DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 812 UD 030 484

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TITLE Equity in Primary and Secondary Education: Findings from Nigeria.
PUB DATE Apr 95
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 18-22, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Education; Developing Nations; *Economic Factors; Education Work Relationship; *Elementary Secondary Education; Enrollment; *Equal Education; Females; Foreign Countries; Government Role; Needs Assessment; *Parents; Poverty; Religious Cultural Groups; Teachers
IDENTIFIERS *Muslims; *Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Eighty parents and teachers were interviewed in Nigeria to identify attitudes toward inequities in access to education that may be related to high population growth and weak economic growth. Children from poor families and Muslim girls are underenrolled in Nigeria. The interviewees acknowledged the continuing underenrollment but did not think it was due to a lack of personal initiative or was in any way appropriate for these groups. They described the value of education for these children and thought that their enrollment in education was likely to increase. No specific suggestions were made for means to insure such an increase. A comprehensive approach to helping families move out of poverty was rejected because of its cost and the demands of the general population for services such as better water quality and road improvements. (Contains 17 references.) (Author)

Equity in Primary and Secondary Education: Findings from Nigeria

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Presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in April, 1995 in San Francisco, California

RUNNING HEAD: Nigerian Equity Issues

Abstract

Eighty parents and teachers were interviewed in Nigeria to identify attitudes toward inequities in access to education that may be related to high population growth and weak economic growth. Children from poor families and Muslim girls are underenrolled in Nigeria. The interviewees acknowledged the continuing underenrollment but did not think it was due to a lack of personal initiative or was in any way appropriate for these groups. They described the value of education for these children and thought that their enrollment in education was likely to increase. No specific suggestions were made for means to insure such an increase. A comprehensive approach to helping families move out of poverty was rejected because of its cost and the demands of the general population for services such as better water quality and road improvements.

Equity in Primary and Secondary Education: Findings from Nigeria

Between 1985 and 2000 a ninety percent increase in attendance is expected among primary school students in sub-Saharan Africa. Approximately 125 million students will be in primary school in sub-Saharan Africa in the year 2000. While most children in sub-Saharan Africa will have some primary schooling, about twelve percent will never receive any formal schooling. If all children were to participate in primary schooling, 163 million would be in school in the year 2000, and 2.5 times more places would be needed than were available in 1990 (Lassibille & Gomez, 1990). Far fewer children are expected to partake of secondary education. This is a more expensive form of education. Nations have limited the growth of secondary education in favor of extending the opportunity for primary education to a larger segment of the population. Since all children will not be enrolled in school, it is important to determine which children will not be served, whether the groups they represent can be predicted, and what factors will result in individual children not attending school.

Despite growing populations, African governments have continued their efforts to provide primary education for all their children. Since a continental conference in Addis Ababa in 1960, African countries have been committed to the implementation of universal primary education. At that conference, African nations set 1980 as the target year for the achievement of universal primary education. Although this goal was not met, enrollment was far greater than the projections had suggested it would be. It had been projected that 33 million children would be enrolled in African primary schools in 1980, instead, 59 million were enrolled (UNESCO, 1961, 1986, 1987.)

Many African children begin school, but a large proportion of these children do not complete their schooling. Primary school completion rates declined in the lowest-income countries (those with an annual per capita income of U.S. Dollars $450 or less) during the 1980's. This decline can be traced to early dropping out of school and also to high rates of repetition in grade. Children drop out of school partly because they do not learn the content to be taught. There are many reasons for not learning content including: high student-

teacher ratios, underqualified teachers who have limited teaching strategies available to them, few books and teaching materials, and teachers who do not plan because they are tired from traveling long distances to school or from working more than one job as a result of a low salary (Lassibille & Gomez, 1990; Sunal, Osa, Gaba & Saleemi, 1989; and Cornia, Jolly, & Stewart, 1987).

Many students begin school at a late age (Gajraj & Schoemann, 1991). These students' families may have had to wait until they saved enough money to cover uniforms and school materials. They may have had to save enough money to be able to go without the student's income-producing activity for a while. These students may not complete their education due to the factors that caused their late enrollment.

