



Primary Education Funding in Nigeria: Status and Challenges

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Abstract

This paper shows the trends in the funding of primary education in Nigeria. It suggests that it will not be very right to discuss issues pertaining to primary education in isolation from the other segments of education. Some general points about education are made and the fact that finance is a key factor to the success of education generally is made clear. It asserts that the status of education is reflected in education indicators. Hence statistics on enrolment and literacy levels are presented to illustrate the present situation of education in Nigeria, primary education inclusive. The focus on primary education highlighted the various education codes and laws as well as the genesis of education policies, which captured primary education. Sources of funding education generally are highlighted while statistics showing trends in funding education generally, and primary education in particular from 2010 to 2018 are presented. The average exchange rate of naira to dollar from 2013 to 2018 are presented to point to the value of naira in those periods. The challenges of primary education in Nigeria are identified and the way forward in dealing with them is proffered. The way forward is tied to the necessary rebirth and re-orientation needed in the wider Nigerian society.

Keywords: Primary Education, Funding, Status, Challenges, Nigeria.

Introduction

Education is regarded in all cultures of the world as an enterprise that is indispensable. Education is the light that shows the way to development and good life. Philosophers assert that:

- Education is a sign of freedom. Only the educated are free – Epictetus.
- Education is a controlling grace to the young, consolation to the old, wealth and ornament to the rich – Diogenes.
- Educated men are as much superior to uneducated as the living are superior to the dead – Aristotle.

Every culture imparts one form of education or the other on the citizenry. The education could be formal or informal. Both forms of education impart something of value to the people who belong to the culture. Since no group of people would want to be left out in the world scheme of things, they strive to constantly improve on their forms of education. What they do or fail to do, the manner they get about it, etc. have implications for their level of educational attainment and development generally. Education enterprise is a serious business.

There are as many definitions of education as there are authors who care to define it. The complex nature of human personality, complexity of human environment, different philosophies of

life, and different educational theories and practices constitute the reasons why different authors define education differently (Aggarwal, 1981). The definition by Taiwo (1993) is considered here adequate enough for the purpose of this paper. According to the author, education is the training of the young with a view to their growing up and developing into adults who can fend for themselves, live in a society and be of service to that society. This definition is considered to have captured the essence of both the formal and informal education. Though both formal and informal education are of value in education of people of every culture, yet issues and challenges of education discussed in this paper will be built around formal education which also has a primary education segment.

Many individuals, government, organizations and agencies have shown interest in development of formal education at all levels. The United Nations General Assembly in 1948 declared that education should be the right of everyone and hence urged nations to, at least, make education free and compulsory at the primary school level. The MDG target number two focused on achieving universal education and the SDG number four is targeting inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of long learning opportunity for all (Umeakuka, 2016). These declarations and targets underscore the great importance attached to education with respect to the social, political, economic and total lives of the people. Achievement of these targets, to a very great extent will depend on the level of funding of education in a culture. A well-funded education enterprise, no doubt, will reflect in the education indicators such as enrolment, out-of-school rate, literacy level, completion rates, etc.

A general picture of school attendance and literacy level in Nigeria, perhaps, will serve a useful purpose in that a well-funded education system is expected to reflect in attendance and literacy levels (and in other indicators). It must be stated here that it is very difficult to discuss primary education adequately without reference to other segments of education because they are all linked up in many ways.

Table 1: Education Statistics in Nigeria (Who is going to School)

Zone	% Uneducated Males	% Uneducated Females	% Average Illiterate	% Educated Youth Population
North East	56.75%	61.1%	56.75%	43.25%
North West	46.9%	62.8%	54.85%	45.15%
North Central	22.6%	38.0%	30.3%	69.70%
South East	10.70%	18.70%	14.70%	85.30%
South West	11.6%	17.1%	14.35%	85.65%
South South	6.1%	13.0%	9.55%	90.45%

Source: Nairaland Forum, culled from African Development Information released 9 August 2015



Table 1 above, is considered in this paper to contain clear and enough data for anybody to answer the question: Who is going to school in Nigeria?

Let us take a look at the trend in the enrolment by level of school in Nigeria from 2012-2016 and the percentage changes.

