

Government efforts and the challenges of achieving quality education among secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria (2012-2020)

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Abstract

This study investigates the efforts and challenges faced by the Delta State government in achieving quality education in secondary schools from 2012 to 2020. The research focuses on the provision of school facilities and education funding as critical initiatives while also examining the factors hindering the attainment of quality education. The documentary method was exclusively adopted for data collection and analysis, utilizing reputable secondary sources such as journal articles, government documents, newspapers, magazines, and internet sources. The findings reveal that the government's efforts to entrench quality education at the post-primary level necessitate reassessment, as the provided school facilities have not kept abreast with the escalating number of public secondary schools in Delta State, resulting in a lack of uniformity. Additionally, the study exposes the government's failure to adequately address these issues, resulting in a stagnation of student academic performance, as evidenced by The West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) results. Furthermore, the research highlights increasing disparities in accessing secondary education

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due to natural disasters such as floods, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, and the prevalence of student truancy induced by cultism. The study recommended, among others, the need for improved school facility provisions and effective education funding strategies.

Keywords: Government, quality education, secondary education, Delta State, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental right for citizens, and in recent times, it has evolved into a catalyst for national development. As nations compete globally, quality education has become a powerful tool in shaping a skilled and competitive workforce. Recognizing its significance, governments worldwide strive to provide accessible and effective education systems that can positively impact society (Psacharopoluos, 1989; Levin, 1997 & Zajda, 2009). In Nigeria, Okonjo (2017) emphasized that education is crucial to progress and an essential driver of national development. As an industry responsible for cultivating the required workforce for socioeconomic, political, and cultural growth, quality education plays a transformative role in the lives of learners (Nwabueze, 2011, quoted in Paully and Korre, 2019).

This study focuses on secondary education, which bridges primary and tertiary levels in Nigeria's formal education structure. Secondary schools aim to equip adolescents with essential communication, literacy, and numeracy skills, preparing them for functional living within society and higher education (Chinelo, 2011; FRN, 2013; John, 2017).

The Delta State government shares a vision of delivering top-notch education to every child, irrespective of background, ensuring a solid foundation for responsible citizenship (Delta Vision, 2015, as quoted in

Emordi, Ibeme, Nhamani & Okonkwo 2020). As the regulator and financier of the public education system, the government's role is crucial in ensuring effective policy implementation and providing necessary facilities for sustainable quality education (Ekundayo, 2004; Nwaham, 2011; Asiyai, 2012).

However, despite the government's efforts, challenges have emerged that hinder the achievement of quality education in Delta State's secondary schools. Natural disasters, like floods, have caused significant damage to school facilities, impacting over 350 public schools since 2012 (Uwagwu, 2012). Insecurity challenges, such as student cultism, pose threats to the safety of teachers and learners, disrupting the learning environment (Emordi et al., 2020a). The recent COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the crisis, leading to increased student absenteeism and inequities in education accessibility of learning materials due to the digital divide between urban, coastal, and rural students.

The consequences of these challenges are evident in the destruction of school facilities, reduced learning opportunities, and declining academic performance in The West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) results between 2014 and 2018 (Oyekanmi, 2016).

This study examines government efforts to provide school facilities and quality education funding in Delta State's secondary schools. Additionally, it will explore the various challenges undermining these efforts, hindering the realization of quality education in public secondary schools within the state.

By shedding light on these issues, this research provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to formulate effective strategies and policies to enhance the quality of secondary education in Delta State, Nigeria. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on

educational development and its role in shaping the nation's prosperous and sustainable future.

The first section begins with the methodology, overview of government efforts regarding the provision of school facilities and funding; this is followed by an examination of the factors hindering government efforts towards achieving quality education among secondary schools in Delta State, and another section deals with conclusion, and recommendation.

2. Methodology

The documentary method of data collection and analysis was employed in this study. This method involves gathering and analysing existing documents, records, and publications related to the research topic. The study collected data from various secondary sources, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, official government reports, newspapers, magazines, and reputable internet sources (Clark, Foster, Bryman & Sloan, 2021). The adoption of the documentary method is justified for several reasons:

Longitudinal Analysis: The study covers eight years (2012-2020), and the documentary method allows for a longitudinal analysis of historical data. This enables a comprehensive understanding of the government's efforts and challenges in achieving quality education over an extended period.

