

Increasing access and students' enrolment in basic education: A challenge to quality education in Kano State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The drive to improve basic education delivery in Nigeria has been given tremendous impetus in recent years. The goal of basic education can only be realised through provision of inclusive, equitable and quality education; several indicators have shown that authorities jettison quality to focus in increasing access. This paper, therefore, reviews the provision and delivery of basic education in Kano state. Specifically, the paper revealed how increasing enrolment in affects the efforts to improve the quality of education in the state. While the government initiatives made significant differences by increasing access to education of children who would have been denied schooling, quality indicators which include teachers-pupil ratio, students' academic achievement, attrition and completion rates have stagnated at best or dropped. Efforts to ensure and maintain quality education in the state are reported to face serious challenges, including mainly inadequate funding that will ensure provision of essential teaching and learning facilities and insufficient trained and competent teachers. Finally, the paper recommends among others that, adequate funding and ensuring judicious management of the funds, competent teachers should be engaged and their welfare be adequately improved, as well as the supply and maintenances of teaching and learning facilities. Sincerity in the implementations of these and other recommendations would positively affect the over 3.5 million children in basic education, encouraging further enrolment and improving the quality of education they receive.

Keywords: Access, completion rate teaching, enrolment, quality education

1. Introduction

Education is central to development and a key to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality and lays a foundation for sustainable economic growth (World Bank, 2009). Research has shown that education is one of the most effective development investments every nation can make (Basic Education Coalition, 2004). Adequate investments in education facilitate the achievement of most other development goals and increase the probability of sustaining growth (USAID, 2005). Each year of schooling increases individual output by 4–7%, and nations that improve literacy rates by 20–30% have seen increases in gross domestic product of 5–16% (Basic Education Coalition, 2004). Education builds the human capital that is needed for overall development of a society or nation. Further emphasised by USAID (2015) education brings significant improvements in health, nutrition and life expectancy and thus the country with an educated citizenry is more likely to be democratic and politically stable.

One major goal that derives from Nigeria's philosophy of education is the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society. In line with this goal, UNESCO (1998) asserted that what is needed is educational system that seeks to enhance the full capacity and capabilities of human beings while ministering to the socioeconomic needs of Africa (the society).

The expected role of education in Nigeria and elsewhere is the training and production of skilled, knowledgeable and assured quality workforce for both the world of work, survival and overall national development in the contexts of individualisation, independent humanisation, fractionalisation and lifelong learning (Nwadiani, 2012). In spite of the aforementioned benefits of education and its attendant multiplier gains, providing adequate access to education is still problematic. This is a function of multiple challenges education face in an attempt to widen access to the ever-increasing population demanding for education at all levels. These challenges manifest more in the areas of funding, human capital resources, pedagogy, quality assurance and relevance, curriculum reforms, attitudinal dispositions and among others.

Survey data suggest an overall decline in primary enrolments from 2006 to 2015 (available data nationally), except in the Northwest where Kano state is located. In contrast, the data suggest an increase in public Junior Secondary School (JSS) enrolments. That said, the figures are unreliable and much of the private school data, in particular, are absent. Household survey data from between 2004 and 2015 suggest little change in primary attendance, at around 60% of school-age children nationally, although there is considerable variation across the country (Humphreys and Crawford, 2015).

Broadly speaking, attendance is lower in the north than in the south, in rural areas rather than urban, for poorer households than richer, for girls more than boys in northern states, for Muslims more than non-Muslims and for nomadic and migrant children and children with disabilities. Enrolment data from Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria supported states show huge variation between states and within states between LGEAs.

Basic education in Kano state has witnessed a drastic increased in enrolment since 2011 as a result of government considerable placement of the importance of basic education in promoting socioeconomic and political development. The introduction of several initiatives such as school feeding programme, free uniform to pupils and constructions of more classroom has made basic education more accessible but has also raised concerns on the quality of education being provided at primary and JSSs in the state. This has been attributed to the inadequate provision of teaching and learning resources that match the increasing enrolment due to inadequate funding. Consequently, this has resulted to high teacher-pupil ratios which hinder instructional effectiveness in the schools. This

situation has raised number questions on the instructional processes and quality of education provide at basic education level in Kano.

