



Nigerian Economic System and Access to Primary Education

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ABSTRACT

World over, it has been accepted that education is the key to nation building and occupies a planned locus in the budgets and administration of every Government. Every society has its distinctively designed set of systems and policies for educating its people. The Nigerian Government likewise, has its set of planned policies and facilities to achieve the education of its people. However, access to primary education in Nigeria is impaired by many factors. This paper therefore examined the Nigerian economic situation, the Nigerian education system, Access to education in Nigeria and the barriers to primary education access in Nigeria. Inadequate funding, incompetent teachers, home factors, religious beliefs, poor policy implementation and child disability were identified as some of the chief causes of the problem of unequal access to free and compulsory primary education in Nigeria. This paper therefore recommended inter alia, that, Government should provide adequate funding for the primary education needs of Nigerian children, provide enabling environments by ensuring educational provision and improvement of quality of education especially in the rural areas, provide financial and technical resources for development and implementation of an Inclusive Primary Education Initiative (IPEI), for children with disabilities and develop policies, plans and strategies to ensure that Nigerian children who are enrolled in primary schools remain in school, complete six years of primary education and possibly transit to upper basic level.

Keywords: Nigerian Economic System, Education, Access to Education, Primary Education.

INTRODUCTION

Education has been identified as a major driver for global sustainable development. Governments around the world have marked out plans on how to achieve the education of its citizens. In Nigeria, education is managed by all arms of Government; Federal, State and Local Governments. The World Education Service (WES) (2017) informed that the Federal Ministry of Education is ultimately responsible for policy formation, ensuring quality control, and is primarily involved with tertiary education. While secondary and primary education are largely the responsibility of state (secondary) and local (elementary) governments.

The concept of access to education is to make education available to the citizenry both in the rural and urban areas, providing an enabling environment that is geared towards creating full provision and decentralization of educational institutions; primary, secondary and tertiary education within states and local areas of the country. (Agile, 2018). It is established in the constitution of Nigeria by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) that access to educational opportunity is the right of every Nigerian citizen. It provides that the government shall through its policies ensure equal and adequate educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels and direct policies towards the protection of citizens' rights. However, Nigeria's SDG goal 4; of equal access to educational opportunity at all levels has not nearly been achieved. Regional, social, and political inequalities as well as inequalities of income and opportunities have been growing rapidly and have adversely affected access to education in the country. All children, no matter where they live or what their circumstances may be, have the right to quality education, but 1 in every 5 of the world's out-of-school children is in Nigeria.

(World Bank, 2019a). WES (2017) summarized that everything rises and falls on education, and by not educating our children, we are greatly damaging our continent's future and failing to help them become tomorrow's leaders.

The Nigerian Economic System

Nigeria is considered the most populous African nation in the world, expanding through 923,768 km² with a population of over 180 million. The country is rich with vast forest and land resources, rivers, oil, gas, and solid minerals. Considering the geographical and demographic features, natural endowments, income level and distribution, Nigeria is considered a potentially large centre of production and consumption activities, and has the potential of becoming a big economy. (Anyanwu, 2008). The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (2019) reported that Nigeria's population is projected to grow from more than 186 million people in 2016 to 392 million in 2050, becoming the world's fourth most populous country due to high birth rates and immigrations.

Nigeria operates a mixed economic system where the private ownership of resources is complemented with a substantial public sector ownership and participation in the production of economic activities. According to Bab (2015), a mixed economic system provides a form of compromise ground between capitalism and socialism, planned in a way to guarantee stability and growth without unduly frustrating free enterprise. The author added that Nigeria is a typical example of a mixed economy, a middle-income, mixed economy and emerging market, with expanding manufacturing, financial, service, communications, technology and entertainment sectors, ranked as the 21st-largest economy in the world in terms of nominal GDP, and the 20th-largest in terms of purchasing power parity.

