

Quality and Equity in Nigerian Educational System: A Panacea for Economic Empowerment, Development Strategy and Social Justice

Ngozi E. Uzoka, University of Lagos, Nigeria
Rosita Igwe, University of Lagos, Nigeria

The IAFOR International Conference on Education - Dubai 2015
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper relates to Education: Social Justice and Social Change. It examines the issues of quality and equity in Nigerian educational system and how it enhances national economic and development strategy that brings about social justice. The study sets out to identify the general problems and needs facing the country in the field of education that is hindering the realization of quality, equity and social justice. It further examines the accessibility and difference in the quality of education being offered in the urban and rural areas, and highlights the reasons behind the high level of repetition and drop-out rates in the rural schools. Four research questions and four hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A descriptive survey design was employed targeting all the principals and ministry of education officials in the four, out of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria (South-West, South-East, North-East, and North-Central). Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select one hundred (100) principals and twenty-five (25) ministries of education officials from each of the selected geo-political zone bringing the total number to five hundred (500) participants. Questionnaire and interview were used as instruments of data collection, while descriptive and inferential statistics were employed for data analyses. Some of the findings of the study revealed that there are differences in the quality of education and accessibility to education in the rural and urban areas. Most schools in the rural areas do not have adequate and qualified teachers. Moreover, there is apparent lack of infrastructure and educational resources. The study recommends, among others that there is need to offer quality education to every Nigerian child whether in the rural or urban areas and an educational system that is responsive to current national demands and conducive to sustainable development that will enhance social justice.

Keywords: Quality, Equity, Accessibility, Empowerment, Development Strategy and Social justice

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Introduction

The search for quality and equity is paramount in all spheres of life seeking an even development of its members, and the educational sector is never left out in this search. Given this importance, it is pertinent that all hands be on deck to ensure that they are properly instituted in the Nigerian educational system. Education itself, according to the Fourth National Development Plan, is the most important instrument for change and the most important resource for development. Hence, the Nigerian Philosophy of education states that:

- a) Education is an instrument for national development. To this end, the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education
- b) Education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society
- c) Every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his/her ability
- d) There is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria. To this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive, while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education. (FRN, Reviewed National Policy on Education, 2013)

In Nigeria today, the government, political parties, the media, parents and the society at large are making education a priority. This importance accorded to education is based on the fact that education is an instrument for social mobility, brings important and unrestricted access to good life, it is a necessary means to economic and industrial development and the enhancement of social justice among the populace (Uzoka, 1997). To ensure that all these are achieved through education, there is need to establish quality and equity in the educational system. Therefore, all who have education in their care at all levels should strive to make quality and equity very central in the Nigerian education policy.

Osifela, (2011), defined quality as a multi-dimensional concept with different meanings, but may be interpreted against local contexts and benchmarks. Materu (2007) referred to quality as "fitness for a purpose, meeting or conforming to general accepted standard as defined by an institution, quality assurance bodies and appropriate academic and professional communities. Ideally, quality should be the prime goal of any educational system. This is because of its significance to private and public sectors and its benefits for improving the quality of education for the individual and the nation at large.

Quality education promotes more productive workforce and hence a more competitive and successful economy. For individuals, a good education leads to better jobs, income, health and greater self-sufficiency. In like manner, quality education in a nation contributes to lower level of crimes, higher level of institutional trust and more participation in democratic processes with better informed debate in public policy.

Thus, the quality of education is a basic factor in the attainment of national goals for economic and social reforms.

Similarly, the necessity of establishing the place of equity in education cannot be overemphasized. In education, the term equity refers to the principle of fairness, (Anumenechi, 2015). Inequities occur as when biased or unfair policies, programmes, practices, or situations contribute to a lack of equality in educational performance, results and outcomes. Equity and equality are often used interchangeably with the related principles of quality. Equity encompasses a wide variety of educational models, programmes, and strategies that may be considered fair, but not necessarily equal. It has been said that “equity is the process, equality is the outcome” given that equity – what is fair and just – may not in the process of educating students, reflect strict equality that is what is applied, allocated, or distributed equally. In other words, quality and equity should go hand in hand.

