

FALLING STANDARD OF EDUCATION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: WHO IS TO BE
BLAMED AND WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

PAPER DELIVERED ON 3RD OF AUGUST, 2019 ORGANIZED BY AT-TA'AWUUN
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES, BOSSO, NIGER STATE

DELIVERED

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PREAMBLE

That the north is educationally backwards is a statement of affirmation by the count of the number almajiris, beggars and destitute, political thugs and jobbers (Jagaliyya) roaming the streets of northern cities is a clear testimony to that assertion. Six decades after independence, the northern region with 19 states is still believed to be educationally backward compared to the southern and western parts of Nigeria. Although, historically the western and southern regions received western education much earlier from the Missionaries and colonial masters. The north also had contact with western education only the colonialist before independence with the widespread presence of the missionaries in the middle belt. Islamiyya education was known to be the form of education which the northerners used to read and write in Arabic consequent upon trans-Saharan trade with Arabs and jihadist of Shehu Usman Bin Fodio (1754 - 1815) in the 18th century. Therefore, there exist civilisation in the north before the coming of colonialist in the northern region. Apart from Hausa and Fulfulde, the Arabic language was spoken by the populace and used in educating its members. So, the north is not a region that could be termed illiterate (Sani, 2015).

Status of Education in North

Geographically, the northern region which today constitutes 19 states (north-central; north-west and north-east) was an autonomous division called northern province. The region was an amalgamation of 14 kingdoms of predominant Hausa's, Fulani's, Kanuri's and few Yoruba speaking people of Ilorin. The north occupies the savannah grassland of 729,966 square kilometres. Niger State is the largest in the landmass of 76,000 Km² equivalent to 12 southern states with a total landmass of about 78,000 Km². (see fig. 1).

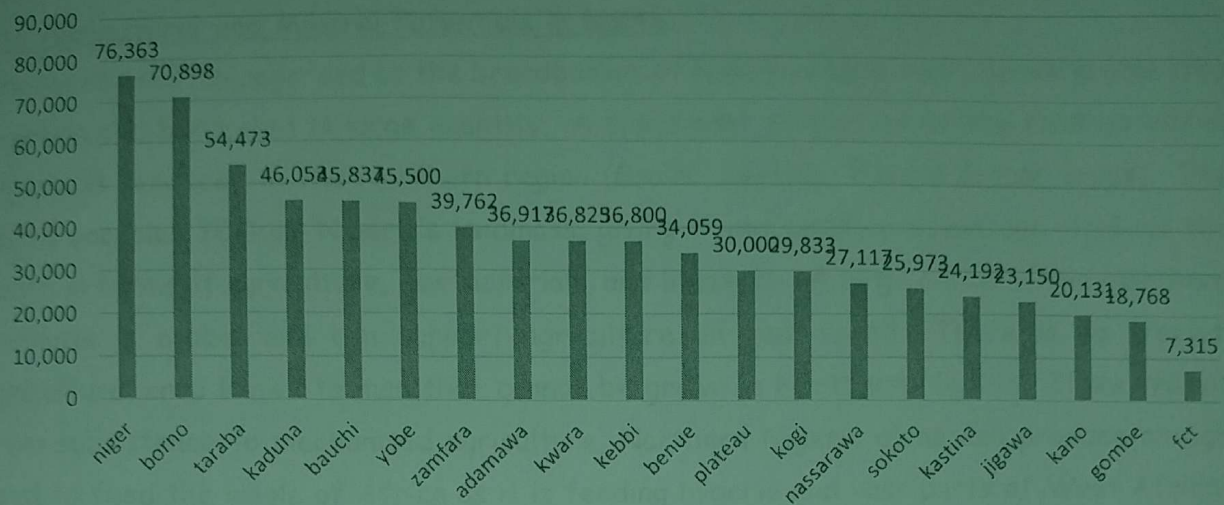


Fig. 1: Northern States Land Area in Square Kilometers

Review of literature has indicated that the problems of education in the north can be found in issues of access to education, its quality, equity, and impacts. To address these problems, the government of Nigeria has received several interventions in aids and grants from International development partners DIFID, UNESCO, UNICEF, and USAID. The past government has also come up with different interventionist programmes; such as the UPE in the 1970s and UBE in 1999 geared towards providing free and compulsory education to boost access to education. The Nigerian Northern Education Initiative Plus Project was a recently launched in 2011 seeking to increase access to education of over 2 million school aged children in the Northern states in partnership with states governments in insurgent afflicted areas of Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Gombe, Sokoto, Kastina and Bauchi. There are the United Nations Millennium development goals (MDG'S) which had target eight goals; provision of access to primary education; gender equality; extreme poverty reduction; reduce infant mortality; improve maternal health; HIV/AIDS; environmental sustainability and global partnership.