Nigeria's economy is mainly dependent on petroleum. The economy grows as oil market grows. Anyanwu (2008) reported that Oil revenue accounts for 26.2 per cent of GDP, 89.8 per cent of foreign exchange receipts and 83.0 per cent of government revenue in the last five years. The economy has stumbled for years due to political unrest, corruption and poor fiscal policies. The economic collapse in the late 1970s and early 1980s and the lower spending of the 1980s contributed to substantial discontent which resulted in the structural adjustment program (SAP) with effect from 1986 to 1990. (Jonin, 2014) This program was based on the principle that, as GDP per capita falls, people demand relatively fewer social needs and relatively more private needs, which are essential items such as food, clothing, and shelter. Ndubuaku (2017) and U.S Central Intelligence Agency (2019) informed that about 70% of our revenues come from petroleum. The Agency further highlighted that the oil-rich Nigeria despite her strong fundamentals has been staggering with complexities such as inadequate power supply, infrastructural lack, delays in the passage of legislative reforms, an inconsistent regulatory environment, ineffective judicial system, unreliable dispute resolution mechanisms, insecurity, and pervasive corruption. These regulatory constraints and security risks have limited new investments in oil and natural gas, and Nigeria's oil production had been contracting every year since 2012 until a slight recovery in 2017. The U.S. CIA (2019) informed that Nigeria's economic growth has since been driven by growth in agriculture, telecommunications, and services. Despite this, the economic diversification and growth have not translated into a significant decline in poverty levels as over 62% of Nigeria's over 180 million people still live in extreme poverty. The African Development Bank Group (2019) confirmed the growing importance of service and Industry has strengthened growth in the economy. The sector accounts for about half of Nigeria's GDP, in 2018, reflecting a recovery in services and industry, particularly mining, quarrying, and manufacturing.

An Overview of Education in Nigeria

Education for a better life has been a constant concern for people all over history. In modern times, education has occupied a planned position as a tool pivotal for economic development. Education is seen as the bond which holds community and man. Every society has its uniquely designed system for training and educating its own people (Obayi, 2015). According to Amaewhule (2014), education emerged in Nigeria due to perceived obvious societal symptoms that the home could not anymore provide the needed experience to shape young people into mature adults. By implication, education has the supreme function to prepare the youth to for the world of work as well as becoming useful to society by providing the required skills and social orientation.

The Nigerian philosophy of education therefore is based on: the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen, the full integration of the individual into the community and the provision

of equal access to education opportunities for all citizens of the country at primary, secondary and tertiary levels in formal and vocational education programmes (Nnamani & Oyibe, 2016).

Education, according to World Bank (2002) is fundamental to all developing countries to prosper in a knowledge based economy and has become of critical advantage. The aims of higher education in Nigeria as outlined by the Federal Ministry of Education and as seen in Asiyai (2013) include amongst others:

1. Contribute to national development through higher level manpower training.
2. Develop and inculcate appropriate values for survival of the individual and the society.
3. Development of the intellectual capabilities of the individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environment.
4. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service.
5. Promote national unity and international interactions.

The Nigerian education system is divided into four levels, namely: kindergarten, primary/basic, secondary and tertiary levels. There is also provision for adult, non-formal and special education (Benwari & Dambo, 2014). Students are expected at each level to pass all prescribed examinations before moving to the next level.

Primary Education in Nigeria

Primary education, interchangeably called Basic education in this study, began in Nigeria during the colonial era by Missionaries in the 19th century. The first primary school in Nigeria was founded in 1843 in the town of Badagry (Adefule, 2016). Other primary schools began to grow around the south-western states through other missionary groups, before spreading to other parts of Nigeria. Amadioha (2011) informed that the spread of western education to the north was not a smooth sail as it was in the south, due to the existence of an Islamic system of education. However, with much effort, different missions began to open primary schools in the north, starting with the 1898, Church Missionary Society (C.S.M) which established schools at Zaria and Bida. This was followed by Anglican Missionary who established a school in the North in 1902 and others.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria through the National Policy on Education declared that Nigerian children are expected to commence primary education between the ages of 4-6 and are taught basic subjects like Mathematics, English Language, Social Studies, Christian Religious Knowledge, Islamic studies and Science, which are considered basic and form the bedrock for further learning (FRN, 2013). Some private primary schools stretch a bit further to teach subjects like Music, Computer Science, Home Economics, Fine Arts and French.

