

# Policy Adaptations for Inclusive Literacy Pedagogy for Internally Displaced Children Camps in Benue and Plateau States, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *The study addressed policy adaptations for inclusive literacy pedagogy for internally displaced children camps in Benue and Plateau States, Nigeria. Employing qualitative interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of the educational challenges faced by internally displaced children, explanatory sequential design was adopted. The target population for the study consisted of headmasters for FGD (= 36) residing in selected IDP camps in Benue and Plateau States, Nigeria. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and interviews were used for data collection. The reliability of the FGD guides was obtained by trial testing it on a small group and multiple moderators was used to check consistency. The reliability index was found to be 0.78. The FGD discussions were recorded (with participants' consent) and transcribed for analysis. The focus of the FGD was on effective implementation of responsive pedagogy in literacy education for internally displaced children (for teachers) and educational policy that support responsive teaching methods in crisis-affected areas (for teachers and school managers). It was found that the effective implementation of Responsive Pedagogy for Internally Displaced (IDP) children is capable of bridging the gap between basic academic skills and the practical, psychosocial, and socio-economic needs of displaced populations. This finding highlights that education for displaced children must serve as a holistic survival and stabilization tool rather than just academic instruction. It means that classroom strategies must adapt to prioritize mental health, life skills, and community resilience alongside reading and solving problems using mathematics to foster successful reintegration.*

**Key Words:** policy adaptation, inclusive literacy education, internally displaced children, responsive pedagogy, functional literacy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Decades of ethno-religious conflict, farmer-herder disputes, and armed banditry in Plateau and Benue States have led to a serious humanitarian crisis characterized by the displacement of many people from their ancestral lands. This situation has serious consequences for children, who are often the most vulnerable in such crises. Consequently, the educational landscape in these two states has remained

severely disrupted with many schools destroyed, repurposed as shelters for internally displaced families, or rendered inaccessible due to violence and other forms of insecurity, leading to substantial educational gaps for children. Internally displaced children are especially vulnerable, struggling with legacies of violence such as psychological trauma, loss of family support, and inadequate access to education. These challenges contribute significantly to a cycle of poverty, as many children lack the necessary skills for stable employment and community development. By way of addressing these challenges therefore, this study explored responsive pedagogy and functional literacy instruction specifically tailored to respond to the unique needs of internally displaced children.

This research is anchored in Constructivist Learning Theory, which posits that learners construct knowledge through their experiences and interactions within their environment. Key theorists such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky emphasize the importance of social context and collaborative learning in the knowledge construction process. Constructivist theory aligns closely with the principles of responsive pedagogy, which advocates for adapting teaching strategies to meet the unique backgrounds and experiences of students, particularly those from marginalized communities. This alignment is crucial for effectively addressing the challenges faced by internally displaced children in Benue and Plateau States, who often come from traumatic backgrounds and require educational practices that recognize and validate their experiences.

Responsive pedagogy emphasizes the necessity of educators being attuned to the emotional and psychological states of their students. In contexts where trauma is prevalent, such as among internally displaced populations, understanding students' backgrounds is vital for creating safe and supportive learning environments (Gowon et al. 2026). By employing strategies that acknowledge the lived experiences of these children, educators can help mitigate the effects of trauma, thereby enhancing both emotional well-being and academic performance. Additionally, the integration of functional literacy—which focuses on equipping learners with practical skills applicable to everyday life—further enhances this approach. Functional literacy encompasses not just basic reading and writing skills, but also critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to navigate complex social and economic environments. By grounding the research in Constructivist Learning Theory, the study aims to enhance the educational experiences of internally displaced children, promoting their ability to engage meaningfully with the curriculum and their communities.

The literature on responsive pedagogy highlights its significance in contexts where learners face substantial barriers to education, such as trauma from violence or displacement. Research has demonstrated that responsive pedagogy can lead to improved engagement and learning outcomes (Achor, 2023). For instance, Tomlinson (2014) discusses how differentiated instruction—a core component of responsive pedagogy—enables educators to address the varying readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles of students, fostering an inclusive classroom environment. In the context of internally displaced populations in Benue and Plateau States, responsive pedagogy is essential for addressing the emotional and psychological needs of children affected by trauma. Miller (2019) emphasizes that understanding students' backgrounds allows educators to create supportive learning environments that cater to their specific needs.

