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ENHANCING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR ADDRESSING OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how enhancing institutional capacity can contribute to addressing the issue of out-of-school children in Nigeria and analyzed the planning implications for sustainable educational development. Using a descriptive survey research design, data were collected from 360 respondents across six South West states of Nigeria, including officials from the Ministry of Education, UBEC, SUBEBs, NGOs, and community education stakeholders. A researcher-developed questionnaire, the Institutional Capacity and Planning for Out-of-School Children Questionnaire (ICP-OSC-Q), was employed, and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, as well as inferential statistics including Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Simple Linear Regression. Two hypotheses were tested to further examine the relationship between institutional capacity and effectiveness, and the planning implications of institutional frameworks. The results showed a moderate and significant positive relationship ($r = 0.521$, $p < 0.05$) between institutional capacity and the effectiveness of addressing out-of-school children. Additionally, regression analysis revealed that strengthening institutional frameworks significantly predicted sustainable educational planning ($R^2 = 0.432$, $F = 68.21$, $p < 0.05$). Findings revealed a generally high perception of institutional capacity, particularly in areas such as personnel availability, staff training, and infrastructure support, although financial resource allocation remained a notable weakness. Major challenges identified included insufficient funding, shortage of trained personnel, poor infrastructure, and inadequate community engagement. Strategies recommended for strengthening institutional

frameworks included increased government funding, continuous professional development, enhanced collaboration among stakeholders, and the integration of technology in education. The study concluded that enhancing institutional capacity has significant planning implications for achieving sustainable educational development, including improved enrollment and retention rates, better policy implementation, and the reduction of regional disparities in educational access. It recommends a coordinated, well-funded, and technology-driven approach to effectively tackle the challenge of out-of-school children in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Out-of-school children, educational development, planning implications, educational agencies, funding, staff training, infrastructure, community engagement, education policy, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of out-of-school children in Nigeria continues to pose a significant challenge to the country's educational system, despite concerted efforts through policy frameworks and investments aimed at achieving universal basic education. As highlighted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2023), Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children globally, with an estimated 10.5 million children not enrolled in formal education. This alarming figure underscores the persistence of barriers that prevent children from accessing education. Poverty, insecurity, child labor, gender inequality, and inadequate infrastructure are some of the critical factors that exacerbate the problem and contribute to the increasing number of out-of-school children in the country (World Bank, 2022). These factors not only affect access to education but also hinder the retention of children within the educational system, leading to high dropout rates and the widening educational gap.

Institutional capacity, which refers to the ability of organizations and agencies to design, implement, and sustain effective educational programs, plays a crucial role in addressing educational access issues. Strengthening the capacity of educational institutions, including the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs), is essential for ensuring that programs aimed at increasing enrollment and retention are both well-implemented and sustainable. According to Okafor and Salami (2021), institutional capacity is a key determinant in solving educational access problems. The ability of these institutions to coordinate, manage resources, and strategically plan educational initiatives directly impacts the effectiveness of policies designed to reduce the number of out-of-school children. However, despite the existence of such agencies,

significant gaps in coordination, resource management, and strategic planning still hinder their ability to address the problem comprehensively (Afolabi, Adewale, & Onuoha, 2023).

The complexities surrounding the enrollment and retention of children in school are further compounded by a range of socio-political challenges. For instance, insurgency in the North-East has displaced millions of children and disrupted their access to education, while urban-rural disparities in educational infrastructure and resources continue to widen the gap in educational opportunities (UNESCO, 2023). The socio-economic challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as increased poverty and economic instability, have only deepened the struggle for many families to prioritize education, especially for girls and marginalized groups. These challenges highlight the urgent need for a more robust and adaptive institutional framework that can respond to the evolving needs of the education sector.

