



# Educating Children in Difficult Circumstances in Nigeria

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## EDUCATING CHILDREN IN CIRCUMSTANCES OF ECONOMIC DEPRESSION AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

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### Abstract

*Educating the children is a reliable tool for unlocking the potentials of children in the aspects of knowledge impartation and acquisition, skills development, attitudinal changes and moral re-orientation and so on to become functional and useful citizens of the society. This paper discusses circumstances and features of economic depression and poverty in Nigeria; causes and features of economic depression and poverty in Nigeria; educating the children under economic depression and poverty in Nigeria; the way forward for educating the children under economic and poverty, and concludes by pointing out the need for government and professional commitments, flexibility in educating the children through improvisation and use of community resources in teaching among others.*

### Introduction

Education is a strategic tool through which the unique potentials of children in terms of knowledge, skills, attitude and moral values are unlocked. The slogan "Education for all is the responsibility for all" underscores the fact that educating the children is a fundamental right of every child in Nigeria. The slogan reveals the importance of education in shaping and reshaping the intellectual, psychomotor and emotional domains of children to be patriotic, self reliance and contribute meaningfully to the economy. Educating the children therefore, constitute the foundation towards achieving the transmission of life principles, and the conservation and perpetuation of sound social values and knowledge to new generation for human dignity and peaceful co-existence. It is the foundation for lifelong learning and human development for a country to develop scientifically and economically.

The importance of education, according to Okebukola (2008) include the development of skills and knowledge for growing the economy and spawning new industry, reducing poverty, promoting good health, gender equality, accelerating development and improving the welfare of children, promoting enlightenment for political and social stability among others.

The Nigerian Education at all levels is guided by the National Policy on Education (2013) which presents the national objectives with high expectations for implementation through formal and informal training by parents, teachers, guardians and other stakeholders. Formal training takes place in the school where structured and organized teaching and learning takes place through the use of approved curriculum to provide pupils with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. The educational process takes place in physical, social, cultural and psychological environments which makes it a complex enterprise. This makes it imperative that some basic elements such as humans and materials resources in the form of funding, school buildings, facilities, committed and qualified teachers with up to-date pedagogical knowledge and skills, healthy and secured environment must be available to achieve at the desired goals.

restiveness, cultism and restricted access to fundamental needs like education and health facilities. The reality of this economic crunch is felt more in the education sector which are made obvious in poor funding of education over the years resulting in severe lack of infrastructures in schools, lack of quality and quantity of teachers, unhealthy and unsecured learning environment among others. Invariably, this has seriously undermined the education of children especially those from the poor household. A child with high quality childhood education tends to have higher level of success in life with secured future life and early childhood education. According to Odiagbe (2015) the situation has significant impact on subsequent performance at other levels of education and life achievement.

The post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have increased awareness of the importance of educating the children to lay good foundation for posterity. According to Azi (2007) Nicholas Negroponte, in contemporary issues in Nigeria every single problem one can think of: poverty, peace, the environment, is solved with education. It is apt to examine: circumstances and features of economic depression and poverty in Nigeria, causes and features of economic depression and poverty in Nigeria; educating the children under economic depression and poverty as well as the way forward.

### **Circumstances and Features of Economic Depression and Poverty in Nigeria,**

Economic depression and poverty is no more news in Nigeria as they have become a household slogan. Nigeria experiences of economic crisis started in 2008 as economic meltdown. Economic depression is defined differently by different people. In economics it is a period of economic crisis in commerce, finance, and industry, characterized by dwindling prices, restriction of credit, low output and investment, numerous bankruptcies, and high level of unemployment. Investopedia (2017) defines depression as a prolonged economic downturn in economic activities. Economic depression is therefore a longstanding economic recession and is influenced by globalization of economies, overproduction, decreased demand, unemployment and lowered wages. On the other hand, the National Planning Commission (2004) defined poverty as a ravaging economic and social phenomenon that manifested in the inability of victims to acquire the basic necessities of life. Thus recession, economic meltdown and depression are intertwined and their effects are serious and obvious in economic growth and development of a nation. The realities on ground in Nigeria are well demonstrated in the following ways:

a. High Inflation Rate: The Business dictionary defines inflation as one of the indices of economic down turn and a major contributor to hunger. Inflation not only leads to higher food prices but also significantly affects the living standard through deterioration in diet, reduced food consumption or even out right starvation especially among children from poor background. Udofia and Ekong (2017) noted that high food prices in Nigeria have placed considerable pressure on poor households to spend more as well as narrowed down their access to affordable nutritious food in quality and quantity. This invariably affects the level of development in terms of health and mental readiness of children for education. Inflation threatens the Nigeria's food security and makes life difficult for those in experiencing poverty. Many children living in poverty struggle to meet their basic needs and so often experience education as "stress".

