

## ENSURING QUALITY EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD FOR NIGERIA

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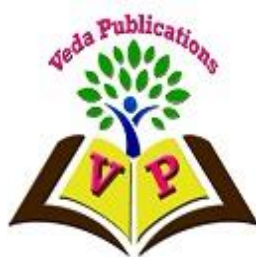
### Abstract

This paper examined the meaning and features of quality education, the state of education in Nigeria, the challenges of ensuring quality education in Nigeria and the way forward. The analysis revealed that Nigeria in her National Policy on Education reflected the features of quality education as required by UNESCO. However, with regards to actualization of the policy there is great departure from the plan. This is shown in such areas as decay of infrastructure, lack of equity, overcrowded schools, underfunding, poor teacher motivation, overcrowded curriculum, non-contextualization of the curricular, over emphasis on intellectual development at the expense of the moral and physical development of learners. It was therefore recommended that all stakeholders in education, (curriculum planners, school administrators, private organizations, employers of labour, national and international organizations, the labour unions in the education sector, and the government) must rise up and play the specific roles assigned to them in the Nigeria Policy on Education and other policy documents of the various levels and aspects of education.

**Key words:** *Education, Quality, Ensuring, Challenges*

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## 1. Introduction

In the Nigerian Constitution (1999) as amended, education is in the concurrent list i.e. to say that federal, state and local governments are all expected to be involved in the business of providing education to the Nigerian community. In addition, the private sector has been given ample opportunity to actively participate in the provision of education. To ensure that there is uniformity in the education provided by the different providers, the National Policy on Education 1977, reviewed in 1988, 1998, 2004, 2008 and 2013 was drawn to outline the minimum standards expected of each level of educational. Besides, implementation guidelines were developed to ensure that there was no misinterpretation of how to implement the policy and to ensure that the expected quality of education was not only established but sustained over the years.

In discussing this issue, we need to understand, the key terms i.e. education, and quality.

The term **education** has been defined from different angles by different people. According to Business dictionary; education refers to the wealth of knowledge by an individual after studying particular subject matters or experiencing life lessons that provide an understanding of something. The Oxford Learners Dictionary defines education as the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university. Aristotle saw education as the creation of sound mind in a sound body. It develop man's faculty especially his mind so that he may be able to enjoy the contemplation of supreme truth, goodness and beauty. For (Pestalozzi), education is the harmonious and progressive development of all innate powers and faculties of man-physical, intellectual and moral.

Attempting to provide a comprehensive definition of education, Kurnar and Ahmad opined that education may be defined as a purposive, conscious or unconscious, psychological, sociological, scientific and philosophical process, which brings about the development of the individual to the fullest extent and also maximum development of society in such a way that both enjoy maximum happiness and prosperity. Thus education is the development of the individual according to his needs and demands of society, of which he is part.

Education essentially entails the transformation of the totality of the individual mentally, morally/emotionally and physically to be useful to himself and useful to the society at large. Any educational system that focuses on only an aspect of these three domains is handicapped and may not be truly qualitative.

**Quality** on the other hand refers to the standard of something as measured against other things of similar kind; it is the degree of excellence of something or a distinctive attribute to characteristics possessed by something. The International Standards Organization (ISO) from business perspective, defined quality as the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears ability to satisfy stated needs. Quality education then means

the education that meets the widely accepted defined standards of education. VVOB (2015) see quality education as that which provides all learners with capabilities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihood, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual well-being.

### 1.1 Features of quality education.

According to UNESCO (2000) quality education includes:

- I. Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities.
- II. Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender sensitive, and provides adequate resources and facilities such as well equipped buildings to open-air gathering spaces, adequate in materials and books, lavatories, clean water supply, classroom maintenance, space and furniture availability.
- III. Content that is reflected in relevant curriculum and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the area of literacy, numeracy and skills for life and knowledge on such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace.
- IV. Process through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparity.
- V. Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes and are linked to the national goals for education and positive participations in society.

In essence, quality education cuts across five major areas to include the learners, the learning environment, the content, the process of teaching and learning and the learning outcomes.

According to VVOB, there are six dimensions of quality education. They include:-

- a. **Equity:** where personal and social circumstances like gender and ethnic origin are not an obstacle to achieving educational goals.
- b. **Contextualization and relevance:** where education blueprints are based on the real needs of a country or community.
- c. **Learner friendly:** teaching and learning which help make the learner active, interested and focused.
- d. **Sustainability:** so as to ensure that the educational practices are institutionalized.
- e. **Balanced Approach:** so that the child is developed all round-intellectually, morally and physically. This enables the learner become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual wellbeing.
- f. **Learning outcome:** quality education requires result-oriented approach where learners must develop minimum standard of skills.

