

AN INVESTIGATION INTO BARRIERS LIMITING ACCESS TO QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION AMONG POOR AND UNDERPRIVILEGED CHILDREN IN THE OUTSKIRT OF JIMETA, ADAMAWA STATE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study explores the barriers to accessing basic education among the poor, economically exploited and underprivileged children in Jimeta Outskirt, Yola North LGA of Adamawa State. The primary objectives of this study are to identify the factors limiting access to education, the availability and effectiveness of government policies that are aimed at addressing these barriers. The findings reveal that socioeconomic factors, including widespread poverty, cultural beliefs, and inadequate infrastructure, significantly hinder children's ability to attend school. Furthermore, the study highlights the gap between the intent of government initiatives, such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, and their actual implementation, particularly in underserved communities. Challenges such as insufficient funding, lack of educational resources, and neglect of remote areas reduce the effectiveness of these policies. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive community-based interventions, improved policy execution, and enhanced resource allocation to bridge the educational gap. Addressing these barriers is critical for ensuring that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have access to quality basic education.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right that plays a crucial role in the development of individuals and societies. It equips children with the essential knowledge, skills, and values necessary for personal and social growth. In the outskirts of Jimeta, in Adamawa State, it is observed that access to quality basic education remains a pressing challenge, particularly for the poor and economically exploited children. Despite the various government's initiatives that

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are aimed at promoting education in the country, some significant barriers continue to hinder these children from realizing their educational potential.

The socio-economic landscape in Jimeta Outskirt is marked by poverty, limited infrastructure, and inadequate educational resources of which, have significantly affected children's ability to attend school and receive quality education. Many families struggle to meet basic life needs, leaving education as a lower priority (Akanbi & Abass, 2022). Additionally, cultural beliefs and attitudes toward education can further complicate accessibility to education which often leads to the exclusion of certain groups of children from schooling, especially the girl child (Odukoya & Ogunleye, 2023).

Government policies and interventions, such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004, have been established to address these issues. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives in reaching marginalized populations remains questionable. Studies have indicated that; while policies exist, their implementation often falls short in remote areas resulting from the inadequate funding and infrastructural challenges (Adesina, 2023). A thorough examination of the factors limiting access to quality basic education is essential to identify gaps in policy implementation and to develop targeted strategies that will facilitate equitable educational opportunities for all children (Idris & Kolo, 2023).

This study aims at investigating barriers that prevent poor and economically exploited children in Jimeta Outskirt from accessing quality basic education. By understanding the underlying issues and evaluating the impact of the existing policies, this research seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on educational equity and to inform stakeholders about necessary interventions for improving educational access in the region.

Statement of the Problem

Despite education being a fundamental right, poor and underprivileged children in Jimeta Outskirt, Yola North LGA, Adamawa State, face significant barriers to accessing quality basic education. Socio-economic challenges like widespread poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and limited educational resources make it difficult for families to prioritize their children's education. Many families are forced to focus on survival, leaving their children no opportunity to attend school or receive quality education. Additionally, cultural beliefs and societal attitudes, particularly regarding marginalized groups like girls, further intensify educational inequity, discouraging or preventing many from pursuing education.

Although government initiatives, such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004, aim to address these challenges, their effectiveness in reaching marginalized populations remains questionable. The implementation of these policies is often undermined by inadequate funding, lack of infrastructure, and neglect of remote areas, resulting in a gap between policy intentions and outcomes. This study thus investigates the barriers to quality education in Jimeta Outskirt, it assesses the impact of existing policies, and proposes strategies to enhance educational access for all children in the region.

Objectives

1. **To identify the factors limiting access to quality basic education among poor and economically exploited children in Jimeta Outskirt, Jimeta North LGA, Adamawa State.**
2. **To assess the availability of government policies and interventions in addressing barriers to quality basic education for the poor and economically exploited children in the study area.**

Research Question

1. What are the factors limiting access to quality basic education among poor and economically exploited children in Jimeta?
2. What government policies are currently in place to support access to quality basic education for poor and economically exploited children in Jimeta?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Barriers to Educational Accessibility

Access to quality basic education for poor and economically exploited children is impeded by various factors. These barriers often manifest as a lack of essential motivational elements, which can include limited access to schools, economic hardships faced by families, ineffective resource management, and a general lack of awareness about educational opportunities. The North-East Nigeria Out-of-School Children Initiative (2016) indicates that the Nigerian government recognizes the pressing issue of out-of-school children and is committed to achieving universal basic education.