On the other hand, functional literacy extends beyond basic reading and writing skills, emphasizing the ability to use these skills effectively in real-world situations. According to UNESCO (2025), functional literacy is a crucial driver of socioeconomic development, significantly impacting

employment opportunities and overall quality of life. Research indicates that functional literacy is particularly vital for marginalized populations, including internally displaced children in Nigeria. Studies have shown that children who acquire functional literacy skills are better equipped to reintegrate into their communities and contribute positively to society (World Bank, 2018). Furthermore, functional literacy has been linked to improved health outcomes, civic engagement, and social cohesion, making it an essential component of educational programs in crisis-affected areas.

The intersection of responsive pedagogy and functional literacy emerges as a critical area for addressing the unique challenges faced by internally displaced children in Benue and Plateau States. Winthrop and McGivney (2016) argue that integrating responsive teaching practices into functional literacy programs can lead to more effective learning experiences. This integration allows educators to create curricula that not only build literacy skills but also resonate with students' lived experiences, making learning more relevant and meaningful. Programs incorporating culturally relevant materials and community-based learning can help students connect their education to their real-life contexts, thus enhancing motivation and learning outcomes (Gonzalez *et al*, 2025).

Despite the recognition of both responsive pedagogy and functional literacy as essential components of effective education, many educational policies in Nigeria remain rigid and standardized. Recent initiatives, such as the Nigerian National Policy on Education, have begun to acknowledge the importance of inclusive and responsive educational practices. However, significant gaps still exist between policy and practice, particularly in regions affected by conflict and displacement (Osokoya, 2019). This research aims to bridge this gap by providing evidence-based recommendations for integrating responsive pedagogy and functional literacy into educational programs for internally displaced children, ultimately contributing to their resilience and socioeconomic empowerment in the face of adversity.

By combining responsive pedagogy, which transforms teaching methods to accommodate diverse backgrounds, with functional literacy that provides essential skills, this research aims to improve educational outcomes and empower these children to escape or break the vicious cycle of poverty. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights on effective educational strategies that promote resilience and social cohesion among internally displaced children in Nigeria.

### **Research Objectives**

The following research objectives helped to shape this study:

1. Identify the indicators for implementing responsive pedagogy
2. Document the policies for effective implementation of responsive pedagogy in literacy education for Internally Displaced Children

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Responsive Pedagogy in Crisis-Affected Educational Settings**

Responsive pedagogy refers to instructional strategies that actively account for learners' social, emotional, and cultural contexts, especially in diverse and challenging learning environments. In conflict-affected settings such as Benue and Plateau States in Nigeria—where displacement due to violent conflicts is widespread—traditional pedagogical approaches may fail to meet learners' needs. Research shows that responsive teaching, which includes trauma-informed practices, learner-centred

approaches, and culturally relevant content, is essential for supporting children affected by displacement (Burde et al., 2019; INEE, 2022).

In emergencies, effective pedagogy must focus on psychological safety, community integration, and differentiated instruction to respond to the varied academic levels and socio-emotional needs of internally displaced children (IDCs). According to the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE, 2022), responsive teaching in emergency contexts improves learning outcomes and resilience, particularly when educators are trained to adapt instruction to trauma-sensitive realities and disrupted schooling histories.

Furthermore, Winthrop et al. (2018) note that education in displacement settings must be flexible, inclusive, and grounded in local contexts to ensure that it serves not only academic needs but also psychosocial recovery. This approach enables students to re-engage with learning despite adversity, and it positions schools as stabilising institutions during displacement.

### **Functional Literacy as a Pathway to Socioeconomic Empowerment**

Functional literacy extends beyond the acquisition of basic reading and writing skills to include the ability to apply those skills effectively in daily life for problem-solving, economic participation, and informed decision-making. UNESCO (2020) defines functional literacy as the use of literacy skills in ways that contribute to social and economic development, such as accessing healthcare, understanding legal rights, and engaging in income-generating activities.

In contexts of displacement, functional literacy becomes a critical survival skill. Internally displaced persons (IDPs), particularly children and youth, face challenges in navigating healthcare systems, emergency relief services, and informal labour markets. Studies show that literacy programmes incorporating real-life content—such as health literacy, disaster preparedness, and financial literacy—can enhance the well-being and autonomy of displaced populations (Sabates *et al.*, 2021).

In Nigeria, where educational access is unequal and displacement disrupts formal learning, functional literacy initiatives embedded in non-formal and emergency education frameworks can help IDCs rebuild lost opportunities. The Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2022) asserts that functional literacy is central to reducing vulnerability and increasing participation in civic and economic life.

### **Linking Responsive Pedagogy and Functional Literacy for Holistic Development**

The synergy between responsive pedagogy and functional literacy is vital for improving the life chances of internally displaced children. While responsive pedagogy addresses the how of teaching by adapting methods to learners' realities, functional literacy addresses the what by ensuring content is directly applicable to real-world challenges. Together, they provide a framework for literacy instruction that is both emotionally affirming and practically empowering.

