

18

Access and Quality Education: The Prevailing Crisis in Nigerian Educational System for the Achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

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Abstract

This paper discussed access and quality in education as a militating factor for the realization of human development objectives packaged in Millennium Development Goals. Education is an important component of the life of any nation. In view of this, the paper identified some of the factors that hinders access to quality education. This includes poor funding, poverty and embezzlement/ corruption among others. Based on these, suggestions that could enhance accessibility to quality education for the actualization of MDGs were made.

The aspiration of Nigeria as the giant of Africa in terms of human and material resources is to develop her education sector to portray social relevance and

Journal of Resourcefulness and Distinction, Volume 4 No. 1, November, 2012

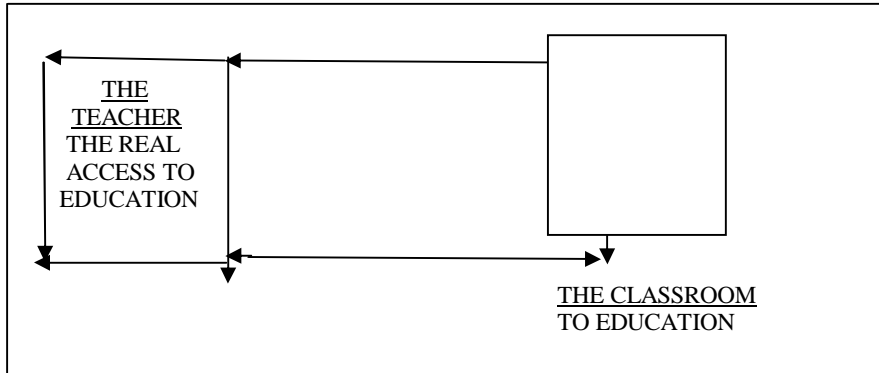
stand the taste of this ever changing world of mankind. This is due to the fact that education is a precondition for accelerated growth and sustainable development. Education is a tool for the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and any future global programme. In line with this, the National Policy on Education (2004) section 1 stated unequivocally the philosophy and goal of education thus every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his/her ability. The policy stated further that there is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria; to this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive ... However, despite the above assertion, access to and quality of education still remain the fundamental issues which have generated commnets in the Nigerian educational scene. Therefore, the task of this paper is to discuss access and quality issues and the achievement of MDGs in Nigeria with a view to suggest way forward for the Nigerian educational system.

Access to Education

For the purpose of clarity, it is pertinent to give operational definition of the two concepts above "Access" and "Education". The word access can be seen as having opportunity to utilize something or be involved in an event. According to Fanjonyomi (2008) access constitutes opportunity to make use of experience or something. The something determines the nature of access. Hence, it is possible to talk of economic access, social access, psychological access and social access. While education according to Mohammed and Tijani (2011) is a process of teaching, training and learning offered in schools to improve knowledge and develop skills". Education is a long life process of imparting knowledgd, skills, desirable attitudes in to the people for active citizenship. The purpose of education is to expose the learners to many learning experiences that would change thier perception to things and make them an informed members of the society.

Access to education in the opinion of Bulama (2008) is the ability or chance or right to the process of learning in a school or any other programme of study. According to him, the school is the deriction where access to education is found, the classroom is the place where access to education takes place, and the teacher is the real access to education". This illustrated below:-

Access and Quality Education: The Prevailing Crisis in Nigerian Educational System for the Achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)



Similarly, David (2008) perceived educational access as the availability of the opportunities for education and actual participation in it". Accordingly, UNESCO (2003) asserted that access to education is ensuring the equitable access to educational institutions based on merit, capacity, effort and perseverance.

Inherent in the foregoing delectation is that access to education is the creation of opportunities and precision of the enabling situation for members of the society to patronize the education sector based on their intellectual capacities for survival in the society.

Quality Education

The education that helps to develop human potentials for social, economic and political development or advancement of the society can be referred to quality education. Rahmat, Tijani and Kate (2010) opined that quality education is a process of inculcating worthwhile knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which make individual learners become usefull members of the society. Fajonyomi (2008) affirmed that "the quality of education is a function of the quality of the environment, of the inputs and of the process He explained further that:-

provision of quality education entails setting standards or benchmark agreed upon the stakeholders or shareholders and all agreeing parties should be responsible enough to meet up there own portion(s) of the agreement. Meaning quality assurance must be put in place."(pg6).

