortunately, 95.5% of these disabled children in Nigeria are out of school and have little or no knowledge regarding sexual reproductive health issues and diseases (Onyedinefu, 2022). 85% of schools in Nigeria are also not accessible to children with disabilities. According to Mercy Gichuhi, the Country Director of Save the Children International Nigeria, children, girls, and women with disabilities are the most affected and disadvantaged in times of disaster, armed conflict, or humanitarian crisis.

Children who come from low-income households in Nigeria also experience inequality in teaching and learning outcomes. A survey by Veriv Africa showed that 62% of Nigerian primary school students who experienced learning poverty are from low-income households. It also revealed that late enrolment rates of students in Nigeria were associated with financial constraints, especially in Northern Nigeria. Poverty remains a factor affecting various education outcomes for students, such as school readiness, language development, dropout rates, and cognitive and emotional development.

Therefore, this disparity, if not addressed with urgency, can limit Nigeria from maximising the multi-dimensional benefits of gender education equality, such as boosting Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and reducing income inequality.[5] It begins by identifying that girls, boys, and disabled individuals do not start at the same level playing ground, and mapping out policies

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[4] See the 2023 Nigeria Education Factsheet

[5] See the IMF Blog post

that are more inclusive for all, regardless of social disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic, Fragility, Conflict, and Violence[6].

Consequently, the government has implemented several policies and initiatives to ensure education inclusivity in Nigeria, such as the National Gender Policy (NGP) 2006, National Policy on Education (NPE) 2013, and the National Policy on Inclusive Education, which commenced in 2016. Initiatives to close this disparity also include the Accelerated Education Programs (AEPs), Accelerated Basic Education Programs (ABEPs), Luminah 2030, Girl for Girl (G4G), Social-Emotional Learning Programs (SEL), and so on.

5. Policy Environment and existing Education in Emergencies (EIE) frameworks

According to Partnership for Learning for All in Nigeria [PLANE](2022), the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has supported three education in emergencies (EiE) programmes in Borno and Yobe, both located in the North East. These are the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP), Addressing Education in North Nigeria (AENN), and Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL). Others include the Girls Education Project from 2012-2022 and the Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP) (UNICEF, 2025).

Although programs do exist and are effectively reducing the number of out-of-school children, significant roadblocks exist in relation to upscaling the efforts. Although some do doubt the extent of the OOSC, noting the disaggregated and unrecognised nature of many interventions, everyone agrees that the problem still exists.

The Nigerian Government on its own has various policy frameworks to cater for the OOSC. This is captured in the National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools In Nigeria, Federal Ministry of Education (2021). The policy was drafted by the Education in Emergencies Working Group which is chaired by the Ministry of Education. The policy is based on four distinct pillars:

i. Safe Learning Facilities (resilience to environmental hazards)

This pillar focuses on ensuring that school infrastructure is designed and maintained to withstand environmental hazards such as floods, fire, and other physical threats. It also includes strengthening school perimeters, improving lighting, and providing secure water and sanitation facilities, all of which are essential for creating an enabling environment where children can

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learn without fear. In regions like the North East and North West, where insecurity and environmental risks are acute, safe learning spaces are not only about infrastructure but also about protecting children from direct harm.

ii.   Prevention and Response to Violence Against Children in Schools

Violence in schools, whether physical, sexual, emotional, or peer-related (bullying), has been a major barrier to access and retention. This pillar emphasizes child protection systems within schools, mechanisms for reporting and responding to abuse, and the training of teachers and school administrators in safeguarding practices. By tackling violence head-on, the policy aims to reduce dropouts and build a culture of trust where parents are confident that their children will be protected at school.

iii.   School disaster management

Recognizing that many schools are located in areas prone to conflict, displacement, or natural disasters, this pillar promotes the creation of school-based disaster management committees. These committees are tasked with conducting risk assessments, identifying vulnerabilities, and preparing contingency plans. The committees also serve as rapid response structures when emergencies occur, ensuring that learning can continue through alternative arrangements such as temporary learning spaces or community-based schooling.

iv.   Risk and Resilience Education

The final pillar integrates resilience-building into the education system. This includes the development of early warning systems for threats (such as conflict, disease outbreaks, or weather-related hazards) and incorporating resilience practices into the school curriculum. By teaching children skills in disaster preparedness, conflict resolution, and psychosocial coping, this pillar aims to empower learners to navigate uncertainty while sustaining their education.

6.   Education Innovations and Implementers in Nigeria

In response to Nigeria's education crisis, a range of education innovations have emerged to expand access to quality learning, support learners affected by conflict, and promote gender equality and inclusion. For this mapping, the analysis focuses on three key categories of such innovations: Accelerated Education Programs (AEPs), Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs, and Girls-Focused Programs (GFPs). Rather than aiming for a comprehensive inventory, the mapping focused on identifying well-documented and scalable education innovations, particularly those with clearly measurable outcomes or publicly available evidence of impact, that illustrate current approaches to reaching out-of-school children and

marginalized groups. Mapping these innovations helps to understand their design, delivery, and alignment with national education priorities, as well as their effectiveness in improving learning outcomes, enrolment, and inclusion for marginalized groups.

