

The Phenomenon of Street Children and The Complexity in Reforming Their Lives Through Inclusive Education

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Abstract

Street children are frequently regarded as a phenomenon, they are treated differently and are not viewed positively. Since they are frequently seen negatively, they habitually encounter prejudice and discrimination. The reasons for their presence on the street are still diverse and convoluted. Thus, the chief purpose of this research is to carefully ascertain the merits and demerits of trying to reform them using inclusive education. Various academic search engines like Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, RefSeek, and CORE were extremely useful during this research process. This non-empirical research collected information using various current studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses. A thorough literature review was conducted to source accurate and pertinent information about reforming the lives of street children from January 2024 to September 2024. The findings suggest that while inclusion is vital for reforming these children it is convoluted and seemingly impossible to achieve. Inclusion means that all children study together and are afforded various options within the educational system to ameliorate their overall situations. Since the lifestyle of street children is radically different this process seems to be unattainable. A major deterrent to their reformation lies in the fact that they are stigmatized and branded by members of society. This stigmatization is very deep, and it is almost impossible to value the good in street children. Thus, it is tremendously difficult to reform the lives of street children. Nonetheless, some of them prefer a different type of life and they should be given this opportunity.

Keywords: Reform, Street Children, Inclusion, Inclusive Education, Learning, Diversity, Equity, Equality.

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Introduction

Wikipedia contributors (2022) mentioned that when trying to understand street children it is advisable to consider the following ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, or disability. Wikipedia contributors (2022) noted that these children daily encounter discrimination in all spheres of life. Globally the number of street children continues to rise significantly, and they are often seen negatively. A review of the literature (Hamilton et al., 2020; White et al., 2021; Chatham & Mixer 2021) revealed certain aspects, characteristics, and traits of street children but precise information about this topic is still scarce. One of the objectives of this research was to offer some explanations and demonstrate the great intricacy in trying to accurately comprehend and reform their lives. This issue is intricate and labyrinthine but necessary to understand the lives of street children. Another important objective was to ascertain whether their lives could be changed through inclusive education. Still, another objective was to underscore the merits of building rapport with street children.

Ng et al. (2022) conjecture that when street children realize that people are interested in helping them, they are sometimes willing to trust the relationship and collaborate. Sometimes rapport

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is established. This is very significant in trying to rehabilitate them since it makes them feel appreciated and part of the process. When street children are incorporated into this process, it can create solid relationships and eliminate barriers. It is against this background that this study was undertaken.

According to Harfiani and Akrim (2020), all children have an innate right to education. This right must be affirmed and upheld. Moreover, there should be no distinction about ethnic background, race, social status, economic ability, political status, language, geography, gender, religious belief, and differences in physical or mental conditions. Thus, according to the perspective offered by Harfiani and Akrim (2020), inclusive education is possible even for street children.

A review of the literature (Maepa 2021; Maulana & Ismail 2022; Parveen 2019), revealed that there was no documentation on the rehabilitation of street children through inclusive education. Thus, this research fills the gap and simultaneously addresses the research question. Can street children be reformed through inclusive education? This non-empirical research examined relevant papers, articles, and books related to this topic. This research is significant because it can encourage people to cultivate a growth-promoting perception towards street children and thus accentuate the relevance of inclusive education. Moreover, it can assist in eliminating discrimination towards street children and fostering more research in this area. It can also motivate others to conduct more research in this field. Recommendations for leaders, non-governmental organizations, educators, and those involved in education were offered.

Following the erudite guidelines of Creswell and Poth (2018) a critical review and synthesis of existing research pertinent to this topic was utilized. This included a prudent and cautious selection of current peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and other significant sources relevant to the scope of this study (A'dillah Mustafa & Noorhidawati 2020). Academic search engines like Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, RefSeek, and CORE were extremely useful during this research process, (Paul & Criado 2020). Moreover, the research question, Can Street children be reformed through inclusive education? guided this study.

