

Funding Education in the Post COVID-19 Era: the case for the Nigeria Primary Schools

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Abstract: Primary education in Nigeria is the stepping stone for further learning and educational attainment of the Nigerian citizenry. Thus, the need for proper and adequate funding of the sector, irrespective of the COVID -19 pandemic. This review presented the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to the Nigerian education system; discussed the various problems inherent in the Nigerian education sector vis-à-vis the primary education; highlighted the objectives of the Nigeria primary education as well as its' sources of funding. Hence, to increase access to quality education, enrolment of learners and improving learners' learning outcomes in Nigeria primary schools, adequate funding for education and increase in the Nigerian education budget allocation during and after the COVID-19 pandemic should be ensured. The paper also presented some suggestions on improving education funding, quality and access in Nigeria.

Keywords: COVID-19; Funding; Primary Education; Nigeria.

Introduction

The robustness of the Nigeria education system is fundamental for a continuous and sustained national growth and development. There is need to maintain quality in the teaching-learning processes. As such, the Nigerian government needs to pay greater attention to the development of the education sector at all levels if she is to achieve the sustainable development goals. A good indicator for ascertaining the extent to which governments' value education can be deduced from the volume of funding and resources allocated to the sector in the national fiscal budget. In the case of Nigeria, budgetary allocation to the education sector is a far cry from the standard of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommendation of at least 15 percent. There is a high likelihood that the situation could worsen in the wake of the Corona virus pandemic.

The Corona virus Disease (COVID-19) outbreak is a major problem to the global education systems. It has prompted unscheduled shutdown of schools in over 100 countries of the world and may have forced over one billion learners to be out of school with rise in students' debts and general job loss of parents and guardian. Human activities in many parts of the world; ranging from research, sports, worship, transportation, entertainment, economy, social gathering/interactions, businesses and politics, had been affected immensely, however, the education sector seems to be one of the worst-hit by the pandemic. The pandemic has exposed numerous ills in the education systems around the world, especially in many African countries where challenges of poor infrastructure, inadequate staffing, poor funding of education as well as lack of teaching and learning aids abound (Edeh, Nwafor, Obafemi, Shuvro, Atonye, Aabha & Ihuseen, 2020; Loayza & Pennings, 2020). Akinwumi and Itobore (2020) posited that the pandemic has resulted in a global paradigm shift in the world's education systems towards an increasing reliance on technology-based solution, stemming from the unprecedented shut down of schools.

The shutdown of schools due to the pandemic outbreak may also have created a dilemma in school children food and housing security, and how the education system transit from the usual conventional teaching and learning strategies to blended learning. The pandemic has proved to be a major menace creating a dichotomy between learners and teachers in Nigeria. Currently, e-learning has become the alternate means that educational institutions have adopted in Nigeria as the new normal (Igbokwe, Okeke-James, Anyanwu, and Eli-Chukwu, 2020); and would require adequate funding from all stakeholders, for it to be sustained.

More so, UNESCO (2020b) highlighted the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on education to include: interrupted learning, uneven access to digital learning portals, poor or reduced schools' feeding/nutrition, social isolation and increased pressure on schools. Akinwumi and Itobore (2020) reiterated this by stating that the Covid-19 outbreak has affected the Nigerian educational parlance by increasing the number of out-of-school children, negatively affecting children/learners' psychology, repositioning of schools and the calendar, unpreparedness of parents and families to online and distance learning. Similarly, the surge in the priority recently given to the health sector is likely to decrease the funding available for other sectors including education (Loayza & Pennings, 2020).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, it is expected that over 23 million persons will be forced into poverty due to the pandemic (Mahler, et al, 2020). It has led to decreased individual income, decreased household education expenditure and school participation, low students’ motivation and enrolment, and disparities in learners’ learning outcomes (World Bank, 2020b; Ferreira & Schady, 2009; Bandiera, et al, 2019). Nonetheless, in the post Covid-19 era, the aforementioned can be mitigated by governments at all level through the award of stipends to learners, cash transfer programs to parents/households, fee waivers to indigent learners, to ensure that educational attainment with respect to teaching and learning is continued (Snilstveit et al, 2015; Birger & Craissati, 2009).

