

EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

This paper examines the state of education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels in Nigeria. It starts by briefly reviewing the fundamental issues that need to be addressed to achieve a 21st century reality. It highlights the problems of education in Nigeria and examines the strategies and initiatives necessary to put education in right perspectives for National development. Among such initiatives, the issue of teacher education is considered essential because it serves the dual roles of advancing knowledge and providing the required capacity and skills that influence the lives of our future leaders. The challenges that hinder the development of education in Nigeria are then examined. These include the issue of technology in education and poor research environment and funding.

Finally, the paper addresses opportunities for educational development in Nigeria, especially given a new, more open political environment. Such opportunities include the role and impact of Technology, achieving transformative sustainability of Higher Education and education with appropriate content and direction.

The global education revolution of the 20th century resulted in massive development in education worldwide. This is because education is. What *everybody* who exists in this present time needs to acquire to meet up with the demand of the society. Many developed countries pay good interest on education because they understand that it can go a long way in solving national problems.

Education is the process of educating or being educated. It is the series of training given to students practically and theoretically. The places of training include the nursery and Primary School, Secondary Schools and Higher Institutions. The broad category of education is the Formal and Informal education. Formal education is the method whereby the students are taught by their teachers or lecturers in their learning classes from their course outlines. It involves learning how to read and write.

Informal education is the type that does not involve learning how to read or write. Several reasons can be mentioned to highlight the cardinal role of education.

Education satisfies a basic human need for knowledge, provides a means of helping to meet other basic needs, and helps sustain and accelerate overall development. It provides essential skilled manpower for both the Formal and Informal sectors of the economy, provides the means of developing the knowledge, skills, and productive capacities of the labour force, and acts as a catalyst in encouraging modern attitudes and aspirations.

In order for education to realize its key role in development, its major development objectives must be carried out. But, unfortunately Education in Nigeria like many other developing Countries is bedevilled with myriads of problems. We now have educated people. Educated for what? What is the philosophy of education in Nigeria?

Problems of Education in Nigeria

The development of education in any given society is hampered by a variety of problems *Adeyinka (1971)*. The failure in Nigeria education system reflect the problems that have beset governance in the Country more generally since independence. A lack of skills, monitoring and accountability have led to poor policy implementation, inferior training of teachers and bureaucrats, and a system many people have lost hope in.

Most people have given up on education because they find nothing useful to do with their certificates. These days you find children of school-going age roaming about on the streets hawking and touting.

The Problem of Relating the Curricula to National Manpower needs

The biggest problem today in education is turning out students that are well balanced-mentally, spiritually, emotionally, physically and financially. The curriculum today at schools deal more with academic studies and information than it does with being able to attain the success that everyone aspires. It takes a "success minded" person to be successful today. We see many people who are successful that didn't get a "good education" and many people that did, that are not successful. What is responsible for this anomaly? Is it that success in life is not only determined by knowledge? We need to teach people to set and meet their goals, to raise their standards, to be emotionally stable, and masters in relationships, financial and time management, besides attaining knowledge in their career. Schools today do not answer career related issues. We spend too little time focusing on real-world skills such as creative problem-solving, cooperation, communication and leadership.

Our education system does not reflect the society we are striving to have. The current

narrow definition of education alienates children and robs our society of precious talents.

The biggest challenge in education today in Nigeria is that our current purpose for schooling is inadequate. AYe are not yet teaching for the future our children are inheriting. We have largely defined the goals of schooling as verbal, mathematical and scientific literacy in order to graduate students who are employable and able to compete in the global economy. But given the global challenges we face, from climate change, war, terrorism, poverty, overpopulation, genocide, cruelty and so on. It is imperative that we educate a generation that has the knowledge, tools, and motivation to be Problem-Solvers and System-changers in order to create a sustainable, peaceful and humane world for all.

The challenge for education is how to produce a modern Nigerian who responds to the internal, spiritual and human needs of the Country on one hand and on the other to the challenge of living a global community where science and technology have reached a level of profundity with which he should be familiar.

Problem of Access to Basic Education

UNICEF (1999) report pointed out that about four million Nigerian children have no access to basic education. Today, there are about 48,242 primary schools with 16,7960.78 students in public schools and 1,965,517 in private schools in Nigeria. In addition, Nigeria has about 7,104 Secondary Schools with 4,448,981 students (The Guardian, May 6, 1999, and Dike, 2001).