Street Children: Who They Are

According to Pratap and Singh (2021), street children are proliferating at an alarming proportion in many parts of the developing world. Maepa (2021) posited that street children are growing at an alarming rate, and it is a social problem that needs exigent attention. Yildirim et al. (2020) agreed that although the number of street children is increasing rapidly it is difficult to quantify them. Kosmara et al. (2021) predicted that the phenomenon of street children has social implications that need to be urgently addressed. It is not simple to arrive at a single unified definition for street children because it is still complicated, and circuitous. However, the United Nations (2017) suggested that because street children are not homogenous, their diversity could include age, gender, ethnicity, and nationality. According to Ng et al. (2022), some of the children are homeless and do not maintain contact with their parents or relatives. Some work on the streets while others return to their homes occasionally. Unsurprisingly, nearly every country views them differently and the literature described them as inconsequential. Similarly, the Consortium for Street Children (2021) suggested that they are inconspicuous globally and are frequently treated badly by almost everyone, by many government officials, policymakers, and even religious organizations. Street children are

susceptible to abuse, neglect, and discrimination (Reza, & Bromfield 2019). According to Setyowati et al. (2021), they are regarded as garbage because of their negligent conduct and unruly deportment and are branded and excluded from society. In addition, they interminably experience several types of prejudice, injustice, and ill-treatment in all spheres of life. Reza and Henly (2018) affirmed that street life is hapless and ill-fated, and these children are habitually inflicted with all types of hardships. Unsurprisingly the Consortium for Street Children (2021) affirmed that their desire for a better life is very low. Bajari and Kuswarno (2020) also narrated that since their behavior does not conform to that of mainstream society, they are regarded as obnoxious. These children habitually parade the streets and are prone and subject to the elements. According to Irawati et al. (2021), street children do not depend on their families and relatives and seek refuge and solace wherever it is possible. Unsurprisingly, some of them sleep under bridges, bus stations, and undesirable and unfavorable places. Bwambale et al. (2021) simply referred to them as homeless, but Sah et al. (2019) carefully noted that they are invariably at high risk because they are utterly vulnerable and defenseless. They are also unaware of their rights and privileges and are ignored by society. Consequently, Sah et al. (2019) affirmed that these children need professional assistance because they do not know that they can attain their objectives and have a different life. With limited education and inadequate hope, their future is almost diminished and crushed.

According to Ismael (2019), there are multiple factors why these children are homeless. Some of them include the death of parents or relatives and the breakdown of the family. Other reasons were dire poverty, illicit substances, and violence in the homes. He further indicated that the situation becomes abhorrent as some adults even send their children on the streets to beg. Societal et al. (2021) also agreed that acute poverty and the absence of adequate parental intervention cause children to be homeless. Consortium for Street Children (2019) mentioned that there is a difference between the terms “street children” and “homeless children” and they are not interchangeable. A review of the literature also described them in an unsatisfactory manner. Prasad (2021) conducted research and noted that more than a third of the street children affirmed that they were homeless because they were deprived of the affection of their families. Hence, they were disenchanted and extremely cautious of making new acquaintances. Even the efforts to reintegrate them by non-governmental institutions did not bring the desired results. Because of this great mistrust that they have towards others, Prasad (2021) further mentioned that these children often fabricate and disguise the truth, and this type of behavior compounds their ability to attain their objectives.

According to Dutta (2018), street children are always concerned with survival, and this is contradictory since street children dwell in the city, but they cannot appreciate the comforts of urban life. Pratap and Singh (2021) also claimed that street children roam the streets in search of the necessities of life and their struggle for survival continues. In addition to neglect and ill-treatment, they are also predisposed to gang violence and all types of assaults. They are easy victims for drug dealers and sex traffickers, and targets for prostitution (Parveen, 2019).

