

THE NIGERIAN EDUCATION IN THE PERIOD OF SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY: WAYS FORWARD

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At the National (Hybrid) conference, Faculty of Education

1st November, 2023

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Introduction

Education is fundamental to the establishment of an innovative knowledge economy and a thriving society in any nation. It is in recognition of this importance that the international community and governments all over the world have made commitments for citizens to have access and quality education. Unfortunately, the potentials of education systems in developing countries, including Nigeria, to fulfil its responsibility are frequently frustrated by a plethora of sociopolitical and economic issues. Nigeria has continued to battle with serious development crisis significantly traceable to the decreased human capital with its human capital development ranked only 142nd position among 169 countries (UNDP, 2020 Human Capital Index). This position places Nigeria at the bottom, meaning that Nigeria is considered to have a low level of HDI. The level of human capital in a country relates to a greater extent to the level of productive capacity of that country. This explains why human capital development must be considered as one of great importance in the future (World Bank, 2020).

The national literacy rate is currently 59 percent (The World Bank Group, 2022) suggesting low literacy rate in Nigeria. The net quantity and quality of education in Nigeria, in comparison to past decades, given our population and economy, is negative (UNESCO Digital Library, 2022). It is believed that this situation is as a result of the state of the sociopolitical and economic environment of Nigeria today. The uncertainty and volatility which Nigeria society presents today creates a sense of fear, dispensation and hopelessness among the people, particularly in the education sector. Neglecting Nigerian education in this period of sociopolitical and economic uncertainty would in many ways endanger the prosperity of the future of our children. Therefore, it becomes salient that we discuss some of the sociopolitical and economic environment which are critical stress points to Nigerian education. We will also examine the consequences of some of these sociopolitical and economic environments on Nigerian education, and then proffer suggestions as ways forward.

The Nigerian Education: Current situations and concerns

Educational System in Nigeria has been desiring obtaining knowledge based economy and social development through the provision of high quality and accessible education to all citizens. Achieving this goal is increasingly becoming a conundrum. In the Global Competitive Index for 2020-2021 released in 2022, Nigeria ranked 163rd. among the 180 countries profiled on intellectual capital in relation to education. Nigeria was outwitted by its African peers in the 2023 global skills rankings due to its poor educational system and low human capital development. Nigeria is in the 100th position compared to other African countries like Botswana (29th- the best-ranked African country), Camerron (48th), Rwanda(52th) among others. in 29th position, is the best-ranked African country with Nigeria in the 100th position. In Botswana for example, every child is guaranteed a free primary and secondary school education. Botswana's diamond industry made education a top priority in

conjunction with the government, hence, the country has rapidly become one of the fastest-growing economies through its education policies. In Egypt, education is compulsory for eight years between the ages of 6 and 14. All levels of education are tuition-free at all government schools and institutions (see table below for the ranking by countries).

GLOBAL RANK	COUNTRY NAME	BUSINESS 54%*	TECHNOLOGY 22%*	DATA SCIENCE 19%*
29	Botswana	100%	40%	27%
48	Cameroon	59%	69%	38%
52	Rwanda	94%	13%	35%
58	Zambia	64%	41%	39%
72	Ethiopia	56%	39%	26%
75	Côte d'Ivoire	60%	27%	20%
77	Zimbabwe	58%	19%	23%
86	South Africa	50%	12%	14%
90	Uganda	46%	9%	10%
93	Somalia	40%	4%	9%
97	Ghana	26%	6%	3%
98	Kenya	24%	3%	4%
100	Nigeria	25%	1%	2%

2023 Global Skills Ranking of Some African Countries

Source: Coursera, 2023.

The UBE Programme was aimed at providing free, compulsory universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age. It is regarded as an educational intervention programme which is designed to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulate and accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration. Some identified achievements of the programme include development, production and distribution of text books, development of national framework for integration of Almajiri education as well as construction of numerous infrastructure projects in schools across the country. Despite these achievements, the programme is affected by many challenges which include poor capacity of local Government education authorities to effectively run the programme, poor professional qualification of caregivers and teachers and weak early childhood curriculum. Others are poor professional development training, poor teacher-pupil ratio as well as inadequate funding (World Bank, 2021). Despite notable interventions of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the government, we still have about 16.2 million Out of School children (6-15 years), the second largest number in the world (NMPI, 2022). Out of this number, 2.28 million is from the south while 13.9 is from the North. The situation continues to worsen due to the degenerated security situation in the country. The delivery of education at primary and secondary schools across the country has suffered from years of neglect, compounded by inadequate attention to policy frameworks within the sector. The public perception is that the quality of education offered at basic and secondary education level is low and that standards have dropped.

In the 2022 World Education Forum's ranking involving 140 countries, including 38 African countries, Nigerian education system failed to find a place among the top 10 in Africa. The ranking, which assessed overall level of labor competence, digital literacy, interpersonal skills, and the capacity to think critically and creatively, amount and quality of schooling in each country found Nigeria wanting in all necessary factors considered. Nigeria has been unable to fully accomplish UNESCO's Education for All. Some of the top 10 African countries with the best education system are Seychelles (the only African country to fully accomplish UNESCO's 'education for all'), Tunisia, Mauritius, South Africa, Algeria, Botswana, Kenya, Cape-verde, Egypt and Namibia. It is baffling that these countries with lower economic power than Nigeria have shown more commitment to improve their education system while Nigeria is still wallowing in lackluster.

At the higher education level, about 270 Universities in Nigeria produce thousands of graduates yearly which are supposed to be pivotal to the capacity building efforts of any nation. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of these graduates' gain employment after their courses, thereby creating frustration and restiveness among these youths, limiting capacity building opportunities. The FGN has done some good job in building educational institutions but the quality of education provided by the universities has been on the decline due to poor funding, subsequently leading to incessant strike actions with its attendant effects. The decline is also due to low staff motivation, frequent closure of schools, brain drain syndrome; Japa syndrome, disproportionate staff-student ratio (Massification of students), Scanty research feats. Examination fraud; students versus host community clashes; cultism; students' indecent dress code; drug abuse; violent behaviour and sexual harassment; shallow teaching; financial exploitation of students by lecturers, poor planning and supervision among others.