Having seen how important quality and equity are in the educational system and in other spheres of life, it is of necessity to have a purview of how well it is integrated in the Nigerian educational system, especially in the provision of educational services. In this regard, there seems to be visible disparities in the provision of educational services between the urban and rural schools in Nigeria. These disparities would exist in the form of qualified teaching personnel, accessibility, adequate funding, low economic status of the parents (Nwachukwu, 2014). Furthermore, the globalization process has contributed in widening this gap a great deal in the sense that while globalization offers many opportunities, the educational system is not yet in such a state that it can derive the benefits of globalization.

Moreover, there seem to be high level of educational wastages which is reflected in the high repetition and dropout rates and low level of enrolment in rural schools in Nigeria. This study therefore sets out to examine the difference, if any, between urban and rural schools in the quality of education, determine the extent to which education has been made accessible to the people; ascertain the levels of repetition and dropout rates in urban and rural schools; determine the level of availability of resources in the schools and suggest ways by which the government can through education respond to current national demands, sustainable development and social justice.

The study raised five research questions and postulated four hypotheses to guide the investigation:

- What is the difference in the quality of education provided in the urban and rural schools?
- How much has education been made accessible to the people in the urban and rural areas?
- To what extent will wastages (as measured by dropout and repetition rates) affect the quality of education?
- To what extent will the availability of resources affect the quality of education?

- How can the government ensure that education responds to the current national demands, sustainable development and social justice?

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

- There is no significant difference between the urban and rural schools in the quality of education.
- There is no significant difference between the rural and urban areas in accessibility to education.
- There is no significant relationship between wastages (as measured by dropout and repetition rates) and the quality of education.
- There is no significant relationship between availability of resource and the quality of education.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population for the study comprised of all the principals and teachers of the public schools and the officials of ministries of education in Nigeria. The sample for the study comprised of the principals and ministry of education officials in the four, out of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria (South-West, South-East, North-East, and North-Central). Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select one hundred (100) principals and twenty-five (25) ministries of education officials from each of the selected four geo-political zones bringing the total number to five hundred (500) participants. Questionnaire and interview were used as instruments of data collection; simple percentage was used to analyze the questionnaire, while t-test and Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient were employed to analyze the hypotheses.

Findings

In order to determine the existing relationship between the variables, the data collected from the participants using questionnaire drawn from the research questions were analyzed accordingly together with the hypotheses and the results are as shown below:

Research Question One & Hypothesis One

Findings from the research question one shows that more than seventy-five percent (75%) of the participants agreed that a great difference exists in the quality of education offered in the urban schools as against what is obtainable in the rural schools. Similarly, the hypothesis one which states that there is no significant difference between the urban and rural schools in the quality of education was analysed below.

**Table 1
Independent t-Test on the Quality of Education**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	Sig. of P	Effect size (d)
Urban	300	15.93	1.13	498	19.11	000	1.33
Rural	200	13.90	1.23				

Significant at p<0.05

Table 1 indicates that there is a significant difference between quality of education provided in the urban and the rural areas ($t=19.11$, Df: 498, $p<0.05$, $d=1.33$). Thus, the null hypothesis earlier stated was rejected and it can be inferred that the quality of education in the urban schools is significantly higher than in the rural schools. The effect size as measured by Cohen's d indicates that the effect size is 1.33 which is considered great. Any effect size, greater than 0.8 is considered to be of great magnitude.

Research Question Two & Hypothesis Two

Findings from the research question two reveals that education is more accessible to people in the urban areas than people in the rural areas. Probing further, the hypothesis two which states that there is no significant difference between the rural and urban areas in accessibility to education was tested thus:

**Table 2
Independent t-Test on the Accessibility of Education**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	Sig. of P	Effect size (d)
Urban	300	16.33	1.077	498	31.84	000	1.67
Rural	200	13.20	1.080				

Significant at p<0.05

Table 2 reveals that there is a significant difference between accessibility to education in the urban areas and in the rural areas ($t=31.84$, Df: 498, $p<0.05$, $d=1.67$). Thus, the null hypothesis earlier stated was rejected and it can be inferred that accessibility to education differ significantly in favour of the urban areas when compared to the rural areas. The effect size as measured by Cohen's d indicates that the effect size was 1.67 which is considered great.

