



**BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS TO
BASIC EDUCATION IN KWANDE LGA OF BENUE STATE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract:

This survey investigated the barriers to equitable access to basic education in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State and pointed out the implications for human capital development. The survey took place during the 2016/2017 academic session and involved both parents and head teachers. Data were collected mainly through a 26-item questionnaire developed by the researchers and validated by two experts. Its reliability coefficient using Cronbach's Alpha yielded 0.81, meeting Pallant's (2005) recommendation. A total of 32 head teachers and 400 parents volunteered to provide opinions, which constituted the data for the study. By using the convenience sampling procedure, it was possible to get only those respondents who were available and willing to participate in the study. A total of 432 copies of questionnaires were returned for analysis. Result of the analysis using descriptive and inferential statistics showed that in the 2016/17 session alone, 2,286 out of school children were found in the study area, and major barriers to basic education access include non-payment of fees, gender, prevalence rate of herdsmen/farmers clashes, level of parental income, and child interest. The most affected population groups include orphans, care givers, the physically challenged, girls and displaced children. A significant difference was noticed between the number of out-of-school children in towns and villages ($p=0.01$) and in the

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mean rating of barriers to children's access to basic education by teachers and parents ($p=0.03$). The study suggested among others that the Government should make primary education truly free and affordable for every child. This will reduce imbalance in educational enrolment and completion between the haves and have nots.

Keywords: equity, barriers, basic education, human capital, illiteracy

1. Background to the Study

Social equity is a principle that is cherished by both developed and developing nations. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank (2005) defines equity as the situation that individuals should have equal opportunities to pursue a life of their choice and be spared from extreme deprivation in outcomes. The central concerns of equity are 'equality, fairness and social justice' (Jones, 2009, p.3). But stakeholders are worried if this principle is ever practised in our national life. Narrowing down the discussion to equity in education, we make reference to the position of The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO (2007) not only holds equity in high esteem, but also encourages and regulates that all member nations should provide the best opportunities for children of school age to achieve their educational aspirations. Equity in educational opportunities and learning presupposes that nations should pursue and provide high-quality education for all children, regardless of their background or where they live (UNESCO, 2007).

The idea of education for all is predicated on the principle of equity. The desire of achieving education for all is a global goal and all modern nations are expected to work towards the realization of this goal. In Article 3 of the expanded vision of UNESCO of the World Declaration of Education for All (UNESCO, 1990), significant emphasis has been placed on universalizing access and promoting equity to basic education for all children, youths, and adults. This was re-echoed and reaffirmed during The World Education Forum popularly called 'The Dakar Framework for Action' held between 26 and 28 April 2000 in Dakar, Senegal. In that meeting, the Forum decried the high illiteracy levels among nations and declared as unacceptable the over 113 million children that have no access to basic education and the continued gender discrimination practices that permeate school systems. For emphasis, Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all. Equity as a global trend deserves attention in research as a basis for measuring economic and manpower

development. Nigeria as a developing economy, needs to boost the literacy level of her citizens through basic education in order for her citizens to fit into the information-based economy. The question is: Is Nigeria (and Benue State in particular) ensuring equitable distribution of basic education service among the various social groups? Basic education is the type of education that is given to children in their formative age. Common experience shows that many children of school age are not attending school nor receiving any form of private tuition in order to acquire basic literacy skills. It should be the worry of parents and the government that a large number of children are not attending school. Experience has shown that many children who fail to acquire education in their early years do not have opportunities to school again, especially when they eventually marry. Early marriage and other socio-economic factors become obstacles to formal education. Experience has also shown that many illiterate children constitute a nuisance to society after failure to secure very useful means of livelihood. Basic education should be acquired early enough, as this will be to the advantage of the child in developing the right attitudes and skills for their sustenance. In Nigeria today, most job opportunities are limited to youths of between 23 to 30 years. If children of school age do not attend school in good time, they miss such opportunities on account of age. Government and parents should do everything possible to encourage early education. The importance of this subject matter has made it desirable to investigate and understand the barriers to basic education in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State.

