

# NEW HORIZON IN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA- FROM ACCESS TO QUALITY: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

By

**SOPHIE EMIKE OMOZUAWO**

*Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi,  
Edo State.*

## **Abstract**

*There is no gain-saying the fact that education is the foundation on which every other facet of the developmental strides of a country or a nation depends. This is the reason that informs Government to adequately invest in the education of the citizenry. To ensure that education provided is viable and gets to the people it is meant for, it has to be accessible and qualitative in nature. On the contrary, if education does not get to the people it is meant for, education cannot be said to be accessible. In view of the above, this paper titled New horizon in education in Nigeria, from access to quality: Issues and challenges, focused on issues of interest in respect to what it involves to achieve access to quality education such as budgetary allocation, professionalism of the teacher, the curriculum, blended learning approach, technological advancement and poverty level. Based on the issues and the challenges as noted, the paper suggests that there should be adequate funding by government of Nigeria in the education sector, ensuring proper monitoring of the funds to prevent diversion, invest in ICTs to enable education get to remote areas of the country. The paper equally suggests that, in using new technology to bring about access to quality education, the government should adopt the ``Blended`` approach to teaching and learning which allows individuals learn at their own pace, can boost access to quality education.*

**Key words:** New Horizon, Education, Access to Quality, Issues and Challenges.

The development of any nation or country depends to a large extent on the human resources available to them. This is not attained by magic but on the attention the government of a nation or country gives to its educational needs and how such a country

is able to constantly be abreast with technological advancement. It is imperative to invest in Education since with it, poverty is reduced. Provision of and access to quality education is important as its attainment is effective in boosting economic growth of a nation and thereby increase in incomes as well.

With high standard of education given to a people, there is the possibility that, there will be improvement in the people's chances of having a healthy life reducing maternal deaths, and combating diseases such as Ebola and malaria among others. When individuals have access to quality education, they get developed intellectually and attitudinally thus, enabling the people to promote peaceful coexistence. It could therefore be said that education is one of the most important investments a country can make in its people and its future.

In affirmation that education is important, Idogho (2011) noted that the mandate of education is to develop the whole man mentally, morally, socially and physically and to enable the citizenry assume leadership roles in their immediate and extended society in the near future. She is saddened that in spite of this mandate education in Nigeria in particular and African in general find it difficult to provide the enabling environment for the realization of this vision due to absence of quality teaching and other resources needed to boost quality education which is given to the citizenry.

Access to quality education benefits individuals, society and the world at large. Education can do so much for a country or nation in view of this, investing in education and ensuring that it gets to even the remotest areas of a nation, is never a wasted effort rather it should be seen as investment in human capital development. Thus Education has the power to make a people better informed, leading to a positive national orientation. Similarly, Obiazi (2017), opine that education is the process of facilitating the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values beliefs especially in schools.

This paper discussed new horizon in education in Nigeria, access to quality, from the perspectives of issues and challenges.

In access to quality education in Nigeria, there are issues and challenges that need consideration. The issues and challenges to be discussed in this paper are Budgetary allocation utilization, Professionalism of the teacher, Policy implementation continuity, Blended learning approach, Content of the Curriculum, Technological advancement, Poverty level.

### **Budgetary Allocation Utilization**

Ensuring access to quality education at all levels will equip the people with the needed skills for the local labour market. Education should not be reserved for a privileged few. Government should recognize the importance of investing in education and allocate to it meaningful budgets. Ogakwu (2011) noted that fund is required to pay staff, provide and maintain equipments and facilities. He also noted that best brains are normally lost to countries with better education funding. Ogakwu concluded that funding should be a joint responsibility of government and the private sector. Eya and

Oranu (2011) noted that in view of the fact that budgetary allocation has been reduced due to dwindling incomes from oil, government could consider other avenues from which to raise funds for education. Aguba (2013) also noted that underfunding was the lots of education saying that it is only earmarked and not ``eyemarked``.

The fact here is that Nigeria government should make funds available so as to make access to quality education possible. Public investment in education is vital in building a highly skilled and educated workforce and in sustaining Nigeria's prosperity and progress. Improving education quality at all levels is imperative if access to quality education is to be achieved. Increases in government education spending are often not enough to meet key education targets and provide a decent government, which allocates its public education resources based on the country's priorities and needs. While public education spending priorities will vary from country to country, increased investment in education will help to successfully meet key education targets and build a skilled workforce.

According to Omoike (2013) evidence of corruption is manifested in all aspects of the educational system and the entire nation. He noted that Corruption is manifested in contract inflation, in direct purchase of materials, in payment of salaries, especially to ghost workers, inflation in the number of pupils enrolment to attract more funds for wrong uses. Yet, despite recent improvements in total enrollment numbers in elementary schools, the basic education system remains underfunded; facilities are often poor, teachers inadequately trained, and participation rates are low by international standards.

