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Revamping Innovative Education in Nigeria Institutions to Meet Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in Post-Pandemic Era

DR. STELLA C. EZEH

*Department of Educational Management And
Policy School of Education Federal College of Education (Technical) Umuze.*

And

DR NNEKA FELICIA OKEKE

*Department of Educational Management And
Policy School of Education Federal College of Education (Technical) Umuze*

And

CHINWE A. NJOKU

*Department of Educational Management And
Policy School of Education Federal College of Education (Technical) Umuze.*

Abstract

This paper examined revamping innovative education in Nigeria institutions to meet Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in post-pandemic era. The paper also x-rayed the concepts; innovative education, Nigeria educational institutions and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). It went further to discuss the nexus between revamping innovative education and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in post-pandemic era, how to revamp innovative education for achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in post-pandemic era and the banes to innovative education in Nigeria educational institutions. Based on the content of the paper, the writer concluded that national greatness and ability of Nigeria to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in post-pandemic era is a function of revamping education which must not only be qualitative but innovative in contents and outlook. Hence, it was recommended amongst others that Government should dedicate at least 26% of Nigeria's total annual budget to education, as recommended by UNESCO. Also, accountability and transparency should equally be the watchword for all the managers and administrators of education at all levels.

Keywords: Revamping, Innovative Education, Nigeria Institutions, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), Post-Pandemic Era

Introduction

The eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2019 has affected every sphere of life and may forever change how individuals or people in the society do things or have always lived. Of all the sectors of governance, the educational sector, appears to have been most greatly affected and therefore requires a more pragmatic approach to resolution (Anifowoshe, Aborode, Ayodele, Iretiayo & David 2020). According to the report by UNESCO (2020), the closure of educational institution during the pandemic impacted over 91% of the world's student population. The ripple effect of the pandemic was felt by both the educators and students in primary, secondary, colleges and universities as academic sessions were disrupted after the coronavirus was declare a public health emergency. Therefore, it is an excellent time for educational institutions in Nigeria to reorganize what the prospect of education would look like in post-pandemic era and take realistic steps in revamping its educational institutions towards meeting the need for Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). Innovative education is the hub of any economy of a nation just as the wheel rotates around the hub, the economic sector of Nigeria rotates around innovative education considering the current socio-economic, scientific and technological development of Nigeria. Rashtriya (2005) pointed out that, the wealth and prosperity of a nation depends on the effective utilization of its human and material resources through industrialization. Technological advances have given rise to upsurge in information hunt which has made students of various educational institutions to be in a great pursuit for innovative education; as they are keen to learn new things, ideas, technologies and new ways of acquiring information (Kyari, Adiuku-Brown, Abechi, & Adhlakun, 2018). Innovative education is one of the vital tools for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4).

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in the post-pandemic era can only be achieved through the revamping of innovative education in Nigeria institutions. Revamping is the process or instance of changing the way which something is organized or arranged or as to organizing something in a new way, give a new different structure (Dibbari, 2021). It could be regarded as a positive process or effort by individuals, groups, organizations and government to enhance or influence for novel status in individuals, groups and nations that provide the citizens those congenial opportunities that would enable them provide the basic and essential means of achieving socio-economic independent (Advance Oxford Dictionary, 2010).

Revamping process in Nigeria education institutions is paramount to the country's economy. Therefore, to 'revamp innovative education' means to change, adjust or reposition the emphasis or direction of learning from what it is; to a different approach that will lead to the attainment of worthy goals such as SDG4. Thinking in the direction of the concept to 'revamp innovative education'; it means that the current education system lacks what it takes to address the out of school children concerns of the nation in post-pandemic era and thus, must be adjusted or changed in terms of approach and content to meet the present needs of the society it serves. It is against this backdrop, that this paper seeks to explore the topic "revamping innovative education in Nigeria institutions to meet Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in post-pandemic era".

Conceptual Clarifications

Innovative Education

Innovation is the act of departing from old traditional ways of doing something to a new order. It is a purposeful, organized, risk-taking change introduced for the purpose of satisfying economic wants and resulting in increased productivity. Innovation involves change. It is necessary that innovation should as much as possible be encouraged for organizational progress (Aguba, 2021). Innovative education encourages teachers and students to explore, research and use all the tools to uncover something new. The thinking processes that go into it will help students develop their creativity and their problem-solving skills. Innovative education is a change that is deliberate, purposeful and can be on a small or large scale; it is a departure from an existing practice that can be sustained for some time. When widely adopted, an innovation becomes a reform (Chukwu, 2014). Global changes in recent times call for innovative education. Chukwu (2014) as cited in Aguba (2021) lists the following as some of the benefits of applying innovation in the school system. According to him, innovation in education:

- enhances the child's capacity to learn
- ensures that handicapped children are better placed to participate in teaching and learning activities
- makes teaching and learning processes more interesting
- brings about improved teaching methodology
- enhances the achievement of stated school objectives
- improves societal wellbeing as it improves various sectors of the economy of nations.

