

Status of Quality Inputs in Basic Education and the Reduction of Learning Poverty in Nigeria

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Abstract

The availability of physical and human capacities for proper pedagogical process and qualitative learning outcomes are still considered necessary and prerequisites by basic education stakeholders, towards achieving a reduction in learning poverty Nigeria. The inability of a school child above the age 10 to read, an age-specific-comprehension passage is termed learning poverty. This is clear indication that qualitative teaching and learning were not taken place. It is on this basis that the study investigated the quality of inputs in UBE schools vis-à-vis the eradication of learning poverty at the national and sub-national levels (in some selected states across the six geopolitical zones) in Nigeria. Septically, the study was guided by this research question: what is the current status of quality indicators in the basic education schools at national and sub-national levels? The study adopted Ex-posit facto research design; data were obtained through secondary source, particularly from the UBE website. The national figures were further decomposed to sub national entities; a total of six (6) states, one from each geo-political zone were randomly selected to illustrate with figures the current status of quality inputs. Conclusively, the problem of poor-quality input was found real and at this pace of development of basic education, learning poverty may be unwittingly exacerbated and thus compounding other social and economic challenges for our nation. The nexus between quality inputs and learning poverty has been discussed, however, salvaging the situation requires that the various policymakers and stakeholders should consider the suggestions that were stated in this report.

Keywords: Quality Inputs, Basic Education, Reduction of Learning Poverty, Nigeria

Introduction

A fundamental global target in basic education is that all children should be able to read by age 10. Enhancing children's ability to read is not only an inalienable right of children but the foundational step for learning and when this is not achieved further intellectual development of the affected children will be arrested and future careers may be affected. The inability of school children above the age 10 to read, which is termed learning poverty is clear indication that qualitative teaching and learning were not taken place, perhaps the teachers in the school systems were not well endowed in such a way that in the lower and middle basic school children could be helped to learn to the extent that they can read. It is possible, with a great deal of effort, for those trapped in learning poverty, to learn later in life. Poor-quality of input to basic education can be detrimental to the development of children, as it may lead to poor social, emotional, educational, health, economic, and

behavioural outcomes. It has been acknowledged that not much was done in the preparation of relevant and adequate personnel for the take-off of the programme (Shekarau, 2014; Taiwo 2018). Poor understanding of the present strength and direction of the relationship between quality inputs and learning outcome is worrisome. Yet, it is most worrisome that the children in schools have manifested visible evidence of not being able to read age-specific comprehension passages at age 10. This phenomenon tagged learning poverty has the propensity to mature into future earning poverty among affected children. In situations like this in which case the human capital formation effort fails then, the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4), fails too, because without successful pivotal learning at the basic level, integration into the world of learning and the transition into the world of work fails ultimately.

Moreover, if the human capital formation processes needed to power careers are circumscribed, national economic growth and development are not powered, will individual and national lives not be affected in places where such learning crises are persistent? Hence, poor quality input needs to be studied to ascertain if such is a major contributor to human capital deficits that can possibly undermine the sustainable economic growth, with possible consequence on earning poverty too. There is need also, to raise awareness on the future costs of present inaction, as the average Human Capital Index (HCI) score across countries is 0.56; this means that by the age of 18, a child born today will be only 56 percent as productive as a child would be under the benchmark of a complete education and full health (World Bank 2021). It has been demonstrated that the quality of input is among the most important educational factor predicting the learners' achievement and learning outcomes, (Ferguson, 1998; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1999). Moreover, ascertaining the prevalent level of basic education inputs is needful to stakeholders. One hand it gives an account of what is on ground in the basic education sub-system and the other hand it offers an empirical basis for better and further interventions.

However, to properly situate the crisis being precipitated by poor pedagogical outcome, the concept of Learning Poverty was conceived by the World Bank and developed alongside the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Learning poverty is said to have set-in when a school child at age 10 is unable to read and understand a simple comprehension passage legible, readable and comprehensible to other age 10 children; such disadvantaged child suffers from learning poverty. This indicator brings together schooling and learning indicators of which the indicators of teachers' quality is an integral part: it begins with the share of children who have not achieved minimum reading proficiency -as measured in schools. Presently, 53 percent of children, according to the World Bank report, in low and middle-income countries are below the learning poverty line. Though the World report, did not capture Nigeria perspective of the learning poverty, but in some developing countries, the level is as high as 80 percent.

