



Issues in the Funding of Public Education in Nigeria: A Focus on Free Education Programmes

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ABSTRACT

This paper is directed at highlighting the funding pattern of the federal government of Nigeria in relation to public education. It involves a review of relevant policy documents and research reports. The purpose is to stress the importance of adequate funding in relation to pertinent issues that affect the quality of free education programmes in Nigeria. This paper reveals that the adequacy of government funding of education has been adversely affected by inaccurate projection of target population for free education programmes due to poor statistical base and insufficient demographic information; the security situation in the country that compels government to spend increasing amount of money on security issues; and the weakness of the national currency against major international currencies like the British pound, the US dollar and the Euro that reduces the purchasing power of the naira in the international market. It recommends timely collection, collation, analysis and documentation of all demographic and institutional data relating to the funding of free education programmes.

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Introduction

The funding of education has been a bone of contention in virtually all labour conflicts between government and various labour unions in the education sector. Although with these conflicts, the sector seems to gain some financial leverage, the growing demand for formal education and the expansion of education programmes to accommodate rapid technological changes in the contemporary world continue to render such financial leverage insignificant. It is for this and other reasons such as inflation and population growth that Agabi (2013), describes the education sector as financially insatiable. This paper highlights the trend in the funding of public education in Nigeria with emphasis on issues arising from free education programmes. The purpose is to stress the importance of adequate funding in relation to pertinent issues such as quality of teaching manpower, provision of educational facilities and the maintenance of equal standard in the provision of quality education.

The Concept of Free Education

Generally, a resource or service can be described as free if it attracts no cost to the receiver. From an economic perspective, the extent to which a resource or service is free is relative to the opportunities that the receiver has to forego to avail him/herself such resource. A free good or service is therefore a good or service that is not scarce so that its availability is not an effective constraint to its usage (Black, 2003). The basic characteristic of free goods and services is that "their supply exceeds the demand; as a result of which they do not have a price" (Kalra, 2006:139). Education is a service that involves the use of human and material resources that require varying levels of fund utilisation for its success. Education can be described as free if the cost of participation is not borne by the participant or if private cost is so low that it becomes comparatively insignificant in relation to the total

cost of education.

Public education as used in this discourse refers to that education that is funded either completely or partly by government. It is that education programme that is financed from public fund. In Nigeria, all education services in public primary and junior secondary schools are presumed to be free and the responsibility for funding these levels of education (which constitute the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme) is shared between the federal and the state governments. This has been the arrangement beginning from the 1999/2000 academic session. The extent to which the UBE programme is free is captured in the following declaration of the federal government of Nigeria, as presented in sections 2 and 3 of the UBE Act 2004:

Every Government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age....The services provided in public primary and junior secondary schools shall be free of charge. A person who receives or obtains any fee contrary to the provisions of subsection 1 of this section commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding N10,000:00 or imprisonment for a term of 3 months or to both. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2004a:A115).

In this regard, the private cost of participating in the Universal Basic Education programme in Nigeria is reduced to the level that parents are only mandated to send their children to school and ensure that they attend and complete primary and junior secondary schools. The opportunity cost of sending a child to school is made insignificant by the United Nations' declaration of education as the right of every child. A parent who tramples on the right of a child to universal basic education in Nigeria is liable to a reprimand on first conviction; a fine of two thousand naira (N2000) or one month imprisonment or both on second conviction; and a fine of five

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thousand naira on subsequent conviction or two months imprisonment or both (FRN, 2004a). As observed by Agabi (2013a), these penalties are directed at maintaining the principle of education for all as the responsibility of all.