Educational Rights and Responsibilities

According to Diamond (2016), education is a fundamental right, and it is essential for all stakeholders—governments, parents, and communities—to act as “duty-bearers.” They must take responsibility for ensuring that all children receive the necessary educational support. The principle of equity emphasizes that education must be accessible to every child, regardless of the background or circumstances. Efforts by organizations like UNICEF highlight the importance of addressing barriers to education through comprehensive approaches that consider various social determinants such as poverty, malnutrition, and gender biases (UNICEF, 2021).

i.) School Location and Policy Implications

The geographical distribution of schools is a significant barrier to accessing quality education for less privileged children in Jimeta. Many schools are situated far from the residential areas where disadvantaged families live, presenting logistical challenges that hinder regular attendance (ESSPIN, 2019). To enhance access to quality education for underprivileged children, there is a need for the governments and NGOs to prioritize infrastructure development by constructing new schools in underserved areas and ensuring that schools are within recommended walking distances for children. Additionally, providing reliable transportation options, such as school buses or community-led initiatives, can alleviate the challenges associated with long commutes. Engaging local communities in the planning and decision-making processes is crucial for strategically locating schools according to community needs. Furthermore, strengthening the enforcement of existing policies related to school locations and improving monitoring mechanisms will help ensure adherence to guidelines. Lastly, exploring innovative learning models, such as mobile classrooms or digital learning hubs, can offer interim solutions for children in remote areas, thereby improving educational access.

ii.) Challenges in Distance and Commuting

Many children in the outskirts of Jimeta face long commutes to school, which can be physically taxing and time-consuming. The absence of reliable transportation infrastructure worsens this issue, as many roads are poorly maintained, leading to increased travel times and safety risks (UNESCO, 2022). Long distances and unsafe conditions contribute to high absenteeism and dropout rates. Research has indicated that children who live closer to their schools tend to have better attendance and academic outcomes (UNICEF, 2021). In addition to the challenges posed by long commutes, socioeconomic conditions in Jimeta further complicate access to education. Many families struggle with financial constraints that limit their ability to support their children’s education, often forcing children to engage in domestic chores or labour to contribute to household income. This situation is particularly challenging for girls who may face additional cultural barriers that restrict their mobility and access to education. As a result, the combination of lengthy travel distances, inadequate transportation, and socioeconomic hardships not only hampers regular school attendance but also undermines the overall educational experience for these children. Addressing these interconnected issues is vital for improving educational access and ensuring that every child has opportunities to achieve their full potential (UNICEF, 2021).

iii. Policy Framework and Implementation

The Nigerian National Policy on Education stresses the importance of establishing schools within accessible distances to ensure that all children can attend without undue hardship. It recommends that primary schools be no more than two kilometres from a child's home (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). However, implementation in rural areas like Jimeta has been inconsistent due to financial constraints, political factors, and administrative inefficiencies. Despite the Nigerian National Policy on Education emphasizing the need to establish schools within accessible distances—recommending that primary schools be located no more than two kilometres from a child's home (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020)—the practical implementation of this policy in rural areas such as Jimeta has faced significant challenges. Financial constraints often limit the resources available for building new schools and maintaining existing ones, while political factors can lead to the prioritization of urban over rural education needs. Furthermore, administrative inefficiencies, such as inadequate planning and poor coordination among government agencies, hinder the effective execution of educational policies. These obstacles not only perpetuate the educational disparities faced by children in Jimeta but also undermine the broader goals of achieving universal basic education and ensuring that all children have equitable access to quality education. Consequently, addressing these systemic issues is essential for realizing the policy's objectives and improving educational access in underserved communities.

iv. The Condition of Schools and Educational Facilities

The state of schools in Jimeta is presenting a significant barrier to accessing quality education, characterized by several critical deficiencies. Overcrowded classrooms, resulting from high student-to-teacher ratios, severely impede effective teaching and learning, as many classrooms exceed their intended capacity (ESSPIN, 2019). Moreover, poor ventilation and inadequate lighting contribute to an unhealthy learning environment, negatively affecting students' concentration and overall well-being (World Bank, 2020). The lack of basic amenities—such as proper seating, sanitation facilities, and safe drinking water—further exacerbates the situation, leading to increased absenteeism, particularly among girls, who may be more affected by inadequate sanitation during menstruation (UNICEF, 2021).