2. The Problem

In the background to the study we argued that the principle of equity in educational opportunities is a global trend and member countries of the United Nations Organizations have the mandate to ensure that their citizens have equitable access to basic education. In practice, this is far from reality. Research studies provide proof that illiteracy among children of school age is on the rise worldwide (UNESCO, 2000) and imbalance in educational opportunities is making illiteracy more prevalent. In Nigeria, imbalance in educational opportunities between different parts of the country persists (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2012), and there are indicators of lower enrolment in rural areas as compared to urban areas. There is also noticeable imbalance between children of poorer households and richer ones and lower enrolment of females especially in the north compared to boys (Humphreys, 2015; Nwogu, 2015; Moja, 2000; Akimbi & Akimbi, 2015). The problem is likely to be unabated in the northern part of Nigeria where the war against Boko Haram insurgents is still going on with millions of

people being displaced on a daily basis. Even as the exchange of gunfire in the battle zone has subsided, the guerrilla tactics of planting bombs that blast in public places like markets, motor parks, worship centres and schools has become a daily occurrence particularly in Maiduguri and environs till date. The effect of this phenomenon on social life especially organized schooling is unimaginable. Benue, though not a core northern state, but shares political and economic ties with the northern states has been experiencing the spill over effects of the crises in the northern states. Besides, with the increase in herdsmen/farmers crises of which Benue and environs are badly hit, more and more people are displaced in Benue and this has negative effects on children's school attendance and completion.

This study is therefore, interested in identifying the barriers that hinder children's equitable access to basic education in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State. Kwande Local Government Area was chosen for this study because it shares boundary with the Cameroon Republic and Taraba State. Both locations are near the north-eastern states where activities of Boko Haram insurgents are on the increase.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the barriers to equitable access to basic education in Kwande LGA of Benue State and point out the implications for human capital development and economic growth. In particular, the study sought to:

1. determine in the study area the number of children of school age not attending school for the 2016/2017 academic year and the reasons behind it.
2. determine in the study area the number of children that dropped out of school for the 2016/2017 academic session and the reasons responsible for this.
3. determine the mean ratings of the barriers to basic education as opined by head teachers and parents?
4. establish whether or not parents and teachers differ on what constitute barriers to children's access to basic education?
5. identify physical/terrain factors that pose a threat to basic education access in Kwande LGA.
6. ascertain which population group is mostly affected by these barriers.

4. Research Questions

The study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the number of children of school age not attending school in Kwande LGA for the 2016/2017 academic year?
2. What is the mean difference in the number of boys and girls not attending school for the 2016/2017 academic session?
3. What are the reasons why children are dropping out of school in Kwande Local Government Area?
4. What are the barriers to equitable access to basic education in Kwande LGA?
5. What are the physical/terrain factors that pose a threat to basic education access in Kwande LGA?
6. Which population group is mostly affected by barriers to basic education access in Kwande LGA?

4.1 Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between children of school age in towns and villages not attending school.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of the barriers to children's access to basic education between head teachers and parents.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of the factors that mostly affect children's access to basic education by teachers and parents.
4. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of the population groups mostly affected by barriers to access to basic education by head teachers and parents.

5. Significance of the Study

No study known to the authors has investigated the barriers to equitable access to basic education in Kwande Local Government Area (LGA). The present study therefore, holds the promise of revealing not only the barriers to children's access to basic education but also hopes to provide very useful information on the literacy standing of children of school age in the area. The study will provide a picture of the successes and failures of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) interventions in the area. It is also hoped that the findings of the study would be of immense value to not only the Government of Benue State but also the Federal Government of Nigeria in evaluating itself on the attainment or otherwise of Education for All goal. Results could form the basis for the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and Ministry of Education to initiate literacy intervention programmes, teacher preparation, and adult and literacy campaigns, and teacher retraining programmes.

5. Review of Related Literature

Going by the modern growth theory, economic growth depends not only on main inputs such as land, labour, capital, technology but also on social, education, economic and political structures. According to Ucak (2015), this theory evolved out of the views of classical economists whose major concern was to examine the relationship between human capital and how it affects labour productivity and earnings for the workforce. The proponents of this theory are of the view that educational attainment is a significant contributor to human capital development, which in turn is a determining factor in economic growth. This theory is relevant to this study because, in the quest to brace up with the challenges of modern day knowledge-based economy, basic education is an asset and major yardstick to become active and effective contributors to the knowledge-based economy. Many developing countries make basic education a priority in order to meet the global aspiration to attain education for all in order to improve the quality of life, reduce illiteracy and poverty. Therefore, ensuring access to basic education is a way of tackling the problem of imbalance in employment and other life opportunities.

