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Inequalities within Nigeria's Education System: A Focus on Secondary Schools in Lagos, Ondo State and Ogun State

Abstract

This paper aims to examine the current inequalities within Nigeria's education system with a brief focus on Lagos, Ondo State and Ogun State. It will also examine how the current system is funded and will consider the percentage of GDP the government spends on education in Nigeria in comparison to other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to this, the inequalities in terms of the payment of school fees within both the private and public sectors in Lagos will be examined. Furthermore, the quality of education in Nigeria in terms of resourcing, facilities, and equipment and class sizes will be evaluated. Comparisons will be made about the relationship between education and economic growth. This paper intends to examine the quality of the current education system and the extent to which adult illiteracy is increasing in Nigeria. The paper will highlight the current trends in Nigeria's education system and will finally put forward recommendations to improve Nigeria's education system.

Keywords: Nigeria's education system, economic growth, adult literacy, funding, quality

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the current inequalities within Nigeria's education system, with a brief focus on Lagos, Ondo State and Ogun State. The research was inspired by recent research conducted by UNESCO where their findings suggest that Nigeria currently has 10.5 million children out of school (UNESCO, 2016, p. 30). The paper also aims to examine the relationship between education and economic growth. The paper will identify the percentage of GDP that is invested into education in Nigeria in comparison to other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This paper will also consider the quality of education in Nigeria in terms of exploring issues such as resourcing, equipment and class-sizes. Current trends within Nigeria's education system will also be considered.

According to UNESCO (2016, p. 1) Nigeria currently holds the world record of having the highest number of its young people out of school, there are approximately 10.5 million children out of school. Nigeria tops the table of 12 other countries where it accounts for 47% of the global out-of-school population. Furthermore, UNESCO (Ibid.) points out that of all countries in the world, Nigeria is one of the four that has experienced the highest increase of children who are out of school since 1999.

Methodology

For the purpose of this paper a combination of both primary and secondary research was conducted. In total 10 secondary schools in Nigeria were visited. In Lagos State 6 schools were visited. In Ogun State 2 schools were visited and in

Ondo State 2 schools were visited by the researcher. The justification of the visits were to better understand how Nigeria's education system functioned and to establish whether inequality within the system actually existed. Discussions, observations and meetings were also held with a Non-governmental organisation.

Several focus groups were also held with the Head teachers and teachers from schools in Lagos, Ondo State and Ogun State. In Lagos State 6 focus groups were held with each individual school, 2 focus group meetings were held in both Ondo and Ogun state. Teacher training sessions were also conducted to identify existing problems. 7 Training sessions were delivered to teachers in Lagos State and 2 sessions of training in both Ondo and Ogun State.

Secondary research was conducted and reference has been made to research recently conducted by UNESCO *Education for all global monitoring report* (2016). Statistical data has also been derived from the World Bank (2014) working for a world free from poverty. The justification for employing these research methods were to gather first-hand information from stakeholders and schools as well as others who work very closely within educational institutions in Nigeria because they possess an in-depth knowledge of the system and are in a position to identify any inequalities that may currently exist.

Study limitations and literature review

There was limited access to research on a wider section of schools in Nigeria. For example the research focused on secondary schools in Lagos, Ogun State and Ondo State. The validity of the research might have been better if research were carried out across a wider spectrum of schools across various states in Nigeria. The research was conducted within the Southern region of the country. Research was not carried out in the North and Eastern regions of the country, however, the research relied on secondary research in these regions.

The literature review was gathered to consider previous research that currently exists in the area of inequalities within Nigeria's education system and to investigate other related topics pertaining to the content of the research paper.

A funding crisis

Despite recently over-taking South Africa as the continent's biggest economy, Nigeria invests less in education than almost any other country in Africa, according to figures released by the World Bank (2014, p. 1). There are two key indicators of good practice in education expenditure, governments should spend 6% of their gross domestic product on education and about 20% of their budget on schooling. Nigeria spends just 1.5% respectively in those areas, based on UNESCO calculations (UNESCO, 2014, p. 71) there is scope for the government of Nigeria to do more than treble its education spending if the current state of affairs are to improve.

There are currently various government reforms and initiatives aimed at improving Nigeria's education system. These include the upgrade of some polytechnics and colleges of education to the status of degree-awarding institutions, the approval and accreditation of more private universities and the dissemination of better education-related data, including the recently published Nigerian Educational

Statistics, a publication assisted by USAID among others (Onyukwu, Clark & Ausukuya, 2011).

