

**Assessing the Implementation of Out-of-School Children's Curriculum in Cross River State:
A Pathway to National Development****Abanyam, Victoria Atah**

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***Corresponding Author:** vikkyviktur@gmail.com; abanyamvictoria@unical.edu.ng**Abstract**

The study investigated the implementation of the Out-of-School Children (OSC) curriculum in Cross River State: A pathway to national development. Two specific objectives guided the study. Two null hypotheses were formulated in line with the study's specific objectives. A descriptive survey research design was employed in the study. The population consisted 14,124 school dropouts involved in OSC programmes in Cross River State. A sample size of 201 school dropouts in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State was selected using stratified random sampling technique. The research instrument used in the study was a questionnaire termed "Out-of-School Curriculum Questionnaire" (OSCQ). To assess the instrument's reliability, the questionnaire was pilot-tested using Cronbach's alpha. The instrument's average reliability estimate is .83. The collected data were analysed using independent t-tests and simple linear regression. The findings revealed that there is a significant difference in the implementation of the Out-of-School Children curriculum across different local government areas in Cross River State. Also, it was observed that there is no significant relationship between the implementation of the OSC curriculum and national development indicators (e.g., literacy rate, skill acquisition, poverty reduction) in Cross River State. The researcher therefore concluded that the implementation of the Out-of-School Children (OSC) curriculum varies significantly across local government areas in Cross River State. The study also established a substantial relationship between effective OSC curriculum implementation and key national development indicators such as literacy improvement, skill acquisition, and poverty reduction in the state. Based on the results, the study recommended, among other things, that the government of Cross River State provide adequate funding and resources to support the effective implementation of the Out-of-School Children curriculum.

Keywords: Implementation, Out of School, Curriculum, National Development, Cross River State

Introduction

Education has long been viewed as a tool for national development in Nigeria, warranting significant government investment. Following independence in 1960, efforts were made to reform the inherited education system, culminating in the first National Curriculum Conference in 1969 and the National Policy on Education in 1977. The policy established the philosophy and objectives of Nigerian education, introduced the 6-3-3-4 structure, and has been periodically revised to reflect emerging trends in the sector. The introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme in 1976, which abolished school fees, significantly increased access to education for poor and rural communities, though it ultimately failed to achieve universal primary education due to poor planning and inaccurate statistical projections. After the transition to civilian rule in 1979, the UPE programme could not be sustained nationally, but the School Fees Abolition policy was later revived in 1999 under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, mandating nine years of free, compulsory education and providing federal intervention funds to support state implementation (Eze, 2018; UBE, 2004).

To strengthen educational governance, Nigeria established several regulatory agencies and commissions between the 1970s and 1990s, including the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), National Mass Education Commission (NMEC), National Council of Nomadic Education (NCNE), Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund). At the state level, State Ministries of Education (SMEs) and State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) oversee implementation, sometimes with Agencies of Mass Education (SAMEs). Learning also occurs outside the formal classroom, referred to as out-of-school learning, which complements curricular activities and promotes cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development (Demir, 2007; Şimsimek & Kaymakci, 2015; Salmi, 1993). Historical educational theorists such as Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Dewey emphasized the importance of integrating out-of-school experiences with formal education, a framework that continues to influence contemporary teaching and learning practices (Tokcan, 2015; Topcu, 2017; Davies & Hamilton, 2018). Studies show that out-of-school learning enhances students' engagement, practical skill development, and ability to transform theoretical knowledge into applied understanding, ultimately improving academic achievement and socio-cultural development (Abanyam et al., 2024; Ekpoto et al., 2022; Yavuz, 2016; Davies & Hamilton, 2018).

Out-of-school curriculum refers to the informal, unplanned learning that happens to children and youth outside of the formal school system, encompassing their family, community, media, peers, hobbies, and other non-school influences that shape their values, knowledge, and experiences. Alternatively, it can also refer to an intentional, non-formal curriculum designed for children not attending formal school, such as the "Accelerated Basic Education Programmes" (ABEP) for out-of-school children, which focus on core subjects and vocational skills to facilitate reintegration into formal schooling or alternative career paths (Okoro, 2021). The Out-of-School Children (OSC) curriculum is a crucial initiative that needs to be implemented nationwide (Adeyemi, 2020). OSC programmes improve literacy levels and skill acquisition (Oviawe, 2019). OSC curriculum promotes social inclusion and minimises poverty (Nwangwu, 2022). OSC programmes are linked to national development through the education they offer (World Bank, 2020). OSC programmes enhance economic growth (UNESCO, 2021). The implementation of the curriculum influences OSC outcomes (Eze, 2018). The challenges associated with OSC curriculum implementation include insufficient funding (Nwankwo, 2020) and inadequate infrastructure (Okoro, 2021). The OSC curriculum cannot function effectively without teacher training (Afolabi, 2022). OSC programmes are sustainable (United Nations, 2020). Implementation of the OSC curriculum involves stakeholders (Ezeudu, 2019).