Local implementers of education innovations in Nigeria, especially in conflict affected regions include Horn of Hope Vision for Peace and Community Development of Nigeria (HOHVIPAD), Kanem Borno Human Development Association (KABHUDA). **HOHVIPAD** is a faith-based non-governmental organization that was founded in 2005. They aim to provide humanitarian and community development support to the deprived communities in Nigeria. Over the years, they have implemented 4 cycles of AEP programs and a full cycle lasts for 9 months (this will be discussed in more detail below). **KABHUDA** is a non-governmental organization that was established in 2007 and they provide food, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), and Education for vulnerable people of all ages and genders in the North-eastern region of Nigeria both during and after emergency periods. Also, they provide non-food items to vulnerable people in IDP camps, host communities and returnees in North-eastern Nigeria. The organization's main objective is to improve access to education and psycho-social well-being of marginalized children and youth. Over the years KABHUDA has implemented 7 cycles of AEP interventions with each cycle lasting for a period of 9 to 12 months (Adenuga & Adeniran, 2022). Other notable international implementers of education innovations in Nigeria include UNICEF, PLAN International, and the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

6.1.   Accelerated Education Programs (AEPs)

Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) have been introduced in response to the high number of out-of-school children, particularly in the northern regions. These programmes are designed to be flexible and age-appropriate, running on a shorter timeline so that children and young people who are over-age for their grade can catch up with their peers. AEPs give a second chance to learners who have missed out on school or had their education disrupted by poverty, marginalisation, conflict, or crisis. The overall goal is to ensure that these learners acquire equivalent, certified competencies for basic education, delivered through teaching methods that reflect their maturity and learning needs (UNHCR, n.d.). AEPs implemented in Nigeria include:

 i. Education in Crisis Response

Programme	Objectives	non-formal learning centers	Enrolment	Impact
Education Crisis Response (2014-2017) completed 5 (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Yobe) (HOHVIPAD)	- Restore access to education for out-of-school children (OOSC). - promote psychosocial well-being, and facilitate the transition of learners into formal schools or vocational training	1456	Total: 80341 Female: 43,944 Male: 36,397 30,154 (17,789 females, 12,365 males) transitioned. 50.2 % of enrollees could read, 72.8% of the enrollees met or surpassed socioemotional competency criteria, 85.4% Completed basic literacy and skill acquisition program.	Total number transitioned: 30,154 Female: 17,789 Male: 12,365

ii. Department for International Development (DFID) - Education in Emergencies (EiE) - Non-Formal Learning Centres (NFLC)

Programme	Objective	non-formal learning centers	Enrolment	Impact
DFID-EiE NFLC (2017 -2020) (completed) 2 (Borno and Yobe) 9 to 14-year-old children (KABHUDA)	Provide education to out-of-school children (OOSC) in conflict-affected areas. - Strengthen community-based non-formal learning centers (NFLCs).	400	34000	Reached 34,000 children across Borno and Yobe states. - Trained 400 learning facilitators on literacy, numeracy, and SEL. improved the educational access, foundational learning outcomes, and emotional well-being of OOSC in Northern Nigeria.

iii. Addressing Education in Northeast Nigeria (AENN)

Programme	Objective	non-formal learning centers	Enrolment	Impact
Addressing Education in Northeast Nigeria (AENN) Completed 2 (Borno and Yobe) (2018-2021) (KABHUDA)	Address educational disruption caused by conflict.	Established 912 NFLCs across 8 LGAs in Borno and Yobe. Served over 34,000 OOSC in the initial cohorts. Distributed learning materials and supported NFLC operations.	over 200,000	Transitioned learners into formal schools or vocational programs

iv. Opportunity to Learn (OTL) Program

Programme	Objective	non-formal learning centers	Enrolment	Impact
Opportunity to Learn (OTL) Program Ongoing (2021–2026). 2 (Borno and Yobe) 12 Local Government Areas). International Rescue Committee (IRC) & Plan International	Provide foundational literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills to OOSC. - Transition OOSC to formal education and vocational opportunities.	Established 912 NFLCs across 8 LGAs in Borno and Yobe. - Served over 34,000 OOSC in the initial cohorts.	Over 34,000 OOSC served through NFLCs in the first cohort. Deliver Accelerated Learning Programs (ALP) for children aged 10-15. Train learning facilitators and provide learning materials. Mainstream OOSC into formal schools or market-relevant training	Improved access to education for vulnerable children and youth. Strengthened local and state institutions to manage and oversee non-formal education programs. Distributed learning materials and supported NFLC operations.