Consequently, today, we have over 10 Million out of school children in the Northern region. Statistically, one in every five of the world's out-of-school children are in Nigeria (UNICEF). In the north, the picture is glimmer and bleaker with a net attendance rate of 47.7% of those children that attend school. Primary school attendance and achievement of the North is below the national average with over 70% of students in JSS unable to read and write. Parents would prefer to keep their wards at home due to poverty, inadequate school facilities, poor quality of education and insecurity than to allow them to attend school. Thus, we can see that the level of education deprivation in northern Nigeria is chiefly driven by economic barriers, socio-cultural norms, and practices, especially on the girl child. In Borno,

Yobe and Adamawa states, about 802 schools are presently closed, 497 classrooms destroyed and another 1392 damaged but repairable by Boko Haram between 2011 to date.

The Agricultural and Mineral Potentials in North

The North is often regarded as the breadbasket of Nigeria where every known arable crop is grown and harvested in large quantity. A significant proportion of the food we eat in Nigeria is produced in the Northern region (Grains, cereals, Tubers & cash crops). The North occupies 70% of Nigeria's landmass, giving it comparative advantage vis-à-vis the South in terms of agriculture, raw materials, and livestock. A large chunk of the Northern landmass is arable and can support agriculture all year-round. There is no tropical agricultural crop known to man that cannot be grown in Northern Nigeria. If we transit from subsistence to mechanised agriculture, Northern Nigeria alone can produce enough food to feed the whole of Africa as it is feeding Nigeria and vast parts of West African countries now.

Northern Nigeria alone is bigger than in most African countries. Currently, Nigeria waste a staggering 1.3 trillion Naira on importing various food items and other consumables annually, which is almost one-six of the nation's budget even though the North can produce all the food we need. Already, it is the North that feeds the South-East, South-South, and South-West of Nigeria ranging from food grains to beef. It is not contestable that, virtually all Southern food crops and livestock come from the North. Much of Nigeria's freshwater resources are also in the North (River Niger, River Benue, and other freshwater tributaries). If our Northern governments would agree to a policy framework on agriculture and solid minerals, the North will earn for Nigeria billions of dollars annually almost equivalent of what we get from crude oil export.

The Nigerian Extractive Industries and Transparency Initiative (NEITI) reported about 40 different kinds of solid minerals and precious metals buried in Nigerian soil waiting to be exploited. The commercial value of solid minerals is estimated to be in hundreds of trillions of dollars, with 70 percent of those buried in the bowels of Northern Nigeria. Reports indicate that the insecurity in Zamfara State is partly due to illegal activities of miners from across the border of Niger Republic. This attests to the fact that the region is rich in the mineral deposit. The black Gold deposits are also known to be commercial quantities in Chad basin, Bida Basin and the Plateau.

Table 1: Mineral Resources Available in Northern Nigeria

S/ N	State	Mineral Resource Deposits
1.	Abuja	Marble, Clay, Tantalite, Gold, Lead Zinc, Dolomite, Cassiterite
2.	Bauchi	Gypsum, Lead Zinc, Uranium, Amethyst (Violet).