One could therefore infer from the fore-going that innovation is essentially needed for any educational institution to be functional, efficient and effective.

Nigeria Educational Institutions

Education is the inculcation of what is worthwhile to those that are committed to it. It deals with relatively change in behaviour as a result of learning. It is also the process of receiving and giving instruction in a school. Through education, learning can be facilitated and knowledge, skills, values, morals, aptitudes, beliefs and habits acquired. It deals with cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. Education can be differentiated from training, literacy, instruction, curriculum, numeracy, indoctrination and schooling (Oluwuo, 2021). Education is both a discipline and a process which many a time takes place within an institution.

Educational institutions are social organisations through which children and adults are taught academic knowledge, learning skills, and cultural norms. In Nigeria, they are social institutions through which society provides its members with knowledge, including basic facts, job skills, and cultural norms and values. Nigeria educational institutions are responsible for systematic transmission of knowledge, skills and cultural values within a formally organised structure. It is one of the most influential organisations in Nigeria society.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is universal, holistic and indivisible, with a special imperative to leave no one behind. Education and the achievement of SDG4 - ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all - plays a central role in building sustainable, inclusive and resilient societies. Much progress was made under the Millennium Development Goals toward universal primary school enrollment; SDG4 now aims to raise the bar and make education a catalyst for broader change toward sustainable development.

The initiative of sustainable development goals (SDGs) came at the exit of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in September 2015 when world leaders came together at the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York to sign a new global partnership for development. The SDGs replaced the MDGs, which in September, 2000 rallied the world around a common 15-year agenda to tackle the indignity of extreme poverty. With the job unfinished for millions of people there is the need to go the extra mile in ending hunger, achieving full gender equality, improving health services and getting every child into school. It is the aim of SDGs to accomplish these tasks for greater human happiness, with year 2030 as the target date.

Sustainable development is mostly regarded as the development of that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own development needs. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2016) concisely expressed that, sustainable development is an organizing principle for global development that supports the welfare of both people and planet. There are quite a lot of sustainable development goals in practice in Nigeria, for example sustainable development goal 1, goal 2, goal 3 and even up to goal 17. However, this study is basically anchored on sustainable development goal 4 which is focused on quality equitable and all-inclusive education. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) is geared towards all-inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. The emphasis under this goal has worldwide coverage of quality education from pre-school through at least secondary education, and then on to more advanced, skills training (Sachs, 2015). The ambition of the goal is to build a nation that will facilitate a realization of the full potential of each child in order that he/she can contribute to building a just, tolerant and egalitarian society. The vision of an inclusive quality education reflects on the idea of education for all, principally for those groups who are seen to be vulnerable. It then means that those who lead education in several countries must give attention to all forms of education, both formal and non-formal.

Education, predominantly the all-inclusive and quality education is the focus of SDG 4, and is critical to all of the other SDGs and sustainable development in general (Buckler & Creech, 2014 as cited in Hanachor&Wordu, 2021). SDG 4 is therefore a wise decision because education is the bedrock of any society that is willing to open up employment opportunities for all which help in bringing out individual from the shackle of unemployment and poverty; reduces societal inequalities and provide the knowledge and skills needed to live supportive lifestyles. Oluwuo (2021) posits that an educated citizenry is spirited to employing informed and sustainable development. This essence implies that, a national sustainability plans can be put in place to ensure that all girls and

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boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. Hence, the introduction of all-inclusive education can expedite changes in values, world views and behaviour at the level of the individual, the community and society at large (UNESCO, 2016).

Furthermore, for sustainability in education lifelong learning as noted in SDG4 is indispensable, this is because it facilitates reflective or critical learning, knowledge and skills acquisition and greater agency to address complex sustainability issues, for example, how to create a sustainable school or a carbon-neutral city’ (UNESCO, 2016). Lifelong learning (LLL) as a component of SDG4 is a continuous learning which translates the acquisition and development of knowledge to a process that is essentially an integral part of living. Lifelong learning conceptualizes learning as the life wide, voluntary and self-motivated quest to knowledge for not only personal but professional reasons as well. It recognizes that learning is not confined to childhood or the classroom, but takes place throughout life and in a diversity of circumstances (Barrah, 2023), the ultimate goal being to enable learners to obtain more of the new skills required by the knowledge economy as well as more traditional academic skills (Barrah, 2023). In Soni (2012) as cited in Barrah (2023) four characteristics which transform education and training into Lifelong Learning were identified. They includes: the integration of both formal and non-formal/informal learning; self-motivated learning; self-funded learning; and a commitment to universal participation in education and training. Therefore, lifelong learning indicates an inclusive education and learning model that embraces all children, youth and adults, both as learners and as educators (Torres, 2003 as cited in Barrah, 2023).