6.2.   Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP)

The Federal Government of Nigeria launched the Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP) on June 23, 2022, under the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) with funding support from the European Union and Plan International Nigeria. ABEP aims to ensure that out-of-school children (OOSC) aged 10 to 18, especially those affected by displacement, conflict, early marriage, or living in hard-to-reach and underserved communities, return to school (ReliefWeb, 2022). Focus would be on two major programmes implementing the Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP) in Nigeria: FCDO's Partnership for Learning for All in Nigeria (PLANE) and USAID's Opportunities to Learn (OTL).

Nigeria's Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP) has recorded important progress in enrollment, mainstreaming, and learning outcomes, with particular benefits for girls but limited impact on children with disabilities. Across five cohorts, more than 230,000 learners have been enrolled, with girls making up 56 percent of participants but children with disabilities accounting for less than one percent. While 37 percent of learners (around 87,000) have transitioned to formal education, dropout rates remain high, especially among boys and children with disabilities, revealing persistent challenges in sustaining participation. Within ABEP, this analysis focuses on two major programmes: the Partnership for Learning for All in Nigeria (PLANE), funded by FCDO and implemented in Borno and Yobe; and Opportunities to Learn (OTL), funded by USAID and implemented in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe.

6.3.   Innovation Design: Delivery Models, Curriculum, Learning Pathways

ABEP is designed around a condensed version of Nigeria's nine-year basic education curriculum, covering English, Mathematics, Science, History, and a Nigerian language. The programme provides flexible learning through evening and weekend classes, often hosted in community spaces such as leaders' houses, mosques, and churches. Community Education Committees (CECs) comprised of parents, teachers, and local leaders determine the location of learning centres, ensuring accessibility and ownership. A distinctive feature of ABEP is its structured transition framework, formally endorsed by the National Council on Education and the Ministry of Education. This framework provides a standardized pathway for learners to move from non-formal to formal schooling, addressing a long-standing gap where individual programmes previously relied on their own reintegration approaches. Both PLANE and OTL adopt this transition framework, though they differ in their levels of success in mainstreaming learners.

6.4.   Implementation Modalities

Both PLANE and OTL operate through a combination of community-based learning and NGO support, working in partnership with state governments and donor agencies. PLANE, implemented by UNICEF, Plan International, and Save the Children, reflects a strong consortium model funded by the UK's FCDO. OTL, on the other hand, is supported by USAID with IRC and Plan International as key implementing partners. Despite different funders and structures, both programmes rely heavily on community engagement for mobilization, retention, and management of learning spaces.

6.5.   Alignment with GEI, DRR, and National Education Strategies

The ABEP interventions are well aligned with Nigeria's Universal Basic Education framework and the national policy on reintegration of out-of-school children and youth. They also support gender equality and inclusion (GEI) by prioritizing the enrollment of girls, although mainstreaming outcomes suggest that girls do not necessarily benefit more than boys once enrolled. Children with disabilities remain significantly underserved. From a disaster risk reduction (DRR) perspective, both PLANE and OTL address the educational needs of children affected by insurgency and displacement by providing safe community learning spaces and embedding psychosocial support into programme design.

6.6.   Effectiveness and Impact Analysis

Evidence from PLANE and OTL shows substantial improvements in literacy, particularly for the lowest-performing learners. In PLANE, which uses the ASER methodology, literacy assessments reveal dramatic gains: in Cohort 1, the proportion of beginner readers dropped from 57 percent at baseline to just 3 percent at end line, while Cohort 2 declined from 40 percent to 4 percent. By the end of the programme, most learners had progressed to reading words, paragraphs, or short stories. OTL, which relies on the EGRA methodology, recorded more modest gains, with the share of learners at the lowest literacy level dropping from 66 percent to 40 percent. Nearly half of OTL learners scored within a moderate literacy range by end line, suggesting measurable though less dramatic progress compared to PLANE. Differences in results between the two programmes may reflect not only effectiveness but also differences in the assessment tools employed.

Enrolment and retention patterns further illustrate both progress and challenges. PLANE enrolled 60,401 learners, 59 percent of whom were girls. However, dropout remained a concern: Cohort 1 enrolment dropped by nearly 40 percent (from 30,000 to 18,000), although Cohort 2 fared better, declining from 18,000 to 15,000. Across ABEP as a whole, 37 percent of learners were successfully mainstreamed into formal schooling, equivalent to 87,019 children. Mainstreaming rates varied across programmes, with OTL achieving the highest at 45 percent, followed by EU-supported interventions at 31 percent, and PLANE at 21 percent. These figures suggest that while ABEP has succeeded in addressing barriers to girls' access to accelerated education, its ability to sustain learners and transition them into formal systems remains uneven.

