

POLICY BRIEF

September 2023

Investing in Education for National Development: Policy Priorities for Nigeria's New Administration

Sixtus C. Onyekwere

The progress and advancement of any given nation is significantly dependent on its human capital, which is cultivated through the [provision of high-quality basic education](#). This is established in the [definition of education](#), which links it to the stock of skills, competencies, and other productivity-enhancing characteristics. Thus, the prioritisation of basic educational policies that tackle significant learning challenges is imperative for propelling human capital advancement in Nigeria. [A study](#) has shown that prioritising the enhancement of foundational skills could potentially be a more economical strategy for promoting employability than previously recognised. [The study](#) indicates that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and other advanced forms of education may encounter difficulties in enhancing

the worth of education in the absence of foundational skills. Hence, it can be argued that directing significant energy and resources towards the reformation of TVET or higher education institutions may not yield the desired outcomes if students lack the fundamental prerequisites for effective learning.

These show that there is a strong possibility of improving living conditions over time in Nigeria if basic education is prioritised and the barriers to children's learning are removed. To eliminate these barriers to children's learning, the basic education system in Nigeria needs immediate, medium-term, and long-term reforms, which are proposed in this paper for the new administration to address (see Fig 1).

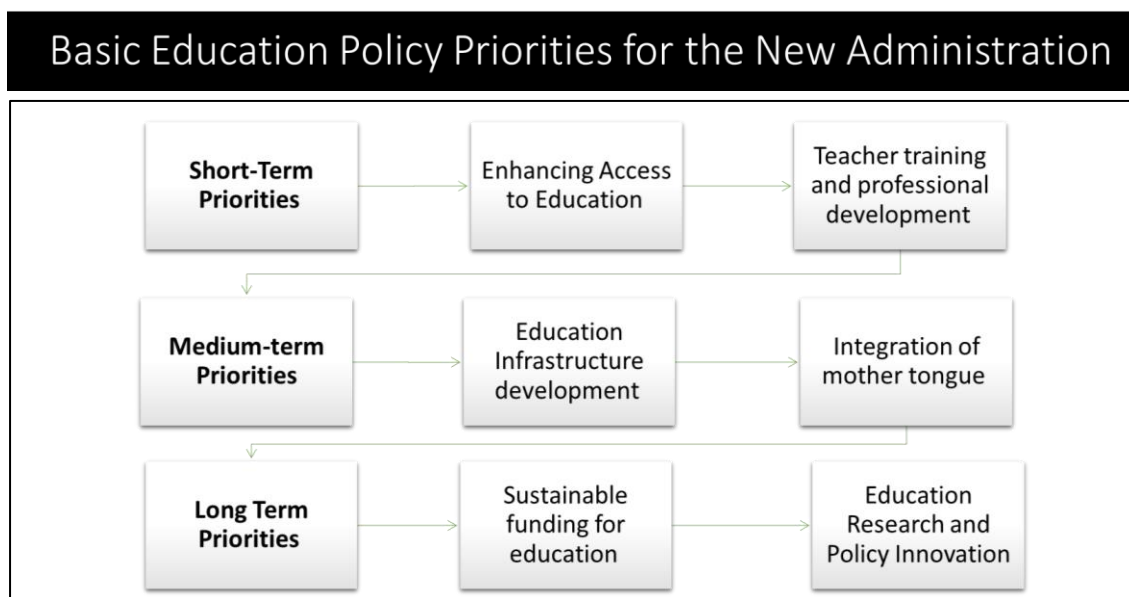


Fig.1 Short, medium and long-term policy priorities for education

1. Enhancing Access to Education

Schools and Classroom Availability: Expand the reach of education by increasing the number of schools and classrooms, especially in rural and marginalised areas. Data from [Statista](#) shows that in the whole country, there are about 100 thousand public classrooms for pre-primary education, whereas the number required was about 146 thousand, which means that there is a lack of adequate classrooms in Nigeria. At the primary level, according to [available data](#) on classroom availability in the country, there exists a shortfall of more than 230,000 classrooms. The class sizes in Nigerian primary schools are notably substantial, with an average of 38 pupils per teacher (PTR), according to the latest data from the [World bank](#). This puts Nigeria among the top 15 [countries in Africa](#) with the highest class sizes. Ideally the smaller the class size, the better the education quality. For instance, neighboring countries like Ghana, Namibia, Sierra Leon, Liberia, and Cabo Verde have PTR of less than [30:1](#)

Enrollment: Implement strategies to reduce barriers to enrollment, such as providing free or subsidized textbooks, uniforms, and transportation for disadvantaged students. This will also reduce some of the challenges that that lead to an increase in out-of-school. According to the [World Bank](#) Primary school enrollment rate stands at 86% as of 2019 data. Although this seems like a good score in terms of percentage, 14% of school-aged children being out of school is still a massive concern.

Inclusive Education: Establish and enforce policies that promote inclusive education for children with disabilities, ensuring they have equal access to quality education. A significant proportion of Nigerians live with disabilities. The [Demographic and Health Survey \(DHS\) \(2018\)](#)

Report shows that 7% of household members over the age of five report some level of difficulty with at least one functional domain, including vision, hearing, communication, cognition, walking, or self-care. Despite the large number of disabled people, insufficient attention has been paid to issues that confront this vulnerable group, and limited efforts towards providing an enabling environment for them. Various forms of exclusion include the inaccessibility to public buildings and transport services, lack of access to social protection and rehabilitation services, and the negative social attitude towards differently-abled people. Elaborating on the extent of the exclusion, [The Winford Centre for Children and Women](#) reports that the provision of special education needs in Nigeria can be described as largely unavailable, citing an example that out of the 1,001 primary schools in Lagos State, only 17 schools currently provide Special Educational Needs (SEN) services.