The extent to which the UBE programme is free at the state level is captured in the following statement by the Rivers State Government, RSG (no date):

His Excellency, Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi declared free and compulsory education in primary and post primary schools in Rivers State in 2009. In furtherance, the State Government provides free books, sandals, sports wears, uniforms and bags for every child living in Rivers State in order to ensure that indigent families are not educationally disadvantaged. (RSG, no date: p 4)

The provision of free lunch for school children was one of the strategies designed to attract and sustain the interest of children and indigent parents in the free education programme but the sustenance of the strategy has been hampered by a number of issues that hinge on funding. As reported by RSG (no date), school feeding is no longer in existence in Rivers State as a result of the large investment of state fund on infrastructural development and teacher training; and moreover, statistics from Nigeria Education Management Information System, NEMIS, show that Rivers State is not alone in this predicament because all other states of the federation indicate incapacitation due to the huge cost. In essence, the feeding of school children is no longer a part of the free basic education programme in Nigeria. It is now a part of the private cost of education that is borne by parents.

However, Agabi (2006 and 2013a), aptly observe that basic education can be truly free when it stimulates the participant's desire for higher level of training for socio-economic enhancement; adequate and appropriate machineries are put in place to ensure that the law of compulsion is respected by all stake holders; and the statutory quality of education is maintained. By implication, the quality of free education is not judged by the level of public investment but by its ability to qualify the beneficiary for education at subsequent levels of training. The products of such education should also be fit for some level of economic engagement as warranted by national labour age and by the level of education attained.

The Beginning of Free Education in Nigeria

Free education in Nigeria began in the Western Region in 1955 under the government of Obafemi Awolowo. As reported by Fafunwa (1974), it was planned to provide free education of good quality to all children in the Western Region of Nigeria; it was tuition-free; books and writing materials were given freely to all the children who turned up for primary school enrolment; All activities directed at the provision of instructional resources, teacher training and construction of school buildings began in 1952; and so, the Western Region had three years of preparation that preceded the launching of the first free universal primary education programme in Nigeria in January 1955. In spite of this, more children turned up than the budget for the free education programme could accommodate.

In 1957, the government of the Eastern Region, under Nnamdi Azikiwe also launched a free universal primary education programme for the Eastern Region. This UPE programme lasted only two years and by the third year, tuition-free primary education in the Eastern Region became limited to elementary classes 1-3 because the cost of funding a universal primary education was much more than the regional

government had anticipated (Fafunwa, 1974). This was because the projection for enrolment fell far below the reality and more children than was expected turned up for enrolment. In September 1976, the military government of Nigeria launched the nation-wide free and compulsory universal primary education programme. By 1979, it also realised that the bill for the free and compulsory primary education programme was a lot more than the federal government could carry alone (Aiyepoku, 1979; Taiwo, 1980; FRN, 2004). As put by Aiyepoku, (1989:40):

The new civilian administration which came into power in October 1979 introduced a new revenue allocation formula in 1980. Under the new formula, the Federal Government put a complete stop to financial assistance hitherto extended to the states for financing UPE and secondary education.... Consequently, from January 1980 states no longer had as much money from Federal sources for financing education as was the case in the days of UPE and secondary education grants.

At this point, the funding of primary education was shifted to state governments and private investors. Fees were re-introduced and the compulsory dimension of the free primary education policy was conveniently ignored by all the tiers of government.

The recurring decimal in these early attempts at providing free primary education is the massive and unexpected number of children that turned up to be enrolled in primary schools. In all the three cases, unexpected enrolment explosion made the budget for primary education meagre and grossly insufficient. As observed by Agabi (2006), the UPE experience in Nigeria is a reflection of the extent to which the Nigerian child desires formal education. It also shows the extent to which the poverty level in the country affects the level of participation in formal education.

Obviously, more children would enrol in and complete primary school education if it is provided at minimal private cost. Consistency in the policy of funding public education is therefore a requisite condition for improving the level of participation in any free education programme.

The UBE and Lessons from History

The planning and implementation of the universal basic education scheme in Nigeria took into consideration most of the factors that hindered the success of the universal primary education which lasted barely four years as a national programme. As observed by researchers and observers of the education process in Nigeria, the major impediment against the universal primary education programme in Nigeria was resource inadequacy due to inadequate funding (Taiwo, 1980; Aiyepoku, 1989; Agabi, 2006). The responsibility for funding the universal basic education programme is therefore shared between the federal and state governments technically to avert the mistakes of the past.

