GRADIVA

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

Implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Policy on Equality of Access to School and the Crisis of Out-of-School Children in Nigeria

MBA, Cornelius Chukwudi (PhD)[1], Patricia Nwamaka AROH (PhD)[2]*, AYUBA, Sakiru Opeyemi[3], Samuel Okechukwu OME (PhD)[4] & Jovita Chinelo EJIMONYE (PhD)[5]

1.Division of General Studies, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani, Enugu State.
2,4,5.Department of Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
3.Department of Political Science, School of Secondary Education, Arts & Social Sciences Programmes, Federal College of Education (Special) Oyo, Oyo State.
Email: [1]chidimbac@yahoo.com; cornelius.mba@esut.edu.ng, [2]nwamaka.aroh@unn.edu.ng (*Corresponding Author Email), [3]sakiru2613@fcesoyo.edu.ng, [4]samuel.ome@unn.edu.ng, [5]jovita.ejimonye@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper examined the implementation of the UBE policy on equality of access to school to ascertain if it is responsible for the variations in rate of out-of-school children among the geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Evaluative research design was adopted for the study. Two research questions were posed to guide the study. Purposive simple random sampling procedure was used to select 7,269 respondents as sample. Primary and secondary data were used to support sources of data collection for the study. A structured questionnaire was designed to elicit information from the respondents. Percentage and Mean were used in the data analysis. With respect to the first research question the results showed that there were remarkable differences among the rural and urban dwellers as well as among the geopolitical zones on the walking time and kilometer distance to the nearest school. With respect to the second research question, the results showed that children in the south had greater access to good classrooms and schools than those in the north. It therefore concludes that the UBE policy on equality of access to school has not been effectively implemented and is responsible for the variations in rate of out-of-school children among the geopolitical zones in the country. The study recommends that: more schools and classroom blocks should be provided closer to the children across the federation but especially in the north to make accessibility easier to the children; the existing ones and the new ones to be provided should be well equipped for conducive and effective learning; more attention should be paid to securing school children by ensuring that well-armed security personnel are deployed to and around the schools and should escort the children at least to and from close distances to their schools and homes to ensure their safety; alternative schools and classrooms should be adopted in vulnerable places and where schools are not within nearby distances to the communities and settlements.

Keywords: *Access, Accessibility, Equality, Policy Implementation, Out-of-School Children, Universal Basic Education.*

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, the issue of out-of-school children is a major concern, leaving countless young minds without access to education. Recent data from the Cable Index sheds light on the severity of this crisis, revealing the top three states grappling with the highest percentages of out-of-school children. Kebbi, Sokoto, and Yobe stands out with alarming figures where 67.6%, 66.4%, and 62.9% of children respectively aged 6-15 are out of school relatively. These numbers paint a glim picture of the educational landscape showing deep-seated challenges

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

hindering children's right to learn and succeed (Sun, 2022). In Kebbi state, nearly seven out of ten children miss out on formal education reflecting issues like insecurity, poverty and inadequate infrastructure. Similarly, in Sokoto state the situation is dire with over two-thirds of children out of school; limited educational facilities and low awareness of the importance of education contribute to high drop-out rates, especially among marginalized communities (UNICEF, 2023). Yobe state closely follows with nearly two-thirds of its children lacking schooling opportunities. The state's history of banditry has disrupted education with safety often prioritized over schooling (Adepoju and Fabiyi, 2023). Accordingly, challenges like child labour and early marriages worsen the problem, trapping communities in cycles of illiteracy and poverty (Sun, 2022). The impact of this crisis is profound, affecting both the current generation and the nation's future prosperity. Without concerted efforts and sustainable solutions, Nigeria risks wasting the potential of millions of youth and stalling socio-economic development (Adepoju and Fabiyi, 2023).

Furthermore, indicating a deteriorating trend, as at 2020, statistics showed that about 10.5 million of the country's children aged 5-14 years are not in school. Specifically at that time, only 61% of 6-11 year-olds regularly attend primary school and only 35.6% of children aged 36-59 months receive basic education (Sun, 2022). UNESCO's 2022 report also showed that, approximately 20 million Nigerian individuals of school-going age of its approximately 200 million populations are not enrolled in school. This amounted to 20% of Nigeria's entire population and is more than the overall population of out-of-school children in all the countries in Africa (UNICEF, 2023).

This is the scenario notwithstanding that Nigeria's educational system has witnessed a catalogue of changes in policies and programmes since the past six decades. With high level uncertainties beclouding meaningful planning in Nigeria's educational system, it imperatively becomes a fact that the implementation of education policies (the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1977 [revised thrice - 1981, 1998 and 2004]; the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Policy, 2000; the Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE) Policy, 2003; among others) should have been the most important of all policies which the Nigeria government should be concerned with. Importantly, Section 1(5) of the National Policy on Education had stressed the need for the provision of equal and unhindered access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at all levels both inside and outside the formal school system (FGN/NPE, 2004). The need for the realization of this objective informed the Federal Government's reintroduction of the UPE policy in a new cloak in the year 2000 as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy. Overall, this was a major policy made and put in place by the Federal Government to ensure citizen's unfettered access and accessibility to education but the extent of its implementation has come under serious scrutiny regarding the number of out-of-school and drop-out children in Nigeria in recent time.

By access to education it is often globally implied: "on-schedule enrolment and progression of children at appropriate age, regular attendance, learning consistent with national achievement norms, a learning environment that is safe enough to allow learning to take place, and opportunities to learn that are equitably distributed" (Lewin, 2021:29). Access to education world-wide is bound to its compulsory nature; it is believed that all school-age children must be granted access free from any form of discrimination or encumbrances (accessibility). Universal access to education is the ability of all people to have equal opportunity in education regardless of social class, race, gender, sexuality, location, ethnic background or physical and mental dispositions. In formal education, the term access typically refers to the ways in which

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

educational institutions and policies such as admission, retention and transition policies ensure – or at least strive to ensure – that children have equal and equitable opportunities to take full advantage of their education (OECD, 2022). Viewed critically, one can decipher that access to education is slightly different but has relationship with its accessibility.

Precisely, the highest performing education systems are those that combine quality with equity. Equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background and location, are not in any way, obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness); and, that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion) - all referring to both access and accessibility to education (United Nations, 2023). In such education system, the vast majority of children have the opportunity to attain high level skills regardless of their own personal, spatial (locational) and socio-economic circumstances; they give all children opportunities for a good quality education and not ending up as drop-outs or out-of-school children (OECD, 2022).

The term "out-of-school children" refers to children who are yet to be enrolled in any formal education, excluding pre-primary education; the age range of out-of-school children is 6-11 years (United Nations, 2023). Out-of-school children are therefore school-age children that are supposed to be in schools but are not due to parental and governmental failures to provide accessible quality education for them; they are young children of school age that are roaming the streets without access to a functional formal educational (Ojelade, Aiyedun & Aregbesola, 2022). Simply put, it is a non-attendance to school of school-age children for some established reasons or factors. Sadly, they are children whom the government and the parents have failed to provide quality basic education for.

The 1979 Constitution had put education on the concurrent list, which implies that the responsibilities and authority in education is shared among the three tiers of government (i.e., federal, state and local governments). Between 1983 and 1999, a military era, decrees such as Decree No. 16 of 1985, Decree 26 of 1988 and Decree 36 of 1990 were all promulgated to guide and regulate the conduct (operations and financing) of education in the country and these were carried into the 1999 Constitution (as amended 2011 and 2014). Observably, as a result of chronic under-investment in education by the governments, Nigerian households where they are capable end up picking up almost 72% of total education expenditure in the country; hence, households lament the high cost of sending their children to school (UNICEF, 2023). Another clear consequence of this under-investment is the lack of or inadequacy of public schools to provide or ensure the needed access and equity. For that, most large Nigerian cities have experienced a proliferation at every nook and cranny, of low-cost, substandard and shanty private schools augmenting this shortfall, but which mostly operate outside government control and for capitalist business or commercial purposes (Adepoju and Fabiyi, 2023). The rural areas are worst off as schools are either not existing at all, highly inaccessible due to terrain and vulnerability of location or simply, too far away from the recommended children's walking-distance of between 0 to 3 kilometers or walking-time of less than 30 minutes (OECD, 2022).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory of causation is adopted as the framework of analysis in this study. The theory, also known as the causality theory, refers to the ability of one variable to impact another: the first variable either causes the second variable to exist or cause the incidence of the second variable to fluctuate. Early theorists associated with this thought are Aristotle and David Hume. To them, causal explanation seeks to explain a set of observed events in terms of the

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

hypothesized latent events that caused those observations. The causal theory also holds that the transaction between the perceiver and the world should be analyzed primarily in terms of the causal relation underlying the transaction (Grice, 1961). Traditionally, indirect realism was associated with the causal theory, but not all versions of causal theory (see Vision, 1997); though the causal principle seems relevant in all view of perception, whether direct or indirect.

