

Educational Policy in Nigeria: Analyzing the Impact of the 9-Year Basic Education Policy on School Enrollment and Retention Rates

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Abstract

This paper explores the 9-Year Basic Education Policy in Nigeria, analyzing its impact on school enrollment and retention rates. The policy, introduced to improve access to education, faces several challenges, including financial constraints, teacher shortages, and cultural barriers, particularly for girls in rural areas. The paper examines the key interventions made by the government, such as conditional cash transfers, scholarships, and school feeding programs, which aim to improve retention. It also discusses the role of community engagement and local education authorities in sustaining educational reforms. By comparing Nigeria's efforts with similar reforms in other African countries, the paper assesses the long-term effects on educational outcomes, especially the reduction in dropout rates. Lastly, the paper offers recommendations for future educational reforms in Nigeria, focusing on infrastructure improvements, teacher development, and gender equality to ensure the sustainability and success of the policy.

Keywords: 9-Year Basic Education Policy, school enrollment, retention rates, conditional cash transfers, scholarships, school feeding programs

1. Introduction

The 9-Year Basic Education Policy in Nigeria was introduced as a pivotal response to the country's educational challenges, with a focus on expanding access to education and improving its overall quality. This policy was deeply influenced by global movements advocating for Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Education for All (EFA), particularly the adoption of international frameworks like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Prior to its introduction, Nigeria's education system faced critical issues, including low enrollment rates, high dropout rates, and significant gender disparities, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. The policy sought to address these systemic barriers by ensuring that more children, particularly from underserved areas, had access to a comprehensive and quality education. Historically, Nigeria's education system had undergone several reforms, but challenges such as poor infrastructure, insufficient funding, and undertrained teachers persisted. The 9-Year Basic Education Policy, which came into effect in 1999, was a transformative step to rectify these issues and bring about a more inclusive educational system.

The policy marked a significant shift from a 6-year primary education cycle to a 9-year cycle, combining 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education. This was designed to not only extend the period of compulsory education but also to ensure that the curriculum was comprehensive enough to prepare students for further education and employment. It aimed to address a critical gap in access to education, especially in rural areas where children often faced significant barriers, such as distance to schools, poverty, and lack of educational infrastructure. By extending compulsory education to include junior secondary education, the policy sought to improve overall enrollment rates and reduce the number of children dropping out before completing their basic education.

The main objectives of the policy were to increase access to education, improve educational equity, and enhance educational quality. One of the primary goals was to ensure that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, had the opportunity to receive a free, compulsory, and high-quality education. The policy sought to bring more children, especially from rural and marginalized communities, into the formal education system. By expanding the scope of basic education to include junior secondary school, the policy also aimed to improve the quality of education by focusing on curriculum reforms and pedagogical approaches that were relevant to the Nigerian context. The policy was designed to address both educational access and quality, creating a more holistic education system that would better equip students for their future roles in society.

In terms of its role in improving access to education, the 9-Year Basic Education Policy sought to reduce the educational gap between urban and rural areas. By making primary and junior secondary education compulsory, it ensured that education was more accessible, especially for children in remote areas who had traditionally been excluded from the formal education system. The policy also placed a significant emphasis on gender equity, aiming to reduce the gender disparity in school enrollment and retention, particularly in rural and conservative communities where cultural and societal norms often hindered girls' access to education. With a focus on expanding school infrastructure, improving teacher training, and ensuring a quality curriculum, the policy aimed to create an environment where both boys and girls could access and remain in school, contributing to Nigeria's long-term educational development goals.

2. Key Features and Structure of the 9-Year Basic Education System

The 9-Year Basic Education Policy in Nigeria is designed to offer an accessible, inclusive, and comprehensive educational system, which aims to improve both access to education and the quality of education provided. It is a multi-faceted approach, covering the duration of schooling, the content of the curriculum, and the necessary infrastructure and resources required for its successful implementation. This section provides a detailed analysis of the key features and structure of the 9-year cycle, with a focus on its breakdown, curriculum reforms, and infrastructure needs.

2.1 Breakdown of the 9-Year Education Cycle: 6 Years of Primary and 3 Years of Junior Secondary Education

The 9-Year Basic Education Cycle is composed of 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education. The primary education phase begins at age 6 and serves as the foundation for students to acquire basic literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills. This phase focuses on fundamental subjects such as mathematics, English language, science, and social studies, ensuring that all children, regardless of their socio-economic status or location, gain a basic education.