3.	Benue	Lead Zinc, Limestone, Iron Ore, Coal, Clay, Marble, Barytes, Gem Stones, Gypsum
4.	Borno	Diatomite, Clay, limestone, Hydrocarbon (oil & gas), gypsum, Kaolin, Bentonite,
5.	Jigawa	Buttes
6.	Kaduna	Sapphire, Kaoline, Gold, Clay, Surpentinite, Asbestos, Amethyst, Kyanite, Graphite, Silhnite, Mica, Ruby, Aqua Marine, Rock Crystal, Topaz, Flospar, Tourmaline, Gemstone, Tentalime
7.	Kano	Copper, Glass Sand, Gemstone, Lead/Zinc, Tantalite, Cassiterite, Prochinre
8.	Kastina	Kaolin, Marble, Salt
9.	Kebbi	Gold,
10.	Kogi	Iron Ore, Kaolin, Gypsium, Feidsper, Goal, Marble, Dolomite, Talc, Tantalite
11.	Kwara	Gold, Marble, Iron ore, Cassiterite, Colubite, Tantalite,
12.	Nassarawa	Beryl, Aquamarine, Heliodor, Dolomite/Marble, Sapphire, Tourmaline, Quartz, Zircon, Tantalite, Cassiterite, Columbite, Lamanite, Galena, Iron ore, Barytes, Feidspar, Limestone, Mica, Cooking Coal, Talc, Clay, Salt, Chalcopyrite
13	Niger	Gold, Talc, Lead/Zinc
14	Plateau	Emerald, Tin, Marble, Granite, Tantalite/Columbite, Lead/Zinc, Barytes, Kaolin, Belonite, Cassiterite, Clay, Coal, Wolfram, Salt, Fluoride, Molybdenite, Gemstone, Bauxite
15.	Sokoto	Kaolin, Gold, Limestone, Phosphate, Gypsum, Silica Sand, Clay, Laterite, Potash, Flakes, Granite, Gold, Salt

The Contraptions that held back the North

In my opinion, the North, as an enclave found itself held hostage by its cultural encumbrances, diversity, and idiosyncrasies. These are images and peculiarities of North, which its people pride in and hold strong views and sentiments either overtly or covertly. Thus, these views are the contraptions of the North, which is enmeshed in that have negated its potentials and people from taking their rightful position in the affairs of this nation. Some of these drawbacks are in its:

- ✓ **CULTURAL MYTHOLOGY:** this ranges from factors of Cultural Relativity, ethnocentrism and Multiculturalism. These are the tendencies of the real inhabitants of the north, which they have wittingly or unwittingly displayed to its minority groups, which have had a tremendous negative impact on the peoples. The Hausa-Fulani sees themselves as the core-northerners while any other ethnic nationality within the north is perceived as inferior. To a great deal, the historical antecedents of the north

remain the mystery that refused to unlock and has confounded its problems (Bayajidda the legend and the Hausa bakwai and Banza Bakwai of 15th century).

- ✓ RELIGIOUS EXCLUSIVISTS: the majority of the northern populace are Muslims who are either adherents of Sufism or are Salafist, Suni's and Shi'ites but are also latently divided. Christians and traditionalist represent a small proportion of northerners. Today, more than ever, the north is religiously divided with one Killing and maiming the other. We have seen this in Kaduna, Plateau and Nassarawa States in the North.
- ✓ PERCEPTION OF WESTERN EDUCATION WITH CYNICISM: No doubt Islam predated Western education in northern Nigeria. The Catholics and Baptist Missions came to the North with western education which was vehemently resisted and even refused lands to build a church. The few Northern elites that attended mission's schools benefited from western education and became colonial secretaries and were empowered economically and politically. Till today, some segment of North views western education with scepticism and prejudices as capable of Christianizing their wards.

Who to be Blamed for falling Standard of Education in Northern Nigeria?

When President Muhammadu Buhari said in his inaugural speech on the 29th May 2015 that, "I belong to everybody and to nobody" many pundits like me thought that another great son like the late Sarduna of Sokoto (Sir Ahamdu Bello) is borne to address the issues that have held Nigeria and the North hostage. Therefore, the list of those who are to be blamed for the backwardness is endless:

- ❖ Northern Governments who are any without tangible Northernization agenda or policy framework to develop the north have succeeded in putting the entire region in a dilemma (whether in education, agriculture, tourism, trade, etc.).
- ❖ Nonexistence or dilapidated infrastructure to drive the agricultural and tourist revolution (Schools, Industry, Roads)
- ❖ Public schools have become breeding grounds of miscreants and thugs. Indiscipline among teachers is rife. Parents no longer bother about their children schooling. Total removal of class repeats for students who have not met the minimum requirement for promotion; Cultism, Corruption, etc.
- ❖ There is an over-bearing quest for paper qualification among youths and the octogenarians (forgery of education certificates) though not entirely a northern problem.
- ❖ The inclusion of politics into education and admission processes in the University's recruitment and appointments of teachers.
- ❖ Policy summer-sault which can be seen on Nomadic education, Almajiri schooling and most recently in RUGA policy that was forcefully killed by south.

