

## GOVERNMENT FUNDING AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE IMPERATIVE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

*Martin Iorgbir UGBUDU,*

*College of Education, Department of Political Science, Oju, Benue State  
ugbudumartins@gmail.com*

&

*Esther Nguamo ASHIR,*

*College of Education, Department of Social Studies, Oju, Benue State  
ashirnguamo@gmail.com*

### **Abstract**

*The imperative for sound and quality education cannot be overemphasized. Education is fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations. It provides the needed manpower for the overall turn-around of a nation. In Nigeria, the educational system is bedevilled by poor funding characterized by incessant strikes, closures of schools and decay in infrastructure. This study examines the issue of government playing a dominant role in financing public schools vis-a-vis the quality of education in Nigeria. The fundamental question that is posed is, in a nation where educational policies, infrastructure, personnel and programs are provided mainly by the government, can education develop beyond what the government can provide? Using a descriptive approach, the study, which relies on secondary data and adopts the systems theory as its frame of the analysis found out that government funding of the educational sector has eroded the quality of education in Nigeria. Based on this, it recommends a funding strategy where Non-Governmental Organizations will complement government efforts to fund education in the country.*

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### **1. Introduction**

Education is a *sine qua non* for progress and development in any society. It is an instrument for the enhancement of the socio-economic advancement of the individual and the nation at large. Invariably, the growth and development of any nation is a function of the quality of its human resources produced from its educational system. Any nation that neglects education,

albeit, does so at its own peril. This informs why education was adopted as a basic human right in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Cognizance of the importance of education to national development, the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria under the *Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy*, Section 18 stipulate that government should direct its policy towards ensuring, among other things; that when practicable, provide free compulsory universal primary education, free university education and free adult literacy programmes. In pursuant of this, the Compulsory Free Universal Basic Education Act of 2004 otherwise referred as the UBE scheme makes basic education free, compulsory and a right to every child. The UBE scheme aims at ensuring an uninterrupted access to 9-year formal education by providing free, and compulsory basic education for every child of school-going age under six years of primary education and three years of Junior Secondary Education; providing early childhood care development and education (ECCDE); reducing school drop-out and improving relevance, quality and efficiency; and acquisition of literacy, numeracy, life skills and values for lifelong education and useful living.

Under the UBE act of 2004, every tier of government in Nigeria is to provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age; Every parent is to ensure that his/her child or ward attends and completes (a) primary school education; and (b) junior secondary school education. The Federal Government's role is to provide assistance to the States and Local Governments in Nigeria for the purposes of uniform and qualitative basic education throughout Nigeria.

This quest by the country to provide universal basic education to her citizens has inevitably led to an explosion in school enrolment in the country. Statistics indicate that children enrolment figure in elementary schools by states in the federation stood at over 22.4 million in 2018 (Varrella,2020), but in spite of this, Nigeria currently possesses the largest population of out of school learning youths in the world ( UNDP, 2020). According to United Nations Children's Fund, (UNICEF), there are 11 million out of school children (BUDGIT, 2018). Apart from having the largest number of school drop outs, the entire educational system is poorly funded by the government. The annual allocation to the education sector in the nation's budget have been less than the 26% recommended by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for developing countries. Since 2015 to 2021, there has been a downward slide in the budgetary allocation to the educational sector by the federal

government and this is replicated in most state government budgets. In 2016, N369.6 billion - 7.9%; 2017, N550.5 billion -7.4%; 2018, N605.8 billion -7.04%; 2019, N620.5 billion -7.05%; 2020, N671.07 billion - 6.7% and 2021, N742.5 billion -5.6% was allocated to the educational sector by the federal government ( premium times,2021 ).

It is pertinent to point out that the educational system at all levels in Nigeria is characterized by poor performance and a major factor responsible for this is the crisis of funding (Nwachukwu, 2014). Notable features of government playing a major role in funding education in the country are delay in the release of the allocated funds; lack of accountability for the allocated funds as well as frequent unhealthy political interference in education (Ige,2016). Consequently, the entire educational system from primary to tertiary level is bedeviled by series of problems ranging from shortage of quality of staff; dearth of infrastructure; shortage of books/ journals; inadequate laboratories for teaching and research; inconsistent and ill-conceived policies; cultism; irregular payment of salaries; fraud and self-deception with regard to accreditation; low staff-student ratio as in most tertiary schools, lecturers take 1000 to 1500 students in a lecture hall without public address system. Above all teachers are poorly remunerated compared to their counterpart in other countries (Obodumu, 2005 Okecha, 2008). The concomitant impact of this on the educational sector is that the products are considered sub-standard since most of the tertiary institutions especially the universities lack conferment of international accreditation. Also this has stunted socio-economic development, exacerbated unemployment and accentuated insecurity in the country.

