

MANAGEMENT OF THE NEEDS OF IN AND OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN IN 21ST CENTURY NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

On examination of the multifaceted needs and challenges of both in-school and out-of-school children in 21st century Nigeria, this article proffers potential solutions to approach the issue. To do justice to the topic, the article reviews existing literature and policies, which helped to highlight the challenges and opportunities in addressing the needs of both groups. It focuses on access to quality education, holistic human development, and an all-inclusive education, it examines the socio-economic, cultural, and policy factors influencing the Nigerian educational system and specifically the use of modern technology in teaching/learning system. This article assumes that through comprehensive reformation of policies, especially as it relates to the educational system, community involvement, and the introduction of innovative educational practices such as SMART experiential learning, apprenticeship and entrepreneurial skills, these needs will be addressed.

Keywords: in-school, out-of-school, inclusive education, holistic human development, reformation, innovative education practices, use of technology, SMART experiential learning, apprenticeship.

INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental cornerstones for national development is education. Education has been described as the bedrock of every society and a tool for nation-building. (Enakpoya and Collins, 2012). The level of growth and development of any nation depends on the literacy level of its individual members. Any nation's economic development and social transformation are said to be primarily influenced by its educational system. Mogboh, (2023). Once the educational system of any society is destroyed, the future of that society lies in shambles, and the youths in particular will be jeopardized. In the words of Nelson Mandela (1994), "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Consequent upon this, every nation with good vision makes significant effort to develop and standardize its educational system. This is observed in the National Policy on Education. NPE (2014). This being the case, education is made readily available to all those who need and who seek it.

However, Nigeria faces major challenges in ensuring the well-being and education of her citizens. The educational sector faces significant challenges that are pertinent and need urgent attention, especially in the management of the needs of in-school and out-of-school children. According to UNICEF (2021), approximately 10.5 million Nigerian children aged between 5 and 14 years are out of school. This makes Nigeria stand among the countries with the highest number of out-of-school children in the global terrain. Out-of-school children are vulnerable to exploitation, violence, manipulation, and poverty, while the in-school children need support to achieve their full potential. Even the children who attend school, World Bank (2017) emphasized that the quality of education is often incapacitated by inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, outdated curricula, and insufficiently trained teachers.

In this article, attempts will be made to determine the current state of education in Nigeria, identify the needs of children from both groups, and suggest some strategies for effective and efficient management of 21st century Nigerian school children.

THE CURRENT STATE OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The Nigerian educational system is facing a lot of challenges, not excluding a huge number of out-of-school children, a barely functioning basic education system, and an underfunded

education sector (UNESCO, 2020). Underfunding of the educational sector, especially the tertiary institutions, has adverse effects on the system. The workers, in their struggle for better pay, have engaged in industrial actions a number of times. Punch Newspaper (2022), reports that the Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASUU, has embarked on sixteen (16) strikes in twenty-three years. These strikes stem from the failure of the Federal Government to implement the agreement reached with ASUU on the funding of the tertiary institutions, the improved salary scheme of workers, an increase in the budgetary allocations to the education sector, and retirement age. These protracted crises have been continuously crippling the education system. The need for more funds to keep the system running has led the school authorities to hike the fees paid by students. This has resulted in the increase in the number of out-of-school children because there is hunger and poverty in the land and parents are not able to afford the necessary fees.

According to a report by UNICEF Nigeria (2022), “one in every three children in Nigeria is out of school, with 10.2 million at the primary school level and 8.1 million at the junior secondary school level. In June 2024, the numbers increased to 10.5 million, notwithstanding the fact that basic education is supposed to be free and compulsory. The increase in the number of out-of-school children is not only as a result of poverty and economic hardship in the country, but gender and geography also contribute. Girl child education in Northern Nigeria is in the gestation period due to the culture of early marriage.

Nevertheless, insecurity has adversely affected education in Nigeria. Many schools have been forced to close due to bombings, kidnappings, and attacks from different anti state groups. The fear of attacks and kidnapping has led to a drastic decrease in the number of students enrolling in schools especially in the danger-prone zone. Generally, in some states of the Federation, students take exams with fear and anxiety. These insecurity challenges have culminated and made education less interesting, resulting in the low standard of education. The drop-outs, who have lost their opportunities and potentials, are in the streets, giving room for a potential increase in crime rate. Efforts to address the problem of insecurity in Nigerian schools should include, as Mogboh (2022) recommended, that the entire school system should be securitized and placed on red-alert for state actors to devote adequate attention and resources towards ameliorating this

menace, and that the school system should involve school security at the forefront of security discusses.