Gender-disaggregated results indicate that girls consistently outperform boys in literacy outcomes. In PLANE's Cohort 1, the proportion of girls achieving the highest literacy level rose from 1 percent to 18 percent, compared to an increase from 1 percent to 12 percent for boys. At the same time, the share of girls at the lowest literacy level dropped from 32 percent to 2 percent, compared to a reduction from 25 percent to 1 percent for boys. OTL showed a similar though less pronounced trend: the proportion of girls at the highest literacy level increased from 3.5 percent to 6.8 percent, compared to an increase from 3.8 percent to 5.6 percent for boys. Meanwhile, the percentage of girls at the lowest literacy level fell from 37.3 percent to 21 percent, while the percentage for boys declined from 29 percent to 18.9 percent. These results show that girls benefit more strongly than boys from ABEP in terms of learning gains, even though their mainstreaming outcomes remain similar. Children with disabilities

continue to be the most marginalized group, making up less than one percent of total enrollment and showing very low mainstreaming rates (PLANE, 2025).

7. Girls-Focused Programs (GFPs)

7.1. The Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) is a large-scale education innovation funded by the World Bank and implemented through the Federal Ministry of Education in partnership with participating state ministries. Its primary aim is to expand secondary education opportunities for adolescent girls, particularly those who are out of school, married, or living with disabilities, across 18 states, including Borno. AGILE combines multiple delivery models such as formal secondary schooling, conditional cash transfers (CCTs), life skills and digital training, and community engagement to address the barriers that keep girls from completing education (Kadagile, 2024). Since its inception, the number of girls in secondary schools in target states has increased from about 900,000 to over 1.6 million. Under the program, more than 5,000 classrooms have been renovated, over 250,000 eligible girls have received scholarships, and construction and rehabilitation of WASH facilities, alongside installation of computers and solar panels, have made schooling more convenient and conducive for both girls and boys (World Bank Group, 2023). Over 68,000 benefitting from CCTs, 30,000 from structured life skills sessions, and more than 32,000 from digital skills training. Beyond access, AGILE seeks to improve retention and transition rates by easing financial constraints and empowering girls with market-relevant competencies, while also engaging families and communities to support girls' education (Ekitiagile, 2025). As a government-led and donor-financed initiative, AGILE is aligned with national education strategies, Gender Equality and Inclusion (GEI) priorities, and global Education in Emergencies (EiE) frameworks, positioning it as one of Nigeria's most comprehensive interventions for adolescent girls' education.

7.2. Girl Child Concerns (GCC) is a Nigerian non-governmental organization established in 2003 with a focus on improving the lives of vulnerable girls and their families, particularly in northern Nigeria and conflict-affected areas like Borno State. Over the last four years, GCC has prioritized meeting the educational and social needs of young girls affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, providing access to formal education, safe spaces, life skills, sexual and reproductive health education, and mentoring. Through its Female Students Scholarship Scheme (FSSS), GCC has supported over 500 girls to graduate from secondary school, with

more than 100 currently enrolled in boarding schools, many of them from IDP camps in Borno and Yobe States. In 2017, 75 beneficiaries completed secondary school, including 42 of the Chibok schoolgirls who escaped abduction in 2014. GCC also runs Safe Spaces platforms, which empower adolescent girls, including married adolescents, to build literacy, numeracy, social-emotional learning, and networks of trust. To strengthen long-term educational opportunities, GCC is establishing a Girls' Academy in Borno State, modeled after the Khan Academy approach, which allows learners to progress at their own pace using blended methods of classroom lessons, exercises, and digital tools.

Beyond education, GCC implements economic empowerment programmes that have reached over 1,000 women in IDP camps, providing start-up capital, vocational training, and tools to engage in viable trades such as knitting and other small enterprises. These interventions not only improve livelihoods but also reduce the vulnerability of women to harmful coping strategies, such as transactional sex in displacement settings. GCC has further invested in advocacy and community mobilization, sensitizing citizens on gender equality, human rights, and accountability in governance, while engaging communities in supporting education and demanding better services. With its integrated model that combines education, empowerment, health, and advocacy, GCC contributes to improved enrollment, retention, and transition rates for girls, delays early marriage, and promotes social inclusion for marginalized groups. As an NGO-led, community-based initiative, GCC aligns strongly with Gender Equality and Inclusion (GEI) priorities, Education in Emergencies (EiE) frameworks, and broader national strategies for girls' education and resilience in fragile contexts (Girl Child Concerns, 2022). GCC, in collaboration with UNICEF also commenced a two-in-a-week phone-in radio program on life skills for girls in Borno State where community members can listen and make contributions through phone calls.

