

Utilizing Sustainable Development Goal Four for Peace Building in Nigeria

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Abstract

By fighting ignorance and poverty which are leading causes of violent conflicts and instabilities especially in developing nations like Nigeria, education has for long been recognized as a veritable tool for peace building and reduction of violent conflicts. Proper education can reduce the risk of conflict, the risk of people turning to or returning to conflict thereby aiding in building a peaceful and resilient society (Thompson, 2015). The knowledge impacted through education teaches tolerance, enlightens, propagates respect and dignity for all and reduces poverty etc which are core factors that determine the peace and stability in every nation. However, to achieve this, certain conditions as listed in the sustainable development goal four that calls for global inclusive, equitable quality education that promote lifelong learning opportunities for all must be met. This study looked at the current state of education in Nigeria against the expected standards of the sustainable Development Goal four using secondary sources that includes books, journals and materials from the internet to generate data. Findings from the study found indicates that while the country has structures in place for education, factors that include heighten insecurity, high level poverty, poor learning environments, some cultural and traditional practice among others downplays the place of education there by making Nigeria to account for the highest number of out of school children globally. The study recommends the following for Nigeria maximize the gains of education and also achieve the sustainable development goal four target; improved security across board, better learning environment and scholarship, equal access to education irrespective of gender, ethnicity and other affiliations and employing only qualified teachers that are equipped with relevant skills to teach students at all levels.

Key Words: Education, Sustainable Development Goals, Peace building, Effective Learning Environment, Improved Security

“Education is, quite simply, peace-building by another name”

Kofi Annan (1999)

Introduction

Education is globally recognized as a fundamental human right and an important component of socio-economic development at individual, community and national levels. Having access to education gives a level ground to people irrespective of age, social class or other affiliations to acquire the skills needed to improve their lives and contribute to the wellbeing and development of their communities and the larger society. Babalola (2022) describes education to be the “most potent weapon to fight ignorance and poverty as well as a veritable tool for self-development and advancement of society.” Hence, education is not just a tool that empowers an individual and ultimately the society to develop and reach its full potentials but also a great weapon that fights ignorance and poverty which are leading factors that causes conflicts and instabilities. In addition, the provision of education can reduce the risk of conflict, the risk of people turning to or returning to conflict thereby aiding in building a peaceful and resilient society (Thompson, 2015) as the knowledge impacted teaches tolerance, enlightens, propagates respect and dignity for all and reduces poverty etc which are core factors that determines the peace and stability in every nation. In recognition of the pertinent role education plays in promoting the culture of peace and molding peaceful individuals and nations, the great Nelson Mandela describes it as “the

most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

However, despite the key role education plays in building and sustaining peace, it is hardly prioritized nor accorded the resources needed to flourish especially in regions such as Nigeria that are bedeviled with diverse forms of violent conflicts that have led to the death and destruction of many. On the contrary, the education sector in Nigeria has taken a downward spiral especially in the last decade due to challenges that ranges from insecurity, infrastructural decay, inadequate financing, lack of qualified teachers and industrial strike actions by public universities lecturers among others. Ethnic and religious factors also play very significant role on the current despicable state of education in Nigeria. Recent data indicate that Nigeria has approximately 20% of the total out of school children population in the world and the number is growing daily due to high incidences of kidnapping of school children for ransom, natural disasters that forced many to flee their homes, heightened insecurity, migration, poverty, gender disparities and early girl child marriage, poor infrastructure and learning conditions (UNESCO, GPE 2022). Considering at this dire situation, there is no gain saying that Nigeria has the urgent task to change the negative trajectory that has robbed the nation of brilliant minds that could otherwise contribute to its peace and meaningful development.

The paper is divided into sections; the first section is the introduction which gives an overview of the current state of education in Nigeria, the second section states the objectives of the study and the methodology used, the third section critically examined the current state of education in Nigeria against the tenets of Sustainable Development Goal Four while section five is the recommendation concluding part of the study.

Objectives of the Study

The study is set to achieve the following objectives:

1. Assess the current state of education in Nigeria using the indices of sustainable development goal four that aims to achieve global inclusive, equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
2. Explore how education can be utilized for peace building, tolerance and conflict management in Nigeria.