The Ministry of Education, in its attempt to stop the increase in the number of out-of-school children, inaugurated a four-years plan that will last from 2024-2027. The aim is not just to reduce the number of out-of-school children but also to strengthen basic education. National Policy on Education (2021) reported that, “the primary focus is on the basic education with the task of reducing the number of out-of-school children by 15 million, among other priorities.” They will start by integrating the non-formal schools into the formal school systems, to strengthen and increase the adult education programs, and encourage girl-child education. To actualize these ends, the ministry of education has adopted the National Commission for Almajiri and out-of-school children, and approved a policy on Early-Child-Care-Development programs.

Furthermore, UNICEF, together with other international organizations, has picked key interest in children education in Nigeria. This initiative stems from their declaration that “all children, no matter where they live or what their circumstances are, will have the right to quality education” (UNICEF, 2017). UNICEF and other international organizations desire to improve the Nigerian educational landscape and will work on the creation of an enabling environment that will facilitate the improvement of our educational standard. In field trip investigations, it has been observed that the education deprivation in northern Nigeria is driven by various factors, not excluding economic barriers, and socio-cultural norms and practices that discourage attendance in formal education, especially for the girls (UNICEF, 2018). Through the help of foreign aids and technology, our educational system is wearing a new and better look. One of the fruits of their efforts is the introduction of Smart Schools experiential learning programme.

Smart School Experiential Learning Programme

This refers to an educational institution that utilizes technology to enhance teaching and learning experiences. These schools integrate various digital tools and resources, such as interactive whiteboards, tablets, educational software, and internet connectivity, to create an immersive and dynamic learning environment. The primary aim of Smart School is to harness the potential of technology in the optimization of educational outcomes and prepare students for success in a rapidly growing digital world. The successful outcomes of Smart School in different countries suggest that if employed in Nigeria, its result will be enormous. Enugu State Ministry of

Education has interestingly started on pilot basis the experiential programme and hopes to replicate this in all the political wards of the state. This programme includes free education and feeding at the level of basic education, (NGMUN Conference, Enugu (2024)). However, it is a challenging task in Nigeria's education system due to inadequacy of energy and the level of technological skills. Kim (2012) aimed that South Korea's Smart Education Initiative will provide digital textbooks and online resources to all students by 2021. This project will help in personal learning for both teachers and students, teacher's empowerment, resource efficiency, etc. However, it will be a challenging task because of our state in the technological society.

KEY NEEDS OF IN-SCHOOL CHILDREN

Access to Quality Education.

Nigerian students need to have access to quality education, which should equip them with essential knowledge and skills. This includes well-trained teachers, updated curriculum, and an effective teaching method. A curriculum that will be relevant to the needs, the culture and future aspirations of the children should be developed. It should prepare the children to face and survive the real-world challenges of the contemporary time.

Similarly, to impart quality education to the children, the teachers need to be properly groomed. It is crucial for school teachers to engage in continuous training and professional development. A Latin adage has it that *nemo quod dat non habet*, "no one gives what he does not have." Obanya (2014), opined that enhancing teacher training programs and ensuring the provision of necessary resources are crucial in meeting these needs. Therefore, it is pertinent to have trained and updated teachers with high knowledge for the school children.

SECURITY NEEDS/INFRASTRUCTURE

Nevertheless, it is essential for a safe and conducive environment to be provided for school children in Nigeria. This will greatly facilitate their learning ability and speed. A safe and conducive environment involves the building and maintenance of standard infrastructure in the school environment, addressing the security challenges, and finally, looking after the wellbeing of the children, both physically, emotionally, and psychologically. There is a need for basic amenities like clean water, electricity, and sanitation facilities. Lack of these amenities can become a hindrance to learning.

Holistic Development

Certainly, holistic development is a critical aspect of the needs of in-school children in Nigeria. Holistic development goes beyond academic learning; it focuses on various aspects of a child's growth. Adewale (2019) holds that implementing comprehensive curricula that include life skills, physical education, and arts is essential for the overall development of a school child. For the proper physical health and well-being of school children, schools should encourage and promote balanced diet and teach students to participate in physical activities like sports and games. These help to maintain overall health. Similarly, for a balanced emotional and social development of school children, the schools teach the children how to manage and control their emotions. Children should be taught empathy, self-awareness and mastery and interpersonal skills. Students need opportunities to interact, collaborate, and build positive relationships with their peers. With this, children learn how to communicate and engage themselves in teamwork.

