

ANALYZING THE HISTORY AND EXPLORING THE FUTURE OF BASIC QUALITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SDG FOUR

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Abstract

The inspiration for this study stems from the United Nations member states' decision to unveil a global development agenda set to span fifteen years (2016–2030). Every member country, including Nigeria, was required to formally adopt, domesticate, and integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their national development planning strategies. This agenda, code-named Agenda 2030 to signify its terminal year, prioritized key global objectives, with SDG 4 focusing on inclusive and equitable quality education a critical area for Nigeria given its historical challenges in basic education implementation. Using speculative, prescriptive, and analytic modes of philosophical inquiry, this study examined Nigeria's policy alignment with the SDGs, particularly Goal 4, which emphasizes lifelong learning opportunities for all. The research identified significant barriers hindering the achievement of SDG 4, revealing a wide gap between policy formulation and implementation. The challenges included inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure, lack of instructional facilities, and systemic corruption. To meet the 2030 deadline, the study recommends that the Nigerian government: Strengthen support systems for basic-level teachers, increase education funding, improve infrastructure and instructional resources, reduce out-of-school children by enforcing free basic education as mandated in the National Policy on Education. By addressing these issues, Nigeria can make meaningful progress toward SDG 4 and contribute to the global 2030 agenda.

Keywords:

Basic Education, Quality Education, Nigeria, SDG Four, Education History, Future of Education.

Introduction

Nigeria adopted and began implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2016, aiming to achieve Quality Basic Education by 2030 in alignment with the United Nations 2030 Agenda (2016–2030). This agenda serves as a follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000–2015), which were established by the United Nations General Assembly. This study focuses specifically on SDG 4 (Quality Education), examining its implications within the Nigerian context. In September 2015, heads of government from 193 UN member states convened in New York, USA, to launch this 15-year global development agenda, officially designated Agenda 2030 to mark its target completion year. The MDGs' implementation period concluded in December 2015, prompting the UN to mandate that all member countries including Nigeria—integrate the SDGs into their national development plans. The SDGs, also referred to as the Global Goals Agenda, require full compliance from all member nations. This study explores Nigeria's efforts to align with SDG 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education. Additionally, the paper analyzes past educational policies, current challenges in Nigeria's basic education system, and future prospects for achieving this goal.

Reflections on the Past of Nigeria's Basic Quality Education

Quality Basic Education is the Preparation for the Future and Immediate Needs of Children Quality Basic Education serves as both preparation for the future and a response to the immediate needs and interests of children, particularly when socialization is emphasized as its most important aim. Such education is designed to guide the future of children born into a cultural context, as clearly articulated in Nigeria's National Policy on Education:

“There is a need to clearly state the philosophy and objectives that underlie the government's massive investment in education and to spell out, in unambiguous terms, the policies guiding its educational efforts.” The policy further clarifies the Federal Government's commitment to a uniform education system, stating: “It is the government's wish that any existing contradictions, ambiguities, and lack of uniformity in educational practices across different parts of the Federation be removed to ensure even and orderly national development.”

Who Should Decide on Education in Nigeria? What Factors Should Guide Decision-Making for Basic Education's Future?

Nigeria has achieved significant milestones in the history and development of education. The Federal Government has made efforts to harmonize the education system, beginning with the formal launch of the National Policy on Education in October 1982. However, its implementation traces back to 1976 with the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE). The 1982/1983 academic session marked the start of the Junior Secondary School (JSS) system. Since then, Nigeria has revised the National Policy on Education in 1981, 1998, 2004, 2007, and 2013. Additionally, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was launched on September 30, 1999, by former President Olusegun Obasanjo, leading to the Universal Basic Education Act (UBEA). This act mandates the provision of Basic Education, comprising:

- 1. Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE)
- 2. Primary Education
- 3. Junior Secondary Education

Despite overwhelming evidence that education is crucial for community and national development, inequalities in access to quality basic education persist. Millions of poor Nigerians remain excluded from educational opportunities and outcomes. Recent political changes present Nigeria with another opportunity to fundamentally review policies and social programs, ensuring quality primary

education for all. Rather than piecemeal reforms, the entire education system would benefit from coherent national policy development. New policies under the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) must align with Nigeria’s democratic aspirations while reflecting the realities of its National Vision 2030.

The Goals of Education in Nigeria (As Stated in the National Policy on Education)

- 1. Moral and Civic Development – Cultivating morally sound, patriotic, and effective citizens.
- 2. Social Integration – Fully integrating individuals into their immediate communities, Nigerian society, and the global community.
- 3. Equal Access – Ensuring equitable access to quality education at all levels, both within and outside the formal school system.
- 4. National Consciousness – Instilling national values and awareness.
- 5. Skill Development – Equipping individuals with mental, physical, and social competencies to contribute positively to society.