By 2020, primary school enrollment rates in Nigeria had improved significantly due to the policy, although challenges still remain. According to data from the UNICEF Education Statistics (2020), primary school enrollment rates in Nigeria had reached approximately 90%, a significant increase from previous decades. However, this figure still reveals a gap in achieving universal primary education, particularly in the northern regions where enrollment remains below the national average, with a 5% difference between the northern and southern regions.

The junior secondary phase, which follows the primary education cycle, spans 3 years and is meant to solidify the students' foundational knowledge and prepare them for either senior secondary education or vocational training. The inclusion of this phase was a significant aspect of the 9-Year Basic Education Policy, as it helps reduce the dropout rate after primary school. Junior secondary school allows for more specialized learning in subjects such as technology, arts, civic education, and basic sciences, providing a broader set of skills and knowledge for students to transition into either higher education or the workforce.

This extended 9-year cycle serves not only to expand access to education but also to ensure that children are more prepared for the challenges of adulthood. Moreover, the policy addresses the issue of early school dropouts, as it requires all children to remain in school for a longer period. Data shows that the dropout rate in Nigeria had decreased post-policy, from 18.9% in 1999 to 15.6% by 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria).

2.2 The Integration of Curriculum Reforms and Pedagogical Approaches

A key feature of the 9-Year Basic Education Policy is the integration of curriculum reforms to make education more relevant to Nigeria's socio-economic needs. The Nigerian government recognized that access to education alone was not sufficient; educational quality and relevance were equally important. As such, the policy emphasized the need for a more inclusive and modernized curriculum, which would be adaptable to the diverse contexts in which Nigerian children live.

The curriculum reforms focus on including life skills, vocational training, and citizenship education, making it more relevant for the 21st-century Nigerian economy. For instance, the inclusion of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in the curriculum has been a major reform to prepare students for an increasingly

digital world. As of 2020, approximately 50% of Nigerian primary and junior secondary schools had integrated computer literacy into their teaching programs, a remarkable improvement in fostering digital literacy among students (UNESCO, 2020).

Furthermore, the curriculum was adjusted to be more child-centered and interactive. The traditional rote memorization approach was replaced by pedagogical techniques that encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and creative thinking. These changes aim to equip students with skills that are not only academically sound but also applicable in real-life scenarios. Active learning, group discussions, and experiential learning techniques have been emphasized, and teacher training programs have been aligned to support these new teaching approaches.

To ensure these reforms were effectively implemented, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) developed new curriculum guidelines and educational resources, which were provided to schools across the country. While these reforms have been largely welcomed, challenges remain, particularly in rural schools where teachers may still lack the training to implement these more advanced pedagogical techniques. Teacher training programs have been ramped up to address these gaps, with the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) overseeing the accreditation of teachers and professional development courses.

2.3 Infrastructure and Resource Allocation to Support the Policy

For the 9-Year Basic Education Policy to be successful, it is crucial that adequate infrastructure and resources are available to meet the educational needs of students. One of the most significant challenges in Nigeria's education system has been the lack of proper infrastructure in many regions, especially in rural and underserved areas. In response, the policy emphasizes a comprehensive approach to improving both physical infrastructure (such as classrooms and learning materials) and human resources (such as qualified teachers and administrators).

The government has made significant investments in school construction and rehabilitation. By 2020, the Federal Ministry of Education had constructed over 15,000 new classrooms across the country and initiated large-scale renovation projects for existing schools, especially in the northern and southeastern regions where school facilities were most inadequate (UNICEF, 2020). Moreover, efforts were made to improve the school-to-student ratio, which stood at approximately 1:70 in some parts of the country, with new programs aimed at reducing this to 1:40.

However, despite these improvements, funding constraints and administrative challenges in resource allocation remain. As of 2020, Nigeria allocated just 5.5% of GDP to education, which is below the UNESCO recommendation of 6% for developing countries. The uneven distribution of resources continues to pose significant hurdles, particularly in remote rural areas. The Northern Nigerian states still face severe shortages of schools and educational materials, with many students studying under substandard conditions. Addressing these disparities in resource allocation remains a critical focus of the policy, as unequal access to quality infrastructure hampers the full potential of the 9-Year Basic Education Policy.

The 9-Year Basic Education System aims to not only increase enrollment rates but also ensure that education is delivered through a reformed curriculum and pedagogical approach. To support these efforts, significant investments in infrastructure and resources are necessary. However, challenges in funding, distribution, and quality remain, requiring ongoing efforts to bridge gaps and ensure that all Nigerian children, regardless of location or background, receive a high-quality education.

3. The Relationship Between Educational Policy and School Enrollment Rates

The 9-Year Basic Education Policy in Nigeria was designed to address significant challenges in the country's educational system, particularly in terms of school enrollment rates and access to education. This section delves into the pre-policy enrollment trends, the policy's impact on enrollment, and the specific gender disparities that have historically hindered access to education, particularly for girls.