b. High Rate of Unemployment: Employment is the primary source of financial and material strength for meaningful living. Employment is possible when a country is economically buoyant. In a depressed and poverty stricken economy, the chance of getting

a job becomes very difficult if not impossible. Unemployment is a social plague which may result in psychological stress, emotional instability, lack of self worth and self confidence. People who are unemployed are easily manipulated into negative thinking and actions such as stealing, committing suicide, being violent and being involved in other criminal activities and thereby affecting the parents in sending children to school with ease.

c. Wider Rich-Poor Gap: The impact of economic depression is well demonstrated by the poverty level and socio-economic divide between the poor and the rich in Nigeria. The socio-economic inequality is getting wider in Nigeria with very few getting richer and living in affluent while majority live in abject poverty. Economic depression to children may not really make sense but poverty does because when they see other children attending first class private schools or going abroad to study, eating and enjoying life to the fullest but the parents of the poor cannot provide the basic needs not to talk of attending school. This socio-economic divide is exerting tolls of uncertainty on the quality of life and education in Nigeria currently. It is right to say that education of children grows knowledge for productivity, skills, enhance self-reliance thereby leading to closed relationship in socio-economic development.

Increase Level of Insecurity and Moral Decadence: Economic depression, poverty and insecurity are closely related. The high rate of social vices like cultism, social unrest, kidnapping, youth restiveness, political jobbers, cyber crime or bank fraud may directly or indirectly be linked to the prevailing economic depression and poverty in Nigeria. Students living in poverty according to Sato and Hensmire (2009) exhibit characters like laughing when disciplined as a way to save face in material poverty; argue loudly, make angry responses; make vulgar comments; physically fight because they lack belief system to use in conflict resolution, show disrespect to teachers because they may not know the adults worthy of respect, extremely disorganized, harm other students verbally or physically, cheat or steal because of weak support system, weak role models, emotional resources and talk incessantly because poverty is very participatory.

In the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the second level of need which is safety emphasizes security of body, employment, resources, the family, health and property. It is therefore impossible to have this security and moral standard in an economically depressed and poverty stricken society and therefore education of children is seriously impeded because of lack of confidence and opportunities of having trusting relationships with people who have benefitted from education.

e. Increased in School Dropout: Strong, healthy and conducive learning environment are some of the conditions that ginger students' interest, retention and successful completion of school. The situation for both primary and secondary levels learning environment in Nigeria is odd and devastating due to economic depression. The children of school age are affected by stress of hunger, sickness, lack of school materials like books, uniform and shoes thereby making some children rebellious and drop out of school. The deficits in cognitive, emotional and psychomotor development of children growing up in a depressed and poverty ridden families have more to be desired as evidenced especially in cities where children of school age are seen roaming the streets in tattered clothes, looking fragile and hawking during school hours. A conducive and secured environment predisposes children to developing and learning core values and manners from adults who are



physically, mentally and psychologically balanced. Educating the children of course require conducive, serene and secured environment to motivate and sustain their interest in school.

f. **Scarcity of Funds:** There are intricate ties between economic depression, poverty and fund in circulation. Economic depression is known for low circulation of cash in the society. The scarcity of money supply makes even basic goods to remain longer on the shelf for sale. People roam about willing to work but no money to higher their services. Many people who are working may even have salary cut or owed for several months. This invariably leads to low money flow in the society resulting in untold hardship, hunger and psychological stress like anxiety and emotional instability. Unavailability of fund adversely affects the education of the child.

