

# The Future of Education in Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

Education is the cornerstone of national development, driver of economic growth, social cohesion, and innovation. The future of education in Nigeria will require significant transformations that would be driven by technological advancements, evolving societal needs, and innovative educational practices. Extensive research works have been carried out on education in Nigeria, which focused on different aspects of the system. Nigeria education system has for too long been faced with myriad of challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, teacher education and supervision, irrelevant curricula, corruption, and funding, among others. In this paper, we try to explore the benefits and challenges facing education in Nigeria and suggest the way forward.

**KEYWORDS:** *Nigeria education, infrastructure, funding, AI in education, eLearning, public private partnership (PPP), gender disparity, educational technology, immersive VR, drones, simulations.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Education in Nigeria is a critical aspect of the country's development, which includes primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education. The education in Nigeria is structured into:

1. Primary education: This lasts six years, with focus on basic literacy and numeracy skills. Efforts are made by the government to improve the access to primary education, due to its importance in national development.
2. Secondary education: This is divided into junior and senior secondary with each lasting three years. The secondary schools face a lot of challenges such as lack of adequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and limited access in rural areas.
3. Tertiary education: These include universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. Nigeria currently has 170 universities, which comprises of 43 federal, 48 state, and 79 private institutions, offering various programs. This forms the 6-3-3-4 educational system i.e. composed of six years primary, three years of junior secondary, three

years of senior secondary, and four years of tertiary education [1], as shown in Figure 1.

## HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The "History of Education in Nigeria," as written by Professor Babs Fafunwa, serves as a detailed overview of the country's education system, from early times to the 1970s. Some of the keys points are [2-8]:

1. Indigenous (Pre-colonial) education: Indigenous education in Nigeria as opined by Fafunwa existed long before Western or Islamic education and was informal but functional, which was aimed at:
  - Character development.
  - Skill acquisition (e. g., farming, fishing, blacksmithing).
  - Social responsibility and cultural preservation.

It was said community-based, oral, and lifelong, "Education was an integral part of the socialization process," – Fafunwa (1974).

2. Muslim (Islamic) education: This type of education was introduced in Nigeria around the

11<sup>th</sup> century through the trans-Saharan trade routes, especially in the northern regions. The key features are:

- Quranic instruction
- Arabic literacy
- Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh)

Kano, Katsina, and Bornu emerged as centers of learning of intellectual hubs.

3. Christian (Western) education (Missionary and colonial Influence): Western education began with Christian missionaries in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, primarily along the southern coast, with the following key developments:
  - 1842: Methodist missionaries arrived in Badagry.
  - 1845: Church Missionary Society (CMS) began schools in Abeokuta.

The denominational rivalry and the lack of a coherent policy were criticized by Fafunwa, which he said fragmented early education efforts.

4. Colonial era (Colonial Educational Policies and the 1962 Education Ordinance): Fafunwa critiques British colonial educational policies for being:
  - Elitist
  - Designed to produce clerks, not thinkers
  - Lacking in vocational and technical content

The 1926 Education Ordinance tried to regulate and expand education but still served colonial needs rather than national development.

5. Post-colonial era (Post-Independence Educational Development): In this regard, Fafunwa outlined some significant reforms such as the:
  - 1969 National Curriculum Conference.
  - 1977 National Policy on Education (NPE) – In which he was a key contributor.
  - Emphasis on universal primary education (UPE), vocational training, and education for self-reliance.

He also advocated mother-tongue instruction, functional literacy, and relevance to Nigerian socio-economic realities. “No nation can rise above the quality of its education system.” – Fafunwa.

6. Fafunwa’s Educational Philosophy is based on his belief that:
  - Education should be relevant to the learner’s environment.
  - Indigenous knowledge should be integrated into formal education.
  - Bilingual education (mother-tongue + English) is essential.

“A child learns best in his mother tongue because language and culture are inseparable” - Fafunwa (1982).