Table 2: Enrolment by level of school in Nigeria from 2012-2016 and the percentage changes

Level of School	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Pry 1 – 6	24,893,442	26,158,375	25,801,197	25,442,535	25,591,181
	–	5.08%	-1.39%	-1.39%	0.58%
JS 1 – 3	5, 277,527	6,168,764	6,203,094	6,180,291	5,968,142
	–	16.89%	0.48%	-2.65%	-1.28%
Pry 1 – JS 3	30,170,969	32,327,139	32,004,291	31,622,826	31,559,323
	–	14.45%	0.55%	-0.37%	-3.55%
SS 1 – 3	4,934,772	5,152,804	4,292,489	4,910,944	4,495,309
	–	4.42%	16.7%	14.41%	-8.87%

Source: Federal Ministry of Education (2016). Released in 2017.

Table 2 above is quite revealing. The percentage changes in enrolment for primary one to primary six was in the negative in 2014 (-1.39%), and 2015 (-1.39%). In 2016, the percentage change for primary 1 – 6 was less than one percent (0.58%). It is worrisome to observe that percentage change in enrolment for JS 1 – 3 (part of basic education) was in the negative for 2015 (-2.65%) and 2016 (-1.28%). When the data for primary 1 – 6 and JS 1 – 3 are pooled together, that is the basic education segment, the revelation becomes more disturbing as the percentage changes on enrolment for 2015 and 2016 were on the negative – 2015 (-0.37%) and 2016 (-3.55%). Even the SS 1 – SS 3 percentage enrolment change for 2016 is in the negative (-8.87%). A lot of factors must be responsible for the ugly picture revealed above and, funding is suspected to be the greatest culprit. In a piece written in the guardian online titled: Despite Decades of Funding,

Literacy Levels in the Northern States remain Low, Amzat (2017) presented the following data to support this claim.

Table 3: Percentage Literacy of the 36 States plus the FCT.

S/N	State	% Literacy	S/N	State	% Literacy
1	Abia	94.22	20	Kano	38.06
2	FCT	78.84	21	Katsina	10.36
3	Adamawa	55.82	22	Kebbi	20.51
4	Akwa Ibom	78.84	23	Kogi	83.93
5	Anambra	92.11	24	Kwara	69.66
6	Bauchi	19.26	25	Lagos	96.30
7	Bayelsa	86.83	26	Nasarawa	59.21
8	Benue	73.74	27	Niger	22.88
9	Borno	23.11	28	Ogun	81.76
10	Cross River	89.08	29	Ondo	81.15
11	Delta	87.43	30	Osun	90.57
12	Ebonyi	77.76	31	Oyo	80.25
13	Edo	90.53	32	Plateau	63.65
14	Ekiti	95.79	33	Rivers	95.76
15	Enugu	89.40	34	Sokoto	15.01
16	Gombe	29.05	35	Taraba	72.00
17	Imo	96.43	36	Yobe	7.2
18	Jigawa	25.08	37	Zamfara	19.16
19	Kaduna	47.31			

Source: Amzat (2017) [See References]

A look at Table 3 would suggest that there must be something the states with high literacy levels are doing which those with low literacy levels are not doing. One could not continue to repeat the same thing every time and expect to have a different result. There is still room for improvement by all the states and the FCT.

A Focus on Primary Education in Nigeria

Primary education is the foundation upon which the other levels of education stand. Fafunwa (1980) had noted that elementary education is the core of African development even though many African educators would rather give priority to secondary, technical and university education. As far back as the colonial period, several actions had been taken to improve education delivery in Nigeria, which include primary education. Writing on Historical Development of Education Laws in Nigeria, Nwagwu (1993) documented the following actions:

- The first Education Ordinance of 1882.
- The Education ordinance of 1887.
- The Education Code of 1903 and Ordinance of 1908.
- The Education Ordinance and Code of 1916.
- The Education Code of 1926.
- The Education Law of 1948 and the Act of 1952.
- The Universal Primary Education Laws of the 1950s.
- The 1979 and 1989 Federal Constitutions.



- The Laws, Decrees, and Edicts of the 1980s and 1990s.

