



Counted in and being out: Fluctuations in primary school and classroom attendance in northern Nigeria



Sara Humphreys^{a,*}, Dauda Moses^b, Jiddere Kaibo^c, Máiréad Dunne^a

^a Centre for International Education, School of Education, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RC, UK

^b Modibbo Adama University of Technology, PMB 2076 Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria

^c Federal College of Education, PMB 2042 Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 August 2014

Received in revised form 5 August 2015

Accepted 23 August 2015

Keywords:

Access

Attendance

Northern Nigeria

Gender

School organisation

Discipline

Community

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we explore particular aspects of educational access in primary schools in northeastern Nigeria. Moving beyond a simplistic notion of access as enrolment, we draw on empirical data from case-study research in Adamawa State to illustrate fluctuations in school attendance. Using predominantly qualitative methods, we explore how school organisational structures and practice have a significant bearing on pupils' access to school and to the classroom. In particular, we elaborate the ways that the annual, weekly and daily school timetables as well as punitive disciplinary regimes often militate against educational access. Finally, we highlight how educational administration and schools unwittingly contribute to denying pupils their right to access quality education.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In this paper we explore aspects of educational access, which, driven by the imperatives of fulfilling Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3, have typically been discussed in narrow terms of school enrolment and 'gender gaps', with an almost exclusive reliance on quantitative indicators (UNESCO, 2004; Aikman and Unterhalter, 2005). Our interest here is in considering what happens in the gap between enrolling in school and achieving physical access to the school, the classroom and the chance for learning. Our aim is to illustrate the distinction between enrolment and access to learning. The latter is not a one-off event that can be captured in year-on-year statistics; rather it is a complex, fluctuating and dynamic process negotiated among various social actors, and which is influenced by a myriad of out-of-school and in-school factors that can draw children in or push them out, even within the same school day. Understanding these factors and social processes is vital if improvements in educational outputs are to follow the gains made in educational inputs.

We based our empirical work in Nigeria, which has hit the international headlines for having the largest number of primary-age children out of school in the world – an estimated 8.7 million according to the most recent available enrolment figures (www.data.uis.unesco.org¹). However, we draw primarily on recent case-study research on access to primary education in Adamawa State, northeastern Nigeria (Dunne et al., 2013). We start with a section on the background, in which we outline our theoretical position with respect to understanding access and gender, before briefly describing the Nigerian context. We then present an overview of the research study conducted in Adamawa State. Our discussion of the research findings starts with an overview of the attendance data collected at the case-study level. We then turn to the qualitative data and analysis to elaborate the distinction between access as enrolment and as sustained attendance. This is followed by a focus on access to the classroom within the case-study schools. We conclude the paper by discussing the main points from our empirical analysis together to emphasise the various ways in which equating enrolment with access is misleading and obscures the ways that fluctuating access has implications for key questions about educational quality, equality, accountability and outputs.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: s.humphreys@sussex.ac.uk (S. Humphreys).

¹ Based on 2010 enrolment figures.

2. Conceptual issues

2.1. Conceptualising access

As highlighted above, enrolment figures are an inadequate indicator of access. For a start, being enrolled in school does not necessarily mean *being* in school, and being in school does not necessarily mean being engaged in productive learning (Filmer et al., 2006; Lewin, 2009). For this reason we identify four distinct stages of access: access as enrolment; access as sustained attendance (sustained access); access to the classroom, once in school; and finally access to the curriculum, with pupils engaged in meaningful learning. These collectively form access to good quality education, the ultimate goal. As the 2004 Global Monitoring Report bluntly put it:

... education is a set of processes and outcomes that are *defined* [original emphasis] qualitatively. The *quantity* [original emphasis] of children who participate is by definition a secondary consideration: merely filling spaces called 'schools' with children would not address even quantitative objectives if no real education occurred. Thus, the number of years of school is a practically useful but conceptually dubious proxy for the processes that take place there and the outcomes that result (UNESCO, 2004: 28)