This study therefore posits that the provision of education as a social service through government funding has and will continually affect the standard of education in the country due to the vagaries in government revenue flow; insufficient and untimely release of allocated funds to the educational sector; and above all corruption. Education as a social service cannot get to all citizens at the current level of government leadership in it; hence Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should complement government efforts. The study therefore examines the funding of education in Nigeria vis-à-vis the role of non-governmental organizations. Specifically it seeks to interrogate the nature of government funding of public schools; the problems associated with the funding pattern and it suggest strategies to complement government efforts.

## **2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Quality of Education**

The concept of quality in education is an elastic concept that eludes a precise definition. It has been subjected to different interpretations by different people. Igwe (Cited by Ayo-Sobowale & Akinyemi 2011:3) see quality in education to cut across policy formulation to implementation of educational process covering the scope of curriculum, teaching/ learning process, resources and facilities; students and teachers environment. This encapsulates better school environment, more qualified teachers, adequate supply of textbooks and relevance to social needs.

While Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and Educational Initiative (EI), (cited in Slade, 2017, para.15) aver that

*A quality education is one that focuses on the whole child—the social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development of each student regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or geographic location. It prepares the child for life, not just for testing.*

They further point out that a quality education is one which learners as well as the environment for education are healthy, content is relevant, teaching is student centred and prepares the learner adequately to cope with further studies, take up employment and participate in the competitive global environment. This emphasizes that quality education is education that caters for the needs of the individual, the community and the society to prosper.

However, this study adopts the view of Maduewesi (as cited in Ayo-Sobowale & Akinyemi 2011, p.3) who sees quality education as “can expression of standard or the mean by which a certain set of standards in education can be achieved”.

### **2.2. Funding**

Funding generally refers to sources of finance and how the money is utilized for the accomplishment of a set target. In other words it refers to provision of financial resources in order to accomplish a need, project or programme. In education, Agbolu (as cited in Adeyemi 2011, p.295) see funding as sources of finance and how the money earmarked for education is spent especially for the purchase of goods, provision of infrastructure and the payment for personnel services. Funding is imperative for the transformation of the educational sector.

Hence, curriculum review, staffing, equipment and infrastructure in schools revolve around funding. Funding of the educational sector has remained one of the most keenly debated issues in the educational sector in Nigeria today because the nature and pattern of funding invariably impacts on the quality of education.

This study sees funding in education as the process of making the acquired funds meant for the educational sector available to the end users to access a range of goods and services across sectors designed to support the educational development of their students

### **2.3. Theoretical Framework**

This work is anchored on David Easton's systems theory. The systems theory is an approach to the study of phenomenon that sees the society or an organization as comprising of inter-related parts that works towards the stability of the system. The theory "advances the understanding of an entire phenomenon through the identification and interplay of forces and elements, which when united, creates stability but if disunited causes instability and conflict which upset the system" Sulu-Gambari and Okpaga (2005, p.141). The educational system is an amalgam of many interdependent components working together to equip the citizens with the necessary skills for the economic, political, scientific and technological advancement of the country. The health of the educational sector therefore becomes a function of how well its component parts operate and interact within the system.

A typical educational setting comprises of but not limited to the following interacting parts, laws and regulation, finances and funding, school and infrastructure, teachers and staff; books/computers/instructional materials; and students, parents and communities. It should be noted that these parts are interrelated and the malfunctioning of one part adversely affects the entire system. Funding in particular is germane in achieving the goals of the educational sector which are tied to the main national goals of Nigeria which essentially are the building of a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy; and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (NPE, 2004). Hence staffing, equipment and infrastructure revolve around adequate, timely and regular funding of the educational sector.

### **3. Funding of Education in Nigeria: Nature and Trends**

Formal education was first introduced in Nigeria by the missionaries during the period of colonial rule by the Christian Missionaries and the schools were financed and maintained by the voluntary agencies through school fees paid by parents, subscriptions from churches and grants from Missionary Societies (Adeyemi, 2011, Callaway & Musone 1968). The colonial government did not take part in financing education until in 1882 when the Education Ordinance passed by the colonial administration made provisions for the financing and maintenance of schools established by the colonial government. Even after the passage of the Education Ordinance of 1882, voluntary agencies still spent more on education than the colonial government for most of the period (Adesina, 1977; Adesua, 1981).

It was until the enactment of the 1926, Education Ordinance by the colonial administration, that the government started playing an active role in the development of education in the country by making provisions for inspectors of schools to group schools into A, B, C, and D categories according to the level of efficiency and tone of the schools; and Native Administration started expending sums of money on education especially in Southern Nigeria but more money was spent on education by the voluntary agencies (Adeyemi,2011).

Though the 1926 Education Ordinance marked the foundation of the Nigerian educational system; it was until the advent of the 1951 MacPherson Constitution that provision was made for the federal government and regional governments to have concurrent responsibility for education. The federal government assumed responsibility for education at the federal capital territory in Lagos and the regions took over responsibility of education at the regional level. However, the federal government still assisted funding of education in the regions particularly tertiary education. This funding came in form of recurrent grants based on enrolment; grants for capital projects as approved by the government; and special grants for specific educational projects (Adeyemi, 2011). This period saw the government playing an active role in financing education.

However, the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme in 1976 by the federal government marked the beginning of an era where the government started playing a major role in education through financing. The UPE was designed to make primary education free and available throughout the country. During this time, the government accepted responsibility for everything the pupils and students needed to improve academic pursuit. It should be noted that, though laudable as it was, the UPE scheme suffered from inadequate

financing by the federal government in the 1980s when oil prices plummeted and the government started shirking from its responsibility (Csapo, 1983).

In 1999, the federal government again launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme to be financed from public funds. In the UBE guidelines, every primary or junior secondary school is expected to have one general science laboratory for elementary science and domestic sciences, one ventilated improved toilet for a maximum of 40 pupils per toilet, and one teacher to handle 40 pupils in class. So far as noted by Okecha (2008), Ige (2016), these criteria have not been met due to scarcity of funds. In some primary schools the pupils that constitute a class sit on the floor in a classroom with no chair or table.

The introduction of free and compulsory basic education has not led only to an explosion in school enrolment but also an increase in the number of institutions. Statistics indicate that as of 2018 the country has 62, 406 public primary schools and 11, 874 junior secondary schools (Varrella, 2020). The number of public Secondary schools in Nigeria was 13,929 as of 2018 with a students' population of 20 million (Varrella, 2021). Statistics from the Federal Ministry of Education shows that Nigeria has 48 approved state polytechnics and 37 federal polytechnics. In 2019, there were 21 Federal colleges of education and 47 state colleges of education. There are also, 48 state owned universities and 43 federal government owned universities apart from private universities (NUC, 2021).

The increase in school enrolment and number of institutions notwithstanding, the entire educational system starting from primary school level to tertiary level is plagued by series of problems ranging from shortage of quality staff, dearth of infrastructure, shortage of books and journals which has impacted on the quality of education (Okecha, 2008). It should however be noted that these problems transcend funding but yet it is central to the transformation of the educational sector.

Public funds for financing the educational sector in Nigeria come from various sources and this includes direct government expenditures in the form of loans and grants, subsidies to households such as scholarships. It also includes payment from Education Tax Fund (ETF) - that is 2% of profit earned by companies operating in Nigeria. The share for tertiary education is managed by TETFUND and the share for basic education is managed by UBEC. Meanwhile, private sources in form of school fees form a negligible percent.

It has been observed by Adetula, Adesina, Owolabi and Ojeka (2017) that since independence in 1960, the funding of education has been in downward trend whereas the enrolment at all level of education has been on the increase. In fact, the funding of education in Nigeria cannot be compared with some countries in Africa that are less endowed in material resources. The country has up till now refused to comply with the UNESCO recommendation that at least 26% of the budget is to be spent on education. Incidentally, Lesotho with less endowed resources spends 35.33% of her budget on education, Namibia, 27.04%; Ethiopia 9.01%; and Guinea 8.60%; (World Bank, 2015).

A glance at the federal government's allocation to the educational sector over the years shows that the proportion of federal government budget is low.