In the same vein, UNESCO cited in Musbahu and Tijani (2011) asserted that quality education is making the abstract real and developing the capacities of individuals and society to work for a sustainable development. From the above, it is deduced that quality education is synomimous with functional educational provision for members of

the society to enhance their capacities for national unity and productivity. Therefore, quality education is a product of effective implementation of educational policies and adequate provision of teaching and learning resources. In other words, quality education is the education that champions the course of human progress.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The millennium Development Goals represent a global strategy aimed at developing all facets of human endeavour. Its attention and target is to find lasting solution to world's developmental challenges. The MDGs are drawn from the action and target contained in the millennium declaration that was adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of State and Government during the UN millennium summit in September 2000 (UNDP, 2008). The millennium Development Goals are:-

- 1-Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.
- 2-Achieving Universal primary Education.
- 3-Promoting Gender Equity and Empowering women.
- 4-Reducing child mortality.
- 5-Improving maternal Health.
- 6-Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
- 7-Ensuring Environmental Sustainability.
- 8-Developing a Global partnership for Development. (UNDP, 2008)

These goals are to be achieved by the year 2015 in order to curb the developmental challenges in the world in general. Participating countries are expected to articulate policies, strategies and plans to facilitate the achievement of the eight development Goals. With four years left to meet the deadline for the achievement of these goals, one begins to wonder the possibility of actualizing these when the education sector that is considered as the backbone of development still leaves much to be desired.

Access and Quality Education:-Impetus for MDGs

The achievement MDGs without any doubt is predicted on access to quality education by the teeming population of Nigeria. However, more attention and genuine commitment have not been given to education. Even though there is clear policy on accessibility to education, the number of citizens outside the schools across the country outweighs those in schools. According to Bulus (2010) there is disparity in the enrolment in the school sub-sectors. For example ECCDE expected enrolment is 22million but the actual is 2.02 million, leaving 19.98 million out of school. The expected enrolment for primary Education is 34.92 million but the actual is 24.42 million. There is short fall of 10.5 million. In junior secondary schools, the expected enrolment is 9.27 million; the actual is 3.27 million, leaving 6.0 million unenrolled. For nomadic and migrant children, only 450, 00 are enrolled out of the 3.5 million school

Access and Quality Education: The Prevailing Crisis in Nigerian Educational System for the Achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

aged learners (Pg23). In the above analysis, it is clear that many children are out of school. There are some rural areas in Nigeria today that do not even have a single classroom talk more of qualified teachers. In view of this, Bulama (2008) remarked that “we seem to not only remain stagnant as a nation but also retrogressing badly because our access to education is faulty”

Another issues is the “Quality” of the education imparted into the participants. In an attempt to remedy the poor quality of education, according to Bulus (2010) government embarked on reform of policies in the education sector to improve the existing condition of education that fails to satisfy the need of individual members of society” Ironically, despite the structural and curriculum innovation or reforms and the huge amount of money been expended, quality issues still remain pervasive. In fact it has become an unsummontable problem that has devastating effect on national development. A close observation of public schools in Nigeria presents undesirable picture. The schools lack basic facilities for effective teaching and learning activities. With this scenario, the potential embedded in education has not been fully explored and utilized for the achievement of human development objectives of the MDGs. The ugly picture of the education sector, without doubt has negative implication on other sectors of the Nigerian economy such as politics and health among others. In line with this, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) stated unequivocal that “any governmental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution”. Therefore, urgent corrective measure should be taken to arrest the situation for the common good of all members of the society.

Hindrance to Access and Quality Education

Education is undoubtedly bedeviled with many challenges which serve as threatening factors to accessible quality education in Nigeria. Some of these are discussed below:-

Insufficient Fund

Education is an essential and capital intensive service. It is a social investment required for socio-economic and political development of any country of the world. However, the education sector is faced with insufficient funding. Thus, inability of the government at all levels to adequately finance education to comply with the UNESCO’s prescription of 26% budgetory allocation constitutes a major problem to accessible educational quality in Nigeria. To support this, James (2008) lamented that lack of enough funds has prevented the execution of meaningful projects in most of our schools today

High Level of Poverty

Poverty is a reality in every human society. Even though a country can claim to be developed, there are still element of poverty in such a society. Oyeyinka (2001) in Jere (2004) relates poverty to inaccessibility to food, clothing, shelter, education health service and clean water to mention but a few. Jere (2004) opined that poverty can be measured in terms of level of income, standard of living (quality food intake, housing and health), level of employment and level of literacy among others. Without any doubt, poverty is a militating factor to Nigeria's desire to position her education sector for national development. Many parents deprived their children the opportunity to acquire education not because of weakedness but rather, their poor financial capacities. In many families today, children must hawk to support the economic status of the family.