5.1 Concept of Equity

Equity issues are multidimensional and the wide variety of views on the subject attest to this fact. Equity is a basic requirement that guarantees social stability and economic development of nations. Nations that encourage equity ensure that they promote a level playing field where all members of society have similar chances to become socially active, politically influential, and economically productive in order for them to contribute to sustainable growth and development (Jones, 2009). The World Health Organization (2017) stresses that equity is the absence of avoidable or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically, or geographically. The three principles of equity according to Jones (2009) include:

- (a) Equal life chances: There should be no differences in outcomes based on factors for which people cannot be held responsible.
- (b) Equal concern for people's needs: Some goods and services are necessities, and should be distributed according solely to the level of need.
- (c) Meritocracy: Positions in society and rewards should reflect differences in effort and ability, based on fair competition.

Experts also talk about equity as *inclusion* and equity as *fairness*. Relating this to education, equity as inclusion means ensuring that all children reach at least a basic

minimum level of skills. Equity as fairness implies that personal or socio-economic circumstances, such as gender, ethnic origin or family background should not be obstacles to educational success (OECD, 2012).

5.2 Basic Education, Human Capital Development and Economic Growth

Basic education was conceived to embrace the six years of primary school and the three years of junior secondary education. The Nine-Year basic education was introduced in Nigeria in conformity with the [International Standard Classification of Education](#) (ISCED) practice where basic education stands for the first phase of primary or basic education, which takes six years while the lower or junior secondary education takes three years. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2012) provides that basic education shall be free, compulsory and include adult and non-formal education programmes at the primary and secondary school levels, and is meant to serve all children, adults and out-of-school youths. Apart from the basic goals of inculcating permanent literacy, numeracy and the ability to acquire communication skills, the goal of basic education as it relates to development of human capital and the growth of the national economy is to:

*“Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child’s capacity;
Provide the child with the basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality”*

(FRN, p.11-12)

One can therefore, say basic education is a prerequisite for means of survival in today’s knowledge-based economy. Son (2010) had defined human capital as the ability and efficiency of people to transform raw materials and capital into goods and services similar to Sullivan and Steven’s (2003) assertion that human capital represents the knowledge, skills and ability that make possible for people to do their jobs. We clearly see basic education as the main driver of human capital development. This is because, the entire process of preparing and nurturing individuals to acquire relevant skills, know-how and experience to fit into various jobs begins with basic education. This position links educational attainment to human capital development and economic growth. In reality, the main workforce of a nation is made up of youths of between eighteen to forty years. Government has the obligation of raising the quality of its education force to achieve economic growth. This begins with basic education.

5.3 Barriers to Basic Education

Section 1 of Nigeria's Policy on Education (FRN, 2012) outlines the philosophy and goals of education in Nigeria with a clear declaration that *"Every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities each according to his or her ability"* (FRN, p.6). The National Policy on Education unequivocally promotes free access to basic education by making it *"tuition free, universal and compulsory"* (FRN, p.12). The Policy also stipulates that government will ensure that *"everything possible shall be done to discourage the incidence of dropping out at the primary level of education..."* (FRN, p.13). Notwithstanding the provisions of the National Policy, barriers to access to education abound, and these barriers vary from place to place.

