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# POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY AND EDUCATION REFORMS IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

Poverty is a serious economic and social vice that afflicts its victim adversely. Poverty is so dynamic that it manifest in so many forms such as lack of income and productive assets that denies its victims sustainable livelihood, chronic hunger and malnutrition, homelessness lack of durable goods access to clean water, poor sanitation and diseases, lack of education, low life expectancy, social exclusion, high level of unemployment among others. Therefore poverty is a critical challenge that needs to be addressed urgently because of its devastating effects on human well being. it is against this backdrop that this paper intends to look at how educational reforms in Nigeria could be used as a strategy for poverty reduction. The paper argued that educational reforms could be channeled toward poverty reduction in the sense that education is valued as a source of economic progression and social mobility by increasing the value of efficiency of the labour force and thus improves economic growth. The paper concludes that this economic growth is expected to translate into higher income thereby lowering poverty levels. The paper also made some possible policy recommendations towards poverty reduction strategy using educational reforms.

**Keywords:** Poverty, Poverty Reduction, Strategy, Educational Reforms, Nigeria

## Introduction

Poverty is a multifaceted concept that includes social, economic and political elements. As a dynamic concept, poverty is changing and adapting according to consumption pattern, social dynamic and technological changes. (Ricardo, 2008). Poverty could be chromic /absolute or relative. Poverty is also seen as the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions. It said to exist when people lack the means to satisfy their basic needs. These basic needs constitute those needs that are necessary for survival.

United Nations sees poverty fundamentally as the inability of getting choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively is society, not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. This could extend to also mean insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, household and communities, susceptibility to violence and also living in marginal or fragile environment without access to clean water and sanitation (UNIFEM, 2005). In a nutshell, this definition implies relative deprivation of individuals, communities to basic necessities of life and as a result, it exposes its victims to danger and of course it dehumanizes its victims.



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World bank on the other hand defines poverty as a pronounced deprivation in well-being and comprises many dimensions. It may includes low income and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival and dignity. It also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice and sufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life ( World Bank, 2011) some of these basic determinants of well-being includes; adequate food, shelter, portable water health care, education and employment opportunities (Akintola and Yusuf, 2001).

Economic aspect of poverty focus on material needs which typically includes the necessities of daily living such as food, clothing, shelter, safe drinking water. Therefore in this sense poverty may be understood as a condition in which a person or community is lacking in the basic needs for a minimum standard of well-being and life particularly as a result of a persistent lack of income. An analysis of social aspect of poverty on the other hand tends to link conditions of scarcity to aspect of the distribution of resources and poverty in a society and recognizes that poverty may includes lack of access to information, education, health care or political power (silver, 1994).

Poverty therefore is a challenge that developing countries, Nigeria inclusive can overcome through among others good economics and social policies, innovations and efficient use of resources, investment in technological advancement, good governance and visionary leadership with the political will to prioritize the needs of the poor. These elements are vital in enabling the provision of schools, clinic, roads, electricity, soil nutrients and clean drinking water that are the basis not only for a life of dignity and health but also for economic productivity.

**THE CONCEPT OF POVERTY, POVERTY REDUCTION AND EDUCATIONAL REFORMS**

**POVERTY:** The conceptualization of poverty becomes necessary in order to identify the causes of poverty, measuring its extent and assessing progress towards its reduction. The world bank also sees poverty in terms of poverty line that are based on estimate of the cost of goods and services needed to meet the basic subsistence needs. The new poverty line is $2.15 person per day as updated by world bank in September, 2022. (www.worldbank.org). Thus the poor are regarded as those whose incomes is at or below specific poverty lines.

As earlier noted, poverty could be absolute or relative. Copenhagen declaration describes absolute poverty as a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, education and information. It depends not only an income but also an access to social services (www.un.ng) Similarly, one time president of the world bank Robert Mcnamara once described absolute poverty as a condition so limited by malnutrition, illiteracy, diseases, squalid surrounding, high infant mortality and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency.

Relative poverty on the other hand describes poverty as socially defined and dependent on social context, hence relative poverty is a measure of income inequality. In a nutshell, absolute poverty refers to the deprivation of basic human needs which commonly includes, food, water, sanitation, clothing, shelter and healthcare whereas relative poverty could be seen contextually as economic inequality in the location or society in which people live (World Bank, 2011).

**Poverty Reduction**: This is a set of measures both economic and humanitarian that are intended to permanently lift people out of poverty (wikipedia). Poverty reduction also involves improving the living conditions of people who are already poor.

