

Unlocking futures: Policy solutions to address the challenge of out-of-school children in Nigeria – spotlight on Oyo State

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Abstract

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa and seventh largest in the world is projected to double its population by 2050 (UNDESA, 2019). With 20.1% percent of out-of-school children in Oyo State, Nigeria (Planning, Research, & Statistics Department, Ministry of Education, Oyo State 2022), the disproportionate number of children not enrolled in formal education systems serve as a tangible indicator of a deficiency in the accessibility of education within the state, thereby hindering the broader socio-economic advancement of the nation. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the current state of affairs; examine the causes, consequences, and existing efforts to address this issue. The paper also proposes policy alternatives to eradicate the issue of out-of-school children in Oyo state Nigeria which will in turn contribute to the improvement of the educational system in the region and the country. The proposed policy alternatives are a result of data collection, review of ongoing policies and existing relevant literature and consideration of various factors contributing to the challenge of out of school children issue.

Keywords: Education policy; Out-of-School Children; Education Access

1. Introduction

In a recent study by UNESCO, Nigeria ranks second among countries with the highest number of out-of-school children (OOSC), with approximately 20 million children of primary school age, adolescents, and youths of secondary school age out of school (UNESCO, 2022). Specifically, the Oyo State Ministry of Education reports that 20.1% of children are currently out-of-school making it the largest state in Southwest Nigeria where children are currently not receiving education (Planning, Research, & Statistics Department, Ministry of Education, Oyo State 2022). This alarming situation demands immediate attention and effective solutions as year in and year out, the number of children not accessing education keeps on increasing (UNESCO, 2022).

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals highlights SDG 4 as “ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations 2015). Halfway to the 2030 Agenda and children still do not have access to education in places like Oyo state Nigeria. For the world to achieve SDG 4, all children must be enrolled in school.

1.1. Country context

Nigeria is a country with over 220 million people with six geopolitical zones namely, North Central, Northeast, Northwest, Southwest, Southeast, and South-South. The country has thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory.

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It is a multiethnic country with over 400 ethnic groups and 500 languages including Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa. The educational structure of the country is greatly influenced by the colonial history of the country. Pre-colonial era, Nigeria had a rich history of indigenous education which was an informal structure taught orally or through apprenticeship. However, the colonial era introduced Western education which uses English as the primary source of learning (Fafunwa, 1974).

According to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), the Nigerian education system comprises the following components:

- Early childhood care and development, catering to children aged 0 to 5 years.
- Basic education, from the ages of 6 to 14, which includes 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education.
- Post-basic education, typically 3 years, which is offered in senior secondary schools or technical colleges.
- Tertiary education provided by colleges of education, monotechnic, polytechnics, and universities, offering 4-year or 5-year programs.

1.2. Oyo State

Oyo state is one of the 36 states in Nigeria, it is in the Southwestern region of the country. Oyo State has 33 Local Government Areas, which are divided into 3 Senatorial Districts: Oyo North (13 Local Governments); Oyo Central (11 Local Governments), and Oyo South (9 Local Governments).

2. Problem definition

Approximately 20.1% of children are currently out of school in Oyo State Nigeria making it the largest state in Southwest Nigeria where children are not receiving education posing a significant educational challenge to the region and country's educational system, with the most impacted groups being young girls and children from low-income households living in rural areas (Planning, Research, & Statistics Department, Ministry of Education, Oyo State 2022).

Out-of-school children are children within official school age range currently not enrolled in either primary or secondary schools or any formal or non-formal education program. (UNESCO-UIS, 2014). They include children who have never attended school, as well as those who were once in school but dropped out at some point. The challenge of out-of-school children is further exacerbated by a wide range of socio-economic factors including poverty, distance, and lack of interest in education.