Building Rapport

A review of the literature suggested that it is almost impossible to build rapport with street children. This is largely because building trust is dynamic and progressive and evolves during a relationship and street children are very cautious about establishing bonds, especially with adults (Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022). This is because they do not feel valued and appreciated

and hence do not trust others. The heart of building rapport is fostering mutual respect and dignity and maintaining a high degree of confidentiality (O'Neill, 2018). According to O'Neill (2018) building rapport is meaningful only when profound and creditable trust is established and sustained. However, Julien (2021) resolutely hypothesized that it is difficult to build trust and understand the lives of street children. He further explained that establishing rapport does not entail criticizing and condemning their feelings but giving advice and good counsel. Building a trusting relationship with street children is not concerned with solving issues. It is an expertise that some people must master and hone because when it is conducted skillfully meaningful relationships are established (Hamilton et al., 2020). Thus, building rapport is vital in reforming the lives of street children. One of the integral elements of trust is that it is dynamic and evolves during a relationship. Koščak et al. (2021) advocated that it is important to build rapport with children, although communication with them is difficult. Liu et al. (2022) also believed that it is imperative to maintain dialogue with street children since it deepens the bond of friendship. Birgitte Fyhn and Berntsen (2022) emphasized the value of paying close attention to the voices and experiences of street children. In this regard, they believe that some people need to be proficient and listen with unconditional positive regard. Ng et al. (2022) strongly advocated that people must create a safe ambiance where street children can speak without inhibition. This is necessary in creating rapport. They also claimed that adults must learn how to listen truthfully and genuinely and foster rapport with children. Julien (2021) believed that dialogue incorporates empathy, reflection, and not casting judgment.

According to Bandura (1977), a healthy self-concept among children is important in building rapport. This self-concept is imperative for the positive development of street children. Factors that are important in positive self-concept include past experiences, social modeling, and oral persuasion (Bandura, 1977). Once children have successfully mastered these tasks, they are more likely to adopt this different approach to learning. Possessing a good self-concept also empowers these children so they would be intrepid to express themselves. Bandura (1977) further added that listening is necessary to grasp the overall perspectives of children, and more emphasis must be given to this discipline of creating rapport. Too often, the discipline of creating rapport and understanding is underrated, depreciated, and deflated. Birgitte Fyhn and Berntsen (2022) admitted that nurturing rapport with respect, comprehension, and listening is an exceedingly labyrinthine issue. Nonetheless, they were reassured that when individuals pay attention with a regardful and attentive ear, a child-centered environment is established. Skovsmose (2020) resolutely recommended that adults should consider the tremendous benefits this will bring to street children. Thus, the dynamic process of listening facilitates understanding and mutual trust and friendship are evident. When healthy relationships are formed, they energize and motivate people. They become dauntless and stouthearted and are unflinching in promoting their ideas. Trust and friendship become more purposeful when children can speak without inhibition. According to Mithani et al. (2021), adequate provisions that include a pleasant and agreeable environment must be afforded so that children can share their stories and thus establish mutual trust and friendship.

Brookes (2018) conjectured that effective rapport with children is beneficial to fostering rapport. She affirmed that there is merit when children are encouraged to verbalize their needs and are encouraged to demonstrate ways, they can achieve them. This dynamic heightens the bond of friendship because children are treated with dignity and respect and are dauntless to convey their sentiments. Walker and Misca (2019) firmly affirmed that the opinions and perspectives of children must be incorporated when decisions are made. When this is suitably

achieved, there is a marked difference. Children are motivated with a sense of self-determination and self-reliance. They appreciate and are aware of the need to be responsible for their actions and decisions. While this scenario is complicated it can be attained. Thus, street children must be allowed to express their views and opinions. be allowed to share their stories, (Kaneva & Corcoran 2021). Therefore, establishing bonds with street children involves creating amicable relationships, camaraderie, and a positive environment of harmony, (Ferguson, 2017). On the other hand, Adler and Rodman (2010) opined that these children must see merit, value, and purpose when they express themselves. Church (2019) also argued that different groups can petition and campaign with the government to support the rights of children.

Adler and Rodman (2010) conjectured that there are five steps in fostering rapport: accepting, comprehending, retaining, assessing, and reacting. Parveen (2019) affirmed that the foundation for building a trusting relationship includes authenticity, sincerity, and an appreciation for what is conveyed. Oftentimes, these sentiments and instincts are significant in arriving at ways to illuminate the opinions of children. Adler and Rodman (2010) together with Gerrig and Zimbard (2008) believed that it is imperative to establish rapport with growth-promoting intentions. Parveen (2019) emphasized that establishing rapport with children is necessary for perceiving their views.

