

## **Barriers to Access Equity and Quality of Education in Nigeria**

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### **Introduction**

Education is a crucial factor in ending global poverty and as such, accessibility to education throughout even the poorest nations in the world becomes a pressing issue. With education, employment opportunities are broadened, income levels are increased and maternal and child health are improved. In countries with solid education systems in place, there are lower crime rates, greater economic growth and improved social services. In areas where access, attendance and quality of education have witnessed improvements, there has also been a decrease in the spread of AIDS. It is a must-do issue to ensure that every child has finished or completed primary education and to enable every child to further develop, intellectually and socially.

Developing countries usually suffer from remote location, lack of infrastructure and inadequate teaching/learning facilities and trained staff. These are all major problems that bring about poor quality in education and lack of access to it. There is the need for innovative methods of delivery which can help bridge this gap and thus provide universal access to education.

Access to basic education lies at the heart of development. Lack of education is both a part of the definition of poverty and a means for its diminution. Sustained and meaningful access to education is critical to long term improvements in productivity; the reduction of inter-generational cycles of poverty; demographic transition; preventive health care; the empowerment of women; and reductions in inequality. It is central to the long-standing and recent images of development that depend on the capabilities that create choices and freedoms

that ignorance denies (Streeten, 1999; Sen, 1999). The basic propositions that underlie these observations are well established in the research literature and widely believed. Universally, poverty reduction is seen as unlikely unless knowledge, skill and capabilities are extended to those who are marginalized from value-added economic activities by illiteracy, lack of numeracy, and higher-level reasoning that links causes and effects rationally. In most societies, and especially those that are developing rapidly, households and individuals value participation in education and invest substantially in pursuing the benefits it can confer. The rich have little doubts that the investments pay off. The poor generally share the belief and recognize that increasingly mobility out of poverty is education-related, albeit that their aspirations and expectations are less frequently realized.

The general case for expanding access to education is therefore compelling. Its recent manifestations in the MDGs and the Dakar Goals confirms a consensus on the centrality of education to development. However, it remains the case that, the discourse that surrounds EFA and the MDGs is not grounded in an explicit single set of propositions about the role(s) education play in development.

The drive to improve the quality of basic education in Nigeria has been given tremendous impetus over the last decade. Examples of the Nigerian government's commitment to improvement include: the expansion of compulsory education from primary level to junior secondary level in the 2004 Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, and the subsequent revised national policy on education; the apparent increase in the number of children accessing secondary education; the establishment of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) with its associated advisory and funding mechanisms; sustained collaboration with international development partners (IDPs) such as DFID, UNICEF and USAID; the funding of a major collection of studies in a wide-ranging review of basic education in 2004; and the more recent establishment of a presidential task force on education in 2011. In addition, through a range of government initiatives, there has been

sustained effort at improving equity and widening participation in education, increasing access to basic education among girls, nomadic and Muslim children. However, given the size and diversity of Nigeria, and the fact that the education sector is still recovering from its neglect during the years of military dictatorships, huge challenges still remain.

Despite all the efforts made by the Nigerian government to provide basic education to her citizens, about 10.5million primary school age children are reportedly out of school- this constitutes almost 42 per cent of the primary-age population (UIS estimate, 2010). School access rates show major disparities across geographical regions . While about 37 per cent of girls and 30 per cent of boys of primary school age in the Northeast, Nigeria are out of school; only 1.6 per cent of girls and 0.5 per cent of boys of primary school age in the Southeast, Nigeria are out of school. Even within the Northern region, disparities exist between urban and rural areas; as children in rural communities are much less likely to attend school than those in the urban centres (World Bank, 2013).

Universal access to basic education is far from being achieved in Nigeria, especially in fragile states with weak governance and infrastructure. There are still communities where less than half of school age children complete primary school and less than a quarter complete junior secondary successfully. It has been observed that household poverty remains the most common correlate of exclusion, through gender, disability HIV status, social group affiliation, location and many other forms of exclusion remain significant, often interacting with poverty to create multiple deprivations that demand integrated responses. Many of the children who are enrolled are effectively excluded as a result of irregular attendance, low achievement, overage progression and drop out before completion of full basic education.

