

# **Empowering Education in Nigeria: Challenges, Strategies, and Inclusivity for Sustainable Progress**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as a guide in pursuing global sustainable development. SDG 4, focused on inclusive quality education, is pivotal for societal, economic, and personal advancement. As Africa's most populous nation and a key economy, Nigeria faces challenges in realizing SDG 4 due to limited access, regional disparities, inadequate teacher training, and socio-economic factors. This study aims to understand the interaction between Nigeria's education landscape and SDG 4. It examines obstacles and strategies to quality education. Education takes various forms beyond formal schooling. Non-formal education targets adults and marginalized communities, while informal education promotes critical thinking. Special education caters to disabilities, and online education offers flexibility. Vocational and technical education aligns with job markets, enhancing employability. The formal education system requires innovative approaches like learning webs, dialogical education, and student-centred methods to address challenges. Non-formal education demands funding, tailored curricula, educator training, and accreditation. Informal education benefits from awareness campaigns and collaboration. Special education should address barriers, raise awareness, and invest in vocational rehabilitation. Online education needs alignment with traditional standards and safeguards. Vocational and technical education necessitates industry collaboration, while technical education requires funding and infrastructure. Challenges can be overcome through innovation, collaboration, and investing in education, infrastructure, and accessible programs. By weaving knowledge into every corner of society, Nigeria can thrive, realizing the transformative power of education.

*Keywords: Education, Nigeria, Sustainable Development Goals, Challenges, Strategies*

## **1.0. Introduction:**

In the global pursuit of sustainable development, the United Nations' framework of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serves as a beacon for positive change. SDG 4 is a vital cornerstone of these goals, advocating for inclusive and equitable quality education. Education is pivotal in shaping societies, economies, and individuals, providing them with the tools to navigate a rapidly evolving world and contribute effectively to their communities. In the Nigerian context, the synergy between the nation's educational landscape and SDG 4 assumes paramount significance, as it determines Nigeria's ability to cultivate an informed and skilled populace capable of driving socio-economic progress (United Nations, 2015).

With its distinction as Africa's most populous nation and one of its leading economies, Nigeria confronts a spectrum of challenges in realizing the objectives of quality education. Despite considerable strides, the country contends with persistent issues that impede the seamless attainment of SDG 4. The hurdles range from limited access to well-equipped learning environments, regional disparities between urban and rural education, and inadequacies in teacher training to intricate socio-economic factors contributing to gender imbalances and regional inequities. The ramifications of a less-than-optimal education system extend beyond personal advancement; they shape the trajectory of national development, influencing innovation, productivity, and societal cohesion (Fatimayin, 2015).

## **2.0. Objectives**

This study endeavours to illuminate the intricate interplay between Nigeria's education landscape and the aspirations of SDG 4. The objective is to critically examine the challenges obstructing progress and explore the strategies that promise to mitigate these obstacles. By evaluating Nigeria's alignment with the targets articulated in SDG 4, this study aspires to uncover avenues that lead to a more inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education system.

## **3.0. Materials and Methods**

This study combines secondary data sources to examine Nigeria's education system. The research involved an extensive review of scholarly literature, policy documents, reports and grey literature from government agencies and civil society organizations related to quality education.

## **4.0. Diverse Dimensions of Education**

Education transcends formal classroom settings, encompassing a multifaceted landscape that recognizes the imperative for diverse educational modalities. Non-formal education extends learning beyond traditional institutions, catering to adults and marginalized communities, fostering lifelong learning, and addressing skill gaps. Informal education, often experiential and self-directed, promotes curiosity and critical thinking outside structured curricula. Special education for individuals with disabilities promotes inclusivity, addressing unique learning needs and promoting social integration. Online education provides accessibility and flexibility, bridging geographical barriers and accommodating diverse schedules. Vocational and technical education responds to evolving job markets, equipping learners with practical skills and enhancing employability. Shifting from the quantitative proliferation of educational centres to

prioritizing academic quality ensures that individuals are equipped with knowledge and possess critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability skills essential for navigating a dynamic world.

## **5.0. Navigating Educational Challenges**

### **Formal Education**

Formal education encompasses the structured and systematic learning journey within institutions like schools, colleges, and universities. It is characterized by a standardized curriculum, a hierarchy of grades and credentials, and a strong emphasis on academic accomplishments and certifications (Tans et al., 2020).

