IMPACT OF ABANDONED SCHOOL CHILDREN AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ON SUSTAINABILITY IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
Early childhood education plays a vital role in ensuring in ensuring the sustainability and well- being of vulnerable children, particularly abandoned school children. The study investigated the impact of abandoned school children and early childhood education on sustainability in Lagos state, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study, using a descriptive research design and Abandoned School Children and Early childhood Sustainability (ASCECHS)" and "School Children Abandonment for Teachers (SCAFT) were used for data collection with Cronbach alpha, reliability coefficients of 0.74 and 0.82 respectively. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select sixty (60) respondents in Lagos State. The mean, standard deviation and weighted average were used to answer the research questions. The findings highlighted the positive influence of early childhood education on sustainable child development and, underscoring its crucial role in societal growth and development. The study concluded by stating that the factors and consequences of abandoned school children have forced school aged children to resort to hawking and other informal income generating activities to survive, thereby forfeiting their rights to education due to the dire economic circumstances. It was recommended that collaborative efforts from stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies to address infrastructure and policy implementation.

Keywords: Abandoned School Children, Early childhood Education, Sustainability

Introduction

Early childhood sustainability initiatives have garnered significant attention as a crucial strategy for mitigating school children abandonment in Nigeria. Nigeria, a densely populated West Africa nation, grapples with numerous challenges in its educational system, notably the pressing issue of abandoned school children. This pervasive problem erodes the fabric of our society, undermining the potential and prospects of future generations. Abandoned school children refer to those who have discontinued or never commenced their education due to factors such as economic hardship, socio- cultural barriers, conflict, and limited access to quality educational opportunities.

The phenomenon of abandoned school children, characterized by parental or guardian neglect, poses a significant obstacle to Nigeria's quest for Universal Education. Specifically, abandoned school children are pupils enrolled in classes but lacking essential care, support, and guidance from their caregivers. Consequently, these children face myriad challenges that hinder their academic performance and overall well- being. Poverty stands as a significant barrier to education for school-aged children in Nigeria, perpetuating a circle of disadvantage. With a substantial portion of its population living below the poverty line, Nigeria grapples with one of the world's highest poverty rates, as reported by the World Bank. The harsh reality of poverty forces many low- income parents to

prioritize immediate needs over their children's education, leading to school abandonment (Adebowale, 2020). In rural areas families struggle to survive amidst dire circumstances with education often seen as an unaffordable luxury, adding to the already overwhelming financial strain. Nigeria faces a critical challenge with out- of – school children, with approximately 10 million youngsters aged 5 to 14years missing out on formal education, according to UNESCO's 2021 report. This vulnerable group lacks essential support and resources, exacerbating their risk of abandonment and limiting their access to quality education. In Nigeria, out – of – school children, typically aged 1 to 12 , are often found on the streets without access to a structured educational system, further marginalizing them (Ojelade, Aiyedun & Aregebesola, 2019). This phenomenon underscores the need for targeted interventions to ensure these children receive the education they deserve.

Early childhood education refers to the educational experiences provided to young children before they enter primary school. According to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), early childhood education encompasses learning opportunities offered to children under the age of four .Early childhood plays a vital role in fostering holistic development in children, including brain development and laying the foundation for future success. Sustainable development prioritizes the well- being of current and future generations by balancing economic, social, and environmental needs. As Speth (2008) notes, sustainable development strives to ensure equity for future generations. Recognizing children as stakeholders with the greatest interest in the future highlights the critical role of early childhood professionals play in promoting sustainable development. By acknowledging children's rights and interest, early childhood education becomes a citizenship issue.