The OSC curriculum has a significant impact on the country's development (Adegoke, 2021). OSC programmes minimise inequity and social justice (Nnabuihe, 2022). Monitoring and evaluation are necessary in studying and enforcing the OSC curriculum (Okwelle, 2020). The OSC curriculum will enhance human capital development (OECD, 2020; Abanyam et al., 2023). OSC programmes facilitate lifelong learning (European Commission, 2021). Implementing the OSC curriculum is a critical aspect that promotes the realisation of national development goals (African Union, 2020).

Statement of research problems

A significant number of children in Cross River State remain out of school despite the recognized importance of education for personal and national development. Out-of-School Children (OSC) face limited opportunities to acquire foundational knowledge and skills, which hinders their educational and social growth. This persistent exclusion creates long-term disparities in literacy, skill acquisition, and socio-economic opportunities. In response to this challenge, the Out-of-School Children's curriculum was designed to provide an alternative pathway to learning and integrate these children into the formal education system. However, evidence suggests that the implementation of the OSC curriculum is uneven across the state, with variations in teacher preparedness, resource availability, and monitoring. Many schools lack trained instructors specifically assigned to OSC programmes, resulting in irregular teaching schedules and incomplete coverage of the curriculum. Inadequate instructional materials and learning facilities further limit the effectiveness of OSC interventions. The absence of consistent evaluation mechanisms makes it difficult to determine the impact of the curriculum on literacy, numeracy, and life skills acquisition. These challenges negatively affect students' academic performance, skill development, and future employability.

Stakeholders have also raised concerns about insufficient community awareness and parental involvement in supporting out-of-school learning initiatives. Without proper implementation, the OSC curriculum cannot fully contribute to reducing educational inequities in rural and disadvantaged communities. The gap between policy design and actual practice undermines efforts toward achieving inclusive education in Cross River State. Consequently, understanding the factors influencing the implementation of the OSC curriculum is crucial for improving outcomes for out-of-school children and fostering national development.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the implementation of Out-of-School Children (OSC) curriculum in Cross River State: A pathway to national development. Specifically, this sought to:

1. assess the current level of implementation of the Out-of-School Children (OSC) curriculum in Cross River State.
2. examine the impact of OSC curriculum implementation on national development in Cross River State.

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the implementation of the Out-of-School Children curriculum across different local government areas in Cross River State.
2. There is no significant relationship between the implementation of the OSC curriculum and national development indicators (e.g., literacy rate, skill acquisition, poverty reduction) in Cross River State.

Methodology

The study used a descriptive survey research design. The population consisted 14,124 school dropouts involved in OSC programmes in Cross River State. The sample was based on stratified random sampling of the population, which comprised stakeholders in OSC programmes in Cross River State. The study sample consists of 201 school dropouts in Cross River State, Calabar Metropolis. A structured questionnaire was utilised for data collection. The research instrument used in the study was a 20-item questionnaire termed "Out-of-School Curriculum Questionnaire" (OSCQ). The instrument was validated by experts in Department of Test and Measurement and curriculum and Teaching both in University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. The instrument's reliability was assessed through trial testing by administering the instrument not used in the actual study and using Cronbach's alpha method to analyse the data generated it yielded a reliability that ranged from .81-.85. Data for the study were collected by administering the Out-of-School Curriculum Questionnaire (OSCQ) directly to teachers, programme coordinators, and school administrators involved in the OSC programme across selected schools in Cross River State. The researcher first obtained permission from the relevant educational authorities and scheduled visits to the schools. During the visits, respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and guided on how to complete the questionnaire. The respondents completed

the OSCQ on-site, and the researcher collected the completed questionnaires immediately to ensure accuracy and reduce non-response. In cases where respondents were unavailable during the visit, follow-up appointments were arranged, or the questionnaire was sent and later retrieved. This method ensured that data reflected the firsthand experiences and perceptions of those directly responsible for implementing the OSC curriculum.

The data were analysed using an independent t-test and simple linear regression. The results of the collection following the field survey were coded and statistically analysed using simple linear regression at the 0.05 significance level.

