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QUALITY EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS PATHWAYS TO SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Access to quality education is a fundamental pillar of achieving sustainable development, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, where education plays a pivotal role in shaping social advancement and economic sustainability. Over the years, various educational reforms have been implemented to realign Nigeria's basic education sector to meet international standards and fulfil Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) which aims at ensuring "inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all." This paper investigates the relationship between quality education and sustainable development, examining how improvements in Nigeria's Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme between 2019 and 2024 have contributed to social and economic transformation. It assesses policy frameworks, infrastructural development, teacher training, student performance, and community involvement as fundamental benchmarks of quality education. A mixed-methods approach involving document analysis and stakeholder interviews was adopted to evaluate the state of education and its impact on development. Findings reveal that while policy frameworks are in place, their implementation faces challenges such as financial deficit, inadequate teacher support, poor infrastructure, and socio-cultural hindrances. However, certain regions showing promising results demonstrate that targeted interventions in education can foster national development, reduce poverty, and empower individuals, especially the future generation. The study concludes that quality education remains an effective means to achieving long-term social and economic transformation in Nigeria and recommends increased public sector investment, improved teacher training, and community involvement to bridge the implementation gap.

Keywords: Quality Education, Sustainable Development, Universal Basic Education, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Education is universally recognised as the cornerstone of development. In both developed and developing nations, access to quality education is considered vital for achieving economic prosperity, social inclusion, and political stability. In Nigeria, however, the promise of education as a transformative force remains partially fulfilled. Although the Nigerian Government has made improvement in the enrolment level, the quality of education being experienced by millions of Nigerian children does not meet up with global standards. The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG

4), which aims that ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, emphasize that access to education alone is not sufficient but the quality of education being experienced is equally important. This article seeks to investigate how access to quality education can serve as a fundamental tool for sustainable development and an impetus for social and economic transformation in Nigeria.

There are numerous challenges faced by the Nigerian educational system, some of which include; lack of trained teachers, outdated curricula, lack of adequate

infrastructural facilities, high school dropout rates and lack of community involvement. These pressing challenges significantly impede the country's ability to fully utilize the potential of its youthful population. According to recent reports by UNICEF and UNFPA Nigeria, approximately 63% of Nigeria's population is under 25 years old. The Nigerian government failure to provide quality education for this demographic risks continuing cycles of poverty, insecurity, inequality and instability.

This study argues that improving access to quality basic education in Nigeria is not merely a policy objective but a critical tool for economic growth and development. It examines educational interventions between 2019 and 2024 under the UBE framework, assessing their effectiveness in promoting sustainable development. The fundamental question of this research is: how does access to quality basic education contribute to sustainable social and economic development in Nigeria?

The purpose of this study is to explore the fundamental relationship between access to quality basic education and the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria, positioning education as a foundational enabler of long-term national progress. In a nation where educational inequality and poor learning outcomes persist in hindering systemic reform efforts, understanding how quality education can function as a transformative force is not just timely, but essential. The study acknowledges that sustainable development is multidimensional, encompassing not only economic growth but also social inclusion, environmental protection, and institutional resilience. It asserts that these dimensions are heavily dependent on the level and quality of human capital, which in turn is shaped through effective educational systems. Therefore, the research aims to analyse how quality education, which is characterised by equitable access, skilled teaching, adequate infrastructure, and relevant curricula, can drive progress across all spheres of growth and development in Nigeria.

The importance of this research is based in its timely contribution to the critical national and global discourse on how quality education functions as a transformative tool for sustainable development. Nigeria continues to struggles with a lot of development and social issues, these ranges from insecurity, widespread poverty, infrastructural deficits, high rate of unemployment, gender inequality, as well as social and political instability, this research assert the centrality of education as the root cause and sustainable solution to many of these pressing developmental challenges. This research provides valuable insights for educational experts at the federal, state, and local government levels who are responsible for formulating and implementing educational and developmental policies. This research analysed the current state of Nigeria's education sector between 2019 and 2024 and identified gaps between policy and practice, and serves as a basis for evidence-informed decisions, which can guide interventions that align more effectively with the Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG 4) and Nigeria's national development plans, such as Vision 2030 and the National Development Plan (2021–2025).