In general, the northern part of Nigeria has particularly recorded high cases of out of school children (UNICEF, 2007). Research Triangle Institute (RTI) (2016) reported barriers to educational access to include *"such things as poverty, social norms, inadequate supply of quality education, and/or an understanding that a formal Western education was either bad or not worth the cost"* (p.2). In one survey covering two states namely Bauchi and Sokoto, the RARA Framework for Monitoring Equitable Access to Education in Northern Nigeria reports that poverty and social norms are major reasons why children experience access problems to basic education (RTI, 2016). Okorie (2017) was more interested in factors militating against girl child education in Nigeria. He identified poor family background, religious isolation, disability, early marriage and pregnancy, gender-driven violence, cultural discrimination and attitudes against women's status and role. In one study, Humphreys (2015) came out with out-of-school factors and in-school factors as access barriers to basic education. To Humphreys (2015) out-of-school factors responsible for non-enrolment, absenteeism and/or dropout from schools include: illness or hunger; the need to do paid/unpaid work (including caring for siblings and sick relatives); an inability to pay school costs and fees; lack of uniforms or other materials; and parental attitudes. On the other hand, in-school factors were listed to include poor infrastructure and facilities; lack of space or overcrowding; teacher absenteeism; pupil avoidance of harassment, bullying or corporal punishment; an inability to understand the medium of instruction (MOI); and the poor quality of teaching and learning taking place. For higher education, Nwogu (2015) maintain that equitable access is often marred by factors such as found the problem of carrying capacity, quota system of admissions, University Matriculations Examination (UME) unaffordable costs, armed conflicts/insurgency, selection methods, gender inequality to be the major access problems. Barriers to educational opportunities whether at the primary, secondary or tertiary levels have been there since independence (Nwogu,

2015) and are a major reason for social suspicion, feeling of neglect and constant agitations for fairness and equality especially among minority groups and women. In a multiethnic nation like Nigeria, this is expected. Today, agitations for equal opportunities in education and employment have led to the formation of pressure groups, non-governmental organizations and even dissident groups that rebel against constituted governments. The main implication of this review is that Nigeria is yet to attain the goal of education for all. It is desirable to further find out communities with the problem of imbalance in education opportunities with a view to addressing them. From research, the problem is more in the northern states of Nigeria. But is the problem common in Benue, a middle belt State also?

6. Method

Descriptive survey was utilized as the design for this study. The nature of the research warranted eliciting the opinion of targeted participants as well as gathering facts. This design was suitable because it involves natural and man-made educational phenomena that are of interest to policy makers and educators (Borg & Gall, 1989). The area of the study was Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. Kwande is made up of four Districts namely Turan, Ikyurav-ya, Nanev and Ishangev-ya. Kwande is bounded by Vandeikya Local Government in the West, Cross Rivers State in the South, the Republic of Cameroon in the East while the North and North-West are bounded by Ushongo and Katsina-Ala Local Government Areas respectively.

6.1 Study Sample

A total of 32 head teachers and 400 parents were sampled through the convenience sampling procedure. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling procedure that is used where members of the target population meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study (Dörnyei, 2007; Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The researchers used only parents and teachers who were available and willing to volunteer information required of them after they were told the importance of the exercise.

6.2 Instrument for Data Collection

Two structured questionnaires were developed by the researchers and used for data collection. Each questionnaire contained five major sections. Section 'A' elicited demographic information such as location of school, whether urban or rural. Section 'B'

determined the number of out of school children. Section 'C' elicited information on reasons why children drop out of school. Section 'D' elicited information of barriers to children's access to basic education and Section 'E' elicited information on population groups mostly affected by the barriers. Appropriate instructions guided every section, but in the main, respondents were to rate the items according to how much they agreed on a scale of 1 (Disagree), 2 (Strongly Disagree), 3 (Agree), 4 (Strongly Agree).

6.3 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was given to two experts in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching, Benue State University, Makurdi for validation. After that Cronbach Alpha reliability test was performed to determine the internal consistency of a set of scale or the score for each scale item of the instrument. A reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained and reported. Going by Pallant's (2005) recommendation, a reliability coefficient of 0.7 and above is ideal to confirm the reliability of the instrument.

6.4 Data Analysis Method

Data were analysed mainly by means of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations and percentages were used to answer the research questions, while independent samples t-test, a form of inferential statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

6.5 Analysis of Data and Results

Research Question 1: What is the number of children of school age not attending school in Kwande LGA for the 2016/2017 academic year?