Both enrollment and the school-age population grew rapidly into the early 1980's. The school dependency ratio is the proportion of the population aged 6 to 14 in respect to the working age population aged 15 to 64 (UNESCO, 1994, p. 15). Through the year 2000 this ratio is expected to increase in sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time the region's economy will have a low level of growth and the population will have the highest rate of growth (3.2 per cent) in comparison to other world regions (UNESCO, 1994, p. 15).

Education is expensive. African countries spent nine percent of their capital expenditure on education, primary through university levels, between 1975 and 1987 (Lassabile & Gomez, 1991). By 1991 the expenditure had dropped to 4.6 percent of their gross national product (UNESCO, 1994). They allocated a greater share of their resources to primary education, 1.43 percent of their gross national product, than did countries in Latin America or Asia. The gross national product of African countries is expected to grow about 0.3 percent a year. This will be low compared to other areas such as Latin America where 1.4 percent growth is expected and Asia, where 4.7 percent growth is expected. (Lassibille & Gomez, 1990).

Those still unserved are often poor, live in isolated rural areas, or are girls from traditional families (Gajraj & Schoemann, 1991). The proportion of girls among unenrolled children is expected to grow in sub-Saharan Africa through the year 2000. Overall, sub-Saharan Africa is number two in the proportion of unenrolled children, aged 6 to 11 with

South Asia first (UNESCO, 1994, p. 14).

Girls are often not enrolled because they are viewed by family members as eventually having responsibility for passing the culture on to their children. Their families view schooling as a mostly foreign process that might change their daughters' ability to pass on the culture. Many of these families also are concerned about the length of schooling. As their daughters approach and enter puberty, they worry about the possibility of pregnancy. In some cultures, daughters are married at puberty. Marriage is not thought to be compatible with continued school attendance. These families are likely to withdraw their daughters from school as they approach puberty. They are also more likely to refuse to ever enroll them because of the concerns they would have in the later years of schooling (Adesina, 1982).

Solving the problems presented by hard-to-enroll segments of the population requires financing programs that address all aspects of the lives of these people. Some countries may not make a strong effort to enroll those who are underserved. This is most likely to happen when they do not have enough facilities nor enough trained teachers to handle these children should they enroll in school. The Ivory Coast and Nigeria are examples of African countries that do not have the capacity to enroll eighty percent or more of potential students. Surging population growth reinforces efforts to continue to enroll children from families who are already supportive of enrollment and provides a rationale for placing less effort on the enrollment of other segments of the population (Sunal, in press, 1996).

As public schools suffer from the weak economic situation in their country, parent-teacher associations are often formed to provide extras for schools. These associations might buy a map, books, chalk, or build a classroom onto a school. Family-based funding has always been common throughout sub-Saharan Africa (Carnoy & Samoff, 1990). Many schools in recent years depend heavily on such funding for supporting the cost of everything other than teacher salaries. Generally it is expected that families will pay for writing materials and textbooks. When uniforms are required, families pay for them. As the economic picture weakens, families pay for more and more of the costs of education.

Poor families are faced with tough choices when the limits of their finances are reached. The percentage of poor children who are not in school can be expected to grow.

Education in Nigeria

Primary Education

In 1976 Nigeria committed itself to the provision of universal primary education (UPE) to its children. A basic, six-year level of education was seen as a means of creating unity between the many disparate groups making up Nigeria's citizenry. It was also seen as a means of working towards the equalization of educational opportunities throughout the nation by providing a minimum level to which all children would be educated (Ozigi and Ocho 1981; Adesina 1982). The national commitment to UPE was endorsed by many, although not all, Nigerians (Casapo, 1983, 1981).

A large commitment of money and the endorsement of many Nigerians was not enough to prevent problems as UPE was put in place. The program has been a success in that many millions of children have received a primary education. However, a low quality of education was noted as an accompaniment to quantity education (Bray, 1981). A survey of inspectors responsible for primary schools completed a decade after the initiation of UPE suggested that conditions in primary education were continuing to be such that quality education was difficult to obtain (Sunal, Osa, Gaba, & Saleemi, 1989).