In the post Covid-19 era, the adaptive/technology classroom has become a norm, and the teaching-learning activities are now technology driven. The adoption of these technologies may have taken a very slow pace in the Nigeria context. This may have been due to low budgetary allocation to the education sector. An assessment by the OECD (2013) showed that since 2010, education budget has been on the decline, accompanied with a reduction in teachers’ salaries and welfare packages.

Also, a number of developing countries as a result of financial downturn necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic have drastically reduced their education budgets (UNESCO, 2009; Martin and Kyrili, 2009). Okebukola (2016) as cited in Okeowo and Agunloye (2018) recounted that “money cannot solve all the problems in the education sector, but without it, no solution is possible”. Additional spending into the Nigerian education sector will be required in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in education, especially in reducing learners’ dropout rate (Gaspar et al, 2019; Snilstveit et al, 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to discuss education funding in Nigeria amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, with primary education in view.

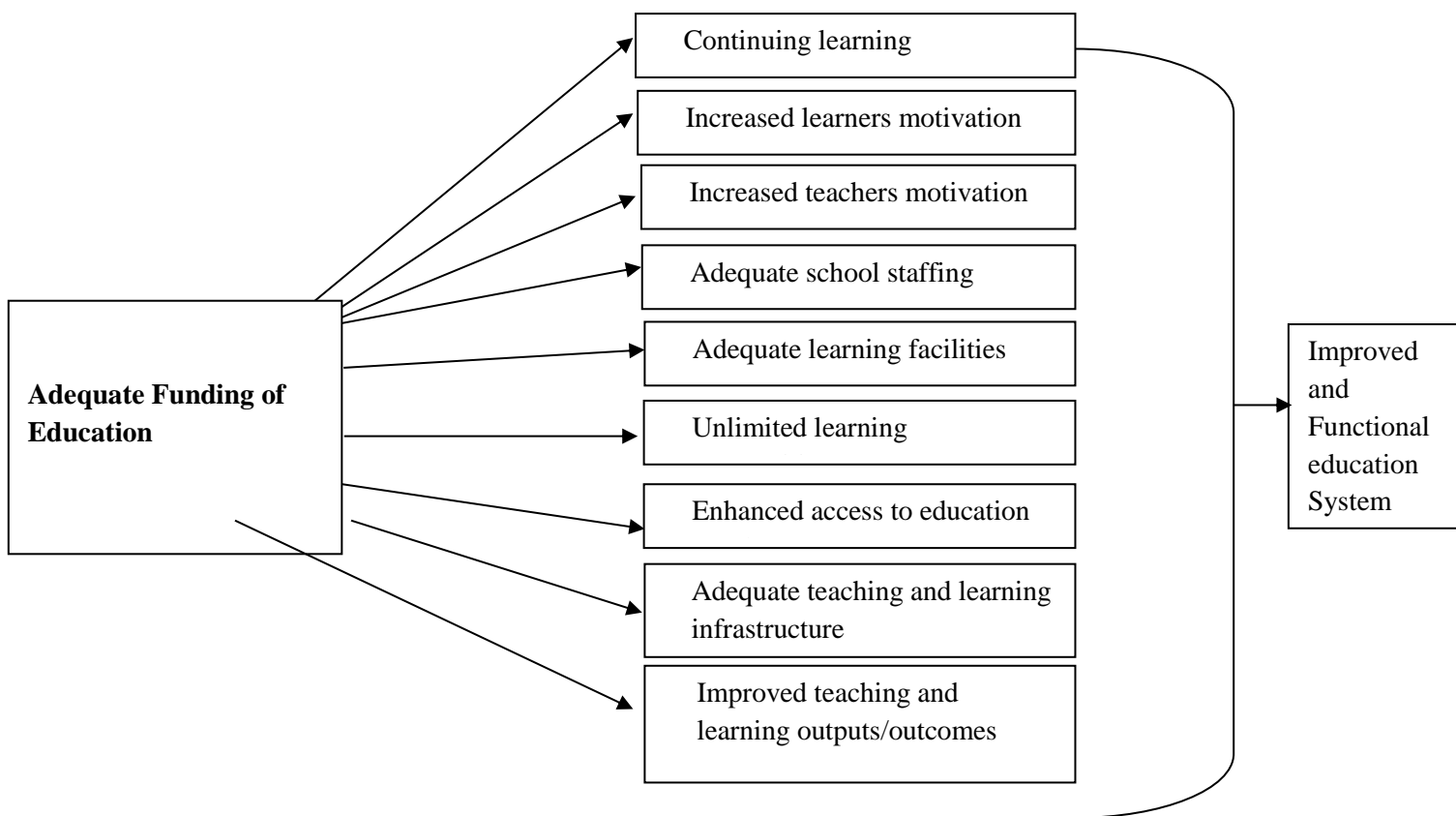


Figure 1: Essence of education funding in Nigeria (Developed by the researchers).

Table 1: National budgetary allocation for education in Nigeria (2010 - 2019)

Year	Total national Budget (#)	Education budget (#)	% of total budget
2010	40 trillion	293billion	7.19
2011	4.22 trillion	393 billion	9.31
2012	4.74 trillion	453 billion	9.15
2013	4.92 trillion	499 billion	10.15
2014	4.69 trillion	494 billion	10.54
2015	4.49 trillion	434 billion	10.71
2016	6.06 trillion	431 billion	7.92
2017	7.44 trillion	551 billion	7.41
2018	8.60 trillion	605.8 billion	7.04
2019	8.92 trillion	620.5 billion	7.05
2020	10.33 trillion	671.07 billion	6.7
2021	13.08 trillion	742.5 billion	5.6

Source: Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning (2021)