2. Basic Education

In 1999, the Nigerian government introduced Universal Basic Education (UBE) in its quest towards achieving 'Education for All (EFA)' as mandated by the World Declaration on EFA 1990. According to Fabunmi (2004), the programme was conceived as a response to the level of awareness and general education of the populace. The UBE was introduced to take care of the large population of the disadvantaged groups, the rural community, the girl child, the nomadic, the disabled, the almajiri and the phenomenon of boys dropout. According to Adepoju and Fabiyi as cited in Ajuwon (2008), the goals of the UBE program as specified in the implementation guideline by government in 1999 include as follows:

Developing in the entire citizenry, a strong conscientiousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion, provision of free UBE for every Nigerian child of school-going age, reducing drastically the incidence of dropout from the formal school system, catering for young persons, their schooling as well as other out-of-school children or adolescents through appropriate form of complementary approaches to the provision of UBE, ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong living.

Basic education is expected to be free and compulsory for Nigerian children. It begins at the age of six and consists of 6 years of primary schooling and 3 years of junior secondary schooling. The goal of primary education is to inculcate functional literacy and numeracy, develop the ability to communicate effectively and enhance positive attitudes towards cooperation, work, community, national development and continuing learning (UNESCO, 2011). The curriculum for the first 6 years of basic education is discipline based and addresses the goals of primary education. Consequently, Nigerian children are expected to have a continuous, uninterrupted stretch of education for 9 years from primary school to the 3rd year of the JSS (Labo-Popoola, Bello and Atanda, 2009).

The JSS level comprises 3 years of schooling after the primary school education. The curriculum at this level is both pre-vocational and academic. It is designed to enable pupils to acquire further knowledge and develop skills. Students are expected to take a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 13 subjects including all the core subjects. Students will have to take assessment tests for all these subjects; after which, those who will pass the tests will be awarded Junior School Certificates. Students who complete junior secondary education can then enrol in senior secondary schools, technical colleges or vocational training centres offering 3-year programmes, in which they can earn National Technical/Commercial Certificates. The students' next levels of education will be based on the results of the assessment tests to determine their academic ability, aptitude and vocational interest.

3. Quality Education: What is it?

Because the debate on quality has been prevailing for a long time, there has been no universally acceptable definition of quality (Hoy et al., 2000). There are two aspects of quality in education: Quality of the education system as a whole (including schools and related bodies, teaching and learning environment, policies, etc.) and quality of what the system offers to the students/learners (i.e., quality of teaching and learning process, curriculum, etc.). Terms such as efficiency, effectiveness,

equity and quality have often been used synonymously (Adams, 1993). It is, therefore, not easy to define quality in the context of education.

Education being a service and not a product, its quality cannot lie exclusively in the final output. Its quality should also be manifested in the delivery process. Quality of education should also take into account determinants such as provision of teachers, building, curriculum, equipment, textbooks and teaching processes (Grisay and Mahlick, 1991). For them, quality of education has a three-dimensional approach comprising quality of human and material resources available for teaching (inputs), teaching practices (process) and results (outcomes). Further, according to them, there are some indicators such as repetition, dropouts, promotion and transition rates which are frequented by planners to arrive at an approximate measurement of quality.

Earlier, government policy placed greater emphasis on ensuring free and compulsory basic EFA children. However, with the tremendous growth in school enrolments throughout the world, the need for shifting priority on increasing access to higher quality of schooling was felt. In fact, many international organisations now believe that access and quality are not sequential elements; rather, they visualised the role of quality being instrumental in improving access (Jain and Prasad, 2018). Due to the current state of education in both developing and industrialised countries, this issue of quality has become the focus of concern. The Jomtien Declaration in 1990 and more particularly, the Dakar Framework of Action, 2000, through its sixth goal have also emphasised on quality of education (Jain and Prasad, 2018).