Physical infrastructure remains insufficient to provide a secure, healthy, and appropriate learning environment for children in many communities. Learning materials central to the achievement of educational outcomes vary widely in term of both availability and quality. Teachers supply and

deployment are often inefficient and sometimes compromise the provision of effective and equitable access at sustainable cost. The constraints and opportunities that impact on strategies to finance adequate number of qualified teachers are often poorly articulated with the political economy and public sector employment.

Nigerian government and development agencies have repeatedly fallen short of ensuring that all children complete schooling successfully. Most of what must be done in order to universalize access are understood, but often not applied in practice. The most powerful reasons why so many children miss out on their rights to basic education lie in the failure of commitments to widen access to opportunity, mobilize domestic resources and manage public services effectively towards clear goal. There is no good reason why all children in Nigeria cannot attend and complete basic education successfully.

This paper is an attempt to discuss salient issues affecting access, equity and quality of education in Nigeria with a view to providing appropriate strategies of widening the scope to access, equity and quality education.

### **Concept of Access, Equity and Quality of Education**

#### ***Access***

Access in Education is simply the difference between a person who has access and the one who does not have access to education. One goes to school, another doesn't. One has to go to a very far school, another goes to a nearby school. One can pay for education, another cannot. Culture of the society motivates one to go to school but restricts another. Similarly, the school allows a child from one ethnic community but restricts a child from another.

Access, according to Merriam Webster dictionary refers to, "Freedom or ability to obtain or make use of something". In education, accessibility is about having opportunity to get education, irrespective of any condition. Factors that may prevent access are: Gender; Socio-economic background; Ethnicity Disability and Environment.

### **Barriers to Access to Education**

There are many barriers that hinder the provision of access to education. These may stem from social, economic, cultural and political areas. One of the barriers is derived from access to the education system itself. Schools have to be able to offer comfortable environments/settings in order to stimulate the learning experience of all pupils. For example, countries' infrastructure, sufficient school buildings, adequate teachers, learning materials, interesting educational content, basic utilities such as electricity, water and sanitary facilities. Moreover, it is also important to give proper training and support to teachers.

### **Poverty**

Poverty is one of the major problems in developing nations. One of the reasons why children are out of school is because families are not able to pay for their children's education. They usually have to choose between attending school or to work in order to support their families. Another critical issue related to poverty is poor nutrition which leads to illnesses, obstructing educational capabilities.

A report from UNESCO shows that there is a reason why children in developing nations are not attending school. It is indicated that regional non-enrollment percentages vary in the incidence of child labour, with Africa taking top place (41%), followed by Asia (21%) and Latin America (17%). In Africa, population growth, a weak economy, famine and armed conflict have contributed to keeping child labour high and school attendance low.

### **Financial Barrier**

Education is seen as a key instrument for achieving Nigeria's national development goals of sustained, equitable socio-economic development and the eradication of poverty (FME 2004a; FME 2009a; FME 2011a). As a proportion of GDP, Nigeria's expenditure on education by both regional and global standards is high (World Bank 2006). However, as a percentage of total federal spending on the education budget has recently been decreasing (FME 2011a; UNICEF/UIS 2012). Nevertheless,

billions of Naira have been spent, and yet there has been an increase in the number of children out of school.

To support the efforts of government in increasing access to education, funds also came from several international donors such as the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), UNESCO, UNICEF, US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank. However, there seems to be a severe lack of requisite finances for education, particularly at State levels. Most local governments and schools have inadequate capacity and financial resources with which to manage primary education (ESSPIN & UKAid, 2010). According to World Bank (2013) report, total public spending on education in 2006 for instance, was estimated at 5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) and 12.5 per cent of total public spending, well below the recommended Education for All (EFA) threshold of 20 per cent. More worrisome is the fact that a large proportion, often about 90 per cent, of the total public expenditures on education – which is severely inadequate – is absorbed by salaries.