As advocates for young children, professionals have a responsibility to prioritize sustainable development. Speth (2008) further emphasizes that early childhood settings shape fundamental values, essential for tomorrow's society. High – quality early childhood education is crucial for sustainable development. Education's quality and quantity are crucial for sustainable development. As emphasised in the Federal Republic of Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2013), a nation's progress is inherently linked to its education system. However, the alarming sight of school age children roaming outside schools raises concerns. Factors contributing to this trend include changes in family structure and income, parent- child relationships, teacher support, motivation, academic performance, substance abuse, and inaccessible school locations. In northern Nigeria, education deprivation persists. According to UNICEF (2014), economic barriers and socio- cultural norms hinder formal education, particularly for girls. Other factors include:

- Poverty and economic constraints
- Cultural and social norms
- Limited access to schools
- Teacher shortages and inadequate resources
- Child labour and early marriage

To address these challenges, targeted interventions and policy reforms are necessary to ensure inclusive and equitable education

The consequences of any form of abandoned school children are obvious for children and the society. Children abandoned are exposed to social stigma, fewer job opportunities, lower salaries, and higher probability of involvement in criminal activities. The following were identified as the consequences of ASC:

❖ Out of school impels pupils' self-esteem and psychological well-being because they are faced with the reality that they lack skills and knowledge to fulfill their desires.

❖ Earnings for young men and women who quit school have steadily declined over the past three decades as they settle for meager jobs.

❖ School dropouts were more likely to be unemployed compared to those who complete school.

❖ Dropouts are substantially more likely to rely on public welfare and health services.

❖ Dropouts are more likely to be incarcerated during their lifetime.

In addition, an abandoned school child (ASC) hinders individual development and sustainable development which serve as a multidimensional concept of development. This includes economic, social and environmental dimensions being considered and integrated as attested by Boggia, & Cortina, (2010), the Federal Government believes that no nation can achieve economic prosperity without a sound inclusive and functional education system. It is against this backdrop that the study tends to examine Abandoned School Children enhancing factors and consequences for sustainable development of Lagos state Nigeria.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) program aims to universalize access, enhance quality and promote equity in education through strategic partnerships with states, local governments, and key stakeholders (UBEC, 2019). To bolster this initiative, the UBE Act (2004) was enacted, providing legal backing for program implementation. To ensure effective coordination, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) was established at the federal level, while State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) and Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) were established to localize UBE implementation. The UBE Act stipulates that parents who fail to comply with section 2(2) commits an offense, liable to:

- First conviction: Reprimand
- Second conviction: |N 2,000 fine or 1 month imprisonment, or both
- Subsequent convictions : N5,000 fine or 2 month imprisonment, or both

Beyond UBE, various projects are underway, involving the Federal Government, states, United Nations agencies, UNICEF and international organizations, to address Nigeria's alarming rate of abandoned school children. Despite numerous initiatives' Nigeria struggles with a significant number of abandoned school children, ranking among the highest globally. As Grace (2004) notes, most abandoned children drop out of school to engage in menial jobs, seeking survival income, thereby forfeiting their right to education. Ugoduluwa, Anakwe & Mustapha (2004), engaging in hawking activities can have severe consequences for abandoned school children, hindering their physical, mental, psychological, social and emotional growth.

Early childhood education and care acknowledge the holistic nature of a child's development, considering the diverse factors that shape their growth. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bio- ecological model positions the child within a dynamic environment characterized by constant change (Keenan & Evans, 2009). An alternative perspective on childhood influences expands upon Bronfenbrenner's theory, highlighting interconnected spheres of impact. As Velez- Agosto and Soto- Crespo (2017) suggest, these spheres encompass family and community layers, intricately intertwined with cultural, political, and physical aspects that influence a child's learning and development. Davis (2012), argues that traditional environmental education falls short in addressing the full scope of sustainability challenges, prompting a need to reexamine the environmental issues facing young children. According to Davis, early childhood education for sustainability transcends outdoor play and environmental instruction, instead emphasizing children's agency and potential to drive positive change.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's alarming rate of abandoned school children and lack of sustainable early childhood education programs undermines the recognized importance of early childhood development in shaping future success. Despite existing protection laws, Nigerian children face daily neglect, as reported in electronic and print media.

Research indicates that abandoned school children often experience setbacks in growth, social, and psychological development, compromising their physical well- being. Child abandonment is a societal issue with far- reaching consequences, which might result to economic losses, healthcare costs, and increased crime rates. A significant number of children in Nigeria are not attending school or are dropped out due to various factors including poverty, cultural beliefs and limited access to educational opportunities. This situation not only hinders the individual development and well- being of these children but also poses long term consequences for the educational outcomes and socio economic development of the country.