**Educational Reforms:** This could be seen as the process of constantly renegotrating and restructuring the educational standards to reflects the ever evolving contemporary ideals of social, economic and political culture. It is done in order to bring education into alignment with a society's core values (ballotpedia). It is a term that is used to refer to the chronology of significant, systematic revision made to amend the educational legislation, standard methodology and policy affecting a nation's public school system to reflect the needs and values of contemporary society. Educational reforms has been pursed for a variety of specific reasons, but generally most reforms aim at redressing some societal ills such as poverty, gender or class based



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inequality or perceived in effectiveness. Therefore, educational reforms in general implies a continuous effort to modify and improve the institution of education.

**TYPES AND CAUSES OF POVERTY**

Various scholars have made attempt to classified poverty into different types among whom includes situational poverty, generational poverty, absolute poverty, relative poverty, rural and urban poverty. However, in whatever way one may look at poverty it could conveniently be classified either as absolute or relative poverty of which it has been highlighted and discussed earlier in this work.

Common root causes of poverty may include among others the following:

i. **Lack of good jobs:** This occurs when you don't have a good job, you aren't getting a good income.
ii. **Lack of education:** Without education, people aren't able to better their situation.
iii. **Social injustice:** People who are victims of social injustice struggle with getting a good education, the right job opportunities and access to resources that can lift them out of poverty.
iv. **Warfare/Conflict:** Conflict has a huge impact on poverty. In times of war, productivity suffers and virtually most economic activity experiences set back.
v. **Weather/climate change:** Climate change could cause drought, floods and severe storms. All these are likely causative agents of poverty.
vi. **Lack of food and water:** Without access to basic essentials like food and water, its impossible to get out of poverty's circle.
vii. **Lack of government support:** If a government fails to meet the needs of the poor, the poor will mostly likely remain or stay in poverty.

**CAUSES OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

Poverty is not just a state of being poor and people do not just become poor. This means that some factors are responsible for enhancement or that perpetuate poverty. Causes of poverty in Nigeria are multifaceted and it cut across various factors including governance issues, insecurity, weak and undiversified sources of economic growth, lack of economic infrastructures as well as poor or unequal access to education, healthcare and basic services among others.

Poor access to education is one of the major causes of poverty in Nigeria. Research shows that one in every five of the world's out of school children is a Nigerian (daily trust, 2021). It is to be noted that there is an intrinsic link between education and wealth and thus those who are not educated are more likely to be economically disempowered. Corruption is also seen as one of the major causes of poverty in Nigeria. It manifest in many ways, but notably through embezzlement of public funds that are supposed to be used for the benefit of all to the benefit of few individuals. According to Wikipedia in 2018, Nigeria ranked 144$^{th}$ in the 180 countries listed in the transparency international corruption index.

**EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN NIGERIA**

Overtime, as the needs and values of society changes, altitude towards public education also changes. The meaning and education methods has to change through debates over what content or experiences result in an educated individuals or educated society. A consistent theme of reforms includes the idea that large systematic changes to educational standard will produce social returns in citizen's health, wealth and well-being.

Considering education as an economic growth and well being of the people, the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended in section 18 (1), (2) and (3) guarantees access to education at various levels. It states that;

i. Government shall direct its policy toward ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.
ii. Government shall promote science and technology.


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iii. Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy and to this end, government shall as and when practicable provide;
iv. Free compulsory and universal primary education.
v. Free secondary education
vi. Free university education
vii. Free adult literacy programme

However, section 18 (3) emphasizes that free education is provided "as and when practicable at all levels. Perhaps the question one may ask is when would it be possible or practicable for government to provide free education at all levels in Nigeria? And what hinders its implementation.

The federal government in its attempt to reform the educational sector overtime has come up with various reforms and incentives to deal with the education problems. These includes the universal basic education (UBE), Education tax safe initiative, teacher professional development (TPD) programme National education policy, public private sector participation programme, conditional cash transfer and most recently the federal government pronouncement on the introduction of student loan scheme that is expected to takeoff this year.

As laudable as some of these policies are, the initiatives at best have had minimal positive effects on our educational sector so far. For instance, although Nigeria has set up vocational training programme both in the formal 6,3,3 education system as well as state governments and civil societies facilitated programmes, its impact is limited. This is because the programmes is not widespread, lack permeability and the programmes are not standardized in delivery, similarly the lack of an overarching initiatives focused on skills acquisition in the Nigerian education system limits its impact on poverty reduction (premium times, May 2023).

To collaborate this dismal effect of educational reforms, Dakuku Peter side wrote in premium times newspaper, May, 8, 2003 and lamented that Nigerian universities are plagued by the poor quality of instruction and learning leading to generation of unemployable graduates because they need more skills, better cognitive abilities and further critical thinking capabilities. He also noted that this gap can be traced to the quality of our basic education which is under the purview of our local government (premium times, May 8, 2023)

**EDUCATIONAL REFORMS AS A TOOL FOR POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA.**

Poverty has been associated for instance with poor health, low level of education or skills, and inability to work, high rate of disruption or disorderly behaviours and improvidence. It is against this backdrop that education as a poverty reduction strategy remains an imperative.