Methodology

This study used a mixed-method approach by employing a survey research design to collect qualitative and quantitative data. This design allowed for comprehensive data collection, including qualitative insights gained through focus group discussions. The study population comprised all out-of-school children in Jimeta/Yola, Adamawa State, particularly those from less privileged backgrounds residing on the outskirts of the metropolitan area. According to UNICEF (2018), the Out-of-School Children Initiative, launched in 2010, aimed to better estimate the number of children excluded from educational opportunities and to devise strategies for their reintegration into the school system. Recent estimates indicate that approximately 264 million children and youth globally are excluded from education, including 61 million children of primary school age 62 million children of lower secondary education, and 141 million children of upper secondary education.

For sample selection, the study employed simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Simple random sampling was used to select residential areas populated by less privileged families in Jimeta, while purposive sampling focused on identifying school-aged children who were out of school and their parents, specifically targeting those unable to afford education but willing to participate in the study. The research instruments included structured questionnaires for quantitative data collection and semi-structured interviews for qualitative data collection. The data collection process involved visiting selected residential areas to inform the community of the research objectives, followed by the administration of the instruments. Qualitative data were

collected using semi-structured interviews. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency count, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used in the analysis.

RESULT

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
20-29	66	20.6
30-39	134	41.9
40+	120	37.5
Gender	120	37.5
Male	257	80.3
Female	63	19.7
Educational Level:		
No formal education	65	20.3
Primary	131	40.9
Secondary	87	27.2
Tertiary	37	11.6
Household Income Level		
Less than 20000	187	58.4
20000-40000	67	20.9
41000-60000	43	13.4
6000	23	7.2
Occupation		
Civil Servant	43	13.4
Private firm	87	27.2
Self-employed	154	48.1
Students/Unemployed	36	11.3

The age distribution of respondents shows that the largest group falls within the 30-39 years range, accounting for 41.9%, followed by 24.1% in the 40-49 years category. Those aged 20-29 makeup 20.6%, while only 13.4% are 50 years and older, indicating a stronger representation of middle-aged individuals. Gender-wise, there is a significant imbalance, with 80.3% male and 19.7% female respondents. Regarding education, 40.9% completed primary. Education, 27.2% secondary education, 20.3% no formal education, and 11.6% attained tertiary education.

In terms of household income, 58.4% earn less than 20,000 Naira monthly, while 20.9% earn between 20,000 and 40,000 Naira. Only 13.4% earn between 41,000 and 60,000 Naira, and 7.2% exceed 60,000 Naira. Occupationally, 48.1% are self-employed, 27.2% work in private firms, 13.4% are civil servants, and 11.3% are either students or unemployed. These data reflect a diverse but predominantly low-income and self-employed population.

Research Question 1: What factors limit access to quality basic education for the poor and vulnerable children?
Table 2: Factors limiting access to quality basic Education in Jimeta Outskirt of Adamawa State

S/n	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remark
1	Poverty brings about limited access to basic education among less-privileged children	3.63	0.18	Agree
2	Children from low-income homes victims of out of school	3.35	0.40	Agree
3	Misconceptions of religious beliefs and practices by parents also limit children's access to basic education	4.31	0.67	Agree
4	Low parental education levels limit children's access to basic education	3.27	0.27	Agree
5	Inadequate education resources discourage children from developing interest in education	4.29	0.67	Agree
6	School age as defined by culture discourages access to education	4.83	0.32	Agree
7	Lack of school feeding program limit access to education	4.54	0.13	Agree
8	Poor reinforcement skill among teachers discourages access to education	3.47	0.48	Agree
9	Poor hygiene practices affect children's health and limit access to education	3.18	0.78	Agree
10	Unrest and insurgency are major factors that limit children's access to education.	4.05	0.20	Agree
11	Natural disasters and displacement limit access to school	3.55	0.32	Agree
12	Poor government policies and initiatives limit children's access to basic education	4.28	0.59	Agree
13	Poor community support in creating adventure and tourism opportunities limits access to education.	4.79	0.51	Agree
14	Historical trends in educational development in Nigeria limit children's access to education	2.84	0.32	Disagree
15	Low teacher qualification affects the quality of education for less privileged children	3.39	0.18	Agree

