

The Challenge of Rural Education: Issues of Environment and Shortage of Educators in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Education is becoming fundamental to development as it plays a very crucial role in securing economy, improving income distribution and enhancing social progress. However, there are numerous challenges militating against formal education in several rural areas of Nigeria. In view of these, the potential gaps, constraints, and needs of rural education will be discussed in this paper. In particular, this paper will address issues associated with demand and supply of rural educators, educators' development, cultural context of education, and rural education environment. It will also explore the future trend and channel possible course of actions for rural education, with measures to help ensure proper rural education, and safeguard against possible problems which may emanate from the rural educators. It will as well deal with the issue of creating an enabling environment for rural education. Secondary data would be examined and analysed for further recommendations.

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INTRODUCTION

It is very obvious that the world is considerably progressing in technology and is consolidating its development goals and strategies, however, the issue of universal education has not been fully attended to by many nations of the world. Education has been and will always be a pivot for national development. According to Brundrett (2014), education is a basic human right. It is also the vehicle for great transformation and it will remain to be a major tool for influencing change. For instance, education has been identified as the most powerful and vital tool for national development in India (Nidhi, 2015). Ozturk (2001) also stated that education is one of the fundamental factors of development because it raises people's productivity and creativity. Consequently, since education is impactful and imperative, it must not be limited to certain few.

Although literacy aids self-actualization, growth and development, yet, evidences still abound that there are lots of challenges confronting rural education. And despite the fact that education is crucial to development, most developed countries and virtually all developing countries are still facing the ordeal of ensuring sound rural education, only few countries in the world can really be exempted. According to empirical studies, most nations of the world particularly Asia and Africa still have to deal with problems associated with education for all. More importantly, to actualize and achieve the goal of universal education by 2030, tackling peculiar problems associated with rural education become a necessity. In fact, there is need for an expedite action now for a thorough, meaningful and resourceful universal education. Evident pressing needs and prevailing situations in the nations of the world notwithstanding, education is still a major institution and a basic necessity which everyone is entitled to and must have equal opportunity and access to. Wanya, et al., (2012) concluded that it is incumbent upon national government being custodian of public interest to ensure that every citizen is given access to education regardless of their location

Research studies and evidences also reveal that education contributes to the development of an individual's personality. The informal or moral education provided during a child's up-bringing coupled with his interactions with the environment, though very important, so also is the formal education. Biriescu (2014) remarked that we are living in an age of speed and information. More importantly, now than ever before, formal education is indispensable in order to catch up with the advancing technology and development that is in all spheres of life in our world today. On the other hand, if the issue of ensuring quality education in rural communities is not properly handled, non-educated ones may soon find it difficult to catch up with the trend of events in our constantly changing technology driven world today, as illiteracy is becoming a big bane to development. It is a known fact that changes are inevitable; societies are constantly changing, so also rural communities must experience change through formal education.

And that is the reason why the World Education Forum in 2000 adopted the Dakar framework for action which reaffirmed the goal of achieving high-quality basic education for all by 2015. Unfortunately, the Millennium Development Goal of achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015 was unattainable and UNESCO Education 2030 framework for action was implemented to make universal education a reality. But serious and determined efforts must be taken in order to achieve universal primary education since the world has missed the Millennium Development Goal of achieving it by 2015. According to UNICEF data report, 25 countries have net enrollment or attendance of less than 80% of children in schools. And these countries are concentrated mainly in west and central Africa and south Asia. However, the truth is that there is still a long way to go before achieving Universal Primary Education in those regions. Noting that the challenge is most acute in west and central Africa where the net enrollment rate stood at 74% in 2013 (UNICEF, 2016). Sub-Saharan Africa still has the highest rate of education exclusion where over one-fifth of children between ages 6-11 are out of school (UNESCO, 2015). Recently in Nigeria, the out of school children are over 10.5 million children. Bauchi state has the highest number of 1,239,759 out of school children, followed by Katsina state with 873,633 children and Kano state with 837,479 children (Tribune, 2022).

Though there are many hurdles to overcome before attaining education for all particularly in the rural regions of the country, but one of the foremost things to do is to ensure adequate supply of rural educators, and as well as provision of good environment for learning. And so there is need for an extensive and expanded rural development that will encourage massive inflow of educators to rural areas which will in turn improve rural education. In other words, harnessing human and material resources for rural education now become absolutely necessary. Aside these, policies and programs that foster formal education must be efficiently formulated and implemented in order to put illiteracy to total extinction. It is paramount now that fundamental problems affecting rural education must be solved in order to achieve the goal of having a mentally abler society.