Nigeria’s weak education system has contributed to lawlessness, moral decay, corruption, and insecurity. No nation can achieve economic, social, political, or cultural prosperity without a sound and functional education system. While SDG 4 presents opportunities for Nigeria to improve basic education, challenges remain. Education as a fundamental human right is not justiciable, meaning the Federal Government cannot be legally compelled to provide basic education. Furthermore, state and local governments have proven incapable of delivering basic education without federal intervention. To secure a better future, Nigeria must: Strengthen policy implementation, ensure adequate funding and accountability, promote inclusive and equitable access and Align education with global best practices while preserving cultural relevance. Only then can Nigeria build a strong educational foundation for sustainable development.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria’s educational system has undergone numerous changes, marked by the adoption of various programs, policies, and visions. However, quality basic education in the country faces a myriad of challenges, including: poor funding Insufficient financial investment in education, Inadequate infrastructure – Lack of proper classrooms, teaching aids (computers, laboratories, and libraries). Polluted learning environments Unconducive settings for effective teaching and learning, Corruption and mismanagement, Misallocation of resources and poor administration, Lack of routine inspections – Failure by regulatory bodies to monitor schools effectively, Absence of continuity, consistency, and commitment (the 3Cs) Frequent policy changes without proper implementation and Failure to enforce educational policies – Laws and frameworks exist but are rarely executed. In Nigeria, basic education covers pre-primary up to the first three years of secondary school (Junior Secondary School, JSS). The success or failure of the entire education system hinges on the quality of basic education. Unfortunately, poor-quality basic education has led to significant setbacks, contributing to Nigeria’s broader societal struggles. over the years, Nigerian society has endured negative experiences due to these systemic failures, further emphasizing the urgent need for reform, accountability, and sustainable solutions.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Quality Basic Education in Nigeria. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of seventeen aspirational global objectives with 169 targets and 244 indicators, collectively framed as “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” Adopted by all 193-member states of the United Nations General Assembly, the SDGs serve as a universal blueprint for ending extreme poverty, combating inequality and injustice, and

addressing climate change over a 15-year period (2015–2030). Relevance of the SDGs to Quality Basic Education in Nigeria The SDG framework presents a transformative opportunity for Nigeria to align its national development plans with global priorities. As an active member of the United Nations, Nigeria participated in the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and has committed to integrating the SDGs into its policies.

Implications for quality basic education include: SDG 4 (Quality Education) – Ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all, with specific targets for early childhood, primary, and secondary education. Gender Equality (SDG 5) – Promoting equal access to education through affirmative action and policy reforms. Poverty Reduction (SDG 1) – Education as a tool for breaking cycles of poverty. Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10) – Bridging gaps in access to education across regions and socioeconomic groups.

Sustainable Development: A Historical Perspective

The concept of sustainable development gained global traction in the 1980s following the Brundtland Report (Our Common Future). The report emphasized the need for international cooperation, innovative governance, and long-term planning to balance economic growth with social equity and environmental protection. Nigeria’s Commitment to the SDGs Nigeria has pledged to: Domesticating and integrate the SDGs into national development strategies, renew efforts toward achieving quality education (SDG 4) and gender equality (SDG 5), Strengthen policy implementation to ensure no one is left behind. The SDGs into actionable plans, Nigeria can harness education as a catalyst for sustainable development, fostering a future where every citizen benefits from equitable, inclusive, and high-quality basic education.

National Teachers Institute¹ posits that the sustainable development goals will integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development which comprise the following social goals;

- Goal 1: End Poverty.
- Goal 2: End Hunger,
- Goal 3: Good Health,
- Goal 4: Quality Education,
- Goal 5: Gender Equality,
- Goal 6: Reduced Inequality.

The economic dimensions of the SDGs are the following

- Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- Goal 8: Good job and inclusive economic growth.
- Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure,
- Goal 10: Sustainable cities and communities, and
- Goal 11: Sustainable Consumption and Production

Environmental dimensions comprise the following

- Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns,
- Goal 13: Climate Change,
- Goal 14: Conserve water and marine resources,
- Goal 15: Sustainable use of land resources,
- Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies.
- Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalization of partnership.

¹ National Teachers Institute: Guidelines for Facilitators. NTI Printing Press. 2018.
pg. 15

Sustainable Development and the Role of Quality Education in Nigeria

In essence, sustainable development requires eliminating the fragmentation of environmental, social, and economic dimensions, instead focusing on their integration. Education—particularly basic education—is a fundamental human right and a critical driver of sustainable development. It enhances individuals' capacity to address environmental and developmental challenges. Human activities, though varying across socio-cultural contexts, pose the greatest threat to natural resources and, consequently, human survival. As Charter and Tischner argue, sustainable development cannot be achieved through technological solutions, political regulation, or financial instruments alone. Instead, it demands a holistic approach—transforming how we think and act through educational philosophy to shape new policies and practices. The lies in improving quality education in Nigeria, ensuring it fosters sustainable development at all levels and within all social contexts. The central challenge is achieving human well-being without depleting the very resources that sustain it.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and SDG 4

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) empowers individuals to take responsibility for creating a sustainable future. The integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into education policy seeks to ensure equitable, quality education for all citizens. This study specifically examines Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4: Quality Education) for the period 2016-2030, investigating how Nigeria can improve its basic education system while overcoming existing challenges. Unlike prior research, this study uniquely analyzes SDG 4 from a philosophical standpoint, exploring how the educational components of the SDG agenda can transform Nigeria's basic education to achieve global competitiveness. Human activities present serious threats to global survival, particularly through the depletion of natural resources. Education plays a vital role in sustainable development by enhancing individuals' capacity to address both environmental and developmental challenges. In this context, a reciprocal relationship of responsibility exists: while every citizen bears responsibility for their nation, the nation equally holds responsibility for its citizens. Within Nigeria's federal system, state and local governments carry the primary responsibility for providing basic education, with the Federal Government playing a crucial interventionist role.

According to United Nations², the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), attended by 178-member states, produced the first international framework document - Agenda 21. UNESCO, as the designated United Nations body, assumed responsibility for implementing this mission. The principles and framework of Agenda 21 established the conceptual foundation for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), influencing global policies, regional actions, and local initiatives worldwide. This framework specifically advocates for the reorientation of education systems toward sustainable development.

As noted by Karatzoglou, ESD was designed to engage all educational levels in preparing citizens to take responsibility for shaping society - both presently and in future generations. This educational vision seeks to: Improve access to quality basic education, Reform educational curricula, Enhance public awareness. UNESCO's vision for ESD extends beyond immediate educational outcomes, aiming to equip populations with the capacity to: Address historical, current, and emerging global challenges, develop constructive and creative solutions, Build sustainable and resilient societies.

² United Nations: Sustainable Development Conference on Environment and Development. RIO de Janeiro Brazil. 1992.

Research Questions

1. This paper seeks to answer the following research questions:
2. What is the Sustainable Development Goals number four (SDG4) and its bearing on Quality Basic Education in Nigeria?
3. What has been the Nigerian Government Effort in the Implementation of SDG Number four from 2016 to date and beyond toward the 2030 deadline?
4. What are the possible challenges in the implementation of the future Quality basic education component of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria?
5. How Could Sustainable Development Goal Four Agenda promote the future of basic education in Nigeria targeted to the attainment of the nation’s Vision (NV) 2030?

Objectives of the study

The Objectives of this study are to find out the following:

1. To analyze the Sustainable Development Goals number four (SDGs4) and its bearing on Quality Basic Education in Nigeria?
2. To discuss Nigerian Government Effort in the Implementation of SDG four and project future of the programme to the 2030 deadline.
3. To examine the challenges in the implementation of the future Quality Basic Education component of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
4. To find out how the Sustainable Development Agenda could promote the future of basic education in Nigeria targeted to the attainment of the Nation’s vision 2030.

Methodology

Methodology in research examines the systematic approaches and procedures employed in conducting scholarly investigation, particularly within educational philosophy. This study utilized three fundamental philosophical research methods: The analytic method - for critically examining the conceptual foundations and challenges of Quality Basic Education in Nigeria The speculative method - to explore potential solutions and future directions and the prescriptive method - to propose normative recommendations for improvement. The analytic approach was particularly emphasized to systematically investigate and substantiate the identified challenges within Nigeria's basic education system. This methodological choice allowed for rigorous examination of both the conceptual and practical dimensions of quality education provision, while maintaining philosophical rigor in addressing the research objectives.

Application of Philosophical Research methods in this paper

The study was carried out through the use of three philosophical research activities that establish research in the philosophy of education. It is intended that this gives the research work a genuine philosophy of education.

Analytic Mode

The analytic mode of research in the philosophy of education was applied to establish the foundational instruments of basic education, including universal access through early childhood development and primary education. The study focused on basic education for sustainable development and global citizenship, as well as the means of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the Nigerian government. Specifically, it addressed the shortcomings in achieving SDG Goal 4, which focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. The SDG Agenda promotes the development of basic education in Nigeria. This study analyzed and

clarified key concepts by examining their relationships with related ideas and offered possible strategies for the Nigerian government to achieve the objectives of SDG Goal 4 in the context of Nigeria.

Speculative Mode

The speculative mode of philosophy of education was applied in this study following a careful observation of past, present, and anticipated future challenges associated with government policies and programs aimed at achieving quality basic education in Nigeria. The speculative approach is often employed to gain deeper insight into the essence of phenomena and individuals and to develop a comprehensive view of reality. Nigeria is one of the 193 signatories to the United Nations General Assembly's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This study raises several critical questions: What are the possible challenges in implementing the education component of the SDGs in Nigeria? How can the SDG Agenda promote the development of basic education in Nigeria, specifically in relation to the attainment of the nation's Vision 2030? Can Nigeria realistically achieve Goal 4 of the SDGs by the year 2030? What strategies can the Nigerian government adopt to meet the set objectives of SDG Goal 4? Furthermore, what is the relationship between Sustainable Development Goal 4 and quality basic education?

Prescriptive mode

The application of the prescriptive mode of philosophy of education is essential to this study, as it involves a careful and critical examination and analysis aimed at making recommendations to revitalize and improve the quality of basic education in Nigeria. The study employed the prescriptive method to suggest a course of action for redirecting Nigerian education policy, based on an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the government's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda for the period 2016–2030, and to propose a way forward.

Speculating the future of Quality Basic Education in Nigeria

The presence of capable and dedicated human resources is essential for Nigeria's sustainable development. The government regards basic education as a vital tool for creating a workforce that can serve in various capacities and positively contribute to the country's socio-economic and political growth. In particular, the government aims to direct basic education toward the development of relevant human capital, fostering independence, national cohesion, and global awareness.

Although the educational system has undergone several modifications, there have been no significant improvements, especially as global technological advancements continue to influence the country. In terms of the introduction and execution of reforms in the Nigerian educational system, two major issues are evident. First, reforms are often adopted from foreign models—particularly from the United States and Europe—and implemented without due consideration for their relevance or applicability to local culture. This practice, rooted in colonial history, still persists today. Second, many reforms lack a holistic approach; they are introduced and implemented without accounting for their potential impact on other aspects of the educational system and the broader society.

