

## **SCHOOL LOCATION AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *It is obvious that the place a school is located has an impact negatively or positively on the educational opportunities available to those committed to it. There is a general consensus therefore that improving the availability of school opportunities increases greater equality in gender and socio-economic status participation. This therefore influences the policies and measures being embarked by numerous administrations across the world to tackle the educational imbalance between classes, states and ethnic groups in the country. In this paper, equality of educational opportunities entails a lot of things. It means giving the same type educational treatment to everybody without any form of discrimination regardless of any location, disability or barriers the individual may have. The 1999 Nigerian constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria coded, institutionalized and legitimized political patronage representative for sharing the national positions and resources. It provided not only the clauses of “federal character” at the national level and diversity at the local and state level of government, but also instituted a Federal Character Commission to oversee, implement and ensure compliance. There are educational disadvantaged states in Nigeria that led to the introduction of “Catchment Area” which is another phrase in the admission policy to promote equalization of educational opportunity. In this paper, the type of school, topography of site, population, nature of host community, aesthetic value of the site, availability of amenities, pollution levels are some of the factors put into consideration prior to the establishment of a school. Barriers to educational opportunities as identified in this paper include; individual differences amongst pupils, selection methods, quota system of admission, unaffordable costs, gender discrimination, armed conflicts and limited admission spaces.*

**KEYWORD:** school location, education, educational opportunity, federal character

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Education over the years has been established by scholars as a constant tool required in to attaining of societal aspiration of citizens and nations (Ahmed, 2003; Nwogu, 2015). There is a general consensus therefore that improving the availability of school opportunities increases greater equality in gender and socio-economic status participation. This therefore influences the policies and measures being embarked by numerous administrations across the world to tackle the educational imbalance between classes, states and ethnic groups in the country. Recognizing the importance of education in the dynamics of the economy, politics and the society, education was defined as an instrument par excellence for effecting national advancement” (FGN, 2004). Nwogu (2015) postulates that benefits that are ripped from investing in equitable standard education

cannot be measured as it generates increased economic returns as well as rise intellectual growth in individuals while have lasting impacts on the public health and society in general.

Research studies by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) highlighted the distance to school impacts the enrollment of pupils as well as the activities of tutors (UNESCO, 2005). The organization further reiterates that conditions at home, in school, on the way to school and in the community are more likely to prevent students and teachers from having a meaningful and conducive learning environment. According to Onuma (2010) the location of a school has the potential to impact the standard and effectiveness of instructional supervision. He further contends that school location has far reaching impacts on the interest in attending school as well as the provision of educational resources and the dispersal of facilities amongst the rural and urban educational centers. Scholars identify that the distance of school to the home as one of the critical influencers that impact the opportunities of children attending school, the academical performance of students as well the level of responsiveness to duty (Adepoju, 2003). The factors highlighted as responsible for less attendance in schools includes poor location of the school, incessant changes in the policies surrounding education by the government, closure of schools which is contingent upon teachers strike action, high student teacher ratio, poor delegation and supervision, monitoring and evaluation machinery, lack of good text books, poor content and context of instruction, poverty and non-conductive environment to mention but a few.

Magulod (2017) recognized some contributory factors that may define a good relationship between school location and educational opportunity. Further buttressing on his view, he opined that in an effective educational center there is an atmosphere of order, goals orientation that is free from threats of bodily harm and indicators that include exploding rates of drug abuse, arson, strikes and other forms of student induced and perpetuated violence are virtually non-existent. Nevertheless, the quality of school, the location as well as the distance to the school will always play an important role to serious parents, the school personnel and students in the sense that it influences the academical attainment of the student and the extent to which school programmes are directed and controlled. In the school setting, the principle is charged with the production of school programmes and activities that range from planning, organizing, controlling, coordinating and evaluating the school programme in line with the stated objectives of the school.

### **School Location: Meaning and Concepts**

The location of a school dictates to a reasonable extent the educational opportunities offered to its recipients. Numerous scholars have offered definitions to the term "School Location". According to Ntibi & Edoho (2017) school location is a particular location with regards to its physical surroundings "urban or rural" where an education center is situated. In the Nigerian society, life in rural area areas are rather identical, identical and rather less complicated when compared to urban areas that is complicated, heterogeneous and plagued with cultural diversities. This conditions it has been highlighted has an impact on the academic performance as well as the enrollment of pupils (Eugene & Ezech, 2016). Ntibi & Edoho (2017) posits that this can be attributed to the educational circumstances and circulation of social amenities such as electricity, pipe borne water,

health facilities that favour the urban areas when compared to the rural areas. This can also be linked in the dispersion of educational facilities, opportunities and tutors.

It can thus be deduced that the educational opportunities in the Nigerian educational sector varies across schools. It would thus seem that pupils in schools in urban areas in Nigeria have better opportunities to attaining education than pupils in schools in rural areas.