2. Literature Review

Access to quality education is a critical and foundational tool for the achievement of sustainable development. There is a rich and varied body of literature examining the nexus between quality education and sustainable development, which cut across global and local contexts. Universally, education has long been recognized as a transformative force that strengthen social equity, economic growth, and environmental protection. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2022) emphasised that every additional year of schooling can raise individual earnings by up to 10%, reduce poverty risk, and significantly improve public health outcomes. In addition to its critical role in economic advancement, education nurtures critical thinking, civic responsibility, and adaptability attributes which are essential for personal development and national transformation. Globally, studies from countries such as

Finland, South Korea, and Singapore illustrate how strategic investments in teacher training, curriculum innovation, technology integration, and inclusive policies can yield long-term societal transformation. These systems prioritize competency-based learning, equity, and continuous teacher support, offering models of excellence from which developing nations can draw inspiration.

Several studies by Nigerian researchers propose a detailed insight into the country's educational landscape. Ajayi and Afolabi (2020) discovered that while the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme has improved enrolment rates, the quality of education being delivered remains undermined by inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher preparation, and poor resource allocation. Achebe (2020) asserted that Universal Basic Education is important in the eradication of social barriers because it legitimates all kids from needy families to have a similar opportunity to attend school and access membership in civil society. Aina (2019) highlighted a direct correlation between teacher competency and student performance, underscoring the need for robust professional development and retraining programmes. Yusuf and Adediran (2021) explored gender and regional disparities, revealing that cultural norms, early marriage, and security challenges disproportionately hinder girls' access to education in northern Nigeria. Amodu (2020) highlighted that the integration of sustainability within teaching-learning activities in Universal Basic Education also benefits children since it educates young children on sustainable development before they join mainstream school. Eze and Okoye (2022) asserted the importance of community involvement, finding that active School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) lead to better school governance, resource mobilization, and student outcomes. However, according to the World Bank (2021), more than 70% of Nigerian primary pupils fail to attain minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics, pointing to systemic weaknesses in curriculum design, teacher capacity, and policy implementation.

Additional studies by Odukoya et al. (2020) and Iwu and Ike (2022) stressed the role of curriculum relevance in equipping students with employable skills, noting that the current curriculum often neglects entrepreneurial, technological, and environmental education. Similarly, Okeke (2019) identified inequities in educational funding and resource distribution as critical barriers to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria.

While existing literature offers valuable insights, notable gaps persist. Much of the research is region-specific, limiting generalization to the national context. Many studies rely on cross-sectional designs, which fail to capture continuous trends and evolving challenges in the education sector. There is also a tendency to focus on identifying problems without offering actionable, sustainable, and context-specific solutions. Furthermore, while global best practices are occasionally referenced, their adaptation to Nigeria's socio-cultural and economic context is often deficient. Perhaps most significantly, the voices of learners, who are arguably the primary stakeholders, are underrepresented, reducing the depth of insights into the lived realities of educational experiences.

In light of these gaps, this study seeks to provide a holistic, multi-regional, and multi-stakeholder analysis of quality education as a driver of sustainable development in Nigeria. It brings together the perspectives of teachers, students, parents, community leaders, and policymakers to create a comprehensive picture of the current state of education. This research also integrates local realities with global best practices, ensuring that recommendations are both aspirational and practical. By situating the analysis within the SDG framework, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and its links to SDGs 1, 3, 5, 8, and 13, the study bridges the gap between policy rhetoric and actionable strategy. The ultimate aim is to produce evidence-based, context-sensitive recommendations that address systemic weaknesses while leveraging education's transformative potential to achieve Nigeria's long-term development goals.

3. Methodology

To achieve its aim, the study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate a comprehensive understanding of the critical and foundational role that quality education plays in driving sustainable development in Nigeria. The design was chosen to enhance triangulation and ensure validity of data captured from a wide range of educational stakeholders.

The study population consisted of stakeholders who are involved directly or indirectly in the in Nigeria's basic education sector, including teachers, students, school administrators, parents, community leaders, and policymakers. A total of 105 participants were selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. This involved the purposive selection of three geo-political zones (North-West, South-West, and South-East), followed by random sampling of states, schools, and individuals within each zone. This approach was adopted to ensure heterogeneous regional representation and minimized unrepresentative sample.