Inclusive Education

Antoninis et al. (2020) surmised that initially inclusive education was associated with only accommodating students with disabilities in mainstream education. They further advocated that inclusion is more than just incorporating students in mainstream classrooms. It means eradicating all types of discrimination and prejudice and enhancing teaching and learning that accepts and appreciates all students. However, globally many countries are implementing policies to successfully promote inclusive education. This development of inclusive school environments was enforced by Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which offers a comprehensive understanding of education for all (United Nations, 2006). This article ensures that students are afforded equality of opportunity for education in the mainstream classroom environment (Xu 2012; Bellmann & Merkens, 2019). Therefore, the demand for educators to develop inclusive educational spaces that embrace inclusion in the teaching and learning processes is increasing. Harfiani and Akrim (2020) affirmed the perspective that all children have a right to education and there should be no distinction about ethnic background, race, social status, economic ability, political status, language, geography, gender, religious belief, and differences in physical or mental conditions. Their view underscores the fact that inclusive education is possible. Ainscow (2020) believed that although inclusive education was chiefly concerned with accepting students with disabilities there is a wider perspective, and some educational institutions accommodate diversity amongst all learners. According to Ainscow (2020), some educational institutions may need to reform their policies and practices to accommodate inclusion. To adequately establish inclusion government needs to incorporate stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, and those interested in education who can support and own the process of change is therefore essential (Ainscow 2020). Further, proper networks are necessary to motivate and support parents and children, and this could be accomplished by building advocacy skills where parents can lobby and negotiate with schools and authorities for continuous improvement in inclusion (Ainscow (2020). These ideas presented by Ainscow (2020) are crucial since students can offer important

ideas that can enhance inclusion. Antoninis et al. (2020) affirmed that when inclusion is done properly it improves academia, builds social and sentimental bonds, accentuates self-concept, and fosters appreciation among peers. They also believed that inclusion in mainstream classrooms minimizes stigma, stereotyping, discrimination, and alienation.

According to Makwana (2022), an ideal inclusive classroom should meet the following requirements: Give students a sense of belonging and achievement, classrooms should be safe and accessible to all, and educators should foster active participation among students and boost their self-esteem. Integration brings all students into the existing mainstream educational institutions. Inclusion tries to eliminate barriers to teaching and learning and focuses on shaping and molding students (Harfiani & Akrim, 2020). The principal objective of inclusion is that all students can study. Inclusion promotes understanding and harmony and minimizes prejudice. Further, it ensures that children with disabilities are well-equipped to maximize their abilities.

According to the United Nations (2017), inclusive education is an amalgamation of principles, notions, and practices that provide all students with a more efficient and productive education. They further indicated that through inclusion all students are treated equally and are given the chance to maximize their abilities because inclusive education affirms and validates the unparalleled input of all children. Thus, inclusion permits different groups to coexist and grow together and these include students with special needs and disabilities, females, pupils at risk, and even street children, constitute inclusive education. Ainscow (2020) believed that inclusion is possible when teaching and learning cater to individual differences and is beneficial for all students. According to Dalton (2017) in an inclusive environment, the following ought to be obvious, the curriculum must address the needs of all students, notably street children. Maulana and Ismail (2022) posited that because street children are judged negatively their education must not only consist of academics. These children also need to be taught social skills and how to acquire good and growth-promoting habits. Maepa (2021) believed that it is vital that street children possess a healthy self-concept. This would help them to confront the challenges that they face. In addition, Mag et al. (2017) surmised that inclusion must cater to the individuality of children. Therefore, the ideal inclusive ambiance must be focused on children and secure them from harm. It must also address and satisfy the essentials that children need to be comfortable. Educators must be fully cognizant and aware of inclusion and try to facilitate this process. To address this scenario, it may be necessary to revisit the regular curriculum and make corresponding changes to uphold inclusion.