The FRN (2014) as enshrined in the NPE stated that, lawfully, basic education in Nigeria is free and compulsory for all children of school age and is driven through the Universal Basic Education (UBE) which is backed by the Compulsory, Free, Universal Basic Education Act, 2004, agreeable to the Global Education for All (EFA) initiative, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as National Development Goals encapsulated in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) document. The Objectives of the UBE therefore is summarized as:

- To provide a universal, free and compulsory basic education for every Nigerian child of school age;
- To cater for, through appropriate and complementary approaches the learning needs of young persons who have had reasons to interrupt their schooling and reducing the incidence of school-drop-out from formal school system, through improved relevance, quality and efficiency;
- To ensure acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, communicative and life skills, as well as the ethical, moral, security and civic values needed for the laying of a solid foundation for life-long learning.

The Nigerian Finder (2016) informed that the Local Governments are charged with the responsibility of implementing educational policies for schools controlled by Government while the ministry of education oversees the education system in total. The guidelines of the UBE as affirmed by The Nigerian Finder (2016) states that students are entitled to free education up to the junior secondary level.

Access to Primary Education in Nigeria

Education provides a meal ticket for anyone that can access it. The concept of access to education mirrors the affirmation of fundamental human rights, which emphasizes the right to education for everyone. Thus, access to education provides a guarantee for everyone entitled to education to receive it. It implies the right, opportunity or means of making education available within the reach of every citizen of a nation (Enahwo 2009). Eke (2015) defined access to education as the provision of opportunity through policies and educational institutions which ensure that young people attend school and complete schooling as a right.

As far as can be remembered, there has been continuous advocacy and efforts by stakeholders to make education accessible to all. The Nigerian Government is making efforts by building schools and employing teachers. Foreign Governments and international agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, etc, are also making efforts to provide support for developing countries like Nigeria to achieve education for all at least to certain level. Regardless of many attempts by the government through the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the Universal Basic Education Board (UBEB) to map out relevant policies geared towards positioning Nigeria's education system at a balance with international standards, and promote access to primary education, there continues to be the problem of unsatisfactory or non achievement of Nigeria's education goals. (Ben-George, 2018). Nigeria lacks policy coherence and ample implementation plans. (Obafemi, 2015; Okoroma, 2017). Okoroma (2017) noticed with displeasure the inconsistencies between educational policies and implementation efforts in Nigeria and worried that policy somersaults in education have impeded educational development in Nigeria and consequently hampered the nation's growth. He identified some key challenges hindering access to education as including: Inadequate qualified teaching staff, Insufficient funding, Inadequate teaching and learning facilities, Lack of guidance and counseling services, etc. These problems according to Okoroma 2016 are the same as those that handicapped the implementation of the 1976 U.P.E. initiative. This indicates that the change in nomenclature from U.P.E. to U.B.E. in 1999 did not stem from lessons learned from the failure of the then U.P.E., as the quality of education at the primary level today is worse than the pre-1976 era. He therefore advocated that, after the formation of educational policies, there must a translation of policy into a plan of action, emphasizing the need due to increasing national population and diminishing resource availability.

Nnamani and Oyibe (2016) focused on reviewing the extent of achieving Nigerian Educational objectives through effective delivery of Social Studies instruction at the primary education level. This according to them was due to the fact that the Social Studies curriculum was developed to solve the problem created by the separate -subject prevalent approach in the primary schools, adding that the implementation of such a curriculum would be aimed at integrating knowledge and inspiration from many realms of learning. The curriculum associated was aimed at creating a universe of inquiry, discourse and understanding among children of different backgrounds and aspirations, who as citizens of a free and democratic society are obliged to share certain responsibilities and problems. The authors listed the goals of Nigerian education to include: building a free and democratic society, just and classless, united, strong and self-reliant, a great and dynamic economy and a land full of opportunities for all its citizens