**Table:1 Federal Government Budgetary Expenditure on Education as a Proportion of Federal Expenditure (N Billion)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Budgetary Allocation</b>	<b>Education % of total</b>
2011	393.3 billion	9.3 %
2012	468.3 billion	9.8%
2013	499.5 billion	10.1%
2014	494.7 billion	10.5%
2015	484.2 billion	10.7 %
2016	369.6 billion	7.9%
2017	550.5 billion	7.4%
2018	605.8 billion	7.04%
2019	620.5 billion	7.05%
2020	671.07 billion	6.7%
2021	742.5 billion	5.6%

**Source:** Premium Times (2021).

The above scenario shows that government funding of the educational sector is below international norms. Apart from underfunding, money allocated to the educational sector is not released as at when due (Ige, 2016). In Nigeria it is common that allocations to Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) are often not released on time and the educational sector is not immune from this. Budgetary allocations to the educational sector are in most cases not released on time and this affects the implementation of capital projects in the sector and



invariably impacts on standards. Investigations by BUDGIT, 2017 for instance, shows that in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2017, no fund was released for capital projects under the 2017 budget by the federal government. This was due to the extension of the 2016 capital budget implementation to May, 5, 2017 and the late passage of the 2017 budget (BUDGIT, 2018).

Government funding of education is also characterized by exiguous release of funds. What is common in Nigerian budgetary allocations is that fund allocation is not synonymous with funds released. Often money allocated to the educational sector by the government is not completely released and only part of it gets to the end user and this affects project execution in the sector particularly the provision of education infrastructure. In the 2017 budget for instance, a total sum of N56.8 billion was allocated for capital spending in the budget, out of which N33.42 billion was released and N31.61 billion was utilized as at the end of the fiscal year (BUDGIT, 2018).

Government funding of education especially intervention aid is often times tied to some stringent conditions which makes it difficult for some states and even institutions to access the money. A typical example is accessing UBEC funds which require state governments to pay at least 50% of the counterpart fund to be released for capital projects. This has been a major deterrent faced by the states in getting these grant. In 2018, for instance, the chairman of UBEC stated that the commission has N65 billion lodged with the Central Bank of Nigeria that was not accessed. Out of this the South East geo-political zone of the country has the largest funds with the commission which amounts to N15.49 billion; North central, N15.36 billion; South West; 11.18 billion. Meanwhile, the North East and North West had the lowest un-accessed funds, (BUDGIT, 2018).

Poor accountability of funds allocated to the educational sector is also another snag associated with government funding of education in Nigeria. Corruption is pervasive in Nigeria and the educational sector in Nigeria is also enmeshed in corruption scandals. A former Minister of education Fabian Osuji was sacked for offering bribe to members of the National Assembly to increase budgetary allocation to his Ministry by the Obasanjo Regime. The Minister admitted giving bribe to members of the National Assembly as public relations token to facilitate increased allocation to his Ministry and explained that other Ministers do same. Also in February, 2008 the then president, Olusegun Obasanjo had cause to refuse to sign the appropriation bill sent to him for assent by the National Assembly because of padding the budget with various sums of money. Specifically in the educational sector he accused the

legislature of increasing the budget and inserting new vote heads totaling up to N2.1 billion to cater for federal polytechnics at Bali, Ekowe and Ugbokolo. He claimed that these institutions were established in 2005 but were not funded in the budget, (*Daily Independent*, April. 13, 2008). This shows how pervasive corruption is in the educational sector and it affects project implementation in the sector through poor project execution.

Lopsidedness in allocation of funds is also a major feature of government financing of the educational sector. Funds allocated to the educational sector are usually shared to the three tiers of education in Nigeria; that is primary, secondary and tertiary education. What is noticeable is that tertiary education is accorded priority over basic education that is the foundation of education in the society. Money that is accrued to the Education Tax Fund (ETF) for instance is shared in favor of tertiary education sector. The ratio is 50% to higher education, primary education 40% and secondary education receives 10%, Ige (2016), Nwagwu, (2015). Apart from insufficient release of funds, a greater part of the funds allocated to the educational sector is also devoted to recurrent expenditure at the expense of capital expenditure. In the 2017 budget, N278.1 billion was approved for the education sector, out of this amount, 90% -N250.3 billion was for recurrent expenditure while 10% -N27.8 billion went for capital expenditure which covers construction of lecture rooms, equipping laboratories and more (BUDGIT,2018). Also, what is observed is that government funding of the educational sector gives less attention to non-formal education. Hence there are many adults who are illiterates and semi-illiterates in the country (Ige, 2016)

To cope with the problem of underfunding, many schools have resorted to mass admission of students in excess of available facilities to accommodate the students in a bid to raise money to cater for daily administrative exigencies such as fueling of cars, generators and so on. In addition, some schools have resorted to setting up satellite campuses that are ill-equipped and poorly staff, all in a bid to raise funds and this has fundamentally impacted negatively on the standard of education in the country.