### **Social and Cultural Barriers**

Social and cultural barriers in certain societies in Nigeria also have an impact on children not attending school. There exists inequality in education which sometimes could lead to families having to decide about which of their children can go to school. In this case, there is a gender gap as more boys attend school than girls, who drop out of school. For example, because of early marriage and pregnancy. According to UNICEF, every year, at least, 9 million more girls than boys are not getting education. This is due to certain countries' tradition and culture, which require girls to marry at a young age and even in some countries as young as 14 years old. By the time they are married, they need to drop out of school.

Another factor in hampering education to developing nations is due to the fact that, in some schools, there are still issues about intolerance, discrimination and violence. For example, girls sometimes are often the object of sexual

harassment and abuse from their teachers as well as, from their peers. Therefore, they prefer not to go to school.

### **Crisis and Emergency**

Since some communities still cope with crisis and emergency situations, proper educational services are dysfunctional, such as, those dealing with wars and political conflicts. Teachers and students often have to find some locations in their refugee camps for proper teaching and learning to take place.

The devastating effects of armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies also play a big roll in educational expansion in Nigeria. Thousands of children are forced out of school in conflicts affected states of the federation, and several hundreds of thousands are forced out of school by natural disasters each year. During the flood disasters of 2012 – 2014, only a small percentage of humanitarian aids were directed towards education. (Godspower, 2015)

The current Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, Nigeria has encouraged attacks on children, widespread rape of girls and women, and systematic destruction of school facilities. Sexual terror is used as a strong weapon of war. The forceful kidnapping of over 200 Chibok girls from a girls' school in Borno State has made frontline news in the media houses, in major cities of the world. Hence sexual terror is inflicting untold hardships, fear and insecurity on young girls and women, leading to untold damage on their education.

### **Equity in Education**

Equality in education: sameness in terms of access to education and uniform distribution of educational opportunities. Freedom to develop personal abilities and make educational choices irrespective of differences of behavior, aspirations and needs. Where there is equality: no stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices that limit a student to perform at his or her fullest potential.

However, equality does not often result in equal outcomes. It can only work if everyone starts from the same level and

needs, the same materials, having the means to benefit from the equality. Being given the same chances is not sufficient to bring about true equality. Some needs more benefits, more services and treatments due to their situation. Equity is essential to achieve true equality. Equity in education is dependent on two main interdependent factors; fairness and inclusion (UNESCO; 2005).

Fairness: one's personal conditions (women or men, reach or poor, rural or urban, high income or low income, educated or uneducated parents, able or disable) should not interfere with the potential of academic success. Inclusion refers to a standard that applies to everyone in a certain education system (the same level of using language of instruction, the same experience, the same learning resources or the equal chance of participation).

Inclusion in education is based on many universal declarations which reflect on universal human rights and the rights of children. They emphasize: full development of human personality, respect for human rights and fundamental freedom. Inclusion in education is based on the four twenty-first century pillars of education; learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together (UNESCO, 2009). UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights art. 26 states the right to education for everyone, so it should: be free and compulsory at least at elementary level, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) stresses the need to eliminate discrimination to children with disabilities. It also emphasized access to education and training, health care services, rehabilitation services, employment and recreation opportunities, conducive environment for enabling the child to achieve the fullest possible social, cognitive, emotional, cultural, and spiritual development and creative capacities.

The EFA goals set by The Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (1990); all children and young people of this world have the right to education without discrimination.

UNESCO and other UN agencies, international development agencies, international and national Non-Governmental Organizations, have been working towards achieving this goal. In addition, the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1960) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), emphasize that all children have the right to receive education without discrimination on any grounds such as, caste, ethnicity, religion, economic status, refugee status, language, gender, disability etc.

The Dakar Framework for Action (2000) sets inclusive education as one of the main strategies to address the question of marginalization and exclusion. The Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education (Salamanca, Spain;1994) places special emphasis on learners who are the most vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. The fundamental principle of EFA is that all children should have the opportunity to learn.