Effects of the Nigerian Economic state on Access to Primary Education

For education to really serve optimally as a vehicle for socioeconomic growth and sustainable development of Nigeria as well as for the actualization of its objectives, educational institutions, Government agencies and systems must function optimally in relation to set standards. The Federal Republic of Nigeria in the National Policy on education (2013) stated that the Government cannot single handedly provide all education opportunities for all Nigerians, especially with the dynamic and complex education system on ground. The policy therefore, provided that the private sector should continue to partner with the Government to provide education for all. To this end, many schools, according to Ikeobi (2012); such as the St, Paul's Academy, Jos, Dennis Memorial Grammer School, Onitsha, and so on were established by the church and her leaders. Many private individuals have also stepped in to fill the problem of unequal access to education by establishing schools. The problem however is that due to the economic structure of Nigeria, where Government has little control over private businesses, private school investors have become alarmingly profit thirsty, quoting outrageous

sums of money as tuition fees, placing huge charges on educational facilities and thereby building a yawning gap in access to education by all Nigerian children.

Geometric increase in Nigeria’s population during the oil boom era in the 1970s, caused the number of students to rise considerably without proportionate funding as resources are spread more thinly across large numbers of enrolled school children. This challenged the quality of education and led to a downturn in the late 1980s which brought about the neglect of education. (Iruonagbe, Imhonopi & Egharevba, 2015; Olanrewaju, 2018).



Figure 1: Primary School enrolment in Nigeria

Source: Ajikobi, (2018) <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-grading-nigerias-progress-in-education/>

The map of Nigeria above shows the distribution of pupils enrolled in primary schools across the states as at 2016. Ajikobi, (2018) informed that the Ministry of Education did not collect data for Borno state from 2011 to 2015 due to the insurgency by Boko Haram terrorist group. In the year 2016, 25.6 million children were said to be enrolled in primary schools nationwide. The net enrolment rate was fixed at 65 percent, while primary school completion and transition rate were 63 and 49 percent respectively in 2016/2017.

Table 1: Nigeria’s Primary School Completion and Transition Rate

Indicator	2007	2011	2016/17
Primary school completion rate	36%	73.4%	63%
Transition rate to secondary school	93%	70.0%	49%

Source: Ajikobi, (2018) <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-grading-nigerias-progress-in-education/>

The figures below are indicators by the Computer and Enterprise Investigations Conference (CEIC) 2018 on the number of out of school children in Nigeria within the period of 1999 and 2010. Figure 3

is the percentage representation of data in Figure 2, showing the number of primary-school-age children not enrolled in primary or secondary school.

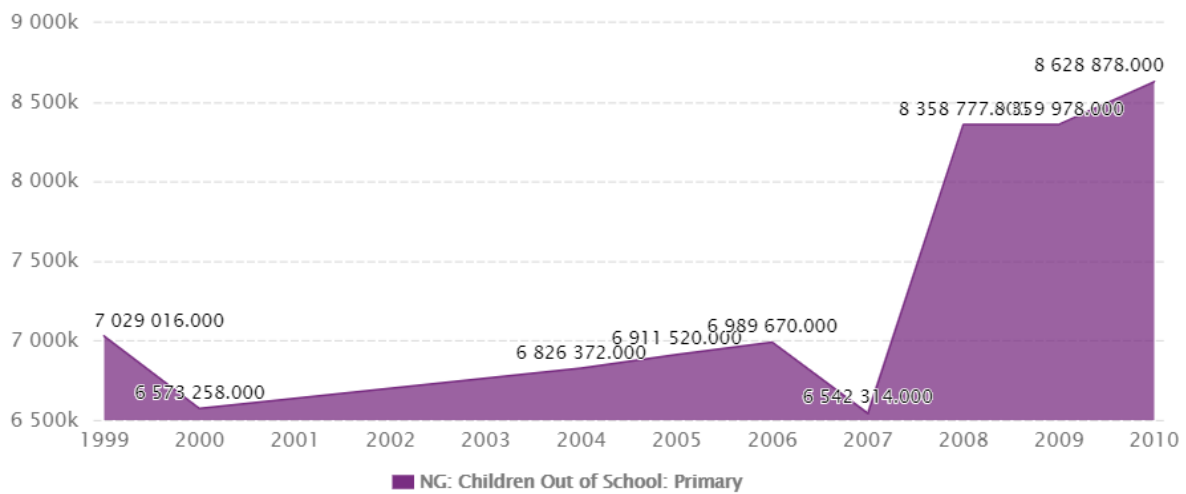


Figure 2: Number of Out-of-Primary-School Children in Nigeria
 Source: CEIC (2018) <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/nigeria/education-statistics>

