
Information Services as a Tool for Reducing the Incidence of Out of School Children Prevalence in Nigeria: A Conceptual Review

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria continues to record one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children globally, posing a major challenge to the achievement of inclusive and equitable quality education under Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). The problem is driven by factors such as poverty, insecurity, socio-cultural practices, inadequate educational infrastructure, weak policy implementation, and limited access to reliable educational information. Information services provide a strategic platform for increasing educational awareness, promoting stakeholder collaboration, supporting informed decision-making, and encouraging school enrolment through libraries, schools, community information centres, mass media, and digital technologies. This conceptual review examines the role of information services in reducing the incidence of out of school children in Nigeria. It reviews relevant literature and theoretical perspectives, analyses the contribution of information services to educational inclusion, and discusses their role in advocacy, community mobilisation, parental awareness, and policy implementation. The paper also identifies challenges affecting information service delivery, including inadequate funding, poor digital infrastructure, low literacy levels, and limited professional capacity. The paper concludes that strengthening information services is essential for improving educational access and reducing the incidence of out of school children. It recommends expanding community-based information networks, improving digital infrastructure, strengthening stakeholder collaboration, and sustaining public awareness campaigns to enhance school enrolment and retention.

Keywords: Information services, out of school children, educational access, educational inclusion, community information services, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognised as a fundamental human right and a critical driver of human capital development, social inclusion, poverty reduction, and sustainable economic growth. It equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values required for productive citizenship and lifelong learning. Accordingly, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) seeks to ensure inclusive, equitable, and

quality education for all by 2030 (UNESCO, 2024). Despite this commitment, educational exclusion remains a significant global challenge, particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria. Nigeria continues to have one of the largest populations of out-of-school children worldwide. Although the government has implemented initiatives such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme, school feeding schemes,

and other educational interventions, millions of school-age children remain outside the formal education system (UNICEF, 2024). This persistent challenge is driven by multiple factors, including poverty, insecurity, child labour, early marriage, gender inequality, inadequate educational infrastructure, parental illiteracy, and weak policy implementation (World Bank, 2022; UNESCO, 2024). The consequences are far-reaching, contributing to unemployment, social exclusion, insecurity, poor human capital development, and slower national economic growth.

While existing interventions have largely focused on expanding educational infrastructure and increasing school enrolment, comparatively less attention has been given to the strategic role of information services in promoting educational inclusion. Access to accurate, timely, and relevant educational information enables parents, learners, communities, and policymakers to make informed decisions regarding school enrolment, government educational programmes, scholarships, and children's educational rights (Yunusa, Ibrahim, Mainagge, & Haruna, 2022). Conversely, inadequate access to educational information often results in low awareness, misinformation, and limited participation in formal education. Information services comprise organised processes for generating, managing, and disseminating information through libraries, schools, community information centres, mass media, digital technologies, and social media platforms. These services facilitate educational communication, promote public awareness, strengthen community participation, and support evidence-based educational planning. Recent advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have further expanded opportunities for delivering educational

information to underserved populations. However, challenges such as poor digital infrastructure, inadequate funding, limited information literacy, and unequal access to technology continue to constrain their effectiveness, particularly in rural and conflict affected communities.

Given the complexity of the out-of-school children crisis, strengthening information services should form an integral component of strategies aimed at improving educational access and participation. Through enhancing educational communication, promoting information literacy, and expanding digital and community based information systems, information services can support school enrolment, retention, and inclusive education (Yunusa, Jaafar, Ismail, & Othman, 2021). Against this background, this review examines information services as a strategic tool for reducing the incidence of out-of-school children in Nigeria by exploring their concepts, roles, challenges, and policy implications for achieving educational inclusion.