A study by Burde et al. (2019) emphasises that pedagogical approaches in emergency contexts must be designed not only to foster academic achievement but also to build learners' capacity to navigate crisis-affected societies. Moreover, Sabates et al. (2021) found that when literacy programmes integrate socio-economic applications, learners show increased motivation and long-term retention of skills.

Winthrop and McGivney (2016) argue that education in crisis must prioritise both foundational skills and the capabilities needed for societal reintegration. This includes equipping IDCs with the literacy skills required to pursue livelihoods, access information, and participate meaningfully in their communities. When pedagogy is responsive and literacy functional, education becomes a pathway to resilience and recovery.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Design**

Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study utilized both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of the educational challenges faced by internally displaced children. Explanatory Sequential Design was adopted. This design involves collecting quantitative data first, followed by qualitative data. The quantitative aspects comprised descriptive survey and quasi experimental designs. The qualitative data is then used to explain or interpret the quantitative findings. It is intended to explore the 'why' behind quantitative results or to understand the mechanisms that may be driving those results. Therefore Focused Group Discussion (FGD) was used to collect qualitative information from school heads, engaged research assistants and the researchers. In trying to evaluate effective implementation of responsive pedagogies, the learning challenges of ID children and informed educational policy to support responsive teaching methods were documented as part of the descriptive survey.

### **Population, Sample and Sampling**

The target population for this study consisted of approximately 749 (pupils = 713 and teachers and headmasters for FGD(= 36) internally displaced children and teachers residing in selected IDP camps in Benue and Plateau States, Nigeria. It was a selection as some areas or location were not secured for visits. So we had a total of 3 schools from Plateau and 8 schools from Benue that were available for use.

The available sample for the study was 18 teachers (male = 12 and female = 6). First all the three schools in Plateau were purposively sampled since they are few in number and population. Also 6 out of 8 schools in Benue were sampled (minding the risk locations) since all are coeducational and 100% IDP camp children.

### **Research Instrument**

The study employed qualitative instrument to gather a nuanced understanding of the educational experiences of internally displaced children. With reference to the qualitative instrument, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guides were used to explore the experiences of internally displaced children, educators, and community leaders to enable documentation of policy and appropriate pedagogy. The FGD included open-ended questions addressing challenges, adaptive teaching strategies, and the impact of trauma on learning. Several iterations of these instruments were conducted to ensure they were culturally sensitive and elicit rich and detailed data. There were two sections of FGD addressing the two related objectives of the study: (A) Effective Implementation of Responsive Pedagogy in Literacy Education for Internally Displaced Children (for Teachers) and (B) Educational Policy that Support Responsive Teaching Methods in Crisis-Affected Areas (for Teachers and School Managers).

To establish the reliability of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guides, the discussion guide was trial tested on a small group and multiple moderators was used to check consistency. The reliability index was found to be 0.78.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and interviews were conducted with educators (the research assistants and school heads), to gather in-depth perspectives on educational challenges and successes. These discussions were recorded (with participant consent) and transcribed for analysis. The focus of the FGD was on: (A) Effective Implementation of Responsive Pedagogy in Literacy Education for Internally Displaced Children (for Teachers) and (B) Educational Policy that Support Responsive Teaching Methods in Crisis-Affected Areas (for Teachers and School Managers).

### **Qualitative Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

#### ***Effective Implementation with Regards to Use of Responsive Pedagogy in Literacy Education for Internally Displaced Children***

Effective implementation of Responsive and Functional Literacy Pedagogy for Internally Displaced (IDP) children focuses on bridging the gap between basic academic skills and the practical, psychosocial, and socio-economic needs of displaced populations. It was established that prolonged crises that disrupt education enhance generational illiteracy. Also, absorbing displaced children into safer communities provides access to education, hence the opportunity for literacy and numeracy. However, trauma still exist for this category of children unless they receive trauma counselling. Yusuf et al. (2020) advocate for participatory needs assessments, contextualised curriculum design, and the integration of literacy with health, civic, and livelihood education. Additionally, sustained investment in infrastructure, teacher training, and multi-sectoral partnerships is essential to improving the reach and quality of literacy interventions.

