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Assessing the Contribution of the Transit School Initiative to Universal basic Education and Sustainable Development Goal-4 in Northern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the role of the Transit School Initiative (TSI) in advancing Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) in Northern Nigeria. Utilizing a survey research approach, data were collected from 1,100 stakeholders across seven states in the region. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were employed to assess TSI's impact on educational access, retention, and inclusivity. Findings indicate that TSI significantly enhances educational opportunities by reintegrating marginalized children into formal schooling through scholarships, flexible learning pathways, and community-driven partnerships. Despite these successes, socio-cultural barriers and resource constraints continue to challenge the initiative's broader implementation. This study underscores the need for scaling TSI's model and integrating its strategies into national education policies to ensure sustainable solutions for addressing out-of-school children in Nigeria. The research provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and organizations seeking to reduce educational inequities and drive progress toward global and national development goals in underserved regions.

KEYWORDS: Universal Basic Education, SDG-4, Transit School Initiative

I. BACKGROUND

Overview of UBE and SDG-4 Goals

Education is universally recognized as a cornerstone for personal empowerment and societal development, serving as a key driver of economic growth, social progress, and equity. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) reflect these principles, striving to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Both initiatives emphasize eradicating educational disparities and addressing the barriers that prevent marginalized populations from accessing education. Education is concerned with the transmission of worthwhile values such as skills, knowledge and planned activities that can develop learners' potentials for human and national development (Ochoyi and Danladi, 2008; cited in Anaduka and Okafor, 2013).

The UBE programme, launched in Nigeria in 1999, mandates nine years of free and compulsory education, comprising six years of primary and three years of junior secondary schooling. It aims to reduce illiteracy, improve enrollment rates, and promote educational inclusivity. Ochoyi and Danladi (2008) reported that UBE has been a global objective which Nigeria like some other nations sets out to achieve through the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. Despite its ambitious goals, the UBE programme faces persistent challenges, including insufficient funding, teacher shortages, poor infrastructure, and socio-cultural barriers. These issues contribute to high dropout rates and leave millions of children excluded from formal education systems. It also includes adult and non-formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary education levels to take care of those who dropped out of school (National Policy on Education 2004; Aboluwodi, 2015). Tahir (2008) cited in Aboluwodi (2015) averred that Universal Basic Education is designed to ensure free access to education, reduce the rate of dropout to the minimum, make education relevant to the needs of learners and make education a lifelong enterprise. Complementing the UBE programme, SDG-4, a global agenda adopted in 2015 under the United Nations framework, aspires to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030. This goal encompasses diverse targets, such as ensuring free primary and secondary education, eliminating gender disparities, and fostering



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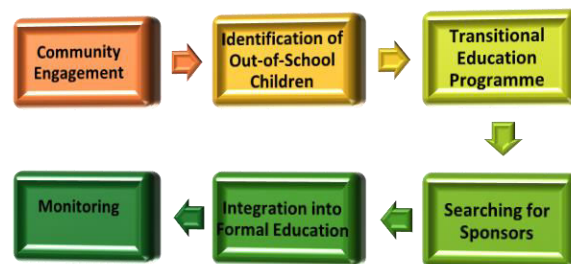
sustainable development through skills education. In Nigeria, achieving SDG-4 is pivotal for addressing the widespread out-of-school children (OOSC) crisis, improving literacy rates, and driving socio-economic growth.

Christopher O. U, & Nkechinyere O. A., (2024) reported that SDG 4-which emphasizes “Quality Education”-ranks highly among the 17 SDGs for altering the world by 2030, and for clear reasons. In essence, SDG 4 calls on all UN members, including Nigeria, to guarantee inclusive and equitable quality education and support opportunities for all people to make a living throughout their lifetimes through the Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA). The Goal-4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). Mathew (2012) equally contributed that Nigeria has several challenges that are militating against effective achievement of the SDG 4 goal: inadequate funding; poor infrastructural facilities and poor administration of schools. Lawrence, Ihebuzor, & Lawrence (2020) reported that the latest SDG ranking by UN assessed Nigeria as the 159 out of 162 nations and it is important that effort is put in place to improve (Global index ranking 2019).

Transit School Model

The Transit School Model is a structured framework designed to address the out-of-school children (OOSC) crisis in Northern Nigeria by providing a comprehensive and community-driven pathway to reintegrate children into formal education. The model emphasizes collaboration, inclusivity, and sustainability to ensure long-term impact.

Transit School Model



1. Community Engagement

This stage focuses on building trust and collaboration with parents, community leaders, and other stakeholders. By sensitizing communities to the importance of education and addressing cultural and socio-economic barriers, the initiative fosters an enabling environment for the reintegration of out-of-school children.

2. Identification of Out-of-School Children

In this stage, a house-to-house survey is conducted to identify children who are not enrolled in school. This process ensures that no child is left behind, providing accurate data on the number of OOSC and their specific needs.