One of the early efforts very relevant in charting direction for education, primary education inclusive was the Nigeria National Curriculum Conference held from 8 – 12 September 1969. In his summary of the purpose and objectives of primary education highlighted by the participants in the conference, Adaralegbe (1969) captured the following: permanent literacy to ensure that the child becomes a better producer or consumer of goods: sound basis of scientific and reflective thinking; ability to solve personal and social problems by using their intelligence; citizenship education to become an effective participating and contributing member of the Nigerian society; and character and moral training and sound attitude development. Others are, physical, emotional and intellectual growth; identification with humanity and the world around him; enhancement of the child's creativity and sense of innovation through the inculcation of an independent mind; opportunity to develop mechanical, vocational and manipulative skills; ability to communicate effectively; and self-discipline.

These general aims of primary education have gone through periods of refinement as reflected in the different editions of the National Policy on Education, the last being the 6th Edition published in 2013. This edition defined primary education as the education given to children aged 6 – 12 years. According to this document, the objectives of primary education include:

- Inculcate permanent literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively;
- Lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking;
- Promote patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity;
- Instill social, moral norms and values in the child;
- Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the changing environment; and
- Provide opportunities for the child to develop live manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capability.

Inadequate funding principally, and some other bottle necks, must be effectively addressed if the above objectives are to be realized in the contemporary Nigeria.

Sources of Fund for Education in Nigeria

Education funding generally is categorized into two by Toluwalope (2016) as Government sources and Non-government sources. Government sources could come as capital grants, recurrent grants, and special grants. The non-government sources could come from school fees; proceeds from school activities such as part-time programmes, affiliation fees; community efforts and donations; external aids e.g. from UNESCO, USAID, PTF, TETFUND, etc. Adeyemo (2000) in his own listing has fund from owner government, tuition and fees, gifts, grants and endowments, investment income, consultancies and research activities, community participation and what he termed auxiliaries like enterprises, licenses, patents, and alumni associations. Schools could source funds in some other ways than the ones listed above. In Nigeria of today, governments remain the primary and major sources of funds for education.

Trend Analysis of Nigeria’s Allocation of Budget to Education Sector

Recall that the UNESCO Benchmark for the education sector is 26% of the total budget of a country. The rationale is to enable nations adequately cater for rising education demands. The following is the trend in Nigeria:

Table 4: Trends in Budget Allocations to Education 2010 – 2018

Year	Total Allocation to Education (₦)	% of Total Budget to Education	% Allocation to Basic Education	Education to 26% Benchmark Less Education %	Exchange Rate Average ₦ per \$
1	2	3	4	5	6
2010	293,427,655,563	7.19	15.09	18.81	-
2011	393,810,171,775	9.32	13.79	16.68	-
2012	468,385,035,983	9.86	14.56	16.14	-
2013	499,761,707,888	10.15	14.45	15.85	155.2
2014	494,783,130,268	10.54	14.25	15.46	167.5
2015	484,263,784,654	10.78	14.12	15.22	196.5
2016	480,278,214,689	7.92	16.06	18.08	304.5
2017	550,597,184,148	7.40	17.30	18.60	305.5
2018	605,800,000,000	7.04	17.99	18.96	360.5

Sources:

2 & 3 = *Premium Times 14 July 2018*

4 & 5 = *computed by this author;*

6 = *Focus Economics. Retrieved 14 July, 2018*

Premium Times (2018) provided figures for total budget, allocation to education, and figure allocated to universal basic education out of the total allotted to education. Space could not allow me to present all the figures because they are all very bulky. However only figures allotted to education are presented in the table. The percentages are approximated while the exchange rates are annual averages.

Table 4 revealed that Nigeria is not anywhere near the UNESCO benchmark of 26% for education. Column 3 revealed that the percentage allocation to education has been on downward trend from 2015 – 2018. Column 5 revealed the wide gap between the percentage allotted to education and the benchmark of 26%. Nigeria still has a long way to go to achieve the UNESCO benchmark even as the trend is in downward direction.

Column 4 of table 4 presents the percentage of allocation to education which goes to basic education. Though basic education, which includes primary education, is the foundation upon which other levels of education are built yet less than 20% of the total budget is allotted to it. I doubt how solid this foundation could be considering the super structures it is meant to carry.