In a nutshell, both UNESCO and VVOB agree that quality education is that type of education which is learner friendly, non-discriminatory (ensures equity) has safe and adequately equipped environment, contextualized and relevant content, result oriented and sustainable.

As a member of UNESCO, Nigeria in its attempt to respond to the issues of quality in education did not only formulate the National Policy on Education but over time found it necessary to review the Policy so as to ensure that quality is enshrined and sustained in the educational system. The National Policy on Education has provided the objectives and the minimum standards for the Nigeria Educational system.

### **1.2 The goals of education in Nigeria are:**

- a. development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen;
- b. total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the-Nigerian society and the world;
- c. provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system;
- d. inculcation of national consciousness, values and national unity; and.
- e. development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society.

All the goals suggest that Nigeria education shall touch all the three human domains - intellectual, physical and emotional.

In order to fully realize the goals of education in Nigeria and gain from its contribution to the national economy, the policy asserted that government shall take necessary measures to ensure that:

- a. educational activities shall be learner centered for maximum self-development and fulfillment.
- b. teaching shall be practical, activity-based, experiential and IT supported;
- c. education shall be related to overall community needs;
- d. all tiers of government shall promote the establishment and support of Reading Clubs in schools, Community Libraries and other such resources that will enhances effective learning;
- e. special provisions and incentives shall be made for the study of the sciences at each level of the education system;
- f. continuing education shall be part and parcel of the education system; and
- g. every child shall be taught in the mother tongue or language of the immediate community for the first four years of basic education. In addition, it is expected that every child shall learn one Nigerian language.

In order to ensure the all-round development of learners the policy stated among other that the quality of instruction at all levels of education shall be oriented towards inculcating the respect for the worth and dignity of the individual through;

- a. moral and spiritual principles in inter-personal and human relations.
- b. enhancing Moral and spiritual principles in inter-personal and human relations;
- c. promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children and
- d. acquisition of functional, skills and competencies necessary for self-reliance.

To ensure appropriate learning environment in line with the requirements for quality assurance.

the NPE (2013) advocated for the provision of Educationist support services whose objectives are to:

further ensure that quality was ensured in the Nigerian educational system, the NPE (2004) further outline the roles of federal, states and local governments in the administration, management financing and quality control.

To ensure sustainability of quality, it was agreed the goals of quality assurance agencies shall be to:

- a. set, maintain and improve standards in all aspects of the school system;
- b. ensure Minimum Standards and quality assurance of instructional activities in schools through regular inspection and continuous supervision;
- c. disseminate on a regular basis, information on problems and difficulties of teachers and institutions and offer practical solutions to them;
- d. encourage dissemination of information on problems and difficulties of teachers and institutions and offer practical solutions to them, and
- e. encourage, dissemination of information on innovative and progressive educational principles and practice in the school system through publications, workshop, meetings, seminars, conferences, etc.

It was further recommended in the policy that federal, state and local government budget should allocate 26% of their budget to the education sector.

Looking at all these, one cannot but say that Nigeria has a good policy framework of quality education and ensuring quality education in the country. The policy has clearly outlined what it takes to have quality education and to sustain it over time. This framework has been on ground since 1977 when the first edition on the National Policy on Education was published. Since then Nigeria has been reviewing the policy to rhyme with changing demands and situations. But in practical terms what is the situation on ground? Have these written provisions and policies been translated into action? This is the issue for consideration.

## 2. Challenges for Education in Nigeria

Although Nigeria has clearly outlined the minimum standards for all levels of education in line with UNESCO minimum requirements for quality education, translating the plans into reality has faced series of challenges. Some of the challenges include poor funding, shortage of space, low human capital, non-contextualization of curricular, over-emphasis on intellectual development/ academic achievement, underestimating the importance of teacher education programmes.

UNESCO (1999) and 1999 World data on Education as cited in Moja (2001) made the following observations about the challenges facing the education sector in Nigeria.

- 2.1 There is a general shortage of space, existing buildings are in state of decay due to lack of maintenance. This has encouraged brain drain of staff and dropout of learners from school.
- 2.2 There is lack of adequate planning of human resource capacity development for the implementation of policies that are vital for improved quality and expansion. Much of the training provided for teachers is of poor quality, some training methods and approaches are outdated and do not reflect the changes in the teaching environment and the requirement of a more technological global environment; staff in service do not have opportunity for staff development, thus teachers' skills are often outdated and inspectors are not providing the necessary pedagogical support.
- 2.3 The demand for access has not been met in a society where social mobility depends mostly on academic achievement.
- 2.4 Rapid expansion in student numbers without comparable expansion of resources such as libraries, laboratories, modern communication systems and information technology equipment, staff and facilities, has resulted in the decline in quality.
- 2.5 Shortage of textbooks at all levels of education, with less than 1% of primary school pupils having access to textbooks; and generally textbook availability was only 10% of what should be.

