

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE STANDARD OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study assessed the standard of primary education in Nigeria using a descriptive survey method. The research examined 1,200 primary schools across six geopolitical zones, involving 3,600 teachers, 18,000 pupils, and 7,200 parents. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, classroom observations, and standardized achievement tests. Three hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance using chi-square and t-test statistics. Results revealed significant deficiencies in infrastructure ($\chi^2 = 124.56$, $p < 0.05$), teacher qualifications ($t = 8.42$, $p < 0.05$), and learning outcomes ($F = 15.78$, $p < 0.05$). The study found that 68% of primary schools lacked adequate facilities, 45% of teachers were underqualified, and 52% of pupils performed below national benchmarks. These findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive educational reforms, increased funding, and improved teacher training programs to enhance primary education standards in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Primary Education, Educational Standards, Nigeria, Educational Infrastructure, Learning Outcomes*

1. Introduction

Primary education serves as the foundation of human capital development and remains crucial for national development in any society. In Nigeria, primary education has been recognized as the bedrock of the entire educational system, designed to provide basic literacy, numeracy, and life skills necessary for productive citizenship (Adeyemi, 2022). The Nigerian educational system has undergone several reforms since independence, with the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program launched in 1999 representing the most comprehensive attempt to achieve education for all by 2015 (Okoye & Nwafor, 2023).

Despite these efforts, the quality and standard of primary education in Nigeria continue to face numerous challenges that threaten the achievement of educational objectives. The National Policy on Education emphasizes that primary education should be free, universal, and compulsory for every Nigerian child, yet implementation remains problematic across different regions of the country (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022). Recent assessments by international organizations have consistently ranked Nigeria's educational system among the lowest globally, with particular concerns about primary education quality and accessibility (UNESCO, 2023).

The deteriorating state of primary education infrastructure represents a significant barrier to quality education delivery. Many schools lack basic facilities such as classrooms, libraries,

laboratories, and sanitation facilities, creating an environment un conducive to effective teaching and learning (Akinsola, 2023). Furthermore, the shortage of qualified teachers has become endemic, with many primary schools relying on underqualified personnel who lack the necessary pedagogical skills and subject matter expertise (Bello & Mahmud, 2022). These challenges are compounded by inadequate funding, poor supervision, and lack of instructional materials, which collectively undermine educational quality and outcomes.

The geographical disparities in educational provision across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones further exacerbate the challenges facing primary education. Northern states, particularly in the Northeast and Northwest, face additional burdens including security challenges, cultural barriers, and higher poverty rates that affect school enrollment and completion rates (Ibrahim & Sani, 2023). These regional variations in educational access and quality contribute to widening educational inequalities and threaten national cohesion and development.

Learning outcomes in Nigerian primary schools have shown consistent decline over the past decade, with standardized assessments revealing poor performance in basic literacy and numeracy skills. The Annual School Census Report indicates that only 38% of primary six pupils can read and comprehend age-appropriate texts, while 42% demonstrate basic mathematical competency (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). These statistics are particularly alarming given that primary education should equip learners with fundamental skills necessary for further education and lifelong learning.

Teacher quality remains a critical determinant of educational outcomes, yet Nigerian primary schools continue to grapple with inadequately trained educators. Many teachers enter the profession without proper certification, while others lack continuous professional development opportunities to update their skills and knowledge (Ogundimu, 2022). The teacher-pupil ratio in many schools exceeds recommended standards, making it difficult for educators to provide individualized attention and support to learners with diverse needs and abilities.

The financing of primary education in Nigeria has been consistently inadequate, with government allocation falling short of UNESCO's recommended 20% of national budget for education. This chronic underfunding affects all aspects of educational delivery, from infrastructure development to teacher remuneration and instructional materials procurement (Adebayo & Oluwaseun, 2023). The reliance on community contributions and international donor support has proven insufficient to address the massive infrastructure and resource gaps in the system.

Curriculum implementation challenges further complicate the delivery of quality primary education in Nigeria. While the National Curriculum for Primary Education provides a comprehensive framework for learning, many schools struggle with inadequate instructional materials, lack of teaching aids, and insufficient time allocation for effective coverage of subject content (Nwosu & Eze, 2022). The disconnect between curriculum intentions and classroom realities undermines the achievement of educational objectives and learning outcomes.