Table 1 Percentage of Out-of-school Children by Age group and Sex

Age (Year)	Population			Number of OOS Children			Percentage of OOS Children		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
3-5	381104	365919	747023	51,413	61,519	112,932	13.5	16.8	15.1
6-11	647009	602357	1249366	132,720	121,606	254,326	20.5	20.2	20.4
12-14	297845	286785	584630	62,708	57,751	120,459	21.1	20.1	20.6
15-18	394860	376088	770948	93,779	92,828	186,607	23.8	24.7	24.2
Total	1720818	1631149	3351967	340,620	333,704	674,324	19.8	20.5	20.1

SOURCE: Planning, Research, & Statistics Department, Ministry of Education, Oyo State 2022

2.1. The extent of the problem

The out-of-school problem in Oyo state, Nigeria is a complex and deeply entrenched issue, with multifaceted causes that impact children's ability to access education. Among these causes, economic barriers emerge as a significant hindrance to accessing education, with families grappling to meet the financial demands associated with schooling. Socio-economic factors significantly hinder children's access to education, with economic hardship preventing families from affording school-related costs like fees and uniforms (Ogunode, Iyabode & Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022). Beyond financial constraints, there are various other factors contributing to educational exclusion in Oyo State, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions to address this issue.

Table 2 Reasons for Out-of-school children by Percentage and Location

Reasons	Dropout		Never Attended	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Distance	5.4	21.8	11.2	31.6
Financial Constraint	65.0	40.3	48.5	24.2
Special Needs	3.3	4.1	1.9	9.0
Marriage	2.4	1.3	7.0	2.0
Nomadic	2.5	4.5	3.8	5.8
Cultural/Religious Belief	0.6	1.8	1.9	2.7
Orphan/Vulnerable Children	8.5	8.1	18.9	9.6
Domestic/Farming	4.6	5.8	2.5	3.9
Street Begging	0.7	2.3	1.7	7.7
Apprenticeship	3.6	6.1	0.6	1.0
Hawking	2.1	2.6	1.1	1.9
Others	1.3	1.3	0.8	0.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

SOURCE: Planning, Research, & Statistics Department, Ministry of Education, Oyo State 2022

Despite free primary education, public schools often charge enrolment and examination fees, adding to the economic strain on households, particularly those living in poverty. The poverty rate is expected to reach 38.9% in 2025, with an estimated 84 million Nigerians living below the poverty line - the world's second-largest poor population after India (World Bank, 2023). Current economic downturns in the country is greatly impacts many parents ability to send their children to school. Compounded by this are physical barriers, such as inadequate infrastructure and a scarcity of schools in some areas, making education inaccessible for many, especially in remote locations (Ayoko & Jegede, 2023).

According to Oladele (2019), well-equipped school facilities serve as strong predictors of enrollment. However, disconcertingly, the same study revealed that about half of government owned schools in Oyo State lack adequately equipped facilities necessary to ensure effective learning for all students. Consequently, this deficiency contributes significantly to the high dropout rates among students, ultimately leading to a surge in the number of out-of-school children in Oyo State.

3. Policy alternatives

To inform our analysis and orient our policy alternatives, we conducted a comprehensive systematic literature review centered on our problem statement, backed by robust evidence that has been demonstrated to be both highly impactful and cost-effective. With a goal and focus to solve the increasing number of out-of-school children in Oyo state, Nigeria, we, hereby, propose three policy alternatives: *Removal of the Hidden Cost of Attendance, One Village - One School, and School Feeding Program*.

3.1. Alternative 1: Eliminating hidden cost of school attendance and enrolment

Poverty remains a key driver for the high rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria (UNESCO 2022). In Oyo State, families grapple with a pervasive challenge that jeopardizes the accessibility and affordability of education for numerous students due to hidden costs associated with school attendance and enrollment. Despite the Nigerian government's introduction of the 2004 Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, which aimed to provide free and compulsory education for primary and secondary schools (Ejeh, 2009), the existence of hidden fees poses a significant obstacle to achieving equitable and inclusive education in Oyo State. These hidden costs, such as fees for books and uniforms, PTA (parent-teacher association) levies, and examination fees constitute a large percentage of total household spending which are a huge burden to poor families. (World Bank, 2009). Addressing this issue is crucial for aligning the

educational landscape with the intended goals of the UBE program and fostering an environment where every student has an equal opportunity to pursue education.