In formal education, problems arise when schools unintentionally lead students to think of education as something they can get and collect, like a product, giving more importance to grades and diplomas than understanding the material. This way of thinking makes them not fully appreciative of the learning process. Also, some teaching methods make it hard for students to interact and participate. When teachers focus only on talking, and students passively listen and remember, it stops them from actively thinking and discussing things with their peers. This leads to fewer questions and less sharing of ideas and prevents them from forming their opinions. This affects how they understand teaching and learning and makes the education system centred on the teacher. The problems with the current education system go beyond not developing important qualities like determination, self-discipline, and social skills in graduates. They also involve not helping students think critically, be creative, and solve problems (Tans et al., 2020).

## Non-formal Education

In Nigeria, non-formal education covers various efforts that target people who can't access regular school systems. These initiatives include programs organized by groups outside the government, like NGOs, to help adults learn to read and write. Some workshops teach practical skills to young people without jobs to help them find employment. Some initiatives work within communities to improve local crafts and entrepreneurial abilities. Evening classes are available for people who work during the day but still want to learn. Mobile education units bring learning to remote areas without many educational options (Sheffield, 1972).

However, non-formal education in Nigeria faces challenges that make it harder for these initiatives to work well. Limited money and resources often make expanding or improving these programs difficult. The lack of set plans and ways to measure progress raises concerns about the quality of education. There aren't always enough trained teachers who can teach specialized skills, which makes it harder for vocational programs to succeed. The certificates from non-formal education programs might not be respected, affecting the learners' opportunities. It's also tough to measure and check the quality of these programs because they're different from each other and aren't always managed from a central place. Sometimes, cultural or social reasons might stop these programs from being successful, like if a community doesn't like the new ideas or doesn't support them (Sheffield, 1972).

## Informal Education

Informal education differs from formal or non-formal education because it's not as structured. It's all about learning while doing regular things like work, hanging out with people, spending time with family, or enjoying free time. This kind of learning doesn't happen in regular schools or planned programs. It takes place at home, at work, in your community, and as part of your daily life. Your family and the society you live in decide what you learn in this way (Shenderuk, 2020).

Informal education includes reading, watching TV, going to cultural places, and travelling – basically, learning on your terms. It covers many different types of learning, from practical skills you use at home to improving yourself. So, activities like cooking, fixing things, attending workshops, being part of online groups, and exploring hobbies all fall under informal education (Shenderuk, 2020).

However, some misunderstandings about informal education cause problems. Some people might not think it's as important as formal education and might not realize how much you can learn from it. Not everyone can access informal education, especially if they don't have the internet or places to go. Sometimes, bosses or schools might not see how valuable informal education is, which could affect your career or your chances of learning more (Shenderuk, 2020).

## Special Education

Education for individuals who have physical disabilities aims to tap into and amplify their inherent abilities, especially those who face physical challenges. The goal is to promote their independence and resilience, preparing them to handle life's complexities and reduce feelings of hopelessness. This approach encourages them to be proactive and inventive, helping them find and apply solutions effectively, ultimately overcoming obstacles (Anggreni et al., 2022).

Special education is personalized to meet the unique needs of each individual with a disability. In contrast, inclusive education advocates for equal educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Vocational rehabilitation, a non-formal education, focuses on skill training to empower individuals with disabilities, enhancing their potential for employment. It aims to boost their self-confidence, self-sufficiency, and long-term job prospects. This might involve practical training in music, computer literacy, communication, financial management, and job readiness. These programs are offered by government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private entities, all tailored to the specific needs and resources of each individual and their community (Anggreni et al., 2022).

However, there are numerous challenges in educating individuals with disabilities. One significant obstacle is the difficulty people with disabilities often face in obtaining jobs. This is often due to employers perceiving them as weak, sick, and dependent on social assistance. Society's perception of disability as abnormal also contributes to these challenges, leading to notions that individuals with disabilities are objects of pity and charity, unable to be independent. Additionally, physical and environmental barriers may prevent access to quality education. For example, training facilities might not be designed to accommodate those with mobility



impairments, and the cost of transportation to training programs can be prohibitive for some individuals with disabilities (Anggreni et al., 2022).