The answer to research question one is derived from Fig. 1 below:

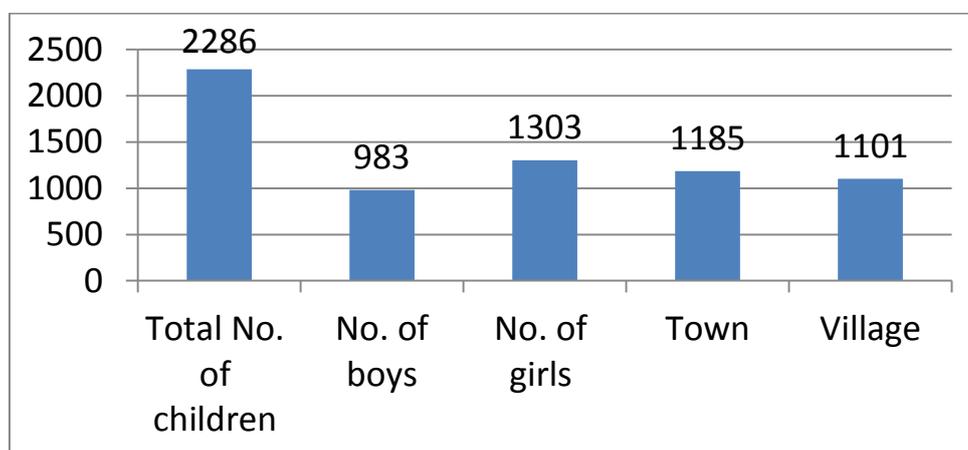


Figure 1: Number of children not attending school in Kwande LGA in 2016/2017

In Fig. 1, the total number of children of school age who were not attending school within the 2016/2017 academic session in Kwande LGA was 2,286. Out of this number, 1,185 were in towns while 1,101 were in rural settlements. Out of the figure, 983 were boys while 1,303 were girls.

Research Question 2: What is the mean difference in the number of boys and girls not attending school for the 2016/2017 academic session?

The answer to research question 2 is contained in the analyzed data presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The mean number of boys and girls not attending school per locality in this year

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
No. of boys that dropped out of/not attending school this year?	2.28	432	1.230	.059
No. of girls that dropped out of/not attending school this year?	3.02	432	2.872	.138

Table 1 contains the responses of 32 head teachers and 400 parents which were used in answering research question two. Total responses were 432. The mean number of boys not attending school for the year in question is 2.28 (SD 1.23) while the mean number of girls is 3.02 (SD 2.87). The mean difference between boys and girls is 0.74.

Research Question 3: What are the reasons why children are dropping out of school in Kwande LGA?

The answer to research question three is contained in Table 2.

Table 2: Reasons why children are dropping out of school

Reasons why children are dropping out of school	Boys		Girls	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Non payment of fees	141	32.6	144	33.3
Needed to work on farm or to assist parents with trade	101	23.4	96	22.2
Migrated	43	10.0	24	5.6
Transferred to other schools	43	10.0	63	14.6
Lack of food/malnutrition	26	6.0	62	14.4
Early marriage	14	3.2	11	2.5
Health related problems	38	8.8	22	5.1
Other/unknown cause	26	6.0	10	2.3
Total	432	100.0	432	100.0

In Table 2, major reasons why boys are dropping out of school are: non payment of fees (32.6%), needed to assist parents on the farm or with trade (23.4%), Migration (10%), transfer to other schools (10%). Major reasons why girls are dropping out of school are: non payment of fees (33.3%), needed to assist parents on the farm or with trade (22.2%), transfer to other schools (14.6%), lack of food (14.4%). Health related problems account for only 8.8% for boys and 5.1% for girls, early marriage accounts for 3.2 % for boys and 2.5% for girls, unknown causes 6% for boys and 2.3% for girls. From this result, we see that economic factor is the main reason why both boys and girls are dropping out of school. Majority of the respondents attribute the cause of dropout rate in schools to economic factors.

Research Question 4: What are the barriers to equitable access to basic education in Kwande LGA?