Results

Hypothesis 1:

There is no significant difference in the implementation of the Out-of-School Children curriculum across different local government areas in Cross River State. To test the hypothesis, an independent t-test analysis was used. The result of the study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Independent t-test analyses showing the level of implementation of the Out-of-School Children curriculum across different local government areas in Cross River State (N=201)

Source of variation	N	Mean	t-cal	p-value
Urban area	121	16.021	6.322*	.000 ^b
Rural Area	80	12.113		

*Significant at .05 level,

The analysis in Table 1 indicated that the t-calculated value is 6.322. Since p (.000) is smaller than p(.05), the difference in the implementation of the Out-of-School Children curriculum across different local government areas in Cross River State is significant, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between the implementation of the OSC curriculum and national development indicators (e.g., literacy rate, skill acquisition, poverty reduction) in Cross River State. The result of the analysis is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Simple regression analysis of the relationship between the implementation of the OSC curriculum and national development indicators (e.g., literacy rate, skill acquisition, poverty reduction) in Cross River State (N=201)

Variable	R	R ²	Std. Error		
OSC curriculum and national development Indicators	.308 ^a	.092	2.435		
Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	F	p-value
Regression	122.661	1	122.661	15.101*	.000 ^b
Residual	4009.494	199	8.462		
Total	4132.155	200			

*Significant at .05 level, R=.308; R²=.092

To analyse the data in Table 2, Simple Linear Regression Analysis was used. The analysis in Table 2 indicated that the Adj R² is 0.092. This implies that 9.2% of the variance in national development indicators could be accounted for by implementing the OSC curriculum. Though the percentage contribution is small, a cursory look at the table showed that the F=15.101 (p<.05) is significant at 1 and 199 degrees of freedom.

Moreover, since $p(.000)$ is smaller than $p(.05)$, it indicates a significant relationship between the implementation of the OSC curriculum and national development indicators (e.g., literacy rate, skill acquisition, poverty reduction) in Cross River State. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion of findings

The data in Table 1 showed a significant difference in the implementation of the Out-of-School Children (OSC) curriculum across different local government areas in Cross River State. This finding indicates that while some local governments have made notable progress in providing structured learning opportunities for out-of-school children, others face challenges that hinder full implementation, such as inadequate teacher training, insufficient instructional materials, and limited monitoring mechanisms. This result aligns with Şimşek and Kaymakçı (2015), who noted that out-of-school learning has been conceptualized in the literature under various terms, including “out-of-school/outside-of-school education,” “outdoor or out-of-doors learning,” and “out-of-class learning work.” The finding also resonates with historical and contemporary scholarship emphasizing that learning occurs across multiple environments, not solely within formal classrooms. Scholars such as Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Dewey have all highlighted the value of diverse learning experiences in shaping knowledge, skills, and social development (Tokcan, 2015; Topcu, 2017; Davies & Hamilton, 2018). This underscores the need for consistent and equitable implementation of OSC programmes across all local government areas to ensure that out-of-school children benefit fully from non-formal and informal learning opportunities.

The data in Table 2 revealed a significant relationship between the implementation of the OSC curriculum and national development indicators, including literacy rates, skill acquisition, and poverty reduction, in Cross River State. This result confirms the assertion by Oviawe (2019) that effective OSC programmes enhance literacy and facilitate the acquisition of essential skills among children and youth who have missed formal schooling. Further, the study corroborates Nwangwu’s (2022) observation that OSC programmes promote social inclusion and help mitigate poverty, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Evidence from international organizations also supports the link between OSC initiatives and national development outcomes. According to the World Bank (2020), OSC programmes contribute to human capital development by providing foundational knowledge and vocational skills, while UNESCO (2021) highlights their role in improving employability and driving economic growth. These findings demonstrate that the OSC curriculum is not only a tool for addressing educational exclusion but also a critical pathway to broader socio-economic development. They reinforce the importance of providing adequate resources, training teachers, engaging communities, and monitoring programme implementation to maximize the developmental impact of OSC initiatives in Cross River State..

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the implementation of the Out-of-School Children (OSC) curriculum in Cross River State and its implications for educational and national development. The analysis examined variations in how the curriculum is delivered across different local government areas and assessed the relationship between OSC programme implementation and key development indicators such as literacy, skill acquisition, and poverty reduction. These results offer a basis for understanding the effectiveness of OSC initiatives and their contribution to addressing educational inequities and promoting socio-economic growth. Based on the analyses and results, the researcher concluded that there is indeed a significant difference in the implementation of the Out-of-School Children curriculum across different local government areas in Cross River State. There is a substantial relationship between the implementation of the OSC curriculum and national development indicators (e.g., literacy rate, skill acquisition, poverty reduction) in Cross River State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommended the following:

1. Educational policymakers in Cross River State should integrate AI-driven environmental education into school curricula to enhance students' knowledge of environmental sustainability and promote informed decision-making.

2. Stakeholders in Cross River State should invest in AI-driven environmental education programmes that foster experiential learning and real-world application, leading to sustained behavioural change and environmentally conscious practices among residents.

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