



Quality and Equitable Education as an Effective Tool for Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract

This paper examines how quality, equitable education advances the Sustainable Development Goals. Quality and equitable education are rallying points and key enablers for achieving sustainable development, poverty reduction, gender equality, and youth and women's empowerment by providing equal access regardless of socioeconomic status. The study discusses quality and equitable education; sustainable development; the Sustainable Development Goals; and Sustainable Development Goal Four (4). Because quality education is central to the Sustainable Development Goals, the paper discusses its role in achieving them and strategies for doing so, including adequate funding, continuous teachers' professional development, improved infrastructure and facilities, stronger school-community relationships, and improved educational content. The paper also discusses the challenges hindering the achievement of quality and equitable education. The paper concludes that the effectiveness of quality and equitable education in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be overstated, as quality and equitable education are strongly linked to universal literacy, poverty reduction, improved health, and sustainable growth and development. Therefore, the government should ensure adequate funding and infrastructure development and regularly review educational content to support sustainable development.

Keywords: Quality Education, Equitable Education, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals, SDG4

Introduction

Education is a critical tool for nation-building. It contributes to national development as it is aimed at transmitting knowledge and the acquisition of skills, potentials, ability, and the development of character and mental power which will enable an individual to make efficient and constructive contributions to the growth and development of the nation. Nigeria like other nations of the world has embraced education as an instrument per excellence for developing her manpower in order to enhance rapid national development, achieve social change, social justice, democracy, and sustainability (FRN, 2013). In a bid to have functional education that will enable individuals to be self-reliant and effective members of the society that will contribute to national growth and development, the policies, programs, and other indices should be aimed at promoting quality education. The quality of education determines the quality of its outcome. Quality education is that which enables individuals and communities to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to participate effectively in the society and contribute meaningfully to its growth and development.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 inter-connected goals that every nation, including Nigeria, is expected to achieve on or before 2030. They are global goals that provide a blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all. All 17 goals are interconnected, meaning that success in one affects success in others. However, the central goal that will help to actualise the other 16 goals is Goal 4 - quality education. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent the first attempt by the world community to focus on the quality of education and learning, and on the role of education in achieving sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, global citizenship, the promotion of peace and non-violence, and the appreciation of cultural diversity towards sustainable

development. According to the Brundtland Commission report (1987), sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Education, particularly quality education, is crucial to the development of society. It fosters full human character and personality development in favour of positive societal values rather than vices. Quality education is seen as the efficiency in meeting set goals, relevance to human and environmental needs and conditions, and something more in relation to the pursuit of excellence and human betterment. Quality education is one that provides all learners with the capabilities they need to develop sustainable livelihoods, make their inputs towards a peaceful and democratic society, and enhance their general well-being towards becoming a cultured global citizen. Quality education is therefore an important rallying point for sustainable development.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical background of this study is grounded in the Human Capital theory by Gary S. Becker (1962). The theory posits that individual workers possess a set of skills or abilities that they can improve or accumulate through education and training. It focuses on the skills and knowledge possessed by individuals and their application in production. It holds that human capacity to perform various tasks is based on skills and knowledge inbuilt in them, as well as external factors such as education and training that develop those skills. By emphasising education and training, individuals can become more productive and efficient. Hence, education, on-the-job training, effective communication skills and health are viewed as components of human capital with consequences for earnings and economic productivity. Training human capital through education brings about economic growth as a result of the skills and knowledge acquired by individuals to enhance value in the labour market. This also emphasises the importance of education in enhancing the perceptual stock of economically successful human ability, which is a result of innate skills and investment in human people. Human capital theory also postulates that quality education leads to the unlocking of productive talent within individuals in a nation to enhance economic productivity as well as national growth and development. The theory views government expenditure on inclusive and equitable quality education as an investment that yields returns to the individual through earnings and economic growth and development. Quality education is, therefore, a vital instrument to be used in the training and development of the latent traits inherent in human, thereby leading to the development of its potentials and sustainable development.