Access to Historical Data: By utilizing secondary sources, the research gains access to a wealth of historical data, providing valuable insights into past policies, initiatives, and trends in the education sector. This helps contextualize the current state of secondary education in Delta State.

Ethical Considerations: The documentary method involves analysing publicly available data and does not involve direct interaction with human subjects. This ensures compliance with ethical considerations and avoids potential privacy concerns.

Comprehensive Data Collection: The documentary method allows for collecting a wide range of data from diverse sources. This comprehensive approach enhances the research's validity and ensures a well-rounded topic analysis.

3. Government efforts towards the provision of school facilities among secondary schools in Delta State

School facilities are resources that promote meaningful teaching and learning in schools (Nwaham, 2011; Obasi & Opene, 2019). The above definition shows that school facilities can link the teachers and the learners for active teaching and learning to occur since both constitute drivers of quality education. Hence, for the teacher to produce and disseminate knowledge, he or she must make use of school facilities such as the blackboard, library, information and communication technology (ICT) laboratory, and other academic aids that are available in the school. Likewise, the learners must also use school facilities such as the library, laboratory, ICT unit, and other student resources to aid in realizing learning objectives.

Tables 1 and 2 below show the identifiable school facilities and the school facilities provided by the Delta State government between 2009-2012 and 2015-2019 that can be used to facilitate the teaching and learning exercise to entrench and maintain quality education.

Table 1: Identifiable school facilities

S/N	School Facilities
1	Lecture Room
2	Students and staff accommodation quarters
3	Functional libraries
4	Laboratories (Sciences, Languages, Vocational and Technical, Music.)
5	Conferences and Seminar Halls
6	Sporting facilities
7	Furniture (chairs and desks)
8	School vehicle
9	First Aid Box and Mini Clinic
10	Quality access to water supply
11	Electricity
12	Information Communication Technology (ICT) laboratories
13	Special facilities for special learners (a brail for blind students, a wheelchair for the physically challenged).
14	Toilet facilities

Source: Nwaham, (2011)

Table 2: Government Provisions to Public Secondary Schools in Delta State, 2009-2012 & 2015-2019

Items provided (2009-2012)	No.	Items provided (2015-2019)	No.
Classrooms Blocks Constructed/Renovated	487	Students Furniture Supplied	115,102
Classrooms Blocks Constructed/Renovated	657	Teachers Furniture	18,131
Classrooms Blocks Awarded for Construction	137	Administrative Blocks Constructed	39
Rehabilitated Classroom Blocks Awarded	67	Academic Blocks Renovated	27
Constructed Primary and Secondary Schools	55	Science Laboratory Renovated	64
Infant Furniture Constructed	540	Constructed Block Wall Fence	29
Teachers' Table Constructed and Supplied	3,110	Renovated Block-Wall Fence	18
Teachers' Chairs Constructed and Supplied	36,082	Construct/Renovated and Supplied Pupil's Desk	2,337 and 35,294
Students' Furniture Constructed and Supplied	8,302	Teachers Furniture Supplied	7,354
Teachers' Tables and Chairs Constructed	1,066	Constructed and Renovated Perimeter Fences and Gatehouses	93

Table 2: Government Provisions to Public Secondary Schools in Delta State, 2009-2012 & 2015-2019 (Cont.)

Items provided (2009-2012)	No.	Items provided (2015-2019)	No.
Procured Textbooks on Math, English, and Social Studies	3,123,328	Constructed Solar Powered Boreholes	79
Teachers Recruited	5,000	Modern Toilet Facilities Built	271
Non-Teaching Staff Recruited	2,000	Teachers Recruited,	1,000

Source: The Pointer Newspaper (2013); Vanguard Newspaper, 2020.

According to Punch (2021) between 2012 and 2020, about 462 public secondary schools existed in Delta State,. Moreover, the data in Table 2 shows that the number of public secondary schools in Delta State between 2012 and 2020 was not matched by a proportional increase in the number of teachers recruited, which could imply a shortage or imbalance in some schools. This could affect the quality of instruction and learning outcomes for students.

Table 2, presented above, illustrates the efforts made by the Delta State government to enhance and maintain the quality of education in public schools within the state. However, the data reveals that certain crucial aspects have been overlooked. Notably, there is a lack of provision for essential writing materials and textbooks for the learners. Additionally, it took the Delta State government more than six years to be able to recruit a thousand teachers, mostly in science subjects, which resulted in neglecting other vital subjects like history, civic education, geography, government, and

various art and vocational subjects that remain in demand in most public secondary schools across the state (Emordi, 2020b).