Objectives of Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG4)

The International Education Framework and the 2030 Agenda, as cited by (Global Campaign for Education, 2019) SDG4 is the education goal objectively based on guaranteeing all-inclusive and equitable education that promote lifelong opportunities for all. SDG4 is embodied with 7 definite targets as seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1:

Objectives of Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG4)	
Target 1.	By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.
Target 2.	By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.
Target 3.	By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

Target 4.	By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.
Target 5.	By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.
Target 6.	By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.
Target 7.	By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

Source: Global Campaign for Education (2019).

Clearly, the SDG4 targets have raised the bar for education beyond merely achieving basic education enrolment. Also, education must now be relevant, inclusive irrespective of children's peculiar circumstances, equip recipients with life coping skills and must be free up to the secondary school level.

The Nexus between Revamping Innovative Education and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in Post-Pandemic Era.

Development Partners and world leaders in 2015 in New York emphasized and agreed that quality education, which encompasses innovative education, should be significantly revamped in helping to achieve the 7 targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). It is extremely difficult to achieve any of the targets of SDG4 without functional and innovation-based education. It is the responsibility of educational leaders across the three major levels of education in Nigeria to create and enthrone innovativeness in their various institutions. It was reported that Nigeria could not achieve six out of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 (Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on MDGs, 2015). Yet the SDGs are expected to build on the MDGs and help achieve of it goals which SDG4. Unarguably, innovative education has direct bearing with the attainment of all the 7 targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4. All the targets of SDG4 are driven by these 7 targets. Experts in Economics of Education severally assert that there are incontrovertible empirical evidence which shows that there is relationship between education and national development (Brewer, 2010), (Cheechi 2006). Education is the surest gateway

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to national greatness and development. Even the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) postulates that education is regarded as the greatest instrument for national development and social change. Japan cannot boast of natural resources but she takes pride in her functional and innovation-based education. Japanese education inculcates in the Youth the spirit of hard work. Today, Japan is one of the strangest economies in the world. Japan is on the right footing to achieving quite substantial number of the Sustainable Development Goals during the post-pandemic era (Aguba, 2021).

This development is made possible essentially due to their innovative education which is both qualitative and functional. Finland is another country with one of the best education systems in the world. Finnish education is quite innovative and pragmatic. It has direct relationship with their cultural, economic and political life. Finnish education system has great capacity to serve as premise for the realization of the SDG4 in Finland during the post-pandemic (Aguba, 2021). Other examples of countries with high impact of revamped innovative educational systems include Canada, Australia, South Korea, United States of America, United Kingdom, Germany etc. Martin Luther King in Aguba (2021) asserts that, “the prosperity of a country depends not on the abundance of its revenues, not on the beauty of its public buildings, but it consists the number of cultivated citizens. If we build the road and airport without building the mind, the undeveloped mind will naturally destroy the road and the airport. No nation has ever and can ever rise above the quality of its educational system.

Aguba (2018) highlights the following correlations between innovative education and sustainable development goal 4:

1. Less out of school children.
2. Access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education.
3. Equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.
4. Elimination of gender disparities in education and equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
5. Educated societies with minimal records of violent crimes in the world.
6. Good health and general hygiene in the country with high impact of education.

Apart from political and leadership related issues, many African countries are today poor simply because their educational institutions are not innovatively driven. Their educational institutions are not dynamic and responsive to changing circumstances in post-pandemic era. Many African countries like Nigeria did not attain more than half of the erstwhile Millennium Development Goals due to their wobbling and ineffective educational systems.