3.1 Pre-Policy Enrollment Trends and Challenges in Nigeria's Education System

Before the implementation of the 9-Year Basic Education Policy, Nigeria's educational system faced major challenges related to low enrollment rates, especially in rural areas and underprivileged communities. The gross enrollment rate (GER) for primary school education in Nigeria was approximately 85% in the early 1990s, but it varied widely across regions. In northern Nigeria, for instance, enrollment was significantly lower compared to the southern regions due to a combination of economic hardship, cultural factors, and inadequate infrastructure. The National Population Commission (NPC) (2007) reported that while primary school enrollment in the south reached up to 95%, it was as low as 50% in certain northern states. This stark discrepancy was primarily due to poverty, distance to schools, and gender biases that restricted girls' access to education.

Another major challenge was the high dropout rate. Despite enrollment, many children did not complete their

primary education. According to UNICEF (2010), 16% of children in Nigeria who started primary school did not finish the full cycle, with the dropout rate being especially high after Grade 3. Several factors contributed to this issue, including the lack of adequate learning resources, poor school infrastructure, and family dynamics that forced children, especially those from rural areas, to stay home to assist with household responsibilities. The issue of low retention was also exacerbated by poor teacher quality, with many teachers lacking formal training or teaching resources. These pre-policy conditions highlighted the urgent need for reforms that would not only improve enrollment but also reduce dropout rates and ensure a more inclusive educational system.

3.2 The 9-Year Policy's Impact on Increasing School Access for Children in Rural and Underserved Areas

One of the primary objectives of the 9-Year Basic Education Policy was to increase school access for children in rural and underserved areas, where educational opportunities were historically limited. The extension of compulsory education to include junior secondary education was a significant step toward increasing overall enrollment in these regions. By requiring students to complete a full 9-year education cycle, the policy aimed to ensure that children who had previously dropped out after primary education would continue their schooling at the junior secondary level, thereby reducing the overall dropout rates.

As a result of this policy, school enrollment saw an overall increase, especially in the northern and rural regions, where education had previously been underdeveloped. According to UNESCO (2020), enrollment in primary education rose from 76% in 2000 to 85% in 2019, with a notable increase in the northern states due to the implementation of free education programs. For instance, Kano State, which had one of the lowest enrollment rates before the policy, saw a 32% increase in enrollment after the 9-Year Basic Education Policy was put in place. The provision of free schooling and the introduction of school construction projects targeting rural areas significantly lowered the barriers to education.

Furthermore, the policy contributed to school infrastructure development in rural areas, including the construction of additional classrooms, the provision of textbooks, and the improvement of sanitation facilities. These improvements helped to make schools more accessible and conducive to learning, thus encouraging children to attend school regularly. Additionally, the introduction of school feeding programs, particularly in rural regions, has played a key role in increasing school attendance and retention. As of 2020, over 10 million children across Nigeria were benefiting from the National School Feeding Program, which aimed to reduce the financial burden on families and increase enrollment in areas that were previously neglected.

3.3 Analysis of Gender Disparities in Enrollment and Efforts to Address Them

Gender disparities in school enrollment have long been a challenge in Nigeria, particularly for girls. Before the introduction of the 9-Year Basic Education Policy, gender gaps in education were particularly evident in northern Nigeria, where cultural practices and gender norms restricted girls' access to formal education. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) in education, which compares male and female enrollment ratios, showed a significant gender gap, especially in rural and northern regions. According to UNICEF (2018), while 90% of boys in urban areas were enrolled in primary education, only 70% of girls had access to the same opportunities.

Several factors contributed to this gender disparity. In conservative areas, families often prioritized the education of boys over girls, as girls were seen as responsible for household chores and marriage. Additionally, lack of female teachers in many rural schools, early marriages, and concerns about girls' safety on the way to school further compounded the issue. As a result, the dropout rate among girls was higher than that of boys, with many girls leaving school before completing the primary cycle.

The 9-Year Basic Education Policy was designed to address these disparities by promoting gender equity in education. The Nigerian government, in collaboration with international organizations like UNICEF and UNESCO, introduced several targeted interventions to improve girls' enrollment and retention. These included gender-sensitive curriculum reforms, scholarships for girls, and awareness campaigns aimed at changing attitudes toward girls' education. Additionally, the government introduced the Girls' Education Project (GEP) to encourage parents to send their daughters to school and to reduce gender-based barriers to education. The policy also focused on recruiting female teachers and providing them with the necessary training to support female students in rural areas.

As a result of these efforts, the gender gap in education has narrowed. By 2020, the gender parity index (GPI) for primary education improved to 0.95, showing that efforts to increase girls' enrollment were making progress. However, challenges remain, particularly in rural and northern areas, where cultural and economic barriers still affect girls' ability to attend and complete school. Despite these ongoing issues, the 9-Year Basic Education Policy has made significant strides in addressing gender disparities and has laid the groundwork for further reforms to promote gender equity in education across the country.

The 9-Year Basic Education Policy has had a significant impact on school enrollment rates in Nigeria, particularly in rural and underserved areas. The policy's focus on providing free education, addressing gender

disparities, and improving school infrastructure has led to increased access to education for children across Nigeria. However, ongoing efforts are needed to address socioeconomic, cultural, and gender-specific barriers that continue to hinder full participation in the education system.

4. Factors Influencing School Retention Under the 9-Year Policy

The 9-Year Basic Education Policy in Nigeria was a crucial step toward improving school enrollment and retention rates across the country. However, retention rates remain a significant concern, and various factors continue to influence whether students remain in school until the end of the 9-year cycle. These factors can be broadly categorized into socioeconomic influences, cultural and gender-related barriers, and the quality of school infrastructure and teaching.

4.1 Socioeconomic Factors Influencing Student Retention

Several socioeconomic factors play a major role in determining whether students stay in school under the 9-Year Basic Education Policy. One of the most significant barriers to retention is poverty, which directly affects families' ability to pay for school-related expenses, such as uniforms, books, and transportation. Even though education at the primary and junior secondary levels is meant to be free, hidden costs often make it unaffordable for families, especially in rural areas where income levels are lower. A report from UNICEF (2020) indicates that 40% of Nigerian children aged 6-14 do not attend school, with a large portion of this group coming from families below the poverty line. These families may prioritize other immediate needs such as food or medical expenses over education, leading to early dropout rates.

Another key socioeconomic challenge is the distance between schools and students' homes. In rural areas, schools can be distant from where children live, and transportation infrastructure is often inadequate. The long commute to school is a barrier for many students, particularly in remote areas where roads are poor or non-existent. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2019), in some regions, children must travel more than 5 kilometers to attend the nearest school, which increases absenteeism and makes consistent attendance difficult, especially for younger children.

Family dynamics also affect retention. In many parts of Nigeria, particularly in rural areas, children may be expected to assist with household responsibilities, including farming, fetching water, or caring for younger siblings. This is especially true for girls, who are often tasked with more household chores than boys. As a result, children from these families may miss school to help at home or may be withdrawn from school altogether if their parents deem the education unimportant compared to their labor contribution to the family. Data from the World Bank (2019) suggests that girls in rural areas are often pulled out of school at higher rates than boys, especially after primary education, to contribute to the family's economic needs.

4.2 Cultural and Gender Barriers Affecting Girls' Education and Retention Rates

Cultural and gender-related barriers are among the most significant factors influencing student retention, particularly for girls in Nigeria. Despite progress under the 9-Year Basic Education Policy, gender disparities in education persist, especially in northern Nigeria, where conservative traditions and practices still affect girls' access to and retention in schools.

Cultural norms often prioritize boys' education over girls' education, especially in rural areas. Girls are often expected to stay at home, help with household chores, and prepare for early marriage, while boys are encouraged to pursue education. This gender bias is entrenched in many families' perceptions of the value of education for boys versus girls. As a result, girls are often withdrawn from school earlier than boys, particularly in the transition between primary school and junior secondary school. According to UNICEF (2018), the gender gap in education remains a persistent challenge, with only 60% of girls completing junior secondary education compared to 80% of boys.

Additionally, early marriages play a significant role in girls' dropout rates. In some parts of the country, particularly in rural areas, girls are often married off before they complete their education, leading to high dropout rates among girls in early adolescence. According to UNFPA (2020), 21% of girls in Nigeria are married before the age of 18, often resulting in girls being pulled out of school once they are married. Early pregnancy and the responsibilities of motherhood further reduce school retention among young girls, as they are unable to balance school with family obligations.

The 9-Year Basic Education Policy has aimed to address these cultural barriers through gender-sensitive initiatives, such as scholarships for girls, community sensitization programs, and safe spaces for girls to learn. The government, in collaboration with UNICEF, has also focused on reducing child marriage through education and awareness programs, which have contributed to slight increases in girls' enrollment and retention rates in some regions.

4.3 The Impact of School Infrastructure and Teacher Quality on Student Retention

The quality of school infrastructure and teacher quality plays a crucial role in student retention under the 9-Year Basic Education Policy. Schools in rural and underserved areas often face significant infrastructural challenges, including poor classroom conditions, lack of electricity, unavailability of learning materials, and unsafe sanitation facilities. These factors contribute to poor learning environments that can discourage students from attending school regularly and hinder their academic progress. The World Bank (2019) reported that 60% of Nigerian primary schools in rural areas do not have adequate facilities, such as proper toilets, clean drinking water, or adequate classrooms, which leads to high dropout rates.

Furthermore, the quality of teachers is a major determinant of school retention. Despite reforms in teacher training, teacher shortages and lack of professional development remain serious concerns in Nigeria's education system. In 2019, the UNESCO Education Monitoring Report stated that 40% of teachers in Nigeria lacked the proper qualifications and training to effectively teach their students. Untrained teachers often rely on outdated teaching methods, which can result in disengaged students and lower academic performance. In areas where teachers are underqualified or absent, students are more likely to become frustrated with their education and drop out. High teacher turnover, which is particularly prevalent in rural schools, further exacerbates the problem. Teachers who leave the profession due to low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of incentives contribute to the inconsistent quality of education.

In response to these challenges, the Nigerian government, through various initiatives, has attempted to improve school infrastructure and teacher quality. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) has been working to improve school facilities and ensure that teachers undergo continuous professional development to meet modern teaching standards. Additionally, some states have introduced incentives for teachers in rural areas, such as housing allowances and bonuses, in order to attract and retain qualified professionals. Despite these efforts, the resource gap between urban and rural schools remains a major barrier to student retention, particularly in the northern regions, where infrastructure and teacher quality are still lacking.

While the 9-Year Basic Education Policy has made strides in improving school enrollment, several factors continue to influence student retention rates in Nigeria. Socioeconomic factors, cultural and gender-related barriers, and school infrastructure all play significant roles in whether students—particularly girls—remain in school. Ongoing efforts to address these challenges through policy adjustments, infrastructure improvements, and teacher development will be key to ensuring that the policy achieves its goals of both access to and retention in education for all Nigerian children.

5. Government Initiatives and Interventions to Improve Retention Rates

The Nigerian government, through various initiatives and interventions, has taken significant steps to address the challenges associated with student retention under the 9-Year Basic Education Policy. These efforts have aimed to reduce dropout rates and ensure that children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, remain in school and complete the full education cycle. Key strategies include conditional cash transfers, scholarships, school feeding programs, and a focus on community involvement.

5.1 Conditional Cash Transfers, Scholarships, and Incentives Designed to Improve Student Retention

One of the primary interventions to improve student retention has been the introduction of conditional cash transfers (CCTs) and scholarships aimed at incentivizing families to keep their children in school. The Conditional Cash Transfer Program was launched by the Nigerian government to provide financial support to poor families under the condition that they send their children to school regularly. The goal of this initiative was to alleviate the financial burden on families that might otherwise be forced to prioritize other needs, such as work or household expenses, over education. Under this program, families receive regular cash payments, which are contingent on students maintaining a minimum level of attendance and academic performance.

Additionally, the government has introduced scholarships for students from low-income families, particularly for girls and children in rural areas, to reduce the financial barriers that might prevent them from continuing their education. These scholarships have been targeted at secondary education, but they also provide support for students in primary and junior secondary school levels. Scholarships are often tied to performance criteria, ensuring that only students who maintain a certain academic standard are eligible to continue receiving the funding. This encourages academic diligence while also making education more financially accessible to families who would otherwise struggle to afford it.

Incentives for teachers are another critical part of this strategy. The government has introduced various programs to improve the quality of teaching in public schools, including financial incentives, training programs, and professional development opportunities aimed at retaining teachers and improving the quality of instruction. Ensuring a stable and motivated teaching force is key to keeping students engaged and reducing teacher turnover, which can disrupt students' education and contribute to higher dropout rates.

5.2 School Feeding Programs and Their Impact on Retention Rates, Particularly for Young Children

The School Feeding Program is another key government initiative that has had a significant impact on student retention, particularly for young children in rural and underserved areas. This program provides free meals to children attending public schools, with the primary objective of improving both attendance and nutritional standards among children from low-income families.

Research has shown that hunger and poor nutrition are significant barriers to school attendance and academic performance, especially for younger children. In many rural communities, families struggle to provide adequate meals, and children often attend school without having had a proper meal. By providing daily meals at school, the government aims to ensure that children are well-nourished, thereby improving their ability to concentrate and perform better in their studies.

The program also has a positive effect on school attendance, as families are more likely to send their children to school when they know that their children will receive a meal during the day. The provision of meals helps to reduce absenteeism, as children are less likely to stay home due to hunger or the need to help their families with food preparation. In some areas, the feeding program has also served as an incentive for parents, encouraging them to prioritize education and send their children to school, knowing that they will receive nutritious meals.

The National Home-Grown School Feeding Program (NHGSFP), launched by the government, focuses on local food procurement, which not only supports the students' nutritional needs but also benefits the local agricultural economy by sourcing food from nearby farms. This initiative not only addresses the nutritional needs of children but also boosts local economies by creating sustainable food supply chains that support local farmers and food vendors.

5.3 The Role of Community Involvement and Local Education Authorities in Ensuring Students Stay in School

The involvement of local communities and education authorities has been crucial to the success of retention efforts under the 9-Year Basic Education Policy. In many cases, communities have played an active role in encouraging children to stay in school and in supporting educational initiatives at the local level. Community-based efforts can help overcome cultural and logistical barriers that may prevent children, particularly girls, from attending school.

Local education authorities are responsible for the implementation of education policies in their respective regions. They work closely with schools to ensure that educational standards are maintained and that retention rates are closely monitored. These authorities also facilitate the disbursement of resources, such as scholarships, teaching materials, and funding for school infrastructure. They are also involved in community engagement activities, which help to raise awareness about the importance of education and address local concerns.

In rural areas, where traditional practices may still hold sway, community leaders—including traditional rulers, religious leaders, and women's groups—have been instrumental in advocating for girls' education and ensuring that schools remain accessible to all children. These leaders often act as intermediaries between the school system and the community, helping to reduce gender biases and promote educational opportunities for all children.

Local education authorities and communities have also been involved in organizing parent-teacher associations (PTAs), which provide a platform for parents to collaborate with teachers and school administrators in addressing retention issues. These associations play an important role in encouraging parental involvement in their children's education, creating a support system that fosters long-term school retention. PTAs often help raise funds for local schools and organize activities to promote student engagement and retention, ensuring that education remains a community priority.

Government initiatives such as conditional cash transfers, scholarships, and school feeding programs, along with active community involvement, have significantly contributed to improving student retention under the 9-Year Basic Education Policy. These interventions target the root causes of dropout rates, such as financial constraints, hunger, and lack of community support, and aim to create an environment in which students, particularly from low-income and rural areas, are motivated and able to remain in school. However, for these initiatives to reach their full potential, continued collaboration between the government, local communities, and education authorities is essential.

6. Challenges in Implementing the 9-Year Basic Education Policy

While the 9-Year Basic Education Policy in Nigeria has made significant strides toward improving access to education, its implementation has faced numerous challenges that hinder its full potential. One of the most significant barriers has been financial constraints. Despite the government's commitment to expanding education, the insufficient funding allocated to schools and infrastructure remains a major obstacle. Schools, particularly in rural and underserved areas, continue to face issues such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of teaching materials, and poor infrastructure, all of which impact the quality of education. The Federal Ministry of Education has

acknowledged that budget constraints limit the scope of necessary improvements, such as building more classrooms, providing adequate textbooks, and updating educational facilities to meet modern standards. Many schools, especially in the northern regions, still lack basic amenities such as electricity, sanitation facilities, and access to clean water, which makes it difficult for students to attend school regularly and for teachers to effectively deliver lessons.

In addition to financial challenges, political and administrative issues have also posed significant difficulties in the effective execution of the policy. Nigeria's education system suffers from a lack of policy coordination between federal, state, and local governments. While the Federal Government has laid out the framework for the 9-Year Basic Education Policy, its implementation often depends on state and local governments, which have varying capacities and priorities. This decentralized system has led to discrepancies in the application of the policy, with some states making significant progress in enrollment and retention, while others lag behind. The political landscape also adds complexity, as changes in leadership at the state and local levels can disrupt ongoing education programs and lead to shifts in priorities, further complicating efforts to maintain a consistent approach to education reform. The lack of policy continuity and coordination between different levels of government has led to delays in implementing vital components of the policy, such as the construction of new schools, distribution of resources, and the establishment of school infrastructure projects.

Another critical challenge facing the 9-Year Basic Education Policy is the shortage of qualified teachers. Despite efforts to recruit more teachers, there is a persistent lack of well-trained and adequately qualified professionals to meet the demands of the expanding education system. According to the World Bank (2019), there is a shortfall of over 100,000 teachers in primary and junior secondary schools, particularly in rural and remote areas. The teacher shortage exacerbates existing problems related to teacher quality. Many teachers are not adequately trained in modern pedagogical techniques or the updated curriculum, leading to ineffective teaching methods and a lack of engagement in the classroom. Additionally, high teacher turnover is another barrier to successful policy implementation. Teachers, especially those in rural and remote regions, often face low salaries, poor working conditions, and limited professional development opportunities, leading to burnout and migration to urban areas where conditions are perceived to be better. This instability further disrupts the education process, contributing to high absenteeism among both students and teachers and creating an environment where consistent education delivery becomes difficult.