Furthermore, despite some completed projects, including classroom renovations and furniture supplies, it has come to light that these infrastructures are of substandard quality and have a relatively short lifespan, lasting at most two years. Additionally, the overall upgrade of secondary schools to meet global standards remains inadequate, primarily due to the prevalent absence of power supplies, computers, and other electronic learning facilities in most secondary schools within the state. These critical gaps in essential resources and facilities hinder the overall progress and effectiveness of the education system in Delta State.

Geo-Jaja (2010) exposed the level of educational inequalities among secondary schools in Delta State. The reason for such inequality lies in the inequitable accessibility of school facilities between the urban, rural, and coastal schools in Delta State. Findings of surveys conducted by Obed-Chukwuka and Ubogu, (2020), and Ubogu (2021) revealed that most public primary and secondary schools in Delta State; need more school facilities for the acquisition and sustainability of qualitative knowledge. Thus, both the teachers and the students are negatively impacted by the dysfunctional state of school facilities in public secondary schools.

Asiyai (2012) established a nexus between the adequate and equitable provision of school facilities and improved students' academic performance. This is because students taught in a positive learning environment perform better than their counterparts who learn in a poor learning environment. Hence, achieving quality education at the secondary school level will entail government commitment to adequate financing of basic education while maintaining an equitable and sustainable distribution

of school facilities among the urban, rural, and coastal secondary schools in Delta State.

It is believed that if the provision of school facilities and adequate education funding is not in uniformity with the increasing rate of public secondary schools, then quality education, as measured through students' academic performance, is likely to retrogress.

The table below shows the academic performance of Delta State students among other States in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) between 2014 and 2018

Table 3: Top 10 and Bottom States Performances in 2014-2018 WASSCE Examination in Nigeria

S/N	Top 10 States	Mean Score	Bottom 10 States	Mean Scores
1	Abia	74.11%	Adamawa	29.24%
2	Rivers	69.73%	Kastina	28.99%
3	Edo	67.22%	Niger	26.72%
4	Imo	64.22%	Kebbi	25.17%
5	Anambra	64.08%	Sokoto	23,27%
6	Bayelsa	63.88%	Bauchi	19.59%
7	Enugu	58.19%	Zamfara	14.38%
8	Lagos	57.47%	Gombe	14.33%
9	Delta	53.4%	Yobe	13.44%
10	Ekiti	52.36%	Jigawa	10.08%

Source: Lawal (2020)

The information obtained from Table 3 above shows that Delta State maintained the 9th position in terms of student academic performance in WASSCE between 2014 and 2018. However, oil-producing states like Abia, Rivers, and Edo took the first, second, and third positions, respectively, while Imo, Anambra, Bayelsa, Enugu, and Lagos were ahead of Delta State. It is paradoxical that Enugu, a non-oil-producing state, took the 7th position. In contrast, most northern states ranked last, with Adamawa ranking first and Jigawa taking the last seat.

The above discovery is in line with Oyekanmi (2016), who argued that between 2012 and 2015, Delta State failed to grab the first, second, or third positions in terms of students' academic achievements, as recorded by WASSCE. The report also noted that Delta State maintained the fifth position in the 2012 WASSCE examination results among the 36 states in Nigeria. However, in 2013, Delta State took the sixth position among the states with the highest number of students with five credit passes, including mathematics and English. Furthermore, Delta State was ranked 1–5 in the 2015 WAEC (West African Examinations Council) examination students' performance rating across Nigerian states.

Based on the preceding discussion, it is necessary to accept Asiyai's (2012) postulation regarding adequate school facilities in conjunction with adequate and sustainable education funding as a correlate to improved student academic performance. Although factors such as a scarcity of qualified teachers, poor working conditions for teachers, student and learner truancy and absenteeism, as well as environmental factors such as insecurity (student cultism), natural disasters such as flooding, and the incoherent implementation of education reforms are likely to undermine students' academic performance.

4. Education funding and quality education in Delta State

Education funding has remained a contentious and ongoing debate within the Nigerian education sector. This is due to the critical role that adequate funding plays in ensuring the availability and sustainability of essential facilities required for education to serve as a catalyst and pathfinder for development. Indeed, funds form the lifeblood of the education sector, as they are instrumental in providing the necessary resources for effective operation.