Discussion

Quality Education

The concept of quality education is not easy to define in a way that is universally accepted. The SDGs documents give a broader meaning to quality education, distinct from the traditional meaning. According to the American Society for Quality Control (1990), as cited in Mohammad (2019), quality education is defined as “the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied need”. In the view of Mohammad (2019), this definition treats education as a commodity that satisfies the needs of a consumer. Quality education provides efficiency in achieving set goals that are relevant to the needs of the people and the environment, in pursuit of excellence and human betterment. Also, UNESCO (2016) sees quality education as “necessitates, at a minimum, that learners develop foundational literacy and numeracy skills as building blocks for further learning, as well as higher-order skills”. This definition establishes a link among the various stages of quality education among learners, teachers, policymakers, planners, and goals. Mohammed (2019) succinctly put that quality education is that stage of education where individuals, communities, society, and the world are benefited. Buckler and Creech, as cited in Mohammad (2019), described quality education as that which is about what and how people learn, its relevance to today’s world and global challenges, and its influence on people’s choices. Thus, quality education for sustainable development reawakens people’s consciousness and sense of responsibility as global citizens and better prepares them for the world they will inherit. The world community accepted the importance of quality education for sustainable development, as there is an important relationship between quality education and the attainment of the other goals of sustainable development (Mohammad, 2019). The Inchelon Declaration states that “Education is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and essential for the success of all SDGs”. This suggests that education can act as a powerful “engine” for the development of a more cohesive and equal society.

According to Goldthorpe and Jackson, as cited in Camilleri and Camilleri (2020), quality education may become more affordable across the population, and schooling may become a strong leveler of opportunities, ultimately bringing better prospects for upward social mobility. Education may also reduce inequalities in society by fostering cognitive, interpersonal and emotional skills, as well as promoting healthy lifestyles, participatory practices and norms (Jackson, in Camilleri & Camilleri, 2020). Quality education may also facilitate interaction among members of society who

differ in their backgrounds. The UNESCO (2009) Bonn Declaration report, as cited in Mohammad (2019), also shows the relationship between quality education and sustainable development. The report states that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) helps societies address priorities and issues, inter alia, water, energy, climate change, disaster and risk reduction, loss of biodiversity, food crises, health risks, social vulnerability and insecurity. It is critical for the development of new economic thinking. This implies that the answers to all the questions related to the SDGs lie in imparting quality education. In the words of Akpotu (2020), quality education enables people to develop all of their attributes and skills to achieve their potential as human beings and members of society. It is one that provides all learners with the capabilities they require to become economically viable and productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies, and enhance individual well-being.

Equitable Education

Every individual is entitled to education that enhances the acquisition of knowledge and skills, making them responsible citizens. Equitable education enhances access to education for every individual, regardless of cultural, religious, and financial background, and is aimed at eradicating illiteracy, ignorance, and poverty, as well as stimulating and accelerating political consciousness, national development, and national integration. Following the Universal Basic Education (UBE) law of Rivers State (2005), which provides for free and compulsory basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age in Rivers State for a period of nine (9) years comprising six (6) years of primary education and three (3) years of junior secondary education, every child is guaranteed inclusive access to education. It also includes adults and non-formal education programmes to take care of those who dropped out of school. This implies that education is meant for every Nigerian child. The United Nations (2012) also reaffirmed “full access to quality education at all levels as a prerequisite to achieving sustainable development, poverty eradication, gender equality and women’s empowerment, as well as human growth for the attainment of the internationally agreed development goals, including goal 4.” Equitable education enhances access to quality learning, increases enrolment, retention, and completion of school, particularly among marginalised populations, reduces inequality, breaks poverty, and promotes sustainable economic growth and development.

Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development formed the basis of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The summit was the first international attempt to draw up action plans and strategies for moving towards a more sustainable pattern of development. According to Abraham (2020), sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It implies a vision, principle, and commitment to a fairer and more sustainable world for all, without undermining the future. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2016) conceived sustainable development as an organising principle for global development that supports the planet and the people. Development involves equality between present and future generations. In the view of Robert, Dionko and Goron (2010), sustainable development is development that takes into account economic, social, and cultural aspects. They see sustainable development, with regard to the preservation of resources, as implying intra- and intergenerational equity, which means that resources should be used optimally to be sufficient for the needs of the present generation and the future. To them, understanding sustainable development from this perspective primarily points to how organisations use resources. This view aligns with Rachael (2015), who argues that conserving resources for future generations is one of the major features that distinguish sustainable development policy from international environmental policy. Therefore, resources must be managed properly to contribute to the nutritional well-being, economic and social well-being of the population in the long term.

