



Effectiveness of Accelerated Education Programmes in Nigeria

Policy Brief

Summary

The out-of-school children (OOSC) issue in Nigeria has lingered for decades in spite of various policy efforts to address it. Even though OOSC are found in all regions of the county, the incident is more prevalent in the northeast Nigeria. That Nigeria hosts the highest number of OOSC globally despite the policy of free and compulsory education calls for an urgent intervention different from the policy status quo. Given the nature of the conventional system of education, OOSC who have never attended school or who missed certain years of schooling stand little or no chance of ever receiving or completing basic education. Alternative education models such as AEP have therefore filled this gap by providing accelerated form of education to OOSC which eventually provides a pathway for their return into formal education system where possible. Nigeria has been privileged to experience up to 5 AEPs in the northeast Nigeria. The effectiveness of these programmes is proven by the education access they have been able to extend to OOSC, the equity they have promoted and their mainstreaming ability. It is recommended therefore that government should take ownership of this education innovation and commit to budgetary funding to scale it up.

Introduction

Over the decades, Nigeria has been on the quest to improve access to education for all school age children within its borders. In spite of free basic education, the prevalence of out-of-school children and youth (OOSCY) remains a concern for policy makers. An estimate of 10.5 million children are out of school (UNICEF, 2022) most of whom are concentrated in the northern Nigeria. While OOSC are not only found in the northern part of the country, OOSC in this part of the country are most vulnerable to exclusion due to a range of reasons, including poverty, conflict, lack of resources, among others.

An OOSC mapping exercise recently conducted in Borno state on the IDRC-KIX¹ research which surveyed 1200 households from 30 communities in 2 LGAs reveals that 46% of children in these communities are out of school, either dropped out or never attended. Apart from other barriers to education, insurgency and insecurity in this part of the country has disrupted the education of many children as survivors fled for safety into IDP camps and host communities. Evidence on the current situation shows that schools in this part of the country are overcrowded, water and sanitation facilities are inadequate, and many schools are still distant from the communities. The lack of quality education in rural schools and conflict

¹ IDRC is International Development Research Center based in Canada. KIX means Knowledge, Innovation and Exchange research approach.

affected areas has resulted in low rates of primary school completion, high rates of dropout and extremely low literacy and numeracy outcomes. Furthermore, very few children living in rural areas are able to access secondary schools, and children with disabilities and low achieving adolescent girls being particularly disadvantaged.

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The evidence over the years suggest that traditional education models hold little prospects for achieving universal and equitable access to quality basic education, particularly in hard-to-reach extreme poverty zones which also applies to conflict affected areas (UNESCO, 2018). Alternative education models, therefore, are increasingly proving effective in filling the gap left open by the traditional models. In recent times in Nigeria, one of such models that has gained attention as implemented various communities in the northeast Nigeria is known as the Accelerated Education Programme.

Accelerated Education Programmes (AEP)

Accelerated Education Programmes have been a major intervention deployed by development organisations to ameliorate the OOSCY situation around the world including Nigeria. These are learning programs that employ accelerated learning methodologies to promote access to education in a reduced time frame for disadvantaged groups, out-of-school, over-age children and youth who missed out or had their

education interrupted due to poverty, violence, conflict, and crisis (Menendez al., 2016).

AEP provides an accelerated learning so that older children can learn foundational skills in a shorter time frame. It is designed to complement formal schooling by providing strong links with the public education so that children can continue learning by transitioning into formal school after graduating from AEP. This alternative model focuses on community approaches; uses local language of instruction; leverages on local facilitator; and maintains flexible lesson schedules. Up to 5 of such programmes have been implemented in Nigeria since 2014 till date. Although the scale of these programmes have been small relative to the magnitude of the OOSC problem in the country, this model of intervention has been witnessed to be effective in getting OOSC back to school only if it can be scaled. This policy brief seeks to highlight the effectiveness of AEPs in correcting the endemic OOSC problem under 4 thematic areas which include access, equity, quality and transition.

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Access to basic education

AEP has proven beyond dispute that it is a viable innovation for making education accessible to the marginalised by the reason of various exclusion factors. In the Northeast Nigeria, for instance, up to 5 programmes have been implemented including Education Crisis Response (2014-2017), DFID-EiE² Non-formal

² DFID abbreviates Department for International Development while EiE abbreviates Education-in-Emergency

Learning Center Project (2017-2020), Addressing Education in Northeast Nigeria (2018-2021), European Early Recovery Project (2019-2021) and Opportunity to Learn (2022).³ Each of these programmes reached out to OOSC in various states, local governments and communities. For example, the Education Crisis Response project reached out-of-school children in 5 states including Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe and Yobe. Children who benefited from these include the overage, internally displaced children, economically disadvantaged, disabled, etc. The design of these programmes ensured that learning was provided to OOSC within their communities by establishing non-formal learning centers within these communities for easy accessibility by learners. The timing of these classes was also flexible to encourage attendance. Facilitators in these learning centers, both volunteers and practicing teachers, were sourced from within these communities to allow for the necessary cultural familiarity needed for the learners and the facilitators to easily connect during the educational interaction. Moreover, learning was predominantly provided in the local language of the learners which enhanced the learning of the children. Since 2014 till date, by a modest estimation, about 310,00 OOSC have been reached with this innovation, providing them the education access which the formal system might not have been able to afford them since they already missed some schooling years. While details of the programme impact of the EU project and Opportunity to Learn are yet to be publicized, this policy brief only provides evidence from the impact report of the first three programmes.