How to Revamp Innovative Education for Achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in Post-Pandemic Era

Administrators of educational institutions in Nigeria should develop the right attitude in students, parents and local community without which innovation cannot thrive. Administrators, teachers and students should not be afraid to try new things. They should allow their imaginations to flow and flourish un-hindered, keeping themselves educated about new trends and technology in education, and be creative with the use of resources. Students should be allowed to take risk and fail so as to learn. Again the

administrators of schools should not see technology, as a silver bullet, a one shot thing as more technology does not mean better learning (Oluwuo, 2021). Technology should be used to boost academic productivity just as it was being utilize during the COVID-19 era and post-pandemic era. For example, in schools especially in the urban areas in Nigeria, we have laptops, interactive white boards, smart phones, tablets, desktops and a lot of softwares and e-learning gadgets. But all these have not led to radical improvements in academic achievement of our students. With all the technologies, teaching and learning have not improved markedly.

Technology on its own cannot transform the education system but the effective use of technology in teaching and learning process. The intangible technology should complement the tangible. Why should technology be more emphasized than the pedagogy, psychology of learning and instructional methodology without which innovation becomes a mere word? ICT has great potential for supporting innovative pedagogies but should not be a magical ingredient. Teachers should be interested not only in how much computers are used but also in how computers are used. Teachers should teach the students and not the content, by using technology efficiently to improve their learning outcomes. Technology should be seen as a tool for an innovative teacher and learner and not a magic wand (Oluwuo, 2021). Also in planning to apply a new technology to education, administrators should consider its potential pedagogic and psychological effects. For example, to apply on-line learning to education, there need to be a solid theoretical foundation, otherwise the application will fail. Theories precede practices. Teachers not versed in theories of education as seen in institutions of higher learning may find it difficult applying on-line learning to education. On-line learning itself is a tool. It is its rightful application that will promote and improve students' learning outcomes.

Furthermore, revamping innovative education for attainment of SDG4 in post-pandemic era is not possible without amazing, inspiring and charismatic teachers with innovative ideas and skills. A true teacher is a great asset to the whole business of education. He cultivates innovation, creativity and spontaneity in the minds of his students. Teachers are generally regarded as co-creators of humanity. They are the most important elements in human civilization and national development (Aguba, 2021). Hanson cited in Aguba (2013) observes that the future of the nation rests in the hands of its teachers, for the qualities they possess today will inevitably be reflected in the citizens of tomorrow. Ukeje in Aguba (2013) asserts that “if a medical doctor makes a mistake, the patient may die, if an engineer makes a mistake, the bridge may collapse; if an accountant makes a mistake, some money may be lost; but if a teacher makes a mistake, the effect may be everlasting and catastrophic.

Teachers are the major determinants of quality in education. If they are uncommitted, uninspired, lazy, unmotivated, immoral, anti-social, the whole nation will be put into various problems. If they are ignorant in their disciplines and impact wrong information, they are not only useless but also dangerous. As rightly and expressly stated by the FRN (2013), “no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers”. For innovative education to flourish in any school in post-pandemic era, the teachers must be committed and equipped with relevant skills. The teacher must make his classes interactive and participatory. His students must be exposed to ‘hands on’ project or practical teaching methods. Innovative education can only manifest when the

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right caliber of teachers are trained, placed, retained and adequately motivated. Such teachers should have the capacity to stand out from the crowd and always recognize the multiplicity of ideas and non-conformist nature of some talented students (Aguba, 2021).

In addition, administrators in revamping innovative education should create successful environment that promotes internal cohesion and freedom of action as well as stimulation of ideas. Positive educational institutions' climate where cross fertilization of ideas is rife remain key to the revamping of innovation in education because institution or school environment replete with rancor and leg pulling is not a fertile environment for innovation to be nurtured and developed. Collaboration and synergy are required. The stakeholders in education like the administrators, teachers, students, parents, government as well as the local community should be allowed to contribute their quota in the education of the children. The environment should be congenial for them to contribute in the administration of schools (Oluwuo, 2021). Flexibility is also very important in revamping innovative education. Hence, teachers, lessons and curriculum have to be flexible and not rigid. Various methods and techniques can be used in teaching to pander to the interests of every student in the class. The students should be encouraged to think and ask questions in class. There ought to be effectiveness, efficiency and productivity in the classroom. This cannot be feasible except the teachers adapt themselves to the right environment and find ways to keep the students interested in what is being taught, which is usually learner centred. Teachers should be willing and flexible to adjust what they teach and how they teach it so as to keep students engaged and excited to learn, make mistakes, take risks and ask questions. The use of various teaching methods will enable students work alone, interact with peers and provide areas of collaborations. This is done by creating flexible learning environment as well as create space for introverts and extroverts in the class. Group work should be combined with individual research.