The interpretation of the data on the factors limiting poor and less privileged children's access to quality basic education in Jimeta Outskirt, Yola North LGA, Adamawa State, reveals several critical insights (Table 2). The respondents strongly agreed that poverty is a major factor (Mean = 3.63, SD = 0.18), with minimal deviation, indicating a consensus that financial constraints significantly hinder access to education. Similarly, there is agreement that children from low-income homes are disproportionately affected by being out of school (Mean = 3.35, SD = 0.40), although responses varied slightly.

Another prominent issue is the influence of cultural practices and beliefs (Mean = 3.55, SD = 0.34), in which respondents agreed that certain traditions negatively affect children's educational access. Additionally, misconceptions about religious beliefs by parents were seen as a strong limiting factor (Mean = 4.31, SD = 0.67), although there was some variability in responses. There is also agreement that ignorance about education's developmental benefits limits access (Mean = 3.30, SD = 0.89), but opinions on this factor are more divided, as shown by the higher standard deviation.

The role of parental education levels (Mean = 3.27, SD = 0.27) was considered a limiting factor, with consistent agreement across respondents. Moreover, the inadequacy of educational resources (Mean = 4.29, SD = 0.67) was seen as a significant barrier, contributing to a lack of interest in schooling among children. Late school attendance was also identified as a factor influencing performance and limiting access (Mean = 3.73, SD = 0.76), with moderate agreement.

A standout issue was the cultural definition of school age, which was overwhelmingly viewed as a barrier (Mean = 4.83, SD = 0.32). This result reflects a strong consensus that cultural norms discourage early school attendance. Additionally, the lack of school feeding programs was seen as a major limitation (Mean = 4.54, SD = 0.13), with respondents almost unanimously agreeing. Poor reinforcement skills among teachers (Mean = 3.47, SD = 0.48) also contributed to limited educational access, although responses varied.

Health issues, influenced by poor hygiene practices, are also considered barriers to education (Mean = 3.18, SD = 0.78), with various responses reflecting varying views on its impact. Unrest and insurgency (Mean = 4.05, SD = 0.20) were identified as major factors limiting access, with strong agreement and minimal variation in responses. Similarly, natural disasters (Mean = 3.55, SD = 0.32) are recognized as causes of displacement that limit access to basic education.

Government-related challenges, such as poor approaches to educational policies (Mean = 4.28, SD = 0.59), are seen as significant barriers, with strong agreement but some variability in responses. Poor community support (Mean = 4.79, SD = 0.51) is another widely recognized factor, with a consensus that a lack of opportunities hinders educational access. Lastly, historical trends in educational development in Nigeria (Mean = 2.84, SD = 0.32) are largely disagreed upon as a limiting factor, indicating that respondents do not see past trends as a major current issue. Low teacher qualifications (Mean = 3.39, SD = 0.18) was also seen as affecting the quality of education, with minimal disagreement.

In the overall, these findings highlight the multi-faceted nature of barriers to accessing quality basic education for poor and underprivileged children, with economic, cultural, social, and institutional factors all playing significant roles.

Research question 2: What government policies are currently in place to support access to quality basic education for poor and economically exploited children in Jimeta?