Concept of Information Services

Information is a strategic resource that supports informed decision-making, education, research, and socioeconomic development (Scott & Rajabifard, 2017). It enables individuals and institutions to identify opportunities, solve problems, and make evidence-based decisions. Effective information services have become essential for promoting educational development and social inclusion. Information services refer to organised activities involved in identifying, processing, storing, and disseminating information to meet users' **needs**. They are provided through libraries, schools, information centres, government agencies, media organisations, community resource centres, and digital platforms. According to the International Federation of

Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2023), information services connect users with reliable information through reference services, information literacy programmes, digital access, and user education. Similarly, UNESCO (2023) views information services as mechanisms that promote equitable access to knowledge, lifelong learning, and sustainable development. In the education sector, information services facilitate teaching, learning, research, and educational planning by providing access to instructional resources, policy information, career guidance, and research findings. They also strengthen communication among schools, families, communities, and policymakers, thereby encouraging informed participation in educational programmes.

Information services are delivered through both traditional and digital channels. Traditional channels include libraries, community information centres, printed publications, extension services, and public awareness campaigns, while digital services utilise ICTs such as the internet, mobile technologies, digital libraries, educational websites, social media, radio, and television. These technologies have significantly improved the accessibility and dissemination of educational information. In Nigeria, information services play an important role in promoting educational inclusion by creating awareness of school enrolment opportunities, educational policies, scholarship programmes, and child protection initiatives. Through effective communication and stakeholder collaboration, they help address information gaps, encourage parental involvement, and support evidence-based interventions aimed at reducing the incidence of out-of-school children.

Concept of Out of School Children

The concept of out-of-school children has gained significant attention in educational research and policy because of its implications for educational equity, human capital development, and sustainable development. Generally, out-of-school children are those of official school age who are not enrolled in formal or recognised non-formal education, including children who have never attended school, have dropped out, or are excluded due to poverty, conflict, disability, displacement, or other barriers to education (Vayachuta, Ratana-Ubol, & Soopanyo, 2016). According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2024), out-of-school children are those within the official age for primary or secondary education who are not enrolled in formal or non-formal educational programmes. Similarly, UNICEF (2024) defines them as children who have never enrolled, have withdrawn before completing basic education, or are denied educational opportunities due to socioeconomic, cultural, or environmental factors.

Nigeria continues to record one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children globally, particularly in rural and conflict-affected communities (Kukawa, Adamu, & Gajiram, 2025). The major drivers include poverty, insecurity, child labour, early marriage, gender inequality, parental illiteracy, inadequate educational infrastructure, teacher shortages, and weak policy implementation (World Bank, 2022). These barriers restrict children's access to quality education and hinder national development. The consequences of educational exclusion are extensive, including low literacy, unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, child exploitation, insecurity, and weakened human capital development. Addressing this challenge therefore requires comprehensive interventions that tackle not only economic

and institutional constraints but also informational barriers. Providing parents and communities with timely and accurate educational information through effective information services can improve school enrolment, retention, and educational participation. In this paper, out-of-school children refer to school-age children who are excluded from formal or recognised non-formal education due to socioeconomic, cultural, institutional, security, or informational barriers.

Information Services and Education

Information services are essential to education because they facilitate the creation, dissemination, and utilisation of knowledge for teaching, learning, research, and decision-making. They provide learners, teachers, administrators, parents, and policymakers with timely and reliable information required for educational planning, curriculum implementation, and institutional development. UNESCO (2023) emphasises that equitable access to quality information promotes lifelong learning and inclusive education, while International Federation of Library (2023) highlights the role of information services in developing information literacy and improving access to educational resources. Within educational institutions, information services support teaching and learning through libraries, digital repositories, scholarly databases, instructional technologies, and other learning resources. They also strengthen educational administration by providing data for policy formulation, planning, monitoring, and quality assurance. Beyond the classroom, information services promote educational awareness by informing communities about school enrolment, scholarship opportunities, government programmes, and children's educational rights, thereby encouraging greater participation in education.

Advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have further enhanced educational information services through digital libraries, online learning platforms, mobile applications, social media, and educational broadcasting. Although challenges such as poor digital infrastructure and low digital literacy persist, these technologies have expanded access to educational information, particularly for underserved communities. In Nigeria, information services contribute to educational inclusion by addressing information gaps that hinder school enrolment and retention. Through effective communication, community mobilisation, and evidence-based information sharing, they support collaboration among governments, schools, libraries, civil society organisations, and local communities (Yunusa, Jaafar, Ismail, & Othman, 2022). Consequently, information services represent a strategic mechanism for improving educational access, reducing the incidence of out-of-school children, and supporting evidence-based educational policy and practice.

Theoretical Framework

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory, developed by Everett M. Rogers (1962), explains how new ideas, technologies, or practices are communicated and adopted within a social system over time. According to Rogers (2003), diffusion occurs through four key elements: innovation, communication channels, time, and the social system. The theory has been widely applied in education, communication, information science, and public health to explain how innovations are introduced and accepted. In the context of this paper, educational programmes, school enrolment campaigns, free basic education initiatives, and digital learning platforms represent innovations aimed at improving access to

education. Information services including libraries, schools, community information centres, mass media, religious institutions, and digital platforms serve as the communication channels through which these innovations reach parents, learners, communities, and policymakers.

The theory further argues that the adoption of an innovation depends on its relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. Educational initiatives that are perceived as beneficial, culturally acceptable, easy to understand, and capable of producing visible outcomes are more likely to gain community acceptance and encourage school participation. The Diffusion of Innovations Theory is relevant to this paper because it highlights the importance of effective information dissemination in influencing educational decisions and behavioural change. By increasing awareness of educational opportunities, government programmes, and the benefits of schooling, information services can improve school enrolment, enhance retention, and promote educational inclusion. The theory therefore provides an appropriate framework for explaining how effective communication and stakeholder collaboration can contribute to reducing the incidence of out-of-school children in Nigeria.

Some Causes of the High Incidence of Out-of-School Children in Nigeria

The high incidence of out-of-school children in Nigeria results from interconnected economic, social, cultural, institutional, and security-related factors Aina (2022). Despite various government and development partner interventions, millions of school-age children remain excluded from formal education due to persistent barriers to access and participation.

a) Poverty: Poverty remains the leading cause, as many families cannot afford the direct and indirect costs of schooling despite free basic education policies (UNICEF, 2024).

b) Insecurity: Armed conflict, banditry, kidnapping, and communal violence have destroyed schools, displaced families, and disrupted education, particularly in northern Nigeria (UNESCO, 2024).

c) Socio-cultural Practices: Early marriage, child labour, gender discrimination, and preference for religious or informal education continue to limit school enrolment, especially for girls.

d) Parental Illiteracy: Parents with limited education often have low awareness of the value of formal education, school enrolment procedures, and available government support programmes.

e) Inadequate Educational Infrastructure: Shortages of schools, qualified teachers, learning materials, and basic facilities, particularly in rural areas, discourage enrolment and increase dropout rates.

f) Weak Policy Implementation: Poor funding, weak monitoring, and ineffective implementation of educational policies reduce the impact of government interventions.

g) Disability and Gender Inequality: Children with disabilities and girls continue to face discrimination, inadequate support services, and cultural barriers that limit access to education.

h) Limited Access to Information and the Digital Divide: Many parents lack accurate information on educational opportunities,

while poor digital infrastructure and low digital literacy restrict access to educational information and services.

i) Population Growth and Internal Displacement: Rapid population growth and displacement caused by conflict and disasters continue to overstretch educational facilities and increase the number of children excluded from schooling. These factors underscore the need for integrated interventions that combine educational reforms with effective information services, community engagement, and inclusive policies to improve school enrolment, retention, and educational participation in Nigeria.

Types of Information Services Relevant to Out-of-School Children

Various information services support educational inclusion by increasing awareness, facilitating communication, and promoting school enrolment and retention among vulnerable children.

