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### Analysis of Integrated Factors Affecting Rural Children Enrolment into Schools: Nigeria in Perspective

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#### Abstract

From time to time, the government of Nigeria at different levels has looked into some socio-economic programmes and their implementation procedures towards increasing the enrolment capacity of school children in rural communities. It was however realistically noted that there are some serious impending factors with the potential to affect the efforts made by the governments and other concerned stakeholders. Strategic resolution of some constricted factors affecting enrolment and subsequent educational growth must be prioritized. There have been different kinds of efforts made by the governments towards improving children's educational enrolment in developing countries. For example, policies are being changed occasionally for increasing the educational attainment of children but some strategic problems need to be addressed to reduce the burden of poor performances of policy actions. Thus, in this paper, the impact of community stakeholders and government

sensitization, free tuition fees and parental decisions on the enrolment of children in school are being investigated. These elements were found to largely influence the enrolment of children in schools in rural areas. Concerning sensitization, it was observed that the deprived orientation of parents and children by the key stakeholders greatly impacts children's enrolment into primary schools in rural areas. For the inhabitants of rural areas, the total expenditures on the enrolment of school children have the potential to affect the enrolment of school children, especially for children from poor backgrounds. Parental influence in the form of negative decisions was also found to be another major factor affecting school children's enrolment in rural areas. A critical observation revealed that the factors studied herein have a more negative influence on households living below the poverty line.

**Keywords:** Rural Area, Education, Poverty, Social Factor

#### 1. Introduction

Nigeria is located in West Africa. The country is naturally blessed with various economically beneficial resources including oil, natural gas, and forest materials. The majority of the human population in the country lives in a rural area with predominant agricultural activities due to fertile agricultural land for the production of food and cash crops. The settlement pattern in the rural areas is predominantly scattered while that in urban areas is heavily concentrated around government socio-economic facilities. The agricultural sector has been the country's major labour employer due to limited opportunities for jobs in the government and private sectors. This scenario has hindered the development of the educational sector in the country making it difficult for the country to exploit its potential for the required development. The availability of infrastructural facilities such as roads, energy, hospitals, and others is heavily constrained due to the high level of corruption and insecurity in the country. Nigeria is presently one of the numerous countries in Africa with a high foreign debt profile and very limited opportunities to service the loans. The ongoing challenges of religious terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping, ethnic conflicts and socio-political agitations have also affected the anticipated development of the country. A major instrument to conquer poverty and antisocial behaviours is education. Education is an essential and basic right of every child which must not be considered a privilege in any way <sup>[1]</sup>. Nigeria has some of the characteristic features of poor investment in human capital and infrastructural development due to a poor educational system, political malpractices, an underdeveloped economic system, poor technology, and degenerating agricultural development.

Nigeria has relied so much on the revenue from oil for so long with very little thought of economic diversification. Unfortunately, the financial benefits from the oil sector have not been properly utilized for the funding of other sectors like health, agriculture and education. Generally, the problem of educational development in Nigeria stems from poor enrolment at the early stage. The budgetary allocation for the educational system in Nigeria is grossly insufficient to cater to the needed growth in enrolment, especially at the primary school level [2]. In the last few decades, the government at different levels has embarked on different school programmes to increase the level of enrolment of children in schools but unfortunately, the desired results have not been yielded. This is because some of the programmes are usually not directed toward the reach of the rural communities in the country. For example, the school free feeding and educational subsidy scheme in the country is inaccessible to the children in rural communities. Even in urban areas where they are in operation, the expected benefits have not been reaped by the masses due to the existence of the cancerous phenomenon of corruption [3]. Human development is measured by the standard and quality of education among other education-related indicators. Enrolment of children in schools and the subsequent dropout rates are key indicators that determine the literacy level in a country [4]. From this perspective, the context of education goes beyond ordinary literacy improvement or the level of enlightenment in a country or geographical location. Therefore, this study investigates some of the integrated factors affecting rural educational enrolment in Nigeria.

## 2. Literature Review

In a country, all development can be achieved with the development of a standard educational system that goes beyond literacy focus. A standardized educational system lays a foundation for effective leadership skills and qualifications. According to [5], education is a useful tool for the identification and selection of well-informed leaders with a creative and innovative understanding of needed transformational change in society. In the study conducted by [6], a strategy for the confrontation of poverty and educational inequalities in rural Bangladesh was presented. It was observed that the Madaras system investigated grossly contributed to the making of gendered inequalities in schools in the country. In Iraq, an investigation of school enrolment during the United States-led war was carried out based on statistical examination [7]. It was found that the percentage of children enrolled in schools has declined in Iraq households based on the 2007 United States-led war compared to other neighboring countries. Furthermore, children's educational enrolment quality in Nepal was studied by [8]. The study mainly focused on the examination of the roles of mothers in children's school enrolment. The results disclosed that the heterogeneity by gender, social status, and type of work of the women determines the children's enrolment status. Children from educationally disadvantaged mothers are likely to be affected in their quest for educational development. It was thus suggested that improving the educational empowerment of women in society will improve the chance of enrollment of children in schools. In Ethiopia, the rapid enrollment of children in schools was studied based on some key challenges concerning Sustainable Development Goals [9]. The results

obtained indicated that a strong decision in children's enrollment can be found in adolescent decision-making power.

