

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES OF PUPILS' TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN GOMBE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the trends and patterns of the transition rate of pupils in basic education in Gombe state over five years from 2014 to 2019. It adopted a mixed methods research design involving both quantitative and qualitative data with layers of population namely: basic education pupils, principals, head teachers, officials from the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) and School Based Management Committee (SBMC) in the state. The research data collection was done through various instruments: official records, key informant interviews, a questionnaire and a focus group discussion. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage, and a qualitative method of thematic analysis. The findings revealed that the transition of pupils during the period under review was on average about 59% owing to factors like costs of education, poverty and lack of interest in education among others. Hence, part of the recommendations made was that the Government of Gombe state should make a concerted effort towards eliminating all hidden costs attached to education at the basic level as well as making basic infrastructure available to attract and retain pupils throughout the stipulated 10 years of basic education as enshrined in the National Policy on Education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Basic Education programme, Pupils, Trend, Transition and Challenges

Introduction

The importance of education to the development of individuals and nations cannot be over-emphasized. In Nigeria, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act (2004) was enacted as a response to the Jomtien 1990 and Dakar 2000 declaration of Education for All (EFA). Basic education was meant to be free and compulsory for all children of school-going age irrespective of any real or perceived differences. The UBE programme in Nigeria was designed in such a way that young citizens of the country from the ages of 3 to 15 years will be given functional basic education that will empower them to be useful and productive in life.

In Nigeria, basic education is planned in such a way that pupils should have uninterrupted ten years of education (Universal Basic Education, UBE Act, 2004). However, about two decades after the implementation of the UBE Act in Nigeria, several studies were conducted and a myriad of problems that plague the whole system was uncovered (Opoh & Ayede, 2018; Okuogo, 2013; UNESCO, 2015). Some of these problems have affected not just the smooth running of the programme, but pupils' transition rate from one level to another. Other problems as revealed from the previous studies include lack of political will; poor planning and implementation of the programme; lack of adequate funding; poorly trained teachers; high rate of pupils' dropout; non-functionality of the curriculum; absence of vibrant supervision and

monitoring, and so forth. These problems, if left unaddressed, could affect the attainment of the UBE goals. Therefore, this study attempted to examine the trend and challenges of pupils' transition from primary to junior secondary schools in Gombe state.

Review of Related Literature

Education is a fundamental human right and basic education has been recognized globally since the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The intellectual global discourse on basic education seems to focus on education transition rates. The education transition rate has been defined by Okuogo (2013) as the percentage of learners advancing from one level of schooling to the next. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2015) reported that the highest education transition rates from primary to secondary school level occurred in individualized countries (98%) and Eastern Europe (96%), which indicated that 85% of learners who get to the last grade in primary school get to attend secondary school, while the lowest education transition rates occurred in West and Central Africa with 52%. The report further indicates that there has been variation in pupils' transition rates in Nigeria's geo-political zones with the South-west (91%) and South-East (83%) being the highest pupils' transition rates, while the North-west and North-East have less than 40% of the pupils' transition rates. Perhaps there could be variations even in the same states of the zones.

Nigeria has over the years tried to provide basic education to its citizens first through Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 and later through UBE in 1999. The UBE was instituted to target all Nigerian children of school-going age. It was structured to encompass one year of pre-primary education, six years of primary and three years of junior secondary education. A child who has completed these ten years of basic education is assumed to have attained the basic education programme, therefore, he/she should be self-reliant.

Despite the government's efforts to provide basic education for its citizens, a lot of children either remain out of school or are unable to complete the stipulated ten years of basic education. Statistics from a survey conducted by UNESCO (2015) stated that the average rate for Northern States' out-of-school children was 43.3%, while that of the southern states was 8.75%. The huge gap lies in the inability of pupils to enrol, transit, and complete basic education. The Federal Government of Nigeria in its bid to meet the EFA goals hoped that by 2015, about 90% rate of transition from primary to junior secondary school would be achieved. However, UNESCO (2015) further indicated that the rate at which pupils transit at the basic level is not encouraging especially with regards to the girl child, since about 57.96% transition rate was recorded for females, which was lower than 58.91% for males, and when the percentage was further scrutinized state-wise, pupils' transition rates in North East geopolitical zone of Nigeria stood at 67.06% for females and 71.78% for males. This statistical record indicates that there is a huge gap between pupils' enrolment rate and school completion rate in most states of north-eastern Nigeria with Gombe state inclusive.

