

THE ROLES OF GOVERNMENT IN PROMOTING SCHOOL ENROLMENT AND RETENTION IN NIGERIA FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs).

Jimoh, Abdulrazak Owolabi B.Ed, Nce
Abdullahi, Umaymah Danladi B.Ed, Nce & **Hadiza, Ibrahim** B.Ed, NCE
Department of Arts and Social Science Education,
Faculty of Education,
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Abstract

Education is widely adjudged as a tool for individual and national development. As such, it is a major responsibility of the Nigerian government to pay proper attention to the sector for the purpose of ensuring quality education in the country. Therefore, this paper outlines the roles, functions, and responsibilities of government in promoting mass school enrolment and retention particularly for the purpose of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and achievement of national development in general. This paper also discusses some causes of low school enrolment and retention which include; poverty, lack of interest in education, teachers' lackadaisical attitude, broken down or poor school facilities, irrelevant teaching methods and curriculum, gender-biased content and incessant strike actions among many other factors. The paper concludes that proper financing of the school system, prompt payment of teachers salaries, provision of functional school facilities and quality teaching resources, provision of functional guidance and counselling services in school, payment of stipend to girl-pupils, and the proper utilization of the school feeding programme are some of the roles which the government must play to promote school enrolment and retention so as to launch Nigeria in the right direction towards achieving education for all its citizens. Among the recommendations is the implementation of the UNESCO recommendation of 26% budgetary allocation to education.

Introduction

Education is regarded as the surest tool that leads to the development of any country due to the role it plays in training and moulding the citizens into right thinking and productive individuals capable of driving the developmental needs of their country. Rufa'i (2014) opines that education is the gateway to development of any society and a basic need that leads to the development of all other sectors. Education is a viable instrument for human socio-economic development (Muhammad & Ibrahim, 2015). The developed nations of the world today are those countries that are advanced in the areas of science and technology. Such countries invest heavily in quality education and research, purposely for the advancement of knowledge which drives the development of such countries through creation of jobs,

improvement of national income, increase in national pride and leads to further breakthrough in the field of education, science and technology. In the same vein, such countries have a high rate of school enrolment with a commensurate quality of education; which makes a majority of the population, literate, educated, self reliant, patriotic and responsible citizens capable of contributing to the growth and development of their countries. In order for a country to achieve such feat, the government would have to invest massively in the education sector in order to ensure quality education and high rate of school enrolment. According to the United Nations Education, Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2017), the net enrolment into primary school in Nigeria was 63.84% in 2010. This is a far cry when compared with some other countries of the world like: Japan, Canada, Spain, Britain, France, Germany, Tunisia, Tanzania, Rwanda and U.S.A among many others who had over 90% net enrolment rate into primary school in the same year. At the same time, it is not all those enrolled into the school system in Nigeria that make it through to completion and it is not all those who completed their primary education that further to the secondary level (UIS, 2017). A reasonable number of factors are responsible for this negative trend and the majority of the solution lies in the hands of the government. Orji and Job (2013) stipulates that, for the sector (education) to contribute meaningfully to national development; there should be proper funding of education by the three tiers of government.

Clarification of Concepts

Government: Government may be described as a body of people and institutions that make, interpret and execute the laws of the land. The government has the responsibility to make and implement policies, conduct public affairs, maintain law and order, and enforce such law in a society. Usara (2008) asserts that the government is a major agent of social change that has the capacity to formulate and implement policies that creates changes in literacy level of the citizen with different educational policies like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) among others.

School Enrolment: School enrolment refers to the total number of candidates that are admitted and duly registered as pupils or students at an institution of learning which could be primary school, secondary school or tertiary institution. UNESCO (2017) defines net enrolment rate as the ratio of children of official school age who are enrolled in school to the population of the corresponding official school age. In other words, it is the number of students in the theoretical age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level.

Retention: Retention is a measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution (Voigt and Jim, 2008). Hagedorn (2005) defines retention as an institutional-level measure of success regarding its ability to make students continue in the schooling system. Retention, therefore, refers to the number of pupils or students who remain and continue in the school system. It can also be referred to as the persistent rate of learners who remained in school to complete their studies.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Also known as the Global Goals, is a set of 17 goals which are intended to be achieved by the year 2030. The SDGs is a post 2015 development agenda and a successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs are a universal call, to end poverty, protect the planet, provide quality education and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity (United Nations, 2017)

Causes of Low School Enrolment

Short fall in budgetary allocation is a major call for concern as the Nigerian government has persistently failed to allocate 26% of its yearly budget to education. This is perhaps the biggest problem facing education in Nigeria leading to poor enrolment and retention rate as figures available shows that over the years, the finances channelled to education by the government is grossly inadequate (Mana, 2015). Frequent policy change has adverse effect on school enrolment and retention. This is evident in Mana's assertion that between 1991 and 1999, Nigeria was headed by five different regimes with eight different Education ministers and each one of them having different ideas and perception of what educational policies to implement.