### **Causes of Economic Depression and Poverty in Nigeria.**

The terms depression, recession and poverty are used to describe different life situations and each life experience shape expectations, knowledge, confidence and opportunities for gaining meaningful education. Economic depression and poverty are intertwined when considering the effects on the individuals and society at large. Economic depression is generally a long standing economic recession associated with immediate and remote causes. Several factors have been posited by researchers and economists. For instance, Chimobi Ucha (2010) in a study on poverty in Nigeria: some dimensions and contributing factors identified key factors to poverty to include unemployment, corruption, non-diversification of economy, inequality, laziness especially those from wealthy homes and poor education system. Other factors are increase in unemployment, drop in available credit, reduced trade and commerce and high interest rates. Economic depression and poverty in Nigeria are also caused by factor articulated under:

a. **High Spirit of Material Consumerism:** Consumerism is an act of increasing consumption without balancing with corresponding production of goods. Nigerians have unsatisfiable quest for material wealth especially imported goods. It is not uncommon to see Nigerians pack wealth like cars, build so many houses even if they would not use it in the next five years. The cheap local goods are replaced with expensive imported ones that why many people go into impulse buying especially now that those goods can be delivered at one's door step and bigger malls being opened here at there with fantastic adverts. This state of shifting from producer oriented economy to consumerist economy has not only robbed Nigeria of its economic growth but also promote corruption and leads to unhealthy economic and psychological stress which of course negatively affect the of the children.

b. **Leadership Lack of Vision and Implementation Will:** This is like a cankerworm in Nigeria and has eaten into the system of government. The resources of the country are being wasted because of political instability and inconsistent leadership. Nigeria is a very rich country both in human and natural resources but these have not translated into ease of educating the children because of poor leadership and political corruption. The vision 20-2020 was a step to stimulate economic growth in Nigeria. With all its laudable themes, Nigeria is still lacking behind because of poor policy implementation. Funds are poorly managed; programmes to alleviate poverty are just means of siphoning money by a few while inefficiency or outright corruption prevents resources from reaching schools for education of the children. The political will to effectively implement the basic and post-basic

education seems to be absent due to the if ruling elites fear that an educated population will be better equipped to challenge undemocratic actions of governance.

c. **Lack of Prudent Economic Implementation and Management.** The political maturity in management and implementation of policies is a problem in Nigeria. The wealth of any country is very critical for economic growth of a country. The seeming rush to riches mentality by leaders has seriously affected the economic growth of the country. Policies are either haphazardly implemented with no recourse for the country economic growth or are left on the drawing board without implementation. The process of educating the children in this depressed economy and poverty in Nigeria suffers due to this negative experience of non-prudence in economic implementation and management.

d. **Poor Quality and Functionality of Education:** The quality and functionality of education is indeed tied to the economic growth of any nation. Quality education is central to development and can be used to rejuvenate the life of citizens resulting in economic empowerment. Though one of the goals of Education for all (EFA) emphasizes promoting learning and skills, the impact is yet to be seen as submitted by Ekong (2008) that institutions of learning in Nigeria deliver instructions more theoretically and in abstract forms with focus on cognitive rather than psycho-productive development. The concomitant effect therefore is the production of non-entrepreneurially skilled products. Quality education is the engine of socio-economic transformation in both developed and developing countries. The quality of functional education of the children to be skilled and knowledgeable becomes an imperative.

e. **Lack of Collaboration with Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria:** Research findings from universities are widely used by many developed countries to solve national issues such as poverty and economic crisis. This is not so in Nigeria, as many innovative research findings from tertiary institutions that could be used to fast forward technological and economic development in the country are dumped on the shelves in different institutions of higher learning. Obviously, from the way government develops policies and programmes without any reasonable impact on the citizens goes to show how government falls short of using appropriate information through research to find lasting solutions to national problems. Facts about the real causes and solutions to poverty and economic depression are presented in research findings. Programmes, policies and procedures for helping people in economic and depressed conditions are created by those who do not fully understand what people in poverty need to move forward. The results have always been the programmes, policies and procedures failing, hijacked or dumped along the way and therefore education of the children suffers.

### **Educating the Children under Economic Depression and Poverty in Nigeria.**

Education of the children under economic depression and poverty in Nigeria is a capacity building process and a necessity to leverage available resources and optimize the applications to build knowledge, attitude and skills for self sustenance. Generally, education demands a lot of funding to provide books and learning materials, pay teachers, provide health care and food among other things. The current economic situation makes it impossible for the basic necessities to be provided to ensure effective teaching and learning of the child especially in public schools.

