

# HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA AND THE PROBLEMS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## **Abstract**

*Education had remained the bedrock for human growth and development through ages. It has been the basis upon which gradual evolution of man through such ages as the early, middle and the late stone (or iron) ages evolved and achieved such experiences and civilizations peculiar to it. Man had evolved from a food gatherer, to the use of sharp-sticks, stones and later iron as tools for sustenance. The experience enabled man to stop eating his food raw, but cooked. The iron-age education enhanced man's ability to produce iron tools, which best enhanced his security and economic sustainability. Iron age education had for ages transformed the socio-economic, political and technological life of Nigeria societies for greater advancement. The study historicizes the evolution of education; and such educational experience which transformed Nigeria and identifies the challenges which had obstructed the development of education for sustainable developments in Nigeria. The methodology is theoretical. The paper made use of secondary data like textbooks, journal articles, newspaper's reports and the internet materials. The paper concluded with the basic mechanism towards advancing the course of education through a systematic eradication of such evils as bad leadership, corruption and bad followership. This in turn gives room for an ideal society by a means of radical but aggressive economic, re-positioning, diversification of economy evolving mechanized agriculture, technical education and the desirable security to consolidate such developmental drives through educationally inclined activities in Nigeria.*

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## **Introduction**

Education as a process through which man acquires some basic experiences from a early age till death remain the only basis through any human society grows, develops and as well sustains such development. No society, the world over could grow and advance in development without earnestly embracing or vigorously pursuing education in its time sense. It has become a yardstick through which man determined the development of certain society. It is the only measure to determine the level of advancement of a society as well as its sustainability.

Moreso, education evolves from the beginning of man some millions of years ago. Lack of documentation at that time had

made it impossible to actually record the beginning of early education (or civilization) of a man. But the fact remains that, education began with the early men who passed through different stages up to the modern time. The totality of experiences gathered at the time through ages is the "tool-guide" that nurtured and sustained man's education in all spheres of life as it affects her socio-economic development.

The evolution of education from the early times must have also been supported by certain ecological factors. These ecological factors could include the climatic factors and the weather condition of the different areas inhabited by man. One could further identify the seasons (like the tropical main forest and the Savannah zones) which

produced different patterns of education resulting from their orientation and experience. This of course affects the ranges of development of education in different parts of the world. This phenomenon (no doubt) affects the level of education as could be adjudged from the disparities between the Black-World and the Whites (Developing and the Developed World) (Peters, 1967).

Elliot (1968) defines education as the means by which the skills and wisdom of society are preserved. This invariably suggests that, the wherewithal to ensure the education and the development of man is within the society. It could then be concluded that, what an individual needs to be educated or be well-informed, acquire wisdom or certain skills lies within the larger society for individual to tap-from. The assumption from the above is that, such nature of education and the means to achieve it would be free and not posing any difficulty before acquiring same.

No wonder the United Nations; in its Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26, declared that: Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory, technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. But the assertion above has not been adhered to especially in the developing societies in Africa, South American and some parts of Asia. And since education is a necessity to a 'would-be' advanced society, all hands must be on deck to permanently forestall the mechanism for educational institutions for sustainable transformation and development.

### **Evolution and Development of Education in Nigeria**

As with the case of any academic discuss, the subject of education had

attracted different definition from scholars from various disciplines. The UNESCO, International Standard Classification of Education defines education as comprising organized and sustained communication designed to bring about learning. The instrument of achieving learning as mentioned in the above definition is communication which remains vital to the learning process. Peters (1967) sees education as the transmission of what are worthwhile, involving knowledge and understanding and some kinds of cognitive perspectives. Akinpelu (1981) defines education as the process being what the "teacher-transmitter" and "student-receiver" do while the product is what the receiver is capable of doing as a consequence of what he has received or experienced during the process of education.

The term education itself was said to have originated from two Latin words: Educere- meaning 'to draw out' or 'to lead out' and Educare-meaning 'to nourish', 'to bring up' or 'to raise' (Osokoya, 1987). To draw out and nourish most probably are the focus of this words. Education perhaps is seen as the process of helping each individual to lead the fullest life he could live. The author also relates education to culture. Like others, he further viewed education in a sociological perspective as the process of cultural transmission and renewal in either literate or non-literate, industrialised or agrarian societies (Aldrich, 1982).