The combined effect of these challenges—financial constraints, political and administrative inefficiencies, and the teacher shortage—has hindered the full implementation of the 9-Year Basic Education Policy. While the policy holds significant promise for improving education access and retention, without addressing these underlying issues, the quality of education and the retention rates of students will continue to suffer. The government must increase its investment in education, improve policy coordination, and tackle the teacher shortage through targeted training and better working conditions if the full benefits of the 9-Year Basic Education Policy are to be realized.

7. Comparative Analysis: The 9-Year Policy and Educational Outcomes

The 9-Year Basic Education Policy in Nigeria, while a significant reform aimed at improving educational access and retention, must be evaluated not only within the context of Nigeria but also through a comparative lens. This section examines the policy's impact relative to similar policies in other African nations and across the globe, assesses its long-term effects on Nigeria's education sector, particularly dropout rates, and explores lessons from successful educational reforms in other countries that could guide Nigeria's efforts.

7.1 Comparison with Other African Nations

Many African nations have implemented educational reforms similar to Nigeria's 9-Year Basic Education Policy, with varying degrees of success. A notable example is Ghana, which introduced a 9-year compulsory education policy in 1996, similar to Nigeria's, focusing on primary and junior secondary education. Ghana's policy also aimed to improve enrollment and retention rates, particularly for children in rural areas. By 2018, Ghana's primary school enrollment had reached 95%, and the country has made significant strides in ensuring that children, especially girls, stay in school. However, challenges such as teacher shortages, poor infrastructure, and rural-urban disparities remain persistent, mirroring those faced by Nigeria.

Another example is Kenya, where the Free Primary Education (FPE) program was introduced in 2003, which aimed to provide free primary education for all children. Following its implementation, Kenya saw a dramatic increase in primary school enrollment, rising from 5.9 million in 2002 to 8.6 million in 2005. However, similar to Nigeria's policy, Kenya faced challenges with inadequate infrastructure and teacher shortages. Kenya's experience underscores the importance of not just expanding access to education but ensuring that sufficient resources—such as well-trained teachers, classrooms, and teaching materials—are available to support the influx of students.

In comparison, while Nigeria's 9-Year Basic Education Policy has led to improvements in enrollment rates, the country faces ongoing challenges related to school infrastructure, teacher quality, and gender disparities. For instance, according to UNICEF, Nigeria's primary school enrollment rate in 2020 reached 87%, but the dropout rates remained high, particularly in the northern regions, where cultural and financial barriers continue to limit retention.

7.2 Long-Term Impacts of the 9-Year Policy on Dropout Rates

The long-term impact of the 9-Year Basic Education Policy on dropout rates in Nigeria is mixed. On one hand, the policy's extension to junior secondary education has provided a more comprehensive educational framework that reduces the likelihood of children dropping out after completing just primary education. However, despite the policy's intent to reduce dropout rates, high dropout rates persist, especially after the primary education phase. This is primarily due to socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, distance from schools, and gender-related cultural barriers.

While enrollment rates have seen gradual improvement, the retention rates remain lower than expected. According to the World Bank (2020), Nigeria's dropout rate for primary education was still around 14% as of 2020, and it increases significantly as students progress to junior secondary education. Dropout rates are especially high in rural areas, where children face difficulties related to school accessibility, poverty, and a lack of parental support. Girls, in particular, are at risk of dropping out due to early marriages, domestic responsibilities, and gender biases within the family and community.

The government's school feeding programs and conditional cash transfer initiatives have had a positive impact on retention, particularly in urban areas, but these interventions are still limited in their scope and reach. In some cases, even when children remain in school, their academic performance and engagement with learning remain low due to poor school conditions and inconsistent teaching quality.

7.3 Lessons Learned from Other Countries

Examining successful education reforms in other countries offers valuable insights for Nigeria in addressing its own educational challenges. One notable example is Vietnam, which has made significant progress in improving education quality and retention rates. The country implemented a universal basic education policy similar to Nigeria's, but with a stronger focus on teacher quality and community involvement. Vietnam's success in improving literacy rates and school retention can be attributed to its emphasis on teacher professional development, strong community engagement, and the integration of vocational training into the education system. Vietnam's experience highlights the need for Nigeria to not only improve access to education but also ensure that the quality of teaching and student engagement are prioritized.