Quality basic education is an open system with several interrelated components. As a subsystem of the broader social structure, any changes within it inevitably affect other facets of society. Furthermore, structural issues within Nigerian society contribute to the challenges faced. The implementation of reforms, policies, and programs often suffers from a lack of continuity, consistency, and commitment. Frequent changes in government result in policy shifts, with little regard for the achievements or plans of

previous administrations. This leads to the premature termination of programs and hinders the resolution of systemic problems.

For reforms to succeed in educational institutions, the involvement of professionals such as philosophers of education, instructors, and educational managers is essential. However, reforms are frequently announced without considering the required infrastructure. Decisions must be made regarding the availability and relevance of existing infrastructure, much of which may not be suitable for the proposed reforms. For example, countries like China are making deliberate and substantial investments in areas such as robotics, nanotechnology, 3D printing, big data analytics, advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, cloud computing, human-machine interaction, and hypersonic technologies.

Quality basic education can provide Nigeria with the foundation it needs to engage with the future. As argued, basic education is a major social institution and the bedrock of sustainable national development. It encompasses the structural transformation of the economy, human capital development, technological innovation, the cultivation of democratic culture, enhancement of human capabilities, social cohesion, and nation-building. Quality basic education has the power to uplift and transform Nigeria. In light of this, what is Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) all about, and what are its implications for quality basic education in Nigeria?

The possible challenges in the implementation of the education component of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria

There are several challenges in the implementation of the education component of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria. Access to quality basic education in Nigeria is often marked by confusion, misinterpretation, and bias among government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Consequently, it is the responsibility of all levels of government to coordinate every aspect of universal basic education programs to ensure uniform, qualitative, and functional education across all states.

The vital role of basic education as a driver of national development has sparked a global demand for more functional and qualitative educational systems. This concern was reflected in the resolutions of the Education for All (EFA) Conference held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 and again in December 2015. These resolutions were reinforced by the United Nations General Assembly’s adoption of the 2030 Agenda at its headquarters in New York, underscoring the importance of quality basic education in achieving the SDGs.

Basic education serves as the foundation for further educational advancement and is meant to be free and compulsory for every child within the basic education age range. The educational revolution of the early 1970s led to a surge in school enrolment between 1970 and 1984. However, between 1985 and 1990, there was a noticeable decline. For instance, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) dropped from 82% in 1985 to 68% in 1990, rose to 86% in 1993, and fell again to 70% in 1996. The Blueprint on Basic Education mandates the government to provide free, universal, and compulsory education for every Nigerian child of school-going age.

This study conducted a situational analysis of access to teaching and learning at the basic education level. Findings indicate that access to education for both boys and girls has increased due to social mobilization and school development initiatives. Nonetheless, several out-of-school factors continue to hinder enrolment and retention, including illness, hunger, the need for paid or unpaid labor, and parental attitudes. Despite policy provisions, access to quality education has remained elusive for decades. According to the

World Bank, over 16 million out of the world’s 113 million children without access to education are Nigerian.

This troubling situation persists despite constitutional guarantees. Section 18 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states: “Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.” However, the question remains: Does the Nigerian government provide quality and sound basic education to its citizens?

The SDG Agenda has the potential to promote the development of basic education in Nigeria and support the achievement of Nigeria’s Vision 2030. A conducive learning environment—defined as an environment that facilitates easy and effective learning—plays a key role in this process. Such an environment not only supports the acquisition of literacy and numeracy but also integrates learners’ economic and occupational realities into their education. Experts assert that a conducive school environment enhances student happiness and improves learning outcomes.

To create such an environment, the government must ensure adequate funding, provide quality infrastructure, and maintain facilities that support effective teaching and learning. Infrastructure refers to the physical and organizational structures and assets available in schools to aid educational delivery. A conducive learning atmosphere, therefore, is fundamental to effective learning.

Concerns about the quality of basic education have persisted for decades. Critics have long argued that education in Nigeria—both during the colonial era and after independence—was too theoretical and irrelevant to African realities. Today, this concern is echoed by education stakeholders, including state governors and public officials, who have openly acknowledged the systemic rot in the education sector.

While quantity focuses on increasing enrolment numbers, quality concerns the relevance and effectiveness of education, asking: What kind of education is being provided? Quantity is easier to achieve than quality, but for the education system to succeed, there must be strong mechanisms for management, quality assurance, and regular monitoring and evaluation. These processes ensure proper fund utilization, accountability, and adherence to employment procedures. Can the policy framework of the Sustainable Development Goals promote quality basic education in Nigeria? The answer lies in the strategic and consistent implementation of SDG-related reforms, guided by inclusive planning, cultural relevance, infrastructural readiness, and continuous evaluation.

The success or failure of any educational system depends on proper planning. It is the foundation of every effective educational policy or program. Without proper planning, even the best-designed education programs are likely to fail. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) program of the past, for instance, suffered due to inadequate planning. This view is a recurring one with Nwagwu in Amuchie, A. A, Asotibe, N & Audu, C. T,³ who observed that poor planning was one of the problems responsible for the unsuccessful implementation of the former programmes.

How could the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda promote the development of basic education in Nigeria, targeted toward the attainment of the nation’s Vision 20:2030?

