

Challenges to Educational Quality in Nigeria

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Abstract

Education is said to be the most potent instrument for measuring national development and indices for economic growth of developed, developing and underdeveloped countries of the world. Unfortunately, even with the global acceptance of the importance of education in engineering development, economic growth and social transformation, there are still numerous internal crisis as well as mirage of external problems facing the quality and ability of education to contribute to the technological advancement of African States. This paper looks at the challenges to educational quality in Nigeria. The objectives of the paper are; to find out the challenges to educational quality in Nigeria; to determine the extent to which education can contribute to national development and growth of the Nigerian economy and to proffer solution to the challenges of educational quality. This study employed a descriptive survey design, where four tertiary institutions from Plateau State were purposively selected for the study. A total sample of 360 respondents were selected through the simple random sampling technique from the four higher institutions. A validated structured questionnaire with 15 items, having a Cronbach's Alfa reliability index of 0.89 was used for data collection. The collected data was analyse using means and standard deviation. Findings from this study showed that inadequate funding, administrative recklessness, non-commitment of government to the educational sector and non-meritorious standard of recruitment are the major challenges hampering the institutionalization of quality education in the state. It was recommended among others that, the government should adhere to 26% budget funding allocation to education from national budget as recommended for African Government by United Nations Organisation.

Background to the Study

Education is one of the most far-reaching requirements for development, alleviating poverty, improving health outcomes and quality of life, reducing gender and social disparities, and enhancing economic productivity. Education contributes to economic growth and societal stability through developing individuals equipped with cognitive and life skills necessary for sustaining the livelihood, and contributing to the productive sector.

The importance stated above explained why education is seen as a crucial sector in the development and transformation of any nation the world over. For education to drive development and social transformation, it requires a major investment in human capital development, which in turn play a critical role in long-term productivity and growth at both micro and macro levels (Uwa, Lanrewajuu & Ojeme, 2014). This explains why the state of education in Africa and Nigeria in particular continues to be an issue of national discourse at all levels. Consequently, the implication of the declining quality of education in Africa at all levels has far reaching negative impact on a nation's moral, civic, cultural and economic sustainability. At this point, it is important to realize that discussions on education and its reforms to make it contribute meaningfully to national development should gradually and systematically move away from a politicized to a more analytical approach that will appreciate the complexities inherent in proffering genuine and workable solutions to challenges to educational quality in order to revamping educational system.

In the Nigerian situation, for the educational sector to contribute meaningfully to national development and social transformation; there is need for proper funding from the three tiers of government. If this has being the case, the Academic Staff Union of Universities will not have any need to embark on industrial actions, Academic Staff Union of Colleges of Education wouldn't have locked down the system for a period of five months just in 2018 alone, infrastructural deficits in the primary, secondary and post-secondary schools would have been a thing of the past; there will be no more brain-drain as research activities will be effectively carried out and examination misconduct will be eradicated or reduced and the sector will contribute meaningfully to national development.

Kingdom and Maekae (2013) states that something urgent has to be done in the educational sector since 'illiterates' are leading Nigerians. But the problem with Nigeria is that there is no difference between an educated president and not so enlightened ones in terms of their leadership. Irrespective of the above observation, the main focus of this paper is to examine the challenges to educational quality in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Education has proven over the years to be the most important instrument for measuring national development and a key agent for economic growth and development of any nation. However, this importance and global acceptance of the role of education in national development, a plethora of challenges still affects the delivery of quality

education in contributing to social transformation of many nations. Also, results of empirical studies have presented contradicting findings on the main issues confronting educational quality. They findings varied from country to country, and even the same country, they still varied from one state or region to another. This appeared to show that each region or state have a peculiar problem relating to the challenges of educational qualities. Therefore, this study specifically investigates the challenges of education quality in plateau state, Nigeria. This is aim at equipping the state government, the policy makers, researchers and all the stakeholders in education with information which will help in carving out policies that will improve the quality of education in the state.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the challenges to educational quality. The specific objectives are;

- i. To find out the challenges to educational quality in Plateau State, Nigeria
- ii. To determine the extent to which education can contribute to national development and growth of the Nigerian economy
- iii. To proffer solution to the challenges of educational quality

Research Questions

- i. What are the challenges to educational quality in plateau state, Nigeria?
- ii. To what extent can education contribute to national development and growth of the Nigerian economy?
- iii. What are the possible solution to the challenges of educational quality?

