

Internally Displacement and Cognitive Reasoning in Children of North Central, Nigeria

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Abstract

The cognitive progression of displaced children has suffered major setback in Nigeria in recent time as a result of boko haram insurgency, Fulani herdsmen militia and communal clashes. Therefore, this study examines the cognitive reasoning of the children of primary and secondary school ages that are currently seeking refuge at internally displaced camps in North-Central, Nigeria. 1,222 internally displaced children were assessed using visual, numerical and verbal reasoning analysis tests respectively, developed by Barrett (2004). Of the total number of participants, 29.8% responded correctly to numerical reasoning tests, 15.6% answered correctly the verbal reasoning tests and 31.7% responded to visual analysis tests. The result showed that majority of the children could not respond correctly to reasoning and analysis tests. The study concludes that children are worst vulnerable to current ongoing displacement in the country and this has resulted into downfall in the educational system and cognitive improvement of the children. It is therefore recommended that quick response to IDP children in the area of education should not be ignored or neglected in case of displacement of any type by government, philanthropists and non-governmental organizations.

Keywords: Cognitive Assessment, Educational Development, Internally Displaced Children, North Central

1. Introduction

Internally displaced children, are the category of children that do not cross international borders recognized by a State but are displaced within the borders of their own nation. They represent 2/3 of the total number of displaced children. Many at times, displaced children find themselves separated from their close relations during such an event. Deprived of the basic care and protection of their family, they become very vulnerable to society exploitation and abuse. Moreover, they are generally weakened by the long distances that they are forced to travel and by the difficulties they have to thus endure. Hence, they become easy targets for smugglers, traffickers, and/or armed groups. Furthermore, such displaced children can also become victims of all forms of discrimination and many of their fundamental rights may be violated due to their displacement. For example, rights may be violated if such displaced children travel to a place where they are a minority ethnic group; and more importantly, their education is completely either abandoned or neglected.

According to the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) and International Organization Migration (IOM) Round V Report (2015), the total number of IDP children (3-17 years of age) in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states is 452,620. Of these 387,287 (85.6%) live in host communities while 65,333 (14.4%) live in IDP camps. The education development of these children is negatively affected on daily basis and schooling has continuously been interrupted by the boko haram insurgency, fulani herdsmen militia, and communal violence for the past few years in north central Nigeria. School children were killed, abducted, displaced leading to a high level of trauma. Many of the school facilities were destroyed and have been burnt down. Large numbers of the population in the affected states and local governments have been displaced leading to thousands of children being out of school. This has adversely affected the gains in education achieved prior to the insurgency and acts

of terrorism. In the north east, Nigeria, reports show that with large numbers of children out of school, especially Adamawa, Borno and Yobe; and North central, Benue, Nassarawa, and Plateau and Nigeria as a country would likely suffer educationally, socially, economically and even politically unless meaningful interventions are devised to circumvent the situation.

Ugwumba and Udom (2015), observed that over 1000 school children have been killed or wounded, leaving about 50 schools either burned down or destroyed completely, while almost 60 were forced to close down totally. Furthermore, as of November 2014, 426 schools have been affected by the insurgency, including 73 in Adamawa, 297 in Borno and 56 in Yobe. At least 115 have been completely destroyed while 311 schools have been partially destroyed with the majority being in Borno State. More than 340,000 students have been affected by the insurgency with death among 314 (Adamawa-33, Yobe-263, Borno-18). 196 teachers killed from three states (Adamawa- 14, Yobe 4, Borno -178) with more insurgent attacks in December and since the beginning of the new year, these numbers might have changed drastically. In Borno state, almost all schools had been closed in 2014 due to attacks. About 200 schools in only 4 LGAs were able to reopen in January 2015. In Adamawa and Yobe most schools had reopened within the metropolis LGAs. With stability returning in most LGAs of all states there is a chance for more schools to reopen.

The continued attacks and counter attacks on these children and their parents and multiple exposure to violence and crisis could disturb their cognitive and behavioural competencies including attention, concentration and memory as basis for academic learning and achievement. Children cognitive and behavioural competences become occupied with their sufferings and are devoted to struggling against surviving the pains rather than growth and mastery of developmental tasks.

Despite all the numerous efforts made by the government of Nigeria towards educational development, the educational sector is besieged by infrastructural decay, dilapidation of structures and production/graduation of illiterate graduate. The monumental increase in the level of illiteracy has made the socio-economic landscape frail and fragile. Today, Nigeria is ranked among the countries with the highest population of illiteracy in the whole world. The failure to efficiently combat the problem has largely been blamed on infrastructural decay, endemic corruption and poor governance.

