



Reforming Nigeria's Education System

Prioritising Skills and Employability Over Structural Adjustments

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Cover Image: Apprentices in the N-Power Build programme at work.

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Executive Summary

Nigeria's education system continues to face persistent challenges despite decades of reform efforts. It currently ranks 150th globally, lagging behind several regional peers, with profound implications for national competitiveness and economic growth. The Federal Government's recent proposal to shift from the 6-3-3-4 to a 12-4 model offers an opportunity for improvement. However, focusing primarily on structural changes risks overlooking deeper systemic issues that have long undermined quality and outcomes.

The sector's enduring weaknesses include chronic underfunding, outdated curricula, teacher shortages, inadequate technological integration, and governance inefficiencies.

This brief argues that the priority must be functional education that equips learners with practical, soft, and industry-relevant skills aligned with Nigeria's development needs.

Drawing on international experiences from Germany, Rwanda, Ghana, Finland, and Singapore, the brief recommends:

- **Curriculum reform** to embed technical and vocational education and training (TVET), entrepreneurship, and digital literacy;
- **Teacher development and welfare** as the keystone reform;
- **Phased capacity expansion** in vocational training and ICT infrastructure; and
- **Strong governance, transparency, and public-private partnerships** to sustain reform momentum.

Achieving success will require navigating Nigeria's complex political economy, sequencing reforms realistically, and aligning them with broader economic development strategies. Without substantive action, structural superficial adjustments will remain cosmetic. Consequently, Nigeria will forfeit the demographic and economic dividends of its young population.

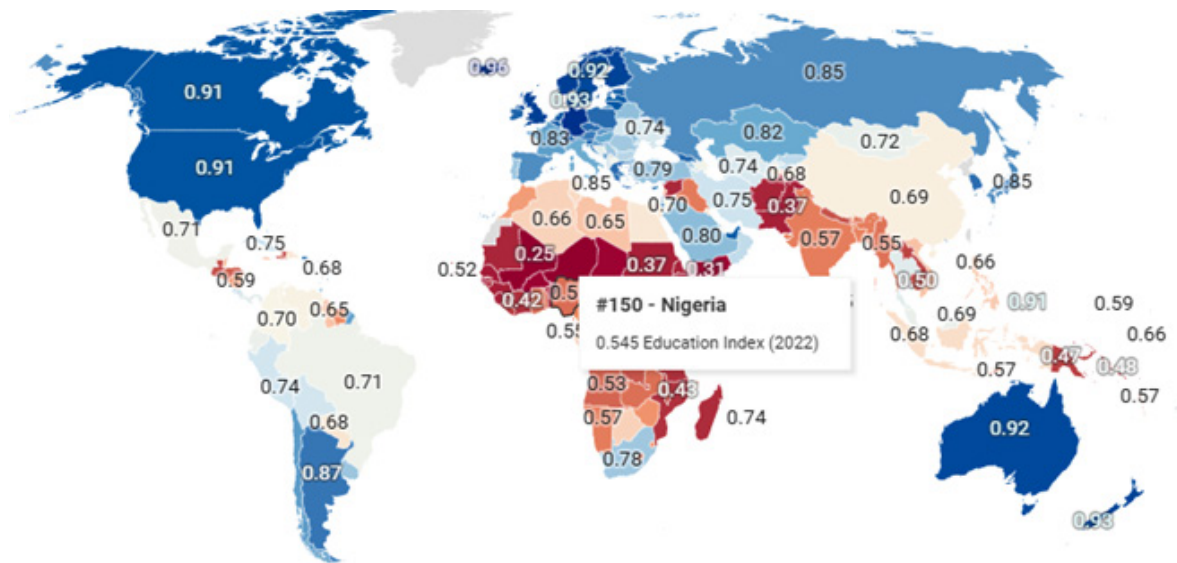
Introduction: Beyond Structure to Substance in Nigerian Education

Education remains the bedrock of national progress, innovation, and competitiveness. Yet, despite several reform attempts, Nigeria's education sector continues to underperform. The Federal Government's recent proposal to replace the long-standing 6-3-3-4 structure with a 12-4 system has reignited debate, with some stakeholders hopeful about the potential benefits of structural change.

