



# **The Role of Education as a Tool for Social Integration of Street Children in Jalingo Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria**

**SHAMAKI, Esther B.**

**Department of Educational Foundations**

**Faculty of Education**

**Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria**

## **ABSTRACT**

A research to find out the role of education in combating the menace of street children on the streets was conducted in Jalingo Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria. Questionnaires were distributed to literate street children, parents, teachers, government officials from 'ministries, board and parastatals of Jalingo Local Government, while interviews were carried out to illiterate street children and parents. After analyzing the data collected, some reasons such as poverty, over-population, large family size, high cost of education etc; were responsible for street children. From the findings, it was discovered that conducive learning environment, government policies and programmes on education, qualified and experienced teachers, enlightenment campaign etc: were some of the solutions to the reasons why children are in the street.

**Keywords:** Street children, education, social integration,

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education forms the basis for growth and development of any country, whether formal or informal. In Nigeria since independence, successive governments have always put education on their priority agenda. For instance, the first major initiative aimed at universalizing the functional and qualitative education in the country was in 1976 commonly known as the Universal Primary Education (UPE) similarly, a National Policy on Education was formulated in 1981 with the broad objective of providing equal educational opportunity to every Nigerian child of school age. Each child is therefore to receive efficient full time education suitable to his ability and aptitude.

It is disheartening when one sees children roaming the street as less privileged citizen, Schroeder (1984) described such children as hopeless, young in the cities and towns who pass leisure time fighting. They can also be referred to someone who struggles all day long to survive, running around begging, thievery or prostituting. Jung (1994) pointed out that, street children are those persons deprived of the joy of a normal childhood and adolescence, many of them die early in a state of extreme poverty or from bullets. It is in the light of the above situation that the researcher sought to find out why they are many young children on Jalingo streets.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The following are the objectives for this study:

1. To find out why there are many school age children in Jalingo streets.
2. To find out why some of them who were in school dropped out.
3. To examine the role of school in combating street children.
4. To find out whether education provides job for the children.
5. To find out possible solutions to children on the street in Jalingo metropolis.

### Research Questions

In order to achieve the above objectives, the following research questions were carried out.

1. What are the reasons for school age children on the streets?
2. What role has the school played to eradicate street children?
3. What role has government played in combating street children?
4. What are the possible solutions to street children?

### Reasons for Street Children

Children of school age are in street as a result of varieties of problems though interwoven with societal phenomenon. This brings to mind the question, where do these children come from and why? UNESCO (1995) in their publication "working with street children" stated that, these street children come from urban or rural families for livelihood. Their families are generally poor or experiencing materials problems. They come mostly from rural communities and minority ethnic groups in the neighboring countries from nomads living in the outskirts of cities and slums. The same source further said that some came to escape long drought or other natural problems.

However some of the reasons or causes of street children are as follows:

*Home, School and Societal Factors:* The family is seen as the first and chief socializing agent of the child as such sets the foundation for behavioural pattern. Eigbokhan (1999) is of the belief that the effect of the home related factors is more powerful than those of the non-home environments. For example overcrowded and large family size, are variables found to be influential in the development of misconduct and disorders in children. Akinyemi et al. (2001) in their study discovered that when parents die, children who have no proper guardians have to go to the streets to fend for themselves and their younger ones. Jung (1984) also confirmed in her statistics "that in 1992 alone over 1000 young people, living on the streets or in the shadow of the prison and the police station, were followed up by the "Hostel of Hope" and over 100 were received into families.

*Learning environment* should be very conducive, attractive and appealing to the child for him to remain in it. But when school environment is not better than street, the child may choose to remain in the streets as that may be easier. If one takes a look around our township school, especially primary schools, classrooms are not sufficient and are poorly maintained. There are leakages everywhere, blown roofs, cracked, collapsing floors and walls and poor toilet facilities have become common sight.

Coleman (1998) stated that public schools must try to meet the needs of all the young people in their community, even if they have social or academic problems. Talyor (1976) further stated that the area in which children are readily affected is that of academic performance. Studies have shown that low academic performance could lead to dropping out of school. Akinyemi et al. (2001) in his study stated that some parents complain of registering their children four times for SSCE, still no good results are obtained. Other parents complain of the quality of the teachers teaching their children these days. Many can not write or speak correct English. That is why some parents in the Northern part of the country even feel that the Quranic schools experiences are more relevant and valuable than western education. Akinyemi et al. (2001) also discovered that some educated and rich parents prefer taking their children to private schools rather than to take them to public schools, as a result children whose parents are poor, go to the street. Coombs (1985) observed rightly that the qualification, experiences, knowledge and level of education of teachers have a positive effect upon pupils/students achievement which encourages the child to stay in the school.