Several studies consistently attempted to explore some of the factors and challenges affecting the successful school transition of pupils especially those pupils from low

and middle-income families or countries. In this regard, the cost of education and the cost-outcome of school feeding programmes were crucial in determining the effective transition of young learners from basic to post-basic education levels (Kristjansson, Gelli, Welch, Greenhalgh & Liberato, 2016). Other challenges of pupils' transition as established from the literature are quality issues that may deter learners from transiting to post-basic education after basic education. Many children in some African countries seemed to pass through primary school without mastering basic literacy skills of reading, writing, arithmetic and entrepreneurial skills (Jones, 2016). Ideally, pupils are expected to have a smooth transition in basic education for the whole ten years during which they shall acquire basic life skills that will make them functional and relevant both to themselves and to society at large. This means that any interruption in the allotted period might hinder the attainment of this goal. For this reason, pupils' inability to smoothly transit through the nine or ten years constitutes an obstacle to the goals of basic education in Nigeria. The previous findings have indicated that the transition of learners to basic education can be influenced by several factors and interventions such as education assistance through foreign aids, school feeding and other educational support. The school feeding programme is usually designed to support the education of children living in poverty by increasing pupils' enrolment, attendance, school retention and learning ability (Birchler & Michaelowa, 2016). However, part of the problem with foreign education aid is that it can lead to weakened domestic institutions and over-dependency on the donors thereby affecting the quality of basic education (Heyneman & Lee, 2016; Riddell & Nino-Zarazua, 2016).

Similarly, Chinyoka and Naidu (2014), Okuogo (2013) as well as Werunga *et al.* (2011) reported that learners from low-income families may not get the appropriate guidance and materials needed for schooling. While Garba (2014) reported factors such as distance from home to school, gender discrimination, early marriage for the girl child and showing preference towards the education of the boy child as major obstacles to education. In the same vein, Okuogo (2013) found out that engaging in economic activities in form of hawking to support the family with income and a child's apathy for education are major problems that affect the transition rate in basic education. Amuchie, Asotibe and Audu (2015) particularly mentioned classroom size as a factor that affects school attendance and the transition rate of pupils which ultimately affect the attainment of basic education programme.

Statement of the Problem

For quite some time now concerns have been raised by stakeholders in Nigeria over the transition of pupils going into junior secondary schools from primary schools to complete their basic education programme. These concerns were made worse when it emerged that Nigeria is home to over 10 million out-of-school children, the bulk of whom are believed to be in the country's northwest and northeast geo-political zones. Gombe State happens to be in the country's Northeast zone. Previous research has established some variations in pupils' transition rate at regional and State levels in Nigeria with Gombe state inclusive. Thus, this study aimed at ascertaining the transition rates of pupils from primary to junior secondary schools for a period of five years (from 2014 to 2019) as well as unravel the challenges that hinder some learners from completing the basic education circle in Gombe state.

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed at investigating the trend and challenges of pupils' transition within the basic education programme with specific reference to:

1. determine the trend of pupils' transition rates from primary to junior secondary school in Gombe state over five years (2014-2019), and
2. examine the challenges that affect the pupils' transition rates in the state within the period under review.

Research Questions

The study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What was the trend of pupils' transition rates from primary to junior secondary school in Gombe state over five years from 2014 to 2019?
2. What were the challenges affecting pupils from transiting into junior secondary schools after their primary school education in Gombe state within the period under review?

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method research design. Creswell and Fetterman (2019) described a mixed method study as a procedure for collecting, analyzing and mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study. This is because it provides a better understanding of the research problem and questions than when a single method is used. Hence, this study used a mixed method in form of an exploratory survey of the trend and challenges of pupils' transition from primary to junior secondary schools in Gombe state. Quantitative data for the study was obtained through a questionnaire, while qualitative data was obtained from focus group discussions with students and key informants' interviews with the respondents.

The population of the study comprised officials of the Gombe State Ministry of Education (SMOE), Gombe State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs), School Based Management Committee (SBMC) and students of junior secondary schools. Stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used in selecting 6 LGEAs out of the 11 in Gombe state (2 LGEAs each from the 3 educational zones of Gombe North, Central and South). Furthermore, a purposive sampling technique was used in selecting a total of 45 key officials, 5 each from the state MOE, SUBEB, SBMC and 30 LGEAs. At the school level, 60 students of junior secondary schools (20 from the 3 educational districts) were used as the sample for the study.

For the data collection, the study employed three research instruments. An official record of pupils' transition from primary schools to junior secondary schools was obtained from the state MOE and SUBEB. This record covered a period of 5 years from 2014 to 2019 and it comprised both public and private schools, rural and urban school locations as well as male and female pupils. Similarly, an interview schedule was developed and administered to the key informants of MOE, SUBEB, SBMC and LGEAs. Lastly, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) schedule was also developed and

administered to the students of junior secondary schools in the state. Before the data collection, the interview and FGD schedules were validated by experts from the Faculty of Education, Gombe State University. The analysis of data was carried out using percentages for the records, while thematic analysis was employed for the key informants' interviews and FGD.