Some of the key milestones are [9, 10]:

1. 1843: First primary school was established by Methodist missionaries.
2. 1854: First secondary school, CMS Grammar School was founded.
3. 1932: Yaba Higher College was established marking the beginning of formal tertiary education,
4. 1948: University College Ibadan was created.
5. 1960: Nigeria gained independence, with a focus on expanding education access.
6. 1976: UPE program was launched.
7. 1999: UBE program was introduced.

### **BOTTLENECKS TO EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

Education in Nigeria is faced by many persistent bottlenecks that are hindering access, quality, and equity, and which are deeply rooted in structural, socio-economic, political, and cultural issues. Some of these challenges are as outlined below:

1. Inadequate funding: Education in Nigeria is seriously and grossly underfunded, with the annual budget allocations often falling below the UNESCO-recommended benchmark of 15-20% of national budgets. The impact leads to poor infrastructure, lack of teaching materials, low teacher salaries, and limited access to quality education [11-14].
2. Poor infrastructure: In Nigeria, many of the schools, most especially in the rural areas, lack basic facilities like classrooms, libraries, laboratories, water, and sanitation. The impact leads to poor attendance and low learning outcomes [15-18].
3. Shortage of qualified teachers: There is critical shortage of trained and qualified teachers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, as shown in Figure 2. Over 40% of teachers in public schools at the basic level are unqualified or lack proper training. This results in high pupil-teacher ratios impacting learning quality i.e., leading to reduced quality of instruction [19-22].
4. Out-of-school children: Nigeria has one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children globally, with over 10 million children not attending school. The cause is due to poverty, child labor, early marriage, insecurity, cultural beliefs or norms, and nomadic lifestyles [23-26].

5. Insecurity and conflict: The issues of armed conflicts in the North-East (e.g., Boko Haram insurgency) and banditry in the North-West have led to the destruction of schools and displaced learners and teachers. These have led to closures of over 11,000 schools in the last decade, causing fear, and trauma impeding education in conflict zones [27-29].
6. Corruption and mismanagement: In the education sector, corruption is manifested in the misappropriation of funds, ghost teachers, embezzlement, contract inflation, lack of transparency, bribery in admissions, and exam malpractices. All of these lead to loss of public trust, inefficiency, and decline in education quality [30-33].
7. Gender inequality: Girls, especially in Northern Nigeria, are known to face higher dropout rates due to early marriage, housework, cultural/gender-based norms, and low parental education - leading to gender disparity in enrolment and retention [34-36], as shown in Figure 3.
8. Poor or irrelevant curriculum: There are lots of arguments that the Nigerian curriculum is outdated and not aligned with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills or market needs such as ICT, entrepreneurship and critical thinking. This results to the graduates' lack of employable skills and entrepreneurial capabilities [37-39].
9. Examination malpractice and low academic standards: The issue of widespread cheating and low enforcement of academic standards affect credibility. This brings about the erosion of academic integrity and low global competitiveness [40, 41].
10. Language barriers: The use of English as the sole or primary medium of instruction in early education can be a barrier for children who speak indigenous languages. This hinders comprehension and literacy development [2, 42-44].
11. The solutions to these bottlenecks would require multi-sectoral collaboration, increased investment, teacher training, curriculum reform, gender-sensitive policies, and better governance.
2. High number of out-of-school children (High dropout rates): This occurs when learners face poor infrastructure, unqualified teachers, or financial barriers, which especially affects marginalized groups like girls, rural children, and disabled students [47].
3. Low academic performance: Poor learning environments and overburdened education system (such as congested classroom, outdated curricula, poor resources) result in weak academic outcomes, especially in public schools. The students as well often fail standardized exams, thereby limiting their access to higher education [48].
4. Skill mismatch and unemployment: This prevent students from acquiring relevant 21<sup>st</sup> century skills since the education systems do not align with labor market demands, hence leading to high youth unemployment and underemployment [49].
5. Widening inequality: Educational bottlenecks disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups, widening social and economic inequality [50].
6. Brain drain: This tends to weaken local systems as talented students and teachers migrate in search of better educational and professional environments/opportunities [51].
7. Stunted national development/limited economic development: Educational bottlenecks slow human capital development, reduced productivity, limiting innovation and national economic growth and development [52].
8. Overcrowded classrooms: There are situations where there are as many as 100 students per teacher in many public schools, exceeding the recommended student-to-teacher ratio of 40 to 1. This hampers effective teaching and learning, with students receiving minimal individual attention.
9. Inconsistent policies and poor governance: This is due to frequent changes in education policies coupled with poor governance. The funds meant for educational development are most often diverted, leaving schools and institutions grossly under-resourced.
10. Gender disparities: This remains a significant issue as the girl-child is discriminated against in the education system.
11. Teacher shortage and poor training: In any education system, teachers are the backbone, but in Nigeria, they face a myriad of challenges such as: lack of access to professional development