*Over population* also contributes to street children. Gone are the days when children are blessings, (but) they are now liabilities. Jung (1994) said that over population leads to death among children because of lack of adequate medical care and facilities. Newly born babies are abandoned by parents who can not care for them and such children are taken to orphanage houses or they grow up and take to the streets at a later age. Poverty forces some parents to give children up as surety or in bondage or handover the child indefinitely in exchange for a sum of money which is almost tantamount to child selling.

*Cultural beliefs and norms* are factors that can make children to go to the street. Balarebe (2000) states that some societies have some dominant customary attitudes which affect female children in the North

and boys in the East. This culture does not encourage training. In the Northern part of Nigeria some parents prefer their female children to hawk on the street to be able to save some money for marriage as they are given out in marriage at an early age. While in the Eastern part of Nigeria most boys prefer a trade to going to school. They hawk to make quick money for their expensive living.

The reasons above show that, parents have greater role to play in order to provide the needs of their children so as to enable them stay in schools as indicated by Maslow (1954) hierarchy of human needs.

### **The Child needs and Human Right**

Abraham Maslow (1954) has identified and classified human needs into five hierarchical levels. These needs are;

1. Physiological needs e.g. food, water, air, sleep, rest, clothes, shelter etc.
2. Safety needs e.g. security, protection from physical harm, ill health, economic disaster etc.
3. Social needs e.g. Love, belonging, friendship, giving & receiving, affection etc.
4. Ego needs (Esteem needs) e.g. self-respect, status recognition, attention, prestige etc.
5. Self- actualisation needs e.g. self-fulfillment & personnel data.

When the above needs of the child are unsatisfied, behaviour changes and this affect desire for schooling. When a child is born, his physiology of growing up is considered, he ought to be accepted and the basic need should be provided including education. If the above theory observations are put into consideration, the problem of the street child will be taken care of, and will drastically reduce the incidence of drop-out and those children whose schooling period was interrupted for whatever reason.

Government Policies and programme to eliminate street children Working in concert with International Labour Organisation (ILO), the government established a National streeting committee that includes representatives from the government labour, industrial groups, and Nongovernmental Organization (NGO). The committee is responsible for developing and overseeing implementation of a National plan of action on child labour. In addition, Nigerian Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) and the Federal Ministry of Employment, Labour and Productivity (FMELP) are carrying out a National child labour survey with funding from the United State Development Organization (USDO). A National plan of action to combat children in street has also been developed by the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Youth Development with support from International Labour Organisation (ILO) National program on elimination of child labour in Nigeria and United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF). In 1999, the government established a police anti - trafficking task force that has helped repatriate over 400 women and girls who have been trafficked during the past two years. UNICEF has also established a series of programs for street children in Nigeria and launched a collaborative project with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Regional Office specifically targeting 'alomajirai' children. UNESCO funded a study on street children in 1995 that was implemented by. a local Nigerian Non-Governmental Organization (NGO).

The Governments new basic Education plan, entitled Universal Basic Education, aims to improve the relevance, efficiency, and quality of schools and to create programs to address the basic Education needs of nomadic and out - of - school children, youths and adults. In addition, the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare has worked in collaboration with UNICEF and the centre for Non - Formal Education and Training on a non - Formal education curriculum for girls to help school drop out and children without access to schools.

### **Education is a bed-rock for the development of the society**

Education can also provide awareness about the danger of street children and exploitative labour. This can raise awareness among children themselves and can provide economic opportunities including micro-finance for the families at risk children. The Government through education can combat children on the street by engaging law that will safe guard and protect child's right. The government of Nigeria through education can use new technologies for information and communication in the environment to create awareness on the danger of children in the street.

## METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this research, a survey design was used, because it would enable the researcher to sample a representation of population from which results obtained would be generalised for the entire population. The instrument used for collection of data was questionnaires and combined with oral interview. A representative population of 100 street children, 100 parents, 100 teachers and 100 government officials from various ministries in Jalingo was used for the study. A self constructed questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two: section A is for street children while section B is for government officials, individuals, parents and organisations. The response options were based on Likert rating scale on a fixed point rate of strongly agreed (SA) to strongly disagreed (SD). The parameters used in the questionnaire items were drafted from other researchers who carried out similar research (Akinyemi et. al. 2001 & Eigbokhan, 1999) in their states. These studies have found these parameters to be relevant in finding out the role of education on street children. This study replicates the same procedure.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Research Question 1,2 and 3

*What are the reasons for school age children on the streets?*

*What role has the school played to eradicate street children?*

*What role has government played in combating street children?*

**Table 1. : Reasons for street children in Jalingo Local Government**

S/N	Items	Yes	%	No	%
1	Poverty among parents	350	87.5	50	12.5
2	Over-population	380	95	20	5
3	Large family size	250	62.5	150	37.5
4	Cultural beliefs & norms	100	25	300	75
5	High cost of education	390	97.5	10	2.5
6	Inadequate education facilities	230	57.5	170	42.5
7	Punishment in schools	150	37.5	250	62.5
8	Rejection of female students by parents as result of unwanted pregnancy	320	80	80	20
9	Unemployment	360	90	40	10
10	Inadequate enlightenment campaign	250	62.5	150	37.5

In this discussion, the research questions were analyzed and the educational implications of each highlighted

1. What are the reasons for children hanging on the street? The results from the respondents show the following reasons for children who hang around the street; poverty among parents, large family sizes, rejection of female students by parents as a result of unwanted pregnancy. The result on the large family size agree with the opinion of Eigbokhan (1999) which state that large family size is also to be related to the incidence of school absenteeism there by making children to go into the street. This means that the home has a role to play in keeping children at school. The educational implication is that parents should encourage their children by providing school materials, pay their school fees and making the home conducive for learning.
2. What role has the school played to eradicate street children. The results from the respondents seem, to indicate the inadequate role played by the school to eradicate street children. These are, over-population of students in the class, high cost of education (e.g. school fees and other charges), inadequate educational facilities. The respondent result on overpopulation seems to agree with the view of Jung (1994) over population leads to death among children because of lack of adequate medical care and facilities. This shows that the school needs to play an important role in keeping children at school. The educational implication here is that the school should provide

- enough class room accommodation, educational materials, conducive learning environment and avoid unnecessary punishment and other fees charges etc.
3. What role has government played in combating street children? The results from the respondents tend to show the inability of the government in combating street children, such as unemployment and inadequate enlightenment campaign. This indicates that the government has a role to play in keeping children at school. The educational implication is that the government needs to play in keeping children at school. The educational implication is that the government needs to provide enlightenment campaign committee which can go round to enlighten parents and children on the importance and uses of education and should also provide job opportunities for applicants so as to encourage children to go to school than going into the streets

**Research Question 4:** *What are the possible solutions on the street children?*

**Table 2. : Possible Solutions to Street Children**

S/N	Items	Yes	%	No	%
1	Provide conducive learning environment	280	70	120	30
2	Giving the child the educational right	300	75	100	25
3	Government policies and educational programmes (Universal Basic Education)	230	57.5	170	42.5
4	Supply qualified and experienced teachers	250	62.5	150	37.5
5	Provide awareness about the danger of street children	270	67.5	130	32.5
6	The needs of the child	350	87.5	50	12.5

From the results of this investigation the solution to stop street children are; conducive learning environment, giving child educational right, government policies and programmes (Universal Basic Education) awareness about the danger of children in the street, and child needs. Most respondents did not accept qualified and experienced teachers as one of the possible solutions to street children. From the above discussion, it shows that there is a great role for the school, government, parents and children themselves to play in combating street children in the society.

**CONCLUSION**

This paper has presented the reasons for street children, government policies and programmes in eliminating street children and the role of education in combating street children in Nigeria. The paper concludes that indeed street children are becoming a phenomenon that has a fighting capacity to slow down or cripple the Nation's future. Children need special consideration, care and protection because of their vulnerability.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the foregoing analysis, the writer recommends the followings:

- i.) That the government should carry out serious enlightenment campaign to enable people know the dangerous and effects of street children.
- ii.) That government should enact laws governing street children in Nigeria.
- iii.) A National Plan of action to combat street children should be developed by the government.
- iv.) Government should establish more industries so as to provide job opportunity for youths.
- v.) Government should encourage and support some of the religious organizations who are willing to help the street children. For example the United Methodist Church of Nigeria (UMCN) Jalingo branch is now taking care of some orphans in Jalingo.
- vi.) Parents (literate or illiterate) should be up and doing (work hard) so as to provide the needs of their children and they should also enlighten their children on the benefit of functional education.

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