2. Statement of the problem

Displacement inevitably takes its ugly toll on children's education. Governmental and non-governmental organizations, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and mental health professionals have argued strongly that educational services is essential for children's psychosocial wellbeing during the periods of displacement by insurgencies, conflicts and other natural disasters (Boyden, Berry, Feeny & Hart, 2002). Many of the areas that are affected by Fulani militia, boko haram and communal clashes in North central have not yet established formal schooling services, also at the IDP camps children of school ages are seen roaming about the camps without any form of temporal educational interventions by government agency and non-governmental organizations to rescue their predicament. It was noted that 28,000 of the children are in transitional class before displacement, which is, preparing for promotion from nursery to primary class to secondary and some from junior secondary to senior secondary class (BSEMA, 2018). This situation has had a serious adverse effect on their educational progression. Most obviously, there is a problem of disruption and loss of access to schools, and idleness among the children, they run the risk of not being able to return to school or completing their education as and when due. In some cases of long term displacement which were found in one of the states of the study dated back to 2012, children have ever know camp life with all its constraints and difficulties.

3. Aim and objectives of the study

The study aimed to assess the cognitive reasoning of IDP children seeking refuge at various IDP camps in the north central Nigeria. The specific objectives include assessment of their performance on numerical, verbal and visual reasoning tests.

4. Methods

4.1 Study Design

A cross sectional ex-post factor design was adopted in which variables such as age, educational level and sex had in fact been manipulated before the study.

4.2 Sample

The sample for this study was drawn from three IDP camps from Nasarawa, and Benue states of north central region of Nigeria. With the use of purposive sampling method, 1,222 children comprising 355(29.1%) males, 324(26.5 %) female and 543(44.4%) who could not indicate their sex completed questionnaires in the study. Their age ranged from 6 to 20 years ($M= 1.27$, $SD=0.45$). Other demographic profile of the respondents showed that 315(25.8%) were in primary class; 217(17.8) were in secondary class; and 690 (56.5%) were neither primary nor secondary school because of no indication.

4.3 Instrument

A questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection in the study. The questionnaire comprises two sections as follows: demographic background information of the respondents and other reliable tests measuring variables of interest in the study. Order of the sections in the questionnaire is as follows:

Section A consists of demographic such as age, sex, primary class and secondary class.

Section B is a set of numerical, verbal and visual reasoning tests developed by Barret (2004) to assess natural intelligence, progress in education and reason skills in a child. It comprises three subsections: Numerical reasoning test (b1) Verbal reasoning test (b2), and Visual reasoning test (b3). Subsection b1 is a 4-item questions in which a respondent is required to identify the missing number at the end of the series. Examples of items in this subsection include “3, 11, 19, 27,?” “516, 497, 478, 459,?” etc. five options are provided out of which one is the correct answer. Subsection b2 is an 8-item set of tests in which respondent is enquired to draw a logical conclusions from the information that has been given. Examples of items in this subsection include “Joan and Mary enjoy playing hockey. Karen and Joan enjoy netball. Karen and Mary enjoy swimming. Which girl enjoys both swimming and hockey?” “Only one word in the brackets means EITHER the same or the opposite of the word in CAPITALS from set of words below, identify this word?” Subsection b3 is a 4-item of two different types. Type one, respondent has to decide which of the objects displayed the “odd one out” is. This will be the one that in some way makes it different from the others. The other type is shown a sequence of objects or shapes in which a respondent is to choose from alternatives given the one that would come next in the line where there is a large question mark. For every correct answer carries 1 mark while every wrong answer is 0 mark. The sum total score of correct answers determine the educational potential of the respondents. A total score of 1-3 indicate below average, 4-8 average, 9-12 well above average and 13-16 exceptional. The researchers obtained .70, .83 and .65 for numeric, verbal and visual reasoning tests respectively. Also, for non IDP children (normal population), a minimum score of 4 and maximum of 15 was obtained; and a mean scores of 2.33, 2.31 and 2.35 were obtained for numerical, verbal and visual reasoning respectively.

4.4 Data collection procedure

Data were collected at three IDP camps located within Nasarawa and Benue states. For ethical reason, the researchers approached the coordinators of the camps to seek permission for the conduct of exercise and this was granted having explained the purposes of the research to them. The camp coordinators led the researchers and assistants to various halts where the children were staying in order to meet with their parents for debriefing and administration of the questionnaires. The children were grouped into primary class and secondary class as indicated. The method adopted for the administration was to ask the children to indicate their willingness to participate by signifying with a raise of hands. The children were properly orientated on how to respond to items on the questionnaire before distribution. A copy was given to each to complete. Completion of a copy of the questionnaire took about 30 minutes. In all, a total number of 1,500 were distributed across the three camps but 1,325 were retrieved. However, only 1,222 properly completed were used for this study.

4.5 Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis were performed with IBM SPSS 21 version. As regards the demographic variables; age was measured in ratio as reported by the respondent; sex was measured as male (1) and female (2); primary and secondary class were also measured on nominal scale of 1-6 based on current class of study. Numerical, verbal and visual reasoning were measured on discrete variables. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviation and percentages were used to analyse the demographic characteristics and their performance on the reasoning tests of the participants.