However, while South Africa has the most institutions in the top 10 (ten) in the sub-Saharan African University ranking 2022, Nigeria is the most-represented nation overall, with 37 ranked institutions, led by Covenant University. Covenant University emerged in the 7th position in Sub-Saharan Africa and the number one in Nigeria, and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, also ranked high (31st position). The indicators cover five pillars: access and fairness, Africa impact, Teaching skills, student engagement and Resources and finance (The Times Higher Education, 2023). This is indeed a good development in the university education system.

A quick look at what is happening in our own area- South East.

Some persons argue that there is something wrong with the current situation of education in southeast Nigeria today. I present few worrisome issues from my personal observations and I guess I am not the only one in this shoe-

1. By 1960, 1970, or even by 1980, there was no one with a First School Leaving Certificate (then standard six) who could not read, write, make correct sentences, and do basic arithmetic. Today, all around us are persons, and not just a few with university degrees who cannot read, write, and do simple arithmetic. (you would notice this in supermarkets and food vendors) What happened or better still, what is happening?

2. For our universities, let us assume that poor quality students are admitted. Must our universities admit persons who score less than 50% (200) in JAMB? Why can't our universities limit to the recommended class sizes and carrying capacities by the NUC? Why can't we limit our universities to willing and capable students and willing and capable lecturers? Why do we have university students who do not attend classes and lecturers who are absent from lecture rooms, lecturers who teach less than the standards they should, set examination questions below standards, and are unable to properly grade scripts, and by so doing produce graduates that are embarrassing?
3. How would it be if all universities in the southeast limit to the right class sizes and take only the best applicants without any other parameters? Can our classes take only the best 40 applicants every year and not more and no other parameters apart from performance is used to admit students?

And so obviously, it could be said that some of our problems are self-inflicted. Man is the beneficiary of quality education, as well as the engineer of good education. so sometimes, we are the problems of ourselves (Recall when teaching was done under the tree).

We shall then proceed to take a look at some Nigeria's sociopolitical and economic environments which are critical stress points for the Nigerian Education.

Sociopolitical and economic environment of Nigeria

The country continues to face massive developmental challenges as a result of sociopolitical and economic issues in Nigeria. Some of these issues include over dependence on oil for exports and revenues and foreign exchange sources, infrastructure gap, weak and ineffective institutions, poor governance and public financial management systems. Others include low level effectiveness, political instability, intractable insecurity (terrorist insurgency, "unknown gunmen/government" and IPOB agitations (seat-at-home observation) and high level of corruption in government. There is lack of job opportunities is at the core of the high poverty levels, regional inequality, and social and political unrest. These sociopolitical and economic problems have negatively affected the many measures of ensuring access and quality Education within the country. Some of the critical issues are as follows:

Nigerian Political Environment: A critical appraisal of the political environment in the country reveals that Nigerians do not have a problem with democracy, or presidential system of government, but are tired of corrupt leadership and poor democratic values. (Some Nigerians believe what we have is kakistocracy and not democracy- and that is government by the least suitable or the very worst). The absence of good democratic values that provide access and accountability to the people, gives rise to further poor governance. This contributes to deepening poverty, creating a foundation for social unrest. Flawed elections, dominance of the ruling party, and scant evidence of political accountability have deepened poverty, creating foundation for social unrest and weakened political institutions. For democracy to thrive it requires strong institutions such as the legislature, courts, police, armed forces and civil service for good governance. The weak political structures in Nigeria have had a negative impact on the economy and the Nigerian Education.

Politics, leadership and governance play critical roles in shaping the education system in Nigeria. Education policies in Nigeria are often influenced by political considerations. Changes in leadership have led to shifts in educational priorities and policies. Political leaders prioritize certain aspects of education, such as funding allocations, curriculum development, or infrastructure development, based on their political agendas. Effective leadership is crucial for translating education policies into actionable initiatives. School principals, college administrators and other educational leaders are important in implementing education policies at the grassroots level. Therefore, they must effectively manage and allocate available resources to ensure they are used efficiently and transparently.

The change in governance is not problematic to the education system but, the lack of continuity of policy practiced by the government causes major disruption to educational goal attainment. As new governments came in succession, continuity in policy implementation is not guaranteed; this has affected educational policy implementation in Nigeria. Teachers and school management are also made to go through a change of actions in line with newly formulated policies. Constant Changes in Policies tend to negatively affect the implementation of the National Policy on Education and consequently the standard of education.

Nigerian Economic Environment

Nigerian economy is basically consumptive in Nature and overly reliant on imports. The economy is so dependent that it cannot stand on its own. Thus, the economic environment of Nigeria could be best described as unfavourable, with negative impacts on institutions. High inflation as a result of subsidy removal has also taken a toll on household's welfare and price increases have pushed millions of Nigerians into poverty. Critical drivers of inflation include security, infrastructural decay, exchange rate depreciation. Supply chain disruption due to poor logistics, and increasing cost of energy and transport (NESG, 2022). On current trends, with the population of 218.08 million (National Population Commission, 2022), and ample natural resources, only one third of the population is living above one USD a day while the other two-third struggle to survive on less than one dollar a day (World Bank, 2022). The number of Nigerians living below the national poverty line is projected to rise by 13 million between 2019 and 2025 (World Bank, 2023). While this scenario makes Nigeria to be an African slumping economic giant, the stagnant non-oil economy prevails partly due to oil theft, pipeline vandalization, and the issue of Boko Haram insurgency which is still protracting from 2009 till date, while the non-oil sector was mostly affected by the floods.