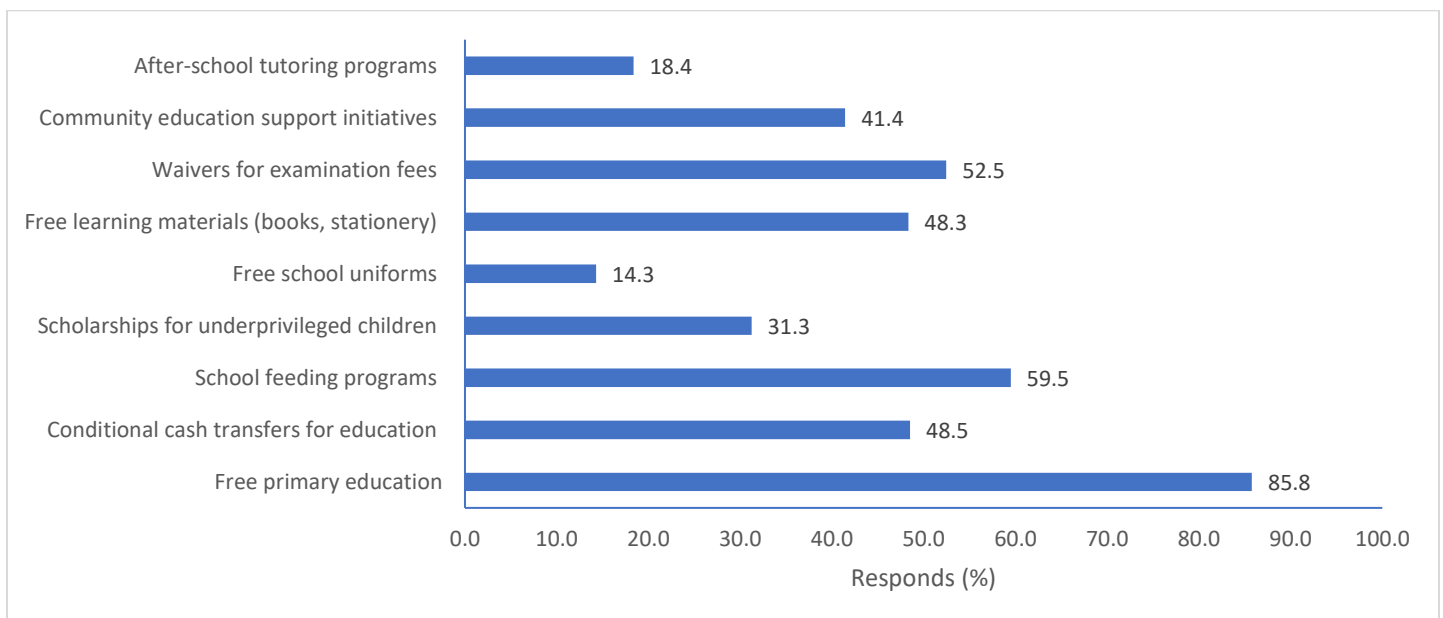


Figure 1: Rating on Government Policies to Improve Access to Education among Poor and economically exploited Children

The bar chart indicates varying levels of awareness among respondents about different educational support policies in their area, with Free Primary Education being the most recognized at 85.8%. This high level of awareness highlights the extensive reach and likely effectiveness of this foundational policy aimed at securing

universal access to education. Both School Feeding Programs and Conditional Cash Transfers for Education also demonstrate substantial recognition, at 59.5% and 48.5%, respectively, underscoring their significance in mitigating economic barriers to school attendance.

Moderately recognized policies include Waivers for Examination Fees and Free Learning Materials, each noted by more than half of the respondents, with percentages of 52.5% and 48.3%. These supports play crucial roles in reducing the direct costs associated with schooling. Similarly, community education support initiatives are acknowledged at 41.4%, suggesting a decent level of community engagement, although there may be potential for greater outreach.

On the lower end of the awareness spectrum are Scholarships for Underprivileged Children, After-School Tutoring Programs, and Free School Uniforms, with awareness levels of 31.3%, 18.4%, and 14.3%, respectively. These findings indicate significant gaps in the visibility and possibly the availability of these programs, which are essential for supporting the academic and social development of economically exploited children. Enhancing the awareness and accessibility of these lower-profile initiatives could further improve educational outcomes within the community.

Discussion

The discussion of educational support policies and barriers to accessing quality basic education among poor and economically exploited children in Jimeta Outskirt, Yola North LGA, Adamawa State, reveal several critical insights from the data. One of the most recognized policies, Free Primary Education, has a significant awareness level of 85.8%, suggesting its broad reach and potential effectiveness in promoting universal access to education. This policy aligns with the Nigerian government's efforts to meet Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UNESCO, 2023). However, despite the high awareness, challenges such as poverty (Mean = 3.63, SD = 0.18) continue to limit access to basic education, highlighting the need for more robust implementation strategies that go beyond awareness (Afolabi & Alabi, 2023).

