

Education as a Driving Force in the Sustainable Development and Growth of Nigeria

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21887210>

Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>For a given society not to sink it must fervently seek to develop and advance. Over time, it has been proved that the development of a society is proportionate to its level of education. Suffice it to say that a people can only grow to the level at which they know. In Nigeria, the sustainability of development has been hampered by the vile unwillingness of successive governments to adequately fund education. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has recommended that for any nation to experience sustainable growth and development it must allocate at least 4 to 6 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or 15 to 20 percent of its annual budget to the funding of education. This recommendation has obviously been derided by successive Nigerian governments who rather allocate such funds to frivolities and white elephant projects that do not directly impact the lives of the citizenry. Based on the findings, since 1999, the budgetary allocation to education has been dismal and discouraging, with that of 2026 pegged at 6.1 percent of the annual budget. Apparently, in the last twenty seven (27) years, the budgetary allocation to education has witnessed either stagnation or declination, with a mean percentage of 7.68 percent. The study also unearths other issues bedevilling the education sector such as corruption, out-of-school children, demotivated teachers, and insecurity. The discourse concludes that for Nigeria to experience sustainable development and growth the education sector must be adequately funded and the funds expended on the infrastructure projects for which they have been earmarked.</i> Keywords: Sustainability; Education; Development; Budgetary Allocation; Nigeria; UNESCO.
Received: 12-06-2026	
Accepted: 15-07-2026	
Published: 11-08-2026	
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Citation: Osieka Osinimu Alao, & Amase Emmanuel Lanior. (2026). Education as a driving force in the sustainable development and growth of Nigeria. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(8), 47-51.	

Introduction

Education is the bedrock of the society. It comprises the impartation of knowledge, enlightenment, refining and liberating the mind, acquiring and polishing skill sets, learning and imbibing morals, codes and conducts, et cetera. According to Verma, Doharey and Verma, education's ultimate purpose is to "contribute to the cognitive development of an individual, the advancement of society, and to make a significant contribution to social, economic, and political development" (2023, p. 1). In fact, the merits of education are countless, but its terminus ad quem is the emancipation of the human mind. That is, no society can be emancipated beyond its level of knowledge. Hence, the development of any society is dependent on its

educational level. Suffice it to say that in any given society, there is a directly proportional relationship between education and development—the greater the level of quality education, the greater its level of sustainable development and growth.

It is impossible for any society to experience sustainable development and growth devoid of education's pivotal role. In Nigeria, the pertinence of education has been undermined by the political elite whose focus is entrenched in frivolities and funfair. Successive Nigerian governments have sidelined the education sector as reflected in the emaciated yearly budgetary allocations. This wanton neglect of the impetus of education by the

Nigerian government has fostered a viral decadence in the education sector vis-a-vis the development and growth of the nation. Hence, the education sector is riddled with a cornucopia of challenges such as poor and dilapidated infrastructure, unconducive learning and research environment, epileptic curricula, demotivated teachers, and shortchanged students. All these are detrimental to the sustainable development and growth of the society.

There is no gainsaying education plays a key role in the sustainable growth and development of any nation. The educational sector of any nation that desires sustainable growth and development requires proper funding in order to propel the transformation of its citizens into viable human capital. This is why United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has proposed that for a nation to adequately grow and develop it must allocate at least 4 to 6 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or 15 to 20 percent of its annual budget to the funding of education. Hence, this research unearths how successive Nigerian governments have either adhered to this proposition or flouted it, and its consequent impact on the sustainable growth and development of the Nigerian state.

Furthermore, Nigeria is lagging behind on all fronts of societal development and growth due to a plethora of quagmires plaguing the education sector. One such quagmire is the country's entrapment in the maze of widespread illiteracy. Statistics show that the illiteracy rate stands at about 30 percent (Statista, 2026). This is outrageous and overwhelming considering the clamour for the much-needed economic and human capital development. Additionally, Nigeria is conspicuously overridden by the menace of out-of-school children, and most recently, the surge of insecurity targeted at schools, which bring to the fore questions bordering on the assuredness of the nation's future. Thus, in light of UNESCO's benchmark, this essay explicates these issues in tandem with the sustainable development and growth of the Nigerian state. This research aims to examine the role of funding in the education sector and its impact on the sustainable growth and development of Nigeria, while the objectives are to: (i) draw attention to this pertinent ingredient of sustainable national growth and development; (ii) show with available data that education has been grossly underfunded over the years; and (iii) advocate for the increased funding of the education sector by the Nigerian government and policy makers in order to attain sustainable development and growth.

Literature Review

Education has been described as vital to the growth and development of any society (McGrath, 2010, pp. 237-238). Its terminus ad quem is the emancipation and

refining of the human mind. A country's pool of human resources can only be viable when its citizens have been subjected to quality education. The quality of a nation's human resource is ultimately responsible for its sustainable economic, social, and political development. Harbison (1973, p. 363) opines that human resources constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of a nation and that a nation that is plagued with underdevelopment has failed to nurture and utilise the skills and knowledge of its people which can only be achieved via formal education. This stance is also shared by Todaro and Smith who assert that education is "fundamental to the broader notion of expanded human capabilities that lie at the heart of the meaning of development" (2011, p. 359).