Educational enrollment and subsequent development have been linked to several factors such as income inequality [10], poverty [11], armed conflict [12], earthquake disaster [13], and gender imbalance [14] among others. The inadequate educational enrolment sector plan in some developing countries has greatly affected the rate of the registration of children into schools in rural areas. Enrolment of children into schools takes a different form as determined by some factors such as prevailing educational situations in the country, religious perspective and socioeconomic challenges. Access to education in developing countries especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has generally increased since the 1990s but unfortunately, millions of children are yet to be enrolled or out of school [15]. There is also a high incidence of a huge disparity in the enrolment of boys and girls in schools due to several constricted factors. The enrolment percentage was reported to favor more male children than their female counterparts. Irrespective of the perceived gender educational disparity index, the rate of enrolment in schools between rural and urban areas in some developing countries in SSA is quite discouraging. From a multi-dimensional perspective, this study consequently investigates the impacts of three different factors on rural school enrolment in Nigeria. The study examined the thoughtfulness of community sensitization, free tuition fees and parental decisions.

## 3. Research Data

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics established that a huge gap exists in the enrolment rates among low, middle- and high-income nations, especially at the primary school level [15]. However, some developing countries are currently at the point of a strong pursuit of increasing policies and activities for boosting the enrolment of children in schools. The policy initiatives also involve effective attendance to evade or limit possible drop out of school. From this perspective, more research becomes necessary on the multi-functional issues involved in early childhood school enrolment in rural areas. This study presents data from a survey carried out based on indices of community stakeholders and government sensitization, free tuition fee regime and parental decisions from households in some selected rural communities in Nigeria. The rural households were selected across the different geopolitical zones in the country. The data was collected based on structured questionnaires and synthesized for the analysis presented in this study. Information regarding the age, parental gender, the headship of households, educational qualification and employment status of the respondents are included in the questionnaire. Furthermore, this study focuses on primary school enrolment from the perspective of community sensitization, free tuition fees and parental decisions across different geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The northwest, southwest and southeast are three selected Nigeria geopolitical zones. Nigeria has six geopolitical zones: Northwest, Northeast, North-central, South-east, Southwest and South-south. Five rural communities were selected from each state in the geopolitical zones used for the analysis presented in this study. The states of Katsina, Ekiti and Enugu were selected accordingly from the Northwest, Southwest and Southeast. Gurza, Tsamiyar Jino, Bazanga, Kokami and Dukawa in

Katsina State were chosen as rural villages from the state of Katsina. In Enugu state, the rural communities of Azunkwo, Uhungo, Abacheku, Onunweke Ezza and Amaeze were selected. Osi-Ekiti, Iwaji, Iye-Ekiti, Ilepeju-Ekiti, and Osan Ekiti were the rural settlements selected for this study for the case of Ekiti State. The choice of respondents from different geopolitical zones was based on the differences in the cultural, religious and social diversity of the people. A total of 50 respondents were selected from each case study rural community. The respondents are the categories of the focal group of people that reside within the selected rural communities. The focal group comprises both male and female parents with the influential decision to enroll their children in schools.

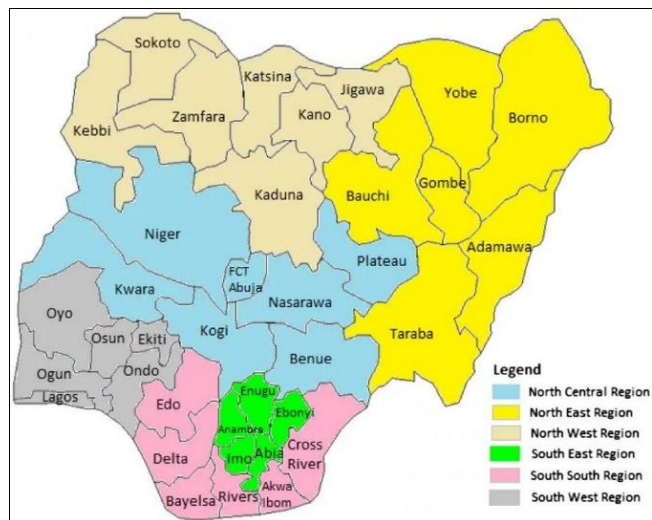


Fig 1: Map of Nigeria showing the six geopolitical zones in the country

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Community Stakeholders and Government Sensitization