Based on the group discussions, the following were agreed upon as Core Effective Implementation Strategies:

***Integrated Learning Models:*** Rather than teaching literacy in isolation, functional pedagogy integrates reading and writing with vocational skills, life skills, and daily problem-solving. This ensures that learners see immediate value in their studies, which is critical for children whose formal schooling has been disrupted. Things to integrate could include storytelling, drama, songs in local language and blended learning strategy. Winthrop and McGivney (2016) argue that education in crisis must prioritise both foundational skills and the capabilities needed for societal reintegration. This includes equipping IDCs with the literacy skills required to pursue livelihoods, access information, and participate meaningfully in their communities. When pedagogy is responsive and literacy functional, education becomes a pathway to resilience and recovery.

***Mother Tongue-Based Instruction:*** Research emphasizes teaching children first in the language they speak and understand best to build a stronger foundation for subsequent literacy in other languages. There should be extension of this to upper primary school classes (Primary 4-6. It is suggested that teachers use ethnomathematics and ethno language teaching strategies for literacy (reading and writing) and numeracy(arithmetic and mathematics). Winthrop and McGivney (2016) argue that education in crisis must prioritise both foundational skills and the capabilities needed for societal reintegration. This

includes equipping IDCs with the literacy skills required to pursue livelihoods, access information, and participate meaningfully in their communities. When pedagogy is responsive and literacy functional, education becomes a pathway to resilience and recovery.

*Transitional and Accelerated Learning Centers:* Many governments, including Nigeria, use transitional learning centers to provide accelerated education that prepares IDP children to rejoin the formal school system usually through the host community schools (this was the basic practice in Plateau State) and should be encouraged.

*Psychosocial Support (PSS) Integration:* Because displacement is often accompanied by trauma, responsive pedagogy includes "child-friendly" teachers trained in trauma-informed care and PSS to create safe, supportive learning environments. It is suggestive that trained counsellors should be posted by State government to such schools besides using specially trained teachers. In contexts of displacement, functional literacy becomes a critical survival skill. Internally displaced persons (IDPs), particularly children and youth, face challenges in navigating healthcare systems, emergency relief services, and informal labour markets. Studies show that literacy programmes incorporating real-life content—such as health literacy, disaster preparedness, and financial literacy—can enhance the well-being and autonomy of displaced populations (Sabates et al., 2021).

### **Structural Barriers and Solutions**

There was a consensus among discussants that:

*National System Integration:* The reality in Nigeria and the states studied is that the government along with NGOs cannot provide adequate learning space and facilities for IDP school children due huge cost. The most sustainable implementation method is integrating IDP children into national education systems (host community system), often using "double shift" schooling to accommodate them without overwhelming existing infrastructure. It is suggested that schools in such community should automatically be made to operate double shift.

*Removal of Administrative Barriers:* Demands in normal schools for transfer certificate, birth certificates or prior school records must not surface for IDP schools. States should waive documentation requirements (e.g., birth certificates or prior school records) that frequently prevent displaced children from enrolling especially when joining host community schools. Where necessary verbal, written interview and careful observation for two weeks should be sufficient.

*Resource Allocation:* Requirements for boys are quite different from that of girls especially conveniences. Implementation requires specific funding for gender-sensitive facilities (e.g., separate latrines and dignity kits) to ensure displaced girls can attend classes consistently.

### **Educational Policies Required to Lend Support to Responsive Pedagogies in the Crisis-affected Regions in Nigeria**

Effective educational policies for supporting responsive pedagogies in crisis-affected regions must focus on flexibility, inclusivity, and teacher support. Based on discussion, key policy areas include adapting the curriculum, providing psychosocial support, and ensuring teacher training in crisis contexts.

*Curriculum Adaptation:* Policies should allow for curriculum flexibility to integrate social and emotional learning and life-saving information (e.g., landmine awareness, protective health behaviours). This includes using conflict-sensitive approaches and ensuring that educational materials are inclusive of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds to promote peace and avoid exacerbating tensions. It is suggested that the policy statement should be:

*The current curriculum for primary school pupils can hardly be covered by schools for IDP children only and highly unfit for their special needs. The curriculum should be adapted to take care of trauma sensitization, ethnic background, social and emotional learning, and life saving information.*

The implementation of responsive pedagogy for functional literacy education has gained empirical support as an effective strategy for improving the educational experiences of internally displaced children (IDCs), especially within conflict-affected regions such as Benue and Plateau States in Nigeria. A growing body of literature highlights the importance of tailoring literacy instruction to reflect learners' contexts, cognitive levels, and socio-emotional needs. Yusuf *et al* (2020), in their evaluation of functional literacy programmes for internally displaced adults in Bauchi State, found that adapting curriculum content to everyday experiences enhanced learner engagement and outcomes. However, they also observed that the lack of baseline diagnostic assessments hindered the effectiveness of instruction. These findings emphasise the necessity of embedding learner assessments in literacy interventions to identify specific academic and psychosocial needs—especially in fragile settings where displacement disrupts learning continuity.