In the context of Delta State, the issue of education funding has been a topic of discussion. According to the former Commissioner of Basic Education, Dr. Ebie, the state government claimed that a significant N6 billion was yet to be utilized as a counterpart fund to access N13 billion in Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) funds. These funds were earmarked for developing and expanding free primary and secondary education in Delta State between 2013 and 2017 (Ogbogu, 2020). The apparent discrepancy in utilizing these funds has raised concerns and further contributed to the ongoing debate on education funding in the state and the broader Nigerian education system.

On the other hand, Emordi (2021) asserted that education funding in Delta State is a politicized affair. The impact of inadequate education funding in Delta State has resulted in many public schools in the rural areas of the state being in dysfunctional state in terms of dilapidated school facilities, a paucity of teaching staff, and an unfriendly learning environment that is susceptible to the vagaries of insecurity threats. Furthermore, Delta State is notorious for paying retired teachers gratuities and pensions late (Chukwuebuka, 2016). For example, retired secondary school teachers have not been paid their gratuities since 2018. This assertion corresponds with the survey research findings by Ubogu (2021) that secondary schools in Delta

State, particularly Oshimili- North, need to be adequately funded due to poor strategies put in place by the government for improving the quality of education. The needed educational paraphernalia that would ensure quality in the system is not put in place, even when it is stressed. Consequently, projects approved for the system are not monitored; teachers need to be adequately retrained and are not rewarded commensurately with their workload. Schools also need more adequate contemporary resource materials and basic infrastructure.

Insufficient education funding has led to inadequate allocation of resources and personnel, resulting in a compromised implementation of the curriculum and the provision of quality teaching and learning services in Delta State. The Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF) report highlights that in 2019, Delta State allocated a mere 11.3% of its total budget to the education sector, falling significantly below the recommended 26% by UNESCO. Consequently, critical areas such as teacher recruitment, training, student support, curriculum review, innovation initiatives, and quality assurance suffered from insufficient funding.

According to Abdallah (2016), the combined federal and state allocations to the education sector were 8.44%, far below the UNESCO benchmark of 26%. The total state and federal government budget stood at N12.2 trillion, of which only N1.03 trillion was allocated to the education sector. The rest of the amounts are either injected into debt servicing, the dysfunctional power sector, or other sectors that promote the inordinate ambitions of the state operators. In the list of top state education spenders, Lagos dominated the list between 2015 and 2019, spending N113.7 billion on education in 2016, which outweighed the spending of the North-East, North-Central, South-South, and South-East altogether. Other top spenders

after Lagos include; Cross Rivers (N53.01 billion) and Ogun State (N43.5 billion), as cited in Abdallah (2018).

The table below shows the top, average, and low state spenders on education in Nigeria for the year 2017

Table 4: 2017 Top, Average, and Low States Spenders on Education in Nigeria

Top States Spender	Amount in Billion	Average State Spenders	Amount in Billion	Low State Spender	Amount in Billion
Lagos	N92.4	Yobe	N17.7	Taraba	N2.5
Ogun	N47	Kano	N17.5	Anambra	N3.4
Kaduna	N45	Kastina	N16.5	Oyo	N4
Sokoto	N38	Jigawa	N16.5	Niger	N4.1
Borno	N33	Bayelsa	N13.5	Zamfara	N5.2
Rivers	N30	Delta	N12	Enugu	N6
Kwara	N29	Plateau	N11.9	Ebonyi	N7
Bauchi	N27	Nasarawa	N11.8	Akwa Ibom	N8.6

Source: Abdallah, (2018)

Information in Table 4 above shows that Delta State, which ought to be above the average and low State spenders on education, is trapped between the top and low State spenders. This is a paradox given that Delta State is an oil-producing State that ought to serve as an example worthy of emulation by other states. Lagos has an N92.4 billion budget for education, while Delta has N12 billion. Thus, what Lagos allocated to her education system is seven times higher than what Delta State offered.

If the needed funds are not available to attract, maintain, and sustain the needed human and material resources that will aid in the realization of quality education, the goals of secondary education as regards training students for self-reliance will be defeated. A perfect illustration is the Delta State government's inability to pay workers' salaries during the 2016 economic recession in Nigeria (Chukwuebuka, 2016). Thus, many public secondary school administrators resorted to illegal fees to sustain the few facilities at their disposal (Emordi et al., 2020a). Likewise, due to poor educational funding, to date, most secondary schools in Delta State lacks quality library facilities, ICT centre, laboratories for sciences and vocational studies, and access to water, electricity, and students' and teachers' furniture are also inadequate. Furthermore, many public secondary schools in Delta State are not fenced due to the inadequate funding of the education system. This makes such schools porous and susceptible to the vagaries of insecurity threats to the lives of the teachers, learners, and school administrators.