Academics without ethics and values does not guarantee a holistic educational development.

COLLABORATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

To ensure that students grow in character and in learning, teachers and parents need to be involved. Schools play significant roles in imparting moral values, ethics and integrity. Character in education helps the students to learn honesty and respect for others. Understanding our civic duties and responsibilities contribute to holistic development. It is good for schools to actively involve parents in their child's holistic development. Parent-teacher partnership enhances overall children's growth.

That notwithstanding, school children need to imbibe and develop life skills such as problem-solving, time management, and financial literacy. They should also be prepared for the practical world waiting for them by imparting skills relevant to their desired careers.

Inclusive Education.

All students, irrespective of their gender, religion, place of origin, or socio-economic background, should be given equal opportunity for education. Anything that might give room for disparity should be eliminated. School authorities should make efforts to ensure inclusivity. Additionally, efforts should be made to reduce gender disparities in education. Programs should

be adopted that encourage the enrollment and retention of the-girl child in school. School system and authorities should recognize and address the unique needs of each student, including those with disabilities or learning differences to accommodate students with disabilities and provide necessary support. Inclusive education promotes diversity and understanding. To promote inclusivity, a hospitable and welcoming environment should be created where all students will feel accepted and valued.

Technological Integration.

Integrating technology into education can enhance learning outcomes. Access to digital resources and tools are essentially important for 21st century education and beyond. Though there are challenges, several initiatives and strategies could help to bridge the division in the highly digitalized world and empower school children across the nation. To keep up with the global education standards, our school children need to be technologically updated, but we are being challenged by limited access to reliable electricity supply, the internet, inadequate supply of technologically-updated-teachers, and insufficient funding.

In the year 2004, the Federal Ministry of Education introduced the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) curriculum for both primary and secondary schools. In the 2006/2007 academic year, the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) developed the ICT curriculum, and the Federal Government of Nigeria, recognizing the role of ICTs, integrated it into the curriculum of our secondary school, but they are being challenged beyond the distribution and installation of computers. In the midst of all these, traditional teaching methods still dominate classroom activities in the Nigerian classrooms. There comes the question, how do we wriggle out of these?

We will suggest strategies for effective technological integration, which include:

- A comprehensive training program to equip teachers with necessary technological skills,
- Availability of reliable electricity, internet and other necessary devices,
- Creation of supportive infrastructure within schools,
- A seamless incorporation of technology into the school curriculum,

It is believed that when these principles are adopted and implemented, the Nigerian school children will be familiarized with technology and therefore, will grow in knowledge and learning. This ensures a brighter future for all students and youths in our educational system.

KEY NEEDS OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

The issue of out-of-school children in Nigeria is a serious problem that affects millions of Nigerian children. Globally, Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children. UNICEF 2021, reported that 10.5 million children aged 5 to 14 years are not attending school. One may be wondering what could be the factors contributing to this high number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. The answers are not far-fetched. As exposed earlier, insecurity, poverty, socio-cultural norms etc. contribute to the problem. Now, how could the huge number of children who are out of school be helped? There are strategies already mapped out above.

The Following Strategies are Suggested:

Access to Education

The Right to quality education belongs to every child. Therefore, every government should make education accessible to every child. For holistic development and for future opportunities, it is necessary that every child has access to quality education. Quality education is more than mere enrolment in school; it entails the provision of relevant curriculum, availability of qualified and professional teachers, a safe learning environment, inclusive practices etc. This is the most fundamental need of every out-of-school child. The issues preventing these children from attending school are many, ranging from economic difficulties to sociocultural factors. According to UNICEF (2021), many children are out of school due to poverty, early marriage, child labour, and insecurity.

To solve the above problems, there must be reasonable investment in educational infrastructure, especially in rural areas where the majority of the out-of-school children live. There is a need to build more schools, provide safe transportation, and ensure that schools are properly equipped with necessary facilities and learning materials. Federal Ministry of Education, (2017) suggested

that when education is made free and compulsory, enrolment rates increase. The federal government, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and private sectors, can actualize this dream.