The federal government of Nigeria declares that her contribution of 50% to the development of capital projects for the UBE is basically an intervention in the compulsory and free UBE programme and is directed at assisting the states and local governments for the purposes of achieving a uniform and qualitative basic education throughout the country (FGN, 2004a). This sharing formula in the funding of basic education may foster inequity in the quality of basic education provided by the different states since all the states of the federation are not equally endowed in revenue generation.

However, the participation of the federal government in the funding of UBE helps to lighten the burden of funding that

is borne by each of the states of the federation. This is quite unlike what happened in the case of the funding of the free, universal primary education programme that was taken up by the federal government in 1976 and; later shifted entirely to state governments in 1979 and; fees were gradually re-introduced by states that could not bear the financial burden and inequity in educational opportunities and participation was re-established while the policy of compulsion was conveniently overlooked.

The pattern of sharing the financial responsibility for the Universal Basic Education programme on a ratio of 50-50 between the state governments and federal government (as established in the UBE Act 2004) will ensure improvement in educational participation not just at the primary school level but also at junior secondary school level. It is therefore very pertinent that the tiers of government keep to their ends of the bargain so that improved participation in basic education can be sustained and the mistakes of the UPE can be sincerely averted.

The Problem of Funding Public Education

In 2008, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) went on strike to demand for improvement in the conditions of universities through improved funding. Dilapidated infrastructures and the general lack of research facilities were prominent in the list of problems that led to the strike. Government consented to ASUU's demands and signed an agreement to that effect in 2009 following which a relative improvement on national budgetary allocation to education was achieved. In July 2013, ASUU went on strike again for the umpteenth time in the past two decades. The agitation this time was that government reneged on the 2009 agreement in terms of adequate funding. Prior to the ASUU strike of 2013, the polytechnics had been shut down for nearly six months in the same year because lecturers in polytechnics across the nation were also agitating for improvement in their conditions of service and that Higher National Diploma certificate issued by Polytechnics be given equal status with the Bachelor's Degree issued by Universities.

The situation is not different with the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) which continues to cry out on the level of infrastructural decay, poor condition of service and the poor quality of education in public primary and secondary schools across Nigeria. Although, much has been achieved in terms of improvement on teachers' salaries and the provision of educational facilities (Ejiogu, 2009; Njoku, 2011; Kaegon, 2013); this observed improvement is relative to the situation in the colonial era and the period before the 21st century. The present situation is a far cry from the expectations of the education sector in the 21st century.

The situation of inadequate funding of the education sector and the resulting neglect of infrastructural upgrading and maintenance is compounded by the rapid growth in the number of public schools in order to accommodate the hitherto abandoned members of the target population. These hitherto abandoned members of the target population in the provision of education as a social service include: the Almajiri street children; children in difficult to reach areas; and children in difficult circumstances amongst who are the physically challenged, the destitute, the orphans and the girl-child who is disadvantaged by religion and by cultural practices.

Okojie (2010), observes that there are 27 federal universities in Nigeria, 36 state universities and 41 private universities as at 2010. Out of these 104 universities in the country, 63 are funded by government while 41 are funded by

private proprietors. However, the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) E-Brochure for the 2013/2014 examination prepared by the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board, JAMB, shows an increase in the number of universities in Nigeria. The document shows that there are 37 federal universities, 43 state universities and 51 private universities (JAMB, 2013). This implies that the Nigerian government is financially responsible for the management of 80 of the 131 universities (not counting other degree awarding and non degree awarding public tertiary education institutions) in the country.

The above statistics also excludes the rapidly increasing number of public primary and secondary schools. The closure of schools as a result of strike actions by teachers has become a common feature of public schools in Nigeria and a consequence of persistent inadequacy in the funding of public education. When private schools are closed down in Nigeria, it is usually not because there is conflict between teachers and school proprietors but most often because such private schools are not providing the statutory minimum quality of education.

The above scenario implies that while private schools (be they tertiary or basic schools) strive to meet and even exceed the recommended minimum quality of education, in terms of infrastructural and instructional resources, etc; public schools at the same level of education are depreciating as the years go by, in terms of infrastructural development and the provision of resources for research and classroom instruction. The poor maintenance culture associated with the management of public school infrastructure and instructional facilities is the direct outcome of inadequate funding. This in the long run creates inequity between public and private schools in the provision of good quality education (Agabi, 2006).