## CONSEQUENCES OF EDUCATION BOTTLENECKS

1. Low literacy rates: Nigeria's literacy rate is about 59.57% as at 2024, with significant disparities between regions and demographics (socio-economic groups) [45, 46].
11. Teacher shortage and poor training: In any education system, teachers are the backbone, but in Nigeria, they face a myriad of challenges such as: lack of access to professional development



programs, poor or low salaries, and poor working conditions, among others [53].

## TECHNOLOGIES IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Some of the technologies used in Nigeria's education system include [54-56]:

1. Artificial intelligence (AI) - This involves the use of AI-powered adaptive learning, such as Class54 for personalized learning experiences for students to better their grades and prepare them for exams, as shown in Figure 4.
2. AI-driven educational statistics, such as EduSat to analyze data to support evaluations, surveys, and research in education.
3. AI tools assist teachers to create customized lesson plans and assessments, automating grading, and providing real-time feedback.

### E-Learning Platforms

1. Platforms like uLesson, Edusko, and Prepclass offer online courses, tutorials, and learning materials tailored to Nigerian students.
2. These platforms increase access to quality education, especially for those in remote or underserved areas.

### Mobile Learning Apps

1. Apps like MobiLearn, LearnAfrica, and ScholarX provide educational content, enabling learning on-the-go.
2. These apps cater to diverse subjects and educational levels, making them valuable resources for students.

### Digital Tools for Classroom Management

1. Google Classroom and G-Suite for education enhance interaction between educators and students, streamline administrative tasks, and promote collaboration.
2. Some other digital tools such as Gradely, help schools and parents deliver personalized learning experiences for students.

### Government Initiatives

The Nigerian government has started the implementation of ICT-based education initiatives to enhance teaching and learning processes, as shown in Figure 5. There is also the focus on equipping schools with technological resources and training educators in digital pedagogy.

Drones are also increasingly being used in educational settings to ensure learning experiences across various subjects. Drones are used to enhance descriptive writing skills, coding and programming, physics and science education, mathematics, teamwork and collaboration, career preparation, and hands-on learning [57-59], as shown in Figure 6.

Immersive VR is also transforming various industries in Nigeria, including education, healthcare, entertainment, and real estate. In education, Virtual Reality (VR) is enhancing learning experiences, making complex concepts more engaging and interactive. Students can participate in virtual labs, field trips, and simulations that foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as shown in Figure 7.

## SOLUTIONS TO EDUCATION BOTTLENECKS

Some of the potential and possible solutions to the bottlenecks in Nigeria education system are as discussed below [47, 60-63]:

1. Increased funding: There is the urgent need to allocate a greater share of the national budget to education, more focus on infrastructure development, teacher training, and access initiatives. In Nigeria, education has consistently been receiving less than 10% of the national budget, falling short of UNESCO's recommended 15-20% benchmark.
2. Improved governance: To strengthen policy implementation, enhance accountability, and promote transparency in education management.
3. Targeted interventions: Specific challenges require programs to address them, e.g., girl-child education, vocational training, and adult literacy initiatives.
4. Private sector engagement (Public-private partnerships (PPPs)): There is the need to encourage private sector participation in education to fund infrastructure, training, and learning materials, as well as leveraging their expertise and resources to support government initiatives.
5. Leverage technology: Integrating technology into the education system in order to enhance access to quality learning materials, online resources, and digital skills development.
6. Teacher capacity: Need for providing ongoing training for teachers, with focus on pedagogy, subject matter expertise, and digital literacy. Need for mass recruitment of qualified teachers, continuous professional development (CPD), and the improvement in teacher incentives and career pathways.
7. Call for rapid school rehabilitation program, textbook & basic supply chains, and disaster-resilient and inclusive design for schools to be accessible to children with disabilities.
8. Ensuring safety in schools via safe school initiatives, psychosocial support & catch-up

learning for displaced learners due to conflicts/insecurity.