In Nigeria, about 4.7million children who are of Primary school age does not go to school. To reveal a more dreadful estimate, 10million of total Nigerian children are deprived of Formal Education. Dr Rosemary Nwangwu, Director-General of Centre for Non-formal Education and Training revealed that this is an

indication that one out of every school age children is not attaining formal education.

Access to basic education lies at the heart of development. Lack of educational access and securely acquired knowledge and skill, is both a part of the definition of poverty. According to Lewin (2007), sustained access to meaningful learning that has value is critical to long term improvements in productivity, the reduction of inter-generational cycles of poverty, and reductions in inequality. Who goes to school, and especially in many developing Countries, who goes to Secondary School/Tertiary Institutions, is a major determinant of future life chances and mobility out of poverty.

Public's Perception of Public Schools

The biggest problem facing education today is the public distrust of anything provided by the government. Public's perception of public schools is disturbing. It has serious effect on its sustainability. Those who can afford to are increasingly sending their children to private schools. It is easy to find problems with anything, schools included in this less than perfect world, but only educators can show us the good things happening in public schools, and if we want to save public schools, we better start sharing those good things about them. Public school teachers and administrators must work together to show the good things being done in public schools, which far outweigh the bad things.

Problems of Technology in Education

ICT is having a revolutionary impact on educational methodology globally. However, this revolution is not widespread and needs to be strengthened in Nigeria to reach a large percentage of the population. Inadequate ICT infrastructure, including Computer hardware and software, access to bandwidth, lack of skilled manpower to manage available systems and inadequate training facilities for ICT education.

Technology needs to come into the classroom to keep up with the learning demands of the 21st Century. Most teachers are not technologically literate and comfortable using emerging technologies as problem-solving tools for teaching and learning.

Problem of Poverty

Poverty is one of the greatest 21st Century education crises. Nigeria has its very large share of this problem because more than 24million children are out of school by 2014. Poverty remains a stubborn fact of life in Nigeria. The negative effects of poverty on all levels of school success have been widely demonstrated and accepted. Children growing up in poverty are less likely to do well at school. In particular, the incidence, depth, duration and timing of poverty of our children in Nigeria remain a continuing source of concern to all educators. It is vital to step up efforts to give these children a better chance of a decent and fulfilling life. Education has a central role to play in such efforts. As the world continues to mark International Day for Eradication of poverty, it is crucial to spread the message that equal access to quality education plays a key role in eradicating poverty. Most of us have a poor understanding of poverty as it affects education.

The direct costs of sending children to school can be formidable for poor parents. As a consequence, not only are poor children less likely to enrol in primary school, but those who do so are more likely to drop out. This is no better moment in Nigeria to realise the need to fight poverty through increased progress in achieving education for all.

Poor Funding of Education

Nigeria is one of the countries within the African continent that has been termed educationally disadvantaged owing to a myriad of problems be devilling the sectors chief among

these constraints remain the issue of poor funding of the sector (Oweh, 2013).

UNESCO, for instance, believes that for the sector to be properly rejuvenated and offer the much needed impact, governments of member countries ought to channel at least 26 percent of their natural Budget to education alone.

Relying on the bench mark advocated by UNESCO, it is still implicit that the education sector still faces the problem of inadequate funding.

In a lecture presented by Prof. Jerry Gana, Pro-chancellor University of Lagos in 2013, he blamed poor funding for the declining standard of education in Nigeria. He said, 'we are not funding education properly in Nigeria. Education is very important. It is a transformation. We must invest. I will say that as a nation, we should spend a lot of our GDP on the education sector. We must fund education'.

Problem of Teacher Education

The main challenge faced by the teaching profession today is both one of numbers and quality. Achieving quality education for all calls for more and better trained teachers, as pedagogical processes lie at the heart of quality education. The challenge of quality must be met head on, while ensuring quality and equity.

Quality of school education largely depends among other factors, on quality of teachers prepared in teacher education institutions. Teacher education in Nigeria has been criticized by stakeholders for excessive qualitative expansion and poor quality.

Quality education for all has emerged as one of the most desirable goals throughout the world.

The competence and enthusiasm of teachers determine the heights to which an educational system can rise.

Ferguson, as cited in Paliakoff and Schwartz beck (2001) observes that quality of

teachers is the most critical aspect of schooling and it has a direct impact on student learning. Teacher education therefore, assumes great importance in achieving the goal of quality education.