Sustainable development is concerned with creating and sustaining the conditions under which both present and future generations of humans will live on this planet. This implies that sustainable development focuses on the immediate needs of the present while also being geared towards the welfare and well-being of every individual. Sustainable development spans social, economic and environmental aspects to promote human well-being in both the present and the future. Hence, development, in fact, must reflect society, the economy and the environment to satisfy individual needs. Klairin (2018) affirms that sustainable development should provide answers with regard to meeting the basic needs of humans, integrating environmental development and protection, achieving equity, ensuring self-determination and cultural diversities, and maintaining ecological integrity. According to Robert-Okah (2020), sustainable development is more than just a concern for the environment. It also has to do with learning and the regeneration of initiatives, as well as the total integration of the understanding and knowledge that will lead to

environmental development. He added that sustainable development (SD) is not about buying and borrowing technologies but about being indigenous and growing our own technologies.

The Sustainable Development Commission (SDC, 2004) defined sustainable development (SD) as providing a framework for redefining progress and redirecting our economies to enable people to meet their basic needs and improve their quality of life, while ensuring that the natural systems, resources and diversity upon which they depend are maintained and enhanced for their benefit and that of future generations. Sustainable development is therefore concerned with creating and sustaining what will enable both current and future generations to live well on this planet. Hence, the objectives of sustainable development will require the protection of the natural resources upon which future development depends. According to the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), as cited in Ilechukwu (2014), development is sustainable if “it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. In line with the above, Suobontina (2004) summarises sustainable development as “equitable and balanced” development. Hence, sustainable development could be seen as the ability to meet today’s increasing demands without affecting the biodiversity or the ecosystem of the same place tomorrow. Following the Sustainable Development Commission Report of 2012, sustainable development is an approach to development that tries to balance different but often competing needs with an awareness of the environmental, social and economic limitations we face in society. This defines sustainable development as the intersection point between particular developmental needs and the consequences of those needs for society at large. It could be referred to as the enlargement of an individual, group, city, state or nation’s horizon in education, health, economy and social wellbeing, without this enlarged horizon depleting opportunities for improvement in the future. According to Giddings et al. (2002), sustainable development, as a concept, explicitly conveys three principal aspects or pillars, which include: environmental protection, economic stability and a just society.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) are those goals that are renewable without future effect or destruction. David (2017) states that sustainable development goals are set of global goals for fair and sustainable health at every level from planetary biosphere to local community. He assert that it is a set of objectives within a universal agreement to end poverty, protect all people, to enjoy peace, and prosperity now and in future. The sustainable development Goals (SDGs) otherwise known as the global goals, are universal call to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that people enjoy peace and prosperity. The sustainable development goals (SDGs) is a transition from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through massive consultation by the United Nations. It is built on the unfinished business of the millennium development goals (MDGs). Abraham (2017) affirmed that the millennium development goals (MDGs) were to address developmental challenges for fifteen (15) years from 2000 to 2015, and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) are targeted on the gains of Millennium development goals (MDGs) from January 2016 to 2030. While the MDGs mainly target developing countries, SDGs focus on all countries across the globe. The sustainable development goals (SDGs) are new set of goals adopted by UN member states as a framework to be explored by the various governments for their agenda and political policies for a period of time.

Norton (2017) listed the seventeen (17) sustainable development goal (SDGs) which are targeted effort to sustaining the gains of the Millennium development goal (MDGs) as follow:

1. End poverty in all forms
2. End hunger by promoting sustainable agriculture
3. Healthy lives and well-being for all
4. Quality and equitable education
5. Gender equality and empowerment
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Sustainable energy for all
8. Sustainable work and economic growth
9. Sustainable infrastructure and industrial growth
10. reduce inequality within and between nations
11. Sustainable shelter and cities
12. Sustainable production and consumption
13. Combat climate change and its impact
14. Suitable use of marine resources
15. Protection of terrestrial ecosystem

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16. Peaceful and inclusive communities and Global partnership
17. Global partnership.

According to the United Nations (2015), these goals are in areas of critical importance, which include people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. All the goals are interconnected and unique in that they cover issues that affect us all. A core feature of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is the intense focus on the means of implementation, and this is where education comes into play. According to Ihenco and Joseph (2020), the Sustainable Development Goals, or the global goals, have indicators that form the basic foundation for attaining the SDGs. These include quality education, a curriculum with objectives to achieve the goals in place, and the availability of laboratories and resources.