Similarly, in Lagos, Oyo State requires parents to provide tax clearance before enrolling their children in schools (The Guardian, 2023). Tooley's study highlights hidden costs such as fees for PTA levy, registration, and graduation, nearly equates to the expenses of enrolling in private schools for economically disadvantaged families (Tooley, 2009). This exacerbates the education access gap, especially since over 80% of rural parents in Oyo State are small-scale farmers, exempt from the tax scheme (Oyo State AgriBusiness Report, 2019). Given the prevalent nature of hidden costs and their stark negative impacts in Oyo State, this alternative advocates for the elimination of all hidden expenses as a policy strategy to dismantle the financial barriers hindering parents from enrolling and retaining their children in school. The presence of hidden fees within the education system establishes a clear connection between concealed costs and educational inequity, as the current system not only denies impoverished children access to education but also amplifies existing disparities and inequalities. Akyeampong (2009) found in his study that hidden costs not only impede the access of the poor but also substantially increase the opportunity costs, affecting the chances of economically disadvantaged children to enroll in and complete basic education. This burden disproportionately affects students from poorer backgrounds, hindering their access to quality education.

A study conducted by Kremer et al. (2003) in Kenya, focused on 14 especially poor primary schools, dividing them into 7 treatment schools and 7 control schools. The intervention included providing free uniforms, textbooks, and funds for classroom construction. Over a period of five years, students in the treatment schools stayed enrolled about 13% longer compared to students in the control schools. This positive impact on enrollment was likely associated with the support provided, including free uniforms, textbooks, and funds for classroom construction. The intervention led to an average increase in class size by 9 students. Additionally, students in the treatment schools experienced a 16% boost in grade advancement compared to students in control schools. (Morgan et al., 2012).

The financial strain imposed on parents and guardians due to hidden fees carries extensive economic ramifications, as it exhibits a direct correlation with increased dropout rates due to the inability to meet unforeseen financial demands. Notably, many programs offering ostensibly free primary and secondary education (FPSE) in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as the UBE program in Oyo, are not entirely comprehensive. Areba's (2011) found that all parents in the 52 sampled schools in his study confirmed paying development fees (100%), supplementary books (100%), and school identification cards (100%), with 38 (73.1%) contributing to academic trips, among other levies. This comprehensive data underscores the widespread financial challenges faced by parents, emphasizing the urgent need for policy interventions to address these hidden costs and ensure equitable access to education.

According to Kenya's National Assessment System for Monitoring Learner Achievement (NASMLA) report (2010), 70.1% of primary pupils dropped out of school due to a lack of uniform, among other reasons. However, for schools in which students received free uniforms, the study found improvements in attendance and preliminary test scores (Areba, 2011). Hence, taking a similar policy path that ensures the elimination of indirect hidden costs in the education system can arguably produce similar results in Oyo State.

3.2. Alternative 2: One Village, One School

Oyo State faces a substantial challenge in delivering sufficient educational facilities to accommodate its large student population. With a children's population (ages 3-17) of 3,351,969, the state has only 5313 schools. Regrettably, the current number of schools falls short of the demand, resulting in an inability to accommodate all school-going children. Moreover, the distribution of these schools is marked by glaring disparities across the state's 33 Local Council Development Areas. (Oyo State Government Annual Digest of Education Statistics Report, 2020).

Location or residence is an important factor in the incidence of out-of-school children (OOSC) in Nigeria. A UNESCO (2022) report shows a growing educational disparity in children's school enrollment in Nigeria, mainly due to socio-economic status, geography, and gender, with poor children, girls, and children living in rural communities being the most impacted. Over 36.7% of primary-aged children in rural areas are OOSC compared to 13.1% in urban areas. (UNESCO, 2012). By implication, limited access to schools is a significant factor influencing school enrollment in rural towns, contributing to a higher prevalence of out-of-school children in these areas.

Evidence from Mali where more than 2,400 constructed community schools enrolled 231,000 children in grades one through six in the 2002–2003 school year shows that establishing schools close to communities and towns can significantly reduce the number of OOSCs. These community schools enrolled 12 percent of the 7- to 12-year-olds in the country (DeStefano, 2007). The "One Village, One School" initiative in Oyo State requires a comprehensive and well-

structured approach, particularly in its implementation across diverse village settings. Smaller or more remote villages, a resourceful strategy would involve repurposing existing structures, such as community halls into educational facilities. This approach not only reduces the need for new construction but also integrates the school into the heart of the community, fostering a sense of ownership and engagement. Larger villages may require more extensive projects, including the construction of new school buildings to accommodate a greater number of students. These efforts should be sensitive to the local context, reflecting the geographical, cultural, and social landscape of each village.