However, global best practice shows that while structures provide a framework, it is content and delivery — not configuration alone — that determines educational quality. Leading systems worldwide increasingly align curricula with labour market needs, digital competence, and local relevance. Nigeria, by contrast, continues to suffer from a mismatch between educational outputs and societal demands.

The statistics are alarming: [Nigeria ranks 150th globally and 16th in Africa for education quality](#), trailing behind several West African peers. This underscores the urgency of reforms that go beyond structure. To drive sustainable change, Nigeria must pivot towards functional education by prioritising practical, industry-relevant skills, critical thinking, and innovation. These essentials must be embedded in a phased reform strategy anchored on teacher development as the foundation.

Figure 1: Nigeria's Global Education Ranking



Source: [Data Panda, 2025](#)

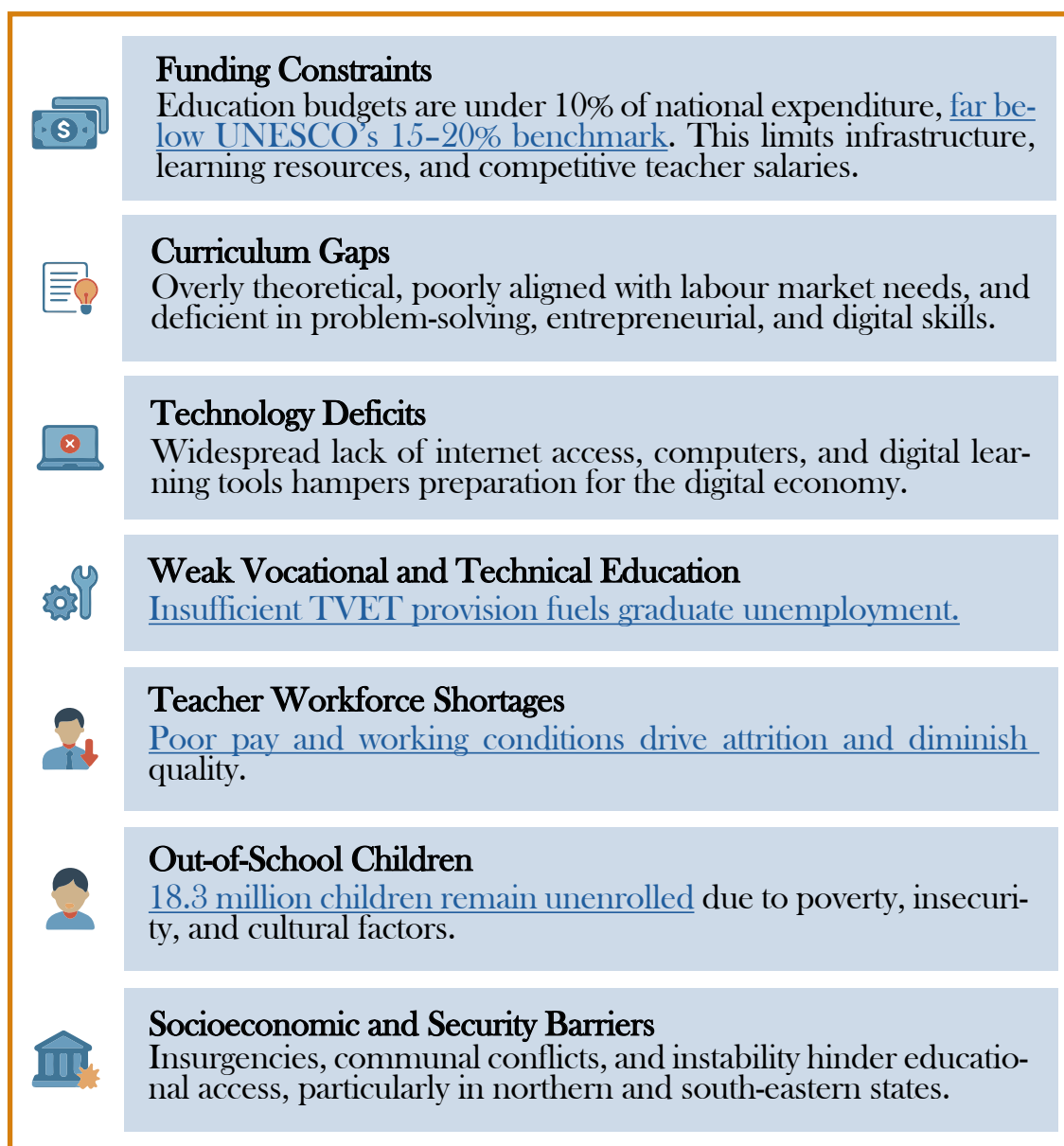
Historical Context of Reforms: Four Decades of Structural Experimentation

Over the past four decades, Nigeria has experimented with multiple structural models. Each reform was intended to improve access and quality. Yet persistent constraints (underfunding, outdated curricula, limited teacher training, and governance weaknesses) have outlived every reform. This history underscores that structural change without systemic reform is insufficient.