By implication, while private schools charge very high school fees to provide state-of-the-art instructional facilities; public schools, due to insufficient funding by government, suffer depreciation of quality arising from infrastructural decay, poor upgrading of dilapidated facilities and persistent use of obsolete instructional resources. The observable consequence of this disparity in standards is that while education activities in public schools are frequently disrupted by strikes, in protest of inadequate funding and infrastructural decay; private schools tend to enjoy a more stable education environment.

This scenario is counter productive in the achievement of equal standards and equal opportunities in the provision of public education in Nigeria in the 21st century. It is important that the same measure of discipline expected of private schools in terms of: (a) the provision of education that is of good quality and (b) compliance with the recommendations of the national policy on education; should also be applicable in the management of public schools. When this is done, adequate funding of education will not be compromised by any level of government, be it federal, state or local government and equality of standards can be maintained by all stakeholders in education.

Factors that Affect Funding of Public Education

There are a number of factors that can make the funding of public education adequate or inadequate. Some of these factors include the size of the target population, the demand for education as a social service; change and innovations in education trend and pattern; inflation; and government priority (Agabi, 2012; Odoemelam, Longjohn & Longjohn 2012; Ayeni, 2003). These will be discussed in relation to the focus of this paper.

Under-estimation of the target population

Funding will be inadequate when the number of people that make up the target population for any education programme is much larger than government projection. This was the experience in the planning and implementation of the universal primary education programme in 1976 when the projection of the target population turned out to be a far cry from the actual school-age population that turned out for the free primary education programme. The same situation of inaccurate projection of target population was again replayed in the hitherto unconscious exclusion of nomadic children, the Almajiri children and children in difficult to reach areas as well as the physically challenged from the free universal basic education, UBE programme in terms of type of education facilities that were provided. Government has tried to make up for this lapse by establishing special schools for these hitherto neglected groups of children. This in effect implies additional expenditure on free education.

The consequence of under-estimation of the target population for a free education programme is that the projection of the cost of meeting requirements for teaching manpower, infrastructure and instructional as well as other material resources are also grossly under-estimated. This is reflected in the removal of free lunch (for school children) from the on-going UBE programme due to fund insufficiency. The poverty level in the country is also such that the participation of private individuals and corporate groups in the establishment and management of education institutions does not seem to significantly reduce the demand for education that is either totally free or highly subsidized by government. To control the population of students and student-teacher ratio in schools, government continues to fund the construction and management of more schools at all levels of education. Table 1 shows the enrolment trend in Basic and Post Literacy Education in Nigeria for a period that spans from 2001 to 2004.

Table 1. Enrolment Trend in Basic and Post Literacy Education in Nigeria, 2001-2004

Year	Class	Male	Female
2001	26,676	237,583	307,376
2002	24,094	400,566	777,499
2003	23,670	417,773	337,665
2004	23,355	424,503	365,198

Source: Culled from Federal Ministry of Education (2006).

Table 1 shows a continuous drop in the number of classes over the period under review. It also indicates significant increase in female enrolment in 2002 and an equally significant drop in female enrolment in the subsequent year. Comparatively, increase in male enrolment was rather slow but steady in the period under review. Based on the information on table 1, the total enrolment for the period under review is calculated and presented in table 2.

Table 2. Total Enrolment for Basic and Post Literacy Education in Nigeria from 2001-2004

Year	Male	Female	Total
2001	237,583	307,376	544,959
2002	400,566	777,499	1,178,065
2003	417,773	337,665	755,438
2004	424,503	365,198	789,701

The enrolment statistics on table 2 may not be an appropriate reflection of the actual enrolment situation in Nigeria for basic education because it did not include the

Almajiri population that was included in the Universal Basic Education programme by the Goodluck Jonathan administration in 2013. It however shows continuous increase in the annual enrolment figure for the four year period. The general indication is that there is a continuous demand for free basic education in Nigeria.