³ Details of the programme impact of the last 2 programmes are yet to be publicized.

Table 1: Scope of AEP implemented in Northeast Nigeria

Programme	States reached	NFLC	Enrolment
ECR (2014-2017)	5 (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Yobe)	1456	80341 (43,944 females, 36,397 males)
DFID-EIE NFLC (2017-2020)	2 (Borno and Yobe)	400	34000
AENN (2018-2021)	2 (Borno and Yobe)	912	over 200,000

Source: Project reports on ECR, DFID-EIE and AENN.

Equity

The equity principle of the AEP programme is fundamental. This guides the design and delivery of the programme as AEPs have been implemented within the tenets of gender equity and social inclusion. As much as possible, a fair representation of both genders has been witnessed in the enrolments. Since girls' education tends to be discounted by households in the northern part of the country, conscious efforts were made to enroll more girl children on the programme to strengthen the campaign for girls' education. As such, 55% (43,944 out of 80,341) of the enrolled learners on the Education Crisis Response (ECR) project were girls (USAID, 2017, p.17). Adequate provisions were also made for the disabled. For instance, the (ECR) project specially created 12 Learning Center for the physically challenged where sign language and other suitable learning aids were used to convey lessons to learners. These also benefited from the vocational training which equipped them with skills they can use for sustaining livelihood. Over the lifetime of the ECR project, 539 (280 males, 259 females) physically challenged OOSCY were enrolled and graduated from the centers (USAID 2017, p28). In further demonstration of equity, learning materials and refreshments were provided to all learners without bias or favoritism.

Figure 1: Adolescent girls in vocational training on the ECR project



Source: ECR Final Report

Quality

The quality of AEP hinges upon the 10 principles of AEP implementation⁴ to which AEPs in Nigeria have adhered as much as possible. This contributes to the overall warm acceptance that the programme has witnessed by both the communities and the formal education authorities where implemented. To ensure teacher quality, AEP facilitators were adequately trained using a cascade system for quality delivery of the lessons. Table 2 shows the number of trained facilitators on different AEPs and the subjects of instruction on each. On the ECR project for example, a total of 1107 volunteer teachers and 9313 formal school were trained across five states including Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe and Yobe, on the delivery of the AEP classes. The DFID-NFLC project trained 400 learning facilitators (IRC, 2021, p2.) while Addressing Education in Northeast Nigeria (AENN) trained over 2000 learning facilitators (FHI 360, 2021, p.2).

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⁴ The principles are provided in the appendix

Table 2: AEP Trained facilitators and subjects on AEP

Programme	No. of trained Facilitators	Subjects
ECR	1107 (Volunteers), 9313 (Formal Teachers)	Numeracy, Literacy, Social & emotional learning
DFID-EiE NFLC	400	Numeracy, Literacy, Social & emotional learning
AENN	Over 2000	Numeracy, Literacy, Social & emotional learning

Source: Project reports on ECR, DFID-EiE NFLC and AENN.

Subjects of instruction include Numeracy, Literacy and Social and Emotional learning to aid the psychological and emotional recovery of children who have been traumatized by the horror of conflict. The AENN programme designed a curriculum in alignment with the national formal curriculum which was later adopted as a prototype for the government approved Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP) curriculum (USAID 2018, p13).

As stated in the ECR report “The ECR project produced substantial learning gains in each of its three cohorts. The project’s final end-line learning assessment showed remarkable improvement in learning performance as about 49% of the learners could read in Hausa, 37% could read in English language, and 39% of them could perform at least one basic mathematics operation. This result is a remarkable contrast to the baseline assessment where 64% of the learners could not recognize any Hausa letters, 50% scored at zero level for English, and 40% could not recognize the numbers 1-9.” (USAID, 2017, p.26). Similar results were recorded in other AEPs implemented.

Figure 2: One-on-one end-line assessment on the DFID-EIE Non-Formal Learning Center Project



Source: IRC-ALP End-line Research Report

Table 3 presents the learning outcomes recorded on the ECR project across five states where implemented. As revealed, out of 80341 children who were enrolled across five states, 50.2% on average was able to read at the end of the programme; 72.8% on average met or surpassed the criteria for socio-emotional competency; and 85.4% on average completed basic literacy and skill acquisition programme.

Table 3: End-line learning outcomes on the ECR project

STATES	Learners enrolled	Can read by the end of the programme	Met or surpassed criteria for socio-emotional competency	Completed basic literacy and skill acquisition program
Adamawa	17898	51%	84%	82%
Bauchi	15503	51%	67%	91%
Borno	15197	37%	72%	89%
Gombe	16026	50%	72%	90%
Yobe	15717	62%	69%	75%
	80341	50.2%*	72.8%*	85.4%*
<i>*These are averages for all the states</i>				

Source: ECR Final Report, 2017.