However, with regards to secondary school education there are predominately two sectors – the state sector and the private sector, the private sector is funded by a fee paying system. Many families from poor backgrounds are unable to pay for the cost of a private education and as a consequence of this many young people go without a secondary school education. As a result of this adult illiteracy is rising in Nigeria. According to UNESCO (2014, p. 71) Nigeria has the highest population of illiterate adults. Others countries are Ethiopia, Egypt, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia.

Spending on education

There is a huge lack of information on state and local expenditure for education which makes accurate estimates of total spending on education in Nigeria difficult to assess (Global Education First Initiative, 2013, p. 12). Overall available data points to a lack of education funding in the sector, in particular at state level. According to the report a large proportion, often about 90%, of total public expenditure on education is absorbed by salaries, whereas the benchmark is 67% (Ibid.).

The report further states that in 2006, total public spending on education in Nigeria was estimated at 5% of GDP and 12.5% of total public spending, well below the recommended Education for All threshold of 20% (World Bank, 2014, p. 8). Spending as a percentage of GDP was higher than in the average Sub-Saharan country but slightly lower than in South Africa and Kenya, which spent 5.3 and 7% respectively (Global Education First Initiative, 2013, p. 12).

According to the World Bank (2014, p. 1) Nigeria spends around 1% of her annual budget on education. UNESCO (2014, p. 1) suggests that to meet the target of ensuring that all children receive a basic education by 2015 that countries should aim towards investing at least 6% of their budget on education. According to recent figures presented by UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2016) Malawi, Mozambique, Ghana and South Africa each appear to have invested 6% or above in their education system. However, no data was available for the following countries: Nigeria, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Senegal, Seychelles, Tanzania, Swaziland, South Sudan, Namibia, Liberia, Lesotho, Kenya, Cote D'Ivoire, Gabon, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, Congo, Cameroun, Central African Republic, Botswana and Angola (World Bank, 2014, p. 9) The only countries that show an element of consistency are South Africa and Rwanda.

Data from the World Bank shows how much each African country invested in education from 2010 to 2013. South Africa currently spends the highest percentage of GDP on Education, it was 6.0 in 2010, 6.2 in 2011 and 6.6 in 2012. However, Nigeria did not submit any data between 2010 and 2013. In general data from sub-Saharan countries was generally inconsistent (World Bank, 2014, p. 1).

Education in state secondary schools

A failure by many states in Nigeria to invest adequately in education has impacted greatly on the quality of education that many young people in Nigeria receive. According to UNESCO (2014, p. 1) teachers need good quality learning

materials to be effective but many secondary schools in Nigeria do not have access to textbooks or computers. This was evident while conducting research in several states in Nigeria, namely state schools in Ondo, Ogun and Lagos.

Poor infrastructure and dilapidated buildings was a common problem encountered. Other problems encountered were small and over-crowded classrooms and a lack of adequate sanitation facilities, for example in one school visited there was no running water and so children would have to fetch water from the nearest stream exposing them to waterborne diseases, this problem was later rectified by a non- governmental organisation who built a borehole.

In the majority of the schools visited essential facilities were lacking such as computing suites, libraries, science laboratories and basic text books. In the school visited in Ogun State, students were forced to use traditional toileting methods.

School fees: a challenge for all

Many young people are out of school because their parents are unable to pay the high school fees charged by many private schools in Nigeria. This is a crisis not only for the poor but for middle class Nigerians as well. It is not uncommon for school fees in Lagos to reach £13,000+ a year in some international schools. In the middle income schools fees range at around £9,000+ a year, this is a huge amount considering that most people in Nigeria earn less than \$1 a day. In Nigeria the quality of education is often associated with how much a parent has to pay.

Teacher training

There have been attempts to improve the level of qualifications amongst teachers in Nigeria. The number of teachers with NCE (post-school teacher training certificate) has increased and the country seems to be moving towards achieving a goal of having the NCE as a minimum qualification for teaching in primary schools (Moja, 2000, p. 13). Basic facilities, teaching and learning resources are generally not available. Teacher-pupil ratios are high and generally performance in examinations are poor (Moja, 2000, p. 26).

Therefore, investing in training for teachers is key, in around a third of countries less than 75% of primary school teachers are trained according to national standards and in a third of developing countries the challenge of training existing teachers is worse than that of recruiting and training new teachers (UNESCO, 2014, p. 6). This argument has been supported by the Education Sector Support Program in Nigeria (ESSPIN), who also suggest that Nigeria's children are being denied the right to a quality education due to poor teacher training initiatives (ESSPIN, 2010, p. 13).