Such high levels of illiteracy are an early warning sign that all global educational goals and other related sustainable development goals are in jeopardy. Progress in reducing poor pedagogical outcome and the attendant learning poverty is far too slow to meet the SDG aspirations. In fact, it is estimated that at the current rate of improvement, in 2030 about 43% of children will still be learning poor. The concept of teacher quality and qualitative

pedagogy in basic level of education has gained international attention. The need for enhanced teachers' quality to protect and encourage the child's cognitive development through all its ramifications. The United Nations General Assembly was among the first world organizations to consider the education of under 10 children as very important. Therefore, in 1989 at the convention on the Right of the Child, the UN General Assembly clearly stipulated the proper development of the child as the inalienable right of the child. Nations were urged to decide quite clearly and early what they intended to do with their young children in through the Education For All -EFA programme. In the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, there is a strong indication that "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity needs special safeguards and care" (UNICEF, 1999). The Conventions on the Rights of the Child places special emphasis on the primary caring and protective responsibilities towards children because of their vulnerability and need for special care and protection. Furthermore, in 1990, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, UNICEF, among others, organized a World Summit for Children at Jomtien as part of efforts to improve the quality of life of children and protect their rights. (Bernard van Leer Foundation (1990). The conference set the goal to be achieved by 2000. The extended the Jomtien commitment and basic education received greater attention and was made one of the six goals of Education for All (EFA-World Education Forum, 2000). This same goal was reaffirmed again in that same year as part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It was accepted as the key to sustainable development, social justice and a brighter future.

Moreover, if the human capital formation processes needed to power learners' future careers are circumscribed, individual and national development may be affected in the long run. Hence, there is a need to observe the consequences of inactions. The average Human Capital Index (HCI) across countries is 0.56; this is an indication that by the age of 18, a child born today will be only 56 per cent as productive as a child would be under the benchmark of complete education and full health. The observed low HCI score arising from a learning crisis occasioned by poor pedagogical outcomes culminating to learning poverty, may not be unconnected to the quality of inputs among other factors, (Tout, Zaslow, Halle, & Forrey, 2009; World Bank, 2019). Indeed, studies have demonstrated that teachers and instructional material quality are among the most important educational factor in predicting the learners' achievement and learning outcomes, (McLaughlin, 1987; Maduewesi, 1999; Uyang, Ojong-Ejeh, & Ejeje, 2017). Hence, ascertaining the current level and quality of inputs are needful thus offering the basis for future and further intervention in the basic education in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem.

The United Nations General Assembly was among the first world organisations to identify the inherent challenges of poor inputs and poor outcomes in basic education., and the need to consider the education of under 10 children as very important. Therefore, in 1989 at the convention on the Right of the Child, the UN General Assembly stipulated proper child development as the inalienable right of all children. Nations were urged to decide quite clearly and early what they intended to do with their young children. In the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, there is a strong indication that the children, because of their

peculiar physical and mental immaturity needs special safeguards, protection and care, (Bernard van Leer Foundation 1990; UNESCO 2015; World Bank 2019). The Conventions on the Rights of the Child place special emphasis on the primary caring and protective responsibilities towards children because of their vulnerability and need for special care and protection. Furthermore, in 1990, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, and UNICEF, among others, organised a World Summit for Children at Jomtien as part of efforts to improve the quality of life of children and protect their rights. If age 10 children cannot read, it is then clear that poor quality of input is in the offing and all other future education-related personal and communal endeavours may be at risk.

The foregoing invariably highlights the urgent need for a society-wide commitment to investing more in enhancing children's corresponding cognitive development. This will be the starting point in eliminating learning poverty; it is as important as eliminating extreme earning poverty, stunting, or hunger. The UBE policy, programmes and projects have been implemented in the last two decades. However, in the course of implementation of the programme it is needful to know the present state of quality indicators and facilities for learning in UBE schools (Coombs, 1980; Domike and Odey, 2014). It is on this basis that the study investigated the quality of inputs in UBE schools vis-à-vis the eradication of learning poverty at the national and sub-national levels (in some selected states across the six geopolitical zones) in Nigeria. Septically, the was guided by this research question: what is the current status of quality indicators in the basic education schools at national and sub-national levels?

Literature Reviews

Given that human capital is the most important component of the wealth of nations, a premium can be placed on the process of human capital formation by focusing on the right management approach to the basic education subsystem (Bruns, Mingat & Rakotomalala, 2003; Babalola, 2010; Federal Republic of Nigeria -NPE 2013; Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015). Indeed, the importance of human capital grows as countries become more prosperous. For instance, human capital in high-income and developed economies, (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development -OECD, countries) human capital makes up over 70% of their wealth, where as it is about 41% of the national wealth in resource-rich but poor countries of the world, Nigeria inclusive. (World Bank 2019). Policy failure cum failures in basic education efforts and non-compliance to policy prescriptions are mutually reinforcing, (Coombs, 1980; McLaughlin, 1987; Shekarau 2014; UNESCO 2015; Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015).