Literature Review

African states are facing numerous problems in implementing an educational policy that would encourage economic development, social transformation, resolve curriculum and Pedagogical problems, economic and political problems intermixed (Otara, 2012). The difficulties confronting most governments in African Countries, however, have been attributed to be basically political (Scanlon & Moumouni, 2012). Africa's problems have no single explanation and differ considerably from country to country. The downward divergence of the continent in the past few decades was attributed to a number of factors such as: poor national economic policies; the prevalence of autocratic and corrupt governments; frequent civil and regional conflicts; and the challenges posed by the environment, which leaves Africa vulnerable to infectious disease and makes it more difficult to produce adequate food or trade with the global economy.

Based on the peculiarity of Nigeria, one of the challenges to qualitative education is the issue of quality assurance (Adegbesan, 2011). Adedeji and Bamidele (2003) asserted that the alarming rate of ineffectiveness of teachers (inputs) in the profession of teaching has led to substandard students (products) and it has extended to graduates who are unemployed and unfit to be placed on any job as an outcome of their half-baked nature, is not a welcomed development. However, the dilemma situation is living among us.

In the views of Olaniyan and Okemakinde (2010), it is wrong to associate the low level of literacy and school achievement to school related factors only. But they identified additional factors such as the home, the society, government and personal characteristics to play a vital role in education development. This is why the need for educational supervision and control is needed to be on ground and effective to checkmate the excesses and the residual functions of developing human capital by the education sector. Sadly, the inspectorate service has dwindled in their expectations at the federal and state levels. This is because the inspectorate service is plagued by a number of issues and challenges (Okugbe, 2010).

Another challenge is the question of inadequate funding that has remained a menace of the higher education in the country. The main source of these problems can be pointed to insufficient funding of the higher education system (Okemakinde, 2010). For many years, funding shortfalls have been a reoccurring decimal as enrollments per year have increased more rapidly than the government's capacity to maintain its proportional financial support. Simply put, higher education system has handicapped with the financial resources needed to maintain educational quality in the midst of significant enrollment expansion. Again, one of the most damaging problems that affects development in the human capital sectors in Nigeria is that of absenteeism; particularly the absenteeism of service providers in education which is widespread and unpredictable, and contributes to low levels of educational outcomes. This prevalence of absenteeism is negatively correlated with economic development and income and thus poorer countries suffer more than wealthier states.

According to Sifuna (2010), the quality of university education, like other levels of education can be measured through an analysis of: (a) inputs such as teaching and non-teaching staff, curricula, facilities and technologies for teaching and learning arrangements for students' catering and institutional management; and (b) outputs such as tests and examinations. Physical planning in the public universities in many countries does not commensurate with their rate of growth and expansion as more students are enrolled, the managers of universities continue to accommodate them in the existing facilities. This has often led to an over-stretching of such facilities. As a consequence, there is congestion in lecture theatres, workshops, laboratories, libraries and boarding facilities. The situation is most deplorable in the sciences and technologies. The required inputs which include adequate laboratory space and workshops as well as spare parts for equipment maintenance and repair, routine replacement and upgrading of equipment, reagents and other consumable supplies are seriously lacking in most universities in the region.

Libraries are among the worst hit facilities in public universities in most countries. Despite increased enrolments, universities do not invest much in the acquisition of books. Libraries hold less capacity of the required books most of which are too old. Some libraries which were designed to accommodate 600 students now serve as many as 10,000 students (Sifuna, 2010). Apart from inadequate space, most libraries cannot afford to contribute to

current journals and other scholarly publications from outside Africa have greatly declined. There is also a scarcity of reference materials.

The massive enrolments without a corresponding increase in the number of teaching staff has meant that the staff to student ratio has risen (Mohamedbhai, 2012). Normally each university has its own staff development scheme. However, there are many indications that due to financial constraints, post-graduate study, which is the basis of staff development does not meet the demands in the university faculties. To recruit academic staff for the public universities, the tendency has been towards relaxing the recruitment and promotion criteria. Consequently, many of the academic staff who in the past would not have qualified for university teaching are now doing so. Moreover, due to very low salaries, it is no longer possible to attract competent staff from abroad to teach in the public universities.