UNESCO (2005) views individual differences is not seen as problems but as opportunities for enriching learning." Inclusion is precisely about reforming schools and ensuring that every child receives quality and appropriate education within these schools. In particular, inclusion is based on four key elements: a never-ending process. concerned with the identification and removal of barriers. It is about the presence, participation and achievement of all students. The goal of inclusive education enables an individual to participate effectively in society and reaching his/her full potential; combat discriminatory attitudes and build an inclusive society for achieving education for all; provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

A vast body of literature on the concept of equity in education has appeared over the past decade, examining the factors that helped to improve education for all, especially those groups who for various reasons have so far been excluded or are not benefiting from existing education provision. Numerous

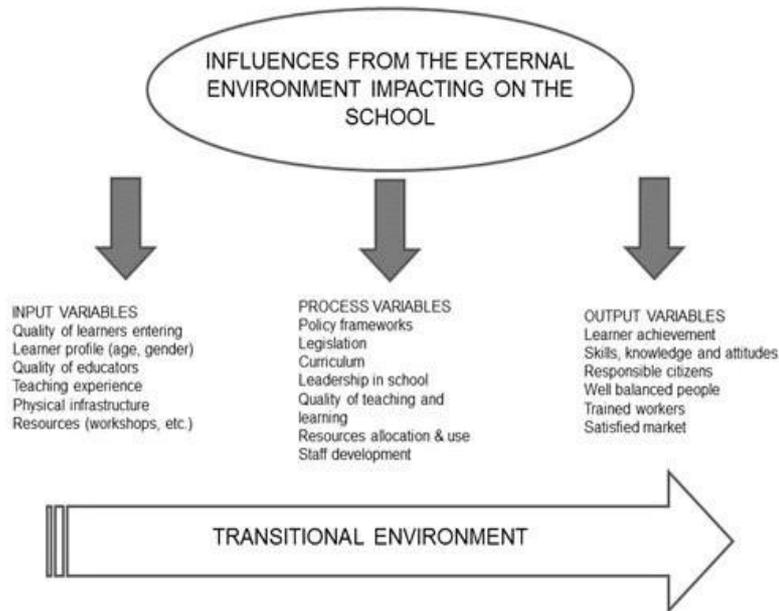
authors use different concepts of equity, (Berne & Stiefel, 1984; Jimerson, 2004; Sayed, 1997; Rubenstein, *et al.*, 1992; Todd *et al.*, 2001).

Equity is a fundamentally important concept that can be used to describe the fairness and effectiveness of the education systems for any country (Rawls, 1972?). It refers to what is socially just, and attempts to address unequal outcomes (Walzer, 1989; Sayed, 2001).

The principle of equity can define the specificity of disparity (Weber, 2002), and advocates of equity may propose a process of differential distribution to achieve the goal. According to Berne and Stiefel (1984) and Chi and Jasper (1997), the concept of equity is highly complex and multi-dimensional, which tends to take on different meanings in different contexts. Chi and Jasper (1997) define the term „equity“ as a normative concept, and it is a purely empirical question to design a valid and reliable instrument which measures difference or inequalities that may exist between various individuals or groups. Rubenstein, *et al* (1992), Rubenstein *et al.* (2006) and Nieuwenhuis (2010) conceptualise „equity“ as an application based on the notions of justice, fairness, and equal opportunities regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and social economic status. It is related to equal access to the same level of basic resources of services to enable people or citizens to participate in social and political processes (McGrath, 1993; Berne & Stiefel, 1979a, 1984b; UNESCO, 2006).

Furthermore, Arnaud (2001) and Nieuwenhuis (2010), state that the concept of “equity” is more associated with fairness, impartiality, and justice with dimensions that make it possible to consider it as instrument to bring harmony into progressive societies and a means of solving conflicts in some legal cultures.

The identified three possible meanings for the concept ‘equity’ from Berne and Stiefels (1984) work, i.e. horizontal equity, vertical equity, and equal opportunity, and the three principles can be broadly conceptualised to include inputs, outputs, and outcomes, as illustrated in Figure below

**Figure 1: Input, Process and Output Variables in Education**

**Source:** Nieuwenhuis, 2007.

“Horizontal equity” is a principle that focuses on disparities across various groups in access and resources. The analysis of equal educational opportunity relates a region’s wealth (measured as regional product per capita) and population density (a proxy for urban/rural location) with the objects of equity. The concept of “horizontal equity” is the principle that children in similar circumstances must be treated in the same way, and thus receives the same level of support in the allocation of resources; i.e. children from any family background or situation should be treated as equals.