- a) **Library and Information Services:** Public, school, community, and digital libraries provide access to educational resources, literacy programmes, scholarship information, and government educational initiatives. Through reading campaigns, mobile libraries, and information literacy programmes, they promote educational awareness and lifelong learning.
- b) **Community Information Services:** Community information centres, traditional and religious institutions, youth groups, and local organisations disseminate educational information through meetings, outreach programmes, and public awareness campaigns. These trusted community structures help influence parental attitudes and encourage school participation.
- c) **School Information Services:** Schools provide information through guidance and counselling units, parent–teacher associations, school libraries, orientation programmes, and educational outreach. These services improve communication between schools and families and support informed educational decisions.
- d) **Digital Information Services:** ICT-based platforms—including websites, mobile applications, social media, digital libraries, and online learning platforms—facilitate rapid dissemination of educational information. Although digital technologies have expanded access, challenges such as poor internet connectivity, inadequate electricity, and low digital literacy continue to limit their effectiveness in many rural communities.
- e) **Media-Based Information Services:** Radio, television, newspapers, and social media play a vital role in public enlightenment by promoting educational campaigns, government programmes, and the benefits of schooling. Radio remains particularly effective in reaching rural populations through local-language broadcasts.
- f) **Outreach and Extension Services:** Mobile information units, literacy campaigns, school outreach programmes, and community advocacy initiatives extend educational information to remote, nomadic, conflict-affected, and underserved communities, thereby improving awareness and school enrolment.
- g) **Civil Society and NGO Information Services:** Civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations complement government efforts through advocacy, community mobilisation, public sensitisation, and dissemination of information on educational opportunities, child protection,

scholarships, and inclusive education programmes. Collectively, these information services strengthen educational communication, improve stakeholder collaboration, and enhance access to education, making them essential tools for reducing the incidence of out-of-school children in Nigeria.

Role of Information Services in Reducing the Incidence of Out-of-School Children

Information services are essential for promoting educational inclusion by improving access to educational information, supporting informed decision-making, and enhancing stakeholder collaboration. In Nigeria, they help address informational barriers that contribute to low school enrolment, poor attendance, and school dropout.

- a) **Promoting Educational Awareness:** Information services educate parents and communities on the value of formal education, encouraging school enrolment and retention through public awareness campaigns and educational communication.
- b) **Disseminating Educational Opportunities:** They provide timely information on school admission, free basic education, scholarships, school feeding programmes, conditional cash transfers, and other educational support services.
- c) **Supporting Advocacy and Community Mobilisation:** Through libraries, schools, media, community leaders, and civil society organisations, information services promote children's educational rights and encourage community participation in education.
- d) **Correcting Misconceptions:** Educational campaigns help address harmful cultural beliefs, gender stereotypes, child labour, and other misconceptions that discourage school attendance.
- e) **Strengthening School-Community Communication:** Information services improve communication between schools and families by providing information on admission, attendance, academic progress, and school activities, thereby increasing parental involvement.
- f) **Supporting Evidence-Based Planning:** Educational data generated through information systems enable policymakers to identify underserved communities, allocate resources effectively, and monitor educational programmes.
- g) **Promoting Inclusive Education and Information Literacy:** Targeted information services support vulnerable groups, including girls, children with disabilities, internally displaced children, and rural populations, while improving information literacy and informed educational decision-making.
- h) **Leveraging ICT and Alternative Education:** Digital technologies, mobile communication, and online platforms expand access to educational information, while information on non-formal and alternative education programmes promotes lifelong learning and educational inclusion. Overall, effective information services enhance awareness, improve access to educational opportunities, strengthen policy implementation, and foster collaboration among stakeholders, making them a strategic tool for reducing the incidence of out-of-school children in Nigeria.

Challenges Affecting the Provision of Information Services

Despite their importance in promoting educational inclusion, information services in Nigeria face several challenges that limit

their effectiveness in reducing the incidence of out-of-school children.