9. Modernize curriculum: The need for updating curricula to include STEM, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and vocational training.
10. Expand access & promote equity: Enforce free and compulsory basic education; offer targeted scholarships, grants, or subsidies to underprivileged students; implement gender-sensitive policies and campaigns to improve girls' school participation.
11. Harness technology & digital learning: Expand e-learning platforms and initiatives like the Computer for All Nigerians Initiative (CANi) to bridge digital gaps; use of public facilities such as libraries as e-learning centers; launch of national digital-skill programs such as 3 Million Technical Talent (3MTT) to train millions in AI, data science, UI/UX, cloud computing, and more [64, 65].
12. Establish student loan & trust fund: The Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFund) offers affordable loans to students in higher education, improving access and affordability; The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) supports tertiary institutions via infrastructure, research, and staff development [66-68].
13. Leverage international support: The approval by the World Bank of \$500 million for education governance to bolster Nigeria's educational and health systems. Global advocates e.g., Malala Fund continue to highlight the challenges and champion girls' education in Nigeria [69-70].
14. Social investment and support programs: This is via N-Power Teach programs that place volunteer teachers in underserved communities, while Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT) and School Feeding help incentivize attendance and reduce poverty-related barriers [71].

## CONCLUSION

The future of education in Nigeria is poised for transformation that is driven by technological innovation, curriculum reforms, and with a focus on inclusivity. However, the following challenges must be addressed such as inadequate infrastructure (e.g., lack of reliable internet, electricity, computer labs), funding constraints (government to ensure meeting up with the UNESCO-recommended 15-20% of the national budget), and the training of teachers. Addressing these challenges will ensure that Nigeria's education system meets the demand of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and empowers its citizens.

More information on the Future of Education in Nigeria can be found in the books in [72-93] and the following related journals:

- International Journal of Progressive and Alternative Education
- Journal of the Nigerian Academy of Education
- The Nigerian Academic Forum
- International Journal of Advanced Academic Research | Arts, Humanities and Education
- World Journal of Innovation and Modern Technology
- International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation (IJRSI)

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**Figure 1. Federal University of Technology Akure**

Source:[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal\\_University\\_of\\_Technology\\_Akure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_University_of_Technology_Akure)



**Figure 2. Educational technology**

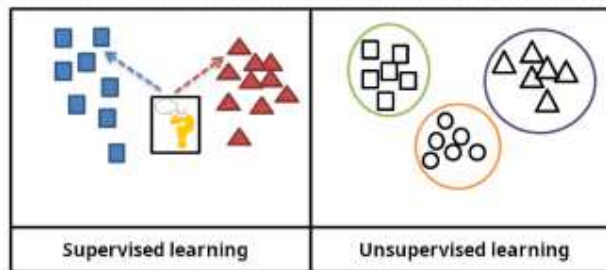
Source:[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Educational\\_technology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Educational_technology)





**Figure 3. Female education in Nigeria**

Source:[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Female\\_education\\_in\\_Nigeria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Female_education_in_Nigeria)



**Figure 4. Artificial intelligence**

Source:[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artificial\\_intelligence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artificial_intelligence)



**Figure 5. Computing education**

Source:[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computing\\_education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computing_education)



**Figure 6. Drone in education**

Source:[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amaravati\\_Drone\\_Summit\\_2024](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amaravati_Drone_Summit_2024)



**Figure 7. Immersion (virtual reality)**

Source:[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immersion\\_\(virtual\\_reality\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immersion_(virtual_reality))