The concept requires that learners who are alike should receive equal shares. This basic principle requires equal expenditure or revenue per learner, so that equals are treated equally. It is clear from both a physiological and psychological perspective that this approach is simplistic as individuals are

not equal in all senses and it does not provide for learners with special educational needs. Thus, the definition of the „equity requires choosing a set of criteria considered “relevant” for the definition of “equals” itself (Galbiati & Vetova, 2005).

The resulting definition is then that those who are in a relevant sense equal, should be treated equally. As one can imagine, this normative definition will certainly spark disagreement over the selection of “relevant” variables. However, by defining equals, all individuals possessing the agreed upon qualities must be treated equally if horizontal equity is to be achieved or maintained. The two concepts of horizontal equity and vertical equity can be applied to many policy issues and generally, horizontal equity represents equal access to public educational services, irrespective of factors such as, location, ethnicity, and religion, or social economic status. In other words, equal treatment of equal needs.

In terms of MDG 2, formal education should give all children, including those from marginalised groups, nomadic pastoralist’s learners in particular, the tools for life that lead to outcomes that are meaningful where they feel confident in using the knowledge and skills they have acquired. Formal education is about developing behaviour based on positive values, understanding and respect for other people’s rights and culture. This would be in line with EFA objectives and MDGs that children should receive the basic education they need to enrich their lives, expand their opportunities and participate in society. The quality of the education they receive in terms of what they learn, under what conditions, and the crucial role of teachers, is key (Krätli & Dyer, 2009:14).

The concept of “vertical equity” recognises that learners are not all the same, and that their starting points, relative to other learners, should be considered in an analysis of equity. In this case, providing additional funds for children who are differently situated, with different levels of resources, should be considered in order to achieve similar results (e.g. school completion) for a particular group of children or a specific region (UNESCO, 2007:24). It is a principle that allows differently situated people to receive appropriately different

levels of resources by taking into account, for example, the higher costs of educating certain learners in order to bring them to a given level of output or achievement.

Some developing countries, for example, South Africa, have created a vertical equity mechanism through categorical funding of special needs programmes and weighting of government allocations according to learners needs and the circumstances under which they live (Berne & Stiefel, 1984:7; Create, 2009). The principle of “vertical equity” means equal access, irrespective of income or financial wealth. It may also refer to the aim of unequal treatment for unequal needs. For example, more resources are allocated for teaching children from poor and nomadic families than for those that come from wealthy or better off families. This is termed “affirmative action” or “positive discrimination”, and is aimed at overcoming the persistence of disparities between groups and communities (Motala, 2005).

Thus, providing additional resources to those who are most disadvantaged and marginalised is a programmatic response to the need for equity and fairness. It allows children and/or learners with different situations to receive appropriately different levels of education services by taking into account the higher costs of educating certain learners in order to bring them to a given level of output or achievement.

Furthermore, Berne and Stiefels (1984) state that the concept of vertical equity ties input equity to output equity. When inputs are “adjusted” for the costs of educating various groups of children as is often done when vertical equity is measured, the adjustment is meant to indicate the amount of additional resources that need (higher costs that are incurred) to bring some learners to a given output levels. It focuses on the treatment of differently situated learners, implicitly assuming that learners require different resources to achieve set levels of performance. Therefore, in some circumstances and for some reasons, it is not only acceptable but also necessary to treat learners differently, because differential treatment based on these characteristics may be necessary to make an education system more equitable. Examples include learners with learning

disabilities and learners from marginalised or economically disadvantaged groups.

Berne and Stiefels (1984) definition of vertical equity, as the appropriately unequal treatment of the unequal, is a more difficult concept to operationalise than the approach of horizontal equity. Not all learners have the same educational needs, and funding strategies in developed countries like the USA, and UK have components that generally address learners' individual needs by providing more resources to the regions/districts and local authorities, thus, serving learners who might require additional or more intensive services.