Poor implementation remains a major challenge responsible for the failure of previous educational schemes and policies in Nigeria. Many educational programs, especially in basic and primary education, have suffered due to ineffective implementation. Several factors have hindered the successful execution of these programs. Educational planning, which involves a systematic analysis of the problems in the

³ Amuchie, A. A, Asotibe, N & Audu, C. T, An Appraisal of the Universal basic Education in Nigeria, Global Journal of Management and Business Research (A) Vol. XIII Issue XI Version 1. 2013. pg. 20

education sector, is essential for resolving these issues. However, a lack of accurate and reliable data has undermined effective budgeting and planning, which are crucial for political, economic, and social advancement.

The collection of educational and related data is critical for effective planning. The study further revealed that the situation is worsened by the fact that the funds allocated and expended on education by various bodies are not always reflected in the official budgets of federal, state, and local governments. These shortcomings affect the entire basic education system and contribute significantly to the decline of education in the country. Why is the education sector underfunded? Does the government take serious measures to fund basic education? Underfunding remains a persistent issue. Without adequate funding, infrastructure, teaching resources, and staff development suffer—leading to poor outcomes in basic education.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in its 1995 report on Human Development in Nigeria, highlighted the country’s education crisis and warned of the rising number of illiterate individuals, calling it a significant developmental challenge. The Policy implementation in the educational sector and basic education in particular has been very ineffective in Nigeria as a result of the following reasons:

- i. Lack of trained, experienced system managers;
- ii. The politicization of educational decision-making alienates faithful implementation of the policies;
- iii. Intra and inter-organization and personality conflicts.
- iv. Inadequate monitoring and evaluation machinery at the local, state and federal governments;
- v. Underestimation of human and material resources for the implementation of educational plans and policies;
- vi. Political instability which failed to provide a conducive atmosphere for policy implementation;
- vii. Political patronage and indiscipline in the management of public institutions take the form of ethnicity, nepotism and tribalism.
- viii. Financial indiscipline in the management of financial resources in the public system is otherwise called corruption and fraud. Such indiscipline results in high wastages not only on the material resources available but also on the human resources earmarked for implementation.
- ix. Lack of exemplary leadership styles.

UNESCO recommends that 26% of a country’s annual budget should be allocated to education. According to the UN agency, no educational program can succeed without adequate funding. Nigeria spends significantly less on education compared to many other African and developing countries. For instance, South Africa allocates 28.8%, Singapore 23.6%, Algeria 21.3%, Cuba 15.1%, and Ghana 30%, while Nigeria allocated only 7% of its budget to education in 2021. As a result of poor funding, educational facilities in Nigeria are often dilapidated or completely collapsed. Basic education is a capital-intensive venture that yields returns slowly. The inability of the federal, state, and local governments to consistently fund education reflects a lack of strong political will to implement and sustain quality basic education. Given this situation, one may ask: Is basic education truly a priority for Nigeria?

To address the shortage of teachers in basic education institutions, the Federal Government introduced the Federal Teachers Scheme (FTS) alongside the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. The scheme initially began with 40,000 teachers and, despite being relatively young, made a positive impact in bridging the teacher gap. However, underfunding severely affected its sustainability. By 2016, the number of teachers under the scheme had reduced to 5,000 due to delays in the release of capital funds meant for allowances. This led to a backlog of unpaid wages. Additionally, many state governments failed to absorb the FTS teachers into their mainstream workforce, further aggravating the situation. It is important to note

that Nigeria is not the only country facing political challenges, but political stability measured by public support, integrity of governance, and the absence of unrest—is critical for educational reform and development.

What are the strategies employed by the Nigerian Government to achieve the set objectives of Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

The Nigerian government has expressed its commitment to achieving Goal 4 of the SDGs – Quality Education. Basic education in Nigeria falls under the Concurrent Legislative List, meaning it is a shared responsibility between the federal and state governments. It must be free and compulsory for children within the defined age group.

The goals of basic education in Nigeria go beyond eradicating illiteracy. They aim to equip children with skills that enable them to become productive, self-reliant, and contributing members of society. This vision aligns with Section 17, Subsection 3(a) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which states:

"The State shall direct its policy towards ensuring that all citizens, without discrimination on any group whatsoever, have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment."

Despite this constitutional backing, donor agencies and international institutions have not made sufficient efforts toward improving early childhood education and scaling up literacy in Nigeria. In response, the Nigerian government has made concerted efforts to strengthen its basic education programme, recognizing it as the foundation for all other levels of education. The two priority areas under the Education for All (EFA) initiative remain and Quality of education and Financing for education

Implications for Sustainable Development Goal number four (SDG4) on Nigerian Basic Quality Education

The Nigerian government is working diligently to provide quality education at the basic, secondary, and post-secondary levels to achieve the United Nations' Agenda 2030, particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. At different levels, the government has made efforts to ensure quality education in line with this global vision. However, two major challenges persist in delivering quality basic education in Nigeria: access and quality. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004 was established to address three key issues: access, equity, and quality. In pursuit of these objectives, the government has taken significant steps, such as distributing 4,961,469 copies of textbooks (covering Basic Science, Mathematics, and English) to Junior Secondary Schools and constructing additional classrooms.

For Nigeria to succeed, the government must demonstrate commitment, continuity, consistency, and seriousness in strengthening basic education, as it forms the foundation of the entire educational system. Past failures in the education sector were identified as a major obstacle to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), contributing to Nigeria's ongoing crisis.

Safe School Initiative in the Face of Insecurity resulting in Abductions of Nigerian Students

The abduction of 276 girls from a public secondary school in Chibok, Borno State, in 2014 brought international attention to Nigeria's school security crisis. Since then, ensuring the safety of students and school facilities—whether from armed attacks or school shootings—has remained a critical challenge.