Enrolment of children in schools in rural communities in Africa is generally poor. This affects female children more due to gender disparity. Some existing uncontrollable circumstances are usually responsible for poor enrolment or drop out of school among children in rural communities. The situation of poor enrolment may be prompted by extreme poverty and lack of government attention. Therefore, the intervention from the government and community-based relevant authorities through sensitization is key. Educational sensitization programmes are the process of creating awareness of the usefulness and impact of education on people. In Nigeria, the local community educational authorities are not doing enough in terms of sensitization activities. Conventionally, the inhabitants of rural communities are usually not adequately aware of the relevance of education in our modern societies.

The investigation conducted was based on the positive impact of community stakeholders and government sensitization on the impact of children enrolment in schools in rural areas. Therefore, to promote a high level of awareness and subsequent academic performance among rural people, sensitization programmes may be required. From the results of the survey conducted, it was observed that the majority of the respondents were inclined that effective sensitization programmes are needed. The results shown strongly agree (SA) values of 45, 43, and 40

respondents from Katsina, Enugu and Ekiti correspondingly as shown in Figure 2. However, the number of respondents who also agree (AG) with the positivity of the impact of the community stakeholders and government sensitization on the enrolment of children is still higher compared to those who strongly disagree (SD), disagree (DG) and left undecided (UD).

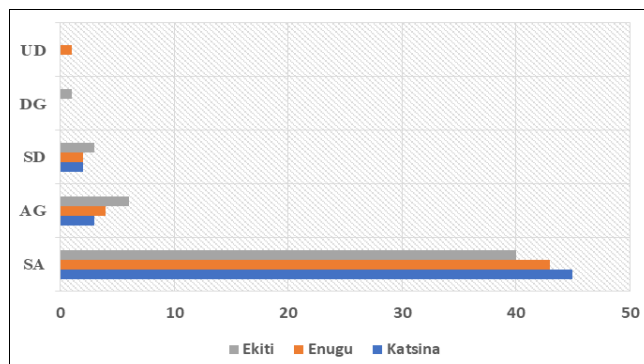


Fig 2: Results of the positive impact of community stakeholders and government sensitization on the enrolment of children in rural schools

4.2 Free Tuition Fee

Truly speaking, access to primary education in Nigeria is currently on the decline based on multiple factors. Tuition fee reform initiatives are very important engagement in developing countries where people have a low potential to pay for tuition due to economic challenges. In Nigeria, the policy challenge for the elimination of tuition fees for school children especially at the primary school level started over three decades ago. It, however, seems to be a failed policy due to the high level of penetration of private schools compared to the number of schools owned by the government in rural communities. However, in some rural communities today, especially in northern Nigeria, rural children are saddled with the opportunities to attend primary and secondary schools at no cost. It is consequently important to point out that this opportunity is only available in very few states across the country. Going by the results of the investigation presented in Figure 3, it was generally observed that the elimination of tuition fees increases the level of enrolment of children in schools in rural communities in the country. In the north-western state of Katsina, 48 out of 50 respondents indicated that the introduction of tuition fees for enrolment has a negative effect. In Enugu and Ekiti in the southern region, 38 and 41 respondents respectively supported that the introduction of tuition fees for enrolment of school children has a negative effect.

Convincingly, it can be concluded that a direct increase in the cost of education in a developing country like Nigeria has a corresponding consequential poor enrolment status or dropout of children from schools. Making provision for affordable and perhaps free education at the primary school level in rural communities is an important effort. The results obtained show that a minimum of 76% of the respondents signified that a free tuition fee regime will have a significant impact on children’s school enrolment in rural communities in the country. An assessment of the results from the different geopolitical zones implies that payment of tuition fees is a major constraint for people in rural areas. Another reason for the results may be due to the concern tuition fee



is just a fraction of the total educational expenditures that may be needed to be accomplished. Other important expenditures such as payment for miscellaneous education materials, books, and school uniforms are a major problem for poor households. Poor rural households are usually financially constrained and the complete elimination of tuition may not solve the problem in totality.