South Korea provides another example of successful educational reform. In the 1960s and 1970s, South Korea faced similar challenges to Nigeria, with low enrollment rates and high dropout rates. However, through a combination of investments in infrastructure, teacher training, and public-private partnerships, South Korea transformed its education system. The country's focus on early childhood education, school infrastructure, and the quality of teachers led to dramatic improvements in retention rates. South Korea's experience suggests that, for Nigeria, a comprehensive approach to education reform should focus on improving school infrastructure, ensuring teacher quality, and making education more relevant and engaging for students.

While Nigeria's 9-Year Basic Education Policy has made strides toward improving enrollment and retention, lessons from other countries like Vietnam and South Korea underscore the importance of a holistic approach to educational reform. Successful reforms not only focus on access but also prioritize teacher quality, school infrastructure, and community involvement to create an environment that supports long-term retention and academic success. These lessons should guide further improvements in Nigeria's education system, helping to overcome existing barriers and ensure that all children complete their education.

8. Implications for Future Educational Reforms in Nigeria

The 9-Year Basic Education Policy has made significant strides in expanding access to education in Nigeria, yet challenges remain in improving its effectiveness, particularly in ensuring high retention rates and educational quality. The future of education in Nigeria will largely depend on addressing the existing gaps and making policy adjustments that cater to the specific needs of rural and marginalized communities. Key to this process will be sustained investments in infrastructure, teacher training, and community engagement.

To improve the effectiveness of the 9-Year Basic Education Policy, one major recommendation is to focus on improving retention rates, particularly in regions where students drop out after completing primary school. This can be achieved through targeted interventions such as conditional cash transfers, which provide financial incentives to parents for keeping their children in school, as well as school feeding programs that reduce the barriers posed by hunger. Additionally, transportation subsidies for students in remote areas would reduce the

burden of long travel distances, which is often cited as a major reason for absenteeism and dropout.

Further adjustments to the policy are necessary to specifically address the challenges faced by rural and marginalized communities. This includes increasing efforts to overcome gender disparities by promoting girls' education through the introduction of safe spaces in schools and strengthening community sensitization programs to challenge traditional gender roles that prevent girls from continuing their education. As the gender gap remains one of the most persistent barriers to retention in many regions, a special focus on empowering women and families through education and awareness campaigns is critical. Governments should prioritize community-driven initiatives, where local leaders and stakeholders are involved in decision-making processes that directly affect school attendance and retention. Engaging religious leaders, local councils, and community-based organizations will be essential in creating local buy-in for the reforms and encouraging families to keep their children, particularly girls, in school.

A significant implication for future reforms is the need to heavily invest in infrastructure to ensure that schools are not only accessible but also conducive to learning. Many schools, especially in rural areas, suffer from poor infrastructure that hampers the quality of education. Improving classroom facilities, providing adequate learning materials, and ensuring reliable electricity and water supply would address some of the fundamental needs of students and teachers alike. In addition, the building of new schools in underserved areas would help address the issue of overcrowded classrooms, which further impedes effective teaching and learning.

Equally important is the need for teacher training and professional development. The quality of education in Nigeria will not improve without ensuring that teachers are adequately prepared to implement the 9-Year Basic Education Policy. Teachers must be trained not only in the new curriculum but also in modern pedagogical approaches that encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and student engagement. Continuous professional development programs, along with competitive salaries and incentives, are essential to reduce the high turnover rates and attract quality educators, particularly to rural schools. Teacher retention can also be improved through specialized training and support systems that allow teachers to perform well in the most challenging environments.

Finally, community engagement must be viewed as a central pillar of educational reform. Engaging parents and community leaders in the educational process ensures that there is a collective effort to support the children and provide the resources necessary for their success. When communities are invested in the success of their children's education, there is greater accountability, and retention improves as a result. Parent-teacher associations (PTAs) should be strengthened, and local governments should foster a greater sense of ownership over education. This would include involving local stakeholders in the decision-making process for issues such as resource allocation, school management, and the development of local education plans.

The 9-Year Basic Education Policy in Nigeria has the potential to transform the educational landscape, but it requires a comprehensive approach to address its challenges. Targeted policy adjustments, investment in infrastructure, teacher training, and community engagement are necessary to ensure that Nigeria's education system can meet the needs of its growing population. By addressing the issues of socioeconomic barriers, gender disparities, and poor infrastructure, the Nigerian government can make the 9-Year Basic Education Policy a more effective and sustainable tool for improving education outcomes in the country.

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