Fafunwa (1974) describes education as human experience from his birth to death. He acknowledges education in the prevalence of indigenous education in Africa before the arrival of Islam and Christianity. He posits every society like Nigeria has its youth educated for the good life (he asserted) has been one of the most persistent concerns of man throughout history.

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The evolution of education therefore is traceable to the beginning of man, especially, the early man. Such early man (hominids) lived in West Africa over three million years ago. Evidence also abounds that he has lived in some part of Nigeria in the early Pleistocene, discovery of skull in Tchad, Bone of Hippopotamus found in Borno with the thick mantle of hides – all suggest the emergence of early man at the time (Thompson, 1981, Shaw, 1980). Early man underwent three stages of life which also produced three different civilizations or education.

The first is the early stone age (Paleolithic age) which produced early stone tools made of bones wood as well as stone. The little knowledge of these instruments enhances the sustainability of the people of that age. This age identifies Acheulian and Sangoan experiences and civilization as a mode of educational attainment for the sustenance of the people. Acheulian was named after the site of St. Acheul of northern France where hand axes as a tool was first found. These tools of oval shape with a cutting edge, all round and carefully trimmed from both sides were used for different purposes namely cutting up or hunt animals among others (Shaw, 1980). The Sangoan was also named after Sango Bay on the western shores of Lake Victoria. Sangoan tool knowledge was found in the upper Sokoto Valley, South of Jos Plateau and North tropical rain forest with tools like Pebble or quartz pebbles. There is no particular radio carbon for Sangoan education in Nigeria until the new age. The Middle Stone age is (Mesolithic age) produced another form of human experience for its sustainability. The age was more evolved in southern Africa with such industries show greater localization and specialization than the earlier one. The tools were more smaller but skillfully made. These tools are found in Ghana, and Afikpo

in eastern Nigeria and Jos Plateau (Shaw, 1980).

The third was the late stone age (or Neolithic age) was characterized by development of very small stone tools called “microliths”. The tools were trimmed to be slotted into arrowshaft. The experience is more refined; which demonstrate a higher and superior knowledge for hunting and other mode of economy like tilling the land for sustainability. The experience of educational attainment of this age compare with the earlier ones depicts a quickening pace of cultural and economic change as things were done at a faster rate. Such knowledge as pottery making and grand stone axes came into being (Shaw, 1980). Shaw further identifies other centres of these new knowledge as the rock shelters at Rop, on the Jos Plateau, Iwo Eleru in the present Ondo State, Mejiro cave at Old Oyo among others.

The late Stone Age (Neolithic) produced a population in the Sahara and Nile valley languages of Afro-Asiatic group (Egypt, Beber and Chaldic languages like Hausa, Angas and Tera) or Nilo-Sahara group like the Songhari, Kanuri, Nubian and Nilotic language). Others are hunters/gatherers of the Nigerian Savannah speaking language of the Niger Congo Group (Fred Spier, 2011). These languages could have been extended to such groups as Kambari, Dakakari, Jaba, Biron, Jukun, Tiv, Efik, Ibibio, Mambila and to eastern Adamawa and later spreading across Nigeria through migration. These explains an intercommunicating population by hunters and gatherers in the Savannah between the Senegal and the Nile. It also explains the coming of agriculture education for sustainability with its increasing sedentism.

The entity called Nigeria today was made up of various independent ethnic groups (as identified above) commonly

called tribes. A tribe then refers to a community of people with a common language, tradition, ancestor and territory. They had forcefully acquired large empires and territories for themselves at various points in time. These empires includes the Hausa/Fulani Caliphate in Northern Nigeria, Oyo (Yoruba) in the forest south and Benin Kingdom to the West of the Niger, the Igbo and Ibibio, Ijaw, Itsekiri etc. inhabited eastern part of the Niger. These ethnic groups had their distinct ways of educating the young ones through an induction into the society and a preparation for adulthood (Osokoya, 1987).