While the quality of inputs into UBE schools vis-à-vis the eradication of learning poverty in Nigeria is the focus here, the availability of minimum standards for UBE implementation is predicated upon the quality of inputs, effective management of resources and deriving quality products and outcomes in the course of the implementation of the policy is also important. However, an unwholesome approach to policy implementations is proven to be detrimental to the possibilities of quality inputs, which may be having drastic negative effects on the learners and thus exacerbating the problem of learning poverty, (Anna 2001; Bbalalola 2010; Anaduaka & Okafor 2013; Aja, Egwu, Aja-Okorie, Ani, & Amuta, 2018).

Though the World report, did not capture Nigeria's perspective of learning poverty; specifically, among the poor countries, the level was as high as 80 per cent. The implication of the foregoing is that about 80% of school-age children will struggle to connect to the world of work. The very future consequence of the problem requires thorough and further empirical investigations. This is becoming a common experience for the educated but poorly groomed graduates, this particularly, portends immediate danger (Berk, 1985; European Commission, 1997; FMOB&NP 2017). While it is recommended that six per cent of Gross National Product (GNP) be set aside to deliver quality education this is not the case in Nigeria. Moreover, bilateral support for and aid to education is declining, and aid to basic education too, (Afolayan 2014; Adedeji 2015 & Taiwo 2018).

Consequent to the shortfall in funding, the physical infrastructure and particularly human capacity were affected in course of implementation of the UBE programme. Teacher capacity development had fallen short of expectation as there were few capacities building programmes for teachers as well as fewer school facilities for on-the-job training, (Daura and Audu, 2015). The factors against learning in basic schools and exacerbating learning poverty were not identified and tackled from the inception of UBE at the turn of the millennium, (Jardine-Ledet, 1999; Akinbote, Oduolowu, & Lawai, 2001). The preponderance of factors that are not favourable to learning will certainly engender high levels of illiteracy. These are early warning signs that all global educational goals and other related Sustainable Development Goals are in jeopardy. Progressive and sustainable increments in the quality of inputs and reduction in learning poverty are far too slow to meet the SDG aspirations (Jardine-Ledet, 1999; Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Clifford, Cryer & Harms, 2018). It is estimated that at the current rate of improvement, in 2030, about 43% of children will still be learning poor (World Bank, 2021). There is a strong need for an enhanced quality of inputs to encourage learners' cognitive development and forestall the possible consequences of learning poverty.

Methodology

The study adopted Ex-posit facto research design; data were obtained through secondary source, particularly from the UBE website. The national figures were further decomposed into north-south divided. Moreover, a total of six (6) states, one from each geo-political zone were randomly selected to illustrate with figures the current status of quality inputs. States used were purposively selected as a fair representative of the prevailing situations in other states to distinguish the geo-political variations within the constituent sub-national entities.

Presentation of Current Status and Quality Indicators in Basic Schools in Nigeria

Table 1: The Current Status of Quality Indicators in the Basic Education Schools at National and Sub-National Levels

Learners in Basic Education (ECCDE, PRY & JSS)	National	South			North		
		Enugu	Lagos	Rivers	Kogi	Gombe	Kano
	31,236,624	316,327	843,961	304,415	302,224	576,186	3,942,267

Number of Classrooms in Basic Education	570,188	13,012	14,618	10,379	4,476	9,611	47,567
Number of Good Classrooms	300,892	6,664	0,513	5,478	7,717	5,315	31,050
Learners/Classroom ratio	1: 55	1:24	1:58	1:29	1:21	1:60	1:83
Learners/Good Classroom ratio	1:104	1:47	1:180	1:56	1:39	1:108	1:127
Percentage of Good Classrooms	1: 53	1:51	1:72	1:53	1:53	1:55	1:65
Learners/Qualified Teacher Ratio in ECCDE schools	1:520	1:51	1:106	1:131	1:34	1:66	1:245
Learners/Qualified Teacher Ratio in Primary school	1:55	1:27	1:59	1:19	1:20	1:55	1:90
Learners/Qualified Teacher Ratio in Junior sec school	1: 27	1:12	1:36	1:11	1:10	1:12	1:29

Source: UBE Website accessed based on School census

Discussion of Findings

Quality Indicators in the Basic Education Schools in Nigeria

From Table 1: Basic School Statistics in some selected states in Nigeria, at the national level, the total number of basic school classrooms were 570,188, but only a total of 300,892 which is about (52.8%) were in usable conditions. The Percentage of Good Classrooms from the selected states, were generally less than 75% as indicated thus, 51%, 72%, 53%, 53%, 55%, 65% for Enugu, Lagos, Rivers, Kogi, Gombe and Kano, states respectively. Except for Lagos (72%) and perhaps Kano (65%), the rest the usable classrooms were hovering around the national average of 52.8%. in the selected states. Learners/Good Classroom ratio at national level stood at 1:104 and in the selected states, were; 1:47, 1:180, 1:56, 1:39, 1:108, 1:127 for Enugu, Lagos, Rivers, Kogi, Gombe and Kano, states respectively. Learners/Qualified Teacher Ratio in Early Childhood Care & Development Education (ECCDE) schools had a national average of 1:520, and in the selected states; 1:51, 1:106, 1:131, 1:34, 1:66, 1:245, for Enugu, Lagos, Rivers, Kogi, Gombe and Kano, states respectively. Learners/Qualified Teacher Ratio in Primary school 1:55, 1:27, 1:59, 1:19, 1:20, 1:55, 1:90 for Enugu, Lagos, Rivers, Kogi, Gombe and Kano states respectively.