Aristotle while philosophically proposing this theory noted that everything has a basic source of being, and everything tends towards some goal or shape. His theory of causation identifies four causes: material, formal, efficient and final. These causes explain why something exists or occurs, considering its physical composition, essential or existential form, external influences, and ultimate purpose. In Aristotle's view of causation, all other "becoming sources", whether formal, efficient or material are subservient or subordinate to the overarching or overall teleological movement. The first, which is formal cause, is the human perception of the phenomenon's shape as it progresses towards its final form. This he linked to the second - the effective cause - following from which, he identified a cause called "efficient causality". Aristotle believes this is why human situations go through a transformation from what came before, through to the current situation. Finally, is the "significant reason" to which Aristotle discussed what has become known as "material cause" in which he asserts that, because one source of becoming is the substance from which a thing is produced, humans experience change as they do. This contention serves as the foundation of Hume's thought of causation which demonstrates such analyses as 'regularity' analysis, 'manipulation' analysis, 'counterfactual' analysis, as well as 'probabilistic' analysis. Causality to Hume assumes that the given value of any independent item is the reason for a dependent item. This means that a people's value on 'Y' is impacted by their value on 'X', and vice versa.

The theory of causation therefore explains the relationship that arises between two temporally contemporaneous or sequential occurrences wherein, the first (the cause) produces the second (the effect). Unlike the concepts of continuity and succession, however, the concept of necessary connection is here subjective in the definition as it emanates from the deception of reflecting events that one have encountered as being constantly conjoined and succeeding one another in a certain order; rather than resulting from any observable properties in the circumstances or situations in the events themselves. As Cook and William put it:

> The law of causation or the principles of causality asserts that whatever happens (action) or whatever is (being) must have a cause, of which that happening or being is the effect. Further implied is that everything happens for a reason; thus, for every effect, there is a specific cause and that is why Aristotle asserts that we live in a world governed by law and chance, where everything happens for a reason, whether or not we know what it is. Thus, because of the cause and effect relationship between two things, it is 'something' that makes 'something' else to happen (Cook and William, 2023:18).

The doctrine therefore affirms that the effect is inherent in the cause in some way and the effect is thus either a real or apparent modification of the cause. Thus the conclusion that cause and effect is the relationship between two events or situations where the cause is directly responsible for creating the effect.

As also observed by Norwich and Chatelier, (2021), the cause is the initiating event or situation and the effect is the result of the cause and for that, they identified three principal underlying conditions: (i) the temporal precedence which simply implies that one thing come before the other in terms of time (effect cannot be physically presented before the cause, thus,

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

an effect cannot come before the cause in a timeline event); (ii) the two events must be related to one another; consequently, if the cause doesn't happen, then the effect shall not take place. The strength of the cause also determines the strength of the effect; (iii) the relationship between the cause and the effect must be direct, which means that the effect is the direct result of the cause, not just a coincidental occurrence. Once these three conditions are met, a cause and effect relationship has been established – but cause and effect relationships don't come in just one form but in different forms.

In relation to the issue under discussion, the assumption here is that the prevalent high numbers and varied proportions of out-of-school children is a direct consequence (the effect) of the prevailing levels of implementation of the UBE policy on access - school distance (the cause) from the children's home and those of the other attendant causes (school location, insecurity, poor financing, cultural and religious practices, among others) across the geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Hence, it is a natural occurrence that if the schools are not properly located, it must have consequences on children's attendance to school. School location in terms of its distance to the feeding population (here the school-age children), along with the ripple effects will definitely lead to either children being out-of-school or dropping out of school. The magnitude of the out-of-school case is aptly explained in the second and the third principles as espoused above by Norwich and Chatelier, (2021) relating to the fact that if the cause doesn't happen, then the effect shall not take place; and that the effect is the direct result of the cause, not just a coincidental occurrence. Hence, variation in the out-of-school children's proportion inferentially, is a direct effect of the levels of access and accessibility of schools to the children in the different geopolitical zones in Nigeria.

Accessibility generally can be viewed as the ability to access and benefit from some system or entity (World Education Blog, 2023). The concept focuses on enabling access for people who are disadvantaged through other forms of assistance or alternative means. Accessibility is not to be confused with usability (UNESCO, 2023). Accessibility is also strongly related to universal design; the process of creating products (siting of schools) that are useable by widest possible range of people (the school-age children) operating within the widest possible range of situations (diverse school locations). Accessible location is focused on ensuring that there are no barriers to accessibility for all people including those that might be disadvantaged (Ojelade, Aiyedun and Aregbesola, 2022).

Therefore school location and distance could be major factors in preventing children from enrolling in primary school or causing them to drop out (Theunynck, 2021). Schools that are located at long distances from children's homes increases their opportunity costs of schooling and can pose safety and security hazards, especially for girls on their way to/from school (World Education Blog, 2023). This is in addition to the economic cost therein to parents such as cost of providing transport to school or accessing boarding facilities as alternatives (Lewin, 2021).

Schools may be located too far away due to difficulties in school construction; difficulties in the planning that determines the location of schools; the existence of small, dispersed communities; or due to migration challenges among certain populations such as for nomadic communities (Ojelade, Aiyedun and Aregbesola, 2022). Hence, the strategies to address the geographic distribution of schools should include school placements, facilitating access to already existing schools, and trying to supply an adequate substitute in an area (Theunynck, 2021); all directed towards ensuring that distance norm is maintained.

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

Distance norm refer to the maximum distance school children travel to reach their most nearby school, which is used in determining school catchment areas (along with the norm of the minimum population for each catchment area) (Obanya, 2020). The establishment of distance norms or catchment areas can have significant impact on children's education because they can determine which school children can attend; and even in some countries, whether or not education is considered compulsory (Kenya, 2020). Distance norms typically require that schools are located within thirty to forty-five minutes (30mins to 45mins) walking time or within three kilometer (3km) from children's homes (UBEC, 2004). However, some countries may have larger distance norms, such as Chad, which has a five kilometer (5km) norm due to low population density (UNESCO, 2023). The prescribed distance norm worldwide is within less than 3-5km; where in some locations this established distance norm may be too far for children to safely travel, particularly if there is difficult terrain, then closer smaller schools will be more appropriate (UNICEF, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). If schools distance norms are reduced, then there will be a need for an increased number of smaller schools, in place of larger schools that are further away, which would likely need to be organized in multi-grade classes (Theunynck, 2021).

Meaningful access and its equality which was seriously addressed in the UBE implementation blueprint in several sections and items can be seen as referring to full and unfettered educational opportunity devoid of all manners of exclusions; that which is crowned by successful learning and improved life chances for all classes of beneficiaries whose knowledge and skills, positive values and attitude should contribute to reducing socio-economic inequalities and poverty in the wider society (Obanya, 2020).

While physical access addresses geographical barriers to expanding and generalizing access in which the problem is usually one of long distance between homes and school, in the Nigerian context this situation manifest in a variety of forms. These include: lack of schools in the immediate neighbourhood of the child, difficult and impenetrable terrains separating human settlements such as swamps, creeks, hills and mountains, desert environments, forests, etc; sparsely populated areas; and, groups that reject the educational facilities in their immediate neighbourhood (UNICEF, 2023; Obanya, 2020).

Sociological access barriers are barriers confronting children who are forced to leave school prematurely, most usually for 'petty' employment or commercial/family activities or to contribute to household work, among others (Olokpade, 2022). Psychological access barriers include: children being physically present but not learning significantly well due to having under-age and over-age children in one class both of whom are likely to have a feeling of "not fitting in"; children with disabilities and special learning needs; children who are new comers to the community in which the school is located; children who have not been adequately prepared in the home for school learning; children who may receive insufficient attention from the teacher because of inherent bias; and, children who find classroom activities not relevant to their daily lives and circumstances (UNESCO, 2023).