Change and innovations

Change and innovations in education are usually indicators of positive development in the planning and practice of education. However, changing trends and innovations often lead to curricular modifications that are designed to accommodate changing trend in the practice and process of education. Often times such changes tend to render existing education facilities obsolete and almost useless in the pedagogical process. In this case, new facilities are required to replace the obsolete ones. More funds will also be required to equip teachers with the new knowledge that will make them continuously functional and relevant in the new system. Typical examples of the impact of innovations in education are observed by Agabi & Onyeike (2008a) to include the replacement of manual typewriters with computers; the replacement of chalkboards with whiteboards; and the introduction of environmental studies, computer studies and introductory technology into formal education curriculum.

Government priority

This is another factor that can make the funding of education great or small because adequacy of fund is relative to existing trend in education. Education is likely to get little financial attention from a government that places defence (national security), development of oil and gas industry, construction of road network, and power generation in the top priority list. Such government often tends to forget that it is the education sector that generates the human capital that is necessary in servicing the sectors in the top priority list; and formal education will lose its purpose even as a social service, if it is not adequately funded. By contrast, education is more likely to get more funding from a government that includes it in the priority list. Agabi & Onyeike, (2008b) aptly observe that the quantum of fund that is allocated to education in the national budget is heavily dependent on the political will of the government in power. Agabi, (2012) reiterates that the priorities of government constitute a strong determinant of the level of funding that is given to any education programme.

Sources of Fund for Public Education

The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shares the responsibility for the funding of education between the three tiers of government that make up the federation. These are the federal, state and local governments. Funds for all three tiers of government are sourced from the federation account, which itself is based on taxes from mainly oil and gas as well as import duties (UNESCO, 2008). According to the research report by the UNESCO National Education Support Strategy for Nigeria (UNESS) published in 2008, revenue from the federation account provides about 90% of federal government revenue and over 80% of revenue for states and local governments. The remaining fraction is made up of internally generated revenue from other areas of economic activity.

Government position in the funding of education is clearly stated in section 13 of the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004). According to this policy document, education is an expensive social service that requires adequate financial provision from all tiers of government for successful implementation of educational programmes. The document

goes further to explain that the huge financial cost of public education is such that the combined effort of federal, state and local governments is not adequate in the effective funding of education. In view of this, relevant bodies such as the Education Tax Fund (ETF), the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), and the National Science and Technology Fund (NSTF) were established to enhance the funding of education. Capital projects based on these various sources of fund include the construction of classroom blocks, offices for school staff, library buildings and the provision of furniture items and equipment for classrooms and laboratories among others. The contribution of these various sources of fund is made visible in public schools by the bold inscription of their names on the structures they funded.

Dimensions of Funding in Public Education

The funding of education can be described from two dimensions namely recurrent funds and capital funds. Recurrent funds are specific amounts of money that are made available at regular intervals to take care of the recurring needs of a school. It is used for the servicing of recurrent expenditures by the school. Capital funds, on the other hand refer to any specific amount of money that is made available for the execution of capital projects. Funds that are spent on capital projects constitute capital expenditures. The fund that is allocated to the education sector is directed at serving these two areas of financial needs in education.

Recurrent Expenditure

In education, recurrent expenditure refers to all expenditures that are made on a regular or routine basis. They include staff salaries, provision of stationeries and instructional facilities, provision of maintenance services such as fuelling the electricity generator for laboratory and workshop activities; fuelling/servicing of the School bus; and the provision of toiletries/confectionaries. In the case of the Universal Basic Education programme (UBE), recurrent expenditure also includes expenditure on the preparation of food for the feeding of school children and the provision of books and writing materials.