The level of additional resources that such learners should receive is often difficult to define, however. The concept of vertical equity would require that schools serving large numbers of disadvantaged learners be allocated more resources than other schools to compensate for these higher deficits. Therefore, if children from different backgrounds were to have similar chances in life, they would have to be treated differently (Hernes, 1974). Quality of results necessitates unequal of provision and resources (Berne & Stiefel, 1999). The idea is that the educational career of the individual would be determined by ability and intents, and not by status and place of residence. Hernes (1974) puts it, "all learners are equally worth, but none of them are alike". According to Hernes (1974), the concept of "vertical equity" is a tool aimed at trying to get everyone to the same level, while quality to equal opportunity is about the right to fairness, and the concept mainly ties input variables to output variables.

The principle of "equal education opportunity", is based on the notion that all children should have an equal chance to succeed, and for there to be equal education opportunity, learners should have access to resources that put them at "a fair starting line" and conditions should be set up to allow the possibility for all to "succeed" (Berne & Stiefel, 1999). In some cases, equal opportunity is treated as a condition of horizontal equity. Turner (as quoted by Nieuwenhuis, 2005:14) however reminds one that, equal of opportunity and conditions tend to produce inequality of results."

Berne and Stiefel (1984a and 1994b) argue that provision of equal educational opportunity focuses on the relationship between per-learner revenues and region/district or learner characteristics that might be considered “compensatory” for the purposes of decisions of resources allocation. This principle is also commonly referred to as “fiscal neutrality”; if disparities across regions or schools exist. It is important to determine whether these are due to “illegitimate” factors (such as differences in local wealth) or other factors such as differences in local preferences for education.

To provide equity and quality education; better teaching and learning in a conducive environment needs to be created. For example, adequately trained teachers, learner-centred methods, appropriate class size, sufficient learning time, appropriate curriculum and relevant materials are key. In addition, better school environments are needed, like basic facilities including water and sanitation, a safe and secure environment, attitudes of respect and tolerance, nutrition and health support and accountable management processes are all ingredients for equity, quality education and social justice.

To underline the concept of social justice, fairness and equity for everyone, special approaches for children from disadvantaged groups, who are unable to receive a quality education without special measures and attention to address their needs are needed. Equity and quality in education will mean doing things differently, treating learners differently based on their individual needs, and this necessitates unequal of provision and resource allocation.

Furthermore, there is a need to broaden the traditional viewpoint of the concept of equity, to focus on the effective use or deployment of resources with the aim of producing equal results, not equal outputs. In this way, equity may be the prerequisite of quality education, which requires unequal inputs (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005; UNESCO, 2010).

According to the literature (Krätli & Dyer, 2009; Fowler, 1999), if the world, developing countries in particular, would like to achieve vertical equity and quality education, children

from parents with different resources (rich and poor) must be treated differently (affirmative action or positive discrimination), but there is always a trade-off between vertical equity, horizontal equity and efficiency.

### **Quality in Education**

The Dakar Framework for Action (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005:29) – the Quality Imperative, defines “quality” as a set of desirable characteristics of learners (healthy, motivated), processes (competent teachers using active pedagogies), content (relevant curricula) and systems (good governance and equitable resource allocation). The Declaration identifies quality as a prerequisite for achieving the fundamental goal of equity; therefore, MDG 6 emphasises improving all aspects of the quality of education. The Dakar Framework for Action declares that access to quality education is the right of every child, and should be “at the heart of education” (EFA Global Monitoring Report,2005:29).

Quality determines how much, and how well, children learn, and the extent to which their education translates into a range of personal, social and developmental benefits. Goal 6 of the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) emphasises the need for a stimulating pedagogy. It is the teaching and learning process that brings the curriculum to life and determines what happens in the classroom, and subsequently, the quality of the learning outcomes.

Although, countries are striving to guarantee all children the right to education, the focus on universal access often overshadows attention to quality (EFA GMR, 2005:4). Yet, quality identified as a key pillar determines how much and how well children learn and the extent to which their education translates into a range of personal, social and developmental benefits.