Table 1: Structural Models in Nigeria's Education System, 1983–2024

Period	Model	Structure
Pre-1983	6-5-4	Six years primary, five years secondary, four years tertiary
1983-2006	6-3-3-4	Six years primary, three years junior secondary, three years senior secondary, four years tertiary
2006-2024	9-3-4	Nine years basic education, three years senior secondary, four years tertiary
2024 (Proposed)	12-4	Twelve years continuous basic education, four years tertiary

Figure 2: Core Challenges Facing Nigeria's Education System



Nigeria's education sector is constrained by entrenched systemic weaknesses that diminish quality, restrict equity, and imperil long-term national competitiveness. These enduring challenges are rooted in decades of neglect.

Why Functional Education Matters for National Development

Functional education integrates theory with practice, equipping learners with the problem-solving skills, adaptability, and employability demanded by contemporary economies. Evidence from international models underscores its transformative potential.

Table 2: International Models of Functional Education and Nigeria-Specific Lessons

Country	Functional Education Model	Economic Impact	Nigeria-Specific Lesson
Germany	Dual vocational training system (classroom+ apprenticeship)	<u>Low unemployment, robust industrial work-force</u>	Embed structured apprenticeships with key industries including construction, agro-processing and ICT, replacing informal training and aligning curricula with sector growth plans.
Rwanda	ICT-focused education and vocational training programs	<u>Growing digital economy, job creation</u>	Harness Nigeria's youth to develop a coding and digital services workforce for outsourcing markets; integrate ICT hubs in public secondary schools from state capitals.
Ghana	Competency-based curriculum + TVET integration	<u>Improved employability, GDP growth</u>	Reform TVET to adopt competency-based modules and require workplace internships in senior secondary education, with industry performance assessment.
Finland	Emphasis on creativity, problem solving, and critical thinking	<u>High literacy, innovation-driven economy</u>	Enhance teacher autonomy by decentralising curriculum delivery, supported with intensive pedagogy retraining and classroom resource grants.
Singapore	STEM-based, technology-focused education	<u>Skilled labour force, global innovation hub</u>	Align tertiary STEM programmes with national infrastructure and manufacturing priorities through industry-led advisory boards co-designing course content.

These examples confirm that skills acquisition, economic relevance, and systemic alignment deliver lasting impact.

Recommendations

As the country undertakes education reform, it is imperative that the process is holistic and guided by foresight on national needs. Reforms must be tied to specific goals and clear timeframes to avoid repeating the failures of the past. The following recommendations are proposed:

Phase 1: Foundational Reforms (1–2 years)

- **Prioritise Teacher Development and Welfare as Keystone Reform:** Implement competitive salaries, modern pedagogy, and professional development as the first priority to enable all other reforms.
- **Reform Curriculum:** Integrate TVET, entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and soft skills into all levels.
- **Strengthen Governance:** Institutionalise transparent budgeting and anti-corruption safeguards.

Phase 2: Capacity Expansion (3–4 years)

- **Enhanced Funding Mobilisation:** Scale funding to gradually reach UNESCO benchmark, and also monitor utilisation.
- **Strengthen TVET:** Expand apprenticeships and industry-linked certification.
- **Expand Digital Learning:** Prioritise rural and underserved areas.

Phase 3: Sustainability and Innovation (5+ years)

- **Public–Private Partnerships:** Collaborate with technology, finance, and telecom sectors.
- **Institute Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) mechanism:** Enable Independent, data-driven framework.
- **Entrench Institutional Coordination:** Formalised mechanisms for policy alignment across tiers of government.

Figure 3: Roadmap for Implementing Education Reforms in Nigeria (2025-2035)