In order not to be deceived by the large figure in column 2 of table 4, it may be necessary to refer to annual average exchange rates in column 6 for the years under review. While the average



exchange rate for 2013 was ₦155.2 per dollar, it jumped up to ₦304.5, ₦305.5 and ₦360.5 per dollar for 2016, 2017 and 2018 respectively. The exchange rate defines the purchasing power of naira in relation to other currencies for the respective years as well as the country's relative level of economic health. By implication therefore, the value and purchasing power of naira is constantly being eroded and definitely this is rubbing off on education generally, and primary education in particular.

Challenges of Primary Education in Nigeria

The primary education being discussed in this paper obtains in Nigeria. By implication, therefore, the challenges of primary education must be a reflection of the Nigerian society. The ways and manners things are done in the Nigerian society must reflect in the ways and manners programmes and institutions in the country are operated and primary education must not be an exception. The following points are considered by this author as the major challenges of primary education in Nigeria:

1. **Under funding:** The statistics presented in this paper clearly show that primary education in Nigeria is under-funded. Come to think about it, it is difficult to name programmes and institutions in Nigeria that are not under-funded. Be that as it may, finance still holds the key to success of any education enterprise.
2. **Misappropriation:** Even as primary education is under-funded yet what is appropriated to it, to a very large extent, is misappropriated. The cases of misappropriation in the various sectors of the Nigerian economy is no longer news to the vast majority of Nigerians and primary education is not immuned.
3. **Corruption:** One may not be very far from being correct if one says that corruption lives in Nigeria. Corruption is an amorphous concept that manifests in diverse forms. All I can say here is that corruption means anytime someone does something contrary to the specified ways and procedures of doing that thing especially with the intention of gaining undue advantage. For example, if one is to operate a particular constitution and one goes ahead and does things contrary to the spirit and letter of the constitution, to this author, it is corruption (of the constitution). Nigeria as a whole is infected with corruption and the primary education sector cannot be an exception.
4. **Total Neglect by those in Authority:** Let us hear this; Banjo made this observation in 1969 with respect to primary education in Nigeria and it is still true today. He wrote: "lowliness is young ambition's ladder by which the climber upward rise; but once he does attain the uppermost rung, he turns around and spurns the base from which he did rise". Nothing can be truer than the above statement with respect to the disposition of those in authority towards primary education in Nigeria today.
5. **Poverty of the Masses in Nigeria Today:** The general poverty in Nigeria today is reflected in the primary schools especially those located in the rural areas.
6. **Square Pegs in Round Holes:** Cases of unqualified people in certain positions abound in Nigerian society and the management of primary education is not immuned from this infection.
7. **Bad Politics:** Politics, so to say, is concerned with protection of one's interests and Nigerian politicians are not interested in primary education.

8. **Who Controls Primary Education?** This struggle is still on in Nigeria among the states, local government areas, and even the federal governments. It is adversely affecting primary education sector.
9. **Who Pays for Primary Education?** Though governments at all levels in Nigeria struggle for control of primary education in Nigeria (as long as local government allocation comes from the federal government), yet none of them is ready to carry the financial burden of primary education (without the federal allocation).
10. **Cultural and Belief Practices:** There are still many parts of Nigeria where the traditional culture and belief practices hinder educational progress and development even at the primary education level.

The Way Forward

What is happening in the education sector generally, and the primary education segment particularly, is a mirror of the Nigerian society. The way forward can only be found in the wider Nigerian society. Too many things are wrong with the way and manner primary education is managed in Nigeria of today right from the top to the bottom. Nigerian society needs complete social engineering for anything to fall in place, including primary education enterprise. Fix the ills of the Nigerian society and problems of primary education would have been addressed. Nigerians need total rebirth and reformatting, since human beings are the operators of the system. However, it is the leadership of the country at all levels that should show good leadership example and the led will find good reason and justification to do well in their various spheres of operation. The leadership at various levels of government in the country have not proved themselves worthy of emulation. When the masses see sincerity in the way the leaders manage government positions, they are most likely to display sincerity in their areas of operation. Since most of the leaders are corrupt, they lack moral ground to stand on to discipline offenders. The primary education segment is also affected and influenced by leadership and other challenges plaguing the Nigerian society.

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