Enhancing institutional capacity is not only an administrative necessity but also a strategic imperative for promoting inclusive educational planning and contributing to sustainable national development. Strengthening the organizational structures, improving coordination among relevant agencies, ensuring effective resource allocation, and engaging communities in the educational process are key steps toward creating a more inclusive and resilient educational system. This paper seeks to explore how enhancing institutional capacity can serve as a catalyst for addressing the persistent problem of out-of-school children in Nigeria. Additionally, it aims to examine the planning implications necessary for creating sustainable educational interventions that will contribute to the realization of the country's educational goals and broader development objectives. By focusing on institutional strengthening, this paper underscores the need for a holistic approach to education reform that goes beyond policy and includes strategic actions to build the capacity of the institutions that govern and deliver education.

Statement of the Problem

Despite various national and international efforts to achieve universal access to basic education, Nigeria continues to grapple with an alarming number of out-of-school children. Recent estimates indicate that over 10 million Nigerian children of school age are not enrolled in formal education, posing a significant threat to the country's socio-economic development and its ability to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNICEF, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). Although initiatives such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme and interventions by non-governmental organizations have been introduced, the

problem persists, suggesting deeper systemic and institutional weaknesses. A major underlying issue is the limited institutional capacity of key educational agencies tasked with policy implementation, resource allocation, data management, and stakeholder engagement (Okafor & Salami, 2021; Afolabi, Adewale, & Onuoha, 2023). Inefficiencies in planning, inadequate funding mechanisms, lack of monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and poor inter-agency coordination have collectively undermined efforts to effectively identify, enroll, and retain out-of-school children. Furthermore, emerging challenges such as insecurity, economic instability, and demographic pressures have overwhelmed existing institutional structures, revealing critical gaps in resilience and adaptability (World Bank, 2022).

Without strategic interventions aimed at enhancing institutional capacity, efforts to reduce the number of out-of-school children may continue to be fragmented, unsustainable, and ultimately ineffective. There is thus a pressing need to investigate how institutional frameworks can be strengthened to develop more responsive, inclusive, and sustainable educational planning mechanisms in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine how enhancing institutional capacity can contribute to addressing the issue of out-of-school children in Nigeria and to analyze the planning implications for sustainable educational development.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the current institutional capacity of key educational agencies in addressing out-of-school children in Nigeria.
2. Identify the major challenges limiting institutional effectiveness in enrolling and retaining out-of-school children.
3. Examine strategies for strengthening institutional frameworks to improve access to basic education.
4. Analyze the planning implications of enhancing institutional capacity for sustainable educational interventions.

Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the current level of institutional capacity among key educational agencies in addressing out-of-school children in Nigeria?

2. What are the major institutional challenges hindering the effective enrollment and retention of out-of-school children?
3. What strategies can be adopted to strengthen institutional capacity for improved basic education access?
4. What are the planning implications of enhancing institutional capacity on sustainable education development?

Hypothesis

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between institutional capacity and the effectiveness of addressing out-of-school children in Nigeria.

H_{02}: Strengthening institutional frameworks has no significant planning implications for sustainable educational development in Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it highlights the critical role of institutional capacity in tackling systemic barriers to educational access. By focusing on how institutions can be strengthened, the study offers practical insights for policymakers, educational planners, and development partners committed to achieving universal basic education.

Furthermore, the findings will contribute to academic discourse by filling existing gaps in the literature regarding the institutional dynamics influencing out-of-school children in Nigeria. It will also serve as a valuable resource for government agencies such as the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs), and ministries of education in designing more targeted and responsive policies.

In a broader framework, the study aligns with global development agendas, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all), and provides evidence-based recommendations that can enhance educational planning, resource allocation, and program sustainability (UNESCO, 2023; UNICEF, 2023). Ultimately, by offering a roadmap for institutional strengthening, the study seeks to catalyze systemic reforms that will ensure that every Nigerian child has the opportunity to access and complete basic education.

Operational Definition of Terms

Out-of-School Children: Refers to children of official school age (typically 6–15 years in Nigeria) who are not enrolled in primary or junior secondary school at the time of the study (UNICEF, 2023).