Peculiar Problems of Rural Education

There are other several constraints impinging on the delivery of rural literacy services, though numerous, but few are highlighted below:

Culture-In most Nigeria rural areas, there are socially marginalized groups with peculiarities and culture constraints that needs to be brought into the mainstream of rural educational development. Obanya (2005) believed that culture and education are inseparable. According to him, the two concepts can in fact be said to be indivisible as the primary definition of education is acculturation. Bearing in mind that culture is a stabilizing force, though some claim that it is a barrier to development, while others view is that it aids development. However, culture still has a major role in development process even though development is often many-sided. Rural educational programs must therefore be conveyed to its beneficiaries with an intent of integrating them along-side with their beliefs and value system. Obanya (2005) also posited that education will only take place in society where the young and the not so young became educated by simply living their culture. This infers that cultural tendencies will affect the way an individual will participate in education, but the difference in participation due to culture may cause educators to inaccurately judge students (Rosenberg, 2010).

Most adult rural dwellers particularly in southwestern Nigeria believe that formal education is good and they are now sending their children and wards to school. But up till now in rural northern Nigeria, there are some who still think that a girl child does not need formal education since she will soon be given out in marriage. Also, many Fulani pastoralists do not send their children either male or female to school because they believe that they will no longer have the desire to tend and care for animals. In some rural eastern Nigeria, their view about formal education is different. They get their children engaged with trade at an early age so that they can quickly make money instead of schooling. They believe that formal education is a waste of time since the utmost aim of receiving formal education is to make money.

Environment-Hereditry and environment are two major factors that influence intelligence. While heredity provides the physical body to be developed with certain inherent capabilities, environment provides the maturation and training. Findings from several extensive studies showed that environment contribute to intelligent quotient (I.Q.). Newman (1940) revealed that variation in I.Q were determined by heredity (68%) and environment (32%). Though recent studies now proved that both shared and non shared environmental

factors can contribute up to 50% of the variation in I.Q (My agriculture information Bank). Therefore, variation in I.Q. during individual's life could partly be due to the environment. And if environment is critical to mental development, creating an enabling environment vis a vis; better schools, healthcare, infrastructural facilities, basic amenities, qualified educators, and less economic discrimination in rural communities then becomes really essential for enhancing the quality of rural education. Pierre du Plessis (2014) had remarked that the effectiveness of rural schools in producing quality learners lies in a good teaching environment, and this is a missing gap that the government must help to fill in some of the rural schools in the country.

For instance, India is a country of 1.3 billion with 67 percent of the people living in rural areas. But due to lack of transportation, many of the rural students in India trek long distances in the morning to school, and consequently easily get tired, sleepy and less active during lessons (India today, 2020). This issue of trekking long distances in the morning to school is also a common phenomenon for most rural students in Nigeria. Shikalepo (2020) also noted another major problem that deals with the siting of most rural schools. The location of some rural schools make technological infrastructure costly and difficult to apply. In addition, rural students do not enjoy instructional tools and facilities as learners in urban areas. And the reason for this is because rural schools serve large numbers of minority learners from families with little educational background. Bailey (2021) also affirm that rural students often have fewer educational opportunity compared to their peers in the cities. However, teaching impoverished learners often lead to interrupted school attendance and learners academic needs not being met. Hence, teachers must possess the ability to modify materials and design curricula that will provide positive impact on student learning.

Unwillingness of the educators to move to rural areas- Pierre du Plessis (2014) found that rural areas are not attractive to teachers, and as a result, many rural areas lack qualified teachers. Most educators are not willing to relocate to rural areas because they are not as lively as cities. There are no sufficient fun and activities in rural places and many educators are not well prepared and ready for these challenges. And this is one of the known reasons why educators, particularly, younger ones are not interested to accept offers to teach in rural schools. This implies that despite concerted effort to ensure equality in services provided, marginalization still occur as educators are not willfully desirous to settle down permanently in rural areas. But there is need for mental preparedness of educators to experience assimilation due to change of environment from urban to rural areas. Formerly, inability of educators to fully conform have led to notable disparities between rural and urban schools. But the truth is that demand for rural educators will continue to increase over the next few decades as school age population increases. Therefore, government must act promptly to ensure the safety of learners and teachers in rural schools and as well provide all necessary amenities that will encourage the educators to stay in rural areas.

*Poor remuneration-*According to Bowers (2016), salary woes has played a significant role in teachers' shortage. Many who feel that they can easily make more money in other career than education are eager to seek high paying jobs rather than settling down to teaching in rural areas. The Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report from UNESCO stated that economic inequality will keep the world from achieving education for all anytime soon (Bagri, 2016). Consequently, policy makers must focus on ways to ensure that they keep teachers that are already in the rural areas, especially those working in hard-to-staff schools. Improved working conditions; better remuneration, incentives, and special packages that would attract rural educators and guarantee a strong and more sustainable teaching pool must also be taken into consideration.