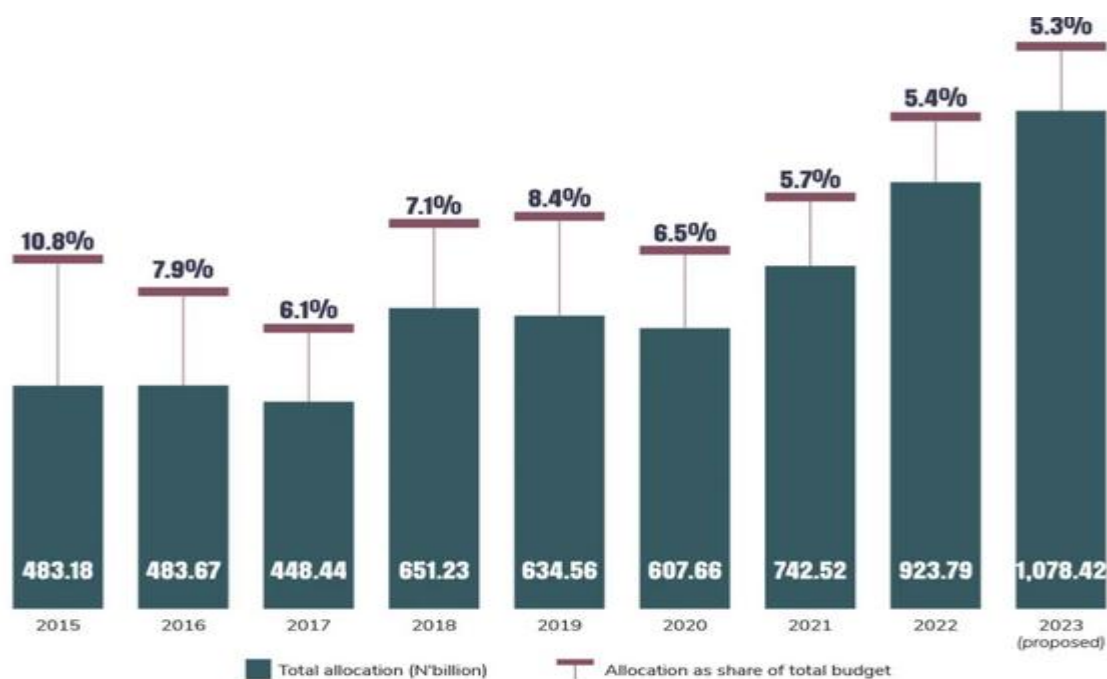
Financial Environment: (FGN budgetary allocation to education)

Successive governments pay lip service to education, which reflects expenditure and budgetary allocation to the sector. Year after year, the budget for education has declined relative to the GDP and total government budget. A significant challenge facing education in Nigeria is inadequate funding. Despite government promises to allocate 26% of its annual budget to education, this has not been achieved, with the sector receiving less than 10% of the budget in recent years (UNESCO, 2021). For instance, "Section 8, paragraphs 69a & b of the 4th edition of NPE (FRN, 2004) and section 5, paragraphs 91 a & b of the 6th edition of the

policy (FRN, 2013) addressed tertiary education, stating: 1) A sizeable proportion of national expenditure on university education shall be devoted to Science and Technology domain, while 2) not less than 60% shall be allocated conventional universities offering science and science-oriented courses and not less than 80% in the universities of technology and agriculture”.

It should be noticed that the above claims are lofty, but this policy contradicts what is on the field. Consequent upon this is lack of resources, inadequate facilities, and low teacher salaries (Thankfully, FGN has recently promised to increase salary wages of lecturers in tertiary institutions. The president also promised to make provision for increment in wages by 25 percent).

Compared with almost every other African country, Nigeria habitually underfunds its education needs, despite the steady rise in its population. The education sector receives significantly less than the minimum of 6% of GDP. In 2018, Nigeria’s Federal Government allocated 651.23 billion naira to the education sector, just 7.1% of the budget, with the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) receiving 100 billion naira (see table below).



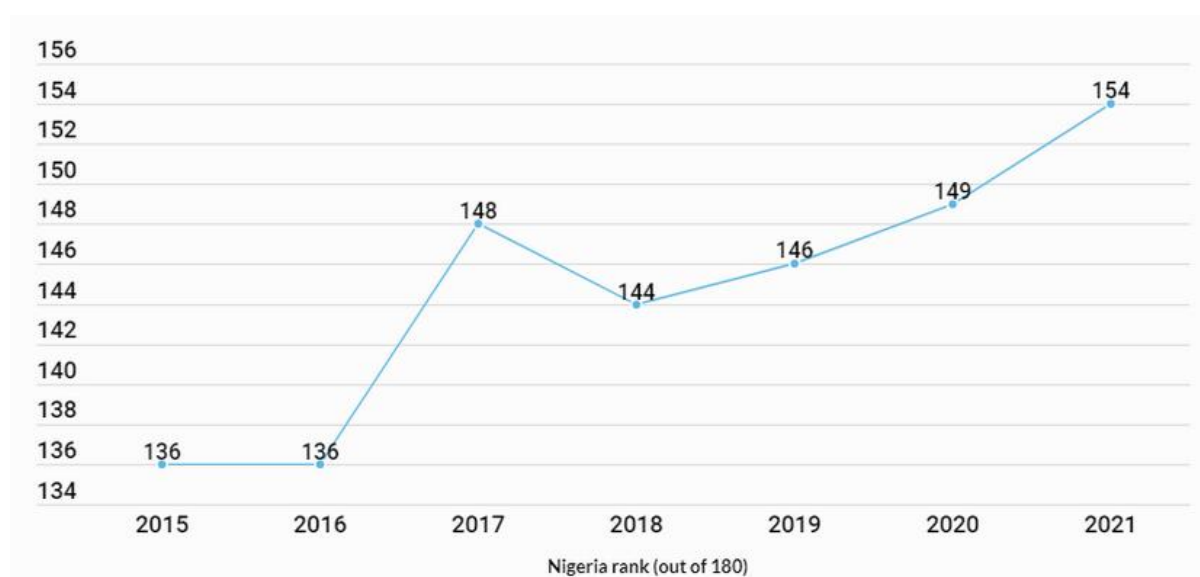
Budgetary Allocation to Education in Nigeria

Source: Dataphyte, 2023.