Ololube, Dudufa, Uriah and Agbor posit that education is "one of the most important inputs for the well-being of any society" and "a powerful instrument of social progress without which neither an individual nor a nation can attain the growth that is necessary for development" (2013, p. 112). The potency of education in the development of any nation cannot be overemphasised because it has been proved that education is a catalyst for societal growth. Education is an objective and component of development and an investment in education is essential for development (Power, p. 149). For a nation to experience sustainable growth and development, its education sector must witness substantial investment. The human capital development of any nation is tied to its quality education because it is the citizens who drive growth and development in diverse sectors. Nigeria continues to wallow in underdevelopment because its education sector has, over the years, been underfunded by successive Nigerian governments.

Studies have shown that there is an unwavering correlation between education and funding in Nigeria (Nwafor et al., 2015; Amadi & Nwogu, 2023; Ohaegbulem & Chijioke, 2023). Nwafor, Uchendu and Akani opine that, "The level of success recorded by the educational sector has been closely linked with the availability of resources" and "funding has been identified as an indispensable instrument" (2015, p. 119). The strategy of funding will no doubt assist in providing the basic resources needed for teaching and learning both in terms of quality and quantity (Nwafor et al., 2015, p. 119). According to Amadi and Nwogu, the "inadequate funding of education limits the ability of institutions to provide the necessary infrastructure, learning materials, and teacher training needed to deliver quality education" (2023, p. 68). Similarly, Ohaegbulem and Chijioke (2023) assert that Nigeria's underfunded education system is an inhibitor to the sustainability of its growth and development. Suffice it to say the sustainable growth and development of Nigeria

is tied to quality education which can only be achieved through adequate funding. Hence, this study investigates the interrelationship between education, funding, and Nigeria's sustainable development and growth.

Methodology

This study deploys a computational analysis of Nigeria's annual budgetary allocation to education based on data sourced from the Budget Office of the Federation, which operates under the Federal Ministry of Budget and

Economic Planning. The analysis is carried out in tandem with UNESCO's proposition that 15 to 20 percent of a nation's budget should be allocated to education for it to experience sustainable development and growth. The analysis deliberately starts from 1999 which is the year Nigeria transitioned from a military to a democratic government. Table 1 shows the percentage of the budgetary allocation to the education sector from 1999 to 2026.

Table 1: Percentage of the Budgetary Allocation to Education (1999-2026)

Year	% Allocation	Year	% Allocation
1999	11.12	2013	8.70
2000	8.36	2014	10.60
2001	7.00	2015	9.50
2002	5.90	2016	6.10
2003	1.83	2017	7.38
2004	10.50	2018	7.03
2005	9.30	2019	7.20
2006	11.00	2020	6.70
2007	8.09	2021	5.60
2008	13.00	2022	5.40
2009	6.54	2023	5.30
2010	6.40	2024	6.39
2011	1.69	2025	4.71
2012	10.00	2026	6.10

Discussion

Budgetary Allocation to the Education Sector

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has recommended that for any nation to experience sustainable growth and development, it must allocate at least 4 to 6 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or 15 to 20 percent of its annual budget to the funding of education. Since 1999, this recommendation has been despised by successive Nigerian governments who have not placed any prestige on education and disregarded the emergency status of the education sector. Table 1 shows that the budgetary allocation to the education sector from 1999 to 2026 has witnessed either stagnation or declination, which is an indicator of the Nigerian government's unwillingness to address the unprecedented festering in the sector.

From Table 1, it can be deduced that the percentage of the budgetary allocation to education from 1999 to 2026 is way below the 15 to 20 percent benchmark stipulated by UNESCO. 2008 with 13 percent witnessed the highest percentage of the budgetary allocation to education, while 2011 with 1.69 percent was the lowest. In about twenty seven (27) years, the mean percentage of Nigeria's budgetary allocation to education is 7.68 percent, which

falls short of the 15 to 20 percent benchmark. These figures reveal that the education sector is in grave danger due to persistent underfunding. Funds meant to be channelled to the sector to drive developmental strides are diverted elsewhere. These funds are supposed to be appropriated for education infrastructure projects such as building research centres and world-class laboratories and studios, funding cutting-edge researches and innovations, providing conducive and well-equipped learning environments, acquiring teaching and learning materials, et cetera. In sum, the underfunding of the education sector only means that the economic and human capital development of the nation is stalled and hence sustainable development is disrupted.

Corruption and the Execution and Maintenance of Education Infrastructure Projects

Nigeria ranks as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. No sphere of the Nigerian polity is void of this hydra-headed monster called corruption. The education sector is not exempted; in fact, it is one of the most plagued. Funds allocated for the execution of education projects and the purchase of equipment are pilfered by corrupt government officials. Impunity is rife and the

dearth of accountability makes it easy for these corrupt practices to go on unchecked. Also, funds earmarked for the maintenance of education infrastructure are cornered by kleptomaniac individuals in the education sector. Hence, many infrastructure projects such as classrooms, laboratories, studios, research centres, student hostels, and so on, are unconducive, dilapidated and, in the worst-case scenario, collapsed.