### **Education: Meaning and Concepts**

Education has been defined as “the fundamental right of humans as well as the foundation to sustainable advancement that contributes to all three dimensions of sustainable development ‘environment, social and economic’ that underpin the governance and security of the individual”. According to Kumar & Ahmad (2008) education can be defined as a process of socialization through which an individual is taught desirable values with which the inherent values needed for survival and continuity of the society are passed on. Agada (2004) asserts that “education is a process through which a society transmits its culture across generations or a process that improves the way of life or culture of a society”. In addition, he stated that education can be defined as the inculcation of competencies, attitudes, knowledge, values through process of institutionalization that has been established for this particular purpose. It therefore be deduced that it could be seen as a system molded by its internal logic, dynamics and habits that are under constant transformations and changes. It is a crucial instrument for individual and social development striving to meet the divergent expectations presented by the times. In Obasi (2000) views, education contains four features; discipline, an institution and a process. The author explained that as product it endows society with skills, knowledge and attitude for the wellbeing of society; as a discipline, it is an organization branch of learning, it represents an enduring network of relationships in social structure and as a process it connotes the intentional and unintentional act of instructing and training people as a conscious effort in bettering society.

### **Equality of Educational Opportunities in Nigeria**

Equality of educational opportunities entails a lot of things. It means giving the same type of educational treatment to everybody without any form of discrimination, regardless of any location, disparity or barriers the individual may have. In this vein, the 199 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria coded, institutionalized and legitimized political patronage representative for sharing the national positions and resources. It provided not only the clauses of federal character at the national level and diversity at the local and state levels of government, but also instituted a “Federal Character Commission” charged with overseeing and implementing and ensuring the compliance of this. In practice, political parties translated and interpreted the “federal character” and diversity and diversity constitutional provisions as “zoning” of political posts and positions while the party in government adopted “quota and patronage system” and also a total politicization of both the civil service, education and the armed forces of the federation. In reality and plain language, the generality of Nigerians perceive themselves as strangers and refugees and are blatantly treated as such outside of their states and indeed local government of origin.

This system is described as “educational disadvantaged area”. Amaele (2000) highlights that the outcome of Lugardian ideals of a perfectly government education was the absence of an English speaking educated class in northern Nigeria in the early period. This necessitated the importation of thousands of southerners into the north as clerks and artisans.

Lord Lugard was eventually succeeded by Sir High Clifford as Governor of the then Nigeria he there after lamented that “after two decades of British occupation of the Northern provinces not a single native of these provinces has been sufficiently educated to enable him to fill the most minor clerical post in the office of any government department. Thus it can be deduced that the emphasis of western education in the south against traditional as well as Islamic education in the north had immense consequences for the contemporary local democracy in Nigeria and above all the bureaucracy of policy processing.

Scholars establish that the Nigerian philosophy on education is focused on the development of its citizens into sound and effective members of the society by offering equal and standard educational opportunities for all citizens across the primary, secondary and university levels within and outside the formal educational system (Adenle & Uwameiye, 2012; Nnamani & Oyibe, 2016). Adenle & Uwameiye (2012) further highlights that the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) lays credence to the above, in the sense that the government policy shall be directed towards achieving equal educational opportunities across all levels. These are some of the measures introduced to achieve the principles of equality in educational opportunity in Nigeria. The abolition of school fees in the state owned schools, following the Federal Universal Primary Educational opportunities to all that could make use of them and not merely those who could afford it.

On the basis of this above discussion it is critical to ask if equality of educational opportunity is practiced in Nigerian schools. If it is, what kind of equality do we apply and what is or are its or their resultant effects with regards to political and socio-economic considerations. According to Okwori (2003) there are educational disadvantaged states in Nigeria that led to the introduction “Catchment Area” which is another phrase in the admission policy to promote equalization of educational opportunity. “Catchment area” refers to the locality in which federal universities are established. The policy stipulated that the states in the immediate vicinity of each University should derive special preferences with regard to admissions. The admission policy of “discretion” opportunity is given to universities to cater for good candidates that would be adversely affected in the process of applying the various quota system guidelines. The most current guideline on admission approved by the Federal Government of Nigeria through the National Universities Commission is as follows: Merit = 45%, Catchment Area = 35%, disadvantaged states = 20 % (Okoroma, 2008). It is critical to highlight that the following provisions by the Federal Government through the NUC (1999, P. 68).

- i. If because of the pattern of applications and the range of courses offered by universities cannot fill all the places allocated to some states, universities are to consult the second choice list of candidates
- ii. In any given university no state shall benefit from both the criteria of locality and educationally disadvantaged (Pp 55-56).