7.3.   Girl for Girl (G4G)

The Girls for Girls project is a transformative initiative partnership between Girl Child Concerns with Education Cannot Wait sought to break barriers and empower girls aged 10 to 16 years in Borno State, Nigeria (Girl Child Concerns, 2023). It is one of the components of Girls' education Project 3(GEP3) which was established by UNICEF as strategy to encourage girls in Northern Nigeria not only to go to school, but most specially to remain in school and to transit from the lower level to the upper level of education.G4G is a peer education programme that establishes clubs for girls (G4G) and boys (He4She) to support girls' retention,

transition and completion of basic education and address gender inequalities in communities (UNICEF, 2022). The project sponsored by UNICEF was designed to increase access to education and create safe spaces for girls. The current focus is on Maiduguri Metropolitan Council and Jere Local Government Area because they were both deeply affected by humanitarian crises that disadvantaged a lot of girls but they also operate in Bauchi, Katsina, Niger, Zamfara and Sokoto. The project engaged over 80 stakeholders with messages promoting girls' education, established 100 G4G groups at the school level, and trained 486 group leaders in life skills and leadership. Additionally, 1,500 girls participated in safe space activities in the targeted schools. The initiative had a wide reach, covering all 50 target schools. A key component of the project was the creation of the G4G training manual, carefully crafted to address the unique challenges faced by girls in Borno State. This manual proved to be a valuable tool for educators, supporting their delivery of practical and relevant life skills training to the girls. Based on a report by UNICEF (2022)[7], At least 135,000 girls benefitted from the G4G initiative through the establishment of 4,514 active groups in primary schools, integrated Qur'anic schools, and junior secondary schools. Over the course of the intervention, girls' attendance rates rose significantly, climbing from 43 percent to 70 percent. Literacy outcomes also improved, with the proportion of girls able to read at a fluency of 31 words per minute or more increasing from 15 percent to 46 percent. Beyond literacy, the programme contributed to higher levels of enrolment, retention, and transition of girls across GEP3 states, alongside noticeable improvements in their overall academic performance.

7.4. LUMINAH 2030

The initiative was initially launched as the Lumina Programme in April 2025 and was designed to tackle the challenge of out-of-school children, with a particular focus on underserved areas. It was subsequently integrated into the Ministry's broader Quality Education and Learning Outcomes framework, reflecting stronger alignment with national education reform goals. Responsibility for implementing the project has since been transferred to the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) (Blessing O., 2025)[8]. The project was initiated to address the enrollment of out-of-school girls in remote areas, and to provide skill acquisition opportunities for them. The initiative will also extend its focus to empowering the mothers of these girls, creating a comprehensive approach to family and community upliftment (famefoundation, 2025). The aim of this project is to educate and economically empower over one million

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[7] https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/media/7761/file/UNICEF%20Nigeria%20How-to-Guide:%20Girl%20for%20Girl%20(G4G).pdf

[8] https://msmeafricaonline.com/nigeria-launches-luminah-2030-to-empower-over-one-million-girls-and-women-through-education/

underserved girls and women across Nigeria by 2030. The initiative is currently being implemented in 12 states and the FCT, including Yobe, Taraba, Kano, Jigawa, Benue, Ebonyi, Anambra, Bayelsa, and Akwa Ibom. The project adopts a holistic empowerment approach by integrating foundational literacy/numeracy with vocational training and leadership development.

7.5.   Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs

The **Girls for Girls (G4G)** initiative has SEL components embedded in its delivery, particularly through its use of role modelling and peer mentoring. By reaching girls with positive messaging, mentorship, and support, G4G fosters essential SEL skills such as self-confidence, resilience, and social connectedness. This approach not only empowered participating girls to believe in their potential but also influenced broader community attitudes, driving a transformational shift in mindsets about the value of girls' education. In doing so, G4G demonstrates how SEL-informed interventions can strengthen both individual development and collective commitment to educational equity.

The **Girl Child Concerns (GCC)** program also offers Youth Development & Mentoring Training to develop boys' and girls' confidence and awareness, and empower them to become active members in their communities, and gain a sense of social responsibility.

DABARU was originally adapted from the "SEL Kernels of Practice" which are evidence-based strategies developed by the EASEL Lab at Harvard University during a contextualization process with Nigerian stakeholders. Following landscape research from 2019 to 2021 to capture local values and priorities, the activities were refined, prototyped, and renamed "Dabaru" (Hausa for "strategy") to reflect their grounding in the Northeast Nigeria context. Results show that after using Dabaru, teachers show improvement in their confidence and self-reported ability to teach SEL. Dabaru is a cost-efficient and potentially cost-effective solution to promote SEL in Northeast Nigeria (Airbel Impact Lab, n.d.).

Dabaru is a set of 20 reusable activities for teachers working with students aged 8–15 in Northeast Nigeria. The activities, which include stories, games, and songs, focus on building three priority skills identified by local stakeholders: self-discipline, tolerance, and respect. Each activity follows a three-part structure: Introduction (naming and explaining the skill), Practice (students engage in skill-focused activities), and Debrief (teachers guide reflection on applying the skill in real life). Dabaru can be integrated into literacy, numeracy, and other subjects, and

comes with locally illustrated visuals and teaching tips for adaptation and progressive learning. Students attended the tutoring program 3 times per week over a period of 5 months, starting at the end of April and ending at the beginning of September. On average, teachers spent 18 minutes per activity and implemented the Dabaru during almost every class session, for a total of 737 minutes (12.3 hours) of SEL activities across 5 months (International Rescue Committee, 2022).