Adequate funding of educational institutions in the country is another step to revamp innovative education for attainment of SDG4 in post-pandemic era. Provision of adequate funds is a desideratum for innovative education. Poor funding is at the root of all crises in Nigerian educational system. It is responsible for the incessant agitations and disputations by various labour unions in Nigeria's educational system. To revamp innovative education in post-pandemic era for achievement of SDG4, an administrator of any educational institution needs to be a quick thinker, smart worker and wide dreamer and should possess inter-personal skills to enable him relate to the others in very different ways to cope with the trend of change occurring in the world today (Bassey, 2009). This he does by setting the intellectual and interpersonal tone of the school as well as influencing the organizational conditions under which the school operates, carrying the teacher along and creating a conducive school climate to encourage teachers work towards sustaining the education innovations. The principal manages and monitors our activities of innovation to ensure effective goal attainment (Fessehatsion, 2017). Lastly, provision of relevant facilities or materials is another key step to revamping innovative education. Facilities are needed in order to create innovativeness in the teaching and learning processes. Researches have proven that instructional facilities stimulate learners' interest and maximizes teachers' productivity.

The Banes to Innovative Education in Nigeria Educational Institutions

The following have been identified as major challenges of innovative education in Nigeria post-pandemic era:

- The conspiracy theory of the pandemic or the notion that the pandemic was a scam (i.e. there was nothing like COVID-19 pandemic).
- Forgetfulness of the lessons learnt during the pandemic.
- Wrong interpretation of the meaning of education.
- Disinterested posture of state actors
- Poor funding
- Uncommitted and ill prepared teaching force
- Institutional leadership issues or frequent changes in school leadership
- Dearth of facilities and relevant infrastructure
- Curriculum related issues
- Palpable insecurity
- Conservative worldview of the society
- Political interference in public educational institutions
- Little academic freedom and autonomy
- Weak incentives and remuneration of staff
- Less money spent on research and development (R&D)
- Fixed mind set of employers and employees
- Risk resistance
- Poor internet access to students and teachers

Conclusion

Based on the discussion so far, it has been established that national greatness and ability of Nigeria to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) post-pandemic is a function of revamping education which must not only be qualitative but innovative in contents and outlook. Successful innovations in education cannot take place except the state actors and educational administrators are effective and efficient as leaders. Most innovations that have taken place in education in Nigeria have been marred by ineffective leadership in schools as well as other challenges. A lot of challenges confront innovative education in Nigeria and might hinder the realization of sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). Hence, the need to proffer solutions that will help mitigate the challenges.

Recommendations

1. Considering the fact that inadequate funding is at the foundation of major crises in Nigeria's educational institution, efforts should be made by Government to dedicate at least 26% of Nigeria's total annual budget to education, as recommended by UNESCO. Accountability and transparency should equally be the watchword for all the managers and administrators of education at all levels. Funds are necessary to provide adequate welfare packages for teachers; provide teaching facilities for staff and students and provide friendly organizational climate.
2. Teaching is the primary function of academics and should be effectively monitored for a successful innovative education to occur in schools.

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3. Recruitment of staff should be based on merit rather than ethnicity and favouritism. Teachers with sound mind should be recruited to drive innovation in schools.
4. There is need for periodic review of curriculum to remain in tune with the dynamics of our changing world. Innovative education requires proactive and innovative laden curriculum at all levels of education. Our curriculum should be pragmatic, practical, scientific, inspiring, relevant and innovative in nature.
5. There is need for training and retraining of teaching staff in our educational institutions to enable them have adequate and innovative foundations in teaching, especially in Universities.
6. Lecturers in higher education should be trained in pedagogy to enable them handle large classes and imbibe appropriate teaching techniques as well as cope with good classroom management. Teaching that drives innovation should not be all comers affair, professionalism is important.
7. Government that is in charge of public institutions should remunerate teachers appropriately so that they have enthusiasm and interest in teaching. Innovation cannot work except teachers are actively involved in the classroom. Commitment and engagement of teacher enhance education innovation.
8. Adequate supply of electricity is required to power on line learning and teaching. Alternative sources of light can be sourced through the internally generated revenue.
9. Administrator in schools should work with outstretched arms. They should work with subordinates to achieve school goals and make progress. Collaboration and effective communication are important for innovations to take place in schools.
10. Admission requirements for candidates who wish to study courses in education in Nigeria should be raised and made more competitive. It is an embarrassing irony that those intending to enroll into Colleges and Faculties of Education are selected from among the weakest and least performed candidates in exams such as JAMB. Nigeria should borrow a leaf from Finland which is one of the countries with the best systems of education in the world. Finland selects her teachers from the best intellectual minds who possess the best pedagogical skills. Innovative education must start with the manner our prospective teachers are being trained and selected.

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