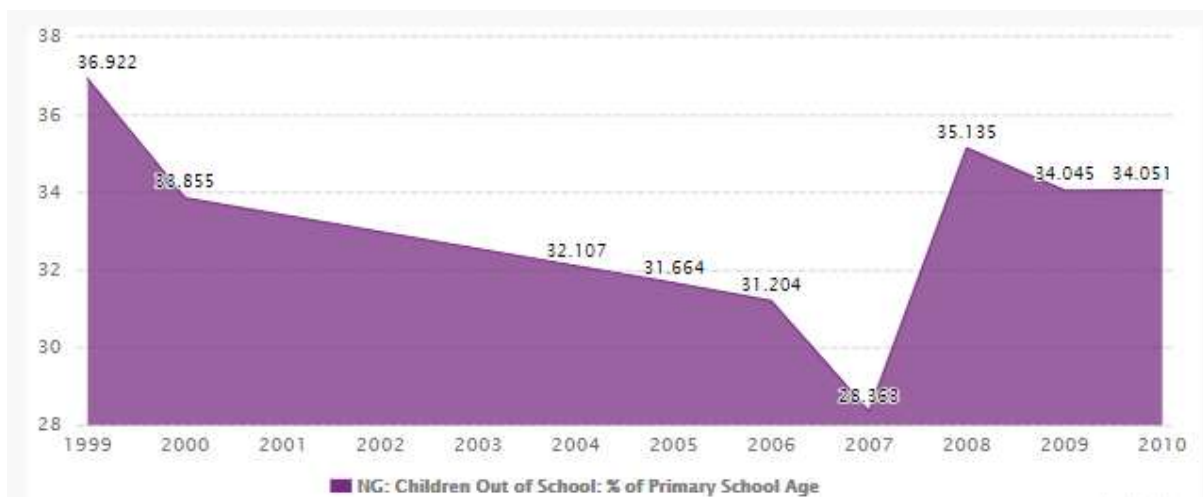


Figure 4: Percentage of Out-of-Primary-School Children in Nigeria
 Source: CEIC (2018) <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/nigeria/education-statistics>

Olarenwaju (2018) reported that Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the entire sub-Saharan Africa; that despite the increase in primary school enrolment in recent years, net attendance is just about 70% and translates to Nigeria having over 10.5 million out-of-school children. This record shows a rise in the number out-of-school children in Nigeria over the years. Although the records shown in figures 3 and 4 above ended in 2010 and may be outdated, UNESCO told Africa Check (2018) that there was no update on the indicator beyond 2010, but new population estimates caused it to be revised downwards to 8.7 million by the UNESCO.

Challenges of Access to Primary Education

In Nigeria, access to education is deterred by many factors ranging from psychological determinants, home factors, religious factors like the case of the Almajiri’s in the Northern parts of Nigeria, financial obstacles, cultural/traditional obstacles, Population growth, etc. Some of the key challenges that hinder free and equal access to primary education in Nigeria are:

Poor Policy Implementation

Poor policy implementation has also been identified as one of the most critical hydra headed obstacles confronting access to primary education. Not to mention that the increased enrolment rates due to growing population have created challenges in ensuring quality education, as resources are spread more thinly. According to Ubulom, Enyekit and Amaewhule (2011) The actualization of the blueprint of the UBE Programme cannot be achieved without total and goal-direct objectives of the implementation process. Nwufor (2015) advised that school cluster system is the solution to abysmal provision of infrastructure for education at a decent quality level. Nwufor (2015) added that the grouping together of several schools within the same geographical location, accessible to members of cluster groups to share materials and resources can improve the conditions of educational delivery and access to quality education.