### **Location of Schools and Educational Opportunity**

Having decided to establish a school in a locality, the choice of location and indeed the site on which the school buildings are to be constructed, becomes very important. By location, it has to do with the accessibility of the school and its situations in relation to other features in the locality. For instance, whether it is centrally placed in the locality or town, or at the North-Eastern, North-Western part of the locality. Its site relates principally to the topography. The slope, nature of the soil on which the buildings are to be constructed. All these are primarily directed towards ensuring security of lives and properties at initial start. The school site incorporates the location of the school and the availability of land for the school which has always been a major factor in achieving peace and stability, educational selection of site is one of the most fundamental steps to be taken in the establishment of schools.

In selecting a site that will define some level of natural peace and security in the system, some basic factors, policies and conditions that will give rise to igniting interests and opportunities for children or students to go to school must be called to mind. These factors comprise;

- The type of school
- Topography of site
- Population
- Nature of host community
- Aesthetic values of the site
- Availability of amenities
- Avoiding pollution i.e pollution free (Abraham, 2003).

#### **1) Type of school**

The type of school one chooses to establish will largely determine the appropriateness of a school site and the level of security and caution to be employed. This is because of the size of the school land space and the facilities needed for secondary schools will no doubt be bigger than what is needed for primary schools. The school should be sited in a virgin area away from the town or inhabited area so that students and teachers can properly concentrate on their work and studies.

#### **2) Topography of Site**

This refers to the elevation of the land. In citing a school the level of land must be taken into consideration and a land in which a school should be sited will be at flat level that is prone to flooding, erosion or any other form of natural disasters as these factors may affect the learning and teaching activities of the teachers and students while creating intolerable levels of security to lives and properties.

#### **3) Population**

This refers to the number of projected number of people in a school. It determines the provision of human and material facilities required by the school. The projected population of the students largely influences the size and facilities needed for a school site. According to Ajayi (2007) the comfort of students and their tutors have been established as one of the most critical aspects of any school environment as if students are comfortable their learning capabilities will be greatly improved. Being comfortable however is relative to a number of factors such as noise, temperature,

climate, sanitation, available space which will go a long way in determining the peaceful nature of the school.

4) Nature of Host Community

It is very important to site school the school in a location that will be peaceful and cohabit able and the various communities will be able to patronize the school. The nature of the host community goes a long way in impacting educational opportunities negatively or positively. This is critical because in situations where there is a communal crisis, most schools are closed and students withdraw from schools in this affected area and this potentially has a negative impact on the activities of the school and students.

5) Aesthetic Values of the Site

Consideration for natural beauty should be stressed in the selection of a school site. Natural beauty is very important as the buildings and other facilities to be provided in a school. Trees, shrubs, streams, brooks, flower bed lawns and field aid to beautify schools and stimulate effective teaching and learning. Regular painting and maintaining the quality of buildings, trimming of flowers, clearing of grasses, proper disposal of refuse, sweeping and removing cobwebs among others provides a relaxed atmosphere for the molding of minds and also instilling the right mental frame of mind.

6) Availability of Basic Amenities

For a school to function properly and effectively basic amenities must be provided. These are accessibility, communication cables, water and electricity, good sewage and drainage systems should be available, if these are provided, this will automatically reduce internal crises that might emanate from teaching staff and students within the school.

7) Prevention of Pollution, Hazard and Corruption

Schools should not be sited close to industrial areas, which will be poisonous, offensive and debilitating, odors gases and waste products. Schools should not be located very close to hostels, gambling and cinema houses and markets so that students are not distracted and corrupted. School sites should be considered before a school is set up. School mapping activities will help in the process of locating school environment. School mapping involves the location for building structures of schools, class rooms, laboratories and workshops.

### **Barriers to Educational Opportunity**

Barrier can be defined as any obstacle or situations that prevent individuals or objects from advancing, communicating or being together. Based on this article, barrier can thus be defined as obstacles to educational opportunities that the populaces are forced to experience in the course of their lives (Nwogu, 2015). According to Okeke (2009) it refers to the situations that prevent access to education across all levels that prevent citizens of a country from attaining the optimal levels of development as well contributing the advancement of the society.

Aluede et al (2012) access to education includes the process of enrolling, attending and completing the levels of education. Hence barrier to educational opportunities refers to any of the following:

- Failure to join in any educational establishment.
- Little or no opportunity to regularly go to school.
- Failure to fully finish the prescribed duration for a course.



- Inability to reach a prescribed objective.
- Failure to transit to the next level of education.