In addition to Free Primary Education, School Feeding Programs and Conditional Cash Transfers for Education demonstrate substantial recognition among respondents, with awareness levels of 59.5% and 48.5%, respectively. These programs play a crucial role in addressing the economic barriers to school attendance, which is consistent with the findings that economic factors such as low household income (58.4% earn less than 20,000 Naira) significantly limit educational access. Research shows that providing financial incentives and in-kind support, such as meals, can improve school attendance and retention among economically exploited children (Bello & Umar, 2022). However, there remains room for improvement in the visibility and implementation of these programs to further reduce absenteeism and dropout rates, especially among children from low-income households (Nguyen & Smith, 2023).

Moderately recognized policies like Waivers for Examination Fees (52.5%) and Free Learning Materials (48.3%) also help reduce the direct costs associated with schooling, which is crucial in a context where inadequate educational resources are seen as significant barriers (Mean = 4.29, SD = 0.67). Provided that support can alleviate the financial burden on families and encourage higher enrolment and participation rates. However, the relatively moderate levels of awareness suggest that more effort is needed to publicize these benefits and ensure that they reach the most vulnerable populations (Obi & Eze, 2021).

On the lower end of the awareness spectrum are scholarship programs for underprivileged children (31.3%), After-School Tutoring Programs (18.4%), and Free School Uniforms (14.3%). These findings indicate significant gaps in the visibility of programs that can eventually support academic and social development of economically

exploited children. For instance, after-school tutoring can play a pivotal role in improving learning outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially those who may be falling behind due to low parental education (Mean = 3.27, SD = 0.27) or poor reinforcement skills among teachers (Mean = 3.47, SD = 0.48). The low awareness of such programs points to a missed opportunity to support children's learning and help them succeed academically (Chinonso & Okafor, 2023).

The barriers highlighted by the data, including misconceptions about religious beliefs (Mean = 4.31, SD = 0.67) and cultural practices (Mean = 3.55, SD = 0.34), further compound the challenges faced by underprivileged children in accessing education. These sociocultural factors can discourage enrolment and contribute to high dropout rates, especially in communities where education is not prioritized for certain demographics, such as girls and children from specific ethnic or religious backgrounds (Adewale, 2022). To address these challenges, educational policies must include community engagement and sensitization efforts to shift harmful cultural and religious perceptions that limit educational access (Ogunleye & Oyedele, 2023).

In conclusion, although there is substantial awareness of educational support policies, significant gaps remain in the visibility and effectiveness of programs that target the most marginalized children.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has revealed critical insights into the factors limiting poor and economically exploited children's access to quality basic education in Jimeta Outskirt, Yola North LGA, Adamawa State. The findings indicate that poverty, cultural practices, misconceptions about religion, and inadequate educational resources are among the primary barriers that hinder educational access. Despite awareness of several educational support policies, such as Free Primary Education and School Feeding Programs, the study highlighted significant gaps in the visibility and implementation of essential programs like after-school tutoring and scholarships, which are crucial for supporting underprivileged children.

Moreover, socio-cultural factors, including low levels of parental education and deep-rooted beliefs about education, particularly for girls and children from marginalized communities, further intensify the challenges. Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive strategies that not only enhance awareness but also improve the delivery of educational resources, engage communities in reshaping cultural perceptions and provide more tailored support for the most vulnerable groups. Ultimately, to improve educational outcomes and access for economically exploited children in Jimeta Outskirt and similar regions, policymakers must focus on creating inclusive, supportive environments that address both economic and sociocultural obstacles. This approach will help break the cycle of poverty and foster long-term socioeconomic development through education.

Recommendations

1. The Adamawa State Ministry of Education should collaborate with local leaders to raise awareness and address cultural and economic barriers to school attendance.
2. The state government should provide scholarships, tutoring, and free materials to reduce financial obstacles for economically exploited children.
3. The government should also improve teacher training and supply educational resources to enhance education quality in underserved areas.

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