Capital Expenditure

This is an area of funding directed at executing capital projects designed for infrastructural development in the education sector. Technically, capital expenditure can also be defined as the total amount of financial resources expended on purchasing long lasting assets such as machinery, furniture, construction of infrastructure, purchase of library books, and vehicles, as well as acquiring services of long lasting value (Ebong, 2013). Specifically, capital expenditure in education includes the expenditure on constructing and furnishing new schools; the expansion of an old school by the addition of new classroom blocks; the construction and furnishing of library buildings, offices and laboratories as well as the renovation of dilapidated infrastructure in schools. It also includes expenditure on the procurement of education facilities such as computers and other equipment that facilitate e-training and e-learning. At the UBE level, capital expenditure also includes any quantum of money expended on the procurement of school uniforms and sandals for school children.

There also exists a third dimension of government expenditure on education. This third dimension is identified by Balami (2002) as indirect expenditure. It consists of scholarship granted to deserving individuals, as well as loans and grants given to educational institutions that meet the requirement for such loans and grants. These indirect expenditures are made through the scholarship boards and

other parastatals of government responsible for managing such funds.

The ability of the education sector to effectively service the various components of expenditure depends greatly on the national budgetary allocation to education in any fiscal year. It also depends on the accuracy of fiscal records that show year-by-year pattern of expenditure in the education sector. Past records on expenditure pattern in the provision of public education by the various tiers of government constitute part of the framework for the projection of annual financial requirement by the sector. Other components of this framework include: (a) Record of enrolment trend for the various levels and types of education in the country (b) Evaluation report on various education programmes and (c) Estimated cost of any planned expansion or change in the education sector.

However, UNESCO observed in their 2008 report on Nigeria that education in Nigeria is challenged by the persistence of lack of accurate reliable and timely data; lack of transparency in educational management and resource allocation; funding gaps and rational utilisation of resources in the education sector, among many other challenges. In more specific terms, the document revealed that there is no reliable information on the total annual expenditure on education by each tier of government in the last 40 years. This was attributed to: (a) the dearth of reliable records of expenditure, especially at the state level; and (b) the multiplicity of accounting systems across the 36 states of the federation. This multiplicity of accounting systems, in UNESCO's opinion, makes nonsense of any effort at collecting, collating and analysing financial records. Table 3 shows recurrent expenditure by the federal government of Nigeria from 2000-2011 as documented by the Central Bank of Nigeria in relation to education.

Table 3. Federal Government Recurrent Expenditure (N million)

Year	Total Recurrent Expenditure	Recurrent Expenditure on Education	% of Education to total Recurrent Expenditure
2000	461,600.00	57,956.64	12.56
2001	579,300.00	39,882.60	6.88
2002	696,800.00	80,530.88	11.56
2003	984,300.00	64,782.15	6.58
2004	1,110,643.60	76,527.65	6.89
2005	1,321,229.99	82,797.11	6.27
2006	1,390,101.90	119,017.97	8.56
2007	1,589,269.80	150,779.27	9.49
2008	2,117,362.00	163,977.47	7.74
2009	2,127,971.50	137,156.62	6.45
2010	3,109,378.51	170,770.56	5.49
2011	2,214,513.33	335,837.89	10.13

Source: CBN Statistical Bulletin (2000-2011) in Oseni (2012).

The table also shows that federal government's recurrent expenditure pattern on education between 2000 and 2011 was rather inconsistently wavy and unpredictable. This may be due to the economic and security challenges of the period under review. The twelve year period from 2000 to 2011 was greatly disturbed by armed turbulence in the Niger Delta region with massive destruction of oil pipelines (which is the nation's economic main stay) as well as other security challenges in the northern region that closely followed the quelling of the Niger Delta crisis. This security situation had great adverse effect on economic growth in the country. The extent of financial set

back suffered by the education sector in relation to national recurrent expenditure is reflected in table 4.