Other impacting factors on the quality of education in Nigeria include low morale of teachers, poor quality of teachers, lack of professional support and teacher training programme, failure to reflect changes needed to implement the innovative curriculum introduced in schools, especially the secondary schools.

- 2.6 There has also been poor funding in Nigeria; between 1989 and 2006, the highest percentage budgetary allocation was 14.86 in 1994 as shown on table1.

**Table 1: Budgetary allocation to education by successive governments**

Year	Percentage allocation.
1989	6.46%
1990	5.45%
1991	4.62%
1992	4.60%
1993	7.20%
1994	14.86%
1995	11.50%
1996	10.81%
1997	11.53%
1998	9.61%
1999	8.70%
2000	7.00%
2001	7.90%
2002	4.70%
2003	4.54%
2004	5.30%
2005	8.70%
2006	8.19%

It might be argued that 2006, is many years ago and much improvement might have been made in succeeding years. But statistics show that even in recent years (2011 - 2015)percentage allocation to education has not moved out of the earlier range as shown in table 2.

**Table 2: Budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria between 2011 and 2015 in percentages.**

Years	Percentages Allocation
2011	10.13
2012	8.43
2013	8.67
2014	10.7
2015	11.29

This is not to say that the actual amount allocated to education has not increased. However, the increase was a function of the general increase in the amount budgeted from year to year and not that of percentage.

In a survey of some 20 countries by the World Bank in 2012 on percentage allocation to education, Nigeria ranked 20<sup>th</sup>, as shown in table 3



**Table 3: Ranking of some 20 countries based percentage budgetary allocation education**

S/N	Country	% Budget Allocation	Position
1	Ghana	31.0	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	Coted'voire	30.0	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3	Uganda	27.0	3 <sup>rd</sup>
4	Morocco	26.4	4 <sup>th</sup>
5	South Africa	25.8	5 <sup>th</sup>
6	Swaziland	24.6	6 <sup>th</sup>
7	Mexico	24.3	7 <sup>th</sup>
8	Kenya	23.0	8 <sup>th</sup>
9	United Arab Emirate	22.5	9 <sup>th</sup>
10	Botswana	19.0	10 <sup>th</sup>
11	Iran	17.7	11 <sup>th</sup>
12	U.S.A	17.1	12 <sup>th</sup>
13	Tunisia	17.0	13 <sup>th</sup>
14	Lesotho	17.0	14 <sup>th</sup>
15	Burkina Faso	16.8	15 <sup>th</sup>
16	Norway	16.2	16 <sup>th</sup>
17	Columbia	15.6	17 <sup>th</sup>
18	Nicaragua	15.0	18 <sup>th</sup>
19	India	12.7	19 <sup>th</sup>
20	Nigeria	8.4	20 <sup>th</sup>

Source: World Bank 2012.

The figures indicate that even among the African and developing nations surveyed Nigeria ranked last. This is to say that even smaller African countries have recognized the need to allocate a higher percentage of their budget to educational development than Nigeria.

Other challenges the Nigeria education sector is facing include:

**2.7 Appointment of less experienced and less qualified teachers to head their schools.**

This is practical in some of the states of Nigeria playing down on teacher's welfare by way of none or late promotion, without area's; no housing, and low salaries. These



have resulted in poor performance of students at national and international examinations.

2.8 **Playing down on teacher's welfare** by way of none or late promotion, without areas, no housing, and low salaries. There have resulted in poor performance of students at national and international examinations.

2.9 **Curriculum Relevance:** The curriculum is not tailored towards meeting the real needs of the Nigerian society, resulting in the production of graduates that cannot be employed and have no skills to engage in some productive ventures to tackle societal problems.

2.10 **Cultism:** This has infiltrated the schools. School conditions like overcrowding, deteriorated facilities, admission malpractice and inadequately challenging academic programmes are partly responsible.

2.11 **Examination malpractice:** This is practiced in all areas for which examinations are required. This calls to question certain certificates where owners cannot defend such certificates by their conduct or productivity:

There also appears to be a deliberate effort either to make the education sector or courses to play a second fiddle. Candidates recommended for NCE are those who have relatively low Jamb scores; in the university, when candidates cannot secure admission to courses of choice, they are pushed to education courses, thus making the education courses a dumping ground for people who neither have background nor the interest for the field of education. These same people graduate and grudgingly engage in teaching in our schools. Apart from these, there is the problem of overemphasis on academic achievements at the expense of both moral and physical development of the learners. Although the overall curriculum has made some little room for moral grooming by way of introducing subjects like social studies, civics, population education, religious studies, general study courses at the tertiary level, the subjects are taught from just academic view point with little or no drive for the moral lessons. Similarly, at the primary and secondary school levels, Continuous Assessment was introduced partly to help observe and model or correct behaviours, but even this is being handled largely from the intellectual point of view. The adviser-advise services were introduced, partly to promote morality but little of these services have been given their prime of place.