## Online Education

Online education leverages the internet and digital technology to deliver educational content, allowing students to access materials, participate in classes, and connect with peers and instructors, regardless of location and online access. There are two primary forms: real-time classes with live streaming and prerecorded classes for flexible, self-paced learning. Online education works across various devices, offering advantages such as broader learning access, cost savings, and customized learning speed. Examples encompass a range of options like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) covering diverse subjects, online degree programs spanning from undergraduate to graduate levels, short-term certification courses, personalized tutoring, language learning platforms, and focused skill classes like coding or digital marketing (Asaqli, 2020).

Nevertheless, online education also brings about challenges. These include the potential for the devaluation of degrees earned online, the limited interaction between teachers and students that can impact learning outcomes, potential compromises in learning quality compared to traditional classrooms, difficulties in evaluating students due to an emphasis on test-centric assessments, the risk of a small number of corporations dominating the online education market, and the possible negative impact on funding for academic research (Dua, 2013; Goldschmidt, 2013; Harden, 2013; Kirk, 2019).

## Vocational Education

Vocational education is a hands-on learning approach that provides specific skills and knowledge needed for particular trades or professions. Its goal is to prepare students for employment in specific industries. This type of education can be formal, through vocational high schools, technical institutions, and community colleges, or informal, through methods like apprenticeships and on-the-job training. The curriculum is customized to fit the unique educational context, local opportunities, and student abilities. The main objective is to enhance students' ability to adapt to changes in science, technology, and the arts while fostering a professional mindset (Yoto, 2016).

Examples of vocational education cover a range of fields, such as automotive technology for vehicle maintenance, culinary arts for professional cooking, welding for metal joining, nursing for healthcare, information technology for computer systems, cosmetology for beauty services, and carpentry for woodworking. These examples represent just a portion of the many vocational programs created to prepare students for success in their chosen careers. Challenges faced by vocational education include the perception of being less valuable than academic education, insufficient funding for specialized equipment, aligning the curriculum with industry needs, a shortage of qualified vocational teachers, and establishing sustainable partnerships with industries (Yoto, 2016).

## Technical Education

Technical education involves training individuals to lead technological advancements within a nation, fostering a deep understanding of technology for self-sufficiency and long-term sustainability. Its influence spans various fields, such as metalwork, mechanics, electronics, and construction, playing a crucial role in shaping various industries (Uwaifo, 2010).

However, technical education faces significant challenges. Despite the growing demand for technical skills, insufficient funding and neglect from the government result in inadequate infrastructure. Many educational departments lack the necessary laboratories, equipment, and modern facilities to provide effective training. The problem is exacerbated by the brain drain phenomenon, as educators seek better opportunities elsewhere due to unfavourable conditions. The combination of low wages and a lack of job satisfaction further contributes to this issue, disrupting the continuity of technical education programs (Bassi, 2004).

## 6.0. Recommendations

### Formal Education

A comprehensive overhaul of the formal education system is imperative to address these challenges. This entails integrating innovative approaches such as learning webs, dialogical education, and student-centred methods (Tans et al., 2020). Learning webs create a flexible learning environment that utilizes interconnected resources, allowing students to take ownership of their education and develop self-directed learning skills. Dialogical education promotes interactive discussions and critical thinking, fostering collaboration and the exchange of diverse perspectives, thus enhancing communication skills and deepening comprehension.

Simultaneously, the student-centred approach tailors education to individual needs, encouraging creativity, adaptability, and problem-solving.

Implementing these strategies will effectively tackle the intricate challenges within Nigeria's formal education system. It will enhance creativity and cultivate robust critical thinking abilities for success in our dynamic and rapidly evolving society. Moreover, investment in teacher training and professional development, along with the improvement of educational infrastructure in underserved areas, should be prioritized. Emphasizing vocational and technical education, increasing government funding, ensuring transparent resource allocation, involving parents and communities in educational governance, and incorporating cultural and ethical education are all crucial steps towards fostering positive change (Tans et al., 2020).

#### Non-formal Education

To strengthen non-formal education in Nigeria, a comprehensive strategy is essential. The government should allocate significant funds to non-formal education programs, enabling their growth, creating high-quality materials, and providing educator training. Curricula should be tailored to practical needs and match local job opportunities, with updates reflecting evolving skills and industries. Educator training programs must emphasize effective teaching methods, communication skills, and understanding of adult learners' unique requirements. Establishing an accreditation system for non-formal education programs is vital for credibility and participation incentives. Technology can play a role by developing online platforms and mobile apps to widen access, promote collaboration, and facilitate self-paced learning. Collaboration with local communities, industries, and NGOs can customize programs to specific skill gaps. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms will refine program effectiveness. Awareness campaigns should

inform potential learners about non-formal education's benefits, and incentives like certificates and diplomas can boost participation. By implementing these measures, Nigeria can establish a dynamic, non-formal education system that equips individuals with relevant skills, fosters economic growth and promotes lifelong learning (Sheffield, 1972).