The principle of quality refers to equitable conditions or circumstances within the school or classroom that promote or enhance quality learning for all learners. It includes the provision of curricula, learning materials, facilities, teachers and instructional experiences that enable learners to achieve high

standards. Furthermore, quality is also related to the absence of barriers that prevent smooth implementation and a conducive learning and teaching environment in classrooms; rural areas in particular. According to Arnesson (2001), it is difficult to explain in definitive terms what it means, since it is deeply embedded in a society's value system. Arnesson (2001) refers the notion of quality of education as a principle of "distributive justice", i.e. that there should be "fair quality of educational service" for social and economic advancement.

In his study "The concept of quality in education", Sayed (1997:26) argues that concept of quality in education is elusive and frequently used, but never clearly defined. He goes on to discuss how its multiple meanings reflect "different ideological, social and political values" (Sayed, 1997:26). By critiquing key principle approaches to quality education, Sayed (1997) underlines what he calls the "value-bases" of any framework for quality in education. Drawing from Berne and Stiefel's (1984) and Bunting's (1993) principles, Sayed (1997) came to the conclusion that, "equity in education does have an underneath line and that line is defined by the goals and values which underpin the essentially human activity of education".

The point Sayed (1997) makes is that this should be the starting point for an understanding of the notion of equity in education. Thus, any discussion of quality, or action to improve quality, must be preceded by an understanding of the learning experiences of individual learners. Sayed (1997) also goes further in that definition of quality are also determined at the country level; countries determine the relationship between their own quality standards and "internationally accepted" definitions. Therefore, efforts to define quality in education and improve learning must be weighed at the school and classroom level, and involve ongoing, systematic assessment.

The definitions of quality as presented above are consistent with the communiqué issued at UNESCO Ministerial Round Table on Quality Education, that recognises that the principle of quality has become a dynamic concept that has to constantly adapt to unprecedented new challenge and needs as societies evolve (UNESCO, 2008). Education systems today are

challenged by the changing character and growing complexity of society; therefore, definitions of quality should not be fixed, but rather evolve as conditions change.

This means that definitions of quality must be open to change and evolution, based on information, changing contexts, and new understandings of the nature of education's challenges. These constantly changing demands and expectations have implications in achieving quality of education for all (UNESCO, 2008). Therefore, systems that embrace change through data generation, use and self-assessment, are more likely to offer quality education for all learners (Glasser, 1990).

Added to this, is the usual focus on the ability of the education system and schools to deliver on equity and quality of education, essential knowledge and relevant skills, teacher competence, the curriculum, teaching and learning methodologies, processes in the learning environment, examinations and assessment, management, administrative practices, planning and policy development. These remain key to the education quality debate (UNESCO, 2003). Moreover, to achieve the desired quality, the inputs and process should be of "quality" in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, excellence and social justice. The quality output can be achieved only if quality is ensured at each level of the educational process (UNESCO, 2003:10).

Many definitions of quality in education exist, testifying to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the concept. The terms efficiency, effectiveness, relevant or responsive, equity and quality have often been used synonymously (Adams, 1993; Ecosoc, 2011). Considerable consensus exists around the basic dimensions of quality education today, however. According UNICEF (2000) report, quality education includes:

Quality learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities, including teacher quality support for their tasks in schools;

- Quality environments that are healthy, safe, protective and

gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities are likely to support learners to succeed in schools;

- Quality content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, innumeracy and relevance skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace;
- Quality processes through which trained teachers use child or learner-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities represents a key factor in ensuring quality school process;
- Quality outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals and objectives for education and positive participation in society.

These factors allow for an understanding of education as a complex system, embedded in a political, cultural and economic context. Furthermore, the factors take into account the global influences that drive the discussion of quality in education.

### **Conclusion**

Access, equality, equity and inclusion are terms that are related and interdependent. Inclusion is a means to provide equal and equitable access to education. The declaration of Education for All (EFA) which seeks to promote the right of every child to education can only be achieved if there is equal and equitable access to education. The system of education must put in place facilities, conditions as well as setting a framework for inclusive education. Awareness to all the social structures about the need for providing equal and equitable access to education to children is needed for making communities committed and perform their responsibilities. There is also need for the community to change attitudes towards vulnerable and marginalized group.