Sustainable Development Goals Four (SDG4)

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) focuses on quality, equitable and inclusive education. Sach (2015) emphasised that this goal has worldwide coverage of quality education from pre-school through at least secondary education, and extends to more advanced skills training. In line with this, Hanachor and Wordu (2021) stated that the ambition of the goal is to build a nation that facilitates the realisation of each child's full potential, enabling them to contribute to nation-building. In achieving this, the vision of inclusive quality education should reflect the idea of education for all, mainly for the vulnerable, with equal access to all and lifelong education. This implies that education stakeholders must give attention to the various forms of education, whether formal or non-formal. Hence, this goal is viewed as ending all forms of segregation, disadvantage and discrimination in accessing quality education. The United Nations (2012) reaffirmed full access to quality education at all levels as an indispensable condition for achieving sustainable development, poverty eradication, gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as human growth, for the attainment of the internationally agreed development goals, including Goal 4. Therefore, education is perceived as the rallying point for sustainable development and a significant step in improving people's appreciation of the need for sustainability. Abraham (2020) noted that, although only Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) expressly talks about quality education, the success of all seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) depends on education. Hence, Sustainable Development Goal 4 is the rallying point, since education is the foundation upon which every society depends for opening up employment opportunities, providing knowledge and skills, reducing societal inequalities and changing values for overall development and sustainability. UNESCO (2017) affirmed that education is both a goal in itself and a means for attaining all the other Sustainable Development Goals, adding that it is not only an integral part of sustainable development but also a key enabler for it.

Aroh (2018) saw education for sustainable development as a participatory teaching and learning approach aimed at motivating and empowering learners to change their behaviour and take action for sustainable development. He further stated that it aims to give learners the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future. UNESCO (2014) affirmed that knowledge acquired through education for sustainable development promotes learners' competencies, such as critical thinking, enabling them to imagine future scenarios and make informed decisions. UNESCO (2016) succinctly stated that education for sustainable development is a vision of education that seeks to empower people to assume responsibility for creating a sustainable future. It aims to improve access to quality basic education, re-orient education curricula and training, and raise public awareness, as well as helping people to develop the behaviour, skills and knowledge they need, now and in the future. The vision of UNESCO in this direction is to provide people with the ability to handle, in a constructive and creative manner, global challenges, both present and future, towards building a resilient and sustainable society. Therefore, an education that encourages teaching and learning of knowledge, skills, perspectives and values which will guide, empower and motivate learners to pursue sustainable livelihoods is ideal.

Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 4, "quality education", is considered very important for the overall development of nature and the world, and an effective tool for achieving other Sustainable Development Goals (Mohammad, 2017). Goal 4 is also known as transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Education provides the means to transmit knowledge, values and skills across generations, enabling societies to lay the foundations for thriving in the future. Despite a number of actions undertaken at all levels, public awareness of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) appears to remain relatively modest, especially at the grassroots and community levels. Awareness and communications strategies sometimes suffer from a lack of sustainable and sufficient institutional and financial resources (United Nations, 2019). It is also noted that being at school is not enough if children are not learning. The quality of education remains a significant challenge, with too many children not reaching minimum levels of proficiency in reading and mathematics, let alone gaining the

knowledge to participate in a more interconnected world. All Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are interdependent and can only be achieved if implemented together. Since education is not only an integral part of sustainable development but also a key enabler, it needs to be included in national development plans and strategies to achieve all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Role of education in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The role of education in achieving sustainable development cannot be overstated. This underscores the many reasons why UNESCO is making efforts to ensure that developing countries, particularly, provide quality education to their citizenry by reorienting the curriculum content of both teacher education and schools. Considering the strong relationship between the quality of education and the sustainable development goals, as shown by many studies by national and international agencies, Mohammad (2019) outlined how quality education could be helpful in achieving the sustainable development goals as follows:

Goal – 1: No Poverty: End poverty in all forms everywhere: It is believed that millions of people could be lifted out of poverty if they acquire necessary reading skills because they could help them make a living on their own and not necessarily depend on the government for all support (UNESCO, 2016). According to a UNESCO report, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills: that is equivalent to a 12% drop in the number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day.

Goal – 2: No Hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture: There is evidence that education increases the opportunities of saving the life of people particularly children.

UNESCO (2013) stated that there are approximately 47 million children in low-income countries who are stunted as a result of malnutrition in early childhood. If all mothers in these countries had a primary education, 1.7 million children would be saved from stunting. If those mothers had a secondary education, 12.2 million children would be saved from stunting.