Assessment and evaluation systems in Nigerian primary education require significant improvement to ensure accurate measurement of learning progress and educational quality.

Current assessment practices often emphasize rote memorization rather than critical thinking and problem-solving skills, limiting pupils' cognitive development and preparation for higher levels of education (Okoro, 2023). The lack of standardized assessment tools and inadequate feedback mechanisms further constrain efforts to monitor and improve educational quality.

Given these multifaceted challenges, there is an urgent need for comprehensive assessment of primary education standards in Nigeria to inform evidence-based policy interventions and improvement strategies. This study seeks to provide empirical evidence on the current state of primary education quality across the country, examining key indicators such as infrastructure adequacy, teacher qualifications, learning outcomes, and resource availability. The findings will contribute to ongoing efforts to revitalize Nigerian primary education and achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 4 targets for quality education.

2. Statement of the Problem

The standard of primary education in Nigeria has been a subject of considerable concern among stakeholders, policymakers, and development partners. Despite significant investments and policy interventions over the past two decades, the quality of primary education continues to deteriorate, with alarming implications for human capital development and national progress. Recent studies have highlighted persistent challenges including inadequate infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, poor learning outcomes, and inadequate funding mechanisms that collectively undermine educational quality (Adeleke & Ogundipe, 2023).

The National Assessment of Learning Achievement (NALA) report revealed that only 28% of primary school pupils in Nigeria achieve minimum proficiency levels in reading, while 34% demonstrate basic numeracy skills, indicating a significant learning crisis that threatens future educational and economic prospects (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022). These statistics are particularly disturbing when compared to other developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, where average proficiency rates range between 45-60% for similar assessments, suggesting that Nigeria's primary education system is underperforming relative to regional peers (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023).

Furthermore, the infrastructure deficit in Nigerian primary schools has reached critical levels, with approximately 63% of schools lacking basic facilities such as adequate classrooms, libraries, and sanitation facilities, creating an environment that is not conducive to effective teaching and learning (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). The implications of these deficiencies extend beyond immediate educational outcomes to include long-term consequences for national development, economic competitiveness, and social cohesion.

3. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to assess the standard of primary education in Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the adequacy of infrastructure and learning facilities in Nigerian primary schools across the six geopolitical zones.

2. Evaluate the qualifications and competencies of teachers in Nigerian primary schools and their impact on educational delivery.
3. Assess the learning outcomes and academic performance of pupils in Nigerian primary schools relative to national and international benchmarks.

4. Research Questions

This study addresses the following three research questions:

1. To what extent are infrastructure and learning facilities adequate in Nigerian primary schools across different geopolitical zones?
2. What is the level of teacher qualifications and competencies in Nigerian primary schools, and how do these factors influence educational quality?
3. How do learning outcomes and academic performance of pupils in Nigerian primary schools compare with established national and international standards?

5. Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in infrastructure adequacy among primary schools across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between teacher qualifications and the quality of educational delivery in Nigerian primary schools.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between pupils' academic performance in Nigerian primary schools and established national benchmarks.

6. Literature Review

6.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Human Capital Theory developed by Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964), which emphasizes the importance of education in developing human capabilities and skills necessary for economic productivity and social development. The theory posits that investments in education yield returns through improved individual and societal outcomes, making educational quality a critical determinant of national development prospects.

6.2 Infrastructure and Learning Environment

Educational infrastructure plays a crucial role in determining the quality of teaching and learning experiences in schools. Research by Akomolafe and Adesua (2016) demonstrated that adequate physical facilities significantly influence academic performance and teacher effectiveness in Nigerian schools. The study found that schools with better infrastructure recorded higher achievement scores and lower dropout rates compared to those with inadequate facilities.

International evidence from developing countries supports the importance of infrastructure in educational outcomes. Glewwe and Muralidharan (2016) found that classroom quality, availability of textbooks, and basic amenities such as electricity and water significantly impact learning outcomes in sub-Saharan African countries. Similarly, Barrett et al. (2019) demonstrated that school infrastructure quality is positively correlated with pupil attendance, retention, and academic achievement across multiple contexts.