Universal Primary Education in Nigeria was designed to educate children ages 6 - 12. It resulted from a recognition that those receiving a primary education tended to be male, urban, well-to-do and resident in a southeastern or southwestern state in Nigeria. These education imbalances were thought to increase the stresses already experienced by a nation with over 200 ethnic groups speaking many languages and practicing Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions. It was thought that education could promote children's view of themselves as a Nigerian citizen first and then as a member of an ethnic group. It could also equalize opportunities as citizens all received a basic level of education (Fafunwa, 1982; Ozigi and Ocho, 1981).

Problems occurring in the first few years after UPE was initiated were described by Casapo (1983, 1981), Wilson (1978) and Urwick (1983). First was an initial serious

underestimation of enrollment. A second problem related to the large enrollment of children in UPE was the need for huge expenditures of money. Although large amounts of money were spent with education expenditures ranking first in state and second in federal budgets, still there was underfinancing. Third, a lower percentage of northern children who were Muslim enrolled, continuing earlier imbalances.

A later study (Sunal et. al., 1989) described conditions in primary schools a decade into UPE as reported by 147 school inspectors. While conditions existed that limited the quality of primary education some positive change seemed to be occurring. The inspectors noted crowding, resulting in some classes being taught outdoors, a great shortage of textbooks and basic teaching aids, the presence of many teachers who did not meet minimum qualifications, and a lack of basic amenities such as access to health care resulting in difficult living conditions for many teachers. They also noted larger numbers of qualified teacher's college graduates beginning careers by teaching in the primary schools and continuing large portions of state and federal budgets being assigned to education. While the inspectors' reports were often negative they also suggested that quality education did occur in some settings, that a cadre of trained teachers was developing and that the potential for quality mass primary education existed. The differences in percentages of children from various groups within the nation appeared to be plateauing.

The creation of a Ministry for Women at the state level was a vehicle for developing programs that would ameliorate concerns in specific groups about possible negative influences of primary schooling on females. Experimentation with state primary school management boards provided a means for focusing on primary schooling issues, for providing for input from citizens, and for experimentation with new ways to attract underserved children and to keep them in school. Local schools began teaching primary school children in the dominant local language rather than in English. The curriculum encouraged the incorporation of local folk stories and of community service. These developments provided a means by which children and their parents could be encouraged, at the local level, to send their children to school (Sunal, Sunal, Osa and Hamid, 1995).

Secondary Education

Secondary education has expanded in Nigeria since independence. A variety of secondary school options exist including teachers colleges, those specializing in the sciences, and those that offer a wide curriculum. In 1983, Adaralegbe stated that universal secondary education would come into being soon after the first cohort of universal primary education graduates completed their primary education in 1985. He estimated that by 1985, primary school completers would have automatic access to secondary education. This did not occur because oil revenues dropped sharply and it was becoming evident that the country did not have the capacity to provide universal primary education. The establishment of secondary schools continued at a slow rate of expansion. Junior secondary schools have often been established first. Eventually these serve as feeder schools for a senior secondary school. Most primary school leavers do not participate in secondary education, with the fewest completing twelve years of education because of the limited spaces available. Other problems also exist including the cost of secondary education and the lack of trained teachers. Parents carry extra expenses and lose the earning power of the adolescent. The problems creating inequities at the primary level are exacerbated at the secondary level.