According to budget analysis by BudgIT, the sectoral allocation for education has declined from 10.8% of the federal budget in 2015 to 5.3% in 2023 which is the lowest level over the years. Education is one of the important areas where governments in both developed and developing economies direct its resources. The belief is that the result from education expenditure will go a long way in transforming human, social, economic, cultural and other aspects of the people’s lives.

Corruption environment

Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), 2021, ranks Nigeria 154 out of 180 countries, with a score of 24 over 100 based on perceived levels of public sector corruption (transparency.org) (see figure below). This indicates that Nigeria has serious corruption problems. To paraphrase Chinua Achebe, the ‘Trouble with Nigeria’ is corruption (Jega, 2005). No matter how we disagree with Transparency International (TI) on its methodology and criteria for ranking countries using the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Nigeria is terribly engulfed by corruption.



Nigeria Corruption Perception Ranks

Source: International Center for Investigative Reporting, 2023

Typical examples of corruption prevalent within the primary and secondary schools level sector include the embezzlement and diversion of funds, equipment and school supplies; procurement fraud; examination malpractice; sexual exploitation; nepotism; favouritism; and bribery, Frivolous trips and estacode racket, absenteeism, extortion of money students/parents for admission or grades, certificate racketeering and so on (Kirya, 2019). In the tertiary education institutions, prevalent and pervasive corrupt practices include deals with contractors and suppliers to rig contracts: extortion of grades and issuance of transcript, sexual harassment and exploitation of students. There is increasing evidence of how corrupt practices rooted in the wider public sector affects, influences, induces and compels corrupt practices in the tertiary education sector, especially, universities which statutorily enjoy some relative autonomy. Three major causes of corruption in the education sector are monopolized political power; low accountability of public officials; and intrusive business legislation/regulation (Meet and Narayan, 2017) and greedy disposition and mindset of many public officials, inadequacy and effective apprehension and punishment (Jega, 1993).

Socio-cultural Environment:

The process of nation-building has often been characterized by tension and threats to the corporate existence of the country because of religious, ethnic and interregional rivalry. Issues of ethnic identity and citizenship have constituted a major challenge to the national integration process over the years in Nigeria. Although the federal character principle of equal representation to promote inclusive citizenship is entrenched in the 1999 constitution of the FRN (as amended). It applies differently to citizens depending on their gender and geographical location, either as indigenes or settlers. The current low literacy rate of 59 percent and high youth unemployment rate of 42.5 percent coupled with abject poverty have hindered access to and quality education in the country (NMPI, 2022).

Diversity of cultures should be a source of strength due to the different variety of skills, abilities, knowledge and large human capacity it brings with it. It can also be a source of tribal and social conflict if not well managed by the government. The political elites in Nigeria, since independence, have not managed this social complexity well. They have manipulated the masses using religious and tribal sentiments to win elections, which has caused nepotism and a big divide in the social fabric of the nation. The political class has continued to pursue quick personal gains to the detriment of the larger society. This conduct undermines public trust, confidence and the authority of the government, which are essential for the nation building.

Nigeria has lately witnessed some crises with religious undertones in some parts of the Northeast and Northcentral Regions. The emergence of boko haram radical Islamic group and Bandits in the North may signify the long-festering extremist impulses that run deep in some states in Northern Nigeria. Unfortunately, in pursuit of their grievances, Boko Haram and Bandits have used extremist religious platforms which have terrorist linkages.

They allege that corruption is pervasive in Nigeria and has turned public service into a criminal enterprise. They also claim that political office-holders are corrupt and have denied the masses basic education services. This may have arisen from decades of failed government projects and elite delinquency, resulting in social chaos affecting every sector in Nigeria including education.

The indigene status dichotomy: The legal status of settlers and indigenous Nigerians, which was inserted in the 1999 Constitutions, has been contentious (Bach, 2006). The term 'Indigene' refers to a person whose parents or grandparents were a member of a community indigenous to that state. This description of indigenous status is linked to blood ties as opposed to residency, and is central to the implementation of the federal character doctrine (Ihekwezu, 2012). The indigene status dichotomy has unwittingly created opportunities for discrimination among Nigerians. In most states non indigenes are discriminated against in appointments, the allocation of scholarships, the award of contracts, access to education and health services. This has been the main cause of ethno-religious tensions in cosmopolitan states like Kano, Kaduna, and Plateau.

Nigerian Legal Environment: The judiciary in Nigeria is having some challenges in meeting the expectations of the populace. Over the years, the face challenges with corruption

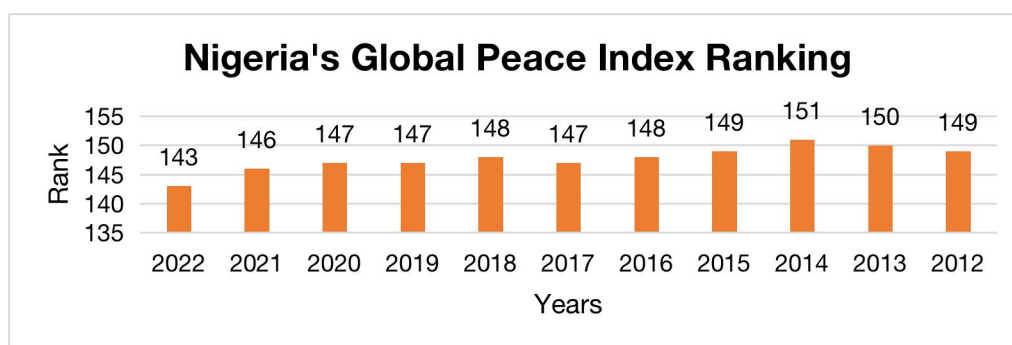
and manipulation by the rich who fragrantly break laws with impunity. This creates a situation where the rich elites are believed to be untouchable and above the law; this affects the psyche and value system of the people. A society lacking in good values and an equitable justice system presents an environment for anarchy and socio-economic problems. The weaknesses of these institutions are largely responsible for the abuse of law and order, and socio-economic problems currently observed in the country.

