

*Full Length Research Paper*

## Provision of free education to all citizens: Justifiable or not in Nigeria's context?

Ige Akindele, M.

Deputy Director, Ministry Of Education, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria.  
([dele\\_divine@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:dele_divine@yahoo.co.uk)).

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The issue of whether education should be free or not for all citizens in Nigeria has been contentious. Many people are contending that because education is a social service, which is meant to eradicate illiteracy, ensures comfortable living of the citizens, as well as the development of the country, it should be provided free for all citizens. The need for equity and egalitarianism, looming poverty, low manpower/literacy level in the country, also lend credence to this. Many are also arguing that education should not be free on the basis that anything that is free lacks quality. The parlous state of the country's economy, perceived falling standard of education, unsatisfied admission demand into tertiary institutions, looming unemployment, as well as inadequate human, material and financial resources, are supportive of this argument. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the concept of free education and its background in Nigeria, the arguments in its favour and those against its adoption. It concludes by recommending measures such as the provision of scholarships and bursaries to pupils/students, introduction of minimal fee in educational institutions as a way of sharing the cost of education with Government, reaching out to international charity organizations to alleviate the burden of education provision by government and uplift the status of education in Nigeria. In the course of this paper however, information and data were gathered from literature to describe the concept and support the arguments raised.

**Key words:** Education, free, free education, citizens, justifiable, not justifiable, case.

### INTRODUCTION

Education plays invaluable role in the life of individuals. Aside the contributions to individuals' development, it contributes to national development. Psacharoupoulos (1981), cited in Ige (2009) in a survey of the rate of returns to educational investment found that:

- The social and private returns are highest for primary education.
- The private returns exceed the social returns especially at the university level.
- All the rates of return to investment in education are above the ten (10%) criterion of the opportunity cost of capital.

- The rate of return is highest in the less developed countries at comparable level.

Psacharouplos (1984), also in Ige (2009) has also listed areas where education can affect economic growth. According to him:

- Education may be a complement to physical capital, which implies that increased capital accumulation contributes to economic growth to the extent that sufficient human capital exists to complement improvement in capital.
- Education has direct impact of farmers' productivity in a number of countries.

- Education enhanced the adoption and efficient use of new inputs.
- The rates of labour force participation among women are likely to be influenced by schooling.
- More highly educated persons are likely to pursue further on the job training which could improve productivity.
- There is a close relationship between literacy level and life expectancy. With a higher life expectancy, individual can reap higher return from their educational investments and thus increasing the rate of economic growth.
- Education affects migration decisions. To the extent that the individual make rational decision about migration, productivity should increase.
- More highly educated women are likely to have lower fertility rate, other things been equal, a lower fertility rates implies a higher national income per capital especially in those countries with high rates of unemployment and over-population
- There is a connection between education and health. The level of mother's literacy has a strong impact on infant and child's mortality rate.

The role which education plays in individual and national development makes it imperative for it to be provided for the citizens of nations. It is in the light of this that Article 26 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 declares that:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Many theories could be referred to, to serve as pillars for the theme of this paper. Of particular interest is the Education-Economy Linkage theory of Akangbou (1987). The theory argues that there is a two-dimensional relationship between education and economy of a nation. While the economy allocates to the education sector the resources (both financial, human and materials) which are needed for the training of manpower such as teachers, bankers, lawyers, accountants, doctors, among others, the products of the education sector are absorbed into the economy to contribute to its development. Another theory that can form a thrust for this paper is the human capital theory, as postulated by Schultz (1963) and others. According to the theory, there is an aspect of the factors of production (land, labour, capital, and entrepreneurship), which cannot be traced exclusively to the outputs of the production process. This factor which is

known as the 'residual factor' or 'human capital' differs from the physical capital. While physical capital denotes the assets, properties and materials including money which are used for the production process, human capital denotes the innate abilities, knowledge or skills of workers in an organization. According to the theory, the human capital can be acquired through education, in educational institution be it at primary, secondary and tertiary level. The level of education acquired by an individual however dictates the quality of the individual. When it is high, the quality of human capital will be high but if the level is low, the quality of human capital will be low. The theory also believes that the production of human capital will yield considerable return in future, in terms of greater lifetime income. The higher the quality of individual in terms of the level of education attained, the higher will be the level of income. Better educated individual with more income skills will however get better job and will thus contribute more to economic growth of a nation.