Material and Method

This non-empirical research collected apposite and germane information using various current studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses. A thorough literature review was conducted to source accurate and pertinent information about reforming the lives of street children from January 2024 to September 2024. This author carefully followed the renowned guidelines of Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) outlined by Moher et al. (2015). In addition, three leading scholarly databases were searched: Web of Science, Science Direct, and IEEE Xplore. To further optimize this research this author followed the profound insights and suggestions from Creswell and Poth (2018), various searches, and used words and phrases like street children, reforming, inclusive education, diversity, equity, and equality. This was further complemented by carefully identifying certain titles, authors, and year of publication.

Limitations

While this research contributed to the understanding of the lives of street children and reforming their lives, there were some limitations that further investigation could address. The methods only accentuated personal observations, combinative literature, reflection on current events, and the authority and experience of various authors, it was not rooted in practical observation and direct experimentation. Because the arguments presented were not enhanced by empirical data, they are more susceptible to criticism. This review only incorporated literature that addressed the lives of street children and how they could be reformed. It did not concentrate on minority students and marginalized groups, nor did it include their socio-cultural background. Additional research could be conducted in greater detail among other minority groups. In addition, this research may have excluded some relevant studies because it was impossible to capture all the information that was available in online databases. Because of limited resources that include a confined database, this study did not represent a comprehensive review of the literature but emphasized in general how the lives of street children could be reformed. Therefore, further studies could review other aspects of the lives of these children. This non-empirical research did not include fieldwork and the actual voices, experiences, sentiments, and opinions of those engaged in the study of street children. In this regard, more research could include both non-empirical and empirical methods. These methods could further encompass both the field of science and the research outcome being analyzed.

Results and Discussion

The Reforming Process

This researcher holds the firm view that education could be instrumental in reforming the lives of those who are homeless. Cahyani et al. (2021) affirmed that education is essential and pivotal because it provides numerous opportunities for growth and development. Hasan et al. (2022) affirmed that education is vital and must address the needs of all, even those who are homeless. Consortium For Children Street (2021) also argued that inclusive education is fundamental. This institution wishes to equip street children with a better future where services, resources, care, and opportunities are available to them. Consortium For Children Street (2021) believed that this is attainable when people pay attention to the experiences of street children. Calp (2020) opined that education boosts self-esteem and confidence and offers hope to children. Education fosters knowledge and allows children to feel a great sense of accomplishment (Calp, 2020). Members of the public must do their part and eradicate the discrimination that these children face.

Although the views presented above are significant, many street children are still incapable of embracing this opportunity. This is because they are frequently stigmatized, branded, rejected, and not accepted in society. Thus, the concept of reforming street children through education is still very labyrinthine and complex. In addition, Edinyang et al. (2020) firmly advocated that parents and significant others must play a leading role in ensuring that street children are given a proper education. Anthony and James (2019) opined that policymakers and those interested in education must seek the right channels to properly instruct street children. Edmonds et al. (2022) conducted extensive research in Jinja, Uganda, and resolutely suggested that education must focus on the needs of all students; even street children. Based on her program, she resolutely recommended that those interested could explore the idea of Street Work. According to her, Street Work involves building a relationship with street children. This includes guidance, counseling and generally caring for their needs. It also involves assisting the children to cultivate and develop their skills. It also aims to reintegrate them with their families so that

they can benefit from the official education system. The International Labor Office (2021) noted that about one-third of all children who engage in child labor are not enrolled in school. This scenario is appalling because education is an integral component of life. Titi and Ika (2022) opined that because homeless children are not fortunate and privileged, they constantly face numerous difficulties in developing social, educational, and cognitive. Prasad (2021) and Dutta (2018) noted that trying to reform street children using education can prove to be quite perplexing and complicated.

In Botswana and India, the research conducted by Pratap and Singh (2021) revealed that street children have limited education. According to Hasan, et al. (2022), many of the children claimed that attending school was not a priority. Thus, they were not aware of the numerous opportunities, and support provided by the state because their principal motive was survival. Taib et al. (2022) also discovered that homeless children were dubious of their potential and reluctant to realize their aspirations or fulfill their dreams because they did not have a proper academic foundation. Research conducted in Kenya by Adama (2019) also indicated that efforts to reform and instruct street children were also unsuccessful.

