



## COUNSELLING APPROACHES TO THE PREVENTION AND CURE OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN PHENOMENON IN KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

This paper delves into the critical role of counselling approaches in the prevention and cure of out-of-school children. The global issue of out-of-school children poses significant challenges to educational equity and societal development. Factors such as poverty, cultural norms, conflicts, and health crises contribute to this phenomenon. Counselling approaches have emerged as effective strategies in both preventing and addressing the root causes of children being out of school. This paper explores how counselling intervention can strengthen family dynamics, foster healthy communication, and support inclusive education for all children. Counselling approaches, encompassing preventive measures and restorative practices, play a crucial role in mitigating the out-of-school children phenomenon. By addressing individual and systemic barriers, these strategies foster a more inclusive and supportive educational environment, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to benefit from formal education.

**Keywords:** Counselling approaches, Prevention, out-of-school children,

### Introduction

Education is a fundamental right and a key driver of national development, yet millions of children in Nigeria remain out of school. So many factors exist as the cause of the menace (Out-of-school children) this including poverty, which limits access to education by creating financial, social, and infrastructural barriers, cultural norms, conflicts, poor funding, corruption and health crises, among others, contribute to this phenomenon. The phenomenon of out-of-school children (OOSC) is a significant global challenge, especially in developing countries. According to UNESCO (2021), over 244 million children and adolescents worldwide are out of school, with sub-Saharan Africa accounting for a significant proportion. The issue stems from multiple factors, including poverty, early marriage, child labour, and lack of access to quality education (UNICEF, 2022). Counselling has emerged as a crucial intervention in both preventing and addressing this crisis by providing psychological, emotional, and educational support to children and families. This paper explores counselling approaches that can be applied to prevent and reintegrate out-of-school children into the education system. Nigerian out-of-school children have oscillated between 10.5 million and around 15 million for more than a decade, with the situation growing worse due to the degenerating security situation in the country.

The Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report (2020) indicated that sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the most children and youth out of school, with 98 million children and young people excluded from education. It is also the only region where this number is increasing. "The region with the second-highest out-of-school population is Central and Southern Asia, with 85 million. The top three countries with the most children and youth excluded from education are India, Nigeria and Pakistan (GEM 2020). "Data compiled by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021), in partnership with the Global Education Monitoring Report, showed that Nigeria has about 20 million out-of-school children, placing it second after India, a nation with over one billion population. Pakistan comes third. The three countries have the highest figures for out-of-school children globally (Haruna et al., 2022). The critical roles education plays in the socio-economic and political development of any nation can never be overemphasised. Education is the pivot upon which the quality of a country's human capacity development is enhanced. From every indication, the economic and technological advances recorded in every nation are tied to the educational attainment of its citizens globally. It is obvious, therefore, that the survival of any organised nation depends on the quality of education of its population. Beyond the production of a capacity of think-tanks for the

advancement of the people, education creates room for better health and nutrition, thereby helping to improve hygiene. It also assists societies to experience a higher child survival rate and provides an avenue for a greater sense of health awareness (Esu, 2022).

### **Concept of Out-of-School Children**

Out-of-school children refer to children in the official primary school age range who are not enrolled in either primary or secondary schools. Children and youth not enrolled in any formal or non-formal education program. According to the United Nations, out-of-school children refer to children who are yet to be enrolled in any formal education, excluding pre-primary education. The age range for out-of-school children is 6-11 years (UNESCO, 2021). Out-of-school children are school-age children who are supposed to be in schools but are not in schools due to parental and governmental failures to provide accessible, quality education for them. Out-of-school children are young children in the age group of 1 to 12 that are roaming the streets without access to a functional educational system (Ojelade et al., 2019). Out-of-school children are the children whom the government and the parents have failed to provide quality basic education for. The term "out-of-school children" is a non-attendance of the school of school-age children for some established factors.

### **Factors Responsible for Out-of-School Children**

There could be various reasons that are responsible for out-of-school menace in Kaduna state, Nigeria. However, for this paper, the following factors will be discussed as follows: poverty, Poor funding/Infrastructure and Access to Schools, Gender Disparities and Cultural Beliefs, Security challenges, and malnutrition and poor health.