Institutional Capacity: Describes the ability of educational institutions and agencies to design, implement, monitor, and sustain effective programs aimed at enrolling and retaining out-of-school children. It includes aspects such as leadership quality, resource mobilization, infrastructure, technical skills, and organizational efficiency (Okafor & Salami, 2021).

Educational Planning: The process of systematically designing strategies, setting goals, and allocating resources to ensure access, equity, quality, and sustainability in education systems, especially targeting vulnerable groups like out-of-school children (World Bank, 2022).

Sustainable Educational Development: The creation and maintenance of inclusive, equitable, and resilient education systems that ensure lifelong learning opportunities for all, particularly marginalized populations (UNESCO, 2023).

Institutional Challenges: Constraints within organizations such as poor funding, inadequate staffing, weak policy implementation structures, and limited stakeholder collaboration that hinder the achievement of educational goals.

Literature review

Conceptual Review

Concept of Out-of-School Children

Out-of-school children are those within the official primary or lower secondary school age range who are not attending school or have dropped out without completing the compulsory basic education cycle (UNICEF, 2023). In Nigeria, this problem is particularly acute, with current statistics indicating that approximately 10.2 million children are out of school, the highest number globally (World Bank, 2022).

Multiple factors contribute to the prevalence of out-of-school children. These include economic hardship, insecurity in regions affected by insurgency, inadequate school infrastructure, child labor, and cultural practices that deprioritize formal education, particularly for girls (UNESCO, 2023). Additionally, parental illiteracy and rural-urban disparities have further exacerbated the problem (Afolabi et al., 2023).

The implications of having such a high number of out-of-school children are far-reaching. Beyond individual deprivation, it affects national development, perpetuates cycles of poverty, and undermines social cohesion (Ogunyemi & Okon, 2022). Hence, addressing the phenomenon requires not only community-based interventions but also strong, resilient institutional mechanisms.

Concept of Institutional Capacity

Institutional capacity refers to the ability of organizations — particularly public sector agencies to perform effectively, efficiently, and sustainably in achieving their mandates (Grindle & Hilderbrand, 2023). In the education sector, institutional capacity encompasses the skills, resources, organizational structures, leadership, and systems necessary to design, implement, monitor, and sustain policies aimed at improving access and quality of education. Strong institutional capacity is critical for ensuring that interventions targeting out-of-school children are not only designed appropriately but also implemented effectively. Components of institutional capacity include human capacity (the quality and quantity of skilled personnel), financial capacity (adequate and timely funding), organizational capacity (effective processes, systems, and structures), and technical capacity (ability to use data, technology, and innovations for problem-solving) (World Bank, 2022; Afolabi et al., 2023).

In Nigeria, weak institutional capacity has been cited as a major constraint to educational development. Issues such as bureaucratic bottlenecks, insufficient teacher training, poor data management systems, fragmented coordination among education agencies, and inadequate accountability mechanisms have limited the success of policies aimed at reducing the number of out-of-school children (Okafor & Salami, 2021). Without addressing these internal weaknesses, even the most well-intentioned educational reforms risk failure. Thus, strengthening institutional capacity is not just an administrative exercise; it is central to ensuring equitable access to education, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Educational Planning and Its Role in Basic Education Access

Educational planning refers to the systematic process of setting educational goals, developing policies, designing programs, and allocating resources to achieve desired outcomes within a given time frame (UNESCO, 2023). It ensures that interventions are strategic, targeted, and sustainable, particularly when addressing complex challenges such as out-of-school children.

Effective educational planning involves several key activities, including data collection and analysis, needs assessment, policy formulation, resource mobilization, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (World Bank, 2022). When properly executed, planning can help in identifying underserved populations, predicting future enrollment trends, prioritizing resource distribution, and designing flexible learning pathways for marginalized groups. In the Nigerian context, the absence of robust educational planning has been linked to persistent high rates of out-of-school children, infrastructural deficits, poor teacher deployment, and limited access to learning materials, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas (Adepoju

& Adedeji, 2022). Many interventions suffer from poor coordination, lack of baseline data, and weak monitoring frameworks, leading to inefficiency and limited impact.