The program's success heavily relies on a collaborative framework involving multiple stakeholders. Engaging government departments, such as the Ministry of Works, is crucial for the logistical aspects of school construction, while partnerships with NGOs and the private sector can provide additional resources and expertise. Local businesses can contribute through funding and support, playing a key role in the financial sustainability of the program. The initiative also addresses the distance challenges confronting many students and cuts their long commute to school by bringing educational facilities closer to their homes.

Prioritizing school expansion to the most disadvantaged children and rural communities is imperative to ensure they attain the basic literacy skills needed to access the benefits of education in adulthood. By strategically placing at least one primary school in every town in Oyo state, not only will the state be leveraging the positive externalities, such as enabling the new infrastructure to serve as a hub for community-wide collaboration towards the state's educational goals, but it will also effectively eliminate the distance barrier currently faced by children and their parents.

3.3. Alternative 3: School feeding program

The evolution of school feeding programs in Nigeria has been driven by the need to address significant challenges such as malnutrition and hunger, which adversely affect educational outcomes and contribute to high child mortality rates. The National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), reintroduced in 2016 after its initial launch in 2005, aims to enhance the health of school children and bolster the Universal Basic Education (UBE) goals (Jacob & Musa, 2021). While it has been widely implemented, the program has faced issues like inadequate funding, subpar meal quality, sustainability concerns, and a lack of consistent deworming, which have limited its effectiveness (Agu et al., 2023). Despite these challenges, the program's objectives remain steadfast to supply nutritionally adequate meals, bolster local economies, and boost enrollment and attendance. Considering Oyo State's existing school feeding program, we propose ways to strengthen it, drawing on the experiences of Kenya, and Osun State, Nigeria and insights from the World Bank's Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) workshop program.

In its "School Feeding Strategy 2020 - 2030," the World Food Programme (WFP) cites Kenya's program as one of Africa's strongest (World Food Programme, 2020). The initial impetus for Kenya's school feeding program was linked to the introduction of Free Primary Education in 2003, which led to a massive increase in school enrollment by about 20% from 2006 to 2010 (Jeans and Uwameiye, 2019). Kenya's success has been partly attributed to its cross-ministerial collaboration, positioning it as a leading example in Africa (World Food Programme, 2020). Oyo State can replicate this system of concerted coordination between various government bodies toward a similar goal, increasing school enrollment.

In Osun State, Nigeria, the local School Feeding Program, O'MEALS, has positively impacted public elementary student enrollment. The introduction of O'MEALS had a significant effect in the first five weeks where elementary school enrollment increased by 38,935 students, going from 155,318 to 194,253. This 25 percent increase marked the highest elementary school enrollment in Nigeria. Since then, the program has expanded to include approximately 252,000 students (Adekunle and Christina, 2016). As one of Nigeria's few enduring school meal initiatives, Osun has strategically garnered federal and international support from the Partnership for Child Development (PCD) in the UK to sustain and endorse its program. This multifaceted funding approach helps ensure the program's continuity (Adekunle & Christiana, 2016). Oyo State can take a cue from Osun's achievements by engaging in similar strategic partnerships and funding models that provide a more sustainable framework for its school feeding program. Emulating such successful practices can potentially lead to improved educational outcomes and higher program retention in Oyo State.

A holistic strategy involving collaboration across various ministries, such as education, health, and agriculture, is essential for an effective school feeding program in Oyo State. This coordinated approach will ensure diverse expertise and resource integration. State ownership is vital for the program's sustained impact and relevance, necessitating the development of tailored strategies for funding and maintenance. Innovative funding sources and community involvement will further solidify the program's foundations. A strong policy and legal framework, potentially enshrined in the state's constitution or through specific legislation, will anchor the school feeding program within the national education support framework, safeguarding its future, and aligning it with the state's educational objectives.