3. Transitional Education Programme

Out-of-school children attend temporary transit classes designed to prepare them for integration into formal education. This stage provides foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, and basic science, helping students bridge learning gaps while awaiting sponsorship.

4. Searching for Sponsors

Efforts are made to connect with sponsors, including government agencies, NGOs, and private individuals, who can provide the necessary financial support for the children’s education. This stage is critical for ensuring sustainability and scalability of the initiative.

5. Integration into Formal Education

Once sponsorship is secured, children are reintegrated into formal schools. This stage involves collaboration with host schools, ensuring a seamless transition and continued support for the children’s academic success.

6. Monitoring

Regular monitoring and evaluation are conducted to track the progress of reintegrated students, assess the effectiveness of the intervention, and identify areas for improvement. This stage ensures accountability and the sustained impact of the model.



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RELEVANCE OF UBE, SDG-4, AND TSI IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children (OOSC) in the world, with over 18.3 million children excluded from formal education, most of whom are in the northern region (UNICEF, 2024). This crisis stems from deep-rooted challenges, including poverty (Ogunode, 2020a; Musa, 2019), gender disparities—where cultural norms discourage girls' education (Gulbaz, Muhammad, & Syed, 2011)—as well as insecurity, which threatens personal safety and regional stability (Katcha & Mukaddas, 2024). Other contributing factors include geographical and infrastructural barriers (Katcha & Mukaddas, 2024), early marriages, child labor, and the prevalence of informal education systems such as the Almajiri system.

Achieving Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) is crucial to addressing these systemic inequities, fostering gender equality, and ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The Transit School Initiative (TSI) is a strategic intervention that directly supports the realization of UBE and SDG-4 by providing an innovative, scalable, and community-driven model for reintegrating out-of-school children into the formal education system.

How TSI Supports the Achievement of UBE and SDG-4

The Transit School Initiative (TSI) directly contributes to achieving Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) by providing an innovative, community-driven solution to Nigeria's out-of-school children (OOSC) crisis.

1. Ensuring Access to Free and Compulsory Education – TSI identifies and enrolls OOSC through house-to-house outreach, removing financial barriers and ensuring children transition into government-supported schools under UBE.
2. Promoting Gender Equality and Inclusive Education – The initiative advocates for girls' education, addresses cultural barriers, and provides flexible learning opportunities to ensure equal access for all children, aligning with SDG-4's inclusivity goals.
3. Improving Literacy and Learning Outcomes – TSI delivers foundational literacy and numeracy education to children, equipping them for formal schooling and lifelong learning as emphasized in SDG-4 Target 4.6.
4. Strengthening Education Systems and Partnerships – By training volunteer educators, collaborating with government agencies, NGOs, and private partners, and integrating alternative learning approaches, TSI enhances educational quality and sustainability.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite Nigeria's adoption of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in 1999 and its commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4), Northern Nigeria continues to experience severe educational disparities, with over 18.3 million out-of-school children (OOSC)—the highest globally. The region's educational crisis is driven by poverty, insecurity, socio-cultural norms, gender disparities, and inadequate infrastructure, limiting access to quality and inclusive learning opportunities.

Government interventions, including Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA) and the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP), as well as efforts from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have made limited progress in addressing this crisis. The unique socio-cultural and security challenges of Northern Nigeria further exacerbate the problem, leaving millions of children without access to formal education, thus undermining Nigeria's progress toward UBE and SDG-4 goals.

In response, innovative, community-driven models such as the Transit School Initiative (TSI) have emerged as critical solutions for reintegrating out-of-school children into formal education through scholarships, flexible learning pathways, and local partnerships. However, while TSI has demonstrated effectiveness in improving educational access and retention, its full impact, scalability, and integration into national education policies remain underexplored. A systematic evaluation of TSI's contributions to achieving UBE and SDG-4 is essential to inform evidence-based policy decisions and expand sustainable solutions for addressing educational inequities in Northern Nigeria.



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III. OBJECTIVE

To assess the contribution of the Transit School Initiative (TSI) in achieving Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) in Northern Nigeria.

Research Question

To what extent does the Transit School Initiative contribute to achieving Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) goals in Northern Nigeria?

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the responses of stakeholders on TSI’s contribution to achieving the goals of Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4).

IV. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a survey research approach to comprehensively evaluate the contributions of the Transit School Initiative (TSI) to achieving Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4).

Population and Sampling

The study targeted 4,589 key stakeholders involved with TSI, including: Students, Educators, Parents/Guardians, sponsors and Programme Managers.

Sample Size and Demographics:

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select a representative sample of 1,100 respondents across multiple states in Northern Nigeria where TSI operates.

Data Collection Tools

Structured questionnaires were distributed to key stakeholders such teachers, parents, community leaders, sponsors and programme managers to gather in-depth perspectives on TSI’s contributions to achieving UBE and SDGs4.