The consequences of inadequate education funding are evident in the decayed infrastructure, lack of essential resources, and delayed payments of teachers' gratuities and pensions. These challenges have affected the overall quality of education in public secondary schools in Delta State and hindered the government's efforts to achieve excellence in the education sector.

5. Challenges confronting government efforts in achieving quality education among secondary schools in Delta State

The fact that the Delta State government is trying to entrench quality education at the post-primary school level does not mean that the Delta State education system is devoid of challenges capable of distorting

government efforts. Hence, some of the challenges inhibiting the realization of quality education among secondary schools in Delta State include:

- Natural disasters (flood)
- Coronavirus pandemic
- Insecurity (Student cultism)

6. Natural disaster (Flood) as a threat to quality education in Delta State

Flooding is a natural environmental disaster that occurs on a global scale. However, flood-related issues in Nigeria have been on the rise since 2012. On the impact of flooding in Nigeria, Adekola and Lamond (2018) posited that the 2012 flood disaster that occurred in various states in Nigeria claimed the lives of about 363 people while displacing over 2.1 million Nigerians between July 3 and November 5, 2012. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) stated that the flood affected 30 out of 36 states. Thus, the 2012 flood disaster was dubbed the worst insidious natural disaster in the 56-year history of Nigeria since it affected over 7 million people, as cited in (Nkwunonwo, 2016).

The 2012 flood also accounted for N2.6 trillion in estimated losses and damages recorded in connection with the flood. Ndujihe (2018), as cited in Okafor (2020), reported that floods as a natural disaster paved the way for the submerging of houses, deaths of people, destruction of farmlands, food, and cash crops, induced inflation in food prices, as well as induced food insecurity, and the subsequent displacement of people. According to Famos (2012), Anugwara (2013), and Emeka (2013), as cited in Nemine (2015), the 2012 flood disaster accounted for 95% of fatalities. It caused food inflation because over 1.9 million hectares of land were destroyed while schools were closed.

Floods as a natural disaster have affected Delta State and its coastal communities in a re-occurring manner since 2012 to present. Uwagwu, as reported in the Pointer (2013), noted that about 350 public schools were affected by the 2012 flood disaster in Delta State. The worst-hit schools are located in Bomadi, Patani, Isoko North, Oshimili-North and South, Ughelli-South, Ndokwa-East, and Aniocha-South, as cited in (Premium Times, 2012). Out of the 25 local government areas in Delta State, about 13 local governments are deeply affected by floods. This constitutes about 75% of affected local government areas, as cited in The Pointer and Premium Times, 2012).

The constant occurrence of floods in Delta State has resulted in the displacement of people, disruptions in academic activities, and a massive loss of school assets and facilities critical to attracting and sustaining quality education in the state.

The 2012 flood in Delta State paved the way for the closure of many public secondary schools in the various coastal communities battling with the flood quagmire. Those schools that were able to withstand the flood were converted into camps for displaced persons (Premium Times, 2012). Corroborating, Adurokiya (2017) affirmed that in the same way, floods sacked many coastal communities in Delta State, floods have again sacked the Burut-North local government of Delta State. The inability of the Delta State government to tackle the issue of the flood menace has resulted in the Ayakoromo community in Burutu suffering re-occurring perennial flooding, as cited in Adurokiya (2017).

The 2018 flood submerged 63 communities in Delta State and destroyed over 40 houses (Okafor, 2020). This led to the inference that flooding constitutes a 99% re-occurring environmental disaster affecting Delta State, as cited in Iheukumere, Nkwocha, Tonni-Okoye, and Agulue (2020).

From the above observations so far, the study, therefore, asserts the following as the impact of the flood on the realization of quality education among public secondary schools in Delta State.

1. Whenever a flood occurs, affected schools are often shut down, which widens the inequality gap between learners in the coastal areas and their counterparts in non-coastal areas. Thus, while others are accessing education due to non-flood occurrences, the coastal area learners struggle to stay safe from losing their lives or being displaced.

2. Flood often submerges schools and destroys schools facilities needed to enhance the realization of quality education.

3. Flooding threatens the lives of learners, teachers, school administrators, and the community.

4. Flood adds to the fiscal burden of the State government. Funds that would be needed to revamp and replace flood-damaged schools, will be adequate to expand secondary education to other underserved areas.