Ansar (2015) identifies household income and per capita income as important factors influencing the participation of a child in education. There are significant cases of non-enrolment and drop out caused by high illiteracy level among the parents of rural area children, pupils lack of interest in studies, illness of family members, illness of child, poor economic conditions, contributing in family economic and domestic responsibilities and taking care of siblings. Likewise, academic reasons like problem of comprehension, unsympathetic or lackadaisical and discriminatory attitude of teachers, use of corporal punishment by teachers and influence of peer group also form the main reasons for drop-out of primary school children before completion of their education. These drop-out children propagated the unsympathetic and discriminatory attitude of teachers to the other members of the area sometimes and that discourages them from enrolling their ward in the school.

The World Food Program (WFP, 2006) assert that, more than half of the children who are out of school are girls and one in every four girls is likely to drop out of school before completing primary education compared to fewer than one in seven boys. The causes of low school attendance can be linked to tradition and culture as much as it can be to poverty. In cultures where men traditionally are the providers, education for girls may be perceived "wasted" because it is not believed to lead to paid employment. Obanya (2017) states that widespread poverty, heavy household chores, long distances of schools, culturally-insensitive education programmes, gender blind programmes and school facilities, gender-biased curricula and gender-insensitive teaching methods contribute to limiting girls enrolment to school and the same factors limit their attendance even when they are enrolled into school.

Yahya (2013) identified some of the problems of education which leads to low school enrolment in Nigeria as follows:- Insufficient budgetary allocation, Inadequate and dysfunctional school facilities, inconsistent educational policies,

Shortage or non existent teaching materials and laboratory equipments in schools, Corruption and embezzlement of fund, Insufficient manpower, Inadequate supervision of schools and school facilities, Preference for farm labour and domestic chores and Incessant strike actions among many others.

The Roles Of Government In Promoting School Enrolment And Retention

The government as an institution of the state with the responsibility of providing safety of lives and property as well as guaranteeing and upholding the fundamental human right as enshrined in the 1999 constitution has a major and crucial role to play in promoting school enrolment and ensuring the retention of such enrolled. UNESCO (2002) recommends a yearly minimum budgetary allocation of 26% for education in order to acquire standard (Mana, 2015). Milton (1962) asserts that, in order to ensure quality, the government must play by the rule of the game through adherence to formulated policies. Also, government has to ensure inclusive education for all regardless of social status, gender, disability, religion or ethnicity. In fact Milton advocated for public funding but private operation of education to ensure enrolment and sustainability of retention. Milton also called for investments in human capital, a system of education where students are granted loan to finance their education and repay the loan after they must have graduated and gainfully employed. As such the loan repaid will be used to finance the education of other students who would in turn repay the loan and again used to finance the education of other students and the cycle continues for generations. Like that, the government doesn't bear too much burden of providing education to its citizen at no cost which affects the national budgets adversely.

Another potent role the government must play to promote school enrolment and retention is the proper execution of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act 2004. In the year 1999, the Nigerian government made a decisive effort to increase school enrolment into the primary level of education through the introduction of Universal Basic Education (UBE). The UBE programme was designed and launched as a nine year basic school educational programme by the Nigerian government. The programme was meant to eradicate illiteracy, accelerate national development, create political consciousness and national integration while serving as one of the country's strategies for the achievement of Education For All (EFA), a key component of the then Millennium Development Goal (MDGs). The government promulgated an act known as the UBE Act 2004 which created the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) which is saddled with the responsibility of piloting the affairs of the UBE programme. Some of the objectives of the UBE includes: (a) ensure unfettered access to nine years of formal basic education (school enrolment component of this conference' theme). (b) Reducing drastically the incidence of drop out from the formal school system, through improved relevance, quality, and efficiency (retention component of this conference' theme). (c) Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communication and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for life long purposes. Unfortunately, a reasonable number of problems are facing the

commission. Joseph (2017) identified shortage of funds, inability to execute policies, unavailability of accurate data and corruption as some of the challenges impeding the achievement of the UBEC goals. In view of the above, Rufa'i (2004) identified some strategies for the effective implementation of the UBE thus: adequate planning to prevent failure, provision of physical facilities and maintenance of such, teaching of marketable skills, effective monitoring and evaluation, constant supply of teaching materials and equipment, and appropriate welfare package for staff among others.

Noel (1985) in Voigt and Jim (2008) posit that, good retention rates are essentially the bi-product of improved quality of students' life and learning in the school. Also, Terenzini (2005) in Voigt and Jim (2008) confirmed that schools with higher retention outcomes are those conducting sound educational practices. To this end, government has to play its part in ensuring that all the level of education receives the attention it requires in terms of manpower, facilities, quality and relevant instruction.

As a way of improving school enrolment, the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), which is a government parastatal for regulating admission (enrolment) into tertiary institutions in Nigeria, announced in August 2017, a reduction in the cut off mark for admission into the tertiary institutions in Nigeria in order to increase admission into the institutions of higher learning (This Day, 2017). While It can be argued that such move may lead to a fall in the standard of education, it is actually a good step in the direction of increasing school enrolment but the various institutions of learning would have to put a mechanism in place to remedy the short fall of the candidates who scored below previous cut-off marks for admission

Voigt and Jim (2008) suggest that, with the significant increase in personal Counselling usage, students can be assisted to overcome problems that may interfere with their performance and involvement in academic and non-academic programs and activities. For this reason, government must strategically partner with Educational Psychologists to promote and improve guidance and counselling services in schools for the purpose of helping learners make informed decisions and surmounting their educational challenges - thereby increasing school enrolment as well as retention. Likewise, the government has to involve professional Educational Psychologist in curriculum planning process to ensure relevance of content to societal and mental needs as well as appropriateness to mental and chronological age of the learners. This would improve learners attention span, understanding and motivate them to remain in the school system.

School feeding is recognized as a way to improve children's nutrition and education and as a vehicle to fight disease. According to the International Food Research Institute (2004) school feeding programmes throughout the world have successfully attracted children to school and have retained them by offering them food or a nourishing snack. Such Programmes have indicated an increase in children's nutritional status, raised school enrolment, improved attendance, increased attention span and are solving community health problems. School feeding provides vital nutrients, and for many children the food they eat at school is the most nutritious they will get all day. School feeding may help children's educational progress,

particularly that of undernourished children. If school feeding programmes are successful in increasing enrolment and attendance, but there is insufficient space and too few teachers to accommodate the children, overall performance levels may not improve. If significant advances must be made in children's education in developing countries, there is an obvious need for integrated programmes combining educational with health and nutritional inputs. The educational goals of the school feeding programme include increased attendance and enrolment and improved concentration in class, aided by the food provided. (Grantham-McGregor, 2005).

The World Food Program (2006) state that, education influence girls' economic opportunities, their participation in community decision making and well being. As such the government must give the enrolment of the girl child a top priority at all level of education from primary through secondary and tertiary education. Uneze and Tajudeen (2012) in Centre for the Study of Economics in Africa (2012) suggests that: (i) the government should introduce a complementary policy of free transportation for the out of school girls in addition to the existing free tuition fees (ii) government should introduce a complementary policy of free stipend for direct education like; school bags , sandals and textbooks especially for the rural dwellers due to high poverty rate and inability to provide these basic needs which has forced many out of the school system. (iii) a good monitoring and evaluation system should be put in place to ensure that the policies are being adequately implemented and measure the level of improvement in enrolment.

World Bank's Primary Education Policy Paper (1990) in Regi (2012) identified five (5) major contributors to the effectiveness of primary education thus; curriculum, learning materials, instructional time, class room teaching and student's learning capacity. A comprehensive review of how the researches since 1990 has addressed the importance of these as well as other factors such as school facilities, teacher training and management has been assessed. As such, The Nigerian government would have to consider making a significant investment in the identified areas if it truly intends meeting the 2030 target for the SDGs

Recommendations

In a bid to achieve the 2030 target for the sustainable development goals in Nigeria, especially the goal 4: ensure inclusive and qualitative education for all and promote life long learning. This paper made the following recommendations to help government promote school enrolment and retention:-

1. The government has to be sincere in its dealings; this would help it eschew corruption, build the necessary willpower and the right level of commitment necessary for promoting school enrolment and retention.
2. Government policies have to be consistent, practical and strictly adhered to. Likewise, all the educational policies formulated by the government should be accorded the necessary priority and value by all tiers of government for the meaningful implementation and achievement of set out goals.
3. The government needs to adequately utilize the power of the mass media and social media to make people appreciate the benefits of education. This will

help to create the right perception and attitude towards education among people especially the rural dwellers.

4. The School Based Management Committee (SBMC) is a key role player that the government must not compromise. The SBMC is key ally at ensuring school enrolment and retention as such, the government should always give them the right and necessary support at every step of the way.
5. The government should adequately partner with well meaning foreign and local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), religious bodies, traditional rulers and even media personalities (celebrities)
6. International development partners and donor agencies should also be sincere in all their dealings with the Nigerian government and people. The aids and grants that would be channeled towards education should be effectively utilized in that regard without any hidden conditions that are capable of hampering the set out goals.
7. Ultimately, funds have to be made available by the government to pursue and execute policies as well as funding for every crucial education plan and projects. The UNESCO 26% recommended budgetary allocation should as well be implemented.
8. The government should promptly pay teachers salary promptly so as to prevent incessant strikes. The government also needs to finance the training and retraining of teachers and school staff to make them deliver their services better.
9. Government would have to adequately make use of incentives especially at the primary level like the school feeding programme and payment of stipend to girls to attract people to school.
10. Government must walk the talk by providing job opportunities so as to reduce the unemployment rate among Nigerian graduates in order to correct the erroneous believe among parents and people who think learners cant be gainfully employed after graduation.

Conclusion

For Nigeria to achieve self-driven development and be ranked among the developed countries of the world, it would have to reverse the negative trend of low school enrolment and provide meaningful and quality education that is society, culture and century relevant for all its citizen. This can be achieved through adequate enrolment and retention of pupils into the school system while also serving as a tool for the achievement of the sustainable development goal by the year 2030. It is therefore hoped that all the recommendations made in this paper would be implemented for the success of the SDGs in particular and the Nigerian nation in general.

References

- Ansar A., (2015). Non-enrolment and drop-out of slum children in schools: an exploratory analysis of Jamia Nagar locality. *International Journal of*

- Education & Applied Sciences Research*, 2(6). Retrieved September 1, 2017, from www.arseam.com
- Centre for the Study of Economics of Africa (2012) Increasing female school enrolment in Nigeria: some policy options. Policy Brief. Volume 1 (8) Retrieved on 4th, September 2017 from www.cseaafrica.org
- Grantham-McGregor, S., (2005) Can the provision of breakfast benefit school performance? Retrieved on August 17, 2017 from www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed
- Hagedorn, S.L., (2005). How to define retention; A new look at an old problem. Lumina foundations. Retrieved September 1, 2017, from www.chepa.org
- International Food Policy Research Institute (2004) Agriculture, Food security, nutrition and and the millennium development goal. Retrieved September 1, 2017 from www.ifpr.org/publication
- Joseph, A., (2017). Problems and prospects of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria. Retrieved on September 4, 2017 from www.infoguidenigeria.com
- Mana M. A., (2015) Educational policy and its implication on the Nigerian education system. *Journal of arts and social science education*. 5(2). 23-29
- Milton F., (1962). Capitalism and Freedom. Chicago. University of Chicago press.
- Muhammad N., and Rabi'u H. I., (2015) Promoting socio-economic skills through girl-child education in Nigeria. *Journal of Research in Arts and Social Science education*. 5 (2) 88-97
- Obanyi P.,(2017) African Education in the EFA era. Ibadan. Mosuro Publishers
- Orji K. E., and Job, M. (2013). the role of education in national development: Nigerian experience. *European Scientific Journal*. October 2013 edition vol.9,(28)
- Regi M. J., (2012). Impact of Public Interventions on Child School Enrollment Rates in India. *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration*. 2,(1), 3 Retrieved on 4th September,2017 from www.ripublication.com/ijepa
- Rufa'i R.,(2004) Strategies for the effective implementation of the universal basic education for sustainable development in Nigeria. In Godwin A.A., and Kolo I.A., (Eds)(2004) Education for sustainable development in Nigeria. Book of readings. Vol. 1. Minna. Niger state college of education.
- This day (2017, august 23rd) jamb fixes 2017/2018 cut-off marks. Retrieved 3rd September, 2017 from www.thisdaylive.com/index
- United Nations (2017) Sustainable Development Goals. 17 Goals to transform our world. Retrieved 2nd September 2017 from www.un.org/sustainable-development-goals
- United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute of statistics. (2017) Education in Africa. Retrieved on 23rd August, 2017 from uis.unesco.org/topic/education-africa
- Usara D.S.,(2008) Understanding the elements of social change in Nigeria. Kontagora. Courage printers
- Voigt, L., and Jim, H., (2008) Noel-Levitz Retention Codifications. Students' Success, Retention, and Graduation: Definitions, Theories, Practices, Patterns

- and Trends. Retrieved on 2nd August 2017 from www.stetson.edu/law/conferences
- World Food Programme (2006) World Food Programme Emergency Report. Report No. 20
- Yahya H., (2013) The problems of education and the way forward. In Zaria education development association. Education for a better tomorrow. Zaria. Abdurrahman Mora educational and vocational centre.