The issue of abandoned school children and inadequate early childhood sustainability is a complex issue with wide- reaching effects on both people and society. A comprehensive strategy is needed to address this issue, one that involves community involvement, funding for healthcare and education, as well as initiatives to alter cultural norms and beliefs around the importance of early childhood development and education. We can encourage a more sustainable and equitable future for children and communities throughout the world by addressing these problems head on. Therefore there is an urgent need to investigate the causes and effects of abandoned school children as well as identify strategies for sustaining and enhancement of early year's education in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions provide the framework for this investigation:
1. To what extent does early childhood education influence children's long term sustainability and development?
2. What challenges contribute to the abandonment of   school children in Nigeria?
3. How do early childhood education programmes in Nigeria address the underlying issues contributing to school children abandonment?

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design. The target population comprised all selected Orphanage homes in Lagos State, Nigeria. The sample of sixty (60) respondents was selected, consisting of 20 males (33.3%) and 40 females (66.7%). The multistage sampling procedure was utilized, incorporating stratified sampling to select the schools, followed by simple random sampling to select the respondents. Two instruments were developed: "Abandoned School Children and Early childhood Sustainability (ASCECHS)" and "School Children Abandonment for Teachers (SCAFT). Expert validation was ensured through face and content validity assessments by specialists in early childhood education and test measurement. Instrument reliability was established using test-retest methodology and Cronbach alpha, yielding coefficients of 0.74 and 0.82 respectively. Descriptive statistical analysis, including mean, standard deviation and weighted average, was conducted to address the research questions.

Results

Research Question One: To what extent does early childhood education influence children's long term sustainability and development?

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Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation abandoned school children and Early childhood Sustainability in Nigeria.

S/N	Issues Raised	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.	I have faced challenges related to abandonment that affect my school life.	60	2.24	.935
2.	These challenges have had a negative impact on my school performance and attendance.	60	2.49	1.023
3.	I sometimes feel unsupported or neglected in my school life due to abandonment issues.	60	2.53	.971
4.	I have someone I can talk to about my feelings and experiences related to abandonment.	60	1.56	.876
5.	My school provides resources or support to help me cope with the challenges I face due to abandonment.	60	1.85	.888
	Total	**60**	**10.64**	**2.545**
	Grand Total		**2.128**	**0.509**

Table 1 shows that item 3, which stated that I have someone I can talk to about my feelings and experiences related to abandonment has the highest mean score of 2.53 (SD=971) followed by item 2 which stated that These challenges have had a negative impact on my school performance and attendance with the mean score of 2.49 (SD=1.023), and item four which is I have someone I can talk to about my feelings and experiences related to abandonment has the lowest mean score of 1.56 (SD=.876) followed by item five which stated that My school provides resources or support to help me cope with the challenges I face due to abandonment with the mean score of 1.85 (SD=.888). The grand total of mean score was 2.128(SD=0.509). The implication of this to the research question one shows that the Early-childhood Education has a positive influence in sustainability of a child. It is therefore agreed that the Early child Education has positive roles in sustainable development of a child in the society.

Research Question Two: What challenges contribute to the abandonment of school children in Lagos state, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on abandoned school children and early childhood

S/N	Issues Raised	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.	Early education helps me feel more prepared for school.	60	1.75	.604
2.	I believe early childhood education helps prevent children from dropping out of school.	60	2.38	1.006
3.	Early education has helped me build better relationships with my caregivers and classmates.	60	1.54	.625
4.	I believe early childhood education helps children stay engaged and interested in learning.	60	1.74	.609
5.	I feel that early childhood education lays a strong foundation for future academic success.	60	1.73	.582
	Total	**60**	**9.02**	**2.456**
	Grand Total		**1.804**	**0.4912**

Table 2 shows that item 2, which stated that I believe early childhood education helps prevent children from dropping out of school has the highest mean score of 2.38 (SD=1.006) followed by item 1 which stated that Early education helps me feel more prepared for school with the mean score of 1.75 (SD=.604), and item three which stated that Early education has helped me build better relationships with my caregivers and classmates has the lowest mean score of 1.54 (SD=.625) followed by item five

which stated that I feel that early childhood education lays a strong foundation for future academic success with the mean score of 1.73 (SD=.582). The grand total of mean score was 2.456(SD=0.4912). The implication of this to the research question two shows that the Early-childhood Education has a positive influence in solving school children abandonment in Nigeria. It is therefore agreed that the Early child Education has positive roles in solving school children abandonment in Nigeria.