The answer to Research Question 4 is provided in Table 3 below:

Table 3: The mean rating of the barriers to basic education by teachers and parents/ householders

Barriers to basic education		Parents/Householders			Head Teacher/Teachers		
		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Gender	400	2.21	1.183	32	3.50	.672
2	Herdsman/farmers crises	400	3.37	.643	32	3.34	.653
3	Communal crises	400	2.97	.962	32	2.94	.982
4	Traditional beliefs	400	1.82	.994	32	2.44	1.045
5	Religious beliefs	400	2.02	1.099	32	2.63	1.129
6	Parental level of education	400	2.75	1.005	32	2.72	1.023
7	Parental level of income	400	3.40	.736	32	3.38	.751
8	Child's lack of interest	400	2.64	1.142	32	2.59	1.160

Table 3 gives an item by item mean rating of barriers to basic education as seen by teachers and parents. This result is used in answering research question four. With reference to our benchmark mean of 2.5, only items with a mean of 2.5 and above are considered a major barrier to education access. From Table 3 above, parents perceive major barriers to children's access to basic education to include: *herdsman/farmers clashes* (M=3.37), *communal crises* (M=2.97), *parental level of education* (M=3.4), and *child's interest* (M=2.64). To teachers, major barriers to children's access to basic education are: *gender* (M=3.50), *herdsman/farmers clashes* (M=3.34), *communal crises* (M=2.94), *religious beliefs* (M=2.63), *parental level of education* (M=2.72), *parental level of income* (M=3.38), and *children's interest* (M=2.59). Barriers chosen by both parents and teachers include:

herdsmen/farmers' clashes, communal crises, parental level of education, parental level of income, and child's interest.

Research question 5: What are the terrain/ physical factors that hinder children's access to basic education in Kwande LGA?

Table 4: The mean rating of the terrain/physical factors that hinder children's access to basic education by teachers and parents/ householders

Terrain/physical factors		Parents/Householders			Head Teacher/Teachers		
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Mountains	400	2.03	1.146	32	2.66	1.208
2	Rivers	400	2.38	1.081	32	2.34	1.096
3	Poor road network	400	2.39	1.217	32	2.34	1.234

Table 4 contains an item by item mean rating of the terrain/physical factors that hinder children's access to basic education as seen by teachers and parents/ householders. With reference to our benchmark mean of 2.5, only items with a mean of 2.5 and above can be considered as physical factors that hinder children's access to basic education. From Table 4, only mountains were seen as a factor affecting children's access. Rivers and poor road networks are not important factors.

Research question 6: Which population group is mostly affected by the barriers to basic education?

Table 5: The mean rating of the population group that is mostly affected by the barriers to basic education by teachers and parents/ householders

Population group		Parents/Householders			Head Teacher/Teachers		
		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Orphans	400	3.12	.975	32	3.09	.995
2	Caregivers	400	3.22	.879	32	3.19	.896
3	The physically challenged	400	3.16	1.076	32	3.13	1.100
4	Girls	400	2.73	1.182	32	2.69	1.203
5	Boys	400	2.34	.918	32	2.31	.931
6	Displaced children	400	2.76	1.176	32	2.72	1.198

Table 5 contains an item by item mean rating of the population group mostly affected by the barriers to children's access to basic education as seen by teachers and parents/ householders. From Table 5 above, all except boys are affected by the barriers to access to basic education. Both parents and head teachers are unanimous in opinion that boys

are not affected by the barriers to equitable access to basic education. This result means that boys have an educational advantage over girls.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between children of school age in towns and villages not attending school.

Table 6: t-test table for the significant difference in the number of children of school age, not attending school in towns and villages

	Location	N	Mean	t	df	p
No. of children dropped out of /not attending school this year?	Town	207	5.7	2.490	430	.013
	Village	225	4.9			

In testing Hypothesis 1, an independent-samples t-test was performed to compare the number of out of school children in towns and village settlements and the results are presented in Table 6 above. There was a significant difference in the scores for children in towns (M=5.7) and villages (M=4.9); $t(430)=2.49$, $p = 0.01$. Since $p < 0.05$, it means the mean difference is significant. We therefore, reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the number of children of school age, not attending school in towns and villages.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of the barriers to children’s access to basic education between head teachers and parents.