5. Flood, if not well-managed, will, in the end, distorts government efforts in improving education accessibility at the primary and post-primary level.

From the above, floods have been a recurring environmental disaster in Delta State since 2012, significantly affecting school infrastructure and disrupting academic activities. Flooding impacts on secondary schools include the closure of affected schools, the destruction of facilities, and the displacement of students and teachers (Uwagwu, 2013). The government's lack of preparedness and proactive measures has exacerbated the negative consequences of flooding on the education system.

7. Corona-virus pandemic as a threat to quality education in Delta State

The emergence of the coronavirus pandemic has indeed undermined the wheels of human development. On February 27, 2020, an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria imported the COVID-19 pandemic onto the shores of Nigeria. Before then, the World Health Organization (WHO) had listed Nigeria among the states in Africa with a high risk for the spread of the virus. The virus spent more than 12 months in Nigeria. The federal government has initiated several public policies against COVID-19 in order to curtail it. A special task force was set up, and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control was mandated to conduct tests, provide results, and foster contact tracing with the COVID-19 Task Force.

Physical and social distancing, coupled with other safety and hygiene measures, was incorporated, which resulted in the total shutdown of schools, churches, and other social gatherings in the 36 federating states of Nigeria. UNESCO (2020), as cited in Abari and Orunbo (2020), noted that COVID-19, as a pandemic, affected about 192 countries of the world. As a result, over 1.6 billion school-age children are forced to stay at home due to global public policies aimed at preventing the spread of the novel virus, which resulted in the closure of schools in various countries worldwide. This marked a shift from the traditional method of physical learning interactions between teacher and student to distance teaching and learning activities enabled by advanced educational technology.

While a few advanced countries adapted to the new wave of distance education, many African countries, particularly Nigeria, lagged. It is a known fact that the Nigerian state and its economy depend on a generator in order to have an electricity supply. Moreover, over half the total population of

Nigeria lacks access to electricity. In the same vein, internet connectivity is still at an infant stage in Nigeria since many rural communities are yet to be covered. Thus, using Google Class and Zoom as advanced educational technology was not viable in Nigeria or Delta State. It was only used in private secondary schools. Again, many public secondary school teachers are not exposed to such technologies, and even the government cannot afford the needed gadgets for such upgrading. Thus, radio and television were used to teach primary six pupils, basic examination, and WASSCE examination classes (Abari & Orunbor, 2020).

Since most public secondary school students are not used to distance teaching and learning methods, such an exercise will not be able to regarding equality the gap in literacy improvement, quality education accessibility, affordability, and the sustainability of such a distance education program. It should be noted that the coronavirus exposed the decayed nature of most public secondary schools in Nigeria and, by extension, in Delta State, regarding transitioning from routine day-to-day school activities to a digitally driven distance and continuous learning exercise.

The COVID-19 pandemic had profound implications for the education sector in Nigeria, particularly in Delta State, impacting students and teachers in various ways:

1. Loss of Instructional Time: The pandemic-induced school closures significantly lost instructional time for students and teachers. According to the OECD report, Nigerian students lost an average of 28 weeks of schooling between March 2020 and February 2021, equivalent to approximately %72 of a typical school year. This extended closure can adversely affect students' academic performance, hinder skills development, and impact their prospects.

2. Digital Divide and Limited Access to Online Learning:

The pandemic highlighted the digital divide in Nigeria's education system, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The OECD report indicates that only 11 percent of students in Nigeria had access to a computer for schoolwork at home, and only 19 percent had internet connectivity at home. These figures are significantly lower than the OECD average of 95 percent and 94 percent, respectively. As a result, many students could not benefit from online learning resources provided by schools and teachers during the closure period.

3. Impact on Student Well-being and Mental Health: The pandemic adversely affected students' emotional well-being. Coping with isolation, stress, anxiety, boredom, frustration, and fear due to the health crisis and its social and economic consequences, many students experienced negative changes in their emotional state during remote learning, as reported in the McKinsey survey. These changes could affect students' engagement, motivation, self-confidence, and resilience.