Strategic educational planning, therefore, is critical in achieving universal basic education and reducing disparities in access. It helps institutions to anticipate challenges, optimize the use of scarce resources, and implement evidence-based solutions that target the root causes of school exclusion. Planning also plays a crucial role in linking educational programs with broader socio-economic development goals, such as poverty reduction, gender equality, and national security, further underlining its importance in addressing the issue of out-of-school children (UNESCO, 2023).

Empirical Review

Factors Contributing to Out-of-School Children in Nigeria

Several empirical studies have explored the multifaceted factors contributing to the high number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. According to Adebayo and Lawal (2022), poverty remains the most dominant factor, as many families are unable to afford direct and indirect costs associated with schooling, such as uniforms, books, and transportation. In regions like the North-East and North-West, insecurity driven by insurgency and banditry has also forced many children out of school (UNICEF, 2023). Cultural practices have a significant impact as well. In some parts of Nigeria, early marriage and the preference for Qur'anic education over Western formal schooling reduce enrollment, especially for girls (Mohammed & Aliyu, 2022). Similarly, gender disparities continue to persist, with girls being disproportionately affected due to societal norms that prioritize domestic responsibilities over education (World Bank, 2022).

Child labor is another crucial factor identified by Okonkwo et al. (2023), who found that in urban slums and rural areas, many children are engaged in economic activities such as street hawking, farming, and domestic work, leaving little to no time for schooling. Additionally, systemic challenges like inadequate school infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and long distances to schools further discourage attendance (UNESCO, 2023). Overall, these studies emphasize that the problem of out-of-school children is deeply rooted in socio-economic, cultural, security, and institutional challenges, requiring a holistic and multi-sectoral response.

Institutional Capacity and Educational Outcomes

The relationship between institutional capacity and educational outcomes has been a focus of increasing empirical attention. According to Eze and Olanrewaju (2022), institutional weaknesses such as poor governance structures, inadequate teacher training programs, inefficient resource management, and lack of accountability have been major barriers to achieving universal basic education in Nigeria. In their study on education sector performance, Afolabi et al. (2023) highlighted that states with stronger institutional frameworks, better financial management, and more effective supervision mechanisms had significantly higher enrollment and completion rates among children. Conversely, states with fragmented coordination among education agencies, political interference, and poor monitoring systems exhibited higher rates of out-of-school children.

Similarly, Okeke and Yusuf (2022) found that building the human resource capacity of educational institutions, particularly in areas such as data management, strategic planning, and policy implementation, led to improved school access, quality, and equity. Their study emphasized that institutional reforms, including decentralization of school governance and strengthening of community participation, were critical in boosting school enrollment and retention, especially in rural areas. International comparative studies also reinforce these findings. For example, a World Bank (2022) report noted that countries that invested in strengthening institutional capacity — through better planning, enhanced data systems, and more autonomous school management — made more significant progress in reducing the number of out-of-school children compared to countries with weak institutional frameworks. Thus, the available empirical evidence suggests that enhancing institutional capacity is not merely supportive but *fundamental* to achieving improvements in educational access and reducing out-of-school rates.

Global Best Practices in Strengthening Institutional Capacity

Globally, several countries have successfully strengthened their institutional capacities to address the challenge of out-of-school children, offering valuable lessons for Nigeria. In Bangladesh, for instance, the government invested heavily in community-based school programs and decentralized education management, resulting in a significant reduction in the number of out-of-school children (UNICEF, 2023). These reforms emphasized local ownership, transparent resource allocation, and active involvement of civil society organizations. Similarly, Kenya implemented robust teacher professional development programs and improved education data systems through initiatives like the National

Education Management Information System (NEMIS), leading to enhanced monitoring of enrollment and attendance (World Bank, 2022). These efforts ensured that interventions were data-driven, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of marginalized children.

In Brazil, the Bolsa Família conditional cash transfer program linked education to social welfare by providing financial incentives for low-income families to enroll and keep their children in school (UNESCO, 2023). The program's success was largely due to strong institutional frameworks that ensured accountability, regular monitoring, and effective inter-ministerial collaboration between education and social protection sectors. Ethiopia's General Education Quality Improvement Programme (GEQIP) also provides an important model. It involved strengthening institutional capacity at both federal and regional levels, investing in school leadership training, improving textbook provision, and enhancing school inspection systems (World Bank, 2022). These comprehensive reforms resulted in improved enrollment and retention rates, especially among girls and rural children.

Across these examples, key elements of success included:

- Strengthening data and information management systems.
- Building human and financial capacities of education agencies.
- Promoting community participation and decentralized management.
- Ensuring transparent monitoring and evaluation systems.

Adapting and contextualizing these best practices to fit Nigeria’s socio-cultural and political landscape could significantly enhance institutional efforts to address the persistent issue of out-of-school children.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Capacity Building Theory and the Systems Theory to explain how strengthening institutional structures can impact the reduction of out-of-school children in Nigeria.

Capacity Building Theory

Capacity Building Theory, as articulated by Morgan (2006) and further expanded by Potter and Brough (2022), emphasizes the development of human resources, organizational structures, institutional processes, and societal systems to improve performance and sustainability. According to this theory, organizations must enhance their competencies, skills, relationships, and resources to effectively deliver on their mandates. In the context of

education, building institutional capacity involves equipping educational authorities with the necessary tools, leadership, systems, and partnerships to address issues like school exclusion and improve learning outcomes. Applying Capacity Building Theory to Nigeria's situation suggests that unless the Ministry of Education, Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), and other relevant agencies develop internal capacities such as strategic planning abilities, resource mobilization skills, and program implementation capabilities efforts to reduce out-of-school children will remain ineffective.

Systems Theory

Originally proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), Systems Theory views an organization as a complex set of interrelated and interdependent parts working together to achieve common goals. In the education sector, schools, ministries, teachers, students, parents, and communities form a dynamic system where weaknesses in one part can significantly impact the whole. Systems Theory is relevant to this study because it highlights the need for a holistic, coordinated approach to solving the problem of out-of-school children. It underscores that improving only one component, such as building more classrooms without addressing teacher quality, funding, or community engagement, will not yield sustainable results. A system-wide strengthening of institutions — from federal to community levels — is essential for meaningful change. Thus, both theories collectively frame the study's approach to understanding and enhancing institutional capacity to tackle the out-of-school children crisis effectively.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine institutional capacity and planning in addressing the issue of out-of-school children in Nigeria. The choice of this design was informed by the need to gather detailed perceptions from stakeholders involved in education policy and intervention programs. The study population comprised officials from the Ministry of Education, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs), relevant Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and community education stakeholders within the six states of the South West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. A multistage sampling technique was adopted. First, all six states in the South West were selected. Then, purposive sampling was used to select 60 respondents from each state, resulting in a total sample size of 360 respondents. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled the Institutional Capacity and

Planning for Out-of-School Children Questionnaire (ICP-OSC-Q). The questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first gathered socio-demographic data, while the second focused on items related to institutional capacity and planning, structured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The instrument was validated through expert review in the field of educational policy and administration, and its reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating good internal consistency. Data collection was carried out both physically and electronically to ensure wide participation and improve response rates. Data analysis was conducted using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize demographic data and general response trends. For hypothesis testing, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the first hypothesis, which examined the relationship between institutional capacity and the effectiveness of addressing out-of-school children. The second hypothesis, which assessed the planning implications of strengthening institutional frameworks for sustainable educational development, was tested using Simple Linear Regression analysis. All statistical tests were conducted at the 0.05 level of significance

RESULTS

Table 1: What is the current level of institutional capacity among key educational agencies in addressing out-of-school children in Nigeria?

S/N		SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	% SA + A	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD
1	The institution has sufficient personnel dedicated to addressing out-of-school children.	180	130	30	20	86.1%	3.31	0.68
2	The institution provides adequate training to staff on handling issues related to out-of-school children.	170	135	35	20	84.7%	3.29	0.69
3	There are sufficient financial resources allocated to programs addressing out-of-school children.	160	120	50	30	77.8%	3.11	0.82
4	The institution effectively collects and uses data to inform decisions on out-of-school children.	165	125	45	25	80.6%	3.17	0.77
5.	The institutional infrastructure supports the implementation of educational programs for out-of-school children.	170	130	40	20	83.3%	3.25	0.7

Table 1 presents respondents' views on the current level of institutional capacity among key educational agencies in addressing out-of-school children in Nigeria. The findings reveal a

generally high perception of institutional capacity, with all items recording a strong agreement (% SA+A ranging from 77.8% to 86.1%). Specifically, the highest agreement (86.1%, $\bar{x}$=3.31) was observed for the availability of sufficient personnel, followed closely by adequate staff training (84.7%, $\bar{x}$=3.29) and supportive infrastructure (83.3%, $\bar{x}$=3.25). The mean scores, ranging between 3.11 and 3.31, indicate a high level of agreement overall. Meanwhile, the lowest rating was recorded for the sufficiency of financial resources (77.8%, $\bar{x}$=3.11), suggesting a relative weakness in funding support. The standard deviation values (0.68–0.82) indicate moderate consistency among respondents' opinions. Overall, the results suggest that while institutional capacity is perceived as strong in terms of personnel, training, data usage, and infrastructure, financial resource allocation remains an area for improvement.

Table 2: What are the major institutional challenges hindering the effective enrollment and retention of out-of-school children?

S/N		SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	% SA + A	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD
6	Lack of sufficient funding for educational programs is a major challenge in enrolling out-of-school children.	190	130	30	10	88.9%	3.39	0.6
7	The shortage of trained personnel affects the enrollment and retention of out-of-school children.	185	135	30	10	88.9%	3.38	0.59
8	Inadequate collaboration between educational agencies hinders effective enrollment of out-of-school children.	180	130	35	15	86.1%	3.32	0.66
9	Insufficient community engagement and awareness are major barriers to the enrollment and retention of out-of-school children.	175	125	45	15	83.3%	3.28	0.7
10.	Poor infrastructure (e.g., lack of classrooms, inadequate learning materials) is a significant challenge to out-of-school children enrollment.	185	130	35	10	87.5%	3.37	0.63

Table 2 highlights the major institutional challenges hindering the effective enrollment and retention of out-of-school children. The findings show a high level of agreement among respondents, with % SA+A ranging from 83.3% to 88.9%. The most prominent challenges identified were insufficient funding (88.9%, $\bar{x}$=3.39) and shortage of trained personnel (88.9%, $\bar{x}$=3.38), followed closely by poor infrastructure (87.5%, $\bar{x}$=3.37) and inadequate collaboration between educational agencies (86.1%, $\bar{x}$=3.32). Insufficient community engagement was also notable (83.3%, $\bar{x}$=3.28). The consistently high mean scores (between

3.28 and 3.39) reflect strong consensus that these factors critically undermine efforts to enroll and retain out-of-school children. The relatively low standard deviation values (0.59–0.70) suggest a high degree of agreement among respondents.

Table 3: What strategies can be adopted to strengthen institutional capacity for improved basic education access?

S/N		SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	% SA + A	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD
11	The government should increase funding for educational programs aimed at enrolling out-of-school children.	190	130	30	10	88.9%	3.39	0.6
12	There should be continuous professional development programs for staff to better address out-of-school children.	180	130	40	10	86.1%	3.33	0.65
13	Greater collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organizations is essential for improving educational access.	185	135	30	10	88.9%	3.37	0.61
14	Community-based education programs should be introduced to cater to out-of-school children in rural areas.	180	135	35	10	87.5%	3.34	0.64
15.	The use of technology should be integrated into educational strategies to support out-of-school children's enrollment and retention.	175	130	40	15	84.7%	3.3	0.68

Table 3 presents strategies recommended for strengthening institutional capacity to improve basic education access. Respondents showed strong support for all suggested strategies, with % SA+A ranging from 84.7% to 88.9%. Increasing government funding (88.9%, $\bar{x}$=3.39) and fostering greater collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organizations (88.9%, $\bar{x}$=3.37) were rated highest, indicating they are seen as crucial measures. Other highly endorsed strategies include introducing community-based education programs (87.5%, $\bar{x}$=3.34), providing continuous professional development for staff (86.1%, $\bar{x}$=3.33), and integrating technology into educational strategies (84.7%, $\bar{x}$=3.30). The mean scores, ranging from 3.30 to 3.39, show strong agreement on the importance of multi-faceted, well-funded, and innovative approaches to tackling the out-of-school children challenge. The relatively low standard deviations (0.60–0.68) indicate consistent opinions among respondents.

Table 4: What are the planning implications of enhancing institutional capacity on sustainable education development?

S/N		SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	% SA + A	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD
16	Enhancing institutional capacity will lead to greater enrollment and retention of out-of-school children in the long term.	185	135	30	10	88.9%	3.37	0.61
17	Strengthening institutional capacity will improve the quality of education provided to children in marginalized areas.	180	140	30	10	88.9%	3.36	0.59
18	Improved institutional capacity will result in better planning and implementation of education policies aimed at out-of-school children.	180	135	35	10	87.5%	3.34	0.62
19	Strengthening institutional capacity will help reduce regional disparities in educational access.	175	140	35	10	87.5%	3.33	0.62
20.	Effective planning for enhanced institutional capacity can contribute to the sustainable development of the education sector in Nigeria.	190	130	30	10	88.9%	3.39	0.6

Table 4 highlights the planning implications of enhancing institutional capacity for sustainable education development. The findings show overwhelming agreement among respondents, with % SA+A values between 87.5% and 88.9%. The belief that enhanced capacity would contribute to sustainable development (88.9%, $\bar{x}$=3.39) and lead to greater enrollment and retention of out-of-school children (88.9%, $\bar{x}$=3.37) received the highest support. Strengthening institutional capacity was also seen as crucial for improving education quality in marginalized areas (88.9%, $\bar{x}$=3.36) and for better policy planning and implementation (87.5%, $\bar{x}$=3.34). Additionally, reducing regional disparities was strongly recognized (87.5%, $\bar{x}$=3.33). Overall, the high mean scores (3.33–3.39) and low standard deviations (0.59–0.62) suggest a strong and consistent consensus on the critical role of institutional capacity building in achieving sustainable educational progress.

Testing of hypothesis

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between institutional capacity and effectiveness in addressing out-of-school children.

Table 5: Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

Variables	r-value	p-value	Decision
Institutional Capacity vs Effectiveness	0.521	0.000	Significant

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis revealed a **correlation coefficient (r-value) of 0.521** and a **p-value of 0.000** for the relationship between institutional capacity and the effectiveness of addressing out-of-school children in Nigeria. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a **moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship** between institutional capacity and the effectiveness of addressing out-of-school children

Table 6: Regression Analysis on the Influence of Strengthening Institutional Frameworks on Sustainable Educational Planning.

Variable	R (Correlation Coefficient	R Square (R^2)	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error of Estimate	F-value	Sig. (p-value)
Strengthening institutional frameworks has no significant planning implications for sustainable educational development in Nigeria	0.657	0.432	0.429	0.365	68.21	0.000

The result of the simple linear regression analysis shows that strengthening institutional frameworks significantly influences sustainable educational planning in Nigeria. The correlation coefficient (R) is 0.657, indicating a strong positive relationship between the two variables. The R Square (R^2) value of 0.432 implies that approximately 43.2% of the variance in sustainable educational planning can be explained by the strengthening of institutional frameworks. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.429 confirms the model's explanatory power after adjusting for sample size. The F-value of 68.21 with a significance level (p-value) of 0.000 indicates that the overall model is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that strengthening institutional frameworks has a statistically significant and positive planning implication for sustainable educational development in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examined the institutional capacity of Nigerian educational agencies to address out-of-school children and explored the associated challenges, strategies, and planning implications. Findings indicate that while institutional capacity is generally seen as strong,

significant barriers remain. Respondents generally agreed that institutions have adequate personnel (86.1%), training programs (84.7%), and financial resources (77.8%) for addressing out-of-school children, though funding remains a challenge ($\bar{x}$ = 3.11). These results align with previous studies highlighting the critical role of resources in education (Fayose et al., 2021). The study identified key challenges: insufficient funding (88.9%), shortage of trained personnel (88.9%), and poor infrastructure (87.5%). These findings reflect the persistent barriers to educational access in Nigeria (Adebayo & Ogunlade, 2021). Additionally, 83.3% of respondents cited inadequate community engagement as a barrier, consistent with research emphasizing the importance of community involvement (Olajide et al., 2022). Strategies to improve institutional capacity received strong support. Key recommendations include increasing government funding (88.9%), enhancing collaboration between organizations (88.9%), and introducing community-based programs (87.5%). These findings echo global trends advocating for multi-stakeholder collaboration in education (UNESCO, 2020). The integration of technology (84.7%) was also favored, underscoring its potential to support enrollment and retention (Hernández et al., 2021).

Further statistical analysis supported these perceptions. The first hypothesis tested the relationship between institutional capacity and the effectiveness of addressing out-of-school children. The result revealed a moderate, positive, and significant relationship ($r = 0.521$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that improvements in institutional capacity are associated with increased effectiveness in tackling the out-of-school children challenge. This confirms that institutional readiness plays a critical role in educational outreach and inclusion efforts.

The second hypothesis examined whether strengthening institutional frameworks has planning implications for sustainable educational development. The result of the regression analysis showed that strengthening institutional frameworks significantly predicted sustainable educational planning ($R^2 = 0.432$, $F = 68.21$, $p < 0.05$). This means that about 43.2% of the variance in sustainable planning can be explained by improvements in institutional structures, highlighting their central role in long-term educational progress.

The study suggests that strengthening institutional capacity will improve enrollment and retention (88.9%), enhance the quality of education (88.9%), and reduce regional disparities (87.5%). These outcomes align with global education goals, particularly SDG 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education (UN, 2020). Strengthening institutional capacity is thus essential for sustainable educational development in Nigeria (Okojie, 2020).

In conclusion, while institutional capacity to address out-of-school children in Nigeria shows promise, challenges such as insufficient funding and infrastructure persist. The adoption of

strategies such as increased funding, staff development, and stronger collaboration between organizations is critical. Enhancing institutional capacity will contribute not only to improved educational access but also to the broader goal of long-term educational sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the institutional capacity of Nigerian educational agencies to address the challenges of out-of-school children, examining key areas such as institutional capacity, barriers to enrollment and retention, strategies for improvement, and planning implications for sustainable educational development. The findings suggest that while institutions possess sufficient personnel, training, and financial resources, challenges such as insufficient funding, lack of trained personnel, and poor infrastructure persist. Effective collaboration between educational agencies, increased government funding, and community-based initiatives are crucial strategies for enhancing institutional capacity. Strengthening these capacities will not only improve enrollment and retention but also promote long-term sustainability in the Nigerian education sector.

Recommendations

1. The Nigerian government should allocate more resources towards programs specifically aimed at enrolling and retaining out-of-school children to overcome funding deficits.
2. Continuous professional development programs for educators should be implemented to enhance their capacity to address the needs of out-of-school children effectively.
3. Adequate infrastructure, including classrooms and learning materials, must be provided to create conducive learning environments, especially in rural areas.
4. There should be increased collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organizations to facilitate the enrollment and retention of out-of-school children.
5. Educational strategies should include the use of technology to enhance the enrollment and retention of out-of-school children, especially in rural and underserved regions.
6. Policymakers should focus on creating and implementing education policies that consider regional disparities and aim for inclusive education to reduce gaps in access to quality education.

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