From the poor situation of the teaching and learning environment and the quality and morale of the academic staff, not much is expected in the quality of instruction. Many lecturers in public universities use old material (yellow notes), which means that the courses they teach are also out of date (Gikunder & Njeru, 2017). Coupled with the flight of the best lecturers from the public universities, the situation has affected the quality of instruction in the public universities. With lack of reading materials, students prefer the familiar expository method of teaching as they perceive university Education to consist primarily of the reproduction of assimilated lecture materials for purposes of passing examinations.

Measures to increase the quality of higher education through teaching and research remains the principal objective and not to abolish universities as at one time proposed by some leading researchers at the World Bank (Sifuna, 2010). Long-term development goals cannot be met without it. It is however, appreciated that improvements in quality are unavoidably expensive. The improvement of quality can be achieved through a variety of measures. Urgent attention should be paid to the establishment and gradual implementation of standards of provision for the full range of inputs to teaching and research. The provision of libraries with the necessary books and periodicals should be the highest priority, closely followed by supplying laboratories and workshops with consumables and materials needed for equipment maintenance and repair. The revival of long-term efforts to upgrade the academic qualifications of staff is also quite essential through postgraduate training in masters and doctoral programmes.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. A purposive sampling technique was used to select four tertiary institutions in plateau state. They include: Federal College of Education Pankshin, College of Health and Technology Pankshin, College of Education Gindiri and Plateau State polytechnic Barkin-Ladi. These institutions were selected because they were among the few higher institutions in session in the State when this study was being carried out. A total sample of 360 respondents (students) were selected

through a simple random sampling technique from the institutions. They were administered structured questionnaire with 15 items rated on a five-point Likert scale. The research instruments were subjected to scrutiny by research experts in order to establish the content validity of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's Alfa which yielded 0.89. Data collected was analysed using mean and standard deviation. Any factor with a mean of 3.50 and above were accepted (Agreed) while, a factor with a mean of less than 3.50 were rejected (Disagreed).

Results

Research Question One: What are the challenges to educational quality in plateau state, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of challenges to educational quality in Plateau State, Nigeria

S/N	Item statements	X	SD	Remark
1	Inadequate funding contributes to poor educational quality in Nigeria	3.64	1.63	Agreed
2	Non adherence to quality assurance impede social transformation of education	3.27	1.55	Disagreed
3	Administrative recklessness is a major challenge to educational quality	3.98	1.20	Agreed
4	Non-commitment of government to confronting challenges in the educational sector	4.00	1.25	Agreed
5	Non-meritorious standard of recruitment impede social transformation of education and quality	4.18	1.27	Agreed

NB: $X < 3.49 =$ Disagreed, $X \geq 3.50 =$ Agreed

Table 1 analysis shows that respondents agreed on all the statement of challenges to educational quality and social transformation with mean values greater than the cut off mean point of 3.50 except for non-adherence to quality assurance impede social transformation of education. The common challenges to educational quality and social transformation is with (M=4.18, SD=1.27), followed by non-commitment of government to confronting challenges the education nal sector (M=4.00, SD=1.25). However, mean values greater than 3.50 signifies the extent to which such factor constitutes a problem to educational quality and challenge to the social transformation of the Nigerian economy.

Research Question Two: To what extent can education contribute to national development and growth of the Nigerian economy?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Extent to which Education contribute to National Development and Growth of the Nigerian Economy

S/N	Item Statements	X	SD	Remark
1	Inculcation of national consciousness.	4.10	1.11	Agreed
2	Training of the mind in the understanding of the world around.	4.34	1.03	Agreed
3	Acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of social abilities	3.98	1.37	Agreed
4	Increase in family income	3.95	1.30	Agreed
5	Contributes to family size management	4.39	0.99	Agreed

NB: $X < 3.50$ = Disagreed, $X \geq 3.50$ = Agreed

Table 2 indicates that respondents agreed on all the items ($X \geq 3.50$) as the extent to which education can contribute to national development and growth of the Nigerian economy. Item 5 (Contributes to family size management) is the most contribution of education to national development and the growth of the Nigerian economy ($M=4.39$, $SD=0.99$), followed by training of the mind in the understanding of the world around ($M=4.34$, $SD=1.03$), as inculcation of national consciousness ($M=4.10$, $SD=1.11$), while the least perceived contribution is the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of social abilities ($M=3.95$, $SD=1.30$). Thus, figures generally imply that perceived contribution of education to national development and growth of the Nigerian economy are: Contributes to family size management, training of the mind in the understanding of the world around, inculcation of national consciousness, acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of social abilities, and increase in family income.