Furthermore, cultural access barrier are those barriers derived mainly from aspects of such persisted activities which have outstripped post-independence reforms. They arise from such problems as the school day and the school calendar not always matching with the cultural day and the traditional society calendar; or the language of the school being different from that of the community; the school not accommodating the different religious beliefs and practices; and the school not being sensitive to the social and religious practices of the various communities in the neighbourhood (World Bank, 2023).

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

Political barriers on the other hand refer to constraints arising from government policies and actions which tend to marginalize or restrict access to some people contrary to constitutional provisions or legal frameworks' stipulations (Theunynck, 2021). These are usually based on interest politics and intents to unjustly exclude or marginalize some people while giving undue advantage to others. Such include policy considerations as the quota system policy, the disadvantaged versus advantaged states' policies, catchment area policies, and federal character policy, among others. These in varied magnitudes have grossly impact negatively on the state of school attendance in Nigeria in recent time (World Bank, 2023; Akinkuotu, 2022).

Many have expressed opinion that the state of school attendance in Nigeria is in a very precarious situation. UNESCO (2023) observes that there are over 244 million children and youths between the ages of 6 and 18 worldwide who are still out of school, with Nigeria along with India and Pakistan having the highest figures globally. Ogunode, Chinweuba and Ayoke, (2023) succinctly note that Nigeria is shamefully home to almost 20 million plus out-of-school children and drop-outs with 33% from the Northeast constituting the highest proportion of Nigeria's school-age children that are out of school. This was followed by North-central - 26%; North-west - 25%; South-south, - 24%; South-west - 22%; and South-east - 19%.

This corroborated UNESCO's report which estimated that northern states have the highest number of out-of-school children with Kano (420,000), Adamawa (437,000), Kebbi (814,925), Gombe (300,000), and Borno (330,389) approximately topping the list (UNESCO, 2023).

Lagos is the third state with the highest number of out-of-school children in the South-west despite having over 1,009 public schools spread across 20 local government areas, out of which 10 has a high number of out-of-school children (UNICEF, 2023). This is worrisome against the backdrop of the federal government's declaration of spending over N1bn ($2.3m) on feeding school pupils on daily basis throughout the federation to keep them in school (Akinkuotu, 2022). This notwithstanding, it is regrettable that Nigeria do not meet the internationally recommended benchmark that countries should spend 15-20% of their annual national budget on education.

Hence, statistics show that in the 2021 budget only a paltry 5.7% was allocated to education by the Nigeria federal government; in 2022, the allocation was marginally increased to 7.2% and in the 2023 budget, 8.8% was given to education (Vanguard, 2023). Sadly reveled here therefore, is that majority of our leaders are hardly worried about the conditions our children are put as a result of this poor funding.

Furthermore, others (Lawal and Babalola, 2022; Hawkins, 2021; Theunynck, 2021) have argued that there are yet other sets of worries that should engage Nigerians about their children among which is the safety of our school environment. Hawkins (2021) reiterate that there is undoubtedly, serious need as a primary responsibility for the government, to ensure that children are safe when they are in school which calls for the schools to be close to and easily accessible within their communities.

He observed that no child should be afraid to enter a classroom – afraid that their school might be attacked or that they might be kidnapped as a result of the vulnerability of the location of the school. In the same vein therefore, no parent ought to fear sending children to school (Vanguard, 2023).

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

As observed by UNICEF (2023), this is on the backdrop of the fact that in 2021 alone, there were 25 terrorist attacks on schools and a total of 1,440 children were abducted, while 16 children were killed. The situation worsened as 11,536 Nigerian schools were closed down after December 2020 because of abductions and security issues and these closures adversely impacted the studies of around 1.3 million Nigerian children. It was further noted that specifically, in March 2021 alone, about 618 schools was shut down in Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Niger, and Yobe states over fear of attack and abduction of pupils and staff (Vanguard, 2023).

Worrisomely, in March 2024, 287 school children and some teachers were abducted by bandits/terrorists from a school in Kuriga village, Chikun LGA of Kaduna state. This is the prevailing situation despite the Federal Government's "safe-school initiative" (ThisDay, 2024). Hence, UNICEF and many other Nigerians are of the opinion that Nigeria's education system can only be transformed through adequate attention and funding to make schools safer and more accessible to children (UNICEF, 2023).

The consequences of all these actions and inactions are quite palpable as one would not be wrong to link them with the current drop-outs syndrome and out-of-school situations. The victims are less likely to take up further learning opportunities and less able to participate fully in the civic and democratic aspects of modern societies; hence, dropping out of school penalizes a child for life (Lawal and Babalola, 2022). The child who leaves school without completing the basic education programme or without the relevant skills is sometimes not better than the child who did not enroll into the school system at all as they have fewer life prospects. This can be seen in lower initial and life time earnings, more difficulties in adapting to rapidly changing knowledge-based economies, and higher risks for unemployment (Theunynck, 2021).

As noted by OECD (2022), out-of-school children impose high costs on society as children who are out-of-school limit economies' capacity to produce, grow and innovate. Out-of-school children syndrome damages social cohesion and mobility, and imposes additional costs on public budgets to deal with the consequences – higher spending on public health and social support, and greater criminality as seen in the Northern Nigeria today, among others (Nwokeocha, 2023). For all these reasons, improving equity especially in access and reducing out-of-school and drop-outs should then be a high priority for Nigeria Federal, States and Local governments (Sun, 2023).

Furthermore, studies has proven that equity especially in access to education can go hand-in-hand with quality; and that reducing drop-outs or out-of-school population strengthens individual and societies' capabilities to respond to recession and contribute to economic growth and social wellbeing (Raliyat, Umma and Aisha, 2022). This means that investing in high quality with greater opportunities and access to education for all, from the early years to at least the end of senior secondary is the most profitable education policy (UNICEF, 2020). This is because children who have enriching access to education and schools will be more likely to stay in education and successfully transfer to the labour market (Daily Independent, 2023).

Those who struggle to access education and schools at early stages but receive adequate support and timely interventions in accessing schools have higher probabilities of finishing despite any difficulties in their family or social background (UNICEF, 2023). This is why Nwokeocha, 2023; Burde and Linden, 2023; Sperling, Winthrop and Kwauk, 2023; Hite, 2022; Pisani and Dowd, 2022; Theunynck, 2021; UNICEF, 2020; Kenya, 2020; UNESCO, 2020; World Bank, 2019d; among others variously suggested measure such as construction of small

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

schools with multi-grade teaching, use of existing buildings, mobile school option, building schools near learners or pupils especially building new schools in strategic places in order to decrease the distance to school and reach as many children as possible, and using such policy measures as the Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA) programme of Gombe State under Governor Muhammed Inuwa Yahaya, Edo State's "Back-to-School" and the "School O'clock" initiative, arresting of defaulting parents and guardians, the Buhari's "School Feeding" programme, and the "Better Education Service Delivery for all" programme, among others to ameliorate the cause and effects of the out-of-school crises in many countries including Nigeria.

However, despite the match between the experience and the environment, the presence of a causal relation does not yet move us to accept that the case (as in school distance and out-of-school crisis) is not one of perception but reality (Pears, 1976). Though it seems clear nevertheless that an action's being a cause of a perceptual state is not sufficient for perception; but if we have multiple observed events spaced out in time, causal explanation could produce hypotheses about how those events are related causally (Kripke and Putnam, 1975). Therefore, the theory of causation is deemed appropriate in explaining this situation other than just for its philosophical appeal.

The availability of statistic information on the social world which has increased in recent time has brought much to its use. But using data to guide goal directed activity appears to need more than simple extrapolation or projection; it frequently seems to need some understanding of the situation's causal character.

Statement of Problem

The Right to Education is clearly enshrined in Chapter 2 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Although regarded as non-justiceable, it has been given effect and made justiceable by other domestic laws such as the Universal Basic Education Act, 2004. The Act provides for compulsory, free universal basic education for all children of school age in the country. By that, it is an offence for a parent not to enroll his or her child/ward in school, and such parent is liable to be reprimanded on the first offence or risk a jail term on subsequent convictions (U.B.E. Act, 2004).