Key Issues on Basic Education Status and Learning Poverty

Availability of Good Classrooms

The inputs made available for the cognitive development of pupils were poor. And as such can not enhance the optimal level of learning that can hinder the festering learning poverty among school children aged 10. These were indicated in Table 1 showed that the available and usable classrooms for learning as best demonstrated by the indicator of Learners/Good

Classroom ratio with the national average of 1: 104 (one good classroom for 104 pupils; the problem of inadequate classroom blocks for pupils usage was too far from the norm (1:40). The UBE policy had stipulated that there should be sufficient classrooms but this is not so as indicated in table 1; the classrooms would most probably be rowdy, such that full concentration of the learners because of the prevailing class size.

Availability of Human Capacity for Teaching

Again the high teacher-pupil ratio as indicated in Kano (1:90) and Gombe (1:55) thus showing that both classrooms and class teachers would not suffice to meet the immediate need of the learners thus reinforcing learning deficits. The poor or outright non-compliance to policy prescriptions is undesirable and would impact negatively on the learners (Dove, 2003; D'Amour, 2008; Shekarau, 2014; Orji, 2021); poor quality inputs herein would likely be mutually reinforcing with unassailable negative learning outcomes, (Coombs, 1980; McLaughlin, 1987; Shekarau 2014; UNESCO 2015; Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015; Taiwo 2018). The availability of physical and human capacities are a necessity and prerequisites for learning. Consequently, some researcher (Uyang, Ojong-Ejeh, & Ejeje, 2017; Orji, 2021), had bemoaned the present level of inputs as an indication of unpreparedness of our universal basic education to confront challenges or unreadiness for a paradigm shift as a prerequisite for global competitiveness.

Availability of Health and Facilities for Secured Environment

The percentage of schools with health facilities at national and sub-national levels in Nigeria was below average at 43.31%. The selected states were less than the national average of 65.32%, 83.98%, 32.99%, 24.30%, 35.13%, 63.41%, for Enugu, Lagos, Rivers, Kogi, Gombe and Kano states respectively. The percentage of Schools with perimeter fence at national and sub-national levels in Nigeria were only about 19.06%, The facilities available in all cases were largely below average in all the five (5) facilities (safe drinking water, power source, health facilities, perimeter fencing and libraries as recorded in the states under review. The findings again pointed to the unpreparedness to achieve qualitative education for all (UNESCO Report 2015; Orji, 2021). Given the current spate of kidnapping of school children and general insecurity in Nigeria and the northern part of the country particularly, the problem of very low coverage of perimeter fencing indicates clearly that the schools are not safe for learning. In the books to read are not there in the library the situation is rather deteriorating as qualitative inputs are not revamped according to Taiwo (2018)

Conclusion

The observed poor or outright non-compliance to UBE policy prescriptions is undesirable and would impact negatively on the learners side by side with poor quality inputs that reinforcing poor learning outcomes and thus worsening the incidence of learning poverty. Conclusively, the problem of poor input is real and at this pace of development of basic education, learning poverty may be unwittingly exacerbated and thus compounding other social and economic challenges for our nation.

Suggestions for the improvement of UBE Programmes and Projects

The present level of input into basic education is grossly inadequate and how it may be exacerbating the emerging and vexatious issues of learning poverty is about the nexus between the quality of inputs into basic education and learning poverty has been discussed. However, salvaging the situation requires that the various policymakers and stakeholders should consider: -

- i. - the need to improve the level of funding available for UBE projects and programme implementations. Concerted effort must be made to ensure that those funds are able and that it gets to the priority programmes and projects.
- ii. - not throwing the available funds to basic schools' problems, rather projects implementers should ensure a painstaking, transparent and judicious application of funds in a most prudent manner.
- iii. - setting targets and timelines that could measure the effort in terms of the inputs and how such measured efforts could be leading to improved quality education towards the eradication of problems that confronts the learners, this will ensure that learning is actually taking place in the basic schools.
- iv. - expediting action on quality teachers recruitment, retention and teaching capacity building to address the yawning gap in the availability of qualified teaching staff at the basic schools nationwide.
- v. – ensuring that safe school initiatives be revisited to provide a secure learning environment where teachers and learners will feel to stay, such that learning is actually taking place under a better cum conducive teaching-learning conditions.

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