Inadequate Funding

Another key factor challenging Nigeria's education is underfunding. Between 2003 and 2013, Nigeria's education funding fluctuated from 8.21 percent of budgetary spending in 2003, to 6.42 percent in 2009 and to 8.7 percent in 2013, while the Government significantly improved in 2014 to 10.7 percent. (WES 2017). Although the budgetary allocations for education have fluctuated over the years, Nigeria's 2019 budgetary allocation for education still falls below the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation's 2015 recommendation of 15-20 percent international benchmark for developing countries and still hovering around 5-7 percent region (Ameh & Aluko, 2019). WES (2017) also reported that while efforts were being made to increase capacity, problems of overcrowded classrooms, shortage of instructional quality, laboratory facilities, bad leadership and others were also on the increase.

Benwari and Dambo (2014) wrote that the laudable goals of Nigeria's education can be achieved through proper and adequate management of the educational system. The authors proposed transformational leadership model as a visionary approach to education management which encourages change and promises to surmount the bureaucratic bottlenecks of administration and aid informed decision making, leading to greater efficiency.

The Universal Declaration of free and compulsory basic education as a Human Right makes clear that poverty and lack of funds should not be a barrier to primary education in Nigeria. Governments in many developing countries, over the last several decades have announced the abolition of school fees and have recorded impressive increases in the number of in-school children (Rueckert, 2019). To the author, increasing access to education can improve the overall health and longevity of a society, grow economies, and even combat climate change and can be achieved through supports from foreign educational aids and grants.

Home Factors

Eke (2015) identified the home factors posing obstacles to young people's access to education. Some of the factors highlighted are: geographical location of the home, (urban or rural setting) as people in the urban areas tend to get more access to education than those in the rural areas, level of education of the parents, income of the household, health status, cultural/traditional beliefs, psychological factors, etc. The author expressed concern that the year 2015 which marked the end of the targeted millennium development goal (MDG) of attaining education for all at the basic in Nigeria level has come and is now past, still not all young people have been able to benefit from that, meaning that the goal has not been attained. Despite all attempts by the Government to promote universal basic education (UBE) through the enactment of laws and the promulgation of the UBE for a free and compulsory education for the first nine years of schooling for all Nigerian children, some obstacles have continued to stand in the way of this attempt. Eke (2015) Wrote that young people's access to education merely on the threshold of enrollment in schools is not enough, arguing that enabling young people remain in school to learn what leads to the total development of their potentials, constitutes real access to education through provision of adequate infrastructure, learning aids, relevant curriculum and all forms of relevant restructuring. But until then, access to education means more than enrolment in a school. Ubulom, Enyekit and Amaewhule (2011) asserted that most of the primary and secondary schools are centered within the urban cities and not at the rural areas and even the existing ones at the rural areas do not have enough teachers for the different subjects and there is usually a problem of proximity of the school from home.

Engagement of Incompetent Teachers

One problem of Access to education is that of engaging incompetent teachers. Educating the whole person is an important goal of education in itself. The teacher therefore is in control of many factors that affect learning, behavior, motivation and achievement. The teacher is expected to take into account the readiness of the learners based on their psychological, emotional, family, physical and social needs. (Amesi, Akpomi & Amadi, 2014). This is to say that being a teacher is way past mere subject knowledge and owning a degree. Okebukola (2017) speaking to the Punch newspaper said that a great part of the problems challenging Nigerian education system is the engagement of incompetent teachers. In his words, “the master key which opens the intricate door to quality education is the teacher”; and until competent teachers are engaged with a provision for good welfare scheme, Nigeria’s education problem will remain unsolved. The cardinals to improving Nigeria’s education system according to Okebukola are:

- To completely revamp the curriculum
- Employ qualified teachers
- Implement teachers’ salary scale
- Mete sanctions on those who mistreat teachers