But today, if there is one scary issue of great national concern, which should touch the conscience of most enlightened citizens; it is the huge number of children currently out of school in Nigeria. Although in 2021 figures of an analytical statistics organization, SBMorgan Intelligence, had put the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria at more than 12.3 million, empirical evidence points to the fact that many more Nigerian children actually dropped out of school.

The 2023 UNESCO data puts the out-of-school children and youth's figure at about 20.2 million (drop-outs inclusive), in spite of the efforts said to be made by various governments to contain the menace. This is very worrisome as it is far greater than those of other African countries: Ethiopia (10.5 million), the Democratic Republic of Congo (5.9 million) and Kenya (1.8 million) (UNESCO, 2023).

Even at that, many of the children who are lucky to be in the classrooms trek distance to the nearest public school - beyond the worldwide prescribed distance norm of within 30 minutes walking time or less than 3km distance. Many come on ragged clothes as school uniform or torn polythene bags as their school bag. Also, many of them do not have easy

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

accessibility to school either as a result of difficult terrain or as a result of the location of the most nearby public or private school to their homes.

Equally is the problem of unfettered access to continuous learning that would ensure they emerge with quality skills to equip them for prosperous future due to discriminatory government policies, local cultural practices and beliefs, poorly equipped and un-conducive classroom environment aside the vulnerability of most schools' location.

Nigeria signed up to the promise of ensuring free quality and accessible primary and secondary education for all children by 2030. For the last two years, UNESCO has led a process whereby governments set up their own national benchmarks for progress towards that goal. Nigeria accented to this important initiative, committing to reduce the percentage of out-of-school children of primary school age to 17% by 2030 and that of youth of upper secondary school to 26% as well as inaccessibility to education acquisition by 2030 (United Nations, 2023).

This required a significant commitment to investment in the education system. The current economic situation in the country adds urgency to the task, with greater unemployment and increasing demand for higher level skills. Yet, while some states and geopolitical zones focus on the reduction of encumbrances that engender inaccessibility and out-of-school children syndrome as a priority, others show little consistency or efforts in their implementation of the policies and practices that support equality of accessibility.

The problem therefore becomes variedly or differently tackled among the different geopolitical zones in Nigeria with some being worst hit as there are variations in the proportion of out-of-school children across the geopolitical zones. Hence the puzzle: Is the variation in the implementation of the UBE policy on equality of access to school responsible for the variations in rate of out-of-school children among the geopolitical zones in Nigeria?

Purpose of the Study

The general objective of this study is to ascertain if the variations in the level of implementation of the UBE policy on equality of access to school is responsible for the variations in the rate of out-of-school children among the geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Specifically the study:

1) Assessed the level of implementation of the UBE policy on equality of access (walking time and distance) to schools across the geopolitical zones in Nigeria.
2) Ascertained if variations in the level of implementation of the policy on access is responsible for the variations in the rate of out-of-school children among the geopolitical zones in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1) Has the UBE policy on equality of access (walking time and distance) to school been effectively implemented across the geopolitical zones in Nigeria?
2) Are the variations in the level of implementation of the policy on access responsible for the variations in the rate of out-of-school children among the geopolitical zones in Nigeria?

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

METHODS

The design of this study was evaluative survey research design. Evaluative survey is a systematic survey which assesses certain performance criteria with the intention of making a value judgment on what is assessed (Mba, 2004).

It is considered evaluative research design because it focuses on the collection, analysis and interpretation of data on the implementation of the Universal Basic Education policy on equality of access to school with a view to making value judgment on whether this could be responsible for the variations in the out-of-school children proportion in Nigeria.

According to Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2006), an evaluative study is the one which attempts to assess the worth of an event or situation with the sole purpose of making a judgment about it. In the same way, the present study sought to assess the situation of the implementation of the UBE policy on equality of access to school among the geo-political zones in Nigeria with the sole purpose of making a judgment as to whether it is responsible for the differences in the rates of out-of-school children situation across the geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Hence, evaluative survey research design was suitable for the study.

The study relied on both primary and secondary data. The primary data was generated using a structured questionnaire while secondary data were from sources like the Newspapers, Internet, Universal Basic Education Commission reports, Nigeria Bureau of Statistics reports, UNICEF and UNESCO documents, among others. These data were used in answering the research questions, and drawing conclusion.

The population of study consists of all the Nigerian children of school-going age (4-16yrs) estimated at over 49,771,229. Out of this population, a sample of 7,269 school-age children was drawn comprising of 2,930 urban dwellers and 4,339 rural dwellers. As a result of the problem of insecurity in the country, these were disproportionately drawn from the six geopolitical zones thus: North Central, 1,013; North East, 1,341; North West, 1,261; South East, 1,033; South South, 1,159 and South West, 1,462 school-age children. Mixed method approach was adopted where stratified simple random and purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting the sample giving consideration to their accessibility.

The researchers distributed and collected 7,269 copies of questionnaire with the help of thirty-seven (37) research assistants from the different localities in the different geopolitical zones. This was resorted to since they are in a better position to understand and use the local language in explaining, directing and assisting these respondents in completing correctly, the questionnaire. The structured questionnaire was developed by the researchers and validated by three (3) experts before adoption. The reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach Alpha reliability test and it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87. The data collected were analyzed using mean and percentage.

A mean score of between 0.1 and 1.0 was interpreted as very adequate; 1.1 to 2.0 was interpreted as adequate; 2.1 to 3.0 was seen as fairly adequate and 3.1 to 4.0 was interpreted as inadequate and 4.1 and above was seen to be very inadequate for the kilometer distance to school while mean walking time of < 10mins was interpreted as very adequate; 10mins – 20mins was interpreted as adequate; 21mins – 30mins was seen as fairly adequate; 31mins to 40mins was considered as inadequate and > 40mins is considered as very inadequate.

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

RESULTS

The results of the study with respect to research questions 1 and 2 were presented in tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 below.

Research Question 1: Has the UBE policy on equality of access (walking time and distance) to school been effectively implemented across the geopolitical zones in Nigeria?

Access to school was assessed by examining the children's approximate walking time and kilometer distance to the nearest primary schools. The results as presented in tables 1 to 5 below were used in answering the above research question.

Table 1: Walking Time to the Nearest Primary School of the Respondents

Background Characteristics	Minutes to the Nearest Prim. Sch.						Total	No of Children	Mean walking time (mins)	% living closer to Private schools
	0-15	16-30	31-45	46-60	Over 60 mins	Don't Know				
Residence										
Urban	85.2	11.0	1.8	0.8	0.7	0.6	100.0	2,930	11.7	62.2
Rural	62.3	20.0	4.4	4.4	8.1	0.9	100.0	4,339	29.3	17.9
Geopolitical Zone										
North Central	67.0	17.5	2.7	2.9	8.5	1.4	100.0	1,023	36.5	31.9
North East	53.9	22.4	5.4	4.3	13.3	0.7	100.0	1,341	36.2	11.3
North West	70.5	16.3	3.1	4.4	4.8	0.9	100.0	1,261	22.5	14.8
South East	60.1	27.6	6.5	3.8	1.4	0.6	100.0	1,033	18.6	33.9
South South	74.0	18.8	2.6	2.1	2.1	0.4	100.0	1,159	15.6	50.3
South West	85.1	6.6	2.5	3.8	1.4	0.6	100.0	1,462	13.7	61.1
Total	**68.4**	**18.2**	**3.8**	**3.6**	**5.3**	**0.8**	**100.0**	**7,269**	**24.1**	**31.1**

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 2: Respondents' K/M Distance to the Nearest Primary School

Background Characteristics	K/M To Nearest Pri. Sch.						Total	No of Children	Mean Distance (km)	% living closer to the Private Sch.
	< 1	1-2	3-4	5-6	>6	Don't Know				
Residence										
Urban	83.9	14.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	0.6	100.0	2,930	0.2	62.2
Rural	61.5	24.8	6.3	2.7	3.7	0.9	100.0	4,339	1.1	17.9
Geopolitical Zone										
North Central	71.7	16.4	4.6	2.4	3.5	1.4	100.0	1,013	1.1	31.9
North East	54.4	27.2	5.8	5.6	6.4	0.7	100.0	1,341	1.5	11.3
North West	72.2	19.2	3.7	1.4	2.6	0.9	100.0	1,261	0.7	14.8
South East	45.7	41.0	10.6	1.6	0.5	0.6	100.0	1,033	1.0	33.9
South South	74.2	21.7	2.6	0.4	0.6	0.4	100.0	1,159	0.4	50.3
South West	80.2	13.7	3.8	0.7	1.0	0.6	100.0	1,462	0.4	61.1
Total	**68.2**	**21.6**	**4.7**	**2.0**	**2.6**	**0.8**	**100.0**	**7,269**	**0.8**	**31.1**

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 1 showed that 68% of children live within 15 minutes and 5% live over 60 minutes away from the nearest primary school. Children in urban areas (85%) live within 15 minutes to the nearest school than children in rural areas (62%). The mean walking time from the household to the closest primary school is 12 minutes (urban areas) and 29 minutes (rural areas). Significant regional differences in the mean walking time were recorded between the Northern and the Southern zones (23-37 minutes against 14-19 minutes respectively).