Results

Research Question 1: What was the trend of pupils' transition from primary to junior secondary schools in Gombe State?

Table 1: Primary and Junior Secondary Schools Enrolment in Gombe state

Academic Session	Enrolment in Primary 6	Enrolment in JSS 1
2014/2015	56,803	30,887
2015/2016	59,015	36,456
2016/2017	62,595	35,763
2017/2018	63,956	39,009
2018/2019	70,713	41,218

Source: Annual School Census, State MOE/SUBEB

Table 1 presents the transition rates of learners from primary six to Junior Secondary School (JSS) one in Gombe state over five years. The data were obtained through the Annual School Census (ASC) exercise by the State MOE and SUBEB.

Table 2: Transition Rates from Primary to Junior Secondary Schools in Gombe state

Academic Session	Enrolment in Primary 6	Enrolment in JSS 1	Transition Rate (%)
2014/2015	56,803	30,887	54.4
2015/2016	59,015	36,456	61.8
2016/2017	62,595	35,763	57.1
2017/2018	63,956	39,009	61.0
2018/2019	70,713	41,218	58.3

Source: Annual School Census, State MOE/SUBEB

The analysis of the data in Table 1 reveals the transition rates of learners from primary to junior secondary schools in the state over the period under review. The transition rates were computed using frequency and percentage based on pupils' enrolment in primary six and JSS 1 as shown in Table 2. For determining the trend of the transition rates, Figure 1 provides a graphical illustration of the transition of pupils from primary to junior secondary schools in the state.

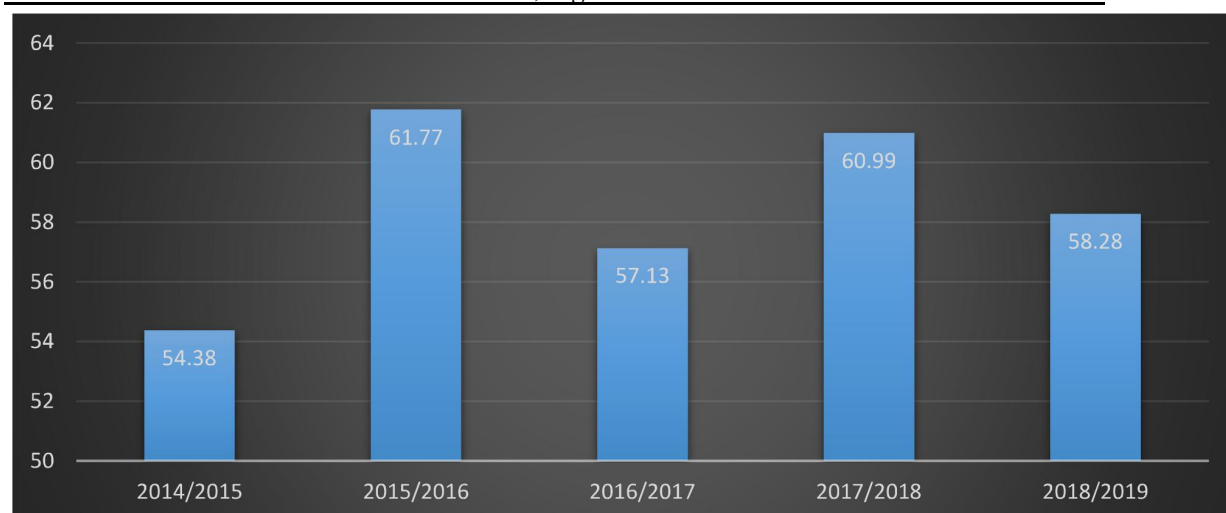


Figure 1: Trend of the Pupils' Transition Rates in Gombe State

Source: Annual School Census, State MOE/SUBEB

Figure 1 presents the trend of pupils' transition from primary to junior secondary schools over the period from 2014 to 2019 in the state. For the period under review, the highest pupils' transition rate was recorded in the 2015/2016 academic session which was about 62%. Another high pupil transition rate of about 61% was found in the 2017/2018 academic session. However, the lowest pupils' transition rate of about 54% was recorded in Gombe state during the 2014/2015 academic year. In the subsequent years (2014, 2016 and 2019 respectively), the transition of pupils from primary to junior secondary schools in the state kept fluctuating, and it was on average about 59%.

Research Question 2: What were the challenges that affect pupils from transiting to junior secondary schools after their primary school education in Gombe state?