Muhammadu Buhari, Jonathan's successor and a former military ruler, campaigned on restoring security in Nigeria, a promise that contributed to his electoral victory in 2015. However, between December 2020

and August 2021, Nigeria witnessed 12 mass abductions and four attempted kidnappings in schools. Some of the most alarming incidents include:

- December 11, 2020: Over 300 boys kidnapped from Kankara Government Science Secondary School.
- March 11, 2021: 39 students abducted from Federal College of Forestry Mechanization, Mando.
- March 15, 2021: Three teachers kidnapped from UBE Primary School, Rama, Birnin Gwari.
- April 29, 2021: Four children abducted from a school in Gana Ropp, Plateau State.
- May 30, 2021: 136 students and teachers kidnapped from Salihu Tanko Islamic School, Tegna, Niger State.
- June 17, 2021: 103 students abducted from Federal Government College, Birnin Yauri, Kebbi State.
- August 16, 2021: 15 students, a lecturer, and his family kidnapped from the College of Agriculture, Bakura, Zamfara State.

The Greenfield University attack (May 2021) was particularly brutal, with five students killed before the remaining hostages were released.

Government and Security Responses

The scale of insecurity has forced the government to deploy soldiers and police indefinitely to protect schools, especially vulnerable basic education institutions. However, the effectiveness of state-led security responses—whether against Boko Haram or other armed groups—remains questionable.

In 2014, Gordon Brown, the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, recommended fortifications, telecommunications systems, guards, and safety equipment for schools. Following the 2018 Dapchi abduction, the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) demanded 24-hour military patrols, leading to security personnel being stationed in schools across the northeast. Despite these measures, school abductions and killings persist. The Nigerian army is already deployed in 35 out of 36 states, yet simply placing armed personnel in schools does not address the root causes of violence. More firearms in schools will not ensure safety if the underlying issues—such as state failure, public distrust in security institutions (police and military), and reliance on vigilante groups—remain unresolved. Vigilante outsourcing is not a sustainable solution to school kidnappings.

Some Recorded Incidences of Banditry in Nigeria (2018- 2020)

S/NO:	Newspaper	Reporter(s)	Dates of Publication	Nature and Place of Attack	Causalities	Remarks
1.	The Punch	Gbenro Adeoye	March 31, 2018	Bandits attacked Bawan Daji village of Anka LGA of Zamfara State and killed over 30 people	Over 30 people were killed	
2.	The Nation	The Nation	March 1, 2019	21 killed in Kawaye village in Bagega community of Anka LGA of Zamfara State	16 people were killed and 40 others got abducted	
3.	The Punch	The Punch	June 9, 2019	25 killed in bandit attacks in Klahu, Tsage and Geeri villages in Rabah LGA of Sokoto State	25 people were killed	

4.	The Punch	Olaide Oyelude	July 4, 2019	11 killed in bandit attacks on Kankara and Danmusa LGA of Katsina State	11 people were killed
5.	The Nation	The Nation	August 19, 2019	Four villagers were killed in banditry attacks in Tsayu village of Jibiya LGA of Kastina State	Death of 4 villagers
6.	The Punch	Maiharaji Altine	January 17, 2020	Zamfara bandit kill 31 persons in attacks at Babban Rafi Village in Gummi LGA and Makosa Village in Zurmi LGA of Zamfara State	Death of 31 persons
7.	Nigerian Tribune	Muhammed Sabiu	March 2, 2020	Bandits kill 50 people in villages in Igabi and Giwa LGA of Kaduna State	50 people were killed while several others injured
8.	The Punch	Olaide Oyelude	April 20, 2020	Bandits kill 47 villagers in multiple attacks on Kurechin Atai, Kurecin Giye, Kurechin Duste, Makauwachi and Daule Villages in Kastina State	A total of 47 people were killed in all the villages
9.	The Nation	AbdulGafar Alabelewe	April 24, 2020	Bandits kill seven and kidnap one in Akwunakwo, Kabirasha and Damba villages in Chikun LGA of Kaduna State.	7 persons were killed and 1 person was kidnapped
10.	Nigerian Tribune	Muhammed Sabiu	May 6, 2020	5 killed and DPO shot in multiple bandit attacks at Faskari and Sabuwa LGA of Kastina State	5 people were killed, 1 was kidnapped and DPO was shot
11.	The Punch Death of	Maiharaji Altine	May 20, 2020	Bandits kill 12 in attack on three communities in Tsafe LGA of Zamfara State	12 people and cart away animals
12.	The Punch	Maiharaji Altine	June 5, 2020	Bandits kill 21 people in Maru and Talata-Mafara LGA of Zamfara State	Death of 21 people