Equal Access for All

Income at the federal level is heavily dependent on oil revenues that have declined in the last decade and a half. Recently, financial responsibility for primary schooling has been turned over by federal government authorities to local education agencies. This has created grave concerns, since these agencies are inadequately funded. The prospect for the continuation of extensive efforts to provide schooling to all children seems unlikely. Children who are from low income families, Muslim girls, and those who combine both these characteristics may forgo or drop out of primary schooling. This may happen as schools at all levels experience financial difficulties and parents are expected to carry more of the financial burden for schooling. Approximately 67% of males and 52% of females aged 6-11 are enrolled in school in Nigeria. The enrollment difference between males and females rapidly increases in the junior secondary school and through the senior secondary

school. Many come from families whose adults have had little schooling since among adults aged 25 and over, males average 1.8 years of schooling and females average 1.3 years. The adult illiteracy rate is 38% among males and 61% among females. The number of illiterate women per 100 illiterate men has increased from 167 in 1985 to 174 in 1990 and is projected to grow to 185 in the year 2000 (UNESCO, 1994, p. 24).

Over the period since UPE's initiation it has become evident that some sectors of the Nigerian population are not being fully served. The most evident group are Muslim girls. For this group, there have been cultural clashes with what is perceived as the "Western" education received in primary schools. There have been concerns in families that primary schooling is in conflict with traditional practices and that it reduces a female's ability to fully pass on her culture to her children (Csapo, 1981; Mohammed, 1984; Sunal et al, 1989). Mohammed (1984) found the 58% of the 100 rural Muslim parents she interviewed in northern Nigeria were concerned with marriageability. These parents favored the tradition of marrying girls at an early age, between 12 and 14 if a good prospect for a husband came along. Even if a good prospect were not available, 33% still favored an early marriage. Recent UNESCO figures (1994) indicate that the average age of marriage in Nigeria is age 18 for females. Those parents who continue to favor the tradition of early marriage do not represent the average Nigerian but still constitute a large group in the society.

In recent years, low income families are also being underserved as the gradual imposition of some school fees makes it ever more difficult for them to afford to send their children to primary school. Schooling results in the loss of children's labor during the hours they are in school thereby reducing the income of a family. Low income families face a high cost when they send their children to school.

Primary schooling no longer guarantees a job as it once did when few children were schooled. Therefore, Urwick (1993) indicates that low income families have little incentive to send their children to primary school.

Inequities may be assumed by citizens and may be accepted as inevitable. For one reason or another, groups underrepresented in education may be thought to be less deserving of education. If such an attitude exists in Nigeria, it may mitigate against efforts

to expand educational access to underrepresented groups. It may reduce efforts because of a conviction that members of these groups would not appreciate the education and/or would not utilize it (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991; Graham-Brown, 1991). Data was collected in Nigeria to determine the attitudes of parents and teachers towards inequities in the enrollment of children in school.

Data Collection and Report

To determine the impact of weak economic conditions in terms of inequities in educational access, interviews were conducted with forty parents and forty teachers of children in Nigeria. Interviews were carried out by faculty at three Nigerian universities. The parent participants were contacted for interviews after being chosen at random from school lists of parents. Fifty parents were initially identified but contact could not be made with ten of them. Forty teachers were then selected at random from the schools serving the children of the parents who were interviewed. All the teachers participated in the interviews.

The interviews were conducted in the native language of the interviewee, translated into English and recorded on interview forms. Interview topics included: personal and family data, educational costs such as fees and materials, knowledge of families whose children were kept out of school, reasons for keeping children out of school and the prevalence of the situation, problems resulting from children being kept out of school, effects of schooling, whether specific groups of children could legitimately have their access to schooling reduced, and future trends.

Seven states were represented, two each in southeastern and southwestern Nigeria and three in northern Nigeria. The parents ranged in age from 22 to 64 years with a mean of 38. Sixty three percent were male and thirty-seven percent female. The teachers were from 26 to 57 years in age with a mean of 34. Sixty percent were male and forty percent female. Among the teachers, twenty were primary school teachers and twenty were secondary school teachers. The parents had between 1 and 5 children in school, with a mean of 2, at the primary and/or secondary level.

Among the parents, 45% (n=18) had completed primary schooling. As described in

Table 1, some of the parents had completed other levels of education, with one holding a Master's degree. All of the teachers had completed the teachers' college or a senior secondary school (Table 1). One had completed an Advanced Teacher's College (equivalent to a two-year college associate's degree or a normal school degree), thirteen held a Bachelor's degree, and one held a Master's degree. All of the teachers holding a Bachelor's degree, and the Master's degree recipient taught at a senior secondary school or teacher's college.