8.   Long-Term Sustainability: Government vs. Donor Financing

Sustainability of education innovations in Nigeria, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected regions, depends critically on whether government systems at national and subnational levels can absorb, sustain, and scale initiatives that are often introduced and financed by donors. Interventions such as Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), psychosocial support (PSS), and emergency pedagogy are designed to respond to immediate crises, but their long-term impact rests on integration into public education systems. Three dimensions are central to this analysis: government capacity, institutional readiness, and teacher training systems.

8.1.   National and Subnational Government Capacity to Absorb and Scale Innovations

One of the key indicators of institutional capacity is the level of public investment in education. In Nigeria, government expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP has shown a worrying decline over the past decade. In 2012, Nigeria allocated approximately 0.55% of its GDP to education, but by 2022, this figure had dropped to 0.35%, marking a 36.5% reduction over ten years. This level of investment is significantly below the UNESCO-recommended benchmark of 4-6% of GDP for developing countries highlighting a persistent gap between Nigeria's education funding and global standards.)

At subnational levels (states, Local Government Areas), capacity varies greatly. Some BAY states (Borno, Adamawa, Yobe) are under strong donor pressure and support, yet face internal revenue constraints, insecurity, and logistical challenges, which limit their abilities to scale programmes once donor funding recedes. For example, in the Education in Emergencies Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP) in Northeast Nigeria, ECW (Education Cannot Wait) estimated a funding requirement of US$118.8 million for 2021-2023 to reach 2.9 million crisis-affected children. Confirmed funding and donor contributions fell short, leaving funding gaps in each year (e.g., in 2023 the gap was approximately US$33 million).

Government systems also often lack flexible budgeting and institutional mechanisms that can respond to emergencies. For donor-initiated innovations, scale-up is frequently slowed by state-to-state variation in political priority, governance, staff deployment, and internal budgeting cycles. Delays in procurement, teacher hiring, and teacher payment remain recurring challenges.

The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) are the primary vehicles for scaling interventions in basic education. However, their fiscal space is constrained; in many states, internally generated revenue is low; federal transfers are unstable; and competing demands (security, health, infrastructure) often push education lower in priority when crises occur. This means many innovations remain pilot-scaled rather than fully institutionalized.

8.2.   Institutional Readiness and Capacity Assessment

Institutional readiness involves whether policies, management structures, data systems, and human capacity exist to sustain innovations. Recent assessments suggest mixed readiness:

- **Policy frameworks** exist: For example, Nigeria has formal documents/manuals for teacher training in emergencies and psychosocial support (UBEC's *[Training Manual on Psychosocial Support Skills and Managing Children in Emergencies](#)* for teachers in crises-affected areas).
- **Data systems** are improving, especially in North-East states under the [AENN (Accelerate Education Nigeria Network)](#), which has supported state government capacity for data collection, use of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), and dashboards for out-of-school children (OOSC) tracking.
- However, staff turnover, weak institutional memory, and lack of routine monitoring and follow-up remain significant constraints. Many interventions are evaluated only during donor funding, with limited capacity in government for independent or continuous evaluation.

In terms of readiness, a core problem is mismatch between what is planned and what is budgeted. Whilst [State Education Sector Operational Plans (SESOPs)](#) are increasingly required to include crisis/emergency responsiveness and gender sensitivity (per GPE-accelerated funding and workshops in BAY states), the integration of such plans into actual state budgets is inconsistent.

8.3.   Teacher Training Systems: SEL, PSS, Emergency Pedagogy

Teachers are central to whether innovations stick. Several recent developments show promise, but also expose gaps:

- UBEC has developed teacher training manuals specifically for psychosocial support (PSS) and SEL in crisis contexts. For example, the Training Manual on Psychosocial Support Skills for teachers in emergency-affected areas aims to equip teachers with hands-on skills to help learners heal and reengage.
- UBEC's Teacher Professional Development (TPD) Programme Document calls for reforms in the in-service teacher training system: moving from irregular mass trainings toward more regular, structured, school-based training models; better alignment with teacher needs; follow-up support; mentoring; and involvement of SUBEBs, Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs), and relevant teacher education institutions.
- The School Based Training (SBT) model has been adopted in many places: training is delivered in the school environment, involving all teachers in selected schools, with cluster models for smaller schools. This model is thought to enhance relevance, reduce costs and increase application of skills in context.

However, certain gaps remain: many teachers in crisis zones still lack prior exposure to emergency pedagogy; in pre-service teacher education, the content for SEL, trauma responsive teaching, multi-grade or multi-age classrooms, is weak or non-existent in many Colleges of Education (UBEC, 2024). Follow up/mentoring after training is weak, and cascade training models have the problem of dilution of content and quality as it moves from master-trainers down (British Council, 2018; UNICEF, 2023).