Table 3 Respondents' Opinions on the effect of school feeding on Pupils' Endorsement and Retention

Responses	SA	A	U	SD	D	MEAN	RANK
There is an increase in school enrolment due to the provision of school meals	91(78.4)	24(20.7)	1(0.9)	-	-	4.76	1
School feeding encourages punctuality	80(69.0)	33(28.4)	2(1.7)	1(0.9)	-	4.62	2
It has contributed to students' regular attendance of school	68(58.6)	45(38.8)	1(0.9)	2(1.7)	-	4.53	3
There is an increase in pupils' retention in school because of provision of meals	52(44.8)	61(52.6)	-	-	3(2.6)	4.42	4
It has reduced the dropout rate of pupils	60(51.7)	37(31.9)	2(1.7)	4(3.4)	13(11.2)	4.28	5

Source: The Effects of School Feeding Programme on Enrolment and Performance of Public Elementary School Pupils in Osun State, Nigeria (Adekunle et al, 2023)

Implementing the School Feeding Program in Oyo State necessitates a strategic approach that starts with a thorough understanding of the specific needs of each community. This requires engaging directly with local communities, civil society organizations, and educational stakeholders to ascertain the unique challenges and resources of each area. For instance, in villages where access to fresh produce is limited, partnerships with nearby agricultural cooperatives could be established to source ingredients. Training programs for local cooks and staff can be developed, drawing on successful models from other regions like Kenya, where the involvement of community members in school feeding programs led to higher meal quality and greater program acceptance (World Food Programme, 2016).

In operationalizing the program, a multifaceted funding strategy is essential. This might include a combination of state funding, contributions from local businesses, and international aid, similar to the approach taken in Osun State, Nigeria. In Osun, a diverse funding model helped sustain the program and adapt it to the local context. Furthermore, establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation system is crucial (World Food Programme, 2016). This could involve regular health and nutrition assessments of the children, feedback sessions with educators and parents, and periodic reviews of the program's impact on school attendance and academic performance. By incorporating these diverse elements, the School Feeding Program in Oyo State cannot only address immediate nutritional needs but also foster long-term educational and health benefits, mirroring the successes seen in other African nations.

3.4. Criteria

To evaluate the cost and benefit of these policy actions for Oyo state, three critical criteria have been identified: equity and inclusivity, the political feasibility of policy implementation, and the pecuniary cost of these policies.

3.4.1. Criteria 1: Equity and inclusivity

In line with the Oyo state government's commitment to ensuring access to quality and inclusive education for children in basic schools in the state, this criterion focuses on catering to marginalized and vulnerable children in the state. The state government in ensuring inclusivity for all children in the state established its Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA) in 2005, which was aimed at bringing out-of-school children into the classroom, improve literacy, and strengthen accountability for results in basic education (BESDA, 2023).

3.4.2. Criteria 2: Political feasibility

To effect assess the likelihood of successfully implementing policies that reduce out-of-school children in Oyo state, it is important to consider the roles and perspectives of Oyo state's stakeholders, including ministry officials, lawmakers, school administrators, teachers, community leaders, and parents. This criterion is informed by the potential influence of these groups as stakeholders' support or opposition is a vital variable that can significantly affect policy implementation and success. Political unacceptability is a combination of two conditions: too much opposition and/or too little support for the proposal to win adoption. Furthermore, political feasibility is grounded in democratic values, such as representation, and participation. It considers whether a policy aligns with the will of the people and whether

relevant officials can support and champion it. The prevalent political will, the politicization of basic education, and the acceptable culture and norms of these communities all have implications for the policy's acceptability and sustainability.

3.4.3. Criteria 3: Pecuniary cost

This involves assessing the direct and opportunity costs of each policy alternative, including salaries, equipment, administrative overhead, and unforeseen expenses. Pecuniary costs are an essential component of assessing the cost-effectiveness of a policy or decision. Pecuniary costs help determine whether the alternative of action is the most efficient way to achieve that objective. Pecuniary costs are integral to evaluating the long-term sustainability of a policy. If the costs are excessive or unsustainable, they may conflict with values related to long-term planning. This criterion is crucial for Oyo State, which recorded an N11B surplus in its recently published budget performance report (Oyo State Government, 2023).