The primary instruments for data collecting was a structured questionnaire developed based on reviewed literature and key informant interviews. The questionnaires, administered to teachers, students, parents, and education officers, included both closed-and open-ended questions focused on infrastructure, teacher quality, curriculum relevance, stakeholder engagement, and the perceived impact of education on sustainable development. Key informant interviews with policymakers, head of schools, and civil society actors provided in-depth insights into systemic and policy-level issues affecting education.

The instruments were validated through expert review and a pilot study involving 15 respondents. Reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.86. Ethical standards were upheld by securing informed consent, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, among others.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages, means, and frequency distribution via SPSS version 26. For the qualitative data, a thematic analysis was conducted, this enabled the identification of emerging patterns and deeper contextual understanding.

Despite regional insecurity and logistical constraints, the combination of methodological triangulation, expert sampling and context-specific tools, contributed to reliability and relevance of findings that reflect the realities of Nigeria's education sector.

4. Results and Discussions

The findings of this study present a detailed insights into the current state of access to quality education in Nigeria and its connection to achieving sustainable development. Data gathered from 105 participants across diverse regions highlighted that while there has been some progress in increasing enrolment level, the quality of education being experienced is below the global standards. Many respondents stressed that infrastructural deficits continues to be a major challenge. Large proportion of schools lack essential facilities which are needed to create a conducive environments for learning, and this often leads to absenteeism, lower academic performance and high dropout rates. This challenge is particularly severe in rural and underserved areas, where resources are not evenly distributed.

Lack of trained teachers is another significant factors influencing educational outcomes. Respondents asserted that shortages of qualified educators, and issues of teacher absenteeism have a direct impact on the teaching and learning process, as well as students' achievement and engagement. The absence of structured training programmes to update teachers' teaching proficiency and subject knowledge further weakens the instructional process.

Another issue highlighted was the need for curricula upgrade, there is limited relevance of the curricula use

in schools to contemporary societal and economic needs. Many respondents stressed that the existing curriculum is overly theoretical, this fails to prepare students for real-world challenges, which includes entrepreneurship, technological advancements, and environmental sustainability. This does not only affects employability but also impedes the potential of quality education to foster innovation and problem-solving skills.

The purpose of community participation was also emphasized. Active Parent Teacher Association, School-Based Management Committee and Community Involvement in some schools yield positive results, such as student retention, better governance and resource mobilization. However, these engagements was not consistent and in many communities these structures were either underutilised or inactive which signals for targeted awareness and empowerment initiatives.

Stakeholders strongly agreed that improving the quality of education is a critical tool for achieving sustainable development. Access to quality education was

connected with poverty reduction, increased economic productivity, improved health outcomes, gender equality, and enhanced civic participation. However, the study revealed distinct regional divergences, the North-Western Region faces the most significant challenges in accessing quality education, due to insecurity, socio-cultural barriers and inadequate resources allocation. Stakeholders also highlighted that while initiatives like Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme and the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) have potential, their impact is undermined by poverty, inconsistent implementation, insufficient funding, corruption and weak monitoring mechanism.

Holistically, the results of this study indicate that access to quality education in Nigeria requires a multi-dimensional approach, which will addresses infrastructural deficits, lack of trained teachers, curricula upgrade, regional inequalities, community engagement and policy execution. With integrated actions across these area, the potential of quality education as a driver and critical tool for attaining sustainable development will be fully realised.

Table 1: Distribution of Demographic Variables

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	60	57.1%
	Female	45	42.9%
	Total	105	100%
Age	18-25 years	20	19.0%
	26-35 years	35	33.3%
	36-45 years	28	26.7%
	46 years and above	22	21.0%
	Total	105	100%
Educational Role	Teacher	45	42.9%
	Student	30	38.6%
	Parents	15	14.3%
	Policy Makers	10	9.5%
	Community Leaders	5	4.8%
	Total	105	100%

Source: Researcher Fieldwork, 2025

4.1 Discussions of Major Findings

The findings of this study underscored the intricate nature of quality education, both as a fundamental human right and a driver and critical tool of sustainable development in Nigeria. The results indicate that while access to education has expanded in recent years, significant gaps remain in terms of infrastructure, teacher quality, curriculum relevance, community involvement, and policy implementation.