Osokoya (1987) and Onwuchekwa (1981) further describe the educational system in these societies though informal was aimed at inculcating attitudes and values in children and as well integrating individuals into the wider society. Such aspects of education (mostly indigenous) includes: initiation, festivals, age-grade system, home training (education), and community education. It is a form of education and training for participation throughout a life time. It is also an education for allegiance, mutual interest and interdependence of one another. It was often arranged to bring-up children to have respect for the elders, ancestors and to develop the spirit of love and patriotism, respects for norms, values, traditions and taboos of the land and to become a self-supporting adult in life. Fafunwa sum all the above as cardinal goals of traditional African Education.

Also, Elliot (1968) sees the above as “the primitive societies, when there were no schools, boys and girls learned from their parents and elders the entire business of living”. The boy learned from his father and the older men of the tribe how to hunt for his food, the way to fight and kill his enemies, and of the part he should play in the religion and government of the tribe. To him, the aims and purpose of education in Africa

today includes:

- Education is the means by which the skills and wisdom of society are preserved.
- In primitive societies, children learned the business of living from parents and elders.
- As societies became more complex the direct form of education was no longer capable of passing on from one generation to another the knowledge and skills necessary in living, and this task now fell on the school.
- The aims and objectives of the school reflect the cultural heritage of the country.

To a very large extent, the evolution of education in Nigeria passed through several stages beginning with the missionary activities in education from 1842, to state intervention and educational ordinance in 1882; and educational ordinance of 1887. Such foreign missionaries as the Church Missionary Society (CMS), Wesleyan mission, the Baptist among others were in the fore-front among those missionaries who established formal education in Nigeria. It was heavily religion biased, intensely denominational and shallow in contents. The education ordinance of 1882 (rescued education through the involvement of the secretary of states) for the promotion and assistance of education in the Gold Coast colony which includes Lagos (Nigeria). The 1887 education ordinance took some further steps at establishing education board, awarding scholarships among others (Taiwo, 1980).

Also, between 1889-1906, education had become well established in Lagos colony and the entire protectorate of Southern Nigeria. And up to the proclamation of Southern Nigeria precisely in 1905. Between 1906-1918,, education in the colony of Lagos and protectorate of

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Southern Nigeria had improved with an increase in attendance, monitoring, aids to school among others. From 1900-1912, the protectorate of Northern Nigeria began to enjoy formal education through the effort of Governor Lugard by the time of amalgamation (Taiwo, 1980, Thompson, 1981).

From 1919-1940s, two colonial governors had reigned with Phelps-Stokes commission on education in Africa, 1920s-1926, which investigate the educational needs of the people among others. Governor Sir Hugh Clifford introduced wider perspectives towards education like the independence of the board, status condition of service of the education department, cooperation among scholars, training of intinery teachers among others. The period also witnessed the establishment of the higher college, Yaba Lagos, 1932-1947.

Full system of education became developed in Nigeria between 1941-1950s. There was a ten year development plan, Asquith and the Elliot commission on higher education in 1943 and of course the birth of a University in Nigeria (University College, Ibadan) in 1948. It became the first university ever in Nigeria although being managed by the colonialists with few Nigerians as members of staffs. (Madu, 2001).

Pre-independence development of education began from 1951 up to 1969. There was regionalization of education with the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 by assigning an increasing measure of responsibility to the three main regions of Nigeria (North, West and East). It provided that each region should have a legislature with power to enact legislation, effective within the boundaries of the region on a range of subjects; education inclusive (Taiwo 1980, Thompson 1981 and Madu, 2001). Each regional director was responsible for the conduct of his

Department to the Regional Executive Council to implement its educational policy (Taiwo, 1980). The 1952 African Education Conference was also of great advantage to Nigeria and its policy makers, held at King's College, Cambridge. The conference extensively deliberated on the expansion of education in Africa with such objectives as development of sound standards of individual conduct and behaviour, understanding of community and its value, permanent literacy and acquisition of some skills of hand and recognition of the value of manual work (Taiwo, 1980).