Primary education is the Nigerian child's springboard towards pursuing higher academic and social goals. It is a vital part of the entire Nigerian education system, as such should be handled with great care and concern. Therefore, government's funding of primary education in Nigeria should be considered extensively, as it is the only level that can accommodate large enrolment ratios of learners (Asodike & Ikpitibo, 2014).

Objectives of the Nigeria Primary Education

The primary education in Nigeria amongst others is to provide learners with opportunities to:

1. obtain numeracy, literacy, communication and creativity skills;
2. benefit from and desire for continued learning;
3. possess the ability to think critically and make logical judgment;
4. value and reverence the dignity of work;
5. have the necessary social, moral and religious standards and values;
6. be self-disciplined, healthy and physically fit;
7. be aesthetic and familiar with his or her people's culture;
8. be aware and appreciative of the environment;
9. be aware of and appreciate other countries and the global society;
10. impart love and respect for own nation as well as co-existing in harmony;
11. be talented individually;
12. be socially responsible while making proper use of leisure time; and
13. be acquainted with and appreciate the roles of technology in national development.

Sources of Funding for Primary Education in Nigeria

The under listed are the major sources of funding for the Nigeria primary education:

- i. The governments;
- ii. The parents/guardian of learners;
- iii. Self sourcing by primary schools;
- iv. Contributions from school communities;
- v. Contributions from business entities/corporations, e.g, Banks, Companies and corporations;
- vi. Contributions from religious organizations;
- vii. Contributions from wealthy individuals/philanthropists; and
- viii. Contributions from international organizations such as IMF, World Bank, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and UNFPA.