4. Challenges in Safe and Effective Schools: Reopening schools during the pandemic presented numerous challenges and uncertainties. The OECD report emphasizes the need to balance health risks with educational benefits. Addressing class size, physical distancing, hygiene measures, testing and tracing strategies, vaccination policies, curriculum adaptation, assessment methods, teacher training, student support services, and stakeholder communication ensured a safe and effective return to school.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria led to the closure of schools, necessitating a shift to distance learning. However, the lack of adequate technological infrastructure in many public secondary schools hindered effective implementation, leading to unequal access to education (UNESCO, 2020). The pandemic exposed the digital divide and underscored

the need for investment in educational technology and teacher training to adapt to future disruptions.

8. Student cultism a threat to achieving quality education among secondary schools in Delta State

Cultism first appeared in Nigeria in the 1950s, before the Nigerian State gained political independence from Britain in 1960. The origins of cultism can be traced back to an effort to champion a good fight against colonial rule and their anti-student policies at the university level, which are frequently marked by racial segregation and discrimination between foreign scholars and students and Nigerian students.

A literature professor formed the Pyrate fraternity in 1952 with his six groups of friends. The yardstick for recruiting new members was based on intellectual competence and good behaviour. Members are seen as men who are not guilty or undergoing prosecution for any criminal offence. Although they appear gentle, they are radical intellectuals who believe in the power of the pen to bring about a revolution. The standard for recruiting members seems so tricky to many who wanted to join the Pyrates; as such, some groups of students came together to form opposing cult groups like the Buccaneers, Supreme Eiye confraternity, and Neo-black Movement of Africa (Oyemwinmina & Abieji, 2015).

According to Oyemwinmina and Abieji (2015), the inability of the federal government to tame the spread of cultism on the university campuses through the Tunde Adeniran 1999 mandate to eradicate all campus cultism by granting amnesty to student cultists that surrendered without protecting their identities from their rival cult groups who are bent on killing them. This paved the way for off-campus cultism to thrive and

transit into the secondary school level. This era marked the departure from cultism as a preserve for intellectuals with good moral conduct into an epoch of cultism as a veritable tool for violence and security threats (Akitoni & Olaniyen, 2018).

The study, therefore, asserts that if training teachers in the various faculties of education are churned out as cultists, this will affect the moral level and discipline of students who will pass through such teachers. Some possible ways that student cultism thwarts government efforts to provide quality education among secondary schools in Delta State are:

1. Atmosphere of Fear, Violence, and Insecurity: Student cultism fosters an environment of fear, violence, and insecurity within schools. The presence of cult members and rival groups leads to threats, harassment, attacks, and even killings, creating a climate of apprehension among students and teachers. Consequently, educational activities are disrupted, leading to low attendance, poor performance, high dropout rates, reduced morale, and psychological trauma in the educational community.

2. Damage to School Facilities and Infrastructure: Cult activities often damage and destroy school facilities and infrastructure. Vandalism and looting by cult members deprive the school of essential resources, such as classrooms, libraries, laboratories, workshops, and ICT equipment. This diminishes the quality of teaching and learning environments, hindering effective instruction and learning outcomes.

3. Undermining Authority and Credibility of School Administrators and Teachers: Student cultism erodes the authority and credibility of school administrators and teachers, who are meant to be student role models and mentors. Cult members often flout school rules and regulations, disregarding dress codes, attendance policies, and disciplinary measures. Moreover, they

may influence other students to engage in anti-social behaviours, compromising academic standards and ethical values.

4. Diversion of Government Funds and Resources: Student cultism diverts precious government funds and resources from educational development to security maintenance and crisis management. The need for increased spending on security personnel, repairing damaged facilities, compensating victims, and prosecuting offenders limit the available resources for vital educational reforms, teacher training, and student support services.

5. Threat to Students' Lives and Teacher Workforce: Cult activities often involve violence and crime due to the rivalry between cult groups, posing a severe threat to students' lives and safety. Additionally, teachers, vital drivers of quality education, may face life-threatening situations, leading to workforce transfers and teacher shortages in affected schools. To retain a skilled and dedicated teaching workforce, the government must prioritize students' and teachers' safety and well-being through enhanced security measures and support systems.

6. Vandalism and Negative Image: Student cultists frequently vandalize school properties when confronted with anti-cultist policies and weak administrative and security systems. Such actions not only degrade the learning environment but also portray the school in a negative light among other reputable institutions.

Cultism poses a significant security and disciplinary challenge to the education system in Delta State. It disrupts academic activities, leads to violence, and threatens the lives of students, teachers, and administrators. Additionally, the negative image associated with cultism in schools discourages enrolment and contributes to the decline in educational standards (Akitoni & Olaniyen, 2018).