- a) **Inadequate Funding:** Limited financial resources hinder the acquisition of information materials, ICT facilities, qualified personnel, and community outreach programmes.
- b) **Poor ICT Infrastructure:** Inadequate internet connectivity, unstable electricity, and limited access to digital technologies, particularly in rural areas, restrict access to digital information services.
- c) **Low Literacy and Information Literacy:** Low literacy and digital skills among parents and communities reduce their ability to access and utilise educational information effectively.
- d) **Inadequate Public Awareness:** Weak communication strategies limit awareness of educational policies, free basic education, scholarships, and other government interventions.
- e) **Shortage of Qualified Personnel:** Insufficient numbers of trained librarians, information professionals, counsellors, and ICT specialists affect the quality of information service delivery.
- f) **Weak Stakeholder Coordination:** Poor collaboration among government agencies, schools, libraries, NGOs, and communities often results in fragmented communication and duplication of efforts.
- g) **Socio-cultural and Security Challenges:** Language barriers, cultural beliefs, insecurity, and humanitarian crises restrict information dissemination and access to education in many communities.
- h) **Weak Policy Implementation and Monitoring:** Poor implementation of educational policies, inadequate monitoring, and limited community

participation reduce the effectiveness and sustainability of information services.

- i) **Misinformation:** The spread of false or misleading information through digital media can discourage school enrolment and undermine public confidence in educational programmes. Addressing these challenges requires increased investment in information infrastructure, improved ICT access, stronger stakeholder collaboration, effective policy implementation, enhanced information literacy, and sustained public awareness campaigns to support educational inclusion in Nigeria.

Strategies for Strengthening Information Services

Strengthening information services is essential for improving educational inclusion and reducing the incidence of out-of-school children in Nigeria. The following strategies can enhance the effectiveness of information service delivery:

- a) **Increase Government Investment:** Governments should provide adequate funding for libraries, community information centres, ICT infrastructure, and educational awareness programmes to improve access to educational information.
- b) **Strengthen Libraries and Community Information Centres:** These institutions should serve as educational resource hubs by offering literacy programmes, mobile library services, community outreach, and information on educational opportunities.
- c) **Expand Digital Infrastructure:** Investment in broadband connectivity, digital libraries, educational portals, and mobile learning technologies will improve access to educational

information, particularly in underserved communities.

- d) **Promote Information and Digital Literacy:** Training programmes should equip parents, learners, and communities with the skills to access, evaluate, and utilise educational information effectively.
- e) **Enhance Public Awareness and Advocacy:** Government agencies, schools, media, and civil society organisations should conduct sustained awareness campaigns on the importance of education, children's rights, school enrolment, and inclusive education.
- f) **Strengthen Stakeholder Collaboration:** Effective partnerships among government, schools, libraries, NGOs, traditional institutions, religious organisations, and communities will improve coordination, resource mobilisation, and information sharing.
- g) **Improve School-Community Communication:** Schools should strengthen communication with parents through parent-teacher associations, community forums, outreach programmes, and digital communication platforms.
- h) **Build Human Capacity and Localise Information:** Recruiting qualified information professionals and delivering educational messages in local languages through trusted community leaders will improve the reach and effectiveness of information services.
- i) **Leverage Mass Media, Social Media, and Monitoring Systems:** Radio, television, social media, and mobile communication should be used to disseminate educational information, while regular monitoring and evidence-based policies should guide continuous improvement and ensure community ownership of information programmes. Implementing these strategies will

strengthen educational communication, improve access to reliable information, and support greater school enrolment, retention, and educational inclusion across Nigeria.

Implications for Educational Policy and Practice

The findings of this review indicate that information services are strategic tools for promoting educational inclusion and reducing the incidence of out-of-school children in Nigeria. Accordingly, educational policies and practices should integrate information services into national strategies for improving school enrolment, retention, and stakeholder engagement.