Problems of the Nigeria Education system

A number of problems bedevil the Nigeria education systems and has given the sector a bad status and image within the international community ([Okwuosa & Modibbo, 2021](#)), and these have been prevalent before the outbreak of the Corona virus, and are likely to worsen even in the post Covid-19 era. Some of these problems are: poor staffing; poor funding; poor governance, corruption and misappropriation of funds; political instability/politicisation of education; nepotism; economic instability; over reliance on oil; population explosion, to mention but a few. Some of these are briefly discussed below:

- (i) **Poor staffing:** This is a major problem presently confronting primary education in Nigeria. There is paucity of teaching and non-teaching members of staff in many primary schools. This is caused by government failure in recruiting able hands in the level; also, many teachers in primary schools have migrated or have been converted into the secondary or tertiary levels of the education sector. The reasons for this are likely due to poor remuneration, poor or no welfare packages as well as low societal status of primary school teachers.
- (ii) **Poor Funding:** In Nigeria, it is a fact that governments at all levels (federal, state and local) have inadequately been funding education. This has resulted in a near collapse of the sector. Teaching and learning infrastructure is a far cry of what is to be expected. Many schools are understaffed, and as such, learners' enrolment may have been negatively affected.
- (iii) **Poor governance, corruption and misappropriation of funds:** Poor governance, corruption and misappropriation of funds are one of the crippling forces of the Nigerian education sector. Nigerian leaders at the helms of government affairs have over time proven to be inefficient and unworthy of trust. Many of them are only pursuing their personal or family interests. The little funding/resources allocated to the education sector is usually diverted into self-purse or for personal gains. Head masters/mistresses in primary schools are not left out. They are also guilty of corruption and funds misappropriation. According to Osim (2016), corruption remains a key problem that has negatively hampered the access to and quality of education in Nigeria.
- (iv) **Political instability/politicisation of education:** Frequent and unscheduled change of governments in Nigeria is a problem facing the education sector. When governments change, their policies (implemented or not) is also changed or abandoned. Education politicisation is also a common abnormality in the sector. Undue and wasteful competition within the three tiers of governments had done more harm than good to the sector. Most times, schools (especially private schools) not worth being regarded as one, is given license/accreditation to operate; with little or no facilities to successfully operate as a school.
- (v) **Population explosion:** The unprecedented rise in the Nigeria population is worrisome. This has caused governments' allocation as well as attention for the education sector to be diverted to other sectors. It has also caused an over stretch of the schools and the facilities therein. Schools now restrict enrolment rates as well as gender equality. The provision of primary education to the Nigerian citizenry has adopted the social demand approach, leading to an over expansion of the system with little or no funding (Igbaji & Mowette, 2017).

In Nigeria, the primary education is mainly funded through concurrent financing from the three tiers of governments (federal, state, and local), with a distinct funding formula/ratio, mandates and responsibilities for each tier. For instance, the federal government provides 50% of the total education budgetary allocation, while the states and the local governments provide 30% and 20% respectively. However, in practical sense, it is the federal government that determines the volume to be allocated over time. This is evident from the recent shortfalls in the allocation to the sector, brought about by a decrease in the price of crude oil, insurgency and the likes (Odufowokan, 2007; [Okwuosa & Modibbo, 2021](#)).

Conclusion

Funding of primary education according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2005) is paramount in fostering gender equality, reduction in poverty levels and continued economic growth. Education should be accessible to all without discrimination. Hence, to increase enrollment and improve learners learning outcomes in the Nigeria primary schools, adequate funding for education and increase in the Nigerian education budget allocation during and after the Covid-19 pandemic should be ensured.

Suggestions

- i. The Nigerian government should as a matter of urgency, treat the education sector with the very respect and attention it deserves. This she can do by providing sufficient funds and resources for primary education.
- ii. The funds/resources so provided should be well monitored in order to deter its mismanagement or misappropriation.
- iii. Governments at all levels should be committed in providing and delivering high quality/standard education for all citizenry.
- iv. Primary school teachers' salaries/welfare packages urgently needs reconsideration, review and upgrade; as this will reduce or prevent teacher turnout or burnout.
- v. Governments and Education stakeholders should recruit adequate capable hands (both teaching and non-teaching members of staff) into primary schools; and
- vi. Government should set up the primary education emergency fund, for the revitalisation of primary education in Nigeria.

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