5. Results

Bivariate correlation analyses on interrelationship among the study variables were performed with a view to understanding the association among the study variables as presented in table 1. Results show that age does not relate with the sex of the respondents ($r = -.03$; $p > .05$), secondary class ($r = .10$; $p > .05$), numerical ($r = -.02$; $p > .05$), verbal ($r = -.03$; $p > .05$), visual ($r = -.01$; $p > .05$) but positively and significantly related with primary class of the respondents ($r = .14$; $p < .01$). Sex is positively and significantly related with primary and secondary classes ($r = .56$; $p < .01$) and ($r = .21$; $p < .01$) respectively, but not related to numerical, verbal, and visual reasons. Primary class does not relate with secondary class ($r = -.11$, $p > .05$), numerical ($r = .01$, $p > .05$), verbal ($r = -.04$; $p > .05$), and visual ($r = -.08$, $p > .05$). Secondary class does not relate with numerical ($r = .03$, $p > .05$), verbal ($r = -.05$; $p > .05$) and verbal ($r = -.07$; $p > .05$). Numerical reasoning is positively related with verbal ($r = .06$; $p < .01$) and visual ($r = .38$; $p < .01$). Verbal reasoning is positively related to visual reasoning ($r = .11$; $p < .01$). The result further reveals that the mean scores of the respondents on the reasoning tests (numerical, verbal and visual) are far below (0.48, 0.25, and 0.64) the norm for normal population.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation and correlational matrix between variables in the study ($N=1,222$)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Age	-						
Sex	-.03	-					
Primary class	.14*	.56**	-				
Secondary class	.10	.21**	-.11	-			
Numerical	-.02	.02	.01	.03	-		
Verbal	-.03	.07	-.04	-.05	.06*	-	
Visual	-.01	-.02	-.08	-.07	.38**	.11**	-
M	1.27	1.48	1.93	2.28	0.48	0.25	0.64
SD	0.45	0.50	1.00	0.67	0.60	0.49	0.64

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation and performance of IDP children on Numerical reasoning test

Variable (Numerical)	N	M	SD	Min	Max	%
Item b1-1	860	2.02	0.55	1	5	70.4
b1-2	877	1.95	0.48	1	5	71.8
b1-3	859	2.04	0.36	1	5	70.3
b1-4	860	3.18	0.59	1	5	70.4

Table 3. Mean, standard deviation and performance of IDP children on Verbal reasoning test

Variable (Verbal)	N	M	SD	Min	Max	%
Item b2-1	684	1.36	0.67	1	3	56
b2-2	27	1.30	0.47	1	2	2.2
b2-3	27	1.67	0.48	1	2	2.2
b2-4	29	1.79	0.73	1	3	2.4
b2-5	955	1.97	0.43	1	3	18.2
b2-6	943	2.54	0.67	1	5	77.2
b2-7	938	1.30	0.54	1	4	76.8
b2-8	946	3.66	0.84	1	5	77.4

Table 4. Mean, standard deviation and performance of IDP children on Visual reasoning test

Variable (Visual)	N	M	SD	Min	Max	%
Item b3-1	885	3.60	0.92	1	4	72.4
b3-2	960	2.31	0.77	1	5	78.6
b3-3	955	1.77	0.93	1	4	78.2
b3-4	953	1.30	0.49	1	4	77.9

6. Discussion

The goal of this study was to examine the educational development of the IDP children by assessing their performance on numerical, verbal and visual reasoning test. The results indicated that age has no relationship with the reasoning tests. This means that regardless of the age of these children especially the school-age category, it I expected that their performance should be within or above average but this was contrary. This could be as a result of inability of the children to access regular school attendance. Available information revealed that the attacks on them has been on increase in the last five years making it difficult to have regular school attendance. As a result of this, many children have lost focus and concentration, more importantly those children who have lost parents, caregivers and have become orphans. Considering their performance in all the tests in table 2, 3, and 4, it is observed that majority of the children had a minimum of 1 maximum core of 5 which is below the non IDP children (normal population), with a minimum score of 4 and maximum of 15 was obtained; and a mean scores of 2.33, 2.31 and 2.35 for numerical, verbal and visual reasoning respectively. Many factors could responsible for this poor performance. One of the reasons could be that the IDP school children are not often guided and directed by the parents due to security threat. This corroborated a study by

Oladunjoye and Omena (2013) that IDP children displaced from rural villages and schools are often neglected and they live in perpetual fear of attacks which could lowering their cognitive abilities to perform well in educational activities.

The performance of the IDP children in these test could also be linked to economic hardship faced at the IDP camp. As a result of the displacement, many families are faced with economic hardship which predispose the children to high magnitude of malnutrition and significant decrease in cognitive abilities. Many live at poverty level or below and such a level of poverty contribute significantly to educational performances and other social problems including poor health and nutrition, exploitative child labour, and violation of the children's fundamental rights.

7. Recommendations

Government should rise up to the challenge of education of the vulnerable IDP children. They should be the prime actor in responding quickly to the educational needs of these children and make resources available and provide a conducive learning environment for the affected children. It is important for government and other relevant organizations and agencies to advance in making commitments to addressing the pertinent needs of improving the quality of life the displaced children and increase the their cognitive development as they grow physically and mentally.

8. Limitations

One of the major limitations of this study is that the status of the parents, caregivers and foster parents were not sought which could be a factor to the educational predicaments of the idp children. Information on IDP children was difficult to obtain because due to the characteristics of the group, people preferred to remain invisible at least until they felt they were not threatened.

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