9. Conclusion

This study examined how government efforts to provide school facilities and education funding affected the quality of education among secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria, between 2012 and 2020. The specific objectives of the study were to: (1) assess the provision of school facilities in Delta State; (2) compare the education funding and spending of Delta State with other states in Nigeria; (3) identify other challenges that hindered the realization of quality education in Delta State; and (4) suggest possible recommendations for improving quality education in Delta State. The study found that the provision of school facilities by the Delta State government needed to be at parity with the increasing numbers of public secondary schools in Delta State within the years under review. As a result, Delta State students' academic performance in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) is not progressive compared to other non-oil-producing states in Nigeria. The study further unmasked that education funding in Delta State is a deceptive gesture since the state failed to be among the top state spenders in education for the reviewed year. The study also revealed that the inability of the Delta State government to tame the challenges of a flood and the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in making education accessibility between urban, coastal, and rural learners widen and, consequently, making the government efforts to achieve quality education among secondary schools in Delta State a difficult task to be achieved. Likewise, student truancy will likely continue unabated since cultism is yet to be tamed.

Despite these significant findings, the study has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings and implications:

1. This study relied on secondary data from various sources, which may not be up-to-date.

2. This study used a descriptive and comparative approach, which may not capture the causal or explanatory relationships between the variables or factors of interest.

3. This study focused on Delta State as a case study, which may not be representative or generalizable to other states or regions in Nigeria.

To address these limitations and contribute to the field of education research, future studies should consider using primary data from surveys or interviews, employ quantitative or mixed methods, and expand the scope or sample of the study. Additionally, future research should explore the implementation and effectiveness of the recommended solutions to the challenges identified in this study.

10. Recommendation

1. Enhance School Infrastructure and Facilities:

Reference: The study found that the provision of school facilities by the Delta State government needed to be at par with the increasing numbers of public secondary schools in Delta State within the years under review. The government should prioritize improving school infrastructure, including classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and recreational spaces, to provide a conducive learning environment for students. A comprehensive assessment of existing facilities is necessary to identify gaps and allocate resources effectively.

2. Optimize Education Funding Allocation:

Reference: The study further unmasked that education funding in Delta State is a deceptive gesture since the state failed to be among the top state spenders in education for the reviewed year. The government should optimize education funding allocation by directing resources toward critical areas impacting student learning, such as teacher training, learning resources, and technology integration. Comparative analysis with other states' education spending can provide valuable insights for budget optimization.

3. Develop Resilience Measures for Natural Disasters:

Reference: The study also found that the inability of the Delta State government to tame the challenges of a flood and the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in making education accessibility between urban, coastal, and rural learners widen and, consequently, making the government efforts to achieve quality education among secondary schools in Delta State a difficult task to be achieved. In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, the Delta State Ministry of the Environment should implement proactive measures to mitigate the impact of natural disasters on education. This includes building resilient school infrastructure, developing emergency contingency plans, and ensuring continued access to learning resources during disruptions.

4. Combat Student Cultism through Awareness and Support Programs:

Reference: The study further revealed that student truancy will likely continue unabated since cultism is yet to be tamed among secondary schools in Delta State. This will consequently, make the government efforts to achieve quality education among secondary schools in Delta State

a difficult task to be achieved. The government should address this issue through targeted awareness campaigns and support programs. Collaborate with security personnel, parents, and communities to create a safe and supportive learning environment that discourages involvement in cult activities. Provide support services to students who may be vulnerable to recruitment into cult groups.

5. Enhance Access to Education during Pandemics:

Reference: The study observed further that the inability of the Delta State government to tame the challenges of a flood and the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in making education accessibility between urban, coastal, and rural learners widen and, consequently, making the government efforts to achieve quality education among secondary schools in Delta State a difficult task to be achieved. The Ministry of Education should develop flexible and adaptable educational models to implement during health crises. Embrace technology-enabled learning strategies and ensure equitable access to quality education for all students, regardless of their location or socioeconomic background.

6. Promote Data-Driven Decision Making:

Explanation: Evidence-based decision-making is crucial for improving education outcomes. Establish a data-driven approach to education policymaking. Regularly collect and analyse data on academic performance, attendance records, and learning outcomes to identify areas of improvement and measure the impact of implemented interventions. This data will inform resource allocation, program design, and policy decisions.

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