Educational status and qualification of Nigeria leaders has been in contention. Section 177 6(2) of the 1999 constitution stipulates that the educational qualification for election to any leadership position is at least a school certificate or its equivalent. This provision has impacted negatively on the will power, performance and decisions made by leaders towards education in Nigeria. It determines the quality of public services, governance, leadership ad commitment to education. It will also foster accountability, transparency and responsiveness of government on educational matters.

The issue of quota system equally affects the leadership position in the educational sector as well as admission of students. It was made as a policy in the country that a percentage of every state is reserved either for admission or employment in every institution as one Nigeria. In this case, chances of better persons are being denied the non-indigenes based on the Nigerian quota system.

The Nigerian security environment

The security ecosystem of Nigeria is ravaged by a myriad of security challenges ranging from insurgency, banditry, herder-farmer clashes, ethnic conflicts, kidnapping and armed robbery, IPOB and Unknown government among others (Ojewale, 2021). The 2022 Global Peace Index (GPI) has ranked Nigeria 143 among 163 independent states and territories, according to its level of peacefulness (Country, Economics, 2022). The root causes of most of these insecurity challenges have been largely politicised with widespread ethnic labelling instead of addressing the criminality perpetuated by identified miscreants. The security challenges have threatened the peace and the Nigerian Education.



Source: World Trade Organisation, 2023

Technological Environment and Teaching and learning

The technological environment in Nigeria is fast evolving. The contribution of ICT sub-sector to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) doubled in less than a decade from 7.4 percent in 2012 to 14.3 percent in 2020. According to the Executive Chairman of the National Communication Commission, the estimated total number of internet users is 84million with a broadband penetration of about 44.30 percent (Vanguard, 2022). As of November 2022, over 180 million people now have access to mobiles and internet penetration is projected to reach 65.3 percent. In spite of these successes, technological advancement in Nigeria has failed to accelerate the pace of Education and economic growth and development. Thus, Nigeria's huge ICT potential is yet to be properly harnessed to enhance education.

The emergence of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), and the incessant ASUU industrial strike action (of 2020 and 2022) with the attendant negative effects on the education sector, presents the importance of planning in the emergence of crisis. Students, particularly experience disruption in their academic programmes resulting to extended years of study. In Nigeria, access to tertiary education continue to be a challenge to students. This is evident in the percentage of JAMB candidates without access to tertiary education in 2019/2020 and 2021/2022 due to ASUU strike. A Combination of technology, for instance Blended learning, with face-to-face instruction can provide meaningful learning outcome as well as increase access and quality education. E-learning initiatives have long been solidly established in most developed countries, while in Developing countries in Nigeria continue to experience low acceptance and integration of different forms of ICT –learning into the educational system remains low (Oyedotun, 2020). Deploying blended learning approach to ensure learning continuity in emergencies has become imperative to safeguard and improve access to education in Nigeria. The use of technology in learning as recognised by the NPE are almost invisible in many Federal education institutions (Ajemba et al., 2021). Today the influence of technology in education cannot be ignored.

Consequences of sociopolitical and economic environment on Education

Going further, I limit further comments on consequences to corruption, poverty, insecurity, unemployment and underfunding.

Corruption

The effects of corruption in the education sector undermines national capacity to develop requisite national social capital for socioeconomic development. In general. Corruption subverts the goal of qualitative education provisioning, denies needed resources to schools, hinders adequacy of infrastructure and instructional materials, puts inadequacy of well qualified teachers in school. Nepotism and favouritism often lead to the hiring of unqualified and unmotivated teachers, who are then difficult to dismiss, resulting in poor-quality education. Corruption in procurement mean that classrooms are poorly equipped, and when families are made to pay bribes or duplicitous 'fees' this amounts to a regressive taxation for those who can least afford it, additionally disadvantaging poor students and placing the

developmental benefits of equitable quality education further out of their reach. Therefore, the need to strengthen accountability mechanisms to ensure effective use of education resources.