Research Question Three & Hypothesis Three

From the findings of research question three, it is indicated that wastages as measured by dropout and repetition rates greatly affect the quality of education. Furthermore, the hypothesis three which states that there is no significant relationship between wastages (as measured by dropout and repetition rates) and the quality of education was tested below:

Table 3
Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient on Wastage and Quality of Education

Variable	Quality of Education Wastage		
	Quality of Education	Pearson Correlation	1
	Significance		0.000
	N	500	500
	Mean	15.12	11.08
	Standard Deviation	1.53	1.52

Significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows the relationship between educational wastages and quality of education as measured by Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Quality of education was found to be negatively but significantly related to wastages as measured by drop-outs and repetition ($r = -0.468$, $N=500$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, the null hypothesis earlier stated was rejected. This implies that when quality of education increases, educational wastages decreases or when educational wastages increases, the quality of education decreases.

Research Question Four & Hypothesis Four

The findings from research question four reveals that availability of resources affects the quality of education. In like manner, the fourth hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between availability of resources and the quality of education was also tested thus:

Table 4
Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient on the Availability of Resources and Quality of Education

Variable	Quality of Education Wastage		
	Quality of Education	Pearson Correlation	1
	Significance		0.000
	N	500	500
	Mean	15.12	13.92
	Standard Deviation	1.53	1.41

Significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 4 indicates the relationship between availability of resources and quality of education as measured by Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. There is a positive significant relationship between availability of resources and quality of education. ($r = 0.356$, $N=500$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, the null hypothesis stated was rejected.

Research Question Five

How can the government ensure that education responds to the current national demands, sustainable development and social justice? This was addressed using the responses from the questionnaire, as highlighted below:

Table 5:
How the government can ensure that education responds to the current national demands, sustainable development and social justice.

S/N	ITEMS	Agreed	Disagreed	Don't Know	Total	Mean	SD	Variance
1.	Government should provide adequate resources to enhance quality education both in the rural and urban schools	473 95%	21 4%	5 1%	500	1.06	0.28	0.08
2.	Adequacy of funds should be provided to schools in both urban and rural areas	470 94%	26 5%	4 1%	500	1.6	0.27	0.07
3.	Government should provide opportunities for teachers in both urban and rural schools to attend in-service training	445 89%	55 11%	0 0%	500	1.11	0.31	0.10
4.	Government should provide housing, electricity, and pipe born water to entice qualified teachers to agree to go to the rural areas.	465 93%	20 4%	15 3%	500	1.10	0.39	0.15
5.	Government should make provision for more infrastructure in both urban and rural schools	446 89%	16 3%	38 8%	500	1.18	0.55	0.30

Table 5 above reveals the percentage, mean, standard deviation and variance of the survey on how the government should ensure that education in Nigeria responds to the current national demands, sustainable development and social justice. From the table, the mean value is consistent, ranging from 1.06 to 1.18, while the standard deviation and variance are all below 1.0. From this, it is evident that greater percentage of the participants agreed to all the questions. This shows that government needs to do a lot to ensure that education in Nigeria responds positively to current national demands, sustainable development and social justice.

Discussion

From the findings, there is apparent difference in the quality of education as measured by spending level, class size, teacher-student ratio, etc. between schools in the urban and rural areas. The importance of adequate provision of these in enhancing the quality of education cannot be overemphasized. Yolo (1976) as cited by Osifela, (2012) identified some crucial factors should be considered in assessing quality of education. These include the quality of teachers, robust curriculum, quality of facilities and instruction, quality of morale and quality of administration and management.

It is a well-known fact that the earlier parents show interests in their child's education, the more positive the effect on the student's performance, school attendance and student well-being. Conversely, when parents do not show enough interest, the quality of education is affected. There is the tendency to have lower income families and unqualified teachers in the rural areas. The lower quality resources in the rural areas affect equity and quality. This agrees with the view of Sammons, (2010), who said equity addresses quality. The idea is that education can contribute to social justice and democracy by closing the gap between students with regards to their background, especially their abilities and the socio-cultural status of their families.

The issue of accessibility to ensure equity and quality is of great concern to the researchers. This is because Nigeria is one of the signatories to the Dakar framework of action, which made it imperative, perhaps, to all nations that signed the accord to "ensure that by 2015, all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free compulsory education of good quality." (Ekhaguere, 2003).