4. Projecting the outcomes

4.1. Alternative 1: Removing School Hidden Costs in Oyo State

4.1.1. Equity and Inclusivity

The removal of hidden costs in Oyo State schools is expected to significantly enhance equity and inclusivity. Drawing from a study by Akyeampong and Rolleston (2009), which found that eliminating hidden costs in Ghana led to a substantial increase in school enrollment, a similar outcome can be expected in Oyo State. Oyo State is expected to experience a comparable increase in enrollment rates, with an upsurge of 10-15% in overall student numbers. This policy will help equalize opportunities for all children, particularly benefiting those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and align with Nigeria's UBE Act's goals for free and compulsory education.

4.1.2. Political Feasibility

Recognizing the potential resistance to the removal of hidden fees from educational institutions is crucial. The political feasibility of eliminating hidden school costs in Oyo State, aligned with the federal government's Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, is assessed as medium. While the UBE's implementation history suggests potential widespread support across various government levels, challenges may emerge due to stakeholder adjustments to the new financial framework. School administrators and heads might oppose the policy due to concerns about covering operational costs without these additional fees. Similarly, the potential for revenue loss could lead to resistance from ministry officials wary of operational challenges. However, drawing on the experiences of similar policies implemented in Ghana, there is a plausible expectation of a 60-70% success rate in smoothly transitioning to a system without hidden costs (Akyeampong and Rolleston, 2009). This transition's success hinges on effective communication and robust stakeholder engagement strategies to address and mitigate these concerns.

4.1.3. Pecuniary Cost Implications

Financially, the policy is feasible, primarily focusing on reallocating existing educational funds rather than incurring additional expenses. In a study on Financing primary and secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa, Chikoko & Mthembu (2020) stated that reallocating even 5-10% of current expenses resulted in significant improvements in educational access in Senegal. In Oyo State, aligning with the UBE Act's provision for free education, this reallocation might involve a 10-15% shift in the current educational budget to cover the cost gaps left by the removal of hidden fees. This approach would be sustainable within the current budgetary framework, making the policy a financially viable option for the government.

4.2. Alternative 2: One Village, One School

4.2.1. Equity and Inclusivity

The "One Village, One School" initiative in Oyo State is poised to significantly enhance equity and inclusivity in education. By establishing schools in every village, this policy directly addresses the disparity in access to education, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This initiative is crucial for girls and children with disabilities, who often face additional hurdles in accessing distant schools. This policy could particularly enhance enrollment among marginalized groups such as girls and children with disabilities, with UNESCO reporting increases in female enrollment by 15-20% in Madagascar (UNESCO, 2022). By reducing travel time and risks associated with long commutes, the policy ensures a safer and more accessible educational environment for all children. Additionally, the presence of schools within each village fosters

greater community involvement and ensures that education caters to local needs, promoting a more inclusive educational system.

4.2.2. Political Feasibility

The political feasibility of the "One Village, One School" policy in Oyo State is a complex aspect that requires careful consideration. Implementing this policy aligns with national educational goals and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) framework. However, its success hinges on strong political will and effective coordination across various levels of government. The policy demands substantial investment in infrastructure, training, and resource allocation, which may pose challenges in gaining unanimous support from all political factions. Gaining the backing of local leaders and communities is crucial as they play a pivotal role in facilitating and supporting the establishment of schools. The policy's success is dependent on a collaborative approach that involves local, state, and potentially federal government bodies, ensuring that the necessary resources and support are mobilized for its implementation.

4.2.3. Pecuniary Cost Implications

The implementation of the "One Village, One School" initiative in Oyo State carries substantial financial implications. While the federal government of Nigeria supports education funding, additional resources will be necessary to fully realize this ambitious project. The state government, therefore, needs to explore a range of funding options. This includes reallocating portions of the state budget to prioritize education, as well as seeking partnerships with private entities that are invested in educational development. Additionally, international aid and support from global organizations such as The World Bank and UNESCO could play a pivotal role in providing the financial backing needed to sustain this initiative. These organizations often offer grants and technical assistance for educational projects in developing regions, which could be instrumental in the successful rollout of the policy.