Similarly for physical development, sports, games and recreational activities were encouraged in the NPE, to ease tension in the learners and help create interest in the teaching learning process. But little or no space is provided for these in the school time. Little wonder that students have embarked on their own exploration and found solace in drugs, pornography from the internet, truancy, homosexuality, examination malpractice, crime, cultism, disrespect for parents and constituted authority. The impression that academic grades or achievement alone is a prove of quality education is not correct. This is one of the challenges that some western countries, whose educational practices we are copying are facing today.

They have the technology, the school infrastructure, the money but discipline and moral training has been so relaxed in the name of child rights that a school child can report the teacher to the police without a word of caution; or pick up a gun and shoot his mates or parents.

All these have drained the quality of education enshrined in the National policy on Education for Nigeria. It has shown that while in principle, Nigeria has declared her interest for quality education, in reality, the will to ensure has not been there over the years.

But is it to say that there is no hope for Nigeria? No there is some hope, particularly at this time of the country's history that a wind of political change has blown across the country. Against this background, we cannot but ask what the nation state should do to ensure quality education for the citizens.

### 3. The way forward

It must be noted that the task of implementing and ensuring quality education in Nigeria requires a collective contribution by all stakeholders each should play his designated role.

**The students** must cooperate with their parents, government agencies, the school administration, the teachers, examination bodies so as to be taught trained, disciplined and examined appropriately. They must avoid all vices.

**Parents** must wake up to their responsibility of preparing the children for schooling and giving them all the moral, psychological and financial support they need for schooling.

**Teachers** should agree to be appropriately trained to teach, imbibe the teaching ethics, be committed to the act of teaching and what it takes to be an effective teacher, the teachers must upgrade and update their knowledge so as to be relevant: they should make themselves familiar with changes in curriculum content, new dimensions in teaching strategies and best practices. They should indeed be models of morality and academic achievements.

**Curriculum planners** need to be developing curricular that are directed at meeting the real needs and challenges that the learners and the Nigerian society are facing.

**The government** should go beyond policy formulation to policy actualization by providing adequate funding, training of teachers, basic infrastructure, and monitoring etc.

**Educational planners and administrators** should manage the school environment, time and resources judiciously with a view to providing learners with the values, knowledge and skills expected of them.

**The private sector and NGOs** need to provide the financial and resource support needed in the education sector.

**International Agencies** such as the World Bank UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, should partner with the Nigerian government to the financing of education.

**Employers of labour** who are the direct beneficiaries of labour can assist by suggesting curricular content and providing some resources.

**Labour unions** in the education sector such as the NUT, ASUU, ASUP COEASUU should play the role of watchdogs of the education sector in Nigeria. The Unions must fight to be more relevant in the scheme of affairs of Nigeria education sector. When the union keeps quiet, it's not only that the education sector will suffer but we as teachers will suffer. Remember that the ETF Education Tax Fund (ETF) formerly Education Tax Fund, which fund the education sector now was a brain child of one of the labour union in the education sector (ASUU), of course, you can do better.

The Unions (either individual or in conjunction with other teacher Unions) should endeavor to set up model schools where best practices in the school system can be demonstrated for government and other stakeholders in education can copy.

#### 4. Summary

This paper:

1. Ex-rayed the meaning and features of quality education, as recommended by UNESCO and VVOB which include equity, context, sustainability, relevance, learner friendly, balanced approach, safe, healthy, protective, gender sensitive and result oriented.
2. Analysis of the state of Nigeria Education system revealed that the Nigeria National Policy on education largely reflected the features of quality education as approved by UNESCO, taking adequate care of the six key areas of quality education.
3. There is a wide gap between the policy document and the actualization of the policy at various levels and forms of education. The analysis showed serious violation of the plan by way of overcrowded schools and classrooms, low motivation and poor quality training of teachers, dilapidated learning environment, lack of equity, non contextualization of the curriculum, emphasis on intellectual development at the expense of moral/emotional and the physical development and poor funding.
5. **Conclusion:** It was therefore, concluded that the quality of education in our schools should not be sustained but should be radically improved in line with the provisions of best practices and the National Policy on Education (2013) and global best practices
6. **Recommendations:** It is recommended that all stakeholders of education, the learners, teachers, parents, curriculum planners, school administrations, employers of labour, national and international organizations, like UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, NNPC, TETFUND Labour Unions in education (NUT, ASUU, ASUP, COESUU) and the government should rise up to their responsibilities. They should play the specific roles assigned to them for quality education in the constitution of the Federal

Republic of Nigeria, the National Policy on Education and other national and international policy documents for the various levels and aspects of education.

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