- a) **Policy Integration:** Information services should be embedded in educational policies to strengthen educational communication, advocacy, and community engagement.
- b) **Evidence-Based Planning:** Governments should establish effective educational information systems to support planning, resource allocation, programme monitoring, and policy evaluation.
- c) **Strengthening Information Infrastructure:** Libraries, community information centres, and digital platforms should be expanded and adequately funded to improve access to educational information, particularly in underserved communities.
- d) **School-Community Partnerships:** Strong collaboration among schools, parents, traditional and religious leaders, civil society organisations, and local communities should be encouraged to enhance educational awareness and accountability.
- e) **Capacity Building and Digital Transformation:** Continuous training

for librarians, teachers, counsellors, and information professionals, alongside investment in ICT infrastructure and digital information services, will improve the quality and reach of educational communication.

- f) **Inclusive Communication and Collaboration:** Educational information should be accessible in local languages and tailored to vulnerable groups, while partnerships among government agencies, development partners, media organisations, and the private sector should be strengthened to improve service delivery.
- g) **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research:** Regular assessment of information services and sustained research on educational communication should inform evidence-based policies and innovative strategies for reducing educational exclusion. Implementing these policy and practice measures will strengthen information service delivery, improve educational access and participation, and contribute significantly to achieving inclusive and equitable education in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The persistent incidence of out-of-school children remains a major challenge to educational inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria. Although various educational policies and programmes have been implemented, barriers such as poverty, insecurity, socio-cultural practices, weak policy implementation, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to educational information continue to hinder school enrolment and retention. This review has shown that information services are strategic tools for promoting educational inclusion by increasing awareness, disseminating educational opportunities, strengthening school–community

communication, supporting advocacy, improving stakeholder collaboration, and facilitating evidence-based decision-making. Through libraries, schools, community information centres, mass media, and digital technologies, information services can address knowledge gaps that contribute to educational exclusion.

The review also identified challenges affecting information service delivery, including inadequate funding, poor ICT infrastructure, shortage of qualified personnel, low information literacy, weak institutional coordination, insecurity, and misinformation. Guided by the **Diffusion of Innovations Theory**, the paper highlights that effective communication and information dissemination can positively influence parental attitudes and encourage greater participation in formal education. Overall, reducing the incidence of out-of-school children requires integrating information services into educational policies alongside improved funding, digital infrastructure, stakeholder collaboration, and community engagement. Strengthening information services will enhance educational access, improve school participation, and support Nigeria's progress towards achieving **Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)** on inclusive and equitable quality education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the issues discussed in this conceptual review, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Governments at the federal, state, and local levels should increase funding for information services** by providing adequate financial support for libraries, community information centres, school information units, and digital

- communication infrastructure to improve educational information dissemination.
2. **Educational information should be integrated into national and state educational policies** to ensure that information services become an essential component of strategies aimed at reducing the incidence of out-of-school children.
 3. **Public libraries, school libraries, and community information centres should be strengthened and modernised** through the provision of current information resources, digital technologies, mobile library services, and qualified information professionals.
 4. **Educational awareness campaigns should be intensified** using radio, television, newspapers, social media, community meetings, and indigenous languages to educate parents and communities on the importance of formal education and children's educational rights.
 5. **Government and educational institutions should expand digital information services** by improving internet connectivity, digital literacy programmes, educational websites, mobile learning applications, and online educational information platforms, particularly in rural and underserved communities.
 6. **Stakeholder collaboration should be strengthened** among government ministries, educational institutions, libraries, civil society organisations, religious institutions, traditional rulers, development partners, and the private sector to facilitate coordinated information dissemination and educational advocacy.
 7. **Continuous professional development programmes should be organised** for librarians, information scientists, guidance counsellors, teachers,

educational technologists, and communication specialists to enhance their competencies in educational communication and digital information management.

8. **Educational information should be translated into local languages and adapted to cultural contexts** to improve accessibility, comprehension, and acceptance among diverse communities across Nigeria.
9. **Comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established** to assess the effectiveness of information services in promoting school enrolment, reducing dropout rates, and improving educational participation.
10. **Researchers should undertake further empirical studies** to examine the effectiveness of different information service models in reducing the incidence of out-of-school children across various geopolitical zones in Nigeria, thereby providing evidence for future educational policy and practice.

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