**Poverty** is a significant factor contributing to the high number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. According to UNESCO (2022), Nigeria has one of the highest rates of out-of-school children globally, with millions unable to access basic education. The financial struggles of many families make it difficult for children to attend and remain in school. The high rate of poverty among Nigerians is also responsible for out-of-school children. The rising poverty that forces parents to put children in the labour market and street hawking, and the breakdown in social and family life are some of the causes of the high rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria. This position was reaffirmed by Ogunode (2021) and Musa (2019) that many Nigerian parents cannot send their wards to school due to the high rate of poverty. Many basic schools in Nigeria pay some fees, like examinations and PTA dues. Such fees are handled by households. When family resources are low, a family will have to choose one or two children to attend school while the others stay at home. Older children, orphans, and girls are most likely to be left out. Children are meant to work for their parents because of poverty. Children are kept at home to help with domestic chores or care for siblings. Older children supporting younger siblings must work to have money for food and other needs. This is a major contributor to the out-of-school problem. The majority of children who drop out of school are young girls who come from poor and rural backgrounds (World Bank, 2010, 2011). The Nigerian economy is really at its end, and most families are finding it extremely difficult to even eat three square meals a day. The inflation rate is biting hard on the majority of the citizens, and this has affected every other aspect of the people's perception of life. Most Nigerians may be aware of the importance of education to the future of their children, yet they lack the financial capacity to send their children to school (Ikiyei et al., 2022).

### **Poor funding/Infrastructure, and Access to Schools**

Rural and impoverished areas often lack adequate schools, requiring children to travel long distances. Many poor communities lack well-funded public schools, making education inaccessible. Corruption and mismanagement of education funds also contribute to poor learning conditions, pushing children out of school (World Bank, 2022). Many parents, especially in low-income families, prefer to keep their children at home due to safety concerns or the cost of transportation (World Bank, 2022). The poor implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria is also responsible for the high out of school children. The UBE programme was designed to provide free and compulsory ten-year basic education for all Nigerian children. The policy of Universal Basic Education (UBE), which mandates the government at the state and federal levels to give compulsory, free and quality education to every child of school age, has not been fully implemented in Nigeria due to many challenges. Ogunode (2021) identified the problem militating against the effective

implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria to include: shortage of funds, shortage of infrastructural facilities, inadequate professional teachers, corruption, and poor implementation of the Child Rights Act.

**Gender Disparities and Cultural Beliefs:** In many poor communities, families prioritise the education of boys over girls, seeing investment in a male child's education as more beneficial. Girls from poor families are more likely to be withdrawn from school for early marriage or domestic responsibilities (UNESCO, 2022).

**Security Challenges:** The high rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria has led to security challenges in many parts of the country, especially the Northern part of the country. Haruna et al. (2022) opined that "20 million out-of-school children represent a grim future, one characterised by grave socio-economic and security consequences for Nigeria". They further stressed that children who are out of school are often used to perpetrate crime and other ills in society, and also observed that this deficiency will affect all aspects of human life, as there will be vacancies in several areas that demand skills acquired through education at school. Ndanusa et al. (2021) observed that this army of out-of-school children poses a potential threat to society in the future if nothing is done to arrest the situation. This set of Nigerians may become willing tools in the hands of disgruntled politicians and elements who want to foment trouble in society. The current incessant cases of kidnapping and other related criminal activities in Nigeria serve as reminders of the implications of not providing Nigerians the opportunity of having at least a basic education. Evidence shows that virtually all indicted and arrested notorious kidnappers are not well educated. They have either a basic education or no education at all (Akorede et al., 2022). Charity et al. (2020) findings showed that children who are out of school are often used to perpetuate crime and other ills in society, and children who are out of school are used to commit some crimes. Birdi, Allan and Warr (1997) found that there exists a relationship between participation in required training courses, work-based development activities and job satisfaction. Children who do not attend school are often exposed to violence and menial jobs. Surveys by both the print and electronic media tend to indicate that over 85 per cent of the criminal activities perpetrated in Nigeria are done by youths who are school dropouts (Ajala, 2012). The cost and effects of school dropout are not only on the individual but also on society at large because school dropouts become frustrated, face rejection, become unemployed, turn to crime and social vices (Ayoko, 2022). School dropouts cost the nation billions of naira in lost wages, tax revenues and productivity over their lifetime. The large number of children who are dropping out of school makes the nation unable to actualise its economic development and technological advancement.

### **Malnutrition and Poor Health**

Children from poor backgrounds often suffer from malnutrition and health issues, which affect their ability to learn. Frequent illness and hunger make it difficult for them to concentrate in class, leading to high dropout rates (Akorede et al, 2022; Abdulbaqi et al., 2025).

### **Preventive Counselling Approaches**

Preventive counselling aims to reduce the likelihood of children dropping out of school by addressing root causes and enhancing support systems.

#### **1. School-Based Counselling Programs**

School-based counselling programs provide emotional and psychological support to at-risk children, helping them cope with academic and personal challenges (American School Counsellor Association [ASCA], 2020). Counsellors work with teachers and parents to identify children who are at risk of dropping out due to issues such as learning difficulties, family instability, or peer pressure. By offering targeted interventions such as mentorship, career guidance, and social-emotional learning, counsellors can prevent children from leaving school.