Research Question Three: What are the possible solution to the challenges of educational quality?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Solution to Challenges of Educational Quality

S/N	Item Statement	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1	Give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically	4.39	0.98	Agreed
2	Gender friendly education policy should be initiated	3.83	1.21	Agreed
3	More budget should be allocated to education and training programmes for teachers	3.85	1.25	Agreed
4	Revisit the recruitment policies to ensure that only qualified teachers are employed	4.19	1.08	Agreed
5	Government should ensure that only men and women of honest and proven integrity into position of authority in the school system	4.13	1.19	Agreed

NB: $X < 3.49$ = Disagreed, $X \geq 3.50$ = Agreed

Table 3 shows that all the item statements on solution to the challenges of educational quality in Nigeria had mean scores higher than the mean bench mark of 3.49. Thus, give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically ($M=4.39$, $SD=0.98$) is the most agreed suggested remedy, followed by revisit the recruitment policies to ensure that only qualified teachers are employed with ($M=4.19$, $SD=1.08$), while the least perceived remedy is gender friendly education policy should be initiated. The above results portray that a commitment on the part of the government can reduce if not eliminate the challenges of quality of education.

Discussion

It is difficult to be left completely satisfied by the wide range of studies looking at the challenges to educational quality in Nigeria. However, based on the data collected and its analysis so far, the major challenges to educational quality in Nigerian society can be drawn thus: Inadequate funding, Non adherence to quality assurance, administrative recklessness, non-commitment of government to confronting challenges in the educational sector and non-meritorious standard of recruitment. Although, this did not de'ter the truth that education has contributed in no little ways in the transformation of the country. To support this, Ajayi and Afolabi (2009) have also remarked that education is largely perceived in Nigeria as an indispensable tool which will not only assist in meeting the nation's social, political, moral, cultural and economic aspirations but will also inculcate in the individual knowledge, skills, dexterity, character and desirable values that will foster national development and self-actualization.

Finding on research question 2 in Table 2 showed that all the five items on the extent of contribution of education to national development and growth of the Nigerian economy were agreed upon by the respondents. They include: inculcation of national consciousness; training of the mind in the understanding of the world; acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of social abilities; increase in family income; and contribution to family size. This findings agrees with Hallak (1990) who asserted that “education is a human right because it leads to individual creativity, increases the participation in the economic, social, cultural activity in society, contributing as such effectively to the human development”. Sen (2002) opined that development occurs when people are able to accumulate something that can make their life more valuable. But we all know that development is the fundamental element of economic progress. Growth economic development is and an instrument for achieving the Millennium Development Goals whereas: It leads to poverty reduction through increased investment in specific human development activities; it leads to increased revenues enabling the implementation of policies in the field of human development.

Finding on research question 3 in Table 3 showed the possible solution to challenges of educational quality to include: training and imparting necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically; initiation of gender friendly education policies; allocating more funds to education and training programmes for teachers; recruiting qualified teachers; and ensuring that only men and women of honest and proven integrity are given position of authority in the school system. These findings agree with Okemakinde (2010); (Adegbesan, 2011); Gikunder and Njeru (2017) who also identified similar solutions to the challenges of educational qualities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings above illustrate the strategic position of education in charting the course of national development and social transformation of any nation. The crisis which has engulfed the African and Nigerian education system centered on government neglect of the educational system and poor funding of education, politicization of education, administrative rascality, incessant change of educational policies and corruption. Some of the challenges faced by African and Nigerian higher education can be dealt with at the institutional level, a number at the national level, and yet others require a regional approach.

The following recommendations were made as panacea to the common challenges that has bedeviled the Nigerian educational system.

1. Government should be determined to make provision for effective funding of education. The Federal Government should endeavour to ear mark 26% of the total budget for educational development as recommended by the United Nations Organisation.
2. Citizenship education as a subject should be made compulsory at all levels of our educational system as this would play a vital role in strengthening emotional, national integration and social transformation of the country.

3. To ensure quality assurance in Nigeria educational system, there is need for adequately trained professional staff in the national quality assurance agencies
4. Government agencies should adhere to merit in the recruitment process into the educational sector. So, as to reduce incompetency in educational service delivery.

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