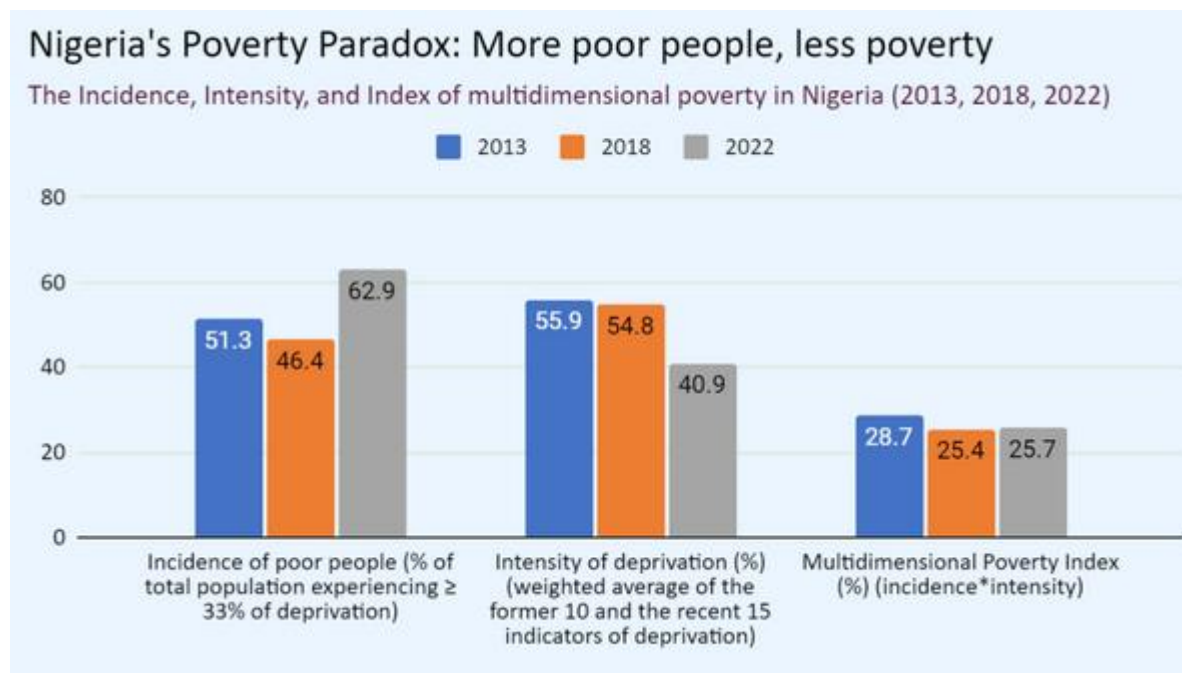
Instances of corruption and mismanagement have led to the diversion of resources away from education and compromise the quality of education delivery (Ogunode and Shofoyeke, 2021). Corruption impedes the role of the education sector in supporting personal development, building a skilled workforce and contributing to the enhancement of societal well-being. The wide spread of this has contributed to the country's poor ranking by Transparency International. Corruption in Nigeria's education sector have created a context where providers of education services are presented with routine opportunities to demand and expect bribes from parents and other service users for their children's passing grades.

Inadequate Funding

The economic realities is resulting into the failure of the Federal Government to adequately fund education. The summary of the future implications of the underfunding of education is dilapidating education infrastructure, incessant interruption in academic calendar, unmotivated teachers/instructors, declining interest in education among the younger generation, poor quality of research and research outputs, amongst others. There are also the challenges of systemic decay of values, dearth of manpower, obsolete learning methodology, unnecessary bottlenecks for new entrants, misplaced priority on the part of industry players, lack of continuity and consistency of policy, weak regulation and control, extinction of skills training for players and weak financial system to adequately support the sector. These challenges remain unabated almost seven years down the line. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) encourages developing countries to ensure that their budget for education does not fall below 26 per cent of their total budget. The federal government has consistently failed in this regard. Until the government takes a decisive step in addressing the education sector, there shall continually be poor quality service delivery which is capable of damaging our children's future.

Poverty

According to a UNICEF report in 2022, about 10.5 million of Nigeria's children aged 5-14 years are out of school. Only 61% of 6-11-year-olds regularly attend primary school and only 35.6% of children aged 36-59 months receive early childhood education. This puts Nigeria as the country with the third highest number of children deprived of education, behind India and Pakistan. This poor situation is occasion by poverty. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2022 report indicates that 63% of persons living in Nigeria are multidimensional poor. The report further states that 65% of the poor (86 million people) live in the North, while 35% (nearly 47 million) live in the South. Furthermore, the 2022 MPI report noted that the extent of the deprivations that these 113 million poor people suffer is at an average of 40.9%. The amount of deprivation that poor people experience in Nigeria reduced significantly from 55.9% in 2013 to 54.8% in 2018 and further down to 40.9% in 2022. However, this level of deprivation remains high and continue to impact negatively on school enrolment and the number of out of school children.



Source: Dataphyte, 2023b

Although basic education is free under the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) Act, there are associated costs, including transportation and the purchase of uniforms, which are unaffordable for many families in Nigeria, particularly those in rural areas. The ICIR reported that enrolling a child into most government-owned primary schools' cost between N10,000 and N20,000, while junior secondary schools cost higher due to certain hidden fees demanded by the authorities. The inability of many parents to meet this cost continue to elevate the number of out of school children in the country. Education is the key factor in addressing poverty, hunger, and insecurity. In this case, education is broadly understood to include training, vocational studies, apprenticeship (Igbaboi), and entrepreneurship (skills acquisition).

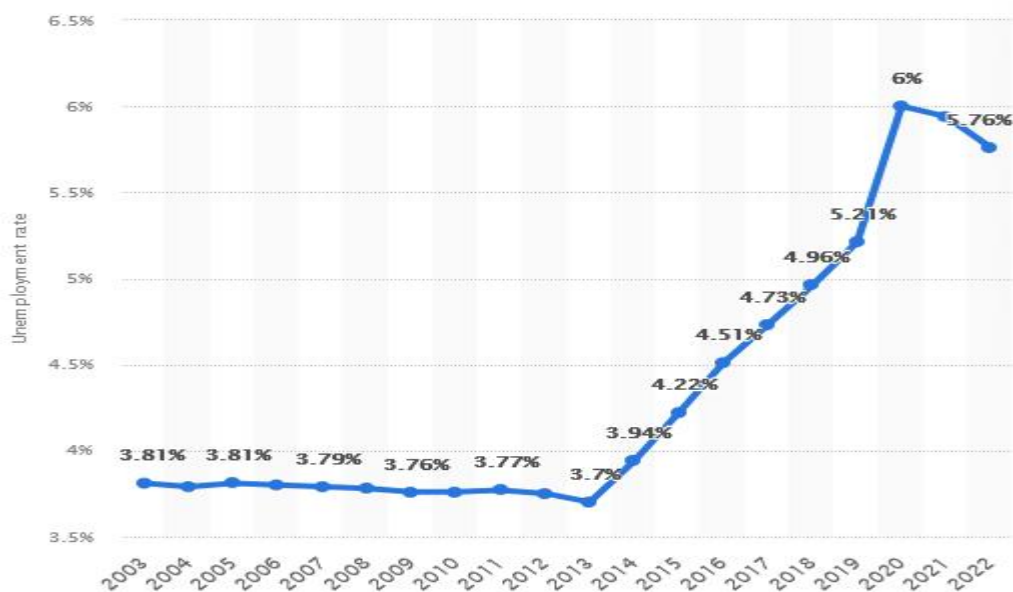
Unemployment

Unemployment in Nigeria has been a persistent and challenging issue for many years, with various factors contributing to the problem.