**Way Forward / Strategies**

Improving access, equity and quality of education in Nigeria requires that, robust attempts should be made to eliminate the barriers that are limiting access and affecting quality of education through good governance.

- Governance refers to the use of institutions, structures of authority and collaboration to allocate resources and coordinate educational activities in the society. The important elements of good governance are summarized to involve transparency, equity and accountability.
- Encourage active Cooperation between the political and the administrative arms of government for the delivery of high-quality service to ensure efficiency and effectiveness needed for sustainable development.
- Education should not be used as a political instrument for campaign, rather, proper plans, design and readiness for implementation must be ensured before commencement. Political will is critical to efforts to provide more access to education to excluded communities.
- Adequate human and material resources should be provided. Leaders and managers must ensure maintenance of infrastructures, facilities and equipment provided. The school management is critical to the effective use of scarce resources available to enhance learning.

**Sensitization of the People**

- Public enlightenment and social mobilization for full community involvement in implementation of programmes geared towards providing equal and equitable access to education is required for the achievement of access to basic education.
- Problems of access due to disparities arising from certain cultural practices and believes can be tackled through sensitization. There is the need for the community to change attitude toward vulnerable and marginalized groups.

**Teacher Supply and Retention**

- Quality education should be ensured through quality and

quantity teacher supply. Teachers should be updated regularly through in-service training, workshops, seminars and conferences for better service delivery and to enhance professionalism. Teacher supply and deployment should be sufficient, balanced, equitable and efficient. Teacher motivation should be seen as a necessary tool for teacher's effectiveness.

- Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) must ensure that set targets are achieved for quality teachers in Nigeria.

### **Curriculum**

- The curriculum should be reviewed periodically and must be properly guided to respond to the needs of the society. Inclusive curriculum should address the child's cognitive, emotional, social and creative development. Change and modify content, approaches and strategies and structures in order to cover all children of the appropriate age range to ensure equity and quality in education.

### **Funding**

- Government of Nigeria should comply with UNESCO's guide lines of 26% allocation of the nation's annual budget in funding education as a strategy to achieving free and compulsory education for all Nigerian children.
- Evolve appropriate strategies for raising funds through involvement of individuals, communities, Parents Teachers Association (P.T.A), private sectors, NGO's, international agencies to support families of poor children to have unhindered access to education.
- Eradicate corruption and administrative bottle necks in handling funds, equipment and supplies. All stakeholders must be accountable for education.

### **Poverty**

- Poverty has denied so many children in benefiting from the free and compulsory education programme of the government. Therefore, government should create more programmes that have bearing on poverty alleviation to improve standard of living of the Nigerian populace.

- The current school feeding programme embarked upon by the Federal Government is a step in the right direction in subsidizing education and widening access to education in Nigeria.
- When every stakeholder is actively, effectively involved and positively held accountable for education, then, access, equity and quality of education will be achieved.
- When Nigerians stop politicizing education, better educational plans and implementation strategies will be put in place by professionals in the field of education.
- Finally, Nigeria has hope for its elementary education when children irrespective of age, gender, location, and socio-economic status have access to quality education.

#### **Teaching and learning environment**

- Provide academically effective, inclusive, gender-responsive, healthy and protective environment for all children, and encourage the participation of the learners themselves, their families and their communities and overcome future learning deficiencies among youth and adults.
- Create a flexible and sustainable learning environment. The schools physical setting must be conducive to the continuous and changing needs of the learning community. Classrooms, labs, and other learning spaces must provide the necessary elements that allow for instruction and learning. Furthermore, they must be adaptable to different teaching and learning activities.
- A truly effective learning environment is one that adapts to the ever-evolving needs of community members. Such an environment must focus on student-centered instructional models that encourage students to realize their full potential.
- Gender inequality is often linked to the issue of education. Eradicating discrimination against females taking part in schooling is believed to be a valid tool for empowering 50% of the planet's population. Furthermore, guaranteeing that all children obtain proper education will aid in defeating global inequality.

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