The Epidemic of Out-of-School Children

Nigeria is riddled with a multitude of out-of-school children. In fact, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Nigeria has the most out-of-school children globally with about 18.3 million (Agwam, 2024). This is alarming considering that children are the future of the nation. In northern Nigeria these out-of-school children are mostly almajiri who roam the streets begging for alms and are susceptible to all sorts of dangers and abuse. These children ought to be in school acquiring the basic education required to progress to advanced stages on the education ladder in order to secure the future of the country. A nation cannot experience sustainable development if its future generations are not endowed with the quality education required to propel sociopolitical and economic transformations.

Demoralised and Demotivated Teachers

Taking a forensic look at the education sector requires highlighting the role and peculiarity of teachers who are the heartbeat of education. Teachers are tasked with curating and transmitting knowledge from generation to generation via instituted educational systems such as the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. This enormous and vital task requires that teachers are well remunerated, but this is hardly the case. In Nigeria, there is widespread demoralisation and demotivation eating into the wellbeing of teachers. Due to the underfunding of education, most teachers are underpaid which in turn depletes their enthusiasm for their jobs. The disregard for teachers by the Nigerian government has engendered incessant industrial actions such as the endless cycles of strikes. In addition, many schools are understaffed, which means the available teachers are overburdened with excessive workloads. This deters maximum functionality and output. Therefore, for Nigeria to bask in sustainable development and growth, teachers, who are propellers of education, must be adequately remunerated for their vital services towards nation-building.

The Surge of Insecurity Targeted at Schools

Recently, there has been a surge of insecurity targeted at Nigeria's educational institutions. Schools have been assailed and forced to close for long periods, which is unhealthy for learning. Teachers and students have been

assaulted, maimed, kidnapped and held hostage. Allegedly, there seems to be a coordinated attack on the nation's educational system—a deadly ploy to undermine the place and prestige of education. This sustained propensity of violence in the education sector is hampering the growth and development of the nation. There are reports of low enrolment in regions prone to terrorist attacks (Taiwo, 2025). A nation that cannot secure its schools cannot secure its future.

Shortchanged Students and the Future of Nigeria

Human capital development is the investment in the training and education of the citizenry that yields progress and achievements in all sectors of the society (Uzoh, 2012). An underfunded education sector, coupled with endemic corruption, implies that students, who are on the receiving end, are shortchanged. The dearth of funds equates the dearth of essential educational infrastructure required for adequate human capital development. Hence, students do not get sufficient training due to the lack of essential facilities and equipment. Additionally, the paramountcy of the learning environment cannot be overemphasised. Students cannot properly assimilate in unconducive learning environments which consequently affects their output. Oftentimes, classrooms and lecture theatres are overcrowded, making it impossible for the teachers to effectively monitor their students. Thus, these vices champion generations of intellectually-handicapped individuals because the education process is truncated. For instance, the university system is always allegedly accused of producing “half-baked” graduates due to the underfunding of the education sector and incessant strike actions by lecturers.

Conclusion

The dereliction of education in any given society is a pointer at damnation. The Nigerian government's perpetual underfunding of the education sector breeds a chain reaction of decadence in the strides of nation-building. The government's unwillingness to meet UNESCO's 15 to 20 percent benchmark of the annual budgetary allocation to the education sector poses a threat to sustainable development and growth. The political class's apathy towards education is glaring wherein political officeholders rather revel in self-aggrandisement instead of brainstorming on strategies towards nation-building.

Corruption is another pitfall in the education sector. Funds budgeted for the execution and maintenance of educational infrastructure projects and the procurement of equipment are pilfered by government officials. Children are the future of a nation, but how can Nigeria that alarmingly has about 19 million out-of-school children

boast of sustainable development and growth? More so, the education sector is riddled with underpaid teachers who, as a result, are excruciatingly demoralised and demotivated to give anything close to their best. Additionally, the spate of violence targeted at schools impedes the educational progress of future generations.

Consequently, based on the findings, the following are some recommendations. First, the Nigerian government should increase the yearly budgetary allocation to the education sector to tally with UNESCO's stipulation of 15 to 20 percent. Second, checks and balances should be put in place to curb the corrupt practices in the education sector so that funds earmarked for projects must be accordingly expended. Government officials should be at all times held accountable. Third, policies to eradicate the epidemic of out-of-school children should be enacted by the lawmakers and enforced by the relevant bodies. Fourth, teachers should be well remunerated in order to boost their enthusiasm. Lastly, the government should tackle insecurity targeted at schools in order to safeguard the nation's future. In sum, education is the fulcrum of human capital development; hence, the only way to sustainable development and growth is to educate the citizenry in order to reap social, political and economic emancipation. Otherwise, with the teeming army of out-of-school children, Nigeria is indeed sitting on a time bomb. Nigeria can only enjoy sustainable development when its citizens are emancipated, and education, most importantly, must be placed on the front burner if such lofty heights are to be attained.

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