Table 7: t-test table for the significant difference in the mean rating of the barriers to children’s access to basic education by Teachers and parents

	Category	N	Mean	t	df	p
Mean rating of barriers to children's access to basic education	Head Teacher	32	2.9	2.167	430	.031
	Parent	400	2.6			

In testing Hypothesis 2, an independent-samples t-test was performed to compare the mean ratings of barriers to access to basic education by head teachers and parents and the results are presented in Table 7 above. There was a significant difference in the rating of head teachers (M=2.9) and parents (M=2.6); $t(430)=2.16$, $p = 0.03$. Since $p < 0.05$, it means the mean rating is statistically significant. We therefore, reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of the barriers to children’s access to basic education between head teachers and parents.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of the factors that mostly affect children’s access to basic education by teachers and parents.

Table 8: t-test table for the significant difference in the mean rating of the factors that mostly affect children’s access to basic education by Teachers and parents

	Category	N	Mean	t	df	p
Mean rating of factors that mostly affect children's access to basic education	Head Teacher	32	2.4	0.977	430	.329
	Parent	400	2.3			

An independent-samples t-test was performed to compare the mean ratings of the factors that affect children’s access to basic education by head teachers and parents and the results are presented in Table 8 above. There was no significant difference noticed in the rating of head teachers (M=2.4) and parents (M=2.3); $t(430)=0.97$, $p = 0.33$. Since $p>0.05$, it means the mean rating is not statistically significant. We therefore, fail to reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of the barriers to children’s access to basic education between head teachers and parents.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of the population groups mostly affected by barriers to access to basic education by head teachers and parents.

Table 9: t-test table for the significant difference in the mean rating of the population groups affected by barriers by Teachers and parents

	Category	N	Mean	t	df	p
Mean rating of population groups affected by the barriers.	Head Teacher	32	2.9	0.186	430	.853
	Parent	400	2.9			

An independent-samples t-test was performed to compare the mean ratings of the population group considered by head teachers and parents to be most affected by barriers to children’s access to basic education. The results are presented in Table 8 above. There was no significant difference noticed in the rating of head teachers (M=2.9) and parents (M=2.9); $t(430)=0.18$, $p = 0.85$. Since $p>0.05$, it means the mean rating is not statistically significant. We therefore, fail to reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of the barriers to children’s access to basic education between head teachers and parents.

7. Discussion of Findings

From the review of literature, we found proof that barriers to access to basic education is a recurring problem and the single most important contributor to illiteracy rates. In the northern states of Nigeria, the problem is assuming an alarming proportion. From the result analysis, a great deal of relationship exists between literature reviewed and the outcome of the present study. This can be seen in the following.

A. Number of Out-of-School Children in Kwande LGA

The findings of the present study reveal that a large number of children of school age are out of school in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State. In the academic year 2016/2017 alone, out-of-school children in Kwande LGA stood at 2, 286. Out of this number, 1,303 or 57% were females while 983 or 43% were males. This result shows that more girls have dropped out of school than boys for the academic year under review. This is similar to findings by Akimbi and Akimbi (2015). The result further indicates that the greater percentage of out-of-school children (1,185 or 51.84%) were found in urban locations while 1101 or 48.16% were found in rural settlements. This finding is disturbing because, if within one year, the number of out of school children in Kwande alone is as high as this, it is a sign that the number of illiterate children in Benue State is on the rise. This should be a worrisome development because, experience has shown that out of school children pose a lot of danger to society. Social vices such as vandalism, violence, stealing, insurgency etc. are associated with illiterates in general and out of school children in particular.

This result further indicates that the problem of imbalance in male-female enrolment in schools is not only faced by the core northern states of Kano, Borno, Sokoto, Yobe, Katsina etc as found by UNESCO (2003) and Okorie (2017), but Benue too is a victim. Similar investigations (UNESCO, 2003, Okorie, 2017) have shown that fewer enrolment figures have been recorded for girls compared to boys especially in Bauchi, Katsina and Sokoto. Similarly, Akimbi and Akimbi (2015) have reported that female dropout rate is becoming more acute in present day Nigeria.