Data Analysis

The data collected using questionnaires were coded and analyzed descriptive and Inferential statistical techniques to identify contribution of TSI in achieving the UBE and SDGs using descriptive statistics.

Research Question: To what extent does TSI contribute to the attainment of Universal Basic Education goal and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4)

Table 1: Responses on Transit School Initiative’s Contribution to Achieving Universal Basic Education and SDG-4

S/N	Item Statement	SD (n)	D (n)	A (n)	SA (n)	Mean	Std	Decision
27	TSI improves access to education for marginalized children.	77	44	473	506	3.31	0.72	High extent
28	The programme supports inclusive education for children with disabilities.	77	66	451	506	3.30	0.73	High extent
29	TSI raises awareness among families about the importance of Universal Basic Education.	77	55	462	506	3.31	0.71	High extent
30	TSI fosters partnerships with stakeholders to achieve UBE and SDG-4 targets.	88	55	462	495	3.30	0.74	High extent



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S/N	Item Statement	SD (n)	D (n)	A (n)	SA (n)	Mean	Std	Decision
31	The programme contributes to reducing the number of out-of-school children nationwide.	77	44	473	506	3.31	0.72	High extent
32	TSI aligns with SDG-4 by promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all children.	88	44	473	495	3.28	0.75	Low extent

Weighted average: 3.30

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in the responses of stakeholders on TSI's contribution to achieving the goals of Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4).

Table 2: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on Transit School Initiative's work alignment with the goals of Universal Basic Education and the SDGs.

Group	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	39.195	4	9.799	2.685	0.30	Accepted
Within Groups	4033.324	1105	3.650			
Total	4072.519	1109				

Sig. level 0.05

V. DISCUSSION

The data analysis shows that most respondents believe that the initiatives by the Transit School Initiative (TSI) effectively promote equal access to quality education for all, in accordance with the principles of Universal Basic Education. They also perceive TSI's programmes as contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by providing educational opportunities to out-of-school children. Moreover, they agree that TSI's efforts are aligned with the goal of reducing educational inequalities and promoting inclusivity, as outlined in the SDGs. Respondents attribute the overall success of TSI's initiatives to their effective addressing of the specific targets set by Universal Basic Education and the SDGs related to education. They also believe that TSI's initiatives effectively tackle the challenges and gaps identified in these frameworks, strongly aligning with their goals.

However, some respondents believed that TSI's contribution and alignment to the attainment of the goals of Universal Basic Education and SDG-4. Specifically, was ineffective, they doubt whether TSI actively promotes the importance of education as a fundamental human right, as emphasized by these frameworks, and whether TSI's programmes prioritize the holistic development of out-of-school children in line with their goals. Additionally, they question whether TSI's work contributes sufficiently to global efforts to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all, as advocated by Universal Basic Education and the SDGs. Furthermore, they disagree that TSI's work actively supports the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms outlined by these frameworks to track progress in education.

The finding from the hypothesis suggests that Initiative (TSI) significantly contributes to achieving the goals of Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4), indicate a statistically significant effect. With a p-value of 0.029, which is below the significance threshold of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H05) can be rejected. This means that TSI's activities are aligned with and significantly contribute to the goals of UBE and SDG-4. The F-statistic of 0.07 confirms that the differences observed between the groups' perceptions are not random but are meaningful and reflective of the initiative's contribution.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Transit School Initiative (TSI) has demonstrated significant contributions to advancing Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) in Northern Nigeria. By addressing the out-of-school children



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(OOSC) crisis through targeted interventions, TSI has improved access to quality education, enhanced academic performance, and promoted equitable learning opportunities. Its focus on reintegrating marginalized children into formal education, providing scholarships, and fostering community partnerships has effectively bridged critical gaps in the education sector. The findings underscore TSI's role as a model for tackling systemic educational challenges, particularly in underserved and conflict-affected regions. The initiative's alignment with global and national education priorities highlights its scalability, suggesting that its strategies can be adapted and expanded to other regions across Nigeria and similar contexts worldwide.

Conclusion

The Transit School Initiative (TSI) has demonstrated its capacity to significantly impact the educational landscape of Northern Nigeria. By addressing key challenges such as access, retention, and inclusivity for marginalized populations, TSI aligns with the objectives of UBE and SDG-4. Despite some challenges, its interventions serve as a scalable and replicable model for advancing quality education and reducing inequities in underserved regions. For sustained progress, integrating TSI's strategies into national frameworks and fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships will be pivotal. The initiative's success signals a pathway for Nigeria to accelerate progress toward achieving inclusive and equitable education.

Recommendations

1. Stakeholders should incorporate TSI's flexible and inclusive approaches into Nigeria's national education policies to address the OOSC crisis effectively.
2. The government and international organizations should provide adequate funding and support to scale TSI interventions across Nigeria. Expanding these models to other regions can ensure broader coverage and impact.

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