2. Teacher Training and Professional Development

Teacher Training and Continuous Professional Development: A comprehensive training program for teachers that focuses on improving their pedagogical skills, subject knowledge, and classroom management techniques should be developed. This is key, as several pieces of evidence point toward the direction that most primary school teachers in Nigeria do not have the subject knowledge. Although [The National Policy on Education](#) stipulates that the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession at any level in the Nigerian school system should be the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE), several arguments point toward the direction that the NCE teachers have limited subject specializations. Noting that the curriculum orientation in training them seems inadequate for the UBE school system. For example, the classic

case of over [21,000 teachers in Kaduna state failing subject-based exams](#) pegged at the primary four levels gives a picture of the state of primary school teachers in the country. Thus, there is a need to provide continuous professional development opportunities for teachers to stay updated with the latest teaching methodologies, technology integration, and assessment techniques.

Attract Top Talents: Create incentives and reward systems to attract and retain qualified teachers in remote and underserved areas. Initiatives could include, competitive salaries, student performance-based bonuses, professional development opportunities, and national recognition and awards

MEDIUM-TERM PRIORITIES

1. Education Infrastructure Development

Renovate School buildings and ensure access to basic amenities: To create a favourable learning environment, primary schools in Nigeria require renovations to school buildings, libraries, laboratories, and other educational amenities. According to [reports](#), there are still a substantial number of schools around the country that lack decency, clean water, electricity, recreational space, bathroom/urinary facilities, ventilation, and heat insulation. These have been shown to have a [deleterious impact on learning](#). Another aspect is to ensure that these facilities are also designed to accommodate children with disabilities, as this is frequently overlooked in existing infrastructural design.

Technology Deployment and adaptation : Technology integration has been shown to improve teaching and learning [outcomes](#). Existing schools must be upgraded to incorporate technology and internet connectivity, providing digital learning and access to online educational

resources. This is important to ensure the resilience of the education system. The [learning loss](#) found in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak has been [partially attributed](#) to the inability to deploy and incorporate technology that would ensure continuous learning even after school closure. This further highlights the need for technology deployment and adaptation in Nigeria's Primary schools.

2. Integration of Mother Tongue

[The use of the mother tongue](#) has been proven to enhance children's ability to assimilate educational content. Three key steps that are needed to achieve mother tongue integration are,

- Recognise and promote the value of indigenous languages by incorporating them into the curriculum as a medium of instruction in the early years of education.
- Develop teaching materials, textbooks, and learning resources in local languages to facilitate effective learning and cultural preservation.
- Train teachers to effectively teach in multilingual classrooms, emphasising the benefits of bilingual education for cognitive development and identity formation.

LONG-TERM PRIORITIES

1. Sustainable Funding for Education

The education sector in Nigeria continues to be underfunded and consistently falls below the recommended funding [benchmark of 15-20% of the annual budget](#). Nigeria's 2023 budget allotment to education was only [5.4%](#), which is far below the benchmark. Finance is required for the provision of educational infrastructure and learning resources, including well-trained teachers and capacity-building programmes for teachers and other pertinent actors in the education sector in general. Thus, three key suggestions for sustainable education funding include:

- Increase budgetary allocation to education and ensure its efficient utilisation, prioritising basic education
- Explore alternative sources of funding, such as public-private partnerships, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and international grants and aid
- Establish mechanisms for transparent financial management and accountability in the education sector to prevent misappropriation of funds.

2. Education Research and Policy Innovation

The importance of encouraging the use of research findings in designing educational teaching and learning, and in educational policy formulations

cannot be overemphasised. Three key steps the government should take along this line include:

- Encourage and support educational research to identify effective teaching and learning strategies, curriculum development, and educational policies tailored to Nigeria's context.
- Establish research centres and collaborations between academia, policymakers, and practitioners to facilitate evidence-based decision-making in education.
- Regularly review and update education policies based on research findings and emerging global trends to ensure relevance and effectiveness.

Policy Summary

SHORT-TERM PRIORITIES

Enhancing Access to Education

- Schools and Classroom Availability
- Enrollment
- Inclusive Education

Teacher Training and Professional Development

- Teacher Training
- Continuous Professional Development
- Attract Top Talents

MEDIUM-TERM PRIORITIES

Education Infrastructure Development

- Renovate School buildings and ensure access to basic amenities
- Technology Deployment and adaptation

Integration of Mother Tongue

- Incorporation of indigenous language into the curriculum
- Translation of learning resources to local languages
- Train teachers to effectively teach in multilingual classrooms

LONG-TERM PRIORITIES

Sustainable Funding for Education

- Increase budgetary allocation to education
- Explore alternative sources of funding such as PPP, grants, and aid
- Establish mechanisms for transparent financial management and accountability

Education Research and Policy Innovation

- Encourage and support educational research
- Establish research centres and collaborations between academia, policymakers, and practitioners
- Regularly review and update education policies based on research findings