The persistent insufficient infrastructure reflects a broader systemic neglect of the learning environment, particularly in rural and underserved communities. Research consistently shows that inadequate facilities directly affect student attendance, health, and learning outcomes. This aligns with UNESCO's assertion that safe and supportive learning spaces are essential for educational equity.

The shortage of qualified teachers emerged as a critical barrier to achieving quality education. The absence of regular professional development undermines instructional quality and student performance. This finding resonates with the World Bank's emphasis on teacher training as a cornerstone of effective education systems.

The issue of curriculum relevance reveals disconnect between the education system and the socio-economic realities of Nigerian society. The lack of emphasis on practical skills, digital literacy, and environmental education limits students' readiness for the labour market and civic engagement. Internationally, countries that have embraced competency-based curricula have seen marked improvements in employability and innovation.

Community engagement appears to play a pivotal role in enhancing school performance, with active PTAs and SBMCs contributing to better discipline, retention, and resource mobilization. However, uneven community participation points to the need for targeted capacity-building initiatives. The strong perceived link between

education and development reinforces the conceptual framework of this study. Education's role in poverty reduction, economic growth, gender equality, and civic participation was evident in participants' views, aligning with SDGs 1, 3, 5, and 8.

Regional inequities highlight the complexity of Nigeria's educational landscape. The pronounced disparities in the North-West reflect deep-rooted socio-cultural, economic, and security challenges. Addressing these requires localized interventions rather than uniform policy prescriptions.

Finally, the policy and implementation gaps identified in this study mirror the challenges documented in earlier research, emphasizing the need for transparency, consistent funding, and robust monitoring mechanisms.

To summarize, the findings of this study reveals that in order to address the inadequacies of quality in the Nigerian educational landscape, there is a need for holistic and multi-stakeholder approach that addressing the quality deficiency in Nigerian education demands a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach that integrates capital investment in infrastructure, teacher professional development, curriculum reform, community empowerment, and context-sensitive policy implementation.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined how quality education is not only a fundamental human right but also a strategic driver and critical tool for achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. The evidence demonstrates that without substantial improvements in infrastructure, teacher capacity, curriculum design, community involvement, and targeted regional interventions, the transformative potential of education will remain unrealized. The interconnection between education and socio-economic growth, gender equality, and civic empowerment reinforces the urgent need for systemic reforms. Ultimately, building a resilient, inclusive, and high-quality education system will require coordinated

action among government, communities, civil society, and international partners to position education as the true engine of Nigeria's sustainable future. In conclusion, educational strategies should be explicitly linked to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring that advancement in education contribute directly to poverty reduction, public health outcomes, gender equality, and environmental resilience.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. **Increased Investment:** To utilise the full potential of education as a driver of sustainable development, the Nigerian government should prioritize large-scale investment in school infrastructure to create safe, conducive, and resource-equipped learning environments nationwide.
- ii. **Sustainable Teachers' Training:** Teachers must be trained through sustained professional development programme to enhance quality retention, equitable compensation and career advancement opportunities that attract and retain skilled educators.
- iii. **Curriculum Upgrade:** There is a need for curriculum upgrade, the curriculum should incorporate skills, knowledge, environment and life skills which are relevant to modern and

societal labour market demand and are needed to solve real life problems.

- iv. **Integrate E-Learning:** Electronic learning platforms which will give student access to studying materials and provide them the opportunity to engage in educative activities and track their performance anytime and anywhere should be integrated to facilitate effective teaching and learning processes.
- v. **Enhanced Community Capacity:** In order to achieve active community involvement, communities should be equipped through capacity enhancement initiatives which will strengthen their involvement in school governance and resources allocation, while region-specific strategies should address local barriers, particularly in disadvantaged areas such as the North-West.
- vi. **Strengthened Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks:** Educational policy must be implemented with transparency, accountability, and continuous observation in order to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and restrain mismanagement. Partnerships with the Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs), international organizations, and private sector, should be broadened to provide increased funding, technological resources, and innovative learning solutions.

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