The Learning Lab model, developed by UNICEF in collaboration with government and education partners, is a recent innovation aimed at strengthening teacher professional development (PD). It is designed to be school-embedded and context-specific, incorporating digital tools, peer support, and continuous feedback loops. The model explicitly links teachers' professional learning to improvements in classroom practice by engaging instructional leadership teams in iterative cycles of inquiry, mentoring, and coaching (UNICEF, 2023).

9. Barriers to Education

Barriers to education in Nigeria are shaped by a combination of supply- and demand-side constraints, both of which are magnified in fragile and conflict-affected settings. On the supply side, repeated attacks on schools, destruction of infrastructure, and shortages of qualified teachers have led to prolonged school closures and unstable learning environments. On the demand side, widespread poverty, displacement, and fear of insecurity discourage parents from sending their children, especially girls, to school. Deep-seated gender and cultural norms further compound these barriers, limiting girls' enrolment and retention in formal education. As a result, Northern Nigeria continues to host the highest concentration of out-of-school children in the country, highlighting the need for policy responses that simultaneously strengthen educational provision and address the socio-economic and security realities confronting households.

9.1. Supply-Side Barriers

Infrastructure

In Nigeria's most fragile and conflict-affected regions, particularly Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states, school infrastructure has been severely compromised. In northeast Nigeria alone, UNICEF reports that 496 classrooms have been destroyed and 1,392 damaged but repairable.[9] Beyond physical damage, the broader estimates from UNICEF shows that up to 2 million children in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe are currently out of school, among whom displaced children account for 56 percent.[10] A major challenge is that, following crises, many schools are converted into settlement areas and camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), further reducing their availability for learning. This widespread degradation and repurposing of educational facilities has created severe barriers to learning, as safe, functional, and accessible classrooms are absent for too many children in crisis-affected states.

Teachers and Human Resources

Shortages of qualified teachers remain one of the most pressing barriers to education in Nigeria's conflict-affected states. Many teachers have fled violence or been displaced, leaving schools understaffed and children without adequate instruction. In Borno State, for example,

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[9] https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/education?utm

[10] https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/press-releases/2-million-out-school-children-expected-access-quality-learning-northeast-nigeria?utm

over 60 percent of schools are estimated to operate with fewer than the required number of teachers, and those who remain often lack specialised training to address the needs of children affected by conflict and trauma.[11] National data reinforces this gap, with pupil–teacher ratios reaching 98:1 at the primary level when teacher qualifications are taken into account.[12] Beyond numbers, there are qualitative challenges: most teachers in these regions have not received training in psychosocial support (PSS), socio-emotional learning (SEL), or emergency pedagogy, which are critical for helping children learn in fragile contexts. This severe shortage, both in quantity and in quality, shows the capacity of schools to deliver meaningful education in emergency settings.

Safety and Security

Insecurity remains one of the major supply-side barriers to education in Nigeria's fragile regions and has continued to disrupt access to schooling in Nigeria's fragile states. At least 113 schools were closed in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe due to insecurity linked to armed conflict, attacks by non-state actors, and banditry.[13] Similarly, kidnappings remain a potent threat; there were 3,620 kidnapping cases in Nigeria, and criminal groups collected the equivalent of about 5 billion naira (USD 3.9 million) in ransoms.[14] These security threats, both directly through violence and indirectly through fear of abduction, have led many families to withdraw their children, especially girls, from attending school, severely undermining education continuity in fragile regions.

9.2   Demand-Side Barriers

Household Poverty

Household poverty remains one of the strongest demand-side barriers to education in Nigeria's fragile and conflict-affected states. With inflation reaching 21.88% in July 2025, the highest in three decades, the rising cost of food, transportation, and basic services has pushed many families to prioritise survival over schooling. In the northeast and northwest, where poverty levels are most acute, parents often struggle to cover hidden schooling costs such as uniforms, textbooks, or transportation. According to the 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), 133 million Nigerians, 63 percent of the population, live in multidimensional poverty, with

[11] https://punchng.com/60-of-borno-adamawa-yobe-schools-lack-qualified-teachers-unicef/

[12] https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099101424050072899/pdf/P507001-c933771f-1821-40e6-8712-dceaebc602b6.pdf

[13] https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2024_nigeria.pdf?utm

[14] https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/4/3/why-mass-kidnappings-still-plague-nigeria-a-decade-after-chibok-abductions?utm

deprivations in education particularly severe in rural and conflict-affected zones.[15] As a result, children are frequently withdrawn from school to contribute to household income through farming, herding, street hawking, or apprenticeships. Girls are especially vulnerable: evidence from UNICEF indicates that economic hardship accelerates early marriage, which further worsens gender disparities in school enrolment. These economic pressures illustrate how poverty interacts with the fragility of educational exclusion in Nigeria's crisis-hit regions.