The discussion of access to education can only be meaningful when it is considered in relation to enrolment in the three levels of education (primary, secondary and tertiary). Access to education is generally looked at from the angle of the number of people enrolled in the educational system compared with those who should have been enrolled in the school and were not. In the bid to improve on the access to education at all levels, the federal government implemented the Universal Primary Education Scheme (UPE) in 1976 and Universal Basic Education (UBE) in the year 1999 which were intended to provide access to basic education to every Nigerian child and it was intended to be universal, free and compulsory. However, the inability to provide the needed infrastructure and pay teachers' salaries were some of the impediments to accessibility.

It has been observed that access to education has been very poor because only a few of the school age children, particularly primary school children in the rural areas were actually in school. It has been further observed that majority of the children who enrolled in schools were from rich households, followed by children from middle income households and only a few number of children were from poor households. This is a clear indication that people from higher and middle socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to appreciate the quality of education and as such ensure that their children go to good schools (Nwachukwu, 2014).

Another key finding of the research is that dropout and repetition rates grossly affect the quality of education. Incidentally, this is more pronounced in the rural schools than in the urban schools. There is no gain saying that the incidents of repetition and dropout rates have a significant relationship on the quality of education. Although, there are many reasons for repetition and dropout, they are clear indicators of poor quality teaching methods and materials (Uzoka, 1997). Suffice it to say that not many of the students who begin primary and secondary schools actually finish, thereby leaving dropouts without the minimum reading and writing skills and basic competency in mathematics.

The findings of the study further showed that availability of educational resources has great impact on the quality of education. This is because educational resources viz-a-viz professionally qualified teachers, adequate and appropriate instructional materials, facilities, current and relevant books for libraries, etc. promote quality education. The use of multimedia within the classrooms has enhanced teaching and learning. The multimedia application is one which uses a collection of multiple media sources e.g. text, graphics, images, sound/audio, animation and/or video. Hypermedia can also be considered as one of multimedia application. In the same vein, Salisu (2012) emphasizes that school facilities have a profound impact on their occupants and functions of the buildings in terms of teaching and learning.

The issue of availability of educational resources in the educational system cannot be overemphasized. This is because quality goes hand in hand with finance, since finance is needed to employ good and professionally qualified teachers, instructional materials, facilities, books for libraries, etc. Therefore, one of the big challenges facing the educational system in the country is that of promoting a quality education for all, especially at the primary and secondary schools levels. This however means substantial investments, and efforts to improve educational administration, training of teachers, curricula reforms, development of new teaching materials using the latest information and communication technology (ICT).

Conclusion

The educational system in Nigeria has not been able to establish efficient and effective means by which to assemble and disseminate the relevant knowledge and basic skills that young Nigerian people need to confront the challenges posed by economic development and technological transformation. The defects which have accumulated over a period have resulted in the persistent inequality of access to education and the poor quality of the services offered.

The study has to a large extent clarified the essence and need for quality and equitable educational system in Nigeria. It has therefore, unequivocally stressed the importance of quality and equal educational opportunities for all Nigerian children which will enhance the realization of national economic empowerment, development strategy and social justice.

Way Forward

1. There is need for the country to provide quality education to every Nigerian citizen at all levels of education in order to achieve equity and reduction of extreme disparities in income.
2. Government should provide the type of education that equips people with the ability to communicate effectively and foster scientific and technological research for development.
3. The paper recommends an educational system that is responsive to current national demands and conducive to sustainable development which will bring about equity and social justice.
4. The government should put in place policies and practices that would enhance economic empowerment and developmental strategy which will bring about social justice.
5. The way the education systems are designed can increase the severity of inequalities and hence negative impact on students' motivation and engagement which may lead to increase in dropout and repetition rates especially in the rural areas. The government, therefore, should revisit and restructure the educational system to ameliorate the anomalies inherent in the educational system
6. Curriculum should be made robust enough to accommodate the needs and desires of every Nigerian child. Thus, the nation needs a curriculum that delivers what students need for their future, what parents want and what the nation requires in an increasingly competitive and globalized world.
7. There is need to provide adequate funding and strategies that are responsive to students' and schools' needs both in the rural and urban areas.
8. Efforts should be made towards making schools both in rural and urban areas conducive for teaching and learning through the provision of adequate and appropriate human and material resources.

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Contact emails: ngozime1@yahoo.com, rositaigwe@yahoo.com