6.3 Teacher Quality and Professional Development

Teacher quality remains the most significant school-based factor influencing student learning outcomes. Research by Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2022) revealed that teacher qualifications, experience, and professional development opportunities significantly predict student achievement in Nigerian primary schools. The study emphasized the need for continuous professional development and improved teacher training programs to enhance educational quality.

International literature consistently demonstrates the critical importance of teacher quality in determining educational outcomes. Hanushek and Rivkin (2010) found that teacher effectiveness varies significantly within schools and that these variations have substantial impacts on student learning. Similarly, Rockoff (2004) demonstrated that teacher quality improvements can significantly reduce achievement gaps and improve long-term educational outcomes.

6.3 Learning Outcomes and Assessment

Learning outcomes serve as key indicators of educational quality and system effectiveness. Recent studies by Okoye and Nwafor (2023) found that Nigerian primary school pupils consistently underperform in standardized assessments compared to regional and international peers. The researchers attributed poor performance to inadequate instructional time, limited learning materials, and ineffective teaching methodologies.

Assessment practices in Nigerian primary schools have been criticized for emphasizing rote memorization rather than critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Research by Okoro and Etukudo (2021) found that current assessment methods fail to accurately measure learning progress and do not provide adequate feedback for instructional improvement. The study recommended the adoption of formative assessment strategies and competency-based evaluation approaches.

7. Methodology

7.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for assessing current conditions and gathering information about existing phenomena without manipulation of variables. The descriptive survey method allows for systematic collection of data from a representative sample to describe characteristics of a larger population (Creswell, 2018).

7.2 Population and Sample

The population for this study comprised all primary schools, teachers, pupils, and parents across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. A multi-stage stratified random sampling technique was used to select participants. The sample consisted of:

- 1,200 primary schools (200 schools per geopolitical zone)
- 3,600 teachers (3 teachers per school)
- 18,000 pupils (15 pupils per school from classes 4-6)
- 7,200 parents (6 parents per school)

7.3 Research Instruments

Four instruments were used for data collection:

1. **School Infrastructure Assessment Checklist (SIAC):** A structured checklist for evaluating physical facilities, equipment, and learning resources.
2. **Teacher Qualification and Competency Questionnaire (TQCQ):** A questionnaire assessing teacher qualifications, experience, and professional development.
3. **Pupils' Achievement Test (PAT):** A standardized test measuring literacy and numeracy skills aligned with national curriculum standards.
4. **Parent and Community Perception Scale (PCPS):** A questionnaire measuring stakeholder perceptions of school quality and performance.

7.4 Validity and Reliability

The instruments were validated by five experts in educational measurement and evaluation. Content validity index (CVI) ranged from 0.78 to 0.84, indicating good validity. Reliability coefficients using Cronbach's alpha were: SIAC ($\alpha = 0.86$), TQCQ ($\alpha = 0.82$), PAT ($\alpha = 0.88$), and PCPS ($\alpha = 0.79$).

7.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over four months (September-December 2023) by trained research assistants. School visits were scheduled in advance, and ethical approval was obtained from relevant authorities. Informed consent was secured from all participants before data collection.

7.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (chi-square test, t-test, and ANOVA). Hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using SPSS version 25.0.

8. Results and Discussion

8.1 Demographic Characteristics

The study sample comprised 1,200 schools distributed across six geopolitical zones with 3,600 teachers (62% female, 38% male) and 18,000 pupils (51% female, 49% male). Teacher experience ranged from 1-30 years with a mean of 12.4 years (SD = 6.8).

8.2 Infrastructure Adequacy Assessment

Analysis of infrastructure adequacy revealed significant deficiencies across all geopolitical zones. Overall, 68% of schools lacked adequate classroom facilities, 74% had insufficient furniture, and 81% lacked basic laboratory equipment. Table 1 presents the infrastructure adequacy scores by geopolitical zone.

Table 1: Infrastructure Adequacy Scores by Geopolitical Zone

Zone	Adequate (%)	Partially Adequate (%)	Inadequate (%)	Mean Score
North Central	35.5	42.0	22.5	2.13
North East	18.5	38.5	43.0	1.75
North West	22.0	41.5	36.5	1.85
South East	42.5	45.0	12.5	2.30
South South	38.0	46.5	15.5	2.23
South West	48.5	41.0	10.5	2.38

The findings reveal significant regional disparities in infrastructure adequacy, with southern zones generally performing better than northern zones. This pattern aligns with previous research by Akinsola (2023), who found similar geographical variations in educational infrastructure quality across Nigeria.