Poor funding- According to Camera (2016) World Report, teachers' shortage crisis was noted and it stands to get worse even in the United States. Also, another report from Learning Policy Institute showed that enrollment in teaching preparation programmes dropped dramatically and fell by 85% nation-wide from 2012-2016. The report further revealed that shortage was particularly severe in special education, and in location with lower wages and poor working conditions. Adams (2002) had earlier remarked that whenever formal education is unevenly distributed and is based on inequality in selection practices, it may perpetuate and legitimize social and wealth divisions in society. Poverty and poor funding of rural schools is one of the greatest challenges faced by rural education (Pierre du Plessis, 2014). Therefore, government need to construct enough classrooms and make instructional materials available for effective learning (India today, 2020). Further suggesting a way out, UNESCO advocated for more federal and state funding of rural schools.

Insufficient and incompetent educators- An influx of incompetent educators in rural areas can partly be due to non-availability of qualified ones. A situation where incompetent teachers are found working in rural

schools will continue because of the challenge of finding and keeping competent ones. Aside this, most rural schools are outside the limelight and due to their smallness and remoteness, they are often disadvantaged. Brundrett (2014) had also noted that formal education was not adequate in some places. Government should therefore encourage, provide and deploy enough qualified teachers to rural areas (India today, 2020). Furthermore, it is important and necessary for rural educators to develop and implement necessary skills that will enable them fit into these changes and ensure educational reforms in rural areas. In addition, educators must devote quality time for preparation and mentoring in order for them to perform efficiently.

Problem of quality and quantity- Brundrett (2014) noted that quality and duration of education for children during their early ages are very important. Yet, there is a huge gap between urban and rural children in terms of quality education. Education in rural areas still suffers from poor planning and defective policy implementation that is further worsened or characterized by low enrolment and consistent awful performances of the students (Giving way, 2022). Biriescu (2014) had discovered that rural schools are less efficient than those in the cities. Bagri (2016) however remarked that for millions of kids, the free, equitable, and quality primary education for all children by 2030 purported by world leaders will not come in time and probably not even in the next 50 years. Therefore, there is need for government to provide facilities required for educational activity, most especially instructional materials needed in the rural schools. It is needful to do this because the problem of inadequate supply of instructional materials is still evident in many rural areas (India today, 2020). Moreover, new methods and approaches must be applied which may be incorporated into the curricula basically to meet the specific mental and social needs of these rural students. However, any chosen approach should lead to an improved standard of education in rural areas. Relevant ICTs and other programs aimed at rural educational transformation must also be embarked upon.

Conclusion

Universal education is all inclusive and must be passionately pursued for meaningful national development. And for this to be done, all spheres of government (national, state and local government) should actively participate to ensure good education for the rural populace. Hence, issues relating to rural education reforms, policy implementation and specific educational programs must be handled tenaciously. Necessary measures through extensive methods that will ensure safe, conducive, and productive environment for learning and increase rural productivity must be taken. More importantly, there is need to ensure management of educational resources so as to achieve its sustainable and balanced use for rural education.

The easiest route to put illiteracy into total extinction is by ensuring adequate supply of rural educators, and by providing them an enabling environment to stay in the rural areas. And in order to reduce emigration of rural educators, basic rural infrastructure must be readily available in the rural communities. Essential social amenities such as internet facilities, adequate power supply, good access road, decent accommodation and all other things that will encourage educators to stay in rural areas must be provided. Aside this, better remuneration and incentives must be given so as to forestall the potential negative effects of shortages of rural educators. Therefore, effort should be made to ensure provision of suitable conditions for an uninterrupted and effective teaching-learning process in rural areas. Targeted intervention necessary for national educational growth and development must as well be identified and adopted.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed by the author(s) with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Ethics Approval

The formal ethics approval was granted by the Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Federal University Dutsin-ma. We conducted the study in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration in 1975.

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Research and Publication Ethics Statement

The study was approved by the research team's university ethics committee of the Federal University Dutsin-ma. Hereby, we as the authors consciously assure that for the manuscript "The Challenge of Rural Education: Issues of Environment and Shortage of Educators in Nigeria" the following is fulfilled:

- This material is the authors' own original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere.
- The paper reflects the authors' own research and analysis in a truthful and complete manner.
- The results are appropriately placed in the context of prior and existing research.
- All sources used are properly disclosed.

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