Table 4. Growth Rate of Nigeria's Annual Recurrent Expenditure in Education (2000-2011)

Year	Education Recurrent Expenditure	Growth Rate (%)
2000	57,956.64	-
2001	39,882.60	-31.19
2002	80,530.88	101.92
2003	64,782.15	-19.56
2004	76,527.65	18.13
2005	82,797.11	8.19
2006	119,017.97	43.75
2007	150,779.27	26.69
2008	163,977.47	8.75
2009	137,156.62	-16.36
2010	170,770.56	24.51
2011	335,837.89	96.66

Source: CBN Statistical Bulletin (2000-2011) in Oseni (2012)

Table 4 shows much inconsistency in the national funding of education. It shows poor consideration of the continuous increase in the demand for education of good quality. This is in spite of the expansion of the free education programme to include junior secondary education. It also negates the importance of relevant changes in the formal school curriculum to accommodate socio-economic changes in the global community. However, the improvement in the national budgetary allocation of 400.15 billion naira in the 2012 budget may seem to show a silver lining in the cloud of poor funding of education but it was only 8.43% of total national budget. The expenditure of 82% of this allocation on recurrent budgetary items (Kupoluyi, 2012) indicates a negation of the importance of infrastructural development in the provision of education as a social service on one hand. On the other hand, the 18% of this allocation that remained for capital projects and miscellaneous items was an indication of the gross inadequacy of national funding of the education sector.

The 2013 national budgetary allocation to education was one that put smiles on the faces of virtually all interest groups in education, except the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which felt that adequate provision was not made for the improvement of university education in Nigeria. The 2013 national budgetary allocation of 426.53 billion naira to the education sector from a total national budget of 4.92 trillion naira was applauded by many, because it was the first time that the funding of education was placed in the top priority list by federal government. The 2013 national budget on education seemed huge compared to previous allocations to the sector, but it was only 8.67% of the total national budget for 2013. Considering also that the national inflation rate had dropped to a single digit of about 8.6 as at May 2013, as reported by the Central Bank of Nigeria on national network news; this budget really reflected a considerable improvement in the funding of education.

The sore and painful spot on this huge allocation to education was that the national currency (the naira) was still very weak in relation to major international currencies like the British pound, the US dollar and the Euro. This weakness in the international purchasing power of the naira made the huge allocation of 426.53 billion naira a far cry from the actual requirement of the education sector in 2013. This is because the sector depends greatly on imported facilities for the

teaching and development of courses in environmental studies, information and communication technology programmes (ICT), E-training and other modern technology based subjects that have been introduced into the formal school curriculum to keep it abreast of international best practices.

Conclusion

Education is financially insatiable because the human population is on a continuous growth trend and new technologies are also evolving and need to be transmitted in schools to improve on human capacity necessary for economic growth. The maintenance of an equal level of growth in the meaningful allocation of fund to public education lies in the effective monitoring and proper documentation of trends in population growth; changes in national literacy level; changes in national education curriculum; and the existing level of qualified teaching personnel for the various levels of education. The funding of free education programmes in Nigeria continues to suffer financial setbacks because adequate consideration is not given to the documentation of vital demographic information in the planning of education. This is further compounded by the dependence of the country on imported educational resources which further heightens the cost of public education due to the weakness of the national currency (the naira) against major international currencies.

Recommendations

This paper makes the following recommendations for the purpose of achieving effective and meaningful funding of free education programmes in Nigeria.

(1) The issue of adequacy of government funding of education is hinged basically on insufficient information resulting from poor data collection and poor management of vital information. The dearth of reliable demographic information will be resolved if more financial and material support is devoted to the collection, collation, analysis and documentation of vital demographic information relating to birth rate, infant mortality rate and school age population. Properly documenting this information in the print and electronic media is therefore strongly recommended as it will help in the generation of a reliable data base that can help improve on the level of accuracy in the projection of school enrolment and fund requirement, especially for free basic education programmes. This is critical to the management of fund in the provision of education as a social service by government.

(2) The weakness of the naira against major international currencies like the British pound, the US dollar and the Euro necessitates a reduction in the reliance of the education sector on imported instructional resources. This paper recommends that more emphasis be placed on the use of locally produced education resources, especially in public schools, in the national education policies and practices. When this is backed with increased efforts at technological transfer directed at developing educational resources for programmes that suffer visible shortfalls in resource availability, the cost of providing education as a social service will be greatly reduced in the long run. The amount of money that would have been spent on imported educational resources can then be put to use in building more schools to accommodate more children; and to provide more resources to facilitate education. In the long run, the problems of high level of illiteracy and all the associating ills will be greatly reduced.

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