Nigeria's unemployment rate stood at 33.3 percent in the fourth quarter of 2020. This is second highest on Global list. However, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) recently reported unemployment rates of 5.3 percent (of fourth Quarter, 2022) and 4.1 percent (of first quarter, 2023), based on the new [Nigeria Labour Force Survey](#) (NLFS). About 53.4 percent of youths are unemployed according to youth unemployment rates released by the National Bureau of statistics in 2022.

More than half of the labour force are either unemployed or underemployed. The “unemployed” are those individuals who are not employed but are (1) actively searching for paid work and (2) available to start paid work, either last week or within the next two weeks. The underemployed means that they work less than 40 hours per week but declare themselves willing and available to work more. About 12.2 percent of employed Nigerians were underemployed in Q1 2023. Some Nigerians even search on the job, reflecting dissatisfaction with their current job or earnings. Around 7.2 percent of working-age Nigerians were employed, but searching for additional work in Q1 2023 (Nigeria Labour Force survey, 2023).

One of the most significant aspects of unemployment in Nigeria is the high rate of youth unemployment. A large portion of the population, particularly those between the ages of 15 and 34, is unemployed or underemployed. This demographic group constitutes a substantial portion of the workforce. The President of African Development Bank, AfDB, Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, lamented the high rate of joblessness among Nigerians, noting that about 40% of youths were unemployed. The figure below shows the number of employed in Nigeria from 2010 to 2022, by gender. The KMPG (2023) report revealed that Nigeria’s unemployment rate to rise to 41% in 2023. The last two years have recorded a significant higher growth of unemployment rate than the preceding years as depicted in the figure below.



Unemployment Growth Rate in Nigeria

Source: Statista, 2023.

There is often a mismatch between the skills acquired through education and the skills demanded by the labour market. Graduates often struggle to find employment that aligns with their qualifications. The Nigeria education policies of 6-3-3-4 system are excellent. However, the inability of the financiers to provide the teaching tools for its success has truncated its intended goal and objectives. To address the unemployment challenge, entrepreneurial programmes need to be integrated into the educational system from primary schools to universities. Creativity, courage and endurance are skills that should be taught by

psychologists to students at all classes of the educational system. Policy makers should generate productive jobs and meaningful work that can sustain households and lift them out of poverty.

Insecurity

Insecurity is threatening the development of education in Nigeria. Basic schools, secondary schools and higher institutions are under distressing attack. The most socially visible attacks on education in Nigeria are those that have occurred in the context of the recent conflicts in north-east Nigeria. For the insurgents behind this conflict, the destruction of education is a key objective and a desirable outcome of the hostilities. In addition to such direct and blatant attacks on the Nigerian educational establishment, in recent times the country has also suffered an increase in acts, criminal and otherwise, that undermine and/or disrupt learning. In different parts of Nigeria, students, pupils, and school administrators have been killed, kidnapped or otherwise severely harmed; schools' premises have been taken over and occupied by miscreants; and in response to the insurgency in the north-east, the government has had little choice but to permit the military use of educational facilities as temporary barracks.

The continuous attacks on the educational institutions have led to frequent school closures with diverse effects on the free flow of academic calendar with its attendant effects on students' educational performance and attainment, school administrators, and teachers' job performance and productivity. Records reveal that approximately 800 secondary school and university students have been kidnapped in coordinated attacks by terrorists and bandits in the last two years (Daily trust, 2022). Kidnapping of school children in Nigeria become more frequent in 2014 when 276 girls were abducted from Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State by the Boko Haram terrorist. There are also the case of 111 schoolgirls kidnapped from the Government Girls Science and Technical College (GGSTC), Dapchi, in Bulabullin Yunusari Local Government Area of Yobe State in 2018; 344 boys kidnapped from Government Science Secondary School, Kankara, Katsina State in 2020; 27 students kidnapped by bandits in Government Science Secondary School, Kagara in Niger State in 2021; and the 317 students kidnapped from Government Girls' Secondary in Jangebe, Zamfara State in 2021 (HumAngle, 2021). The most recent attack occurred on 22nd September, 2023 where about 24 university students were abducted in Zamfara state (Arise News, 2023). These incidences of kidnapping have also contributed to the increasing number of out of school children in Nigeria. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had in April 2022 reported that insecurity had caused the closure of 11,536 schools in Nigeria since December 2020. According to UNICEF, the security challenges in Nigeria have affected the education of 1.3 million children in less than two years. Therefore, the precarious insecurity in Nigeria poses a great threat to the development of education.

WAYS FORWARD

With regards to financing education in Nigeria, the question of who should fund people's efforts to acquire more education, whether government or individuals themselves is becoming increasingly important.

We all know that is the responsibility of government to fund education, but in the current economic environment, our government is finding it difficult to provide the necessary resources to support the increased demand for education in our country through public funds alone, (the Nigerian factor, not far-fetched though). In many countries, private entities and families contribute more than 10% in financing tertiary education. For example, Sweden, Turkiye, UK, USA, Japan, south korea etc.

In my view, while we remain highly expectant with regards to funding from government, I encourage school managers at basic and tertiary education level to explore private sources of funding. I would also encourage school principals and Vice chancellors to facilitate connections and encourage Community collaboration and Engagement. This can be done by:

- (a) **Identifying Community Assets:** Encourage teachers, families, and community members to identify and share their skills, talents, resources, and connections. This could include individuals with expertise in specific subjects or industries, local businesses willing to provide resources or support, community organizations with relevant programs, or parents who can offer their time and skills.
- (b) **Partnerships with Local Organizations:** Collaborate with local businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations to provide additional support and resources to students and families. Explore mentorship programs, internship opportunities, or after-school activities that strengthen ties between the school and the community.
- (c) **Collaborative Planning:** Bring together stakeholders, including families, educators, community members, and local organizations, to collaboratively plan initiatives and projects that leverage the identified community assets. This could involve creating a shared vision, setting goals, and developing action plans that utilize the available resources and expertise.