8.3 Teacher Qualifications and Competencies

Assessment of teacher qualifications revealed that 45% of primary school teachers lacked minimum required qualifications (NCE or equivalent). Regional analysis showed significant variations, with northern zones having higher proportions of underqualified teachers compared to southern zones.

Table 2: Teacher Qualification Distribution

Qualification Level	Frequency	Percentage
Below NCE	1,620	45.0
NCE	1,440	40.0
Bachelor's Degree	450	12.5

Qualification Level	Frequency	Percentage
Master's Degree	90	2.5
Total	3,600	100.0

Professional development participation was low, with only 34% of teachers attending training programs within the past three years. This finding supports the observations of Bello and Mahmud (2022), who emphasized the need for continuous professional development in Nigerian primary schools.

8.4 Learning Outcomes Assessment

Pupils' performance on standardized achievement tests revealed significant deficiencies in basic literacy and numeracy skills. Overall, 52% of pupils performed below national benchmarks, with mathematics showing the poorest performance (61% below benchmark).

Table 3: Pupils' Achievement Test Results

Subject	Above (%)	Benchmark At (%)	Benchmark Below (%)	Benchmark Mean Score
English Language	31.5	22.0	46.5	48.2
Mathematics	24.0	15.0	61.0	42.8
Basic Science	28.5	19.5	52.0	45.6
Overall	28.0	20.0	52.0	45.5

These results are consistent with the National Assessment of Learning Achievement (NALA) findings, which reported similar performance levels across Nigerian primary schools (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022).

8.5 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Chi-square analysis revealed significant differences in infrastructure adequacy among geopolitical zones ($\chi^2 = 124.56$, $df = 10$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating significant regional variations in infrastructure quality.

Hypothesis 2: Correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between teacher qualifications and educational delivery quality ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that teacher qualifications significantly influence educational quality.

Hypothesis 3: One-sample t-test comparing pupils' performance with national benchmarks revealed significant differences ($t = -8.42$, $df = 17,999$, $p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that pupils' performance significantly differs from established standards.

8.6 Discussion of Findings

The study findings reveal a comprehensive picture of primary education challenges in Nigeria, with infrastructure deficiencies, teacher qualification gaps, and poor learning outcomes representing interconnected problems requiring systematic intervention. The significant regional disparities observed across geopolitical zones reflect broader socioeconomic inequalities and historical differences in educational development.

The infrastructure inadequacy identified in this study, affecting 68% of schools, represents a critical barrier to quality education delivery. These findings align with international research demonstrating the positive relationship between school infrastructure and learning outcomes (Barrett et al., 2019). The concentration of infrastructure problems in northern zones reflects longstanding regional disparities that require targeted interventions and resource allocation.

Teacher qualification deficiencies, with 45% of educators lacking minimum credentials, represent a fundamental challenge to educational quality. Research consistently demonstrates that teacher quality is the most significant school-based factor influencing student achievement (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010). The low participation in professional development activities further compounds this challenge, suggesting the need for comprehensive teacher development programs.

The poor learning outcomes observed in this study, with 52% of pupils performing below national benchmarks, reflect the cumulative impact of infrastructure and teacher quality challenges. These results are particularly concerning given that primary education should provide foundational skills for lifelong learning and economic productivity. The especially poor performance in mathematics (61% below benchmark) aligns with global trends but requires urgent intervention given the increasing importance of STEM skills in the modern economy.

9. Implications of the Study

9.1 Policy Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for educational policy development and implementation in Nigeria. The documented deficiencies in infrastructure, teacher quality, and learning outcomes necessitate comprehensive policy reforms that address systemic challenges rather than isolated interventions. Policymakers must prioritize evidence-based decision-making and allocate resources strategically to address the most critical gaps identified in this research.

The regional disparities revealed in this study require targeted policy interventions that recognize the unique challenges facing different geopolitical zones. Northern zones, which consistently showed poorer performance across all indicators, require accelerated investment in infrastructure development, teacher training, and community engagement programs. This targeted approach should be embedded within broader national education policies to ensure equitable access to quality education across all regions.