- ❖ Curriculum Over-load which is often measured in cognitive terms leaving out skills acquisition for entrepreneurship
- ❖ Shortage of qualified teachers supply, which more pronounced in the North.
- ❖ The near-total absence of Teachers' Welfare Schemes and Training opportunities.
- ❖ Strike Actions by Unions in the country. Strikes have become a NORM almost accepted by Nigerians to the extent that, no gets anything without embarking on it (ASUU, NUT, TUC) Poor budgetary allocation to education; UNESCO recommended 26% of the total budget is jettisoned by the federal and states governments to education.

What is to be done?

The way out of this mess does not rest on the government alone. It is everybody's responsibility to propound ideas, initiatives, and models for seeing the North out of this trajectory that is fast threatening to consume everybody. Some of my thoughts are:

- ✓ We should begin by inserting some formal school curricula like teaching English and Mathematics into Islamiyya curriculum.
- ✓ The Mosque should be used to teach western education curricular. Al-Azhar University in Egypt, the world's second-oldest university founded in 970 to serve Sunni Islamic centre. The question is; why are our Muslims Sects in Northern Nigeria not been able to establish schools? Why is every church establishing a school and of recent Universities?
- ✓ We need to have reliable statistical data on education as regards the Education Management Information System (EMIS) for effective planning and budgeting. Without baseline data, no meaning planning and budgeting can be made. (Check school feeding programme and even the free education policy).
- ✓ Governments must improve access to education, especially in states ravaged by Boko Haram and insurgency in their IDP's camps.
- ✓ Educational quality improvement through school supply of infrastructure and schools' facilities. Improvement of classroom conditions and learning resources such as teaching and learning curriculum, teaching methods and assessment; teacher to pupils' relation and ratio in the classroom
- ✓ UNICEF says STATE'S government should support SDG's realised as the achievement of MDG's by 2030
- ✓ The politicisation of Teacher appointment, deployment and remuneration MUST be stopped. Schemes that will make teaching attractive should be put in place.
- ✓ Volunteer teachers should be encouraged and celebrated by communities. Governments should enact Laws that will make volunteer teachers highly favoured and sort after.

- ✓ Quality Assurance Agency should be established and enforced to prepare a report on teachers and schools performance indicators for effective reward system and evaluation.
- ✓ School discipline on erring teachers, pupils' and the management must be carefully articulated and enforced.
- ✓ School-Based Management Committee's (SBMC) as presently constituted by the government cannot achieve its goals because it since lost the focus or philosophy of the idea.

Conclusion

The paper has dwelled on a lot of issues bordering on Northern Nigeria. The presenter attempted a SWOT analytical approach to profoundly make claims upon which he anchored the issue of 'falling standard of education in Northern Nigeria'. The arguments may be in exhaustive, but he may have nevertheless provided a ground for continued discussion among his audiences. Some of the views are mine, which I am strongly passionate about. The problems of Northern Nigeria lie in the policies and programmes of the federal and state governments' which in my view are hollow, outdated, infectious, hypocritical and totally in variance with people's needs and expectations of the people. Research and developments are the key tools for reinventing the wheels of development in any society. And no doubt, education is the only tool for **social equality**. Boko Haram was a product of the failure of education structure in North East, and another greater catastrophic episode is gradually unfolding in North-West and the FCT. The North and Nigeria may not be able to deal with this unfolding scenario which if not quickly neap in the bud, may see to the total eclipse of the North and its fortunes or rather potentials. Rwanda, Seira-leone, Burundi, Zimbabwe and few several other countries have had their sordid experiences. Can the North and Nigeria bear the brute of another civil war?

THANK YOU AND GOD BLESS YOU FOR LISTENING
GOD BLESS AT-TA'AWUUN EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
GOD BLESS NIGER STATE
GOD BLESS THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA