



Assessing Progress and Challenges in Achieving SDG 4 in Nigeria, 2015-2024

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ABSTRACT

The attempt at the alignment of the Nigerian educational system with SDG 4 has been marred by multifaceted challenges that have impeded its overall state. Hence, this study assessed the progress and challenges in achieving SDG 4 in Nigeria, 2015-2024. Two research objectives were established from which two research questions were posed. The study was anchored on the human capital theory. The cross-sectional research design was used for the study and a sample of seven hundred and ninety-two (792) respondents was drawn for the study using the simple random sampling technique. To collect data from respondents, a structured questionnaire was used. The data obtained were analysed using the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, regression and ANOVA statistical tools. The data analysis showed the the quality of education in Nigeria has no significantly improved in response to SDG 4. Also, there challenges like inadequate funding, infrastructure deficits and teacher shortages, among others, inhibit the attainment of SDG 4. Based on the findings, it was recommended that Delta and Anambra states government should invest more funds into the educational sector to facilitate the acquisition of relevant facilities to aid the teaching and learning processes and there should be an efficient and effective evaluation board set up to ensure the selection of the most qualified candidates for teaching jobs.

Keywords: Progress, Challenges, SDG 4 and Nigerian Educational System

Introduction

According to Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2017), the SDGs were developed as a comprehensive global framework, aiming to address pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges around the world by 2030. Goal 4 of the SDGs is centered on the attainment of quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for everyone, irrespective of gender, race, social class, religious affiliation, etc. (United Nations, 2015). In a pluralistic country like Nigeria with a vast population and diverse socio-economic landscapes, the integration of the SDGs into the educational system has been regarded as a critical step toward facilitating inclusive and sustainable development. On this note, the Ministry of Education in Nigeria has attempted to enhance the educational system to become more conducive and inclusive for all citizens (Agomuo & Nwosu, 2020).

Despite this attempt by the Ministry of Education in Nigeria, it is not yet clear if remarkable achievements have been made over the years. Hence, the rationale of the for the study was the fact that there is an ongoing deterioration in the Nigerian educational system, exemplified by poor educational facilities and the lack thereof, poor salary structure, and insufficient and ineffective student welfare programmes (Okebukola & Jegede, 2019). This has raised eyebrows on how well Goal 4 integration has impacted the Nigerian education system. It is against this background that the study examined the nexus between the two variables. The attempt at the alignment of the Nigerian educational system with SDG 4 has been marred by multifaceted challenges that have impeded its overall state. Despite the efforts by the Nigerian government to bridge educational disparities and promote inclusive and quality learning, several fundamental challenges like inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, disparities in access to education (between the rich and poor, male and female, rural and urban areas, etc.) and curriculum misalignment with a rapidly evolving job market demands (UNESCO; 2017).

Similarly, insufficient funding, bureaucratic inefficiencies and a dearth of comprehensive policy implementation have posed additional challenges to the effective integration of the SDGs within the Nigerian educational framework. Being the most populous country in Africa and with the numerous resources available, the achievement of SDG 4 appears to be a must for Nigeria. This is because implications of not achieving SDG 4 will include a large population of poorly educated people and an unproductive workforce that will in turn impact the productivity of the country negatively. It is against this background that the study assessed the progress and challenges of achieving SDG 4 in Nigeria from 2015-2024.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, the educational system in Nigeria has largely deteriorated and reduced to a collection of organisations that merely hand out certificates to students without impacting them with the requisite knowledge to fully function in the society and at the workplace. According to Sanusi and Owoyele (2016), many government-owned schools in the country are bedeviled by the lack of adequate funding, infrastructural deficits and shortage of qualified teachers. It must be stated that while public schools in Nigeria are the most impacted by the deterioration of the Nigerian educational system, schools in the private sector are not an exception. This is because apart from a handful of private schools, many others are highly underfunded and lack the resources and expertise to play their educational role. With SDG 4 in view, the state of education in Nigeria has become a major source of concern. The goal was supposed to serve as a catalyst for emphasising the need for collective efforts to promote prosperity, protect the planet, and ensure that no one is left behind (SDG 4, 2018; UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), 2016). One crucial facet of this global initiative is the transformation of educational systems, which play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of nations and fostering inclusive societies. The adoption of this goal in the Nigerian context has not generated a significant impact on the Nigerian educational system at the primary, secondary or tertiary level. Several reasons have been attributed to this phenomenon such as inadequate funding, bureaucratic inefficiencies, a dearth of comprehensive policy implementation, and poor infrastructure, among others (Robert & Dode, 2018). This situation if not properly addressed could further worsen and pose a challenge to the development of Nigeria. In line with foregoing, this study specifically examined the impact of SDG 4 on quality education in Anambra and Delta states and the challenges inhibiting its achievement.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives were to:

1. Find out if the quality of education in Nigeria improved in response to SDG 4 from 2015 to 2024; and
2. Investigate the obstacles inhibiting the attainment of SDG 4 in the Nigerian educational system from 2015 to 2024.

Research Questions

In line with the objectives, the following questions were posed to guide the study:

1. What is the quality of education in Nigeria in response to SDG 4?
2. What are the obstacles inhibiting the attainment of SDG 4 in the Nigerian educational system?

SDG 4 and the Quality of Education in Nigeria

According to Maduekwe et al. (2017), when examining SDG 4, which focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all, and its implications for Nigeria, it becomes apparent that the quality of education is a critical aspect that requires attention. One of the key elements of quality education is a curriculum that is relevant, up-to-date, and responsive to the needs of learners and society. In Nigeria, there have been efforts to review and update the curriculum to make it more aligned with global standards, as well as to incorporate local context and needs. However, challenges remain in ensuring that the curriculum is effectively implemented and adapted to the diverse learning environments across the country. Quality education depends largely on the quality of teachers. In Nigeria, there are concerns about the adequacy of teacher training programs and ongoing professional development opportunities. Many teachers lack the necessary pedagogical skills, subject knowledge, and support systems to deliver high-quality instruction. Addressing these gaps through improved training, mentoring, and continuous learning initiatives is essential for enhancing the quality of education in Nigeria (Igbuzor, 2006).

Effective assessment and evaluation mechanisms are crucial for measuring learning outcomes, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring accountability in the education system. However, there are challenges in Nigeria related to the design, administration, and use of assessments. Issues such as exam malpractice, inadequate monitoring, and lack of standardized assessment tools undermine the credibility and reliability of evaluation processes, impacting the overall quality of education. The quality of physical infrastructure and learning environments also significantly influences the quality of education. Many schools in Nigeria lack basic facilities such as classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and sanitation facilities, which affect the overall learning experience and outcomes. Improving infrastructure and creating conducive learning environments are essential for enhancing the quality of education and promoting student engagement and achievement (Olaniyi, 2014).

Achieving quality education requires effective governance structures and collaboration among various stakeholders. In Nigeria, there is a need for transparent and accountable governance mechanisms that prioritize education funding, set clear standards, and monitor progress towards quality education goals. Engaging stakeholders such as government agencies, education providers, civil society organizations, communities, and parents is essential for mobilizing resources, fostering partnerships, and driving positive change in the education sector. It must be stated that achieving SDG 4 in Nigeria requires a concerted effort to enhance the quality of education across all levels of the system. Olawuyi and Olusegun (2018) argued that addressing key challenges related to curriculum relevance, teacher training, assessment practices, infrastructure provision, inclusive education, and governance, Nigeria can improve learning outcomes, promote social and economic development, and unlock the full potential of its human capital.

Challenges facing the Nigerian Educational System

The Nigerian educational system faces numerous challenges that hinder its ability to provide quality education and meet the needs of the country's growing population.

- a. **Inadequate Funding:** One of the most pressing challenges is the chronic underfunding of the educational sector. Despite government commitments to allocate a significant portion of the national budget to education, funding levels often fall short of meeting the sector's needs. This leads to insufficient resources for infrastructure development, teacher training, curriculum improvement, and provision of educational materials (Olawuyi, & Olusegun, 2018).
- b. **Infrastructure Deficits:** Many schools in Nigeria lack basic infrastructure such as classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and sanitation facilities. This inadequate infrastructure negatively impacts the learning environment and limits students' access to quality education.
- c. **Teacher Shortages and Quality:** Nigeria faces a shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in remote and rural areas. Additionally, there are issues with the quality of teaching due to factors such as inadequate training, low salaries, and poor working conditions (Oleribe, & Taylor-Robinson, 2016). The result is a lack of motivation among teachers and subpar learning experiences for students.
- d. **Curriculum Relevance:** The curriculum in Nigerian schools is often criticized for being outdated and disconnected from the needs of society and the job market. There is a need for curriculum reform to make education more relevant, practical, and aligned with the demands of the 21st century.
- e. **Security Challenges:** In regions affected by conflict and insecurity, such as the northeast, access to education is severely disrupted. Schools are targeted by insurgents, leading to the closure of educational institutions and displacement of students and teachers, depriving children of their right to education.
- f. **Examination Malpractice and Corruption:** The prevalence of examination malpractice and corruption undermines the integrity and credibility of the education system. Practices such as cheating, bribery, and favoritism erode trust in the educational institutions and devalue academic achievements (Robert & Dode, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

The study will be anchored on the Human Capital Theory.

- **Human Capital Theory:** The human capital theory serves as the foundation for understanding the role of education in fostering human capital development with an emphasis on the significance of investment in education and training for individual and societal advancement (Becker, 1964). The human capital theory, as articulated by economist Gary Becker, posits that education and training are essential investments that contribute to the development of human capital, thereby leading to individual and societal advancement (Beckett, 2013). Applying this theory to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Nigerian educational system sheds light on the importance of education in achieving sustainable development objectives. SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all, with a focus on lifelong learning opportunities. From a human capital perspective, investing in quality education is crucial for developing the knowledge, skills, and capabilities of individuals, thus enhancing their human capital. In Nigeria, improving the quality of education through initiatives such as curriculum reforms, teacher training programs, and infrastructure development contributes to the cultivation of human capital, which in turn supports the achievement of SDG 4. Investing in education as a determinant of health contributes to the development of human capital and supports sustainable development goals related to health and well-being. In a nutshell, the human capital theory underscores the importance of education as a driver of human capital development and societal advancement. By investing in quality education and training, Nigeria can cultivate the knowledge, skills, and capabilities of its population, thereby contributing to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and fostering sustainable development and prosperity for all.

Methodology

The study adopted the cross-sectional research design. The population of the study comprised staff of the formal education sector in Nigeria. For the study, a sample size of 792 was drawn using the simple random sampling technique. The simple random sampling technique is a technique in which the researcher gives all respondents an equal chance of being selected (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The sampling technique was applied through a multi-stage procedure. First, the states were divided according to their three senatorial zones (Delta North, Delta Central and Delta South, and Anambra North, Anambra Central and Anambra South). From the each of the three senatorial districts, the simple random sampling technique was used to select 4 tertiary institutions. The selection process is shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Sample Selection for Staff in Delta State

S/N	Senatorial Districts	INSTITUTION	Sample Size
		Delta State University, Abraka	34

1	Delta Central	Conarina School of Maritime & Transport Technology, Oria- Abraka	33
		Delta State College Of Health Technology, Ofuoma	33
		Michael and Cecilia Ibru University, Agbara-Otor	33
		Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba	33
		Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Ukwu	33
2	Delta North	Admiralty University of Nigeria, Ibusa	33
		Novena University, Kwale	33
		Delta State University of Science and Technology, Ozoro	33
		National Open University of Nigeria, Emevor	33
3	Delta South	Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun	33
		College of Education, Ejeba, Warri	34
Total		12 Institutions	398

Field Survey, 2024

Table 2: Sample Selection for Staff in Anambra State

S/N	Senatorial Districts	INSTITUTION	Sample Size
1	Anambra Central	Anambra State Polytechnic, Mgbakwu	34
		Madonna University, Okija	33
		Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	33
		Paul University, Awka	33
		Anambra State University, Igbariam	33
		Anambra State College of Health Technology, Obosi	33
2	Anambra North	Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze	33
		Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe	33
		College of Health Sciences, Okofia	33
		Federal University, Oko	33
3	Anambra South	Peter University, Achina-Onneh	33
		Tansian University, Umunya	34
Total		12 Institutions	398

Field Survey, 2024

The structured questionnaire titled, Assessment of the Progress and Challenges of Achieving SDG 4 in Nigeria, 2015-2024, was used as the main instrument of data collection. In line with the research questions, the questionnaire was divided into 2 Parts with closed-ended question that were derived from the themes of the objectives. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire was derived by subjecting it to face and content validity tests, and the test-re-test content reliability tests. A reliability coefficient of ≥ 0.76 was derived, which implies excellent reliability. The arithmetic mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the collected data.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the quality of education in Nigeria in response to SDG 4?

Table 3: Analysis of the Questionnaire's Part 1

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	792	3.00	5.00	2.6853	.5736
Q2	792	1.00	5.00	2.4619	.9871
Q3	792	1.00	5.00	2.0812	1.0269
Q4	792	1.00	5.00	2.6853	.6869
Q5	792	1.00	5.00	2.5685	.7154
Valid N (listwise)	792				

Field Survey, 2024

From the above computation, the respondents disagreed that the quality of education in Nigeria has improved as a result of initiatives aligned with SDG 4 (with a mean of 2.6853 and S.D of .5736, which implies a very low variability of responses), SDG 4 has been very effective in enhancing the quality of education in Delta and Anambra states (with mean of 2.4619 and S.D of .9871, which implies a very low variability of responses), SDG 4 initiatives have contributed to improvements in teaching standards and instructional quality in schools (with a mean of 2.0812 and S.D of 1.0269, which implies a low variability of responses), SDG 4 initiatives have contributed to improvements in teaching standards and instructional quality in schools (with a mean of 2.6853 and S.D of .6869, which implies a very low variability of responses), and they are satisfied with the progress made in improving the quality of education in Delta and Anambra states through SDG 4 initiatives (with a mean of 2.5685 and S.D of .7154, which implies a very low variability of responses).

Regression analysis of the quality of education in Nigeria in response to SDG 4

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	SDG 4	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Quality of Education

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.341 ^a	.263	.261	.2921

a. Predictors: (Constant), SDG 4

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11.927	5	10.848	3.310	.248 ^b
	Residual	9.769	787	.138		
	Total	21.696	792			

a. Dependent Variable: Quality of Education

b. Predictors: (Constant) SDG 4

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.

	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.289	.275		1.871	.123
SDG 4	.436	.057	.241	6.741	.248

a. Dependent Variable: Quality of Education

From the regression analysis, it can be seen that $R = .341$, which implies a poor correlation between the independent variable (SDG 4) and the dependent variable (Quality of Education). With $R\text{ Squared} = .263$ (which is lesser than $.5$) and $\text{Adjusted } R\text{ Square} = .261$, it can be said that the regression model is can moderately determine the relationship between SDG 4 and quality of education in Nigeria. Also, with a p-value of $.248$, the observed relationship is insignificant and with an F-ratio of 3.310 , it can be said that the predicted relationship between the analyzed variables is accurate. Under the the coefficients' table, the Sig. value of $.000$ is less than the acceptable Sig. value of $.248$. This implies that SDG 4 has had no significant impact on the quality of education in Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What are the obstacles inhibiting the attainment of SDG 4 in the Nigerian educational system?

Table 4: Analysis of the Questionnaire's Part 2

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q6	792	3.00	5.00	4.6853	.5736
Q7	792	1.00	5.00	4.4619	.9871
Q8	792	1.00	5.00	4.0812	1.0269
Q9	792	1.00	5.00	4.6853	.6869
Q10	792	1.00	5.00	4.5685	.7154
Valid N (listwise)	792				

Field Survey, 2024

From the above computation, the respondents agreed that inadequate funding is a significant obstacle hindering the attainment of SDG 4 in the Nigerian educational system (with a mean of 4.6853 and S.D of $.5736$, which implies a very low variability of responses), infrastructure deficits, such as inadequate classrooms, libraries, and sanitation facilities, pose challenges to achieving SDG 4 (with mean of 4.4619 and S.D of $.9871$, which implies a very low variability of responses), teacher shortages and quality issues impede progress toward SDG 4 goals in Delta and Anambra states (with a mean of 4.0812 and S.D of 1.0269 , which implies a low variability of responses), curriculum issues, such as outdated content and lack of relevance to real-world needs, hinder the attainment of SDG 4 in the Nigerian educational system (with a mean of 4.6853 and S.D of $.6869$, which implies a very low variability of responses), and the fact that security challenges, including conflict and insecurity in certain regions, significantly hinder progress towards achieving SDG 4 in Nigeria (with a mean of 4.5685 and S.D of $.7154$, which implies a very low variability of responses).

Regression analysis of the obstacles inhibiting the attainment of SDG 4 in the Nigerian educational system

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.594 ^a	.553	.536	.39867

a. Predictors: (Constant), Q10, Q9, Q8, Q7, Q6

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	20.063	1	8.144	87.246	.000 ^b
Residual	36.719	791	.146		
Total	56.782	792			

a. Dependent Variable: Attainment of SDG 4

b. Predictors: (Constant), Q10, Q9, Q8, Q7, Q6

Coefficients ^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.891	.408		7.090	.000
Q6	.234	.161	.250	6.458	.003
Q7	.126	.114	.231	14.106	.000
Q8	.089	.071	.170	9.200	.001
Q9	.143	.124	.183	12.158	.000
Q10	.167	.147	.222	8.136	.005

a. Dependent Variable: Attainment of SDG 4

The coefficient tables shows that the significance value of variable Q6 = .003, Q7 = .000, Q8 = .001, Q9 = .000 and Q10 = .005. This implies that inadequate funding, infrastructure deficits, such as inadequate classrooms, libraries, and sanitation facilities, teacher shortages, security challenges, etc. impede the attainment of SDG 4 in Delta and Anambra States.

Discussion of Findings

The data analysis showed that the quality of education has not significantly improved in Nigeria in response to SDG 4. From the analysis, it was revealed that the quality of education in Nigeria has not improved as a result of initiatives aligned with SDG 4. SDG 4 has been not been very effective in enhancing the quality of education in Delta and Anambra states and its initiatives have not contributed to improvements in teaching standards and instructional quality in schools. It has also not contributed to improvements in teaching standards and instructional quality in school and people are not satisfied with the progress made in improving the quality of education in the state through SDG 4 initiatives. The data analysis reveals a concerning trend - despite the implementation of SDG 4 initiatives, the quality of education in Nigeria, particularly in Delta and Anambra states, has not seen significant improvements. This is a stark contrast to the goal of SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The finding is corroborated by Olawuyi, and Olusegun (2018) and suggests that SDG 4 initiatives have fallen short in enhancing teaching standards and instructional quality in schools. This is alarming, as effective teaching is a critical factor in determining student outcomes. Moreover, the lack of progress in improving educational quality has led to widespread dissatisfaction among stakeholders.

Also, the data analysis showed that there are several obstacles inhibiting the attainment of SDG 4 in the Nigerian educational system. It was revealed that inadequate funding is a significant obstacle hindering the attainment of SDG 4 in the Nigerian educational system, infrastructure deficits, such as inadequate classrooms, libraries, and sanitation facilities, pose challenges to achieving SDG 4, teacher shortages and quality issues impede progress toward SDG 4 goals in Delta and Anambra states, teacher shortages and quality issues impede progress toward SDG 4 goals in Delta and Anambra states and the fact that security challenges, including conflict and insecurity in certain regions, significantly hinder progress towards achieving SDG 4 in Nigeria. The data analysis has shed light on several significant obstacles hindering the attainment of SDG 4 in Nigeria's educational system. Inadequate funding is a major challenge, limiting the country's ability to provide quality education for all. This lack of funding affects various aspects of education, including infrastructure development, teacher training, and resource allocation and also causes insufficient allocation of resources to support educational programs and initiatives. Inadequate classrooms, libraries, and sanitation facilities hinder the learning experience and shortages of qualified teachers and inadequate training impede progress toward SDG 4 goals. This is in line with the findings of Robert and Dode (2018), and it must be stated that these challenges are interconnected and can have a ripple effect on the overall quality of education.

Conclusion

Although attempts have been made by the government to achieve SDG 4, the efforts have not yielded the necessary results. The quality of education in Delta and Anambra States have not improved significantly in response to SDG 4. There are still infrastructural and technical deficits. Worthy of note is the gross underfunding of public schools in the states while the politicians live in affluence. The poor educational quality reflects in the productivity of the states and the overall development of Nigeria. This is why there are numerous development challenges in the country. Suffice to say that if this

situation is not swiftly addressed, the issues it will instigate a social, intellectual and economic crisis. In line with the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

- 1) Delta and Anambra states government should invest more funds into the educational sector to facilitate the acquisition of relevant facilities to aid the teaching and learning processes.
- 2) There should be an efficient and effective evaluation board set up to ensure the selection of the most qualified candidates for teaching jobs.
- 3) Government should address the challenge of insecurity in some parts of the state by providing and collaborating with security agencies to ensure safe learning environments, particularly in conflict-prone regions.

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