Empirical evidence suggest that education drives long-term economic growth, spurs innovation, strengthen institutions and fosters social cohesion. Education can directly work to reduce poverty through promoting inclusiveness strengthen communities engagement and using vocational education as a spring to and for development.

Educational reforms in Nigeria could be channeled to serve as a tool for poverty reduction in the sense that human capital in the form of education is even more important determinant of economic growth than physical capital (Paul and Wells, 2009). In educational reforms, vocational education for instance should be given priority among other level of education the elevation of the statues of vocational training will allow young and old to acquire the benefits of skills development in the short term through a flexible program in order to ensure that the skills supplied within the communities marched local demands.

The universal basic education adopted in Nigeria can play some roles in preparing youth for basic academic skills and perhaps many trade skills as well as apprenticeship, clearly build needed trade skills. For instance in Nigeria, it is urged that the agricultural sector is the highest employer of labour, therefore if modest amount of cash and land can be combined with a modicum of agricultural skills, subsistence can give way towards modest societal wealth and thus poverty reduction.

Our educational reforms should be technology driven in order to use education as a poverty reduction strategy. It can be observed that food shortages were common before modern agricultural technology. Closely related to this, is the fact that the dawn of the industrial revolution led to high economic growth eliminating or reducing mass poverty in what is now considered as the developed world. All these were achieved through educational reforms of which Nigeria can toy the same line.

The educational reforms should also been structured such that curriculum reforms needs to be championed by reviewing and updating the curriculum to ensure that it is appropriate and responsive to the needs of the country and in large the global economy. There should be a shift from the emphasis on paper qualification to developing skills bases, analytical and independent thinking needed for mental and economic progress. This is an imperative because poverty reduction occurs as a result of overall economic growth.

As noted earlier, lack of good governance and corruption is a bane to poverty reduction and infact to some extent is a root cause of poverty in Nigeria. Therefore, our educational reforms should inculcate values of good governance because good governance can lead to economic development and poverty reduction countries like than land, Taiwan, Malaysia, South Korea, Vietnam are leading examples. These countries tend to have a strong government called " a hard state". These hard state have the will and authority to create and maintain policies that lead to long term development that helps their citizens not just the wealthy. For instance, multinational corporation are regulated so that they follow reasonable standard for pay and labour conditions, pay reasonable taxes to help develop the country and keep some of the profits in the country, reinvesting them to provide further development. (UNDR, 2000).

There are several efforts both by the federal and states government to reforms the educational sector in order to meet contemporary challenges. Some states like Edo, Lagos and Kwara Came up with Edo-Best, Eko-Excell and Kwara-learn respectively to address knotty Issues faced by their basic education system. As a matter of fact, so many states at one time or the other have declared a state of emergency on the educational sector. But the questions still remains how feasible are these policies in achieving their goals. Therefore, the task of continued educational reforms to align with contemporary issues should be the focus of government. As it is asserted that the primary determinates of a country's standard of living is how well it succeeds in developing and utilizing the skills and knowledge, and furthering the health and educating the majority of it population ( Roberts, 2011).

**CONCLUSION**

Education is a vital tool for poverty reduction in the sense that it is indispensable to economic development and poverty reduction. The paper therefore argued that educational reforms should be structured to encompasses emphasis on acquiring necessary skills, technological and vocational which are necessary for wealth creation and reduction of poverty in the society rather than just acquiring paper qualification. This is against the backdrop that education enhances one's employment opportunities.

However, employment is no guarantee of escaping poverty because increase in employment without a corresponding increase in productivity leads to a rise in the number of working poor. This is why there is need for promoting the creation of quality and not quantity in labour market policies.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

For effective use of educational reforms as a tool for poverty reduction in Nigeria, the paper wish to put forward the following possible policy recommendations.

- For a country that has a sprawling unemployed youth population, the emphasis should continuously be technical vocational education and training (TVET).
- Steps has to be taken to equip the youth with skills that can enable them fend for themselves. This task is the responsibility of the government, the private sector, religious institution as well as other principal stake holders in the society.
- The federal and state government must deliberately emphasis technical and vocational education as well as short term training that delivers new jobs or business with little capital.



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- Mere declaration of free education either at all levels or certain levels is not enough, it should be accompanied by other incentives like students loan scheme, conditional cash transfer, free feeding to enhance school enrollment and bridge educational gap or inequalities in the society.
- Educational reforms should be technology driven in order to meet both domestic and global economic needs.
- The value of good governance should be encouraged and pursued by political leaders because no matter how good these educational reforms are, bad governance can truncate it.

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