At independence and beyond, further investment in education in Nigeria continued from 1960-1970 with the Ashby report on education. Sir Eric Ashby's commission titled its report: "Investment in education" rested on three foundations. First, was the vision of Nigeria in 1980 for its population, economy and religion. Secondly, the staggering figures of Nigeria's need for high level manpower by 1970 and thirdly, the gross inadequate capacity of education system from secondary to tertiary level. The commission made an impressive remark on Nigerian education system through its report. Firstly, it broadened the need for primary, secondary and technical education and teacher training to foster the unity of an educational system. The use of consultants, the knowledge of local circumstance (customs, religions values, traditions etc which could play great influence on education and establishment of new universities were all recommended (Thompson, 1981, Taiwo, 1980).

Meanwhile, the post war reconstruction and the new development after the Nigerian civil war 1967-1970 obstruct its enforcement a little. For instance, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Reconciliation (3rs) continued especially in the South-East of Nigeria, despite the 1976 universal primary education before a new

national policy on education came on board in 1977. It came up with such ideas as: ownership, control and administration of educational institutions by government, democratization of education in order to cancel the imbalance among other parts of the country, curriculum review with emphasis on science and technology, the administrative and financial responsibility by the three tiers of government, the role of teachers, parents and countries overseas education and brain-drain, counseling and guidance and the need for new National Council on education (Fafunwa, 1974; Taiwo, 1980).

By the publication of the government white paper entitled "The National Policy on Education" in March 1977, the federal government of Nigeria set-up an implementation committee for the said National Policy on Education. The committee's recommendations spread across the various areas and levels of education such as: curriculum for primary schools, training and re-training of teachers, the formation of the junior secondary school, University education with more emphasis on science, improvement on technical education, special education for special people, the planning for the take-off of the new secondary school structure, developing curriculum and textual materials for the new system, procurement of pre-vocational workshop equipment and the search for alternative source of funding the new educational system (Osokoya, 1987). This paves the way for 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria. (National Policy on Education, 1981).

Educational trends in Nigeria between 1980 and 1992 fell in the hands of a civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Sagari and two military governments of Gen. Muhammadu Buhari and Gen. Ibrahim Bbadamosi Babangida's regimes. Educational system in Nigeria then

witnessed series of changes at every stage. The management of primary education was to be in the hand of local government 15%, state government 20% and federal government 65% for its funding. But Decree 31 of 1988 changed the funding exclusively to the federal military government of Nigeria, and was to be the minimum standard of education for Nigerians and for six years duration (Fafunwa, A.B. and Aisiku, J.U. 1982).

The secondary education was to be two tiers of six years, (3-3) years each for junior and senior secondary school. National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) developed a curriculum in such areas as: Agricultural Technology at Ordinary National Diploma level (OND), Mass Communication at OND and Higher National Diploma (HND) levels, Secretariat studies at OND and HND levels and metallurgy at OND and HND levels – obtainable at the federal and state polytechnics (Fafunwa, A.B. and Aisiku, J.U. 1982).

University education in Nigeria at the time also witnessed expansion with the establishment of more universities with a duration of our (4) years. It is quite important to note that, Nigerian educational system was tagged 6-3-3-4 at the time. This period ran through the late 1980s. By 1990s, the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria had collapse. The technical buildings for secondary schools with equipment began to rot-away because of lack of manpower to operate the equipments till date.

The change of government from the military to the civilian regime since 1999 up to date did not make any meaningful changes and prospects in the educational system of Nigeria. There has been changes in the structure especially for primary and secondary levels. For instance, basic one to nine was designed for primary education, three for secondary school and four for

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university education between 2001-2004 (Ezeh, 2001). And ever since, the structure of both primary and secondary levels of education have not been clearly defined. This was coupled with non-articulate educational policies of the successive administrations of Chief Obasanjo, Late Yar'adua, Goodluck Jonathan and the on-going government of President Muhammadu Buhari.

### **Challenges and Way-out of the Travails of Education in Nigeria**

The evolution and development of education in Nigeria have been fully discussed; so much that such forces that greatly influenced its workability could be identified. It is no doubt that western form of education have displaced the indigenous education. And of course, the education we mostly pursue and develop now are products of western civilizations. The society thus have little or no contribution or effects on education. The language of communication in education had been foreign (western) as well as the process of such education, thus eroding the indigenous education, culture, norms and other values. Foreign language and culture are thereby being promoted at the expense of the indigenous cultures (Blackemore, 1981).