Therefore, millions of children in Nigeria are not learning the basic skills even though half of them have spent at least six years in school, poor learning has also been attributed to a lack of teacher training (Department for International Development, 2010, p. 53).

Economic growth

Failing to invest sufficiently in Nigeria's education system has impacted significantly on the quality of education received by children in most parts of the

country. It has also contributed to the high number of children who have been denied access to education in Nigeria. According to UNESCO (2014, p. 71), Nigeria has the highest amount of children out of school in the world, the figure currently stands at 10.5 million, this figure is set to rise.

There are many benefits from investing in Nigeria's education system, a significant factor would be a decrease in adult illiteracy. There is currently limited data on the exact figures of adult illiteracy in Nigeria according to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2016, p. 1) but the figures are set to rise if intervention strategies are not put in place.

According to UNESCO (2014, p. 9) in order to tap into the potential for economic growth in many parts of the world's poorest countries (Nigeria being one of them), governments need to expand their tax base and devote a fifth of their budget to education. UNESCO suggest that "If governments in 67 low and middle income countries did this they would raise an additional \$153 billion for education in 2015 that would increase the average share of GDP spent on education from 3% to 6%".

Gillard (in Coughlan, 2014, p. 1) suggests "that it is enlightened self-interest to invest in education". She suggests that anyone who is serious about wanting to promote economic growth and to tackle extremism should start by building classrooms and training teachers.

In addition to this, (Brock, 2012, p. 1) argues that "although Nigeria's economy is projected to continue growing, poverty is likely to get worse as the gap between the rich and poor in Africa's largest oil producer country continues to widen". "Poverty in Nigeria continues to rise with almost 100 million people living on less than \$1 a day" (UNESCO, 2014, p. 8).

South Korea's emphasis on education has seen its young people leapfrogging the academic achievement of other industrialised countries, including the United Kingdom (NCEE, 2013). While some may think this is an unfair comparison to make with Nigeria, things have not always looked cosy for South Korea on the education plane, from being a country that has experienced much hardship it is reported that South Koreans have invested in education as a means towards economic progress and that the country has recognised the importance of developing skills in new technology (NCEE, 2013).

The OECD report states that higher spending does not necessarily convert to higher results and that some education systems are more efficient. South Korea spends about half the amount on school pupils as the United States, but its performance at maths is much higher. Finland, the top performing country at maths in 2003, spends much less than Italy, which was almost the worst-performing country (NCEE, 2013).

Further challenges

Boko-Haram, a militant group who oppose western education, and are behind the abduction of over 200 girls from Chibok, Borno State have added to the growing crisis. Archer (2014, p. 1) further points out "that many more children in particular young girls will continue to be denied an education if this conflict is not resolved".

Irina Bokova, formerly the Director General of UNESCO argues further that “Gender equality in education is a basic human right – it is also essential to achieving sustained development” (UNESCO, 2014, p. 3).

Corruption

Lamido Sanusi suggests that Nigeria must overcome a vested interest if changes are to be made in certain systems (BBC, 2014). Although, his speech is centred on issues relating to corruption within the banking sector, many of these issues may be applied to the lack of progress seen in Nigeria’s education system.

A legal and moral responsibility

Sanusi suggests there is a legal and moral responsibility to ensure that children are not denied an education. The universal declaration of human rights points out in article 26 that everyone has a right to an education.

Furthermore, (Archer, 2014, p. 1) suggests that disadvantage does not have to be destiny, a child born into a disadvantaged family should not have to fall into a vicious cycle of poverty.

Trends in Nigeria’s education system

There is a growing trend for Nigeria’s middle classes to send their children away to school in the west. Current changes to foreign exchange rates means that many middle class Nigerian’s are unable to educate their children abroad. Termly tuition fees range from £4,100 per term to £12,300 per annum for international students.

Conclusion and recommendations

The implications of the research for the future of Nigeria’s education system means that failure to address the current funding crisis in secondary schools in Nigeria would mean that the current figure of 10.5 million young people out of school in Nigeria will certainly rise. This may lead to increases in adult illiteracy.

Education evolves and this places an emphasis on funding and training teachers. Failure to invest adequately in Nigeria’s education system means that education will eventually become a preserve of the middle class and wealthy leading to a vicious circle of poverty for those who are unable to educate themselves or their children.

Clearly there needs to be ongoing conversations regarding why 10.5 million children in Nigeria are currently out of school. The introduction of an effective taxation system. Private schools could be asked to contribute and work in collaboration with public schools. There is also a need to increase funding for the most populated of areas in Nigeria.

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