4. Access to Basic Education and School Enrolment

Access to education means the ability of all school-age children to have equal opportunity in education, regardless of their social class, gender, ethnicity background or physical and mental disabilities. Initially developed with the theme of equal opportunity access and inclusion of students with learning or physical and mental disabilities, the themes governing universal access to education have now expanded across all forms of ability and diversity.

Statistics on access to basic education in Nigeria from international agencies appear worrisome. According to UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Report (2010), one in five Nigerian children is out of school, making Nigeria the country with the largest population of out-of-school children in the world at 10.5 million as of 2010, a figure that has risen almost 3 million since 1999. Indeed, the net enrolment ratio at the basic education level has fallen since 1999, from 61% to 58% (2010). Over the same period, the regional average has increased from 58% to 76%. Of recent, some states in the southwest have recorded large enrolments of pupils occasioned by their educational policies.

Investments in basic education have already led to a significant increase in coverage since the launch of the UBE program in 1999. Yet, Nigeria is significantly behind in its progress to achieve the UBE goals by 2015. An overall enrolment rate in basic is low, especially in the Northern Regions, where rates are particularly low for girls. Only 64% of school-age boys attend primary school and only 57% of girls (World Bank, 2006).

There are large income and geographic differences in education outcomes, with the Northern regions consistently faring worse than the Southern ones. Girls' education outcomes are much lower, with a decreasing gender gap at the national level. In Kano, however, the gender gap is significant and a key barrier to the achievement of EFA goals and the SDGs. The cost of schooling, both the direct and the indirect opportunity costs of attending school, remains the key reason for low enrolment and for dropping out of school (World Bank, 2006). The poor quality of basic education also acts as a disincentive to access and completion. For those children who have access, the quality of education is insufficient to provide basic life skills and knowledge.

In Kano state, the government initiatives from 2011 to date have made significant differences by increasing access to education of children who would have been denied schooling. According to SUBEB official figure, presently, in Kano state, there are about over 3.2 million pupils in its 6333 primary schools across 44 local government areas. 1.7 million of the pupils are boys and 1.5 million are girls (Table 1).

Table 1. Estimated students enrolment by gender in Kano

S. No.	Gender	Frequency	%
1.	Boys	1,700,036	53.1
2.	Girls	1,502,100	46.9
Total		3,202,136	100

Agency Report (2018)

This increase in pupils' enrolment, especially in rural areas, can be attributed to the introduction of free feeding programme initiative of the state government. According to the Kano State Community Reorientation Committee, the introduction of the free feeding programme of the federal government in the state at the end of the first term school session had added impetus to pupils' attendance and then, parents have enrolled their children more in the schools, due to the free food being given to the children (Agency Report, 2018).

5. The Challenge: Raising Enrolment and Quality Education in Kano

Priorities to increase schools' enrolment have undermined the quality of education. As policymakers continue to pursue the goal of increasing basic education enrolment, it is imperative to keep in mind that there is a complex relationship between education quantity and its quality. Being able to learn, understand texts, and carry out essential arithmetical operations and learn some basic skills, is after all the ultimate goal of basic education. Efforts to ensure and maintain quality education in the state with this increase rate of students' enrolment are reported to face serious challenges, including mainly.

a) **Insufficient Trained and Competent Teachers**

A number of challenges have been identified as clogs in the realisation of good access, equity and quality of education in Nigeria. One of these is the critical issue of teacher shortage at all levels of education. For instance, at the basic education level, the UBECs 2012 National Personnel Audit Report revealed gross inadequacy in the quality and quantity of teaching personnel in the nation's primary and secondary schools. In Kano state, the inadequacy of teaching state to take care of these increasing enrollees force a great danger to the successful provision of quality education in basic education schools.