The focus group discussion with students in JSS 1 regarding the challenges that hindered their friends from enrolling on secondary school after their primary school education revealed several challenges, which were thematically analyzed as shown in Table 3. An in-depth interview with key informants from the State MOE, SUBEB and SBMC also provided reasons for the low transition rate of pupils at the basic education in the state. These reasons by the officials were turned into relevant themes to explain the challenges that affect the pupils' transition rate.

Table 3: Challenges affecting Pupils' Transition from Primary to Junior Secondary Schools in Gombe State

Question	Responses/Themes
What were the challenges that affect pupils from transiting to junior secondary schools after their primary education?	<p>Economic Challenges: High rate of poverty; High cost of education.</p> <p>Socio-cultural Challenges: Poor interest in western education; Gender discrimination; Early marriage; Teenage pregnancy; Broken homes; Hawking; Household chores; Distance from School; Ignorance.</p> <p>School-based Challenges: Classroom congestion; Paucity of learning materials; Corporal punishment.</p>

Table 3 indicates the challenges that affect pupils from transiting to junior secondary schools after their primary education in Gombe State. The responses thematically gathered from Key Informants Interview and FGD revealed that the challenges affecting pupils' transition from primary to junior secondary schools in Gombe State were mainly economic, socio-cultural and school-based. The respondents revealed that the challenges include a "high rate of poverty"; "poor interest toward western education"; "gender discrimination"; "early marriage for girls"; "teenage pregnancy"; "ignorance"; "classroom congestion"; "paucity of learning materials" "corporal punishment" and so forth.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are in agreement with the report of UNESCO (2015), which revealed that northern states in Nigeria, Gombe state inclusive, have a total of 43.3% of children who are not in school. This is affirmed in this study as the average transition rates of pupils from primary to junior secondary school stood at about 59% which means that only 41% of pupils on average get to complete the basic education circle. Not only that, but the findings of this study also agree with that of Okuogo (2013) and Opoh and Ayade (2018) who both found that the transition rate of pupils from primary to junior secondary schools has not improved over the years. Does it also answer the question raised by Obun, Joseph and Akan (2018) that are there still drop-outs from the formal school system in Nigeria?

Findings from this study have established that socio-economic, cultural and school-based factors are challenges that affect the school transition of pupils in Gombe state. This is supported by Oglala (2013) who reported that 83.9% of his respondents identified the cost of financing education as a major hindrance to pupils' transition rate as parents are put in a tight position of having to shoulder the burden of some cost of educating their wards in form of books and writing materials, uniform, even transportation and Parents-Teachers' Association (PTA) levies in some instances which ultimately culminate into amounts that some parents cannot afford. In addition, Kristjansson *et al.* (2016) also supports the findings of the study that the cost of education as well as the cost-outcome of school feeding programme affect the rate at which pupils transit in basic education.

Similarly, Amuchie *et al.* (2015) explained that the population explosion has resulted in congested classrooms which further stresses the already scarce human and material resources. Findings from focus group discussion with basic education learners in this study also corroborate the fact that large class size constitutes a challenge in the smooth transition of pupils in basic education in Gombe state. A closer look at the result from pupils' transition rates showed that Gombe state over the period under review has recorded low transition rates of pupils from primary to Junior Secondary Schools. This implies that some pupils who finished primary 6 could not enrol on Junior Secondary School (JSS I) due to one reason or the other. This situation creates school drop-outs who could not complete the basic education programme and; hence could not attain the status of being self-reliant.

Conclusion

Given the results obtained in this study, it can be concluded that the transition rate of pupils from primary to junior secondary school in Gombe state is low as the average stood at 59% for the five years under review. It can also be surmised that factors associated with family financial status, school and socio-cultural nature play crucial roles in affecting the transition rate of pupils in basic education.

Recommendations

Given the findings and the conclusion drawn from the study, the following recommendations were therefore made:

- i. The government of Gombe state should make the necessary effort to eliminate all hidden costs of education at the basic education level. It should provide free uniforms, shoes, writing materials, and transportation services and also abolish all PTA and examination levies charged at the basic education level.
- ii. The government of Gombe state, SUBEB, MOE, community leaders, SBMC and indeed all other stakeholders in education should mount public enlightenment campaigns continuously to eradicate ignorance and to enlighten the community on the dangers of ignorance and the importance of education to an individual and the nation at large.
- iii. The government of Gombe state, SUBEB and MOE should make effort to provide infrastructure like adequate classrooms, portable water, toilet facilities and other basic infrastructure as a means of attracting and retaining pupils throughout the stipulated nine years of basic education.

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