Transition

Evidence abounds that AEP effectively charts a pathway back into formal education for OOSC. AEP graduates either get mainstreamed into formal education system or proceed into post literacy programmes for vocational training if they are too old to go back into formal system to prepare them for the world of work. AEPs have, however, recorded remarkable success in transitioning their graduates into formal schools. With the aid of the State Agency for Mass Education (SAME), these certified graduated learners are screened on a merit-based system and absorbed into relevant classes. The ECR project mainstreamed 30,154 (12,365 males, 17,789 females) across the 5 states of implementation. This number represents 44% of those who completed the non-formal basic education programme (USAID, 2017, p.18). Similarly, as at March 2020, AENN mainstreamed 12,868 cohort one learners (6,664 males, 6,204 females). Also, 8,640 (4,384 males, 4,256 females) adolescent learners transitioned into the Post-literacy program (AENN Report Y2, Q2, p.17). The number represents 73% of the 29,504 learners (13,795 males, 15,709 females) who completed the basic literacy program in 588 NFLCs. AENN was finalizing the mainstreaming of the remaining 27% of NFLC completers before schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic (USAID, 2020, p.17). Detailed data on this are provided in Appendix 2.

Table 4: Number of AEP graduates transitioned into formal school and post-literacy/vocational training programmes

Programme	Total transitioned	Male	Female
ECR	30,154	12,365	17,789
AENN*	12,868	6,664	6,204
	8640**	4,384	4,256

*This report is for cohort one of the AENN

**These are adolescent learners for the Post-literacy

Source: ECR and AENN project reports

Conclusion

- AEPs have provided access to education for OOSCY who otherwise would have had no opportunity to receive basic education as a result of various barriers that led to their exclusion.
- The design and implementation of AEP is built on the fundamental principle of equity as it targets the most underserved in the community so every OOSC of various profiles can have the opportunity to receive basic education. This has been witnessed in the bridging of gender gap in education and promotion of the inclusion of the disabled.
- The quality of AEP is upheld by conscious adherence to the ten principles of AEP implementation. This is demonstrated in training of facilitators, collaboration with education authorities, certification of learners and mainstreaming of completers. The quality of this programme is also evidenced by the substantial learning gains as indicated by learning outcomes posted by children in foundational literacy and numeracy.
- AEP has effectively facilitated re-integration of OOSCY into formal school. While a plausible number of children has been mainstreamed into the formal school, this impact would be better appreciated if the intervention is scaled up across the country.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing proofs, the following recommendation is now proffered:

- Given the evidences on the effectiveness of this laudable innovation, the government should take ownership of this innovation and scale it up. To scale-up the impact of AEP in reducing the number of OOSC, the government should consider dedicating a percentage of the national education budget towards institutionalising and funding the AEP. This is crucial as the AEPs implemented so far are

funded only by international organisations which fund is not guaranteed to be always available. A budgetary commitment to a long-term funding of AEP by the government would ensure that the gains made so far in the reduction of OOSC through this innovation are not lost.

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Appendix 1: Overview of three major AEPs in Nigeria

Programme	Number of States	Learning centers	Enrolment	Volunteers Facilitators	Formal Teachers	Subjects	Transitioned
Education Crisis Response Project	5 (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Yobe)	1456	80341 (43,944 females, 36,397 males)	1107	9313	Numeracy, Literacy, Social & emotional learning	30,154 (12,365 males, 17,789 female)
DFID NFLC	2 (Borno and Yobe)	400	34000	400		Numeracy, Literacy, Social & emotional learning	–
Addressing Education in Northeast Nigeria (FHI 360 Nigeria Factsheet, 2021, p.2)	3 (Borno and Yobe)	912	Over 200,000	Over 2000		Numeracy, Literacy, Social & emotional learning	As at March 2020, AENN mainstreamed 12,868 cohort one learners (6,664 males, 6,204 females). Also, 8,640 (4,384 males, 4,256 females) adolescent learners transitioned into the Post-literacy program* (USAID 2020, p.10)
<p>*The number of learners mainstreamed or transitioned during the quarter represents 73% of the 29,504 learners (13,795 males, 15,709 females) who completed the basic literacy program in 588 NFLCs. AENN was finalizing the mainstreaming of the remaining 27% of NFLC completers before schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>							

Appendix 2: 10 Principles of Accelerated Education Programme

Learners	Principle 1	AEP is flexible and for over-age learners
	Principle 2	Curriculum, materials and pedagogy are genuinely accelerated, AE-suitable and use relevant language of instruction
	Principle 3	AE learning environment is inclusive, safe and learning-ready
Teachers	Principle 4	Teachers are recruited, supervised and remunerated
	Principle 5	Teachers participate in continuous professional development
Programme	Principle 6	Goals, monitoring and funding align

Management	Principle 7	AEP center is effectively managed
	Principle 8	Community is engaged and accountable
Alignment with MOE and Policy Frameworks	Principle 9	AEP is a legitimate, credible education option that results in learner certification in primary education
	Principle 10	AEP is aligned with the national education system and relevant humanitarian architecture