#### **4. The Imperative Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Educational Development**

In Nigeria, it is indeed a truism that educational policies, infrastructure, personnel, funds and programmes are funded by the government. The underlying rationale for public funding is that right to free and compulsory basic education is guaranteed in the Nigerian Constitution. Allied to this, the 'rentier' nature of the economy whereby the government controls strategic mineral resources and collects taxes from these resources; makes it imperative for the government to

play a “big daddy” role by providing education as a social service to the citizens. But as noted by Rowell and Money, (2018) with education regarded as free goods by the government, the demand for it has soared to an extent that the government could not cope with the financial responsibility. Dwindling government revenues amidst geometric increase in school enrolment and the rise in number of institutions has in recent times compelled the federal government to issue a directive to schools, particularly the tertiary institutions to look inward and devise means to at least raise 10% of their total yearly fund internally and from private organizations (Odebiyi & Aina, 1999). As noted by former President, Olusegun Obasanjo, “the days of total or ever near total reliance of government’s funds are over” so the institutions should diversify their sources of revenue generation, (Ayo-Sobowale & Akinyemi, 2011).

Economic recession that has occasioned drop in crude oil prices in the international market has also affected government revenue projections and this has necessitated a downward slide in budgetary allocation to the education sector over the years. Hence, the nation has been spending less than the 26% of a country’s budget recommended by UNESCO on education. Clearly this indicates that government leadership in funding of education cannot make the desired impact. This brings out the rationale for the private sector particularly, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) to complement the role of the government.

As earlier noted, NGOs, particularly the missionaries were precursors of formal education in the country. Formal education was first introduced in Nigeria by voluntary agencies and managed by them until after independence in 1960 that the federal and regional governments took over the schools from them. But in recent times, economic dictates have pushed most states to return the schools back to the voluntary agencies to manage. But beyond transfer of schools to these voluntary agencies, there are many areas that NGOs can contribute to complement government efforts in educational development and reduce the financial burden on government.

Nneji (1999) has pointed out areas that NGOs can assist education to develop. These are early child education, adult and vocational education which are not receiving as much attention as primary, secondary and tertiary education from the government. NGOs can direct most of their educational programmes towards all or some of these areas government have not been able to cater for. Formal education caters little about the education of infants, adults and the youths who are not able to benefit from it. NGOs should see that the pre-school age child who the contemporary economy of Nigeria has denied the attention of the mother is provided some sort

of education. The adult and youth who missed the opportunity of formal education should have places where they can make up for their deficiencies. NGOs should take up the responsibility since the government has not addressed them.

NGOs will equally help education to develop if they can act as pressure groups to encourage government to do more for education. To avoid being tagged political groups, NGOs can perform this function for education by ensuring that their members are among policy makers in education.

The area of financial assistance to indigent students is a fertile ground for NGOs to prove their worth. Identified students who cannot finance their education could be given more scholarship or bursary. This will help to get for education, people who would have been lost to destiny for no fault of theirs

Also, basic education on some social ills and prevailing diseases can be made available to the people by the NGOs. The organization will not have any difficulty doing this since they can get to the people and interact with them at the level the people will participate. For example, information about AIDS is one basic issue NGOs can take up with the rural people.

## **5. Conclusion**

Right to education is guaranteed by the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, 2004 has made basic education free and compulsory in the country. However, government leadership in the funding of educational policies, infrastructure, personnel and programmes leaves much to be desired. Since independence in 1960, when the government started playing a leadership role in financing education in the country, the educational sector has been characterized by poor funding. The country has never for once satisfied the global requirement set by UNICEF that at least 26% of the country's budget be devoted to funding the educational sector. Ironically, the educational system also is not immune to the misappropriation and underutilization of funds that are allocated to the educational sector by the government. The concomitant impact of this is that the educational system is beset with collapsed infrastructure, poor staffing and frequent strikes. This has, over time, culminated in the erosion of quality in the country's educational sector. Most of the schools do not only lack international accreditation, but above all, parents are disgusted that their children and wards are not getting the right education as their counterparts in other parts of the world. This has raised public concern over the way government is funding education in the country. This paper

is therefore advocating for NGOs to complement government funding by actively assuming more responsibility in the area of early childhood education and adult education so as to reduce government burden to concentrate funding in other areas. NGOs can go into partnership with the government by taking over the responsibility of providing school infrastructure at the basic education level- that is, primary school level and the junior school level with the government saddled with the responsibility of taking care of recurrent expenditure such as payment of salaries. NGOs should actively put in place endowment funds and research grants to encourage innovations in schools, especially tertiary institutions.

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