Goal – 3: Good Health: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages: Many studies have found the relationship between education and health. Education helps people understand diseases and preventive measures. According to UNESCO reports that “each extra year of a mother’s schooling reduce the probability of infant mortality by as much as 10% and that a child whose mother can read is 50% more likely to live past age five”.

Goal 4: Quality and equitable education: To ensure inclusive and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. It is considered very important for the overall development of the nations and the world. It is an effective tool for achieving other Sustainable Development Goals.

Goal 5: Gender Equality: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls: The role of education in this context is dynamic. Quality education provides opportunities for full development and reduces gender disparities at every level. The education increases women income.

Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Education and sanitation are strongly linked, improving health. According to a report, the availability of clean water has increased the opportunity for education to the children and women. As per UNICEF, “since 1990, 2.1 billion people have gained access to an improved form of sanitation, such as a flush toilet or latrine with a slab”.

Goal 7: Clean Energy: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all: There is a need for energy, particularly clean energy, for socio-economic development to save the world from environmental pollution. Quality education provides technologies that can increase the availability of clean energy and change people's lifestyles to save energy.

Goal 8: Good jobs and economic Growth: Promote sustained inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Full and productive employment and decent work for all: There is strong relationship between education and economic growth. No nation of the world can develop without education.

Goal-9: Infrastructure: *Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation*: Better education opportunity provides the better human development, technology and planning for the development of infrastructure of a nation. A nation is integrated well with the use of modern infrastructure. In many studies, it is found that infrastructure facilitates the multiple development of the country particularly in the development of market economy.

Goal-10: Reduce inequalities within and among countries: One of the major problems in the recent world is the existence of inequalities in social, economic and educational spheres. Educational provides a tool to bridge the gaps.

Goal-11: sustainable cities and communities: *Make cities and human settlement inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*: Presently, the world is witnessing the rise of mega cities. In most of the countries of the world, the future plan for development is based on urbanization-means the shifting of the population from rural areas to urban areas. The education plays an important role in development of sustainable cities and communities. The quality education gives technology, creative solution, better management technique and planning for the development of sustainable cities and well aware citizens. The quality provides strong civic sense which is important for the development of the nation.

Goal-12: Responsible consumption: *Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*: Responsible consumption refers to the use of resources efficiently and use and re-use of waste for a long period of time by keeping the need of the future generation. With the spread and achievement of education comes awareness and a sense of responsibility.

Goal-13: Protect the Planet-*Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*: The education can make the people to be aware of the immediate damage to our planet and pave way for collective efforts to meet the challenges.

Goal-14: Life below water- *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*: In recent years, due to the advent of modern technology, the exploitation of oceans, seas and marine life has been increasing. The exploitation for oil and gas has further increased the exploitation of oceans and seas. The expanding culture of seafood and the adventurous life of modern men and women have complicated life below water. Acknowledging these problems, the world community has now given special attention to saving life below water and preserving marine life on a large scale. Education curricula from school to university have given due importance to awareness of marine life and the need to protect it.

Goal-15: Life on land- *protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainability manage forests, combat desertification and half and reverse land degradation and half biodiversity loss*: Quality education is important in the protection of environment and well-being. Many studies shows that the concern for environment has increased with higher level of education.

Goal-16: Peace and justice- *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*: Education particularly quality education promotes peace and prosperity of the community, society and the world. The world badly needs peace due to the massive scale of violence in many parts of the world. Quality education can play an important role in bringing peace. Many studies have shown that “people with secondary educations are more likely than those with only primary education to show tolerance for people who speak another language. Hence, education, particularly quality education, can minimise the risk of conflict and violence, which can support global development, particularly in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Goal-17: Partnership for the goals strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development: A collective effort through partnership is required for achieving sustainable development through education.