Thus, to be meaningful, the term 'access' should automatically imply 'access to the curriculum' and 'access to good quality education', however it might be defined. A comprehensive perspective on access includes educational quality, process and outcomes as well as being inclusive, equitable and sustainable (Consortium for Research into Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), 2008: 1). However, even this expanded definition of access does not make explicit the fact that school access is surrounded and supported or denied through a complex web of social relations and interactions both in and out of school. As Fig. 1 indicates, initial and sustained access to school emerges through the dynamic interaction between three broad stakeholder groups, each with their own structures, processes, needs and priorities: schools and teachers, families and communities, as well as educational administrators, working at both state and local government level. Crucially, while each stakeholder group has a significant influence on access, each cannot on its own provide that access. The identification of these three groups, however, does not imply uniformity of views or experiences within the groups as each contains its own complex sets of social relations, hierarchies and processes. The myth of a unified community, in particular, has been well explored (see, for example Gujit and Shah, 1998; Pryor, 2005). The second point to make about our understanding of access is that beyond enrolment, access is not a one-off accomplishment, but rather a gendered process that is constantly negotiated and enacted on a daily basis among the three parties (Dunne et al., 2007).

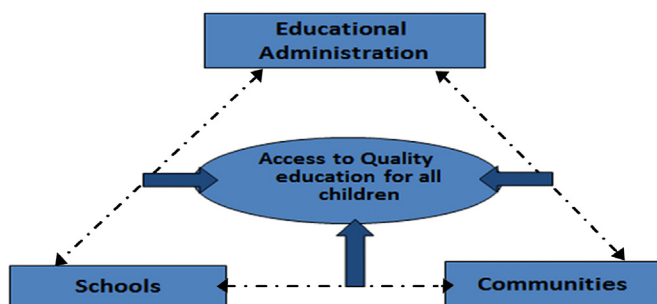


Fig. 1. A relational framework for access.
Source: adapted from Dunne et al. (2007).

Although the fourth stage of access, which is concerned with pupils' engagement with good quality teaching and learning in the classroom, is ultimately the most critical, the focus of this paper is on the first three stages of access we have identified, which are prerequisites for access to the curriculum. In particular, we are concerned with exploring the gaps between the first and second stages (enrolment and sustained attendance) and the second and third stages (access to the classroom). Thus, the spotlight here is on children who, for a variety of reasons, are enrolled in school but who are not necessarily attending regularly, or who are attending but are not actually in the classroom. Although the locus of activity in this paper is the school, it is precisely the ways in which schools, communities and local government education authorities (LGEAs) interact and collectively influence what goes on in the school that forms the core of our discussion.

2.2. Conceptualising gender

In accordance with our notion of access, our theorisation of gender recognises that it is socially constructed, and does not imply an oppositional gender binary (females vs. males) or refer to women and girls alone, but rather to relations among and between females and males (Connell, 1987; Kabee, 1994; Cornwall, 1997). A concern with gender and gender equality is therefore as much about boys' education as girls', and about differences within as well as between gender categories since we recognise that gender interacts with other markers of social identity such as ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, location and lifestyle, constructed within specific historico-political contexts (Mohanty, 1991; Oyèwùmí, 2002). While it is not the aim of this paper to undertake a gender analysis, it is pertinent to recognise that the social and institutional structures in our access triangle are gendered (Connell, 1987), and inevitably have gendered effects on access. We highlight some of these as they relate to our central themes, later in the paper.

However, our research brief for this study was to focus on the education of girls, as an aggregated group, an agenda informed by Nigeria's National Policy on Gender in Basic Education (Federal Ministry of Education (FME), 2007), and international development priorities more generally. Consequently, when discussing enrolment or attendance figures, for example, it is impossible not to refer to the 'biological' categories of 'girls' and 'boys', 'women' and 'men' – what Kessler and McKenna (1978) termed 'gender ascription' – even as we conceptualise gender differently.

3. Access issues in northern Nigeria

The reliability and validity of the ways in which access to schooling has been variously measured in both household surveys and school administrative Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) data have generated much debate and critique, not just in Nigeria but globally. Our aim here is not to engage with that debate,² but to argue that even if the numbers are "right", they do not tell us about the processes of access on the ground. Nevertheless, these quantitative data represent the basis of official accounts and of policy, and as such they provide a point of entry into our discussion of access.

Beyond quantitative evidence from household survey data on attendance in Nigeria, empirical work on access that has largely been carried out in relation to development programmes and interventions, predominantly in northern Nigeria (e.g. the Northern Education Initiative (NEI), Girls' Education Programme (GEP), and the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN)).

² For a discussion of these issues see, for example, UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), 2010; Omoeva et al., 2013.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/356063>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/356063>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)