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

Similarly, Table 2 showed that 68% of children live within 1 kilometer range of the nearest school; 84% of urban children against 62%, of rural live within 1km of the closest primary school. Comparatively, 80%, South West zone; 74%, South-South; 72%, North Central; 72%, North West; 54%, North East; and 46%, South East live within 1km of the nearest school. These findings are largely consistent with those for walking time (Table 1). Table 3 and 4 below showed specifically walking time and kilometer distance to the nearest Government (Public) primary school.

Table 3: Walking Time to the Nearest Government (Public) Primary School

Background Characteristics	Mins. To Nearest Govt. Pri. Sch.						Total	No of Children	Mean walking time (mins)
	0-15	16-30	31-45	46-60	Over 60 mins	Don't Know			
Residence									
Urban	67.4	24.8	4.3	1.8	1.2	0.4	100.0	2,930	18.3
Rural	58.1	22.4	5.1	5.0	8.7	0.7	100.0	4,339	31.4
Geopolitical Zone									
North Central	59.7	23.6	3.7	3.3	8.5	1.2	38.3	1,013	38.3
North East	52.9	23.5	5.6	4.2	13.4	0.5	36.5	1,341	36.5
North West	70.9	16.0	3.3	4.4	4.6	0.7	23.1	1,261	23.1
South East	46.5	35.9	9.6	5.3	2.3	0.4	23.2	1,033	23.2
South South	56.9	31.1	5.6	4.0	3.1	0.3	22.5	1,159	22.5
South West	64.8	20.8	4.4	3.2	6.2	0.5	22.8	1,462	22.8
Total	**60.9**	**23.1**	**4.8**	**4.0**	**6.5**	**0.6**	**100.0**	**7,269**	**27.5**

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 4: Distance to the Nearest Government (Public) Primary School

Background Characteristics	K/M To Nearest Govt. Pri. Sch.						Total	No of Children	Mean Distance (km)
	< 1	1-2	3-4	5-6	>6	Don't Know			
Residence									
Urban	70.5	25.7	2.6	0.2	0.4	0.5	100.0	2,930	0.5
Rural	57.7	26.9	7.4	3.1	4.1	0.8	100.0	4,339	1.2
Geopolitical Zone									
North Central	67.4	20.3	4.9	2.3	4.0	1.1	100.0	1,013	1.2
North East	53.2	28.5	5.7	5.5	6.4	0.6	100.0	1,341	1.5
North West	71.4	20.0	3.8	1.4	2.6	0.8	100.0	1,261	0.7
South East	32.7	48.5	15.4	1.9	0.8	0.6	100.0	1,033	1.4
South South	55.9	34.3	7.2	1.5	0.9	0.3	100.0	1,159	0.8
South West	68.9	22.4	4.5	1.2	2.4	0.6	100.0	1,462	0.8
Total	**61.6**	**26.5**	**6.0**	**2.2**	**3.0**	**0.7**	**100.0**	**7,269**	**1.0**

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 3 showed that 61% of children live within a 15-minutes' walk while 7% live in distances of more than 60 minutes walking time to the nearest Government (Public) Primary School. Children in urban areas (67%) live closer to school than children in rural areas (58%). Overall, the mean walking time from the household to the closest Government (Public) Primary school is 28 minutes. Among children in the urban areas, the mean walking time is 18 minutes, and 31 minutes among those in the rural areas. The proportion that live within 15 minutes walking time to the nearest Government (Public) Primary Schools varies by zone with the highest (71%) in the North West and lowest (47%) in the South East. Furthermore, Table 4

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

showed largely a consistency with the walking time to the nearest government (public) primary school as 62% live within 1km and just 3% live more than 6km away. 71%, of urban against 58%, rural children live within less than 1km from the closest government (public) primary school. Across the geopolitical zones it is: North Central, 67%; North East, 53%; North West, 71%; South East, 33%; South South, 56% and South West, 69%. The mean kilometer distance is 0.5km for urban against 1.2km for rural dwellers. Across the geopolitical zones it is: North Central, 1.2km; North East, 1.5km; North West, 0.7km; South East, 1.4km; South South, 0.8km and South West, 0.8km.

Table 5: Summary of Mean ratings of Walking Time and KM Distance across Geopolitical Zones

Background Characteristics	Mean Walking Time (Nearest Govt. P/S) (In Mins)	Decision	Mean Walking Time (Nearest P/S) (In Mins)	Decision	Mean KM Dist. (Nearest Govt. P/S)	Decision	Mean KM Dist. (Nearest P/S)	Decision
Residence								
Urban	18.3	Adequate	11.7	Adequate	0.5	Very Adequate	0.2	Very Adequate
Rural	31.4	Inadequate	29.3	Fair	1.2	Adequate	1.1	Adequate
Geopolitical Zone								
North Central	38.3	Inadequate	36.5	Inadequate	1.2	Adequate	1.1	Adequate
North East	36.5	Inadequate	36.2	Inadequate	1.5	Adequate	1.5	Adequate
North West	23.1	Fair	22.5	Fair	0.7	Very Adequate	0.7	Very Adequate
South East	23.2	Fair	18.6	Adequate	1.4	Adequate	1.0	Very Adequate
South South	22.5	Fair	15.6	Adequate	0.8	Very Adequate	0.4	Very Adequate
South West	22.8	Fair	13.7	Adequate	0.8	Very Adequate	0.4	Very Adequate

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 5 showed the remarkable disparities in the implementation of the UBE policy on equality of access to schools among the urban and rural dwellers (18.3mins and 11.7mins for urban as against the rural's 31.4mins and 29.3mins mean walking time to the nearest government (public) primary and any primary schools respectively).

The kilometer distances to the nearest government (public) primary are 1.1km, 1.5km and 0.7km for the north and 1.0km, 0.4km and 0.4km for the south respectively. Therefore, since there are remarkable differences among the rural and urban dwellers as well as among the geopolitical zones, this indicates that the UBE policy on equality of access (walking time and kilometer distance) to school has not been effectively implemented in Nigeria.

Research Question 2: Are the variations in the level of implementation of the policy on access responsible for the variations in the rate of out-of-school children among the geopolitical zones in Nigeria?

To answer the above research question data from the Universal Basic Education Commission on the schools and classroom situation in public primary schools across Nigeria and the proportion of out-of-school children in Nigeria were aggregated as shown in tables 6 to 8 below.