Methodology

To address the objectives of this work, the researchers employed the qualitative method to gather data. Materials and information were obtained from relevant United Nations websites (UNICEF & UNESCO), World Bank, published books, journals, and other relevant materials from the internet.

Sustainable Development Goal Four

The goal which is one of the seventeen goals established by the United Nations in 2015 has the core mandate to “**ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.**” The SDG goal four has ten targets that are measured by eleven parameters. Seven of these targets are expected outcomes while three are the means of achieving these targets (UNESCO, 2021). The targets and expected outcomes are outlined below:

1. **Universal primary and secondary education:** By 2030, it ensures that all girls and boys get complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.
2. **Early Childhood Education and pre-primary education:** By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.
3. **Equal Access to technical / Vocational and Higher Education:** By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

4. **Relevant Skills for Decent Work:** By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.
5. **Gender equality and Inclusion:** By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.
6. **Universal Youth Literacy:** By 2030, ensure that all youths and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.
7. **Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship:** By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.
8. **Effective Learning Environments:** build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe and non-violent, inclusive and effective environment for all.
9. **Scholarships:**By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, Small Island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programs, in developed countries and other developing countries.
10. **Teachers and Educators :** By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

Current State of Education in Nigeria

The first target of SDG goal four is to achieve Universal primary and secondary education by 2030. i.e ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. Interestingly, before the launch of the SDGs in 2015, the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in the year 1999 rolled out a programme known as Universal Education with the aim to provide greater access to, and ensuring quality of basic education throughout Nigeria. The goal is in synergy with SDG goal four i.e. to ensure that all in Nigeria between ages 6 and 15 children, regardless of ethnicity, religion, class, or gender, have access to quality basic education (UBEC). Twenty two years after the launch of the Universal Basic Education programme, there has been some level of improvement but the results have been limited and Nigeria's educational system still rates very poorly in most international rankings (Centre for Public Impact, 2017). In the same vein, eight years since the launch of the SDGs, Nigeria has recorded marginal progress in school enrollment and the quality of education offered in the schools. In fact, with almost 20 million out of school children (UNESCO, 2022) Nigeria is rated as one of the countries in the world with the highest number of out of school children.

Even though primary and secondary school education are free in government owned schools, many parents opt for their children to learn monetary skills that will enable them render financial assistance to getting a formal education. Cost of basic necessities such as uniforms, text and exercise books etc needed to enroll in such schools also hinders thousands of children in Nigeria from accessing education. Heightened insecurity that forced authorities to close down schools especially in the northern part of the country, displacement and forced migration (caused by insecurity, climate change and natural disasters etc), cultural and religion are also contributing factors abating school enrollment in Nigeria.

Early Childhood Education and pre-primary education: Early childhood education is a fantastic platform that can be utilized to instill a culture of peace and promote peace in children. It offers plenty of opportunities for

children to learn the value of peace as well as the values of peaceful cohabitation, conflict management and resolution which are critical factors that determine peace in every society.

Hence, the importance of early education especially in a country bedeviled by violent conflicts cannot be overemphasized. To change the negative trajectory of violent conflicts in Nigeria, early childhood education needs to be embraced by all and sundry as studies have shown that children that were enrolled in early childhood education are less likely to be lawbreakers, have diminished risk of socio-emotional mental health risk problems and increased self-sufficiency as they mature and enter adulthood. In addition, early childhood education is the foundation of a child's journey as every stage of education that follows relies on its success and children enrolled in at least one year of pre-primary education are more likely to develop the critical skills they need to succeed in school and as adults they contribute to peaceful societies. Sadly, only 35.6 percent of children aged 36-59 months receive early childhood education in Nigeria (Childhood Education Degree, 2022 & UNICEF).

Equal Access to technical/Vocational and Higher Education: Technical education, as enshrined in the Nigerian national policy on education, is concerned with qualitative technological human resources development directed towards a national pool of skilled and self-reliant craftsmen, technicians and technologists in technical and vocational education fields (Okoye & Arimonu, 2016). Undoubtedly, technical education and vocational training contributes immensely to the development of a nation. If given the required attention, it has the capacity to reduce unemployment rate in Nigeria which is currently at 33%, increase the country's GDP and reduce the spike of insecurity which is largely fed by unemployment and poverty especially among the young population.

Despite the potentials of technical and vocational education to reduce poverty, unemployment and insecurity among other vices in Nigeria, it is not accorded the required attention and going by the trend, it will be an uphill task to achieve the sustainable development goal 3 that stipulates for equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education by year 2030. Some of the challenges truncating the potentials and successes of technical and vocational education in Nigeria include; Inadequate funding of Technical and Vocational Education, Inadequate facilities, Brain Drain, Staff Training and Retention etc (Okoye & Arimonu, 2016).

Relevant Skills for Decent Work: Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men (ILO, 2022). Decent work strongly influences peace building not just in the work place but the society in general. However, to attain this, there are relevant skills the employee must be equipped with that will add value to the employer and organization. Such skills are fluid and constantly changing in today's technologically inclined world and are not embedded in the formal education curriculum. Hence, obtaining formal education it is not enough to succeed in today's competitive labour market but every prospect employee should be equip with other skills relevant in the labour market.

Unfortunately, the labour market in Nigeria is characterized by a significant mismatch between skills demanded by employers and those possessed by these young prospective workers, which has led to an increase in youth unemployment rates. In this regard, The Nigerian education system and curricula need significant reforms to enhance career readiness skills and provide guidance for professional challenges. Doing this will mainstream peace in the workplace and ensue decent work that will invariably contribute to a more peaceful society.

Gender equality and Inclusion: "there is a clear link between working to achieve peace, development and ensuring that girls can get an education. When girls are educated, they make sure that there is peace. Women

want their families to grow and thrive in peaceful conditions, not to be involved in wars” (Mohammed, 2020). Educating a girl/woman brings about a drastic reduction in conflicts because an educated woman is not only an empowered woman but is also a woman working against conflicts and its consequences to ensure a better life for her family and society. In addition, education empowers women to partake in economic ventures thereby increasing their earning power to fight poverty and ignorance which are major sources of conflicts. At the long run, children raised by educated women tend to be more peaceful and contribute to the development of their society. However, in spite of this crucial connection between girl’s education and peaceful society, many girls in Nigeria especially these in rural areas still face challenges that hinder them from accessing quality education. In fact, the girl child accounts for 60% of out of school children in the country and the situation is exacerbated by social norms like child marriage, sexual violence, teenage pregnancy, patriarchal system and traditional preferences that places the male child over the girl child and security-related challenges all posed additional barriers, especially for Northern girls (world Bank, 2021 & Selma, 2021).

Also worrisome is the continual refusals of the Nigerian National Assembly to pass into laws bills that guarantee inclusion and equal rights of women in employment among others. Beyond the immediate implication which is women marginalization, the continual refusal is catalyst that can discourage the girl child from seeking education since she will be marginalized even when educated.

Persons living with disabilities are still faced with many challenges despite the **Discrimination Against Persons With Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2019 that was signed into law by President Muhammadu Buhari**. The Act has the principal objective of achieving full integration of persons with disabilities into the society and generally reaffirms the equal status that persons with disabilities enjoy with persons without disabilities under the laws of the land and proceeds to create mandatory provisions for preserving that equality and ensuring that they benefit from a level playing field as far as is possible. **However, many learning institutions are yet to implement this** as many of the youth living with one form of disability or another wish to acquire knowledge and skills like their counterparts who are not having such challenges but are hindered by certain factors. The infrastructures in many institutions, where such training is being carried out seem not to cater for the need of those having disabilities. The school buildings, library, laboratories, the sitting arrangement are not design to accommodate these category of people. Also, the curriculum seems not to make provision for instructional facilities for students with special needs (Osuyi & Adrian 2019, Adaji & Dokubo 2022).

Signing of the **Discrimination Against Persons With Disabilities (Prohibition) Act is very commendable but the persons and authorities concerned needs to ensure that the provisions contained therein are implemented to ensure inclusion and a fair level playing ground for persons with living with disabilities in learning institutions.**

Universal Youth Literacy: the action for this target aims at ensuring that by 2030, all young people and adults across the world should have achieved relevant and recognized proficiency levels in functional literacy and numeracy skills that are equivalent to levels achieved at successful completion of basic education.

Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship: the target of this goal is to prepare people especially the youths for life in the twenty first century. It is beyond formal knowledge acquired in the class room. “It is an ethos that can be embedded throughout schools, an attitude to be adopted, a value system and a way of life that links the environment and the people who live in, and from, it. Also, it encourages and supports the development of thinking skills, and helps involve and engage young people in their own learning to provide opportunities for teachers and learners to consider global issues; make links between what is personal, local, national and global; engage in culturally-diverse experiences; critically evaluate their own values and attitudes; and develop skills that will enable them to challenge injustice, prejudice and discrimination (Welsh government, 2008).”

In essence, this target aims to promote global citizenship allow individuals to embrace their social responsibility to act for the benefit of all societies, not just their own by inculcating in them a global citizenship mindset through teaching skills needed to transform the world to a better place as spelt out in the sustainable development goals.

Effective Learning Environments: the goal of this target is to build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all. However, a significant number of public schools are dilapidated and in urgent need of rehabilitation or upgrade. Pupils and teachers are often seen in inadequate and deplorable conditions that are not suitable for effective learning. In fact, it is not unusual to see teachers and pupils carrying out their business in open space due to unavailability of classrooms. In such instances, pupils are forced to vacate schools during the raining season and other harsh weather conditions. Also, many of the schools are not children, gender or disability sensitive and it has been attributed as a reason why some parents and guardians are not encouraged to send their wards especially the girl child to school. Basic amenities such as laboratory, good convenience, water, healthcare facility and sanitation are almost nonexistent in such schools.

The first known abduction of school children in Nigeria took place in 2014, when 276 girls were taken from the Government Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State north-east Nigeria. Since then, attacks on schools and abductions of students have grown in number and spread across the northern part of the country. The heightened insecurity and violence has led to the death of some of the abductees, closure of schools especially in the northern region and “even when schools re-open, it discourages parents from sending their children to school and leaves children traumatized and fearful of going to classrooms to learn (UNICEF, 2021)”. Aside the obvious implications of loss of lives, freedom and learning opportunity, some of the abducted students have been indoctrinated into the radical ideologies of the insurgents.

Scholarships:As a developing country, a lot of Nigerians rely on the provision of scholarships either by government, corporate organizations or well-meaning individuals to get quality education especially at the tertiary level. Getting access to scholarships has in no small measure aided many individuals across the country who will have been otherwise easy targets of violent extremists to become peaceful, law-abiding and contributory members of the society. While it is commendable that Nigerian students can access local and international scholarships at different levels of study, there is need for improvement especially in the face of violent conflicts afflicting almost every region in the country. Special attention should be paid to areas that are prone to violent conflicts and also educationally disadvantaged areas that are easy targets of indoctrination and recruitment by extremist responsible for the conflicts across the country.

Teachers and Educators: this target aims to substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and Small Island developing States.

Although teachers and educators are the bedrock of education and by extension important component of advancing the culture of peace in Nigeria, they are in short supply due to mainly lack of adequate content knowledge and pedagogical skills to teach effectively as research has shown that almost half of the teachers in Nigerian schools are not qualified to teach as they do not have basic teaching educational qualifications, which is the National Certificate in Education (NCE) as stipulated by the National Policy on Education (WB, 2021 & Premium Times 2017). Economic hardship has also forced many of the qualified teachers to migrate to other climes in search of better economic opportunities, there by leaving the country bereaved of qualified teachers and educators.

Recommendation and Conclusion

To maximize the gains of education for peace building, Nigerian government and all stakeholders must ensure that children of school going age are enrolled in secured schools as and at when due and they should be provided with all necessary resources needed to excel. Learning institutions should cater for all categories of people irrespective of gender or disabilities, to ensure inclusion and equal learning opportunities for all. Peace education and relevant skills needed for decent work should be mainstreamed into school curriculum at all levels and only qualified teachers should be employed to teach in schools. Government and other stakeholders should provide scholarships and other forms of grants to teachers and students for them to get the right certifications and trainings needed to keep up with global best practices in the education sector. In the same vein, enumeration of teachers should be improved to attract qualified individuals that can use the platform the profession offers to build peace in the nation and train students to become useful members of the society.

In conclusion, education can be described as an untapped gold mine for peacebuilding and conflict management in Nigeria. With commitment that is backed by action from every all stakeholders in the society, Nigeria can leverage on the platform of education to build sustainable peace and amicably manage conflicts without resorting to violence.

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