The use of Nigerian language as a medium of instruction in our schools could propel better understanding, interpretation and application of the knowledge acquired to solve Nigerian problems. The various indigenous industries could also receive a boost and the needed advancement at the expense of the exploitative activities of foreign industries and multinationals. Fafunwa had been in the fore front of championing the course of using indigenous language as a medium of instruction in schools emphasising that pupils are likely to excel (more) in such subject where mother language is used. A recent study reveals a

tremendous success recorded in Ilesanmi (2014), who practically grouped her students into two. The first half (67) were taught "Morphology" (an aspect of English language) in the usual English language, while the second (58) group were taught in a mother language (Yoruba). Both groups were examined and the result of her work saw the second groups (those taught in mother tongue) performed far better (scoring 84%) than those taught in English language with 52% score. This explained more on the tendency of learners to learn better in any subject in schools if such was conducted in his/her mother tongue. Thompson, (1981) further support the above that, "the local national language would facilitate learning process and enable them contribute more effectively to their countries 'banks of relevant knowledge'.

Also, the problem of finance which had plagued educational development since the inception of formal education in Nigeria still persists (Obanya, 1981). The federal government has been in the fore-front, championing the course of education in Nigeria while other tiers of government namely: state and local government had been playing supportive roles. Most of the institutions of learning created by these tiers of government were often underfunded or staffs (teachers) salaries are not paid as at when due thereby truncating the process of education. Most of Nigerian institutions of higher learning like Universities, Colleges of Education and Polytechnics are poorly funded lacking the essential materials for promoting and advancing the course of education in Nigeria. Therefore, there is greater need for proper funding of education in Nigeria for the desired result of transformation in the social, economic, technological and a high level of socialization in the country.

Evidence of underfunding educational institutions is rampant in most

states in Nigeria and Oyo state in particular. Adegun (2014) reiterated how poor funding of education in Nigeria had degenerated into strike action and boycott of duties in the various educational institutions in Nigeria and as such affected the products of such schools most of whom are half-baked graduates and mostly employable. Moreso, incessant strike-action has almost crippled educational system in Oyo State (especially the tertiary institutions). First, it was Ladoké Akintola University, Ogbomoso and presently, other six tertiary institutions in the state namely: The Polytechnic Ibadan, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education Oyo, Ibarapa Polytechnic, Eruwa, Oke-Ogun Polytechnic Saki, College of Agriculture and Technology Igboora and Oyo State College of Education, Lanlate. Poor or underfunding is specifically retrogressing the educational advancement in the state. The NLC and TUC in the state got involved and so little had been achieved so far in the area of payment of full salaries and their accumulated areas, while mode of funding of the institutions is yet to be discussed (Babatunde Adeniyi, 2018). Siddiqui (2008) declared that the current challenge of education as in this age of rapid technological development would be too difficult to meet by the stakeholders if government objects. That is because funds for updated equipment among others associated with a sophisticated information infrastructure are costly.

The problem of manpower was also identified by Obanya (1981) as militating against the progress and advancement of education in Nigeria. The quantity and quality of labour could play a greater influence on the nature of education in any society. One thing is for the educational institutions to be staffed, another thing is the quality of such staffs or labour which could either make or mar the objective of such institution cum government efforts. It is no

doubt that, untrained or ill-trained and unstable teachers constitute harmful agents to educational developments in Nigeria. Moon (2013) posits that, the quality of manpower (teachers) is central to the provision of quality education for learners. Any weakness of the teacher is automatically transferred to the learner. Also in 2011, global monitoring report of UNESCO (2010) notes that teacher shortages remain a serious concern especially in Africa. The outcome of the survey reveals both the shortage and poorly trained teachers constituted a major problem being encountered in this part of the world. This survey was updated for subsequent ministerial meeting held in Abuja, Nigeria in 2010. The appointment of a well trained teachers at various levels of education in Nigeria is mostly desirable therefore, if Nigeria must compete favourably in educational development among the comity of nations.

Problem associated with curriculum planning was also noticeable in Nigerian educational circle. Incessant curriculum changes, weak curriculum and curriculum which does not take into cognizance; the value of its society and time lag often truncate the workings of certain educational policies in Nigeria. The involvement of professionals in the educational system must not be whisked-away (Ivowi, 2001). A societal oriented curriculum with its values and an appropriate time-lag would go a long way to promote the advancement of education in Nigeria. An Ideal curriculum would not go against societal value, but promote the societal advancement deeply rooted in education. This includes academic rationalism as expressed in cultural transmission and child's intellect, structure of knowledge, development of cognitive process, technological development, self-actualization, social reconstruction – relevance all which examines education and



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curriculum in terms of their relations for personal and societal development (Ajala, 2002).

Educational administration in Nigeria had also suffered a great deal in Nigeria. This involves various stakeholders of education in the country namely: the federal government, state government, local government, teachers, traditional rulers, education supervisors among others. These stakeholders are not working towards developing education at the same-pace and in the same way. The *state of Osun's* policy of education for instance, brought numerous schools together, fusing them together in the same academic environment cause a disintegrate and confusion as teachers and students alike became destabilised (Abayomi, 2013). It is on record that Nigerian educational system had been subjected to changes: at pre-independence and post-independence are such recurring changes in educational system in Nigeria at the primary schools, Grade III, Grade II, secondary education, technical colleges, Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and universities levels. But the post-independence has brought several changes as some useful stages like the Grade III & II and technical colleges are currently removed or rendered ineffective.

The Fafunwa's era in the 1990s' specifically identified 6-3-3-4 system for the country, while the technical aspect of it rubbished. The post Fafunwa era of Nigeria Policy on Education adopted 9-3-4 (Nine years of primary and post primary basic 1-9, three years of senior secondary school and four years of University education. But the current policy on education in Nigeria strictly follows the 6-3-3-4 period (National Policy on Education, 2004). But technical education and mass literacy still suffer a "lip-service" from the policy makers. Some of these policy makers in the state deviate from the National Policy to suit their

personal interest as identified in the "state of Osun" above. There is indeed lack of an ideal and stable system of education which the above groups could build-on. There is the need therefore to build a virile or an ideal educational structure, which would be stable, and lack of workable educational policies of government of Nigeria. The education administrators must rise-up to the task to rescue the "educational ship-wreck" from "further drown into the deep-sea".

Also proper administration of education especially at the primary and secondary levels had suffered immensely while the tertiary education which was being given more attention. The government and other stakeholders therefore need to place a greater premium on the development of primary and secondary education, as they form the foundation and the bed-rock upon which higher education is built. The government and other stakeholders therefore need to place a greater premium on the development of primary and secondary education as the foundation of any educational attainment. It probably dictates the direction which the learners and the society build its development (Yoloye, 1980).

### **Conclusion**

Achieving a tremendous success in any policy on education has to do with full implementation of such policy in order to bring the desired goal. The philosophy and goals of education in Nigeria as enshrine in the National Policy on Education (2004) has a profound mode of advancing the cause of growth, development (in all ramification and other aspects of development) of any developing country like Nigeria. The role of ensuring the workability of the National Policy on the Nigerian educational system reposed in the policy makers, while other stakeholders earnestly supports the policy and since education remain the most

powerful instrument of social reform, total adherence to its policy formulation and implementation provides a central plank on which the development of the nation rests. A country like Nigeria needs to create an enabling environment for education to thrive so as to develop such significant areas of technology, economy, socio-culture, politics and the judiciary. The implication of this is to inject a new spirit/value system in Nigerians. Such vices as bribery and corruption, political instability and emergence of insurgencies, religious crisis,

ethnic violence, kidnapping among other vices threatening the existence of Nigeria as a single political entity would vanish if those views above could be looked-into. The reason being that most individuals who perpetrate these acts out of ignorance. Nigeria would be proud to take her rightful position as truly the most populous country in Africa if she genuinely excels in advancing the course of education in Nigeria for her sustainable development.

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