### **Professionalism of the Teachers**

Professional teachers are assets to the teaching profession if access to quality education is to be attained since they are the back-bone to teaching and learning. Their presence in schools cannot be over emphasized as they are the main implementers of the curriculum, since they interpret what the curriculum is meant to achieve within the classroom. Availability of professional teachers bridges the gap between poor and good quality education. It is therefore not out of place in ensuring that teachers are well-trained, motivated, and able to identify weak learners, and are supported by well-managed education systems.

Teacher qualifications also impact directly on quality. There should be attempts to improve the level of qualification amongst teachers. According to Amanchukwu (2011), for quality teaching to take place in the classroom, teachers must receive adequate training that will help them deliver the goods effectively. It also depends on the teachers healthy interactions with the learners. The potential indicators that could be seriously considered in terms of effective teaching are as follows; academic qualifications, pre-service and in-service training, years of service/experience, ability or aptitude and pedagogical content knowledge. For teachers to live up to their expectations, government should ensure that teachers undergo regular seminars, workshops, training

and retraining. As noted by Mbachu (2011), developing teachers in the colleges should not end with graduation but should be continued at every stage of the teacher's career.

The learning environment should necessarily be conducive for effective teaching and learning. Obiazi (2017) is of the opinion that there is the need to employ more teachers to cope with the boost in enrolment. That if not access to quality education will be jeopardized due to lack of manpower to adequately match the enrollees. It must be made known that no nation can rise above the quality of its Citizens. The type of education given to the people of a nation determines the type of economic growth that might exist in that country. If poor quality education is given to the citizens, there is the likelihood that the products would have little or nothing to offer the nation. For quality education to take place in a nation, teachers' preparation should receive a big boost and make them to be adequately available so that learners are able to have access to quality education.

### **Policy Implementation Continuity**

Policies are statements that express goals and how to attain them. Policies are guide to administrators in their day-to-day administration. Policies are the framework within which education is administered in a given place and within specific period (Adebola & Ademola, 2005), Continuity in policy statements is usually a major issue in educational administration in Nigeria. There is usually lack of continuity in policy implementation due to political influences within the Nigeria polity. For instance the number of times the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) has altered its policies on writing the examination and the cut-off marks has put stakeholders in dilemma.

According to Adebola and Ademola (2005), policies are usually changed or altered to suit the government of the day as existing policies can easily be manipulated to suit the government in power. Access to quality education requires consistent policies that stand the test of time and are consistent with the needs of locals. Alafonye (2010) opine that Government to an extent contributes to policy failures in her inability to march words with action. He noted that, the inability of Government to see to policies logical conclusion as noted by Gusau (2008) cited in Alafonye (2010) is a major issue, Alafonye also observed as a result of lack of funds, qualified teaching staff, infrastructural facilities and equipments policy implementation is constantly at a standstill.

### **Blended Learning Approach**

Blended learning refers to the planned implementation of a learning model that integrates student-centered, traditional in-class learning with other flexible learning methodology using mobile and web-based online (especially collaborative) approaches in order to realize strategic advantages for the education system. Ogonnia and Odi (2013), recommended that material should be made available for E-learning and that

instructors, teachers and lectures to be made to undergo training and retraining programmes in areas of new and emerging ICT to enable them integrate new methods of teaching and learning in order for learners to have access to quality education since with E-learning, teaching and learning can be done anywhere and anytime.

Any learning experience that integrates some use of ICTs and some elements of the traditional face –to-face qualifies to be called blended learning. (Graham, Allen, & Ure, 2003, in press) found that people chose blended learning for three reasons: It improves pedagogy; it increases access and flexibility, and increased cost effectiveness in access to quality education. [www.education.vic.gov.au/researchinnovation/](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/researchinnovation/))

Ogbonnia and Odi (2013) noted that to assist teachers in implementing E- learning activities, teachers have to be trained and re-trained so as to get the basics and in turn enable access to quality education. The importance of blended learning is that the learners can access education from anywhere, anytime, anyplace as there are opportunities to learn all the time and all around us. With blended learning as a new horizon in access to quality education, learning can be done in the home, workplace and even while travelling (mobile or “m-learning”). Educational programmes can be tailored towards the kinds of useful delivery media that are convenient, user-friendly, and most importantly serve the needs of the learner.

This can be achieved through Individualized learning experiences for all learners, including those who are disadvantaged, disabled, exceptionally gifted, have special curriculum or learning needs, or who are remote, or away from home/work have access to quality education through flexible study, with learning on demand, anytime or anywhere, to meet learners’ needs wherever they want, Wide access to digital resources, shared tools and information systems are not left out and with the above, access to quality education will be possible, (Eddie, 2000).

### **Contents of the Curriculum**

It is commonly presumed that formal schooling is one of several important contributors to the skills of an individual and to human capital. The content of a country’s curriculum has a lot to say about the effectiveness and efficiency of her educational attainments. According to Lesley (2015), there have been widespread efforts to make curricula more culturally sensitive. As the world becomes more technologically inclined, the school curriculum in Nigeria has to be evolved to provide access to quality education and training for the people. Since curriculum is dynamic, it has to have the capacity to address new challenges occasioned by changes in the societal value system.

Okorafor and Uchechi (2011) noted that the over arching strategy in curriculum content is to improve access to quality education, making it more relevant to productive activities such as value –orientation. They equally noted that a good curriculum takes into account important issues and challenges within the context of a given environment, thus prepares the learners to adequately meet up with them.

There is the need to have a vibrant curriculum that attends to the immediate needs of the people and not to import learning contents that are not suitable to the immediate environment. In buttressing the afore-mentioned, Okorafor ( 2009) in Okorafor and Uchechi (2011) opine that curriculum being an instrument through which the society educates her young ones, has to be re-appraised to meet up with the educational demand of the society.

In the same vein, Aboh (2013) noted that there is a pressing need in Nigeria in every school system to decide what to teach and how to teach it. She concluded that there is a need for appropriate school curriculum designed to be adapted to the needs of the Nigerian society. In respect to the above, the place of effective curriculum cannot be over emphasized in access to quality education when new horizon are being considered, the fact is that, what needs to be delivered must first be known before the means to get there is considered.

### **Technological Advancement**

In this era of technological advancement, such as in the use of ICTs for teaching and learning it is necessary that governments most especially of the developing countries like Nigeria to adequately key into this modern day technology so as to give her people access to quality education, since presently teaching can be made accessible to reach to where it is needed but for lack thereof of internet accessibility. Information and communication technology (ICT), are veritable tools in technological advancement and their use is important in having access to quality education.

As noted by Gaible (2009) in Mohammed (2013), the use of ICT ensures that students have adequate literacy, numeracy and other skills. The use of ICT promotes acquisition of skills and knowledge that empowers the learner for lifelong learning in Nigeria (Mohammed, 2013). According to Ogunji (2013), Nigeria started the implementation of ICT policy in 2001 after its approval. The aim according to Ogunji was to make Nigeria an information technology capable country in Africa as a whole and also to be a key player in information technology (IT) society in 2005. Ogunji maintained that the aim was to make ICT a sustainable engine for development and to compete in ICT globally. Some of the objectives of ICT policy in Nigeria noted by Ogunji (2013) are as follows;

To empower Nigeria to participate in software development, integrate ICT into the mainstream of education, establish and develop ICT infrastructure and maximize its use nationwide, empower the youth with ICT skills and prepare them for global competitiveness, to ensure that ICT resources are readily available to promote efficient national development. How far has these lofty objectives been achieved? Till date, Nigeria as a country is still having teething problems in availability and use of ICTs. There is the need to adequately provide and make ICT available all over Nigeria so that irrespective of where the learner is based, there should be access to the internet with less stress and more ease. If this is done, access to quality education in Nigeria is achievable.

### **Poverty Level**

Another important factor is poverty. The focus on poverty reduction enables the right to education to be a powerful tool in making a change in the lives of the learner. Educating individuals is an important step in overcoming poverty. Better employment in turn implies more earnings for the people as a whole, as well as access to quality Education. Matera (2014) noted that focus on poverty reduction enables the right to education to be a powerful tool in making a change in the lives of individuals. All of which contribute to poverty reduction and economic growth. This contributes to the reason why the provision Government is making in terms of scholarship funds cannot reach many who are qualified to have them. Nigeria needs equitable access to higher Education as indicated.

### **Conclusion**

The above issues and challenges in one way or the other have adverse effects on access to quality of education in Nigeria. For ensuring the accessibility of reaching the un-reached groups, the existing inclusive education should be enhanced and the disparity among regions and states in access to quality education should be reduced

### **Suggestions**

This paper has put forward these suggestions to enable education planners and implementers take new horizon in education in Nigeria from access to quality as imperative since access to quality education paves the way for the attainments of stated educational goals and objectives.

1. Budgetary allocation to the educational sector should be of priority to the government. If the education of the people is weakened due to lack of funds, it will invariably affect other sectors of the economy as no nation grows above what its education can offer her citizenry.
2. Teaching as a matter of fact should be professionalized, with adequate incentives for the profession. That education is a vibrant profession should not be a lip service issue but should be marched with appropriate policy that enables the teachers give back to the society that has given to her. The funds meant for the training and retraining of teachers should not be diverted to personal use or into other areas as teachers require constant training to be abreast with the changes and challenges in the society.
3. There are various ways of teaching. To ensure more access to quality education, government should as a matter of policy introduce the blended method of teaching and learning. This will ensure that learners get access to quality education irrespective of where, when and how they intend to learn. This cannot be achieved without adequate technology.

4. The Contents of the curriculum should not be overlooked since it is the neck on which the outlook of education lies. As such the curriculum should be responsive to the needs of the locals and not to adopt what is obtainable elsewhere.
5. The poverty level of the people should be of concern to the Government. Education should be accessible but if majority of the people are poor, less of them will attain it, as their attention will be on how to make ends meet with the children at the forefront.
6. Policies should as a matter of fact be taken with all seriousness. It should not be a means of settling political scores. What this implies is that there should be continuity in public policies no matter the government that initiated it.
7. The use of ICTs in all levels of Nigerian educational system should as a matter of policy be evolved. It should not be given to only the privileged few but should be made available to all persons at all times and in everywhere

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