B. Reasons Why Children Continue to Drop out of School

On the reasons why children are constantly dropping out of school, the present study reveals that economic-related reasons (non payment of fees 33.3%, needed to work on the farm or assist parent with trade 23.4%) account for the high dropout rate of school children. Other reasons why children drop out of school include migration, transfer to other school, lack of food, early marriage, health related causes. Majority of the

respondents attribute the cause of dropout rate in schools to economic factors. A similar finding has been reported by Humpreys (2015). The implication of this finding is that basic education is not free after all. Various governments keep saying that basic education is free. But our study shows that primary education is not free.

C. Barriers to Equitable Access to Basic Education

In Table 3, the study identified major barriers to equitable access to basic education to include herdsmen/farmers clashes, parental level of income, gender, communal crises, parental level of education, religious beliefs and child's interest. The problem of herdsmen/farmers clashes is assuming varying dimensions and many tend to liken it to the problem of Boko Haram insurgency especially in the north-eastern states of Bornu, Yobe and Adamawa. Armed insurgency and armed conflicts have also been reported by Nwogu (2015) as being among the factors that hinder equitable access to basic education.

D. Physical/terrain Factors as a Threat to children's access to basic education

Our study did not find physical factors such as mountains, rivers, and poor network as affecting access to basic education, even though mountains, rivers, and poor network are common features of the terrain of Kwande especially in Turan, Ikyurav-ya and Ishagev-ya Clans. Both teachers and parents did not see these factors as threats to children's access to basic education.

E. Population Groups Mostly Affected by Barriers to Educational Access

On the population groups mostly affected by the barriers to equitable access to basic education, the study revealed that orphans, care givers, the physically challenged, girls and displaced children are victims. The respondents did not see boys as being victims of these barriers. Since most care givers are girls, it then supports the prevailing conditions that boys have advantage over girls in educational opportunities. This therefore, increases gender gap in school enrolment and completion.

8. Recommendations

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

1. The Federal Government of Nigeria and Benue State Government should make primary education free of charge as contained in government policy document on education. There was evidence on the field that many children dropped out of on account of non-payment of required school fees. Therefore, many of such

children dropped out with the intention to help their parents on the farm or trade to raise money. The Federal Government should not renege on its responsibility of providing required instructional and learning materials for basic education level 100 percent.

2. Government should evolve an educational policy that will ensure a balance in school enrolment between boys and girls, and make children's stay in school an enjoyable experience. Government should cater for indigent children by buying and distributing toys, books and school uniforms for free forms of incentive to raise children's interest in schooling.
3. Government and school proprietors should make the school environment attractive for children's enrolment by providing basic amenities such as water, toilet facilities, play and recreational facilities, and health facilities. This will not only improve the welfare of children but entice children to be in school.
4. Government should enact relevant laws that will prevent herdsmen/farmers clashes. Government should enact relevant laws to encourage ranching, which is a modern method of preventing cattle and other animals from straying into people's farms, public places or encroaching on people's privacy. Stray animals entering people's farms has been the major cause of herdsmen/farmers crises in Nigeria, and one of the leading causes for displacement of people.
5. Government should make relevant laws that will not only encourage the physically handicapped children to enrol in school, but should open schools separately for them while ensuring training tailored according to their physical and psychological needs. In doing this, government will address the imbalance in educational opportunities between the physically challenged and the normal children.
6. Government should address gender gaps, employment and leadership gaps by monitoring and ensuring that gender equality is achieved right at the level of basic education enrolment and completion.
7. Religious and community leaders should help in creating awareness among their followers on the need to give both the male and girl children, orphans and care givers equal educational and social opportunities.

9. Conclusion

From the evidence gathered through the study, it can be concluded that economic factors, gender, the incidence of herdsmen/farmers clashes, parental level of education, parental level of income and child's interest are major barriers to basic education in the

study area. In today's world, it is important for children of school age to be in school to learn skills and competences that will be useful for higher education or the world of work. Schooling is a right of every child irrespective of race, gender, religious affiliation, socio-economic background, or population group to which they belong. But poverty and the harsh conditions associated with formal learning have affected most children negatively and forced them to be out of school. Out-of-school children are likely to develop a feeling of animosity and inferiority towards their peers who have made progress through educational opportunities. Moreover, children without education are vulnerable to poverty and diseases and are more likely to be associated with vices such as aggression, vandalism, theft, armed robbery, and the like.

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