Table 1 about here

Fifty-nine percent of the parents paid school fees. At the time of the data collection a U.S. Dollar ($1.00) was equal to approximately Naira 80. School fees ranged from Naira 200 to Naira 1200 with a mean of Naira 634 ($7.92). Teachers reported the same range of school fees with a mean of Naira 760 ($9.50). All but two parents reported paying for textbooks. The teachers all reported parents as paying for textbooks. The cost of textbooks for a student per year was estimated at a mean of Naira 1266 ($15.83) with a range of from 200 to 3000 reported. The parents indicated that secondary school textbooks were more costly. The average textbook costs estimated by primary school teachers was Naira 800 ($10.00) while the average textbook costs estimated by secondary school teachers was Naira 1800 ($22.50).

Thirty-nine percent (n=16) of the parents reported knowing others who were keeping their children out of school because they could not afford fees, supplies, uniforms, and textbooks. Nearly the same number (n=17, 43%) of teachers reported knowing parents who were keeping children out of school due to direct school costs. Fifty-three percent of the parents and sixty percent of the teachers thought the situation was more common than it had been five years ago. When asked if their perception might be wrong, one quarter of the respondents thought about acquaintances and counted those whom they remembered keeping children out of school for monetary reasons. They decided that more families were keeping children out of school than had done so five years earlier because of

direct school costs. The others restated their conviction that more children were being kept out of school due to direct school costs.

The participants had difficulty estimating whether more parents were keeping their children out of school because they needed their labor to help support the family. All the participants thought that this was likely. However, they said that families will more often blame school fees and are not likely to say that they need the child's labor. They surmised that families who were keeping their children out of school because they needed the child's labor also could not afford the direct school costs.

Fifty-eight percent of the parents thought daughters rather than sons were more likely to be kept out of school if financial difficulties arose. Ten percent of parents thought primary schooling was not good for girls, so it would be better if they were kept out of school. These parents said school was not good for girls because it does not teach them the correct ethical and cultural values and societal norms. Ten percent of the parents thought schooling at both the primary and secondary levels can have a bad effect on boys because they can make friends who will be a bad influence on them and parents may not be able to counter such influences. They thought schools enrolling students from a large intake area present the most problems because many of the students are not neighbors with whose family the parents could discuss a problem if it arose.

Teachers held views similar to those of the parents, with half (50%) stating that parents were more likely to keep daughters out of school for the reasons cited by the parents. Five teachers indicated that problems can arise for both boys and girls if they make friends at school who are a bad influence on them.

Fifty-three percent of the parents thought primary schooling does not help an individual get a job while the others thought that it was helpful. Two parents thought secondary schooling did not help an individual get a job. Sixty-eight percent viewed primary schooling as worth the cost to parents, even if it does not help the student get a job. All the parents thought secondary schooling was worth the cost to them. Seventy-five percent of the teachers thought primary schooling does not help a student get a job but all thought it was worth the cost. They viewed secondary schooling as both helping students

get a job and worth its cost.

Eleven percent of the parents and one teacher thought primary schooling was not useful to some groups of people in the nation. These respondents identified girls whose parents wish to marry them off at an early age as one group to whom primary schooling was not useful. Two parents also mentioned students who do not pay attention in school. All of the parents and the teachers thought primary schooling was most useful to children from poor families because it might give them an opportunity to move out of poverty.

When asked who should be chosen to go to school if finances do not allow parents to send all their children to school, one-third of the parents and 40% of the teachers said the eldest female should go to school because she will not be able to get a job without schooling. Two-thirds of the parents and 60% of the teachers said a boy should go to school because he must support the women and children.

When asked to discuss their predictions for the future of primary and secondary schooling in Nigeria in ten years, all the parents said the quality of schooling would improve and more children will be going to school. Half of the teachers also expressed this view.