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

Table 6: The Classroom Situation in Public Primary Schools in Nigeria, 2024

STATE	LGAs	No. of Schools	Avr. Per LG	Total Classroom Blocks	No of Streams	Classrooms in Good Condition	% in Good Condition	National Ranking
North-Central Geopolitical Zone								
Benue	23	2364	103	9255	21228	3052	33	22nd
Kogi	21	1562	74	14410	11849	8552	59	9th
Kwara	16	1426	91	3838	21648	2647	69	7th
Nasarawa	13	981	76	3320	9496	600	18	32nd
Niger	25	1437	58	5487	7235	3445	63	8th
Plateau	17	1534	90	7472	15911	702	9	35th
FCT Abuja	6	281	47	2305	3270	455	20	30th
Total	**121**	**9,585**	**79**	**46,087**	**90,637**	**19,453**	**39**	**4th**
North-East Geopolitical Zone								
Adamawa	21	1315	63	4244	21044	1146	27	26th
Bauchi	20	1147	57	11395	11395	1841	16	34th
Borno	27	1715	64	8389	14675	4384	52	10th
Gombe	11	783	71	8770	9596	1821	21	29th
Taraba	16	984	62	11000	10997	3790	34	20th
Yobe	17	777	46	4940	12329	412	8	36th
Total	**112**	**6,721**	**60**	**48,738**	**80,036**	**13,394**	**26**	**6th**
North-West Geopolitical Zone								
Jigawa	27	1489	55	23472	10885	4705	20	30th
Kaduna	23	1640	71	14744	16284	3686	40	16th
Kano	44	2270	52	13549	16331	7021	52	10th
Kastina	34	1797	53	5652	10737	3946	70	6th
Kebbi	21	992	47	2878	12776	841	29	24th
Sokoto	23	2088	91	10158	13198	3433	34	20th
Zamfara	14	831	36	3915	5427	1590	41	15th
Total	**186**	**11,107**	**60**	**74,368**	**85,638**	**25,222**	**41**	**3rd**
South-East Geopolitical Zone								
Abia	17	1103	65	9177	13741	2288	25	28th
Anambra	21	935	45	7289	14734	3673	50	12th
Ebonyi	13	754	58	6350	4112	2822	44	14th
Enugu	17	1426	84	38387	21648	30750	80	2nd
Imo	27	1220	45	15630	16085	13720	88	1st
Total	**95**	**4,996**	**77**	**49,446**	**59,669**	**26,293**	**48**	**2nd**
South-South Geopolitical Zone								
Akwa-Ibom	31	1086	35	9128	17654	6841	75	3rd
Bayelsa	8	496	62	3738	9618	678	18	32nd
Cross River	18	807	45	7372	10165	2948	40	16th
Delta	25	1015	41	8401	138191	2448	29	24th
Edo	18	1013	56	11217	20183	4487	40	16th
Rivers	23	1027	45	9387	11786	2816	30	23rd
Total	**123**	**5,461**	**44**	**49,243**	**207,597**	**20,218**	**39**	**4th**
South-West Geopolitical Zone								
Ekiti	16	631	39	8250	16074	3215	39	19th
Lagos	20	920	46	18198	18198	8513	47	13th
Ogun	20	1309	66	10172	14712	2790	27	26th
Ondo	18	1129	63	6939	18873	5045	73	4th
Osun	30	1209	40	10551	1611	NA	NA	***
Oyo	33	1653	50	18321	25572	13054	71	5th
Total	**137**	**6,851**	**50**	**72,431**	**95,040**	**32,617**	**51**	**1st**
Grand Total	**774**	**44,721**	**58**	**340,313**	**618,617**	**137,197**	**41**	

Source: Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), 2025

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

Table 7: No of Out-of-School Children by States and Geo-Political Zones (2024)

Geo-Political Zone	States	No of Out-of Sch. Children	%	Rank	Geo-Political Zone	States	No of Out-of Sch. Children	%	Rank
North Central	Benue	383,022	14.01	14th	South East	Abia	86,124	4.70	34th
	Kogi	118,314		29th		Anambra	92,332		33rd
	Kwara	141,325		25th		Ebonyi	151,000		24th
	Nasarawa	204,771		21st		Enugu	117,091		30th
	Niger	478,412		10th		Imo	125,414		27th
	Plateau	258,256		18th					
	FCT	121,587		28th					
	Total = 1,705,687 (Mean = 243,670)					**Total = 571,961 (Mean = 114,392)**			
North East	Adamawa	489,855	27.17	9th	South South	Akwa Ibom	254,654	6.62	19th
	Bauchi	1,239,759		1st		Bayelsa	86,124		34th
	Borno	266,478		16th		Cross River	140,944		26th
	Gombe	567,852		8th		Delta	50,945		37th
	Taraba	338,975		15th		Edo	76,446		36th
	Yobe	405,100		13th		Rivers	196,584		22nd
	Total = 3,308,019 (Mean = 551,337)					**Total = 805,697 (Mean = 134,283)**			
North West	Jigawa	784,391	36.62	6th	South West	Ekiti	99,778	10.88	32nd
	Kaduna	652,990		7th		Lagos	229,246		20th
	Kano	837,479		5th		Ogun	158,797		23rd
	Katsina	873,633		4th		Ondo	113,746		31st
	Kebbi	877,677		3rd		Osun	260,522		17th
	Sokoto	462,164		12th		Oyo	463,280		11th
	Zamfara	883,952		2nd					
	Total = 4,458,609 (Mean = 636,944)					**Total = 1,325,369 (Mean = 220,895)**			
Grand Total = 12,175,342 (Grand Mean = 329, 063)									

Source: Compiled by the authors from UNESCO Report, 2024

Table 8: Percentage Distribution of Out-of-School Children in Nigeria 2024

High Incidence Rate				Moderate Incidence Rate				Low Incidence Rate			
State	%	Rank	Zone	State	%	Rank	Zone	State	%	Rank	Zone
Kebbi	67.6	1	NW	Plateau	23.2	14	NC	Akwa-Ibom	10.6	26	SS
Sokoto	66.4	2	NW	Kwara	22	15	NC	Kogi	10.2	27	NC
Yobe	62.9	3	NE	Kaduna	21.9	16	NW	Delta	9.3	28	SS
Zamfara	61.3	4	NW	Adamawa	21.7	17	NE	Rivers	7.7	29	SS
Bauchi	55.7	5	NE	Oyo	20.9	18	SW	Cross River	7.6	30	SS
Borno	54.2	6	NE	Ogun	20.5	19	SW	Enugu	7.5	31	SE
Jigawa	51.1	7	NW	Benue	18.4	20	NC	Bayelsa	7.4	32	SS
Gombe	48	8	NE	Ebonyi	16.7	21	SE	Lagos	6.4	33	SW
Katsina	45.9	9	NW	Ondo	13.8	22	SW	Abia	5.6	34	SE
Niger	42.8	10	NC	Osun	12.8	23	SW	Ekiti	5.1	35	SW
Kano	39.2	11	NW	FCT	12.8	23	NC	Imo	5.1	35	SE
Taraba	28.8	12	NE	Edo	11.3	25	SS	Anambra	2.9	37	SE
Nasarawa	25.4	13	NC								

Source: Compiled by the authors from UNESCO Report, 2024

Table 6 above showed the schools and classrooms situation in Nigeria. Specifically it showed the total number of schools, classroom blocks, streams and classrooms in good condition across the geopolitical zones.

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

The national average of number of schools per Local Government is 58. Across the geopolitical zones it is, North Central 79, North East 60, North West 60, South East 77, South South 44 and South West 50. Among the geopolitical zones, the South West comes first with 51% of the total number of schools, classroom blocks and classrooms in good condition and the South East geopolitical zone takes the second position (48%). It is only the South South geopolitical zone among the southern geopolitical zones that is ranked low (39%). On the other hand, the best of the Northern geopolitical zones is the North West in third position (41%) while the North Central (39%) and North East (26%) were in the 4th and 6th positions respectively. Apparently, schools in the south despite being less in number are better positioned with more conducive classroom blocks than their counterparts in the north.

Table 7, showed the ten (10) worst-hit states with the highest number of out-of-school children: Bauchi (1st), Zamfara (2nd), Kebbi (3rd), Katsina (4th), Kano (5th), Jigawa (6th), Kaduna (7th), Gombe (8th), Adamawa (9th), and Niger (10th) are all from the northern geopolitical zones. On the contrast eight (8) of the ten (10) states with the lowest number of out-of-school children: Delta (37th), Edo (36th), Bayelsa and Abia (34th), Anambra (33rd), Ekiti (32nd), Ondo (31st), Enugu (30th), are from the south, and only Kogi (29th), and FCT (28th) are from the north. Table 8, showed that the entire thirteen high incidences (cases) are from the northern geopolitical zones and except for one state from the North Central all the other eleven low incidences (cases) of out-of-school children in Nigeria are from the South East and South South states.

Deductively, since the number of schools/classroom blocks and those in good conditions in the southern geopolitical zones are greater than those in the north, and regarding the fact that the number of out-of-school children is less in the southern than in the northern geopolitical zones, it is inferred that children in the south have better access to schools than those in the north. Hence the variation in the level of implementation of the policy on access is responsible for the variations in the rate of out-of-school children among the geopolitical zones in Nigeria.