According to Nwogu (2017), in the context of Nigeria, the factors that hinder equal opportunities to education comprise of:

i. Individual Difference amongst pupils

In the Nigerian educational system, there is no consideration of the capability and talent of individual students that are enrolled in our institutions of learning. Critics have therefore argued that the running of a consensus curriculum in the educational sector does not do justice to objectives of education in the sense that it is rather unfair to offer equal doses of education to two students with varying levels of capabilities and talents. This according to Nwogu (2017) is a barrier based on the fact that instead of providing equal chances to education it subjects the mental disadvantaged child to the same educational curriculum. Equally, it is funny subjecting a gifted child with the same curriculum with a normal child. What is required therefore is a flexible or diversified curriculum that would handle the various capabilities and talents in the educational sector.

ii. Selection Method

It is on record, that no nation has successfully absorbed all potential students into their educational system. This Nwogu (2017) posits is the reason behind the establishment of examinations like the National Examination Council (NECO), Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) to mention but a few which have been employed to select candidates into a limited number of educational opportunities and organization in the country. This form of selection that is structured on merit stimulates inequality rather than equality in the sense that those who fail to pass these competitive tests are prevented the opportunity to go to the institution of learning of their choice.

iii. Quota System of Admission

This system of admission is based on Federal Character provision in the constitution and is aimed at closing the expanding gap of educational development between the South and the North. It rather encourages discrimination against prospective university candidates on the basis that they originate from a certain state in the country. This is clearly barrier to educational opportunity.

iv. Unaffordable Cost/Transition Rate from Primary to Secondary

Scholars have long established that poverty remains one of the biggest hinders to educational attainment and quality education in Nigeria. This is worsened by the situation that has seen parents made to pay for text books, uniforms, feeding even where for instance, primary school education is supposedly free in most states in the country. These therefore establish financial obstacles to numerous parents in the country thereby limiting the educational opportunities of their children.

v. Gender Discrimination

In the Nigerian context and Africa in general, females face numerous obstacles to opportunity to equal education participation and they include early marriage, early pregnancy, child labour and prostitution to mention a few. This can be attributed to the patriarchal nature of the African society

that include ancient beliefs and cultures that view the education of a girl as a waste based on the presumption that the roles of females is child bearing and domestic chores. This challenges have seen so many girls fail to enroll or drop out of school (Offorma, 2009; Nwogu, 2017).

vi. Humanitarian Emergencies and Armed Conflict as Barriers:

All the across the world, the devastation of war can be clearly seen. From the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the disturbing images in Syria to the events in some parts of Northern-Nigeria armed conflicts has proved to have serious implication for the attainment of equal educational participation. Nwogu (2017) postulated that across the globe as a result of armed conflicts, humanitarian crisis have continued to spring up. In the Nigerian context, the Boko-Haram activities have led to migration of people, the closure of schools and the resulting human crisis in the country. These locations hence, experiencing these armed conflicts drastically reduce their educational opportunities.

vii. Limited Admission Spaces

One of the major challenges to education opportunities in Nigeria is admission spaces in these centers of learning. According to Nwogu (2017) the growing rise in the realization of the importance of education has seen an increase in demand for tertiary education in Nigeria. This has seen tertiary institutions struggling to expand their facilities, facilities and manpower to accommodate this surge, this however is rather difficult. According to a report by the National Universities Commission most universities in the country were over populated, under staffed and facilities over stretched. This was the reason behind the adoption of the carrying capacity that was aimed at ensuring that students are admitted into institutions based on the resources available. These resources comprise of adequately stocked libraries, accommodation, adequate lecture centers, excellent student to staff ratio to mention a few (Henry, 2011). This policy he opined was aimed at improving the quality of education but has turned out to be a barrier to access to tertiary education in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

It is obvious that the place a school is located negatively or positively defines the educational opportunities available to those committed to it. The common belief that expansion of schooling leads to greater equality of access to educational opportunity informs various government measures and policies aimed at off-setting the educational imbalance between classes, states and ethnic groups in Nigeria as a result of the identification of the importance of education to the political, societal, economical dynamics of the Nigerian society. The increasing awareness of the importance and effect of education by the population has increased the quest for the provision of education opportunities in the country. The growing scale however, of educational provision needs a certain form of planning and organization. It is clear hence, that in order to make education available to every member of the society the government has to at all levels make sure of its distribution equally. In addition, school location may impact the quality and thoroughness of instructional supervision and this has serious impacts on the distribution of educational resources and the provision of amenities amongst rural and urban school and also determines the extent of educational opportunities linked with the environment.



## Recommendations

This article makes the following recommendations:

- i. Since location is a major factor that impacts the educational opportunity in Nigeria, government should make favorable policies and deregulate existing ones that are inimical to school location so as to encourage anybody who wishes to gain access to education.
- ii. An environment that creates a positive impact on the students should be offered while sustained efforts should be made at equipping, staffing and funding all our institutions of learning. There should be equal distribution of teaching and learning, human and material resources in all schools. The teacher-pupil/student ratio should be reduced at the primary and post primary levels respectively for better atmosphere of teaching and learning.

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