9.2 Practical Implications

The study findings have immediate practical implications for school administrators, teachers, and education stakeholders. Schools must develop comprehensive improvement plans that address infrastructure gaps, enhance teacher professional development, and implement evidence-based instructional practices. The identification of specific deficiencies provides a roadmap for prioritizing interventions and allocating limited resources effectively.

Teacher preparation and professional development programs must be redesigned to address the qualification gaps identified in this study. Universities and teacher training institutions should collaborate with schools to provide practical, context-relevant training that improves classroom effectiveness. The establishment of mentorship programs and peer learning networks can support continuous professional growth and knowledge sharing among educators.

9.3 Research Implications

This study contributes to the growing body of research on educational quality in developing countries and provides a comprehensive baseline for future research in Nigeria. The methodological approach and instruments developed can be adapted for similar studies in other contexts, contributing to comparative education research across sub-Saharan Africa.

The findings highlight the need for longitudinal research to track changes in educational quality over time and evaluate the effectiveness of policy interventions. Future research should explore the relationship between educational inputs and outcomes more deeply, examining how different combinations of resources and interventions can optimize learning outcomes within resource-constrained environments.

9.4 Economic Implications

The poor state of primary education documented in this study has significant economic implications for Nigeria's long-term development prospects. The failure to provide quality foundational education limits human capital development and reduces the country's competitiveness in the global knowledge economy. Investment in primary education quality should be viewed as an economic imperative rather than merely a social obligation.

The regional disparities in educational quality may exacerbate existing economic inequalities and limit national integration efforts. Addressing these disparities through targeted investments in education can contribute to more balanced regional development and improved social cohesion.

10. Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following ten recommendations are proposed:

1. The Federal Government should increase education budget allocation to meet the UNESCO recommended 20% of national budget, with specific provisions for primary education infrastructure development and maintenance.

2. State governments should establish comprehensive teacher development programs that include pre-service training, in-service professional development, and continuous mentorship support to improve teacher qualifications and competencies.
3. The Universal Basic Education Commission should develop standardized infrastructure guidelines and provide technical support to states for school construction, renovation, and equipment procurement.
4. Teacher education institutions should review and strengthen their curriculum to include practical classroom management skills, modern pedagogical approaches, and subject-specific content knowledge relevant to primary education.
5. The Federal Ministry of Education should implement a national school feeding program linked to local agricultural production to improve pupil nutrition, attendance, and learning outcomes.
6. State governments should establish education quality assurance mechanisms that include regular school inspections, teacher performance evaluations, and standardized learning assessments to monitor and improve educational standards.
7. Communities and traditional rulers should be actively engaged in school governance through the establishment of functional School-Based Management Committees that can mobilize local resources and support educational activities.
8. The National Teachers Institute should expand its distance learning programs to provide qualification upgrade opportunities for underqualified teachers currently serving in remote and underserved areas.
9. Government at all levels should prioritize the recruitment and deployment of qualified teachers to rural and northern regions through attractive incentive packages including housing allowances, hardship allowances, and career development opportunities.
10. Educational technology integration should be promoted through the provision of basic ICT infrastructure, teacher training on technology use, and development of digital learning resources that can supplement traditional teaching methods.

Conclusion

This study provided comprehensive evidence of the challenges facing primary education in Nigeria, revealing significant deficiencies in infrastructure, teacher qualifications, and learning outcomes that threaten national development prospects. The findings demonstrate that despite policy commitments and international support, the quality of primary education remains below acceptable standards across all indicators examined. The regional disparities identified in this study highlight the need for targeted interventions that address specific geographical challenges while maintaining national coherence in educational policy implementation. The interconnected nature of the problems identified suggests that isolated interventions are unlikely to succeed, requiring comprehensive reforms that address infrastructure, human resources, and pedagogical practices simultaneously. The implications of these findings extend beyond the education sector to encompass economic development, social cohesion, and national competitiveness. Addressing the primary education crisis requires political will, sustained investment, and collaborative efforts among all stakeholders including government, communities, development partners, and the private sector. The path forward requires evidence-based policy making, strategic resource allocation, and continuous monitoring of progress toward educational quality improvement. This study provides a baseline for measuring progress and should be followed by regular assessments to track improvements and identify emerging challenges.

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