4.3. Alternative 3: School Feeding Program

4.3.1. Equity and Inclusivity

The projected implementation of the School Feeding Program in Oyo State is anticipated to significantly enhance school enrollment, potentially mirroring the 25% increase experienced in Osun State, as reported by Adekunle and Christina (2016). Such an increase would particularly benefit children in less affluent and remote areas, offering equitable access to nutritious meals. This initiative aims to level the educational playing field by ensuring all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, receive the necessary nutrition for effective learning. This is expected to lead to improved academic performance and overall well-being, fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

4.3.2. Political Feasibility

The political feasibility of the School Feeding Program in Oyo State is evaluated as moderate, given the involvement and coordination required among various stakeholders. The program's success hinges on the collaboration between local farmers, who will provide the ingredients, school administrations responsible for facilitating the meal programs, and meal preparers who will ensure the daily delivery of quality meals. The Nigerian federal government's support for school feeding programs is a positive indicator, as it suggests a favorable policy environment. However, the effective implementation of this initiative will depend on the alignment of these diverse stakeholders, their commitment to the program, and the ability to overcome logistical challenges. The support from the state government, as indicated by Governor Makinde's allocation of a significant portion of the budget to the education sector, further strengthens the political feasibility of this program (EduGist, 2023). With education being a priority for the state government, the school feeding program is likely to receive the necessary political backing and resources for successful implementation.

4.3.3. Pecuniary Cost Implications

The financial implications of the School Feeding Program in Oyo State are expected to be manageable, particularly due to the alignment with the Federal government's National Home-Grown School Feeding Policy. This policy framework provides a foundation for cost-effective implementation, leveraging local resources and community involvement. The integration of local farmers in the supply chain for school meals not only supports the local economy but also reduces costs associated with sourcing and transportation of food supplies. Furthermore, Governor Makinde's allocation of a significant budget to education indicates the availability of funds to support such initiatives (EduGist., 2023). The strategic use of existing financial resources, combined with efficient program management, is anticipated to keep the pecuniary costs within a sustainable range. This financial feasibility is crucial for the long-term success and scalability of the school feeding program in Oyo State.

4.3.4. Confronting tradeoffs

In reducing the number of out of school children in Oyo state, all three alternatives show both direct and indirect potentials to reducing the proportion of out of school children in the state. Eliminating hidden costs and the one village, one school have similar impact with the school feeding program slightly behind.

Implementing new policies will incur financial costs, and the Oyo state ministry of education must carefully balance its budget. Any policy implementation necessitates considering cost and benefit analysis and the state's financial allocations. Even though building one school in each village greatly reduces access barriers such as distance and inadequate school facilities, it comes with the highest pecuniary cost. In contrast, eliminating hidden costs of school attendance and enrolment incurs relatively minor administrative and financial expenses and has the largest effect size on enrollments and grade advancements. It is the most cost-effective option, estimated to increase school enrolment by 13%, improve access and reduce inequality for economically disadvantaged students, increase average class size by 9 students and boost in grade advancement by 16% (WestEd, 2012). Although it requires reallocating funds into the school system to cover for the hidden costs of uniforms, books, exam fees and PTA levies.

Politically, the school feeding program is expected to face the least resistance, compared to one village, one school and eliminating hidden costs of school attendance and enrolment. While maintaining the school feeding program is politically feasible, it has the least effectiveness in increasing enrolments and reducing out of school children with a mean of only 4.76. There is also a gap in methods that can allow for meaningful comparisons of performance, including costs, cost- efficiency, and cost-effectiveness of the school feeding program. Also, scaling up and consolidating school feeding programs requires considerable resources and a steady flow of funds: in low-income contexts like Oyo state. School feeding programs on average cost about US\$145 per child per year. Moreover, no one size fits all. School feeding pro- grams are complex and exhibit different context-specific models or configurations (Gelli and Suwa, 2014).