13.	The Nation	Justina Asishana	June 25, 2020	Four feared killed in Sunko, Gavya and Marafa communities in Manta District of Shiroro LGA of Niger State	Death of 4 Persons
14.	The Nation	Justina Asishana	July 21, 2020	16 persons kidnapped in bandit attacks in Magani and TunganBajo communities of Rafi LGA, Niger State	16 persons were kidnapped
15.	The Nation	AbdulGafar Alabelewe	July, 26, 2020	Bandits kill 10 in two attacks on 3 villages of Jema'a and Kaura LGA of Kaduna State	10 persons were killed
16.	The Punch	Olaide Oyelude	August 9, 2020	Eight bandits, two otherskilled after bandit attacks on Zamfarawa village in Batsari LGA of Kastina State	Death of 2 villagers and 8 bandits
17.	Vanguard	Vanguard	September 4, 2020	Bandits kill 22 people, including 19 vigilantes in Dukku and Kagara towns, Niger State	22 people were killed
18.	Vanguard	Ibrahim Hassan Wugo	September 13, 2020	Bandits abduct 16 family members at Udawa farming community of Kaduna State	16 people were abducted
19.	Vanguard	Ibrahim Hassan Wugo	September 18, 2020	Bandits invade Gidan Madi Police Division in Tangaza LGA of Sokoto State	DPO and 1 Inspector were killed and 2 women abducted
20.	Vanguard	Wole Mosadomi and Shehu Danjuma	October 12, 2020	Bandits kill 14 persons in Ruwan Godiya village of Faskari LGA of Kastina State and Kagara town of Rafi LGA of Niger State. Bandits kill Southern Kaduna District Head and son	14 people were killed, 3 injured and 1 kidnapped Death of 2 People
21.	Vanguard	Ibrahim Hassan Wugo	November 17, 2020	Bandits kidnap 8 ABU students on the Kaduna-Abuja road Bandits kill Southern Kaduna	8 Students were kidnapped.

				District head and son at Gidan Zaki, Zangon Kataf LGA	
22.	Vanguard	Wole Mosadomi	November 20, 2020	Bandits kidnap 14 and kill mobile policeman in Mariya LGA of Niger State	14 people were kidnapped and death of a policeman
23.	Vanguard	Ifeanyi Nwannah	November 23, 2020	Armed bandits kidnap Imam, 17 worshippers from a mosque in Kanoma District, Maru LGA, Zamfara State	18 persons were kidnapped
24.	Vanguard	Bashir Bello	December 1, 2020	Bandits invade Tashar Bama, Dogun Muaze and Unguwar Maigayya villages of Sabuwa LGA of Kastina state	7 farmers including nursing mother were killed and abduct 30 others
25.	Vanguard	Vanguard	December 5, 2020	Bandits attack Kasuwan Magani town in Kajuru LGA of Kaduna State	1 person was killed
26.	Daily Post	Daily Post	December 10, 2020	Kidnappers raid Pmahbe Layout in Ushafa, Abuja	3 persons were abducted
27.	The Nation	Uja Emmanuel	December 12, 2020	Gumen kill four and injure seven in Tse-Angbande in Makurdi LGA of Benue State	Death of 4 persons and 7 person injured
28.	The Nation	Justina Asishana	December 13, 2020	Bandits kill ECWA Gospel Kubwa Kuta in Chukuba village of Shiroro LGA of Niger State	1 person was Killed and 20 others were kidnapped

Sources: Compilation from Nigeria’s Daily Newspapers (2020) and (2022).

Withdrawal of students by their parents and guardians in the face of insecurity

Nigeria and its educational institutions have faced a surge in security challenges in recent years. National security encompasses the safety of all aspects of the nation, including schools. However, the government’s misleading reports on security and the political elite’s tendency to deceive even foreign officials raise serious concerns.

What does true security and good governance mean today? Are Nigerian politicians deceiving themselves, or are they unaware of these fundamental societal needs? Is security merely about protecting lives and property, or is it overshadowed by favoritism and diplomatic maneuvering?

Insecurity is not just a local or national issue it has cross-border, continental, and even global implications. Faced with escalating violence, Northern Governors (particularly those of Katsina and Zamfara) resorted to negotiations with insurgents and bandits terrorizing their states. This approach, however, risks trivializing, politicizing, and even tribalizing security issues.

This was not the first-time state governments opened "peace talks" with armed groups. President Buhari initially endorsed such deals, but their effectiveness remains questionable. Some State Governors have demanded the power to prosecute suspected insurgents locally, a move opposed by former Attorney General Abubakar Malami. However, this proposal has faced backlash: Former Governor Yahaya Bello (Kogi State) and Nasir El-Rufai (Kaduna State) outrightly rejected negotiations, advocating instead for military action and labeling terrorists as enemies of the state. North-East Governors urged the Federal Government to delegate prosecution authority to states, arguing that federal processes are too slow and ineffective. While deploying security forces is a short-term measure, the root causes of insecurity weak institutions, corruption, and lack of trust in governance—remain unaddressed. Without systemic reforms, no amount of military presence or peace deals will sustainably secure Nigeria's schools or communities.

Domestication of the United Nations Agenda on Quality Education into the Nigerian Basic Education System

Nigeria must take immediate action to ensure its education system equips citizens to meet the challenges of 21st-century Quality Basic Education. State governments must prioritize expanding access and fully realizing the right to education for all. To achieve meaningful progress, Nigeria must break free from the socio-economic-political model imposed by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which currently shapes its education system. While Nigeria's founding fathers and modern educators have roots in this system, the nation must develop an independent framework tailored to its unique needs.

If Nigeria disengages from UN-dependent structures, the persistent issues plaguing quality basic education will begin to fade, allowing genuine progress. A network of knowledge-based associations could replace the UN's socio-economic and political influence. However, real change in education requires first transforming the political power structures governing schools.

The UN's capitalist-individualist ideology has eroded Nigeria's traditional value systems. Instead, every nation should:

1. Re-examine its indigenous governance models for education.
2. Adopt a system that aligns with its cultural and national context.