Table 1: UNICEF Framework of Education Quality

	Element	Quality Indicators
1	Quality of Learners	Students' good health and nutrition, early childhood psychosocial development experiences, regular attendance, and family support for learning.
2	Quality of Learning environments	Physical elements (e.g school facilities, class size etc) Psychosocial elements (e.g. Safe environment teachers' behaviour, discipline policies, non-violence etc and services delivery (e.g. health services)
3	Quality of Contents	Students-centred and standard based Curriculum, Uniqueness of local and national content, and focus on literacy, numeracy, and life skills.
4	Quality of Processes	Indicators relating to teachers and teaching (e.g teachers' competences, support for student-centred learning, participated based teaching methods, teachers working conditions etc) and supervision support (e.g administrative leadership, effective use of technology, diversity of processes and facilities).
5	Quality of Outcomes	Students' achievement in literacy and numeracy, life skills, health outcomes. Outcomes sought by parents and learners confidence.

Sources: Adapted from UNICEF (2000): Defining quality; A paper presented at the International Working Group in Education meeting: Florence Italy, June 2000.

Prospects of Education in Nigeria

Amidst so much of drawbacks all hope is not lost with some current initiatives taken in the light of education in Nigeria.

The initiatives taken for promoting education in Nigeria has been strong so far especially the last few years have been observing hopeful changes since the launching of the Universal Basic Education Act.

A lot has been achieved in the construction of new buildings and renovation of dilapidated school buildings.

Nigeria education system is changing for the better and it is changing radically. The increasing demand of online education is felt mostly these days. There is enhancement and advancement in the realm of technology. The good news is many e-learning solution

providers are funding enormous projects all across the country. As a result, many e-learning companies are coming up with idea of exploring the technology hub to raise global competitiveness.

For Nigeria to become globally competent, it has to embrace virtual e-learning. Thus, it is expected that Nigeria is going to witness many prospects in the coming years to come.

In this context, one such news deserves a special mention. British ex-prime minister, Mr Gordon Brown visited Nigeria two years ago, to spread the benefit of education and its awareness to the elementary level. Mr Gordon Brown initiated a tactical step to reach education to all levels from root to the highest level. The good news is that he has plans to allocate financial support for school buildings, teacher training, teacher recruitment, new technology with phones, tablets, online school courses, and so on.

Gordon says "This is part of global initiative to get every boy and girl to school by the end of 2015". He further added with conviction "This movement will build a world where for the first time no boy or girl is denied the right to education".

Online learning achieving success in Nigeria

Infact, many technologically advanced online course providers have already started offering online courses in Nigeria by letting students make use of several mobile devices like tablets, smart phones and ipads. This has rather led to a good success rate in comparism to what had been in the early years.

Nigeria certainly has covered miles in becoming technologically richer, and with progress of time, it is highly predicted to catch up with the educational standards set by the developed countries.

The World Bank has decided to spend US \$450 million (J490b) behind a couple of projects in Nigeria which will result in the

enhancement of employment opportunities for young students.

Suggestions

1) In today's world, characterized by intense global competition and rapid technological change, the key to prosperity is a well-educated, technically skilled work force producing high-value-added, knowledge-intensive goods and services. All efforts must be made to key into the new direction in educational development.

2) The evaluation of current state of teacher education quality is desperately needed in order to reform teacher- education sector in Nigeria. There is no quality education without quality teaching.

3) The education systems will need to become more effective in transmitting skills and competencies to all.

4) Nigeria is currently the continent's fastest growing mobile market. Technology has the potential to rapidly increase access to education as the interest and mobile computing can provide access to education even in areas where there are not enough teachers. Technology needs to come into the classrooms to keep up with the learning demands of the 21st century. Teachers technical abilities and knowledge of ICTs should be enhanced and sustained.

5) Student poverty is the dominant reality in our schools. We need a totally new set of policies and practices to address this 21st century reality. We should think, decide and act together against extreme poverty. Our aim must be prosperity for all not just few.

6) Public school teachers and administrators

must work together to show the good things being done in public schools, which far outweigh the bad things. Public perceptions of public schools must change.

7) Quality education for all has emerged as one of the most desirable goals throughout the world. The UNESCO framework of Education Quality should be strictly adhered to so as to meet the challenge of quality head on.

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