All human social vices are sharper and severe, according to Enoh (2014), when one is deprived of education, he maintained that the products of science and technology are a huge advantage in the hands of the educated ones but to the uneducated, they are dangerous weapons which seriously affect economic development. The vulnerability of children from poor background to be involved in social vices like kidnapping, stealing, cultism, cyber crime and political thuggery among others is higher in a depressed and poverty economy. Children from poor background become powerless and less ready for school in a depressed economy. Educating the children in an economically depressed and poverty condition in Nigeria is very crucial for escaping poverty and stems the tide of increased social vices in the society.

### **The Way Forward For Educating Children under Economic Depression and Poverty in Nigeria.**

In spite of the economic depression and poverty in Nigeria, children have to be educated if the country does not want to be in doom or go into extinct. These could be achieved by;

- (a) **Training Teachers to Be Creative:** Creative teachers and educators are able to apply creative solutions based on the environment and conditions they find the students. Creative teachers see students as individuals, not as a group and so create positive, stable classroom environment, plan lessons and activities that are appropriate and meaningful to solve problems. It is believed that education makes both the person and the nation and also influences values and attitudes (Omolewa, 2001)
- (b) **Teachers to Model Professionalism and Personal Qualities:** Teachers can motivate by modeling positive professional and personal qualities like honesty, neatness, punctuality, humility, to develop students interest in learning. The Nigerian society has changed with very negative set of experiences in which the children live in. Explanations and information that will promote understanding and strategies to cope with the fluctuating environmental changes is very necessary to encourage the child. Children from poor parental background need motivation and encouragement by government provisions for them to appreciate education and live a violence free life. This lies strongly on how the teacher presents his/her professional qualities before the children through praises, facial look and use of effective communication skills in teaching. The teachers' attitudes and beliefs shape the tone of voice, body posture, the facial expressions and actions towards learners. Educating the children positively is possible with teachers' exhibition of professionalism as role models.
- (c) **The Ministry of Education Should Encourage Change of Attitude and Self Esteem:** A lot of social vices like cultism, examination misconduct, sexual harassment, bullying have found their way from the society into the school system. The Ministry of Education should encourage and motivate change of attitude by the teachers through appropriate incentives. This will invariably make teachers to provide students with opportunities to assess their feelings, attitudes and culture and more concerned about how well children are prepared to assume future societal roles.
- (d) **Teachers Should Teach Vocational Skills:** Educating the children is vital for country's technological and economic development. Hence, children should be taught to acquire life skills for livelihood. This should involve the teachers equipping the children with understanding, skills and access information that enables them to perform effectively. This can be in the form of entrepreneurship for self development.



- (e) Teachers Should Use Student-based Instructional Approach: This is based on Strengths Perspective Approach theory which explains that every individual child has strengths. Thus, the quality of teaching would make the difference in learning outcomes implying that pedagogy matters. Teachers can empower children by focusing on what is good about them, what they do know and what skills they possess rather than on the negative side of the students. The key role of a teacher is to facilitate learning of some target curriculum contents through appropriate teaching and learning methods. The choice of teaching method depends on what fits the educational philosophy, classroom demographic factors like students' age, time available, and availability of learning materials, subject area and environmental condition.
- (f) Teachers should be Mentors: Mentoring is the relationship between a teacher and the pupils or the students which can develop naturally through daily interactions at school. This is one of the actions teachers can take that can positively influence the children in poverty and depressed condition. Such a teacher must possess such characteristics as believing in the student's ability to get out of poverty and looking for what is good and right about the students to build their current knowledge, skills and self confidence. This implies that teachers' attitudes and beliefs and moral values should shape the tone of voice, body posture, facial expressions and actions towards students during classroom interaction.

## Conclusion

The paper discussed the elements of a depressed economy and poverty in Nigeria as it hinges on the education of the children. The way forward for educating the children under the depressed economy and poverty has been articulated which if implemented would ensure a steady education of the child. Education therefore would have achieved its role as an instrument for national development.

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