Alternative Education

Since the formal system of education will not be accessible to all out-of-school children, an alternative educational program could be adopted. Alternative education refers to non-traditional approaches that provide learning opportunities for children who are unable to attend formal schools. It aims at reaching out to those who missed out on formal school due to various reasons. Alternative education programs can provide flexible learning opportunities that cater for their unique circumstances. Non-formal education centers, mobile schools, and distance learning programs are effective strategies for reaching these children (Akinbola, 2016).

Types of Alternative Education Programs:

- **Non-Formal Education:** They are designed to provide basic literacy and numeracy skills to children and adults. These programs are flexible, learner-centered, and often take place outside regular school hours.
- **Accelerated Learning Programs:** These are intensive programs that help children catch up with missed education quickly. They condense the curriculum and focus on essential skills.
- **Community-Based Learning Centers:** These centers operate in local communities, making education accessible to children who cannot travel long distances to formal schools.
- **Mobile Schools:** Mobile schools bring education to remote or nomadic communities. They use mobile classrooms or teachers who travel to different locations. An example is the Almajiri school in northern Nigeria.
- **Vocational Training:** For older out-of-school children, vocational training provides practical skills (e.g., carpentry, tailoring, agriculture) that enhance employability. Apprenticeship scheme is very appropriate where one learns a trade or skill through a Master/Mentor – Mentee/Apprentice programme.

- **Distance Education:** Distance education allows children to learn remotely through radio, television, or online platforms e.g. during Covid 19, what happened?.
- **Nomadic Education:** Nomadic education is the educational programme designed for the nomadic pastoralists, migrant farmers and migrant fishermen who lead a mobile lifestyle, NCNE, (2004). In 1986, Nomadic Education Programme was established to provide basic education to the mobile population. These nomads and migrant citizens, like the Fulani herdsman and the migrant fishing communities move from one place to another in search of grazing lands and fishing areas. Aderinoye (2007) opined that this lifestyle inherently conflicts with the static nature of conventional schooling. The primary objectives include improving literacy rates, ensuring the provision of functional and relevant education, and integrating nomadic children into the national education framework without disrupting their cultural practices, (Federal Ministry of Education, 2004). Additionally, Federal Ministry of Education, (2004), states that the nomadic education programme involves adapting curricula to reflect the nomadic lifestyle, incorporating subjects like animal husbandry and environmental management. However, as Usman, (2008) pointed out, the inherent mobility of the nomadic groups makes it challenging to maintain continuous educational programmes. Financial constraints and logistical difficulties limit the effective implementation of the Nomadic Education Programmes, Aderinoye, (2007). There is a need for stronger policies and frameworks to support the sustainable development of nomadic education in Nigeria.

Socio-Economic Support

Socio-economic factors are major obstacles to the educational desire of many children in Nigeria. Many children would have loved to be in school, but because of poverty, child labour and inadequate social support system they are often forced out of school. This limits their opportunities in life. This needs to be tackled through targeted support programs so as to keep them in school or bring out-of-school children back to school. The cost of education can be a

hindrance to children from low-income families. Consequent upon this, it becomes necessary to offer various forms of financial assistance to salvage the situation.

Nevertheless, scholarship programs are avenues that provide access to education for the children from poor families. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in Nigeria provides scholarships for children from poor families. This program helps to encourage school attendance. Again, conditional cash transfer is a system of providing financial incentives to the families on the condition that their children attend schools regularly. A study by Bashir, Lockhead, Ninan, and Tan (2018) found out that conditional cash transfer programs significantly increased school enrollment and attendance rates among the out-of-school children. This program also encourages parents to prioritize education over other useless activities and send their children to school.

Some bright and intelligent children drop out of school because of ill-health and lack of healthcare, especially when their parents cannot afford their health bills; it becomes pertinent to integrate healthcare support with educational incentives. The government and non-governmental organizations can provide basic health care services like vaccinations, regular health check-ups, and health education within the school systems. This can help to ameliorate the situation and increase the number of children enrolled in schools especially from poor families.

The development of local economic support programs that provide income-generating opportunities for families

is encouraged; they can reduce the financial pressures that force children out of school. Microfinance initiatives and vocational training programs for parents can improve household income, thereby making it less difficult for them to afford educational expenses. Programs like these, when combined with educational incentives, can have a synergistic effect on school enrollment (Akinbola, 2016).

There are other initiatives in Nigeria that demonstrate the effectiveness of socioeconomic support in addressing the needs of out-of-school children. The Lagos State government's Eko Education Project, funded by the World Bank, includes components for financial aid, health services, and community engagement. This holistic approach has significantly improved school enrollment and retention rates in Lagos State (World Bank, 2017). Another example is the Northern Education Initiative Plus (NEI+), which targets out-of-school children in northern Nigeria

through comprehensive support programs. NEI+ combines financial assistance, health services, and community engagement to create an enabling environment for education. The initiative has successfully reintegrated thousands of out-of-school children into formal education (USAID, 2020).

Community Engagement

Community engagement is an important tool for addressing the needs of out-of-school children in Nigeria. With this approach, the collective effort of the local community is utilized to maximize to create an enabling environment that values and supports education. Community engagement implies the involvement of community members, leaders, parents, and local organizations to effectively address the socio-cultural and economic barriers that prevent children from attending school.

Through community sensitization, the attitudes and behaviours of the community towards education could be changed. These are avenues to address the cultural practices and societal norms that hinder children's education, such as child labour, early marriage, and gender discrimination. The community members could be enlightened on the importance of education and the long-term benefits it brings to individuals and society. For instance, UNICEF's campaigns in Nigeria emphasize the value of education for girls, highlighting how educated women contribute to healthier and more prosperous communities (UNICEF, 2021).

The involvement of traditional and religious leaders in sensitization programs can be highly effective, as these figures hold significant influence in their communities. For Odukoya (2019), when leaders advocate for education, they can help shift public opinion and encourage families to prioritize schooling for their children.

Grassroots Initiatives: Local organizations can design and implement education programs that address specific local challenges. For example, the Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All (CSACEFA) works across Nigeria to advocate for educational rights and implement community-based education programs that target out-of-school children (CSACEFA, 2018).

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF THE NEEDS OF IN-SCHOOL AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN.

Having discussed the needs of both in-school and out-of-school children in Nigeria, we have to look out for the possible effective strategies in addressing their various needs. Among other points, our gaze will have to focus on policy reform, use of technology, partnership and collaboration, and monitoring and evaluation.

Policy reform

Every reasonable effort to address the challenges of managing both in-school and out-of-school children in Nigeria will require a comprehensive policy reform geared towards creating an inclusive, equitable, and effective education system. The bedrock of any relevant educational management lies in the formulation and implementation of contemporary educational policies that reflect current challenges and opportunities.

The National Policy on Education in Nigeria is a statement of the government's goal, regulations, anticipations, expectations, requirements, and standards for ensuring quality education delivery in Nigeria, (Mogboh, 2023). Nigerian's National Policy on Education needs to be continuously updated so as to incorporate emerging educational needs and global best practices. These policies, among other things, should highlight compulsory and free basic education, as outlined in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, ensuring that every child has the right to quality education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2017). The reformed policies should help to strengthen the enforcement of existing legal acts, like the Child Right Act, which demands compulsory education for children, most especially those from marginalized communities.

Inclusive education strategies are necessary to ensuring that all children, irrespective of their background or circumstances, have access to quality education. Policies should mandate the inclusion of special education programs to support children with disabilities. This includes providing necessary resources, trained personnel, and accessible facilities. Gender disparities in education remain a significant issue in some parts of Nigeria, with girls often facing greater barriers to education. Policies must specifically address these disparities by promoting gender-inclusive practices.

Since the effectiveness and success of the educational sector also depend on the quality of teachers, our educational policies should support comprehensive teacher training programs that

equip educators with modern teaching methodologies and classroom management skills. According to Bashir et al. (2018), well-trained teachers are crucial for improving student learning outcomes and overall school performance. Continuous professional development opportunities should be embedded within educational policies to ensure that teachers remain updated with the latest educational trends and technologies. Sufficient and well-allocated funding is essential for the proper management of both in-school and out-of-school children. Policies must advocate for an increased allocation of the national budget to the education sector.

Notably, when a reformed policy, which addresses inclusive education strategy, improved teacher training, and enhanced funding is implemented, Nigeria can create a more equitable and effective education system that will address the current educational challenges and ensure that all children both in and out of school have the opportunity to receive basic and quality education.

Use of Technology

The introduction of technology into education pedagogy is a positive development that when harnessed properly, would help to address the challenges faced by in-school and out-of-school children in Nigeria. With millions of Nigerian children either not attending school or receiving substandard education, leveraging technology can help bridge the gap and provide equitable access to quality learning. Learning, though a tedious exercise, can be made easier and more interactive and engaging by the use of multimedia and educational games. These can help students to understanding complex theories easily. Digital learning platforms provide an alternative to traditional classroom settings, making education more accessible, especially for out-of-school children. Online learning platforms such as Khan Academy, Coursera, and local initiatives like the Nigerian National Open University (NOUN) offer courses that can be accessed from anywhere. These platforms provide a flexible learning environment, allowing children to learn at their own pace Yusuf, (2020). Learning, though a tedious exercise, can be made easier and more interactive and engaging by the use of multimedia and educational games. These can help students to understand complex theories easily.

The use of digital platforms grants students access to a vast array of educational resources, including textbooks, e-Books, e-Classroom, e-Libraries, research papers, and instructional videos. This access can significantly enhance the learning experience for both in-school and out-of-school children (World Bank, 2017). One can stay in the comfort of his room and do a

number of research projects on any topic without passing through the burden of visiting a traditional library. Nowadays, we have mobile learning applications, like ULesson and Eneza, which offer curriculum-based content that is accessible to anyone with smartphones. Other mobile-learning applications include Duolingo for language learning, Coursera, Udemy, Khan Academy for online courses, etc. These apps are designed to work offline, ensuring that children in areas with limited internet access can still benefit from digital education (Adewale, 2020). With this, no one is denied basic education.

Mass media platforms are also technological means of education. Educational programs broadcasted on the radio and television can reach children in rural and remote areas. Programs like the Universal Basic Education Commission's (UBEC) radio classes have proven effective in delivering educational content to children who are out of school (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). The minimum needed to actualize this could be access to a power supply and a set of radio or television.

Partnership and Collaboration

The management of the needs of in-school and out-of-school children in Nigeria is so complex and challenging that the collaboration of various stakeholders like the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector, community groups, and international organizations are needed for sustainable solutions. The partnership and collaboration of some or all of these sectors will help to generate enough resources both material, financial and ideological that are necessary for educational development and progress in Nigeria. An example is the MTN Foundation's "School Connect" project, which equips schools with digital learning resources, including computers, internet access, and educational software, thereby expanding access to quality education and improving ICT skills among students (Adewale, 2020).

International organizations like UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank provide grants and aid that support educational programs. These funds can be used to build schools, train teachers, and develop educational materials. The Northern Education Initiative Plus (NEI+), funded by USAID, works to improve access to education in northern Nigeria through a combination of community engagement, resource provision, and policy advocacy (USAID, 2020).

Furthermore, collaboration with academic institutions and education experts can help in the development of more relevant and comprehensive curricula, not excluding incorporating technology, vocational training, and life skills education, which are crucial for preparing students for the future (Yusuf, 2020). Collaborations can drive innovation into education, thereby creating new approaches and tools that promote learning experiences. Collaborations can also lead to the development of alternative learning programs, such as mobile schools, community learning centers, and distance education. These programs provide flexible learning opportunities for out-of-school children, allowing them to continue their education in non-traditional settings (UNESCO, 2020).

Additionally, NGOs, community groups, and international organizations can collaborate on advocacy campaigns to push for policy changes. For example, the Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All (CSACEFA) works across Nigeria to advocate for educational rights and implement community-based education programs that target out-of-school children (CSACEFA, 2018).

Based on what we have discussed so far, it is obvious that Partnership and collaboration are vital strategies for the effective management of the educational needs of in-school and out-of-school children in Nigeria. Through sustained partnerships and collective action, stakeholders can ensure that all children have access to quality education, thereby contributing to national development and social progress.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Not just to checkmate the lackadaisical attitude of some civil servants in Nigeria, monitoring and evaluation is an important factor in the assessment of the progress and the impact of educational programs on those concerned. Similarly, it will afford us the opportunity to develop and inculcate the culture of accountability in the children and those responsible for them, and serve as a guide in data-driven decision-makings. An important aspect of Monitoring and Evaluation is the establishment of clear, measurable objectives that align with the overall goals of educational initiatives. These goals should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART). Setting SMART goals helps to create a clear framework for what the educational programs aim to achieve. For example, reducing the number of out-of-school children by a certain percentage within a specific timeframe provides a clear target (UNESCO, 2020).