Community Accountability and Transparency Initiative (CATI) can be launched with the aim of getting community development associations, town unions, Faith-Based Organizations, NGOs involved in monitoring, and deployment of public funds in schools.

Tertiary education should consider diversifying and enlarging their income from sources other than public funds that are consistent with their mission. the funding sources by exploring public-private partnerships, encouraging corporate social responsibility and local and international donors (support with infrastructural, instructional materials, teacher training, teaching salaries).

Again, diversifying sources of funding could be facilitated to enable institutions to behave entrepreneurially in terms of swift decision-making on commercial possibilities; building a market-oriented culture among staff and faculties; and a responsive supply of educational programmes and research activities.

The South East governments can draw on Diaspora financing by floating a Diaspora bond of fund to support consumption and investment in the education sector.

FGN annual budgetary allocation for education should not fall below 26 per cent of Nigeria's total budget according to UNESCO's recommendation.

Government should invest in support programs for students to address school dropouts, and suicidal tendencies among financially disadvantaged students. The criteria for the proposed student loan scheme should be reviewed and implemented. The student financial support Nigeria (a program aimed at providing financial assistance to Nigerian students pursuing higher education- scholarships, grants, loans and bursaries at PG, undergraduate and doctoral levels) should be implemented and strengthened by the government through the FMOE)

Technology integration is very crucial for access, enhanced and continued education system in Nigeria, particularly in the emergence of crisis (by the Federal Government through National Information Technology Development Agency).

Deploying blended learning approach to ensure learning continuity during emergencies has become imperative to safeguard and improve access to education in Nigeria.

The government needs to invest in ICT infrastructure in schools and provide access to digital resources for both teachers and students. Government should increase the provision of ICT in schools located in the rural areas, encouraging periodic training to expose teachers to modern-day teaching methods.

To combat corruption in the education sector, there is need to increasingly deploy both transparency -promoting tools (open govt data and information should be available for everyone to access and share. It keeps govt alert, responsive and honest) and accountability - promoting tools (teachers code of conduct, community (youth and CSOs) monitoring through budget tracking, and social audit trainings) in schools to mitigate corrupt practices.

Introduction of values, integrity and anti-corruption education in school curricular must be implemented to engender reorientation and behaviour changes amenable to the fight against corruption.

A culture of whistle-blowing to expose corrupt practices and their perpetrators should be encouraged and nurtured with appropriate incentives to and protection for whistle blowers as well as sanctions/ punishment to defaulters.

To address unemployment, collaboration with industries to identify in-demand skills and align educational programs with job market requirements is essential. FGN should adequately invest and finance TVET programmes for effective delivery. Partnership with industries can finance the purchase of or donate equipment and tools for TVET institutions and for training educators.

It is crucial to strengthen the integration of practical entrepreneurship education into the curriculum at all levels of the education system, equipping students with the skills and mindset needed to create their own businesses and employment opportunities.

Government should establish skill training centre across states

Encouraging apprenticeships (Igba Boyi) and internships can bridge the gap between education and employment. Less emphasis should be placed on certification.

The youths should be encouraged not to despise small beginning. It is time to encourage our youths to define themselves and believe in themselves, It is also time to define what education is to them, it is only then would they realise their potentials and build on it.

In addressing insecurity, security measures around educational institutions should be improved by deploying security personnel's such as the police, and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps and also the use of technology for surveillance.

A whole- society approach and collaborating with local communities to enhance security awareness and vigilance can also contribute to safer learning environments.

Promoting peace education in schools to instil conflict resolution skills and promoting tolerance is essential to reduce insecurity.

To address poverty, let me say that the many opportunities and strategies mentioned above will not prove attractive if the micro economic environment of the country is unstable: low growth, high inflation, the depreciating naira, and exchange rate volatility make for a daunting challenge.

FGN must get a handle on microeconomic management for the economic stability of the nation.

Individuals are encouraged to consume less, find more sources of income and spend wisely.

The diversification of Nigerian economy should be of utmost importance to avoid over dependence on oil.

Poverty alleviation programs should include cash transfers, vocational training, and microfinance initiatives.

Additionally, there is a need to expand existing school feeding programs to ensure that children from impoverished backgrounds receive proper nutrition to foster attendance and retention of students in schools.

Government should increase teachers' incentives in order to encourage the teaching profession, encourage the free education system especially in rural areas that are more prone to poverty and provide adequate teaching facilities in all educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the uncertainty and volatility which Nigeria society presents today creates a sense of fear, dispensation and hopelessness among the people. The state of education in Nigeria is lamentably poor and could endanger the future of our children and even subsequent generations. Quality education is the key factor in addressing poverty, hunger and insecurity. In this case, lets us broadly understand education to include vocational training, apprenticeship (Igbaboyi) and skill acquisition. Let us also bear in mind that there are perspectives and approaches that can be utilized to turn the situation around. We,

particularly those in south east are prepared to put education in the right footing, I believe we are waiting for a truly committed leadership.

And while we continue to wait that committed leadership, I think it is time to pay more attention to followership. Late former President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere said that of all the sins we as followers of the African Nation have committed, there is a single sin that we must not commit, and that is, we must not give up, we and must not live in despair no matter the situation we find ourselves. Each one of us must remember that we have a role to play to reset the Nigerian education, particularly at this period because if the ocean is to exist, the droplets must be good, if the forest is to exist, the trees must be good. Let us therefore play our parts and let the results be the testimony of our efforts.

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