#### **2. Family and Parental Counselling**

Family instability and parental attitudes toward education significantly influence school attendance (Abdulbaqi et al., 2024). Family counselling helps parents understand the importance of education, develop positive parenting skills, and create supportive home environments. Group counselling sessions can also encourage parents to share experiences and solutions for keeping their children in school.

### 3. Community-Based Counselling and Advocacy

Many children drop out of school due to cultural norms, early marriage, or economic hardship. Community-based counselling involves engaging community leaders, religious institutions, and local organisations to change negative perceptions about education (UNICEF, 2022). Advocacy programs, coupled with psychoeducational counselling, help communities recognise the value of education and encourage local solutions, such as community learning centres.

### 4. Career and Motivational Counselling

Children who lack motivation or perceive education as irrelevant to their future are at risk of dropping out (Bandura, 1997). Career counselling exposes students to future opportunities, demonstrating how education leads to better employment and life prospects. Motivational interviewing techniques help students develop self-efficacy and a sense of purpose, making them more likely to stay in school.

### Curative Counselling Approaches

For children who are already out of school, counselling interventions focus on reintegration, psychological healing, and alternative education pathways.

#### 1. Psychosocial Counselling for Reintegrating Children

Many out-of-school children experience trauma due to poverty, abuse, or displacement (Save the Children, 2020). Psychosocial counselling helps them overcome these experiences and regain confidence in formal education. Group therapy sessions and resilience-building activities create a sense of belonging and emotional stability, which are critical for successful reintegration.

#### 2. Non-Formal and Alternative Education Counselling

For children who cannot return to formal schooling, alternative education models such as vocational training and flexible learning programs provide practical pathways to learning (World Bank, 2021). Counsellors play a key role in guiding these children toward programs that align with their skills and interests, ensuring they continue their education in a meaningful way.

#### 3. Behavioural Therapy and Cognitive Interventions

Some out-of-school children exhibit behavioural issues such as aggression, low self-esteem, or substance abuse, which hinder reintegration (Abdulbaqi et al., 2025; Akorede et al., 2022; Ndeti et al., 2018). Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and behaviour modification techniques help them develop positive coping mechanisms, improve self-regulation, and adjust to the learning environment (Akorede et al., 2022).

#### 4. Peer Support and Mentorship Programs

Peer mentoring helps reintegrated students adjust by providing them with role models who have successfully transitioned back to school (UNESCO, 2021). These programs boost self-esteem, provide academic support, and create a sense of accountability among students.

### Conclusion

Counselling is a powerful tool in both preventing and addressing the out-of-school children phenomenon. Preventive approaches focus on strengthening school, family, and community support systems, while curative interventions facilitate psychological healing, reintegration, and alternative learning options. Governments, schools, and non-governmental organisations should invest in professional counselling services to ensure that every child has the opportunity to receive quality education.

### Suggestions

The following suggestions were made to help minimise the out-of-school syndrome in Kaduna State, Nigeria;

#### 1. Improve Access to Education

Free and Compulsory Basic Education: Strengthen policies ensuring that primary and secondary education is free and mandatory.

Infrastructure Development: Build more schools, especially in rural and conflict-prone areas, and improve existing facilities.

Flexible Learning Programs: Implement alternative schooling options, such as mobile schools, evening classes, and community-based education for children who work or have other responsibilities.

## 2. Address Socioeconomic Barriers

Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs): Provide financial incentives to low-income families to encourage school attendance.

School Feeding Programs: Expand school meal initiatives to reduce child hunger and improve attendance.

Scholarships and Support Programs: Offer tuition waivers, learning materials, and transportation support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## 3. Tackle Cultural and Gender Barriers

Promote Girls' Education: Address cultural biases that discourage female education through awareness campaigns and targeted policies.

Community Engagement: Work with religious and community leaders to advocate for the importance of education.

Ban Child Marriages and Child Labour: Strengthen laws and enforcement against practices that prevent children from attending school.

## 4. Improve Education Quality and Teacher Capacity

Teacher Training: Invest in teacher recruitment and continuous professional development.

Digital Learning Tools: Integrate technology into classrooms and provide access to online learning for children in remote areas.

Curriculum Reform: Ensure education is relevant, practical, and aligned with modern job market needs.

## 5. Strengthen Government and Policy Frameworks

Stronger Monitoring and Data Collection: Develop accurate databases to track out-of-school children and assess progress.

Increased Education Funding: Allocate more resources to education in national and state budgets.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Collaborate with NGOs, international organisations, and the private sector to expand educational opportunities.

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