In conclusion, while one village, one school and eliminating hidden cost of school attendance and enrolment are both more viable options, however, the latter is preferred to effectively reduce the number of out of school children in Oyo state given its high efficiency and lower pecuniary cost. Hence, we recommend **eliminating the hidden cost of school attendance and enrolment**, to foster a more equitable and inclusive education system and significantly reduce the number of out of school children in Oyo state Nigeria.

4.4. Uncertainty

In our policy recommendation, the greatest uncertainty pertains to the political feasibility of proposed changes. While we have analyzed key stakeholders, their precise positions on reducing out of school children remain unclear. The lack of a detailed understanding of their interests challenges our ability to forecast their reactions with confidence. Given this backdrop of uncertainty, our analysis cautiously suggests that eliminating hidden costs of school attendance and enrolment could be a relatively safe and viable option. However, this recommendation recognizes that ongoing, rigorous analysis is crucial.

5. Conclusion

Oyo State confronts the challenge of numerous out-of-school children, affecting its education system, potential labor force, and economic health. To tackle this, a policy mix has been suggested, with eliminating hidden costs at its core. Effectively addressing this challenge requires open communication, involving stakeholders in both the policy development and implementation processes. It also involves highlighting the long-term benefits of enhanced transparency and equity in education. Initiatives that eliminate additional educational expenses and promote equity could lead to a more inclusive education system. Properly executed, such a policy could significantly reduce the education deficit in Oyo State.

Compliance with ethical standards

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No conflicts of interest/ Competing Interests with publication of the manuscript or an institution or product that is mentioned in the manuscript and/or is important to the outcome of the study presented.

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APPENDIX 1

• OUTCOME ANALYSIS MATRIX

Policy alternatives	Criteria		
	Equity and Inclusivity	Political Feasibility	Pecuniary Cost
Eliminating hidden cost of school attendance and enrollment	<p>Increase</p> <p>Improves access and reduce inequality for economically disadvantaged students</p> <p>Increased enrolment rates by 13%</p> <p>Increased average class size by 9 students</p> <p>16% boost in grade advancement</p>	<p>Medium</p> <p>Opposition from school administrators and heads about cost of running the schools</p> <p>Revenue loss and operational challenges on the ministry could lead to opposition from officials</p> <p>Aligns with UBE Act and has governmental support</p>	<p>Low</p> <p>Tap into existing government budget of 21% of the GDP dedicated to education</p> <p>No additional cost is expected on infrastructure or hiring new staff hence, the administrative cost will also be low</p> <p>Requires funding reallocation</p> <p>Reduces family costs</p>

One Village, One School	Medium Eliminate distance barrier Increase access for students in rural communities without an existing school	Low Push back from ministry officials and community leaders as the resources could have been used to do other things Requires strong political will and intergovernmental coordination	High Hire new teachers Purchase new equipment and set up new school infrastructure Reorganizing and expanding the existing school system is costly and Significant initial and ongoing financial investment
School Feeding Program	Medium Increased enrollment of students with a mean of 4.76. Provides equitable nutrition, enhancing learning	Medium Requires collaboration among stakeholders, Has the federal government's support	Medium Manageable within existing frameworks and external support

APPENDIX 2

• STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS MATRIX

Stakeholder	Motivation	Beliefs	Resources
Ministry Officials	Ensure equity and inclusion and uphold the state's vision	Education is a fundamental right of every child	Executive power
School administrators	Adhere to the stipulated guidelines of the ministry of education	Schools shape the future of society	School structure and admittance of students
Parents	Want the best for their children while keeping as much money as they can back in their pockets	Their children should be given equal access to education at subsidized or zero pricing	Associations and parents groups Peer to peer influence
Out of school children	A chance to be learn and be in school	Education could help them escape the poverty trap	Public sympathy
Community leaders	Ensure social mobility within their community	Every child in the community deserves to access education	Community influence
Experts	Ensuring equitable school policies	The state can adopt better policies to ensure equity and social mobility	Shaping public opinion Technocratic expertise on the issue
Media	Maintaining their reach and providing space for public engagement and shaping public opinion Getting advertisements for their house	Influence public opinion by supporting a particular stance and influence policy making Going against the interests of influential industrialists may affect their advertising business	Reach to the public Influence public opinion Can twist the narrative