

## THE CURRENT STATE OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA AND HOW IT CAN BE IMPROVED

Nigeria, officially the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is a country located on the western coast of Africa. With a population of over 225 million, it is the world's sixth-most populous country. On the African continent, Nigeria is the key nation in terms of politics, commerce, and demography. Nigeria is as populous as if four sub-saharan Africans are randomly picked, at least, one of them will be Nigerian. Regardless of the population size, every Nigerian child — no matter who they are or where they are — deserves a fighting chance, and part of that must be receiving an education. Education is an essential tool for widespread national growth and it is one of the most effective tools for eradicating poverty and advancing health, gender equality, peace and stability.

How crucial education is to us cannot be overstated. It is a deliberate way to inculcate advanced degrees of knowledge, values, and skills, in addition to those we naturally acquire. On a personal level, it enables one to weigh options, decide intelligently and pass reliable judgement. However, one-third of children in Nigeria are not enrolled in school and as a result do not benefit from the aforementioned. Subsequent paragraphs hereafter will attempt a critical examination of the current state of education in Nigeria and how it can be improved.

Unquestionably, Nigeria is the country with the largest population in Africa and education is crucial in ensuring that this rapidly growing population is well informed and forms a powerful human capital that will drive the much anticipated industrialization and development of Africa. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Nigeria. Here, education is incorrectly employed to exacerbate and maintain the social class gap rather than as a means of equalizing chances. This is interpreted as resulting in both unequal access to education and high levels of absolute educational deprivation in some regions. In addition to the appalling decline in educational standards, only a select few in Nigeria can afford to pay for high-quality education. The government budgetary allocation on education is given less attention than it deserves. As a result, the tuition costs have increased, and those who cannot afford it are forced to drop out. Free education is no longer truly free because there are numerous hidden fees in the form of levies. Even scholarships are quickly fading into the "good old days," as the wealthy divert the few remaining scholarship programs meant for the needy to benefit their own children. Millions of Nigerian children have never set foot in a classroom because they cannot afford the tuition fees and many who do barely make the transition from primary school to secondary school and then from secondary school to tertiary institution.

In Nigeria's 20.5 trillion naira 2023 budget signed into law at the end of 2022, 8.8% was allocated to the education sector — increased from the 7.2% allocated in the 2022 budget. Even though the Nigerian government has committed to increasing funding for education, which is a crucial step, the allocation is still less than the 15% to 20% UNESCO recommendation. As a result, a disproportionate number of Nigerian children are not in school today, and among those who are, a disproportionate number do not receive a good education that can lead to favorable prospects for their futures.

One of the most neglected aspects of the school's system is the educational infrastructure. Poor maintenance and gross neglect are wrecking havoc on educational facilities. Every year, more students are admitted, but there are no specific infrastructure preparations in place to accommodate them.

Attending a general course lecture is always a headache to majority of students in government-owned tertiary institutions. This is because the available lecture halls can barely accommodate 50% of the students offering the course. I have to deal with this challenge as a new undergraduate. Lecturers in charge of such courses struggle with the public address system, making it really arduous to even note a thing when the said lecture is ongoing. Students will of course still try to find a way to get in even when everywhere has been occupied thereby making the hall jumbled, stuffy and congested. All these put together can lead to mass failure. As this is overwhelming for the students, lecturers are not left out.

Teachers are underpaid and undermotivated. The poor working conditions saps their motivation to teach and knowledge is not effectively impacted into the students. To get the government to agree to their demands, which range from infrastructure to wages, teachers go on strike. Due to the ASUU strike in 2022, which lasted for 8 months before settlements were reached, the majority of Nigerian universities were closed indefinitely. The educational system as a whole and the students in particular suffered greatly as a result. The majority of the time, as has always been the case, the agreement is breached, and strike actions begin again.

There is an urgent need to address the moribund status of education in Nigeria. Placing Nigeria's educational system on the right track will not be simple, and it will require cooperation from all stakeholders—not just the government—at all levels. The budgetary allocations for education should be significantly increased, and a sizeable portion of that increase should go toward the construction and upkeep of educational facilities. Education in public schools should be absolutely free and accessible to everyone. At all levels of government, scholarship programs and cash awards should be reinstated and given to worthy students based on their academic achievement or financial status. Teachers should be paid promptly and adequately. Beyond pay, compensation should include things like required promotions and professional development opportunities for teachers. These will serve as morale boosters for them, and as a result, will lead to efficient transfer of knowledge to the students.

Although it would take a thousand steps, it is possible to bring back high standards of education in Nigeria. With time and regular application of these strategies, Nigeria's educational system will undergo a significant improvement.