Importance of Quality Education in Achieving Sustainable Development

Global communities have acknowledged the role of quality education in sustainable development, and many studies have found that education can promote peace and strengthen efforts to achieve sustainable development. Better-quality education, and more of it, can be achieved through inclusiveness by providing opportunities for large populations on the principle of equity, particularly gender equity. The quality of education determines a better scope for the development of the individual, community, society, nation and the world (Mohammad, 2019). Education helps individuals and communities to understand the importance of preserving natural resources for future use, how to ensure equity, and support economic growth that will benefit the society. Quality education is also important to sustainable development in the following ways:

1. It create environmental awareness through critical thinking
2. Foster sense of responsibility among citizens that enhance environmental protection
3. Enhance advocacy for social justice
4. Enable marginalised communities have the ability to overcome poverty
5. Provide individual with innovative mind-set that will enhance societal growth and development
6. Nurtures future leaders who can provide solutions to global and environmental issues.
7. It enables to escape poverty, as well as contribute towards reduction of inequalities and gender discrimination
8. It helps in building a peaceful society
9. Promotion of healthy environment.

Strategies for Improving Quality Education

Improving the quality of education requires deliberate and concerted efforts by government, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders in the education sector through the following:

Adequate funding: deliberate efforts of government to adequately provide and release fund regularly for education will positively drive the implementation of the policies and programmes of education. According to Nwiku and Mba (2025), when schools are adequately funded, it creates a positive environment for teaching and learning, enhances the hiring of quality teachers and payment of their salaries, provision of textbooks and other learning materials, as well as other educational activities. Fund is therefore vital in the provision of the resources needed for the implementation of education programmes. Nwiku and Inu-ue (2025) noted that funding in education to a large extent determine the quality of education as it enable the provisions of relevant human and material resources needed for the realization of set educational objectives. These resources include library, laboratory, vehicles, personnel, office space, furniture, classrooms, etc. Stakeholders and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) also serve as critical financial support-base to education through provisional assistance in infrastructural development, learning materials, grants for scholarship, and teacher's capacity building. These act as a bridging gap in government funding especially where public resources are inadequate thereby promoting quality teaching and learning.

Teachers' Continuous Professional Development: career growth and development is a key enabler to performance and outcomes. When teachers are continually trained on the job, they gain up-to-date knowledge in their area of specialisation, making them better equipped to carry out their responsibilities in line with global best practices. Teachers' continuous professional development refers to teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transferring the knowledge into practice for the benefit of students' educational achievement (Bastista & Ortega-Ruiz, 2015). Applying the skills and knowledge gained through continuous professional development can best support quality outcomes in teaching and learning. According to Nwiku and Mba (2025), professionals should engage in research, attend conferences, seminars, and workshops, and consult colleagues (mentors) to maintain professional relevance, as this provides insight into current trends and global challenges in the profession. Agi et al. (2020), Macheng (2016), and Walson (2020) in Nwiku (2024), pointed out conditions that will enable, enhanced and maintain teachers' continuing professional development to include: Conferences, regular workshops; courses and practical sessions, in-service training and re-training; seminars, experiences and assistances (mentoring). Teachers' competence in instructional delivery depends on continuous training to inculcate the tolerance, skills, and knowledge that enhance their performance.

Improvement of infrastructure and facilities: Improved infrastructure and facilities are critical for enhancing the quality of education. Infrastructure such as well-built, safe classrooms and well-furnished, functional buildings will lead to student participation, improved academic performance, and teacher effectiveness. According to Adejemi (2022), infrastructure is an integral component of teaching and learning because it enables students and teachers to access a wide range of tools, services and resources to support teaching and learning. Hence, infrastructure provides

educational institutions with the appropriate setting and atmosphere for teaching and learning. They include structures such as classrooms, dormitories, kitchens, dining halls, laboratories, toilets, and related structures such as playgrounds. Facilities are things that help teachers carry out their responsibilities effectively and help students learn well. They include furniture, machines, electricity, vehicles, audio-visual aids, graphics, etc. To achieve quality education, schools need sufficient infrastructure and facilities.

Improvement in the educational content: the content of education that will guarantee quality in education must be relevant, with focus on both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of learning that provide the learners with the knowledge, skills, values, attitude, and innovative mindset required to live a productive life, make informed decision and proffer solutions that will assist in resolving global issues and challenges. The curriculum should shift from memorisation to competency-based learning, encouraging critical thinking, mastery of specific skills, and practical application in life and the future. Educational content requires regular updates to align with modern and global changes that demand technology and digital literacy; thus, modern learning technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools should be embedded in the curriculum. Learners' social-emotional development is necessary to ensure they develop essential life skills alongside academic knowledge. Therefore, educational content should be updated in order to encourage the development of analytical skills, creativity, and problem-solving rather than just content delivery.

School-community relationship: This is the relationship between the school and the community that hosts it, involving mutual understanding, cooperation, and interaction that offer ideas, trust, and benefits to both parties. The school and the community cooperatively exist in partnership to foster an environment that is conducive for teaching and learning through effective communication, stakeholder engagement, building of mutual trust, and ensuring that the goals of the school is in tandem with the values of the community to enhance the growth and development of the school towards quality educational outcomes. The school and the community exhibit a symbiotic relationship, as both benefit from each other, leading to improved resources, academic performance, and student support. According to Omamogbo (2025), when families, local organisations, and community leaders actively engage with schools, they help bridge the gap between home and school, reinforce the importance of education, and create a sense of shared responsibility for students' academic development. Educational barriers such as funding constraints, poor infrastructure, and limited learning facilities are reduced when schools and the community build mutual understanding and support finances and other resources.

Challenges to Achieving Quality and Equitable Education

Poor infrastructure and facilities: the current state of educational infrastructure in Nigeria is very poor and inadequate, with the available facilities in a sorry state. Oluche in Odey (2018) observed that there are several unfinished structures and damaged chairs; classrooms are devastated, grounds are untidy, and lawns are not mowed regularly. Toilet facilities, where they exist, are inadequate, and primary and secondary school teachers do not have comfortable teachers' rooms or offices. According to Adeyemi and Oluwole (2022), the lack of resources is a critical factor in education because it may negatively affect the learning and teaching processes within the classroom. It is imperative to deduce that school facilities are tools in the hands of teachers that enhance teaching and learning and must be provided and properly managed, as their absence implies the non-existence of an organised learning environment called school.

Inadequate Funding: Inadequate funding of schools has been one of the major challenges affecting the quality of education delivery for a very long time, resulting from an unstable economy, limited financial resources, declining budgetary allocations, lack of political will, misappropriation, mismanagement, corruption, and diversion of educational funds. According to Nwiku and Inu-ue (2025), there has been no genuine commitment from the government towards education in Nigeria, especially as it relates to funding, with less than 10% of its annual budget recorded for education, far below the UNESCO recommendation. Inadequate funding results in dilapidated school buildings, insufficient desks, and overcrowded classrooms, with pupils sitting or standing to learn. Poor funding also leads to low teachers' remuneration, thereby affecting their output.

Lack of trained teachers: The Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) (2002) defines a teacher as someone who has undergone approved professional training in education at the appropriate levels and is capable of imparting knowledge, attitudes and skills to the learner. Therefore, to qualify to teach in any educational setting, a person must have undergone professional training in education, either through NCE, B.Ed, M.Ed, or PGDE, with certification from the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN). Regrettably, these conditions are often

overlooked in most cases due to political influence, “man-know-man” or “kickback”, which secretly influence the process in an informal way. When teachers refuse to continuously upgrade and update their knowledge through mentorship, seminars, workshops, conferences, symposia, public lectures, etc., they lose touch with current global realities and innovations in their area of specialisation. Hence, they are professionally unqualified to deliver. There is also a shortage of teachers in schools, which affects the achievement of quality education.

Socioeconomic and cultural barriers: these pose access problems. Most school-age children do not have access to education. In most cases, it is due to poverty, which deprives many of access and forces many to drop out of school. Gender disparity and child labour equally prevent the girl child from accessing education.

Conclusion

Quality and equitable education are central to the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They ensure inclusive, quality learning for all, thereby eliminating disparities arising from gender, disability, and socio-economic status. Therefore, the effectiveness of quality and equitable education in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be overstated, as there is a strong relationship between quality and equitable education and universal literacy, poverty reduction, health improvement, and sustainable growth and development. However, ensuring quality and equitable education that will enhance the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals requires concerted and deliberate efforts by the government and relevant stakeholders towards the provision of adequate resources and the necessary environment for the achievement of educational goals and objectives.

Suggestions

1. The government should prioritise investment in infrastructure development in education. This could involve allocating more funds to improve existing infrastructure and implement new projects aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. The government should ensure that the right of the child to education is protected, with punishment for defaulting parents.
3. The government and stakeholders should consider incorporating technology-based learning platforms and innovative teaching methods into the content of education.
4. Government and managers of education should ensure that the school-community relationship is mutual and devoid of conflicts.
5. Government and school administrators should ensure that teachers undergo continuous professional development in order to keep them informed.

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