### **Education: Scope and Purposes in Nigeria's Context**

Education has many definitions. Many individuals in different professions had attempted to provide definition for the concept. It is thus difficult to have a universally acceptable definition for it. The fact however remains that from the definitions, one can really form an opinion of what it means. Encyclopedia Americana defines education as a process by which individual gains knowledge or insight or develops attitudes/skills. According to O'Connell (1965), it is the social mechanism which is designed to bring about in the person(s) that submit to it, certain skills and attitudes that are useful and desirable in the society. From the definitions and others still in literature, it can be deduced that education is geared towards the training of a child to acquire knowledge, experience, values, and skills which can enable him/her fit properly into the society in which he or she lives.

Education can be informal, non-formal, and formal in nature. When it is informal, it is organized on individual, family or community level and does not involve curriculum, formal teaching and learning (Aghenta, 1999). When it is non-formal, it involves functional literacy, remedial, and continuing education outside the formal school system. Such education is also described as out-of-school education with no defined age group, rules and regulations, syllabus, certified public examination as well as regular certificate (Aghenta, 1999). Formal education is however acquired in institutions of learning including primary, secondary and tertiary.

Primary education is meant for children of the age of between six and eleven years. Secondary education follows the primary education and meant for a child of the age of 12 years and divided into three years of Junior Secondary (JS) and three years of Senior Secondary

(SS) education in line with the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy. Tertiary education is the ultimate of the education process which is aimed at enriching the knowledge and skills of individual beyond secondary education. Such education can be acquired in universities, polytechnics/monotechnics, colleges of education, school of nursing, school of health technology, school of midwifery, and others of higher status than the secondary (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004, p.36).

In Nigeria, education is expected to:

- Inculcate national consciousness and national unity.
- Inculcate the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of individual and the Nigerian society.
- Train the mind in the understanding the world around.
- Enable a child acquires appropriate skills, abilities, and competencies, both mental and physical, as equipment to live and contribute to the development of the society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004, p.4).

### **Free Education and what it Connotes**

The term 'free education' is a synergy of the words 'free' and 'education'. According to Oxford Dictionary of English, the word 'free' means 'without cost or payment'. Education had earlier been described in this paper. Put together therefore, 'free education' is the education that is provided for an individual without cost or payment. Ordinarily, some costs have to be borne in the course of educating a child. These costs can be classified into institutional, household and social costs (Pandit (1981), cited in Adeyemi (1998). While the institutional costs are borne by educational institutions, the private or household costs are borne by individuals including parents/guardians and students (Ige, 2000). Social costs are the responsibility of the society. Institutional costs also consist of the capital and recurrent costs (Olubor (1997). While capital cost consists of the cost of building, equipment and furniture, the recurrent cost consists of teachers and non-teachers' salaries, cost of consumables, scholarships and unspecified items (Ige, 2000). When the cost of educating a child is borne by Government either at the state or national level, or external agent(s) apart from the parents, it is termed 'free education'. 'Free education' can thus be described as all round education being provided for a child freely by Government, the Philanthropists and other agencies without him/her or the parents paying a penny. It is worthy of note that the motive of providing free education for a child is to assist parents towards alleviating the burden of providing education for him/her.

### **Past Attempts in Free Education Provision in Nigeria**

The idea of free education provision has come of age in Nigeria. Sequel to the restructuring of Nigeria into three

regions (i.e. West, East and North) in 1951, education was on concurrent legislative list between the federal and regional governments. This implies that both levels of government have the right to establish, finance and manage educational institutions. In an attempt to increase the access of the citizens to education, government of Western region inaugurated the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme in 1955, which provided free education for the children of the age of six years (i.e. primary school-age). It is not a gainsaying that through the implementation of the programme, remarkable increase in enrolment in primary schools was recorded in the region. According to Adesina (1977), enrolment in primary schools which was 566, 766 in 1955 increased to 802,534 in 1970. Consequent upon the increased enrolment, more schools were established while substantial fund were provided for its implementation, as indicated in Table 1.

As indicated in Table 1, the sum of £2,767 was released as grants to primary schools when the programme took off in 1955, which represents 52% of the total education grant. There was progressive increase in the grants to primary schools from the base year until 1960-61. Decrease in grants could also be noticed from 1961-62 to 1963-64, which resumed in 1964-65. Percentage of primary schools' grants increased from 52% in 1955-56 to 60% in 1956-57 but decreased to 57% in 1957-58. Substantial increase was noticed from 1958-59 until 1960-61 which decreased to 76% in 1962-63. The trend of increase was again noticed from 1963-64 to 1965-66 (i.e. 74% to 80%).

Impressed by the situation in the Western region, Government of Eastern region introduced similar programme in the region in 1957. Unfortunately, financial insolvency and inadequate planning could not allow it to stand the test of time as it was cancelled two years after implementation (Adesina, 1977). Even though the programme could not be sustained in the East, much fund was committed to it prior to its abolition. According to Adesina (1977), at the end of 1957, a sum of £4, 449,328 had been spent on primary education in the region. Worried by the disparities in the provision of primary education across the regions and the low quality of primary schools during the period of implementation of Universal Primary Education programme in the Western and Eastern regions, Federal Government introduced the national brand of the programme in September, 1976, which was not only free but compulsory for children of primary school-age. Through the implementation of the programme nationwide, number of schools and enrolment also increased substantially. Statistics (Federal Ministry of Education, cited in Alayideino, S.O. (1991) indicates that there were 21,223 primary schools in 1975/76 with 2,165,547 pupils, which increased to 30,726 schools and 8,100,324 pupils with the implementation of the programme in 1976/77. As at 1981/82, number of schools had risen to 37,614 while pupils' enrolment was

**Table 1.** Western Region Grants to Primary Education: 1955-1966 (£000).

Year	Grants to Pry. Educ.	Total Educ. Grants	% of Primary Educ. Grants
1955-56	2,767	5,342	52
1956-57	3,011	5,059	60
1957-58	3,337	5,885	57
1958-59	3,867	5,569	69
1959-60	4,883	5,889	83
1960-61	6,205	7,400	84
1961-62	6,144	7,566	81
1962-63	5,944	7,850	76
1963-64	4,551	6,170	74
1964-65	4,791	6,178	78
1965-66	5,020	6,250	80

Source: Adesina (1977). Planning and education development in Nigeria

**Table 2.** Federal Government Expenditure on Primary Education in Nigeria: 1975/76-1977/78 (N).

Year	Total Rec. Exp.	Rec. & Cap. Exp. On Educ.	Exp. On Prim. Educ	% of Exp. On Pry. Educ.
1974/75	1,003.50	116.71	0.81	0.7
1975/76	1,702.74	265.25	0.89	0.3
1976/77	2,192.40	517.81	212.46	41.0
1977/78	3,040.60	87.36	598.96	63.3

Source: Ndagi, J. (1981), cited in Ajayi, K & Ajayi, T. (1989). Trend in the development of Primary education in Nigeria

14.311.608. Detailed analysis of the financial commitment of Federal Government on the nationwide UPE programme is indicated in Table 2.

It can be noticed in Table 2 that there was significant increase in the expenditure on primary education in 1975/76, being the year the UPE programme commenced. Amount spent on primary education showed increase in 1976/77 and 1977/78.

The advent of civilian government in 1979 led to the adoption of a new constitution and put an end to the reign of military Decrees in the education system. This also placed education on concurrent legislative list between the federal, state and local governments. Consequently, one of the registered political parties in the country then (i.e. Unity Party of Nigeria) inaugurated 'free education at all levels policy' as one of its cardinal objectives. The States under the control of the Party (i.e. Lagos, Oyo, Ondo, Bendel, and Ogun) implemented the policy at the primary and secondary levels but could not do so at the tertiary due to its heavy cost implication and inadequate fund. The situation however led to the provision of free tuition, textbooks, equipment, automatic promotion from primary to secondary schools, as well as abolition of all forms of levies in secondary schools (Adesina, 1977). Even though the free education policy suffered from inadequate funding, there was significant upsurge in the number and enrollment in primary and secondary schools

as a result of its implementation (Adesina, 1977). The situation thus placed the affected States ahead of others in terms of education development in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the growth in the number and enrollment of schools without corresponding provision of adequate infrastructure, facilities and teachers, led to a decline in the standard of education. Adesina (1977) lamented that many mushrooms primary and secondary schools sprang up then, many of among which operated under dismal environment.

The lopsidedness in the implementation of Free Education Policy in the 'LOOBO States' necessitated its suspension in 1983 by the military government. This action was based on the argument that Free Education Policy was unrealistic and cosmetic and that its continued implementation will not give room for provision of quality education while the financial implication will be too heavy for Government to bear. Between 1983 and 1999 when military government was in power, the issue of free education took a back seat among government's policies priorities. During the period, various levies were introduced to generate funds for the sustenance of education. With the assumption of power by another civilian government in 1999, another era of free education emerged in the Southwest Zone, which was coordinated by Alliance for Democracy (one of the registered political parties in the country) in control of the States. Aspects of

**Table 3.** Literacy Rates of Selected Countries of the World as at 2008.

S/N	Country	Literacy Rates %
1	Australia	99.9
2	Canada	99.9
3	Germany	99.9
4	Japan	99.9
5	United Kingdom	99.9
6	United States of America	99.9
7	China	93.5
8	South Africa	82.4
9	Zambia	67.9
10	Angola	66.8
11	Nigeria	66.8

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2008)

free education policy that was implemented in these States (Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Osun, and Ekiti) include:

- Abolition of development and all sorts of levies in public primary and secondary schools.
- Regular release of grants- in- aid to primary and secondary schools.
- Payment of Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) fees for the eligible students and writing off of the Junior Secondary Certificate Examination (JSCE) fees.
- Provision of science and laboratory equipment to public schools.
- Provision of scholarships/bursary awards to students.
- Purchase of library books for schools.

Since 1999, Federal Government, under the leadership of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo has inaugurated the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme to provide free basic education for children, having observed anomalies in its provision in the past. Presently, in many States in Nigeria, partial free education is implemented just like the case of the Southwest Zone. This is in the area of payment of Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE), Junior School Certificate Examination (JSCE) fees and the development levy. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme even has as one of its implementation strategies, the provision of free meal for pupils at the primary level. Unfortunately, this is yet to be implemented in many States in the country.

**Arguments in Favour of Free Education Provision:** Many issues can justify the implementation of Free Education Policy in Nigeria, which include the following:

**Need for Equity and Egalitarianism:** In the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004), the five main goals of Nigeria, which forms the foundation of National Policy on Education, are the building of:

- A free and democratic society.
- A just and egalitarian society.
- A great and dynamic economy.
- A land of bright opportunities for all citizens.

It is however worthy of note that goal (ii) and (iv) above are germane and can be achieved if education is provided free for the citizens.

**Poverty:** Nigeria is a country where poverty looms among the citizens. Official statistics show that in 1980, the national poverty incidence was 28.1 % of the population, which increased to 65.6% in 1996 and to 70% in 2000 (Obadan, 2010). The population living below \$1.25 a day (%) from 2000-2007 is estimated to be 64.4% while the population living below \$2 per day from 2007-2008 is 92.4% (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2007; United Nations Human Development Report, 2009). The level of poverty in Nigeria when compared to other countries in the world is also an issue of concern. Statistics further revealed that Human Poverty Index (HDI) in Nigeria was 114 while the GDP per capital was 141 in world ranking (Human Development Report, 2009). The growing level of poverty in Nigeria and the effects on the citizenry has compelled government to implement poverty alleviation policies such as the defunct Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) to make life comfortable for the citizenry. It thus implies that many parents find it difficult to sustain their families and afford the cost of education for their children.

**Limited Access to Education:** Access to education in Nigeria has not been holistic in spite of her efforts to achieve education for all the citizens by year 2015. Over the years, there have been disparities between the expected and actual enrolment in schools, which indicate that many school-age children are still not enrolled in schools. Adiuoku (2009) found that the expected enrolment in primary schools in 2009 was 34.92 million but the actual enrolment was 24.42 million, which indicates a shortfall of 10.5 million. In the case of the Junior Secondary School, the expected enrolment was 9.27 million but actual enrolment was 3.27 million. Also, out of the 49 million illiterate adults, only 500,000 enrolled in schools thus indicating a shortfall of 39, 500,000. It is

**Table 4.** Federal Government's Expenditure on Education in Nigeria: 2000-2009.

Year	Fed. Govt. Annual Budget (₦ Billion)	Alloc. To Education (₦ Billion)	Edu, All as % of Total Budget
2000	664,734.30	67,508.10	10.16
2001	918,028.60	59,744.60	6.51
2002	1,188,734.60	109,455.20	9.21
2003	1,308,287.90	79,436.10	6.07
2004	1,321,580.70	93,767.90	7.10
2005	1,547,272.80	120,035.50	7.76
2006	1,842,600.00	151,723.50	8.20
2007	NA	137.480	6.07
2008	NA	210.00	13.00
2009	NA	183.360	NA

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria Statistical Bulletin (2010).

**Table 5.** Applications and Admissions Into Universities in Nigeria: 1999-2009.

Year	No. of Applications to Univs.	No Admitted	Left Over
1999/2000	417,773	78,550	339,223
2000/2001	467,490	50,277	417,213
2001/2002	550,399	60,718	544,321
2002/2003	994,380	51,845	942,535
2003/2004	1,046,950	105,157	941,793
2004/2005	841,878	122,492	719,386
2005/2006	916,371	NA	NA
2006/2007	803,472	123,626	679,846
2007/2008	1,054,053	194,521	859,532
2008/2009	1,182,381	NA	NA

Source: <http://www.ume.com.ng>, cited in Ajadi, T.O. (2010). Private universities in Nigeria: The Challenges ahead. *American Journal of Scientific Research*, 7 (15-24).

not a gainsaying that situation where many children of school-age are outside schools would draw the hands of the clock of the country backward, particularly in her efforts to achieve Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals.

**Low Manpower/Literacy Level:** In Nigeria, manpower development capacity has been very low, particularly when it is compared to the situation in the developed and the developing countries. In spite of the effort of Government at ensuring one hundred percent literacy of the citizens, literacy rate has been very low. Many children of school age are not having access to schools, In Table 3, the literacy rate of Nigeria in comparison with selected countries in the world as at year 2008 is indicated.

As indicated in Table 3, while the developed countries had higher literacy rate, the case of Nigeria was different, having recorded low literacy rate (i.e. 66.8%) as at that particularly year.

**Arguments against Free Education Provision:** Even though free education is a good policy as it can ensure the development of education, the following factors do not justify its adoption and implementation in Nigeria:

**Parlous State of the Economy:** Over the years, the economy of Nigeria has been in parlous state. Revenue from oil (the major source of revenue) has been inadequate for the financing of the various sectors thus making it uneasy to finance education sector appropriately. It is unfortunate that in the past years, due to poor economy, allocation to education sector has been significantly low in quantity, which is confirmed by data in Table 4.

It is therefore not a gainsaying that the economy might not be able to sustain Free Education Policy implementation. The cases of the defunct Universal Primary Education (UPE), which crashed in the western and Eastern regions due to inadequate fund, are typical examples.

**Falling Standard of Education:** It is no longer news that the quality of education in Nigeria has continued to fall (Dabaleen, Oni & Adekola, 2000; Saint, Hartnett & Strassner, 2003). One of the policies associating with free education provision is automatic promotion of pupils/students in schools. This entails the promotion and mass movement of pupils/students from one grade/class to the next irrespective of whether examination is passed

**Table 6.** Unemployment Rates in Nigeria: 2002-2007 Percentage.

Survey Period	Composite	Urban	Rural
2002	12.6	8.7	14.2
2003	14.8	10.9	16.4
2004	13.4	9.5	15.0
2005	11.9	10.1	12.6
2006	13.7	10.2	14.6
2007	14.6	10.9	14.8

Source: National Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force Survey, in Federal Republic of Nigeria (2009) Annual Abstract of Statistics

or not. It thus implies that all pupils will be promoted to the next grade which will further undermine the standard of education.

**Unsatisfied Admission Demand at Tertiary Education Level:** Over the years, the issue of unsatisfied admission demand for tertiary education can be noticed in Nigeria. While many candidates are willing to have their ways into tertiary institutions (i.e. polytechnics/monotechnics, universities, colleges of education, among others), statistics, as indicated in Table 5 confirmed that they have not been having their ways.

As indicated in Table 5, as at 1999/2000, applications to universities in Nigeria were 417, 773 out of which only 78, 550 candidates were admitted. The trend of unsatisfied admission demand continues till 2007/2008. As at 2007/2008, 1,054,053 candidates applied for admission but 194, 521 were admitted. The argument by universities' administrators has been that the available infrastructures and facilities are limited and cannot cater for the number of applicants. As a result of the inability to gain admission into tertiary institutions, many candidates are becoming frustrated and discouraged daily.

One major factor behind the prevalence of unsatisfied admission demand for tertiary education in the country is the imbalance in the number and outputs of pupils/students at the primary and secondary education levels vis- a- vis the tertiary level. The high level outputs of secondary schools which is incongruent with the number of tertiary institutions have led to this situation. It is therefore pertinent to emphasise that free education provision at the primary and secondary levels will lead to increase in enrolment and outputs at these levels of the education system. Even though private tertiary institutions are springing up daily in every 'nooks and crannies' of the country, these have proved to be insufficient to take care of those who wish to receive tertiary education in the country. Providing free education for the citizens might thus aggravate the situation and continue to generate tension in the country.

**Unemployment:** In Nigeria, many outputs of the education system find it difficult to secure job after their training in educational institutions (Okebukola, 2001;

Aghenta, 1999; Ibeh, 2009; Dabo, 2008). It is even worthy of note that Nigeria is a country where most parents believe that after the graduation of their children, they should be provided white collar jobs. It thus implies that there is over-reliance on white collar jobs by graduates in Nigeria. Data in Table 6 show the level of unemployment in Nigeria between 2002 and 2007.

It is not a gainsaying that if education is provided free for all citizens, more children would enroll in schools and there would be astronomical increase in the outputs of education system. Unemployment level would thus continue to rise and would generate more tension in the country because they might enlist in different kinds of social vices such as kidnapping, robbery, prostitution, among others, which can be noticed in the country these days.

**Opportunity Cost of Free Education Provision:** There is the issue of opportunity cost in the provision of free education for all citizens in Nigeria. In as much as more children of school-age would enroll in education if it is provided free, many individuals in apprenticeship would drift towards education which would create a sort of social imbalance. This was noticed when free education policy was implemented in the South West States of Nigeria i.e. Lagos, Oyo, Ondo, Ogun, and Bendel States in 1979. Many over-aged children in tailoring, bricklaying, carpentry, among other vocations resigned and enrolled in schools. Many teachers were then scared with the number of over-aged adults who proved difficult to be taught having left classes many years before their re-enrolment in schools.

**Indiscipline among Pupils/Students:** Everybody wishes to receive free education. Every parents want free education for their children. There is however the belief that anything that is free lacks quality. People don't usually value what they do not pay for. When education is thus provided free for the citizens, they will not value it. There will thus be high level unseriousness in schools based on the fact that after all it is not the money of their parents that will be wasted if they fail in schools.

**Inadequate Human, Material and Financial Resources:** A feature of education system in Nigeria is inadequate human, material and financial resources. It needs not be overemphasized that the provision of free education for all citizens has to be matched by the provision of adequate resources, particularly the level that can cope with the envisaged enrolment in schools. Presently, Nigeria suffers from acute shortage of teachers in primary and secondary schools as confirmed by Data in Table 7 and 8.

It is evident from Table 7 that in 2005, there were 60,188 primary schools in Nigeria with an enrolment of 22,115,432 pupils and 599, 172 teachers. Teacher/pupil ratio was then 37:1. In 2006, number of schools increased to 86, 833 while enrolment increased slightly to 22,863,194 and the number of teachers to 657,192 with pupil/teacher ratio of 34.2. Both the number of schools,

**Table 7.** Primary Schools Statistics in Nigeria: 2005-2007.

Year	No of Pry Schools.	Enrolment	No. of Teachers	Pupil/Teacher Ratio
2005	60,188	22,115,432	599,172	37
2006	86,833	22,863,194	657,192	34.2
2007	92,007	21,632,970	468,202	46

Source: Federal Ministry of Education (2009). The State of Education in Nigeria

**Table 8.** Pupil-Classrooms Ratio in Primary Schools in Nigeria: 1999-2005.

Year	Enrolment	Classrooms	Pupil-Classrooms ratio
1999	17,907,328	102,943	174
2000	19,151,442	116,101	165
2001	19,041,223	124,229	153
2002	19,806,082	117,020	170
2003	25,704,793	110,494	231
2004	21,395,510	254,319	84
2005	22,115,432	254,319	87

Source: Federal Ministry of Education (2007). Statistics of Education in Nigeria: 1999-2005

enrolment, and teachers decreased in 2007 unlike in 2006 (i.e. 92,007; 21,632,070; and 468,202 respectively) where the teacher/pupil ratio was 46. The ideal teacher-pupil ratio at primary level in Nigeria is 1:259 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) which implies that the ratios recorded at the period were abnormal which will have serious implication on the kind of education that was received by the pupils.

It is indicated in Table 8 that in 1999, there were 17,907,328 pupils in primary schools in Nigeria against 102,943 available classrooms. The pupil/classrooms ratio was then 174. Enrolment increased till 2003. It was 19,151,442 in 2000 and 25,704,793 in 2003. As at 2003, there were 110,494 classrooms with pupil/classrooms of 231. In 2004, enrolment decreased to 21,395,510 but classrooms increased to 254,319, the ratio being 84. Enrolment was 22,115,432 in 2005 while classrooms were 254,319 and pupil/classrooms ratio was 87. It is worthy of note that in an ideal situation, thirty five pupils supposed to be in a class in primary schools. Situation where there are more pupils than classrooms will lead to congestion in class and ineffective lesson delivery.

It needs not be overemphasized that provision of free education for the citizens has serious and heavy cost implication on Government, which has been the major financier of education in Nigeria. In Nigeria, education is financed mainly by Government, either at federal or state levels, Parents, Companies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Philanthropists, among others. With free education, it implies that the cost of provision of infrastructural facilities, payment of teachers and non-teachers' salaries, and others have to be borne by Government. During the period of implementation of

Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the Western region, stupendous amount was spent on its finance, as corroborated by data in Data 1 and 2 above. It is noteworthy that as a result of the policy, enrolment increased tremendously (Adesina, 1977), which might be experienced during the implementation of the policy because many parents would wish to enroll their children in schools due to its free nature. What this implies is that there would be additional yoke on Government. Since the economy has not been in good shape, there is tendency for the problem of Government to be overstressed.

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The situation in Nigeria makes it imperative for education of her citizens to be given maximum priority. Unfortunately, many citizens of Nigeria are yet to avail themselves the opportunity to acquire education, due to factors such as poverty of parents/guardians, unemployment, among others. Over the years, the issue of whether education should be free for the citizens has been a matter of controversy. Even though the implementation of free education policy will have benefits for a country such as Nigeria, if the past experiences are anything to go by, the issue of free education provision will be dismissed with a wave of hand. In the past, many factors contributed to the collapse of free education policy implementation. In this paper, the factors that can make free education feasible and justifiable and also not feasible/justifiable in Nigeria were discussed. It is not a gainsaying that a country such as Nigeria requires education for her citizens in view of her present developmental challenges and the role it can play in com-



bating these challenges. It is however not the provision of education that matters but the provision of qualitative education through which quality outputs/graduates that can contribute to the nation's development at the end can be produced. It is worthy of note that apart from oil, part of the revenue of Government is derived from tax on the citizens either directly or indirectly. It thus implies that education fund being derived from taxes should be spent for all the citizens. Since education is a sector out of many in the economy where few individuals are involved in formal education, spending this fund on the few individuals implies an injustice. What of those in apprenticeship who are not able to enroll in schools.

In view of the importance of education in individual and national development, Government should devise strategies that can ensure that education is available to the majority if not all the citizens in Nigeria and that those already in educational institutions are sustained. For quality education to be provided for the citizens therefore call for cost-sharing strategy between the stakeholders in education. To achieve this, the following are recommended.

**Introduction of Minimal Fees in Educational Institutions:** Parents/Guardians should share the cost of their children's education with Government. In this case, minimal fees should be introduced in educational institutions to generate fund for education development. Illegal collections by educational institutions' administrators and teachers should be banned which from observations do contribute to the hardship of parents in the education of their children. Ministry of education and other government agencies in charge of the monitoring of schools should be alive to their responsibilities.

**Provision of Scholarships and Bursaries to Students:** Government should award scholarships and bursaries not only to the indigent pupils/students but to those in dire need of money/assistance for their education. Wealthy individuals, companies and Non-Governmental Organisations should support Government by initiating more scholarship programmes for pupils/students in educational institutions so as to reduce the hardship of parents on the provision of education for their children.

**Tax on Public Workers:** As a way of boosting the Education Tax fund being collected from the profit of companies operating in Nigeria. Government at both the state and federal levels should introduce minimal education levy per each public civil servant this is because these workers at one time or the other, have benefited from education being provided by government. Such money should be deducted directly from the salary on Pay As You Earn (PAYE) basis and form part of the Education Tax Fund.

#### **Reaching out to International Charity Organizations:**

Government should reach out to International Charity

Organizations for financial assistance in the education sector in view of the limited fund available for the sector.

**Re-introduction of Education loan for Students:** Government should re-introduce education loan for pupils/students in educational institutions with interest free or reduced interest which parents can process for their children/wards.

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