Again, the collection and analysis of accurate and comprehensive data are essential for monitoring progress and evaluating the impact of educational initiatives. The collection of quantitative data, such as enrolment numbers, attendance rates, and examination results, provides objective measures of educational outcomes. This data helps in identifying trends and areas needing improvement (Bashir et al., 2018).

Monitoring and Evaluation should be an ongoing process that gives rise to continuous improvement of educational programs and policies. In Nigeria, UNICEF's education programs incorporate comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation frameworks that include both quantitative and qualitative data collection. These frameworks help in assessing the impact of interventions on children's education and well-being, ensuring that resources are effectively utilized (UNICEF, 2021).

Therefore, when clear objectives are set, and comprehensive data are collected and analyzed, monitoring and evaluation can be an effective and impactful strategy in the management of the needs of in-school and out-of-school children in Nigeria, because these efforts are necessary for the creation of an inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education system that meets the diverse needs of all Nigerian children.

Conclusion

The importance of education to the growth and development of any nation cannot be over-emphasized. Many Nigerians would like to have access to quality education but could not because of a lot of challenges such as insecurity, poverty, a low number of trained and qualified teachers, insufficient funding, inadequate infrastructure, outdated curricula etc. The Nigerian government, in partnership with some non-governmental organizations and private sectors, is making some efforts to ameliorate the system but more still needs to be done.

An objective observation of the current state of education in Nigeria will acknowledge the fact that both the in-school and out-of-school children in Nigeria need collaborative assistance in order to change the face of education and give the next generation a brighter future. The type of education needed presently is the one that is technologically integrated, all-inclusive, qualitative and holistic. The world is going digital with an incredible speed, to catch up, our system of teaching and learning needs to be digitalized. We should make a reasonable effort to harness the

potential of technology to optimize educational outcomes and prepare students for success in a rapidly evolving digital world. Our children need to be empowered to become critical thinkers and global citizens ready to contribute meaningfully to the development of our society. Since the available data proves the impossibility of enrolling all the children in school, alternative education and socioeconomic supports need to be provided for the out-of-school children. An effective way of actualizing this is through the engagement of the community. The engagement of the community guarantees a greater direct access and impact on the children.

There is a need to have a critical review of our educational system. This will help to develop a current curriculum that will be aware of the present life challenges, with an eye on the future. In order to get proper feedback on the policies, an organized monitoring and evaluating team needs to be formed. If these are adopted and implemented, our educational system will experience a positive change because the challenges facing our children, both in-school and out-of-school will be solved.

Recommendations

Based on what we have discussed so far; it is evident that we are educationally lagging behind. A lot of factors contribute to this, but at this section, we have to make some pragmatic recommendations aimed at promoting and upgrading the educational outcome in Nigeria.

- ❖ It is important to regularly review and update the Nigerian educational policies. These policies should reflect the current challenges and opportunities of our country, and emphasize compulsory and free basic education, technological integration in teaching and learning, and an inclusive education.
- ❖ The Nigerian government should increase the federal allocation to the education sector in the national budget. If the government cannot afford the UN recommended percentage of 25%, the six –eight percent allocation is not negotiable in the present economic situation of the country.
- ❖ There is a need to develop and support alternative education programs such as community learning centers, mobile schools, skill acquisition centers, distance learning programs, etc. Since the quality of education depends on the quality of the teacher, it is recommended that comprehensive teachers' training programs be set up. It is also necessary to provide incentives and support for the teachers, especially, those working in

challenging environments. The integration of technology in our educational system will enhance the teaching and learning process of the Nigerian school children. This will make them better prepared for the modern workforce.

- ❖ The local communities should be involved in the educational process, both in decision makings and implementation. It is not just the community, the parents in particular need to be seriously engaged. When the Parent-Teacher Association is strengthened, it will foster a collaborative atmosphere whereby parents and teachers work together to bring out the best in the children. Since it is financially burdensome to afford education in Nigeria, and many parents are poor, it becomes necessary to form partnership and collaboration among government, non-governmental organizations and private sectors in the sponsorship of education. This will assist in making education available to the vast majority of the poor masses.
- ❖ It is necessary to develop a standard monitoring and evaluation system that will assist in the assessment of our educational progress. Similarly, it is important to develop and implement policies that support and encourage a holistic and inclusive system of education in Nigeria. Children with disabilities need to be included in the mainstream education and the gender-disparity gap needs to be closed.

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