Findings

The major findings of the study are:

1) There are remarkable differences among the rural and urban dwellers as well as among the geopolitical zones in terms of walking time and kilometer distance to nearest school.
2) The number of schools and classroom blocks and those in good conditions in the southern geopolitical zones are greater than those in the Northern geopolitical zones.
3) There is greater number of out-of-school children in the northern than in the southern geopolitical zones.

DISCUSSION

The result of the study showed that there are variations in the mean walking time and kilometer distances to the nearest government primary school or even to the nearest primary school among the rural and urban dwellers as well as among the geopolitical zones (RQ1). The finding indicated that the UBE policy on equality of access (walking time and kilometer distance) to school has not been effectively implemented across the geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Thus, the kilometer distance is “very adequate” for urban as against “adequate” for rural dwellers. Across the geopolitical zones it showed “inadequate” for North East (38.3mins) and North Central (36.5mins) and “fair” for the rest (NW 23.1mins; SE 23.2mins, SS 22.5mins and SW 22.8mins). This agrees with the observation of the Universal Basic Education

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

Commission, UBEC (2023) that despite the fact that she has put in place more than 40,000 public primary schools and 6,330 junior secondary schools there are still many children who travel distances from their homes to the most nearby public schools. Thus, UNICEF (2023) decried the situation noting that many Nigerian children who are lucky to be in the classrooms trek distance to the nearest public school - beyond the worldwide prescribed distance norm of within 30 minutes walking distance or less than 3km. UNICEF (2023) also lamented that most of them do not have easy accessibility to school as a result of difficult terrain as well as the location of the most nearby public school to their homes. It also identified other problems as unfettered access to continuous learning due to discriminatory government policies, local cultural practices, and beliefs aside the vulnerability of most school's location.

The finding (RQ2) also indicated that the children in the south have greater access to schools than those in the north and hence the higher proportion of out-of-school children in the northern geopolitical zones. Specifically, the study had found that for the states with schools above the national average across the geopolitical zones, it is: North Central, 6 out of the 7 states; North East, 4 out of the 6 states; North West, 2 out of the 7 states; South East, 3 out of the 5 states; South-South, 1 out of the 6 states and South West, 2 out of the 6 states. Regarding those with more classroom blocks in good conditions the ranking showed that five of the top ten ranked states are from the Southern geopolitical zones - Imo (1st), Enugu (2nd), Akwa Ibom (3rd), Ondo (4th) and Oyo (5th) – while the rest – Katsina (6th), Kwara (7th), Niger (8th), Kogi (9th) and Kano (10th) are from the Northern geopolitical zones. Conversely, eight (8) of the eleven (11) bottom ranked – Yobe (36th), Plateau (35th), Bauchi (34th), Nassarawa (32nd), FCT and Jigawa (30th), Gombe (29th) and Adamawa (26th) are from the Northern geopolitical zones. Only three (3) states from the Southern geopolitical zones – Bayelsa (32nd), Abia (28th), and Ogun (26th) fall within the bottom ranked. Though put together, the number of schools in the north (27,413) are more than those in the south (17,308), the number of classrooms blocks (171,120) and those in good conditions (79,128) in the south are more than those in the north (169,193 and 58,069 respectively). This showed that the level of provision of schools and classrooms blocks as stipulated in the UBE implementation blueprint (action plan) has not been the same across the geopolitical zones but better in the southern geopolitical zones.

Relating the above to the high incidence of out-of-school children the study clearly showed that comparatively, most of the worst-hit states are from the North-West geopolitical zone (36.62% rate) followed by North-East (27.17% rate) and the North-Central (14.01% rate). The South's are comparatively better: South-East (only 4.70%); South-South (6.62%); and South-West (10.88%). Also, all the thirteen high incidence states are from the northern geopolitical zones: North West – 6/7; North East – 5/6; and, North Central – 2/7; South East - 0/5; South South - 0/6 and South West - 0/6. In terms of the moderate incidence states we have: North West – 1/7; North East - 1/6; North Central – 4/7; South East - 1/5; South South - 1/6; and South West – 4/6. In terms of the low incidence states we have: North West - 0/7; North Central - 1/7; North East - 0/6; South East - 4/5; South South – 5/6; and, South West – 2/6. Clearly, all the seven states in the North-West, four in the North-East and one in the North-Central have proportions that are greater than the national average of 329,063 out-of-school children. Summarily, the southern geopolitical zones ranked better than the northern geopolitical zones in terms the key indicators of access to school (mean walking time to the nearest primary school; mean kilometer distance to the nearest primary school; number of classrooms in good condition) and at the same time better in terms of number of children out-of-school. This showed that the issue of physical access has not been properly addressed to

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

ensure equality across the geopolitical zones in order to stem the tide of out-of-school children. Thus the observation that:

> Distance to school partly explains why same children have not yet attended school, and why many others start school older than the official entry age. Hence children from households that are far from schools in terms of distance and/or walking time enroll in schools later than the target age of 5-6 years. Equally, distance from school and available transport opportunities also influence enrolment in secondary schools and affect the transition expected under the Universal Basic Education from primary cycle to junior secondary cycle (Nigeria EdData Survey Report**,** 2011:74).

The above observation was supported by Fatunmole (2022) and Rodriguez, (2022) that the root cause of the huge numbers of out-of-school children in the north is inadequate access to school which is joined by such other causes as mass ignorance of parents on the importance of education; having more children than they could cater for; religious sentiments and traditional beliefs; and, poverty but the most pronounced of them all is lack of unfettered access. The non-availability of schools within the nearest reach of the children which force them out of school (the cause and effect relationship canvassed in our theoretical framework) might not also be unconnected to government poor attention to education funding. The average number of children per class in Nigeria by 2018 was 51; however, a variation among states was observed as, the elementary schools in Katsina located in the North-West zone had almost 101 pupils per class on average in 2018 and the same region also experienced the highest deficit in the number of good classrooms available (Raliyat, Umma and Aisha, 2022). Overall, in the North Western states, there were only 114.3 thousand good classrooms available as opposed to the required 252.6 thousand (Zoe Talent Solutions, 2023). Joining issues is the fact that as a result of the poor locations, their insecurity has forced thousands of schools to shut down and has contributed to out-of-school children in Nigeria; the country contributes 8.3% of the problem globally (Obiezu, 2022).

Undoubtedly, insecurity facilitated by the nature of the environment (vastness of the land, large forests separating communities/settlements and difficult terrains) has exacerbated in the country with the North-west, North-east, North-central and South-east recording huge tolls of the crisis in the past decade (Raliyat, Umma and Aisha, 2022). Specifically, parents withdraw their children from schools in Kaduna, Zamfara and Niger because of the crisis (Lawal and Babalola, 2022). The same is the story in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa where Boko Haram has been waging a campaign against Western education since 2009 (UNESCO, 2009b). In line with the postulations of the theory of causation, our framework of analysis, it is therefore hard not to associate the proportionate differences in the rates of out-of-school children among the geopolitical zones in the country to lack of safe access to school due to the above as well as inter-ethnic conflicts, the role of Fulani herdsmen militia, bandits and Boko Haram - all terrorist group notorious for their kidnapping of mostly school girls (Vanguard, 2023; Daily Independent, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The study showed that there have been disparities in the level of implementation of the UBE policy on equality of access to school (walking time and kilometer distance) among the geopolitical zones. The mean walking distances is shorter in the Southern geopolitical zones than in the Northern geopolitical zones and thus, the kilometer distances is far shorter among the Southern geopolitical zones than their Northern counterparts. Equally revealed is the

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

inequality among the rural and urban centers as the urban centers are more favoured than the rural areas. Equally, the number of out-of-school children is more in the states in the northern than those in the southern geopolitical zones. Thus the conclusion that: the UBE policy on equality of access to school has not been effectively implemented across the geopolitical zones and is responsible for the variation in the rates of out-of-school children among the geopolitical zones in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1) More schools and classroom blocks should be provided closer to the children across the federation especially in the north to make its accessibility easier to the children.
2) The existing ones and the new ones to be provided should be well equipped for conducive and effective learning.
3) More attention should be paid to the security of these school children by ensuring that well-armed security personnel are deployed to and around the schools and should escort the children at least to and from close distances to their homes to ensure their safety.
4) Stiffer penalties should be imposed on parents who without cogent reasons prevent their children and ward from attending school.
5) The government should increase their funding of education and accord it the priority attention it deserves in line with the global requirements and best practices.
6) Alternative schools and classrooms should be adopted in vulnerable places and where schools are not within nearby distances to the communities and settlements.
7) Those practices and beliefs that hinder access to school should be reviewed or completely obliterated by the people with the help of government legislations.
8) Motivation of different kinds should be used to draw children to school especially in such places where education is being de-emphasized for one reason or the other.
9) Those areas where adequate number and conditions of schools and classrooms are lacking should be given priority so that the UBE policy on equality of access should be achieved in order to reduce the tide of out-of-school children and drop-out syndromes especially in those places.