Cultural Norms and Gendered Practices

Cultural norms and gendered expectations continue to shape schooling decisions in fragile parts of Nigeria, often to the detriment of girls' education. In Borno State, early marriage remains a key driver of dropout. Data from the MICS 2021, shows that over 40 percent of girls in Northern Nigeria are married before age 18, with rates exceeding 50 percent in states such as Bauchi, Jigawa, and Zamfara. Once married, girls are far less likely to remain in school, with many shifting to domestic or caregiving roles. Cultural resistance to formal, Western-style education also persists in some rural and conflict-affected communities, where Qur'anic or religious schooling is preferred. This often results in boys attending informal Islamic schools (Almajiri system) while girls remain at home. The cumulative effect is that gendered norms, combined with insecurity and poverty, limit the scope of formal education for millions of children. These dynamics not only reinforce existing disparities but also undermine recovery efforts in fragile regions where the demand for inclusive education is most urgent.

Perception of School Safety

Perceptions of safety have become a decisive factor in whether parents allow their children to attend school in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria. The wave of mass abductions since 2021 where more than 200 pupils were abducted, has intensified community fears about the vulnerability of schools.[16] These incidents have led many parents, particularly mothers in rural communities, to view formal education as unsafe, especially for girls who are seen as more exposed to sexual violence or abduction risks. Prolonged school closures in 2022 and 2023 were justified by state governments on security grounds, but they also reinforced parental reluctance to re-enroll children once schools reopened. For displaced populations, the situation is even more precarious, as learning centres in IDP camps are often temporary structures with

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[15] https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/news/78#

[16] https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/factbox-major-kidnapping-incidents-northern-nigeria-this-year-2024-12-10/

little to no security presence. These persistent fears undermine efforts to expand access and contribute to the widening gap between supply-side interventions and household willingness to send children back to school in fragile areas.

9.3.   Research Gaps and Data Limitations

Despite the availability of multiple datasets on education in Nigeria, significant limitations remain in capturing the realities of children in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Core national surveys such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 2022), the Demographic and Health Survey (2018), and the Nigeria Education Data Survey (2015) provide useful baselines, but given the time period these data were collected, they do not capture recent conflict dynamics. These gaps make it difficult to design timely, evidence-based Education in Emergencies (EiE) interventions, as policymakers are forced to rely on fragmented or outdated information that does not reflect the evolving situation on the ground.

10.   Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from this study shows that factors that enhance the OOS context are multifactorial. The available data above shows that the demand and supply barriers are major inhibitors to accessing education, especially for girls. Educating the girl child has been at the forefront of the education sector in Nigeria, however, certain factors continue to hinder this process. These include but not limited to child marriage, culture, religion, early pregnancy and parents' perception of girls' education. The 2022 MICS data shows that 26.1% of girls are out of primary school compared to boys at 25.2%. This marginal difference is as a result of the stated factors above.

In the Northern part of Nigeria particularly the Northeast, the OOS situation is alarming due to the high level of insurgency in that region. The 2022 MICS data shows that 49.5% of children are out of school at the primary school level. Also, gender bias is seen, as 50.2% of girls are out of primary school in this region compared to 48.9% of boys. The issues of conflict, insecurity, and insurgency in this region, particularly Borno state, has contributed to the rising OOS numbers as schools are forced to shut down, as it is no longer safe to attend schools. Hence, the need to implement education interventions to curb the rising numbers.

Accelerated Education Programmes (AEP) are education interventions that have been ongoing for several years in Nigeria. From the findings above, several AEP programmes have been implemented, particularly in Northeast Nigeria. These programmes target children in

vulnerable positions, with the aim of teaching them numeracy, literacy and life skills. This is to enhance their smooth transition into formal schooling. During the course of the AEP programmes, some were able to meet and exceed their targets for the intervention. Also, girls focused programmes were implemented to provide education opportunities for girls and to enable their retention in formal schools.

However, despite the implementation of interventions such as AEPs and Girls focused programs, the OOS situation in Nigeria is still a cause of concern, particularly in Northern Nigeria. The implications of the rise in the number of OOSC on the development of Nigeria are enormous. Hence, it is important to implement policies that will curb the OOS situation, particularly in Northern Nigeria. Regarding the poverty barrier affecting the access to education, poverty reduction strategies should be implemented to enable poor people to improve their livelihood. Also, parents, guardians and children should be enlightened on the importance of education on human growth and development. This could be done through public sensitizations and educational campaigns. In addition, the law against child marriage should be strictly enforced as child marriage for girls could lead to early pregnancy, hence, affecting their access to education. Furthermore, education interventions such as AEP, should be focused on to improve the transition and retention rate of children into formal schools. Social-emotional learning and psycho social support should also be embedded in education innovations to enhance learners' psychosocial wellbeing and resilience. Finally, the availability of recent data on the OOS situation in Nigeria is a major limitation, as it inhibits a clearer view of the issue across all levels of education (primary, junior secondary and senior secondary). Hence, education stakeholders should ensure there is access to recent, reliable and quality data on OOSC in Nigeria.

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