One of the quality indicators (teacher-student ratio) is reported to be very high. Official records show that 40,053 teachers deployed in basic schools across the state, 31,690 are male while 8093 are female. Going by the number of students enrolled in the schools (3,202,136) and the teachers available in the schools (Table 2). The teacher-student ratio is calculated to be 1:80 (meaning there are 80 students for every one teacher). This figure is high and worrisome and is far above the ideal ratio of 1:40 UNESCO recommended teacher-pupil ratio.

Table 2. Estimated teachers and teachers-pupil in Kano

S. No.	Teacher	Frequency	%	Total teachers	Students	Ratio
1	Male	31,690	79	40,053	3,202,136	1:80
2	Female	8,093	21			
Total		40,053	100			

Agency Report (2018)

This indicator has been used by countries either in the form of a legal instrument with mandatory compliance or as a target or goal. There is no doubt that with the raising students' enrolment, the inadequacy of qualified teachers has negative impacts on the general quality of basic education in the state.

b) Inadequate funding

Funding of education remains a great challenge in Kano and Nigeria. This has been a recurring decimal in the national polity. Budget allocation for the education sector falls abysmally below the United Nations' recommended 26% of the total budget. With the total deregulation of the educational sector in Nigeria at all levels, funding remains a great challenge to the sector (Aremu, 2014). The funding has a multidimensional role in education because adequate funding will ensure provision of essential teaching and learning facilities, improvement in teachers' welfare, as well as provision of essential infrastructures to create conducive learning environment. The increasing enrolment in basic education schools present needs for provision of adequate good infrastructures and teaching-learning materials that will take care of the ever-increasing students' population in the state. It is also the proper funding that will ensure recruitment of qualified personals and training of those in services for improved services delivery.

6. The Way Forward: Balancing Access and Quality

It is clear that a major challenge facing policymakers has been and continues to be, how to find a balance between increasing enrolment while at the same time maintaining and raising the quality of education. International donors have often put pressure on recipient governments to simply increase school enrolment. That policy may have been counterproductive since it might end up emphasising quantity to the detriment of quality. Therefore, to ensure adequate balance between increasing access and quality adequate measures should be taken by stakeholders to:

a) Provide adequate funding since funding remains a great challenge, with the increasing initiative towards boosting enrolment adequate funding should equally be provided to take care of the increasing needs that arose with the increasing enrolment. Budget allocation for the education sector should be increased to at least UN recommended benchmark of 26% of the total budget. Equally important is for the stakeholders to ensure judicious management of the funds in procurement of required facilities that will be sufficient for the increased school population.

b) Employment and training of teachers, to strike a balance between the ever-increasing school population and with the teacher-students' ratio of 1:80 adequate teachers should be employed and those in service should be trained in the science of teaching to be able to implement the basic education curriculum available. To effectively achieve the objectives of basic education effective instructions should be provided, a task which can only be facilitated by teacher. Adequate teachers mean that the teacher-students ratio be satisfactory at least top meet the UNESCO recommended ratio of 1:40.

c) Supply and maintenances of teaching and learning facilities should be provided through the initiative of enrolment support services, all the initiatives should be accompanied the corresponding teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, writing materials, as well as modern instruction materials in adequate quantity. The provided needed learning and teaching materials should be properly maintained with standard monitoring and evaluation system.

7. Conclusions

This overview has highlighted range enrolment driven policy initiatives on increasing access and school enrolment in Kano and Nigerian schools at basic education level. The total amount of initiatives to support increasing access and enrolment does not have relevance for raising the quality of basic education, but how those initiatives are distributed within the sector is significant. Evidence suggests that to address the issue of quality with regard to increasing enrolment, there should be adequate funding and ensuring judicious management of the funds, engagement of trained and competent teachers and adequately improved their welfare be as well as the supply and maintenances of teaching and learning facilities. Sincerity in the implementations of these and other recommendations would positively affect the over 3.2 million children in basic education, encouraging further enrolment and improving the quality of education they receive.

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