Research Question Three: How do early childhood education programs in Nigeria address the underlying issues contributing to school children abandonment?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on abandoned school children and Early-childhood Sustainability in Nigeria.

S/N	Issues Raised	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.	Early Childhood Education helps to reduce the rate of abandoned school children	60	1.70	.926
2.	Children who attend early childhood education often drop out of school	60	3.00	.921
3.	Early childhood promotes lifelong learning and early detention of children with special need	60	1.64	.663
4.	Early childhood foster school readiness and interest in children academic	60	1.30	.497
5.	Early childhood saps a child's personality and further career	60	1.41	.622
6.	Early childhood provides an enabled environment for children abandonment	60	1.40	.558
7.	A child's family is the major determinant of school children abandonment	60	1.83	.806
8.	Cultural practices in northern Nigeria promotes school children abandonment	60	1.95	.990
9.	Crises in the home contributes to school children abandonment	60	1.57	.810
	Total	**60**	**15.70**	**3.180**
	Grand Total		**1.74**	**0.353**

Table 3 shows that item 2, which stated that Children who attend early childhood education often drop out of school has the highest mean score of 3.00 (SD=926) followed by item 8 which stated that Cultural practices in northern Nigeria promotes school children abandonment with the mean score of 1.95 (SD=.990), followed by item 7 which stated that A child's family is the major determinant of school children abandonment with mean score of 1.83 (SD=.806) and item four which stated that Early childhood foster school readiness and interest in children academic has the lowest mean score of 1.30 (SD=.497) followed by item seven which stated that Early childhood provides an enabled environment for children abandonment with the mean score of 1.40 (SD=.558). The grand total of mean score was 1.74(SD=0.353). The implication of this to the research question three shows that the respondents strongly disagreed that Children who attend early childhood education often drop out of school. It is therefore agreed that the Early child Education has positive roles the lives of school children in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

In an attempt to achieve the objectives of this research stated earlier in this study, the following findings were made from the analysis of results presented above which are :

In answering research question one, it was discovered that majority motives influence in sustainability of a child This is supported by (FRN, 2013) as education given educational settings for children aged 3 through 5 years in preparing their entry into primary school, early childhood plays a crucial role in the holistic development of children which includes brain development, school readiness, social and emotional, long term educational outcomes, economic benefits, equality and social justices, laying the foundation for their future well-being and success. It is also in line with, (Speth, 2008), noted that Many of the most fundamental values of tomorrow's society are also being formed in early childhood contexts today. Early Childhood Education therefore has a major role to play in achieving sustainable development. But if we are to collaborate in the development of a more sustainable future, and in developing an Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Early Childhood, then we must develop some common understanding of ESD and we must work together to achieve it.

Research question two revealed that early childhood education significantly contributes to mitigating school children abandonment in Nigeria, consistent with the findings by. Boggia & Cortina (2010), The Federal Government recognizes that economic prosperity hinges on a sound, inclusive, and functional education system. According to Grace (2004), most abandoned children drop out of school to engage in menial jobs, such as hawking, to survive, thereby forfeiting their right to education.

Research question three's findings indicated that the respondents overwhelming disagreed with the notion that children attending early childhood education programs are likely to drop out of school. According to Ugoduluwa and Anakwe (2004), engaging in hawking activities can have severe consequences for abandoned school children, hindering their physical, mental, psychological, social and emotional growth.

Conclusion

The factors and consequences of abandoned school children have forced school aged children to resort to hawking and other informal income – generating activities to survive, thereby forfeiting their rights to education due to the dire economic circumstances.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made;
1. Collaborative efforts from stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies to address infrastructure and policy implementation.
2. Stakeholders and Non-governmental organization should also help in building public school schools for abandoned school children should be kept.
3. The executive arm of government should ensure that they give cognizant attention to the execution and implementation of laws that will make it mandatory that every school should have a well-equipped and well facilitated environment and facilities in the communities for abandoned school children.

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