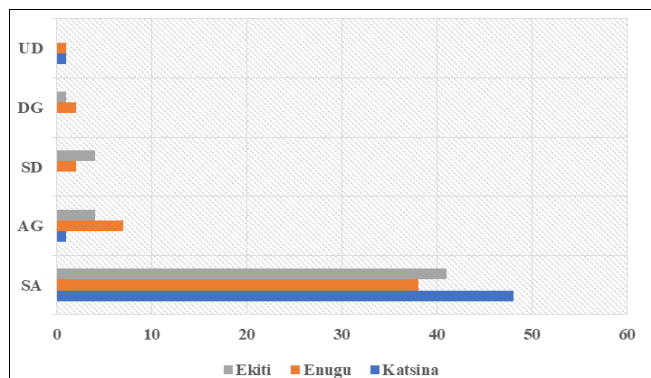


Fig 3: Negative impact of tuition fee on the enrolment of children in rural primary school

### 4.3 Parental Decisions

This is usually a situation activated by poor support from uneducated parents. Parental addiction to unfair customs and traditions orchestrated by some unfair cultural influences. Enrolment of young children into schools has a lot to do with parental decisions and influences across different family perceptions. Children usually have no autonomous decisions concerning their interest to be enrolled in schools at a tender age. Most often parental influence can also be referred to as parental involvement and it can be described as the opinion of parents to influence their decisions for educational development. Parental influence can affect the preparedness of children for education. A negative parental involvement in the enrolment of children into school can bring about a complicated scenario with a threatened sense of autonomous decision-making in the minds of the children. In Figure 4, the results of the impact of parental decisions investigated were presented. It was observed that the total number of respondents who agreed that wrong parental influences affect the enrolment chances of school children is very high.

The total percentages of the number of respondents from the selected states of Katsina, Enugu, and Ekiti are 96%, 86%, and 90% respectively. Very few numbers of respondents strongly disagree that parental influences have no negative impact on the enrolment of their children in schools at the primary level. For example, in the case of Enugu, a total of 3, 2 and 3 respondents stood for strongly disagree, disagree, and undecided responses respectively. The situation in Ekiti which is also a state in the southern axis of the country is somewhat close to that of Ekiti, especially in the total number of disagreeing respondents. A total of 4 and 5 respondents disagree accordingly in Ekiti and Enugu that parental influences cannot affect the level of school children's enrolment. However, the prevailing reality in Nigeria is that children usually sort for parental decisions for their decision-making, especially regarding their expected human development. It is an undoubted fact that the involvement of families has a very powerful potential to

influence children's educational decision-making.

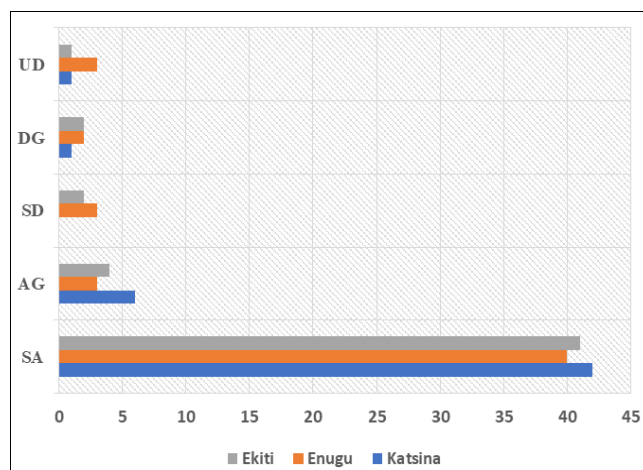


Fig 4: The impact of parental influence on the enrolment of children in rural primary school

### 5. Conclusion

Strategic reform of the educational sector to increase the enrolment of children in rural communities must be given priority in our modern society. The education of vulnerable populations especially the children of rural inhabitants must be a core task of the government. Educational fee reduction reform or exemption in rural Nigeria can be used to increase the current level of children's school enrolment. The findings from the impacts of community stakeholders and government sensitization programs, tuition fee exemption, and parental decisions are very significant factors. Community stakeholders and government sensitization activities for the expansion of the frontiers of children enrolled in school are major factors. It was also found that the provision of intervention or educational enrolment subsidies for children in rural communities could increase the enrolment level of children in primary schools.

Charging school fees for the enrolment of children in public primary schools in Nigeria regardless of the geographical location is a highly controversial issue. This is because a government policy goes against such a practice in the educational sector. The current level of enrolment in rural communities in Nigeria is very poor and to improve it, the integrated factors investigated in this study must be tackled. Therefore, based on the study conducted, the following recommendations are made:

1. Parents and societal stakeholders should work together to support children in making their own decisions regarding their educational prospects.
2. Parents should be guided to improve their willingness to support their children financially to achieve quality education.
3. More efforts should be sustained by the government towards the sensitization of parents for the enrollment of children in local rural communities and give orientations to the people on the relevance of education to their children in modern society.

### 6. Acknowledgments

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