If this approach is implemented across all educational sectors and reinforced with each leadership transition, Nigeria can restore unity, progress, and a truly effective education system.

Nigeria's Free and Compulsory Basic Education Bill: Progress and Challenges

The Nigerian House of Representatives recently passed a bill on free and compulsory basic education, a long-debated issue in the country. While UNESCO and UN human rights agencies emphasize the right to basic education, Nigeria's Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act does not recognize it as a fundamental right—only as a compulsory requirement.

Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children globally, with 10.5 million youths (ages 5–14) not attending school, Constitutional Provisions on Education. The 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended) addresses education in Section 18 (Chapter 2), which states:

- 1 The government shall ensure equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.
- 2 It shall promote science and technology.
- 3 It shall eradicate illiteracy by providing, when practicable:
 - Free, compulsory, and universal primary education.
 - Free university education.
 - Free adult literacy programs.

However, Section 6(6)(c) declares Chapter 2 provisions (including education) as non-justiciable, meaning citizens cannot sue the government for failing to meet these obligations.

Contradictions in Policy and Implementation Former Education Minister Adamu claimed that education is not free, despite the UBE Act and Constitution mandating free and compulsory education. Federal vs. State Responsibility Constitutionally, basic education falls under state and local governments, not the federal government. Yet, major initiatives like the 1976 Universal Primary Education (UPE) and 1982 Junior Secondary School (JSS) UBE program were federally driven. Due to weak capacity at state/local levels, the federal government often intervenes, though it cannot be legally held accountable for failures in basic education.

The National Language Policy Controversy, in a November 30, 2022, Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting, the government approved a National Language Policy mandating mother-tongue instruction for the first six years of primary school. Former Minister Adamu announced the policy, calling it a "national priority." Nigeria has over 625 languages, making implementation complex and contentious. Critics argue this move contradicts existing policies and may face practical challenges in multilingual classrooms. While Nigeria has progressive constitutional provisions on education, implementation gaps, legal non-justiciability, and federal-state contradictions hinder progress. The new language policy adds another layer of complexity, requiring careful execution to avoid further disparities.

Summary of the Findings

- i. The study found out that there existed wide gap between the policy formulation and situation analysis occasioned by unfaithful implementation manifested in poor funding, lack of infrastructural, instructional facilities.
- ii. The study found out that the failure of the state governments to absorb the teachers of the Federal teachers’ scheme into their main stream service further aggravated the problem.
- iii. The study found that out of school children in Nigeria appears to be the highest in the world. The paper found that one of the major challenges facing the provision of quality basic education in Nigeria is inadequate funding. This has resulted in poor infrastructure, lack of instructional materials, and low remuneration for teachers, which affects the quality of education.
- iv. paper is that there is an inadequate training and professional development for teachers in Nigeria. The lack of effective teacher training programs has resulted in a shortage of skilled teachers, which has affected the quality of education.

Conclusion

Nigeria has demonstrated its commitment to providing quality basic education through its ratification of key United Nations agreements. By adopting these international instruments, the Nigerian government has affirmed its obligation to establish proper structures and standards to fulfill educational objectives for its citizens. Basic education serves as the most critical tool for national development in Nigeria, necessitating clear articulation of the philosophical foundations and specific goals underlying the country's educational investments. The nation remains dedicated to achieving UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 on Quality Education, while also meeting international benchmarks that have enabled access to grants and donor funding. To ensure sustainable progress, Nigeria's education system requires fundamental reforms including the development of a coherent philosophical framework aligned with national development priorities. This should be accompanied by a gradual decentralization of educational governance, with increased responsibility devolved to local governments, communities and relevant stakeholders.

Strategic planning, efficient resource coordination and systematic capacity building will be essential to overcome existing systemic challenges. The regulation of basic education from primary through secondary levels demands both flexibilities to adapt to Nigeria's diverse needs and cultural sensitivity to ensure broad acceptance and effectiveness. Through these measures, Nigeria can establish an equitable, high-quality basic education system capable of driving meaningful national progress.

The implementation of these reforms will require careful balancing of federal oversight with local autonomy, while maintaining alignment with both national priorities and international standards. By addressing these key areas, Nigeria can transform its basic education system into a more effective engine for human capital development and socioeconomic advancement.

Recommendations

Nigeria's basic education system should be reinvented for improved delivery. There is a need for multi-sectorial collaborations that focus on the economic, social, environmental, political, and legal aspects of educational access. The following choices are suggested as a course of action in light of the study's findings:

1. Nigeria should focus on the economic, social, environmental, political, and legal aspects of education access. Out-of-school children in Nigeria appear to be the highest in the world. Access to basic quality education is a vital human right that must be ensured for everyone.
2. Nigeria's teachers should be paid a reasonable wage that will enable them to maintain a decent standard of living for themselves and their families. Existing teachers must be retrained to adapt to contemporary teaching pedagogy. The administrators of schools should have seen to it that curriculum and standards are updated.
3. The Government should concentrate its efforts on giving new teachers in basic-level schools supportive systems. Efforts should also be made to improve educational funding, infrastructure and instructional quality and quantity, systemic corruption among other factors reduce out of school children by making basic education as free as possible as enshrined in the National Policy on Education in order to meet deadline of 2030.
4. The Government should regular strengthen monitoring and evaluation of the education system are essential to identify gaps and measure progress towards sustainable development goal four.

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