Poverty remains the greatest enemy of human progress. According to the Federal Office of Statistics (2009) 69 percent of the population lives less than one dollar a day. (David, 2008). It is a known fact that corruption has eaten deep into the fibric of the Nigerian society. It has become a common culture irrespective of tribe, religion and social status. Although, education sector has not been well funded, the little financial commitment by the government has not been properly utilized to a great extent. Thus, the money meant for infrastructural development and provision of teaching facilities have been diverted in some cases, there by making learning environment uncondutive. Therefore, corruption constitutes a great setback to qualitative education. In line with this thought pattern, Bulama (2008) asserted that official corruption, intrignes, politics, greed, e.t.c conspired to deny our children access to education, even where colossal resources are made available to the operators. In the opinion of David (2008) equity and access to education are attributed to widespread problem of unemployment, poverty, health, security, poor infrastructure, power supply and corruption.

Standard and Quality Assurance

According to Bulus (2010) Standard and quality assurance embraces issues on infrastructure, curriculum content and relevance, teacher development, motivation and retention, learner support services and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The inadequacy of the above areas remain contributing factors to access to quality education of the Nigerian child. Similarly, in terms of curriculum content. Obanya (2007) in Fajonyomi (2008) held that there should be a shift from fixed curriculum to more flexible curricular from-works, from a focus on teaching to learning, from transformation and acquisition of skills needed, to continue learning throughout life...

Access and Quality Education: The Prevailing Crisis in Nigerian Educational System for the Achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Unplanned Enrolment Population

Population explosion is one of the problems confronting access to quality education. Most of the Nigerian Institutions are over populated, especially at the primary and secondary schools where more than 100 pupils or students are found in a class meant for than 45/50 student. This situation does not encourage classroom management and control thereby constituting hindrance to quality education.

Ensuring Access to Quality Education

Accessibility to quality education is not to be compromised. This is premised on the fact that education is the only key to technological development of any nation. Therefore, no matter the viability of any Developmental programme, with out access to quality education, it will die a natural death. Therefore, below is a list of measures to make education a potent tool for actualizing the MDGs.

Funding: Education is an essential service that should be well funded by the three tiers of Nigerian governments. Therefore, 26% annual budget prescribed by UNCSCO should be allocated to education for effective performance. Adequate investment and prudent in the use of funds according to Fajonyomi(2008) could salvage the education sector.

Poverty Reduction: Poverty limits access to education. Poverty, hunger and disease should be eliminated from the society through employment opportunities for the educated individuals and provision of modern technology for the rural dwellers.

Monitoring Control: The little funds expended or allocated to education for infrastructural development and provision of teaching/learning facilities in the Nigerian Institutions should be properly and effectively monitored by government agencies to forestall diversion by the leadership of such institutions. Since education is a social and fundamental rights of the citizens, this would enable the people to benefit maximally from schooling. Therefore EFCC/ ICPC Should be strengthened by the government to deal with corrupt practices.

Population Explosion: This should be tackled through building of more classrooms to pave way for active classroom management and effective teaching and learning.

Quality Assurance : Quality assurance is a deliberate plan to enable education meet socio-economic and political developmental challenges. It is an attempt to elevate the standard of education. There are eight(8) components of quality standards outlines in the National Education quality Assurance policy:-

- 1-Learner achievement and standards.
- 2-Learners welfare and participation
- 3-Care, guidance and support.
- 4-Leadership and management

5-school community relationships. 6-Learning environment
7-Teaching and learning. 8-Curriculum and other activities. (Bulus, 2008:26)

The philosophy behind quality assurance is to elevate educational standards through provision of facilities to enhance or achieve access to qualitative learning experiences of the Nigerian Child.

Conclusion

Actualization of Millennium Development Goals is inevitable in the Nigerian society. This assertion is based on the high level of underdevelopment that is characterized by poverty and hunger, decay of Infrastructural Facilities, poor health care, and social economic degradation. In line with the above the paper has discussed access to quality education as a militating factor to the achievement of the fundamental human objectives of the MDGs. The crucial position occupied by education has really called for serious government attention to provide enabling situation for the citizen to acquire quality education for national development.

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Access and Quality Education: The Prevailing Crisis in Nigerian Educational System for the Achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

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