*Teacher Training and Support:* Policies must prioritize training for teachers in emergency preparedness, response, and providing psychosocial support to trauma-affected students. Providing incentives, secure accommodation, and clear career pathways can help attract and retain qualified educators in high-risk areas. It is hereby suggested that:

*Teachers must be trained in emergency preparedness, response, and providing psychosocial support to trauma-affected pupils. Once a new Camp is established with a school to take-off, designated teachers should be sent for one moth training in designated centers.*

Predicala, and Madarang (2023) notes that it is important to create a positive and supportive learning environment that emphasizes effort and progress rather than just achievement. Teachers must offer plenty of practice because practice is essential for developing reading skills. Provide students with plenty of opportunities to read independently, as well as opportunities to read aloud and receive feedback. Lastly, they can use technology to support learning. There are digital tools and apps available that can support struggling readers, such as text-to-speech software, audiobooks, and interactive reading games and we can also create localized digital instructional material.

*Flexible Learning Modalities:* Education systems curriculum should develop national strategies that incorporate diverse and alternative learning methods, such as digital learning platforms, radio, and print materials, to ensure continuity when physical schools are inaccessible. These modalities should be accessible to marginalized groups, including those without internet access. The policy statement here should be:

*Automatic internet access and incorporation of diverse and alternative learning methods, such as digital learning platforms, radio, and print materials, should be granted schools in IDP Camps or children in host communities (if pupils and their teachers are ICT literate) to ensure continuity when physical schools are inaccessible.*

*Safe and Inclusive Environments:* A central policy is the establishment of safe, protective, and inclusive learning spaces, including temporary learning centers and community schools. Policies should also focus on addressing the specific needs of vulnerable populations, such as girls, children with disabilities, and displaced individuals, to ensure equitable access to education.

*It was agreed that: Experts should be involved to interact and source from state government specific needs of vulnerable populations, such as girls, children with disabilities among the displaced individuals for special attention, to ensure equitable access to education.*

*Coordination and Funding:* Policies require strong coordination mechanisms between governments, NGOs, and community leaders to align responses and share data effectively. Ensuring education funding is protected and prioritized during crises, from initial response to long-term recovery, is critical for sustainable education systems. Most children are distracted in a bid to hawk to look for what to use in feeding and so not regular in class attendance. Suggested policies should include:

*A. Non affected communities in such state should be taxed 0.5% of their incomes to support material, structural and feeding needs of IDP children*

*B. Supplementary budget should be made at federal and state levels to boost socioeconomic status of IDP children's schools, Camp Management and their parents.*

These policies suggested could help build resilient education systems that can withstand crises and contribute to long-term stability and recovery.

### **Conclusion and Educational Implications of the Findings**

A number of policies regarding inclusive literacy pedagogy were identified in this paper for adaptation by governments of Benue and Plateau States and Nigeria in general. Many governments, including Nigeria, use transitional learning centers to provide accelerated education that prepares IDP children to rejoin the formal school system usually through the host community schools (this was the basic practice in Plateau State) and should be encouraged. Additionally, because displacement is often accompanied by trauma, responsive pedagogy includes "child-friendly" teachers trained in trauma-informed care and PSS to create safe, supportive learning environments. Thus, education policymakers should provide emergency education curriculum with a clear framework on the use of responsive functional literacy pedagogy to tailor their approaches to meet the unique needs of the displaced populations.

The specific educational implications of these findings with regards to policy formulation and implementation encompass several vital areas:

1. Lessons should go beyond standard theory to teach practical, functional literacy and vocational skills. This ensures displaced children can eventually become self-reliant and rebuild their livelihoods. Teaching materials must reflect the realities of the learners, weaving real-world problem solving and soft-skills training into the daily syllabus.

2. Because displacement causes profound emotional distress, teachers must be trained to recognize and manage trauma, creating "safe space" classrooms that alleviate anxiety. Learning outcomes are deeply tied to mental stability. Schools must act as centers for healing, utilizing recreational activities, art, and structured peer support to help students process their experiences.
3. Instructors require specialized, ongoing professional development focused on Culturally Responsive Teaching to effectively handle overcrowded classrooms, behavioral issues, and diverse learner needs in camp settings. To support a responsive framework, authorities must prioritize the continuous training, fair compensation, and psychosocial support of the teachers themselves.
4. Educational policies must be flexible, acknowledging different learning speeds and the protracted nature of displacement. Host governments, humanitarian organizations, and NGOs must collaborate seamlessly to optimize inclusive, continuous education for displaced children

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