References

1) Adepoju, A. & Fabiyi, A. (2023). Universal Basic Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects. http://uaps.2010.princeton.edu.
2) Akinkuotu, E. (2022). 'Kids are not alright: Nigeria's out-of-school children figure rises to 20million despite daily $2.3million intervention'. The Africa Report.Com/238082.
3) Biereenu-Nnabugwu, M. (2006). Methodology of Political Inquiry. Enugu. Nigeria: Quintagon Publishers.
4) Burde, D., & Linden, L. L. (2023). 'Bringing Education to Afghan Girls: A Randomized Controlled Trial of Village-Based Schools'. In American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 5(3): 27-40. Retrieved from: http://www.leighlinen.com/Afghanistan_Girls_Ed.pdf.

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

5) Cook, J. & Williams, T. (2023). What is Cause and Effect. Study.com. Retrieved from: www.futurelearn.com>courses>steps.

6) Daily Independent Editorial, (2023, June 6). Alarming Figures of Out-of-School Children. Independent. Retrieved from https://independent.ng/alarming-figures-of-out-of-school-children/

7) Fatunmole, M. (2022). 'UNESCO's data on out-of-school children in exposes Nigerian government's lie'. Promoting Good Governance; International Center for Investigative Reporting (ICIR). September, 2: 1-3.

8) FRN (2004). National Policy on Education (4th Edition). Lagos: NERDC Press.

9) Grice, H. P. & Alan, R. (1961). 'The Causal Theory of Perception', Aristotelian Society Supplementary. 35(1): 121-168. Retrieved from: www.hist-analytic.com>GRICE

10) Hawkins, B. (2021): 'Transmodal communications: Transpositioning semiotics and relations'. Retrieved from: www.jbe-platform.com>aral.22015.wu

11) Hite, S. (2022). 'School Mapping and Geographic Information System'. In M. Bary & N.V. Varghese (Ed). Directions in Educational planning: International Experiences and Perspectives: Paris; IIEP-UNESCO. 215-239. Retrieved from: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002137/213735e.pdf.

12) Kenya (2020). Ministry of State for Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands: Getting to the hardest-to-reach; A strategy to provide education to nomadic communities in Kenya through distance learning. Retrieved from: http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G02742pdf.

13) Lawal, I. & Babalola, O. (2022). 'Fresh Concerns on State of Basic Education as out-of-school figure reaches 20million. The Guardian. Retrieved from: www.theguardian.ng>features>focus>freshconcern.....

14) Lewin, D. (2021). 'Access to Education' - IIEP Learning portal – UNESCO learningportal.iiep.unesco.org>glossary

15) Mba, C. C. (2004). Teaching and Research Methodology in the Social Sciences. Nsukka, Chuka Educational Publishers.

16) NEDS (2011). Nigeria DHS EdData Survey 2010: Education Data for Decision Making. Abuja: National Population Commission, Federal Ministry of Education, UBEC & RTI International.

17) Norwich, K. H. & Le Chatelier (2021). Principles in Sensation and Perception: Fractal-like enfolding at different scales. Frontiers of Philosophy (Internet) Available from https://doi.org/10.3389/fphys.2021.00017 [cited 2022 Sept.8];1(17).

18) Nwokeocha, D. (2023). Nigerians and Access to Education. Retrieved from: https//www.dailypost.ng/2023/05/03/nigerians-and-access-to-education-ed.

19) Obanya, P. (2020). Planning and Managing Meaningful Access to Education: The Nigerian Experience. University of Sussex Center for International Education, Department of Education Open Seminar Series. Jan. 25.

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

20) OECD, (2022). Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools. OECD publishing. Retrieved from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264130852-en

21) Ogunode, N. J., Chinweuba, M A. & Ayoko, V. O. (2023). 'Out-of-School Children in Nigeria: Causes, Social Implications and Way Forward'. International Journal on Integrated Education (IJIE) Research Parks Publishing (IDEAS Lab). Retrieved from: https://journals.researchparks.org/index.php/IJIE 1-10.

22) Ojelade, A., Aiyedun, T. G. & Aregbesola, B. G. (2022). 'Environmental Education as an Instrument for awareness creation on the health effects of water contamination in Saburi Community of Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Nigeria The Researcher: A Journal of Contemporary Educational Research, 2(1), 1–16. Retrieved from: scholar.google.com>citations.

23) Pears, D. F. (1976). 'The causal conditions of perception'. Philosophy, 71(276): 245-254.

24) Pisani, L. & Dowd, A. J. (2022). 'Diversity and Equity in Education: Policy, Practice and Options for Reaching Children at the Bottom of the Pyramid'. In D. A. Wagner, N. M. Castillo & S. Grant Lewis (Eds) Learning, Marginalization, and Improving the Quality of Education in Low-Income Countries, 13-44: Cambridge, UK; Open Book publishers. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0256.

25) Raliyat, H., Umma, A. & Aisha, A. (2022). As Out-of-School Children Scourge Worsens: Nigeria Risks Losing out on Literate, Skilled Workforce. Leadership. Retrieved from: https://leadership.ng/as-out-of-school-children-scourge-worsens-nigeria-risks-losing-out-on-literate-skilled-workforce/

26) Sperling, W., Winthrop, J. & Kwauk, C. (2023). 'In Indonesia, more than 60,000 new Schools were built in Strategic places in order to decrease the distance to school and reach as many children as possible'. Retrieved from: http://www.pdf/488980PUBOprim101officialOUseeoOnly/.pdf.

27) Sun, (2022 March 3). States unclaimed UBE funds. https://www.sunngr.com/2022/03/states-unclaimed-ube-funds/

28) Theunynck, S. (2021). School Construction for Universal Primary Education in Africa: Should countries be empowered to build their schools. Washington DC. The World Bank. Retrieved from: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/109291468007863249/pdf/7

29) UBEC, (2023). Progress Report from States. UBE Digest. 7(1). 18-29. April.

30) UNESCO, (2009b). Measuring Access to and Participation in Education, Paris: IIEP.

31) UNESCO, (2023). EFA Global Monitoring Report – Overcoming Inequality: Why Governance Matters, Oxford: Oxford University Press for UNESCO.

32) UNICEF (2023). Children Friendly Schools Manual. New York: UNICEF. Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Child_Friendly_Schools_Manual_EN_040809.pdf.

Volume 65 | Issue 03 | March 2026
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19250220

33) UNICEF, (2020), The Investment Case for Education and Equity. New York: UNICEF. Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/Publications/files/Investment_Case_for_Education_and_Equity_Final.pdf.

34) United Nations, (2023). The State of Education in Nigeria. Lagos: UNESCO Office.

35) Vanguard, (2023, Jan. 31). Nigeria's more than 10million out-of-school children. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/1/nigeria's-more-than-10million-out-of-school-children/

36) Visions, E. (1997).'How Science will Revolutionize the 21st Century.' Retrieved from: en.m.wikipedia.org>wiki>visions_(bo…

37) World Bank (2023), Guidance notes on Safe School Construction. The World Bank. Retrieved from: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/728061468326978133/Guidance-_notes_on_safer_school_construction_global_facility_for_disaster_reduction_and_recovery

38) World Bank, (2019d). Six Steps to abolish primary school fees: Operational guide. Washington DC. The World Bank. Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Six_Steps_to_Abolishing_Primary_School_Fees.pdf.

39) World Education Blog (2023). 'Nigeria has more children out of school than any other country. Why?' Global Partnership for Education: 1-12.

40) Zoe Talent Solution (2023). Education Statistics for Nigeria (100% Updated). Retrieved 12th March from: zoetalentsolutions.com>Education.