### Informal Education

To enhance informal learning, a comprehensive strategy is advised. Launching focused awareness campaigns can reshape public views and encourage engagement. Partnerships between formal education institutions, community groups, and employers can establish routes for acknowledging skills acquired informally. Utilizing digital platforms for accessible resources and courses caters to diverse learning styles. Providing flexible options such as evening classes or short workshops accommodates different schedules, making informal learning more accessible and pertinent (Shenderuk, 2020).

### Special Education

Enhancing education for individuals with disabilities requires adapting environments to reduce physical and social barriers. This promotes their involvement in various social aspects, lessening reliance and improving their social integration. To effectively support these groups in education, several strategies can be employed. Firstly, creating inclusive educational environments that are accessible, possibly through accommodations like assistive technology or flexible learning setups, is vital. Secondly, raising awareness and educating society about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities is crucial to counter negative stereotypes that hinder their educational opportunities. Thirdly, investing in vocational rehabilitation programs is essential to

provide the skills and training needed for successful employment. Collaboration among government bodies, non-profit organizations, and private enterprises can facilitate educational and internship opportunities (Anggreni et al., 2022).

### Online Education

To enhance the effectiveness of online teaching, it's important to align these practices with the same standards applied in traditional classrooms, ensuring students can focus optimally. Educators should also explore additional strategies to create an ideal virtual learning environment. This includes creating concise lesson plans, preparing backup plans, and providing students with the necessary materials for their sessions. Clear etiquette guidelines should govern online classes. Teachers should aim for well-organized, well-lit teaching spaces without distractions like pets or children and minimize background noise. Maintaining a strong, stable internet connection, reducing open browser tabs, selecting a suitable video chat platform, and ensuring clear audio and video for students are essential.

Moreover, educational institutions should invest in reliable assessment tools for evaluating open-ended questions. Protective measures need to be in place to prevent excessive dominance of the online education market by big corporations. Additionally, steps should be taken to safeguard academic research from potential negative impacts arising from the expansion of online education (Asaqli, 2020).

### Vocational Education

A joint endeavour involving educators, policymakers, and industry players is necessary to ensure the continued importance and effectiveness of vocational education. This entails implementing

collaborative actions such as aligning curricula to community needs, prioritizing student-centred and technology-driven approaches, integrating industrial practices into education, offering teacher internships in relevant subjects, conducting competency assessments, providing support for school infrastructure, offering scholarships, and facilitating the recruitment of vocational graduates into the workforce (Yoto, 2016).

### Technical Education

It is crucial to synchronize curricula with current industry needs while incorporating practical experiences and entrepreneurial skills. Equally important is enhancing instructors' skills through specialized training to elevate teaching standards. Upgrading infrastructure and fostering partnerships with industries to provide students with tangible, hands-on learning opportunities are also essential. Promoting STEM education from an early age, maintaining rigorous quality benchmarks, and integrating technology into the learning process all contribute to better results. Recognizing the pivotal role of technical education in national advancement, government backing in funding and policy development is of utmost importance (Uwaifo, 2010).

### **7.0. Conclusion:**

In the grand pursuit of a better Nigeria, education stands as the cornerstone of progress, a beacon of hope for a brighter future. While challenges may persist in formal, non-formal, informal, special, online, vocational, and technical education, innovative strategies and collective action illuminate the path to transformation. Let us embrace change by fostering engaging learning environments, empowering teachers, bridging urban-rural divides, and weaving a tapestry of inclusion. Let technology serve as a bridge, not a divider, and let collaboration between

stakeholders build pathways to knowledge. As we navigate this educational odyssey, we are not merely shaping minds but sculpting a nation. Each learner's success story becomes a building block of national development. With determination, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to education, Nigeria's future shines ever brighter, for the power of education transcends hurdles, igniting a transformative journey that will propel the nation towards the pinnacle of progress.



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