All the parents also thought that those from poor families either will not go to school or will not be allowed to finish more than a few years of schooling. They thought the individual financial situations of these families would not improve enough to enable these families to afford to send their children to school. None of the parents thought the government would finance a wide spectrum of social services that might enable poor parents to send their children to school. They thought the basic needs of the education sector, transportation, clean water supplies, and other services would be financed first. They expressed the view that people would prefer to see money spent on water and other areas than on a full spectrum approach to providing support to poor families so that they might send their children to school.

Most of the teachers, 83%, thought there would be an increase in the number of students attending school and that conditions for the poor will probably get better. So, more children will be attending school because their families no longer will be as poor as

they once were. Teachers all agreed that there are many demands on government in all areas for basic improvements, so it is unlikely that government would invest in a broad spectrum approach designed to help families move out of poverty. They thought the nation's general economic condition will improve and this will result in less families living in poverty.

Implications for Nigeria and for Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan African nations share Nigeria's problem with access for all to primary schooling. They also share Nigeria's problem with providing secondary education to more than a small percentage of primary school leavers. These problems are similar to those that have occurred in the USA and Europe in past decades but they are far more extreme.

Inequities exist and will continue to exist since the funding will not soon be available for the expansion of education to all. Nigerians recognize that some groups of citizens do not have easy access to education for their children because of financial and cultural constraints. The voice concerns about children being attracted to other children at school who might get them in trouble. To some extent these concerns have been voiced in nations in other regions of the world. The economic future of Nigeria is weak and is limited by the rapid population growth being experienced. The Nigerians interviewed were optimistic and thought things would get better and more children would be schooled as a result of better economic conditions. Economic forecasters are not so optimistic and suggest that it is unlikely that Nigeria will be able to continue to enroll the same percentage of students in school.

Nigerians acknowledge that poor families need a wide range of services to move them out of poverty and to enable their children to attend school. However, they do not think these services will be available to poor families because of the many other needs the nation has for basic services. So, they hope that economic conditions will improve and will result in less poverty.

Both parents and teachers recognized the concerns of traditional Muslim parents in terms of their daughter's education. Yet, one-third thought education was important for girls because it was the only means through which they would be able to get a job. The

literature typically does not report such an attitude favoring the education of girls. Should the movement to towns and cities from rural areas continue, Nigerians may increasingly express this viewpoint. There are relatively few jobs outside of farming and trading available in rural areas. Although towns and cities offer many more job opportunities they are often available only to those with some education. Girls need an education that is at least equivalent to that of boys. They probably need a better education in most instances because a male applicant would be more likely to get most jobs. A female applicant may get the job only is she is much better educated than male applicants. Projections by UNESCO suggest that females will continue to be underenrolled in school and that the illiteracy rate of females as compared to males will increase through the year 2000. Both parents and teachers had few suggestions to offer in terms of how to encourage parents to send their daughters to school.

Inequities in education will continue in Nigeria and the numbers of unenrolled children will grow. Because of daunting population growth and lack of economic growth, no reduction of inequities seems likely in the near future. The Nigerians interviewed did not rationalize the inequities. They made no excuses, acknowledging their existence. They explained the causes of the inequities in a straightforward manner and hoped that an improved economic situation would take care of those inequities. They did not think that any group was less deserving of education. A majority thought boys should be educated if a choice had to be made between a daughter and a son because they believed it would be the son's responsibility to provide financially for his family when he was an adult.

Other sub-Saharan African nations do not have Nigeria's wealth and must work with reduced expectations and the much longer time frame induced by having less money available. The problems experienced in Nigeria can be expected to be more difficult to ameliorate elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa.

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Table 1

Educational Levels of Parents and Teachers

	Interviewee	
Level	Parents (n=40)	Teachers (n=40)
Primary school	45% (n=18)	100% (n=40)
Junior Secondary School	30% (n=12)	100% (n=40)
Senior Secondary School or Teachers' College	10% (n=4)	100% (n=40)
Advanced Teachers' College		3% (n=1)
Bachelor's degree	5% (n=2)	33% (n=13)
Master's degree		3% (n=1)