Children with Disabilities

Furthermore, education is still largely an unfulfilled dream for millions of children with disabilities. Regrettably, despite the fact that education is a universal human right, being denied access to education is common for the world’s 93 to 150 million children with a spectrum of disabilities. (World Bank, 2017; Reuckert, 2019). World Bank (2019b) reported that Children with disabilities are among the most marginalized and vulnerable in many countries, facing a multitude of barriers in attending, participating benefitting from school. Infact, they are the most likely to be excluded from education. Listed below are some distressing facts relating to accessing quality education in Nigeria by children with disability:

- Children with disabilities are less likely to stay in school than their non-disabled peers.
- Approximately 85% of primary school-age children with disabilities who are not in school have never attended school.
- When children with disabilities attend school, an inaccessible learning environment and a lack of support for learning hinders their education.
- Learning gaps have widened between children with disabilities and their non-disabled peers in general, and they are the least likely to complete primary school.

Religious Factors

Ivowi, (2015) identified the case of religious discrimination in the practice of Traditional Qur’anic Schools dominant in Northern Nigeria where Almajiri Integrated Model Schools (AIMS) were formed and reputable mallamai were engaged to teach the children with emphasis on reading and memorizing the Qur’an. Unicef (2019) reported that in north-eastern and north-western states of Nigeria, 29 and 35 percent of Muslim children, respectively, receive Qur’anic education, exclusive of basic literacy and numeracy skills and the government considers such children to be officially out-of-school. According to the agency, 2.8 million children in northern Nigeria are in need of emergency support for education in three conflict-affected states: Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. In these States, at least 802 schools remain closed and 497 classrooms are listed as destroyed, with another 1,392 damaged but repairable. This is the outright result of social crises rising from religious orientations and rejection of western education which translated into what is termed “Boko haram”. Crises in these regions have not only resulted in shutting down of schools but have also weakened economic activities in the region.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria’s dream of a free and compulsory basic education for Nigerian children of school age, which was marked to be achieved by the year 2015 has not nearly been achieved. The issue of access to primary education needs to be re-conceptualized as policy statements have not been matched with adequate planning and implementation road maps and actions. There is a yawning cry for a holistic and multidimensional approach to leadership, financing, planning and implementation of the national policy on education for Nigeria to achieve her goal of free and compulsory education for all.

THE WAY FORWARD

The following recommendations are provided as a way forward to improving access to primary education in Nigeria:

1. The Universal Basic Education Board should develop effective strategies for policy implementation to forestall school dropout rate and reduce the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria, especially within the first six years of primary education. The Board should intensify efforts at ensuring that policy statements for school administration would include regulation of cost of education in the private sector, see that all policies are implemented effectively and sanctions served to offenders, to ensure equal access to education as well as the achievement of Nigeria's basic education goals.
2. Adequate funding for the primary education needs of Nigerian children should be given considerable redress to give total and equal access to education for the Nigerian child. The Government should provide enabling environments by ensuring educational provision and improvement of quality of education, especially in the rural areas to promote the education of children who are less likely to be educated. If this is achieved, Nigeria's education system will be at par with global education standards.
3. The Government and the regulatory Agency for primary education should intensify efforts to sensitize and provide the right infrastructure to promote access to free and compulsory primary education, especially within the rural areas to curb the excuses of proximity, poverty, traditional beliefs, etc.
4. Competent teachers with the required set of skills and attitudes should be engaged in primary schools, to bring about desired learning outcomes, as primary education is the foundation on which all other forms and levels of education are built.
5. The Government should provide financial and technical resources for development and implementation of an Inclusive Primary Education Initiative (IPEI), for children with disabilities.
6. Since the Government considers children who receive only religious education without basic literacy and numeracy skills to be officially out-of-school, it is imperative for the Government to develop strategies and carry out actions as a matter of urgency to avert this barrier to free and equal access to education and boost economic activities in all parts of Nigeria. The Education for All Initiative for the attainment of basic literacy and numeracy skills should be enforced in all parts of the country irrespective of religious orientations to achieve Nigeria's national development goals.
7. Generally, the Government should include in the National Policy on Education, policies, plans and strategies to ensure that Nigerian children who are enrolled in primary schools remain in school, complete six years of primary education and possibly transit to upper basic level.

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