Discussion

Is There a Way Forward?

The research question can Street children be reformed? is addressed. It is an undoubted fact that several scholars have produced pertinent literature that critically analyzes street children. They have also offered numerous recommendations and programs geared toward removing these children from the street and reintegrating them into society. While there is merit in trying to incorporate and include them into society, there is a tremendous challenge because they are not accepted in society. They are still marginalized and ostracized and this convolutes the reforming process and further compounds the discrimination that they experience daily. In general, street children are habitually excluded and branded that it may be impossible for them to appreciate rehabilitation. These various forms of prejudice grossly prohibit and obstruct the reformation process. These children encounter several challenges because of injustice and intolerance as they continue to live in a society that completely rebuffs and frequently considers them negligible and inconsequential. The scar of rejection and branding is extremely lamentable and almost impossible to heal. Street children are habitually excluded and criminalized to such an extent that they are forcibly and violently removed from the streets. The prejudices that these children regularly encounter ought not to be diminished. It is interesting to note that they are rejected by society for life. Adama (2019) opined that this stigma is consistent with their lives. Abdi et al. (2017) further added that whether they are on the streets or in some rehabilitation program, they still experience rejection. This only makes them more vulnerable. Thus, this research fills the gap.

Child Hope (2022) opined that the constant rejection and branding make these children feel inferior and worthless. Adama (2019) noted that exclusion also can stigmatize, dehumanize, and discriminate against others. In addition, the lives of street children are transient, and many programs and support services are available when these children work, and children are unable to participate in those ventures. If they do go to school, they still battle to keep abreast with their studies and combat discrimination (Child Hope, 2022). On the other hand, Clark (2019) strongly insisted that when street children are not educated it only perpetuates their cycle of poverty and the numerous violations they experience on the streets. Education can offer these children security and avenues to turn away from the streets and adopt a different lifestyle.

It is against this background that street children exist and live. Thus, the various programs geared to assist them are difficult to implement and sustain because the root cause, which is total rejection and discrimination, cannot be easily addressed Abdi et al. (2017). It must be carefully noted that street children have ambitions, purpose, objectives, and aspirations. Vostanis et al. (2018) highlighted that although there is hope for these children it is seemingly impossible to reform them. This is chiefly because the negative perceptions about these children continue to form a part of their lives, and it is difficult to view them differently. It can be mentioned that because they are ostracized for life, their hope of rehabilitation is minimal and perhaps non-existent. This researcher argues that even without stigmatization and negative labels, the mere fact that these children are homeless seriously convolutes the process of reforming their lives. This is principally because street children are regularly exposed to drugs, alcohol, and sexual exploitation. Some of them are involved in gangs and illicit practices like begging and stealing. Others make a living from whatever they get from the garbage, or scraps of food in the garbage, begging, stealing, or doing the most menial of jobs. Thus, the rejection that they encounter in their daily lives makes them more at risk and averse to any form of growth and development. This is because on the streets they are only concerned with survival and accepting another form of life is rejected.

Conclusion

This research demonstrated the complexity and difficulty of trying to reform the lives of street children. It also accentuated the need to create awareness among citizens so that they can be more informed that street children when rehabilitated achieve their objectives and can contribute to the development of a more meaningful society. This research investigated the intricacy of trying to formulate an accurate definition of homeless children. It also mentioned the usefulness of building rapport and inclusion and provided some guidelines on how this could be accomplished. It carefully outlined the worth of appreciating and assimilating the dignity street children. Mention must be made that acknowledging these children is more than just being mindful of their existence and expressing a willingness to assist. It means being empathetic and unreservedly involved in their lives although it is tiresome, laborious, and tedious. Habitually programs are formulated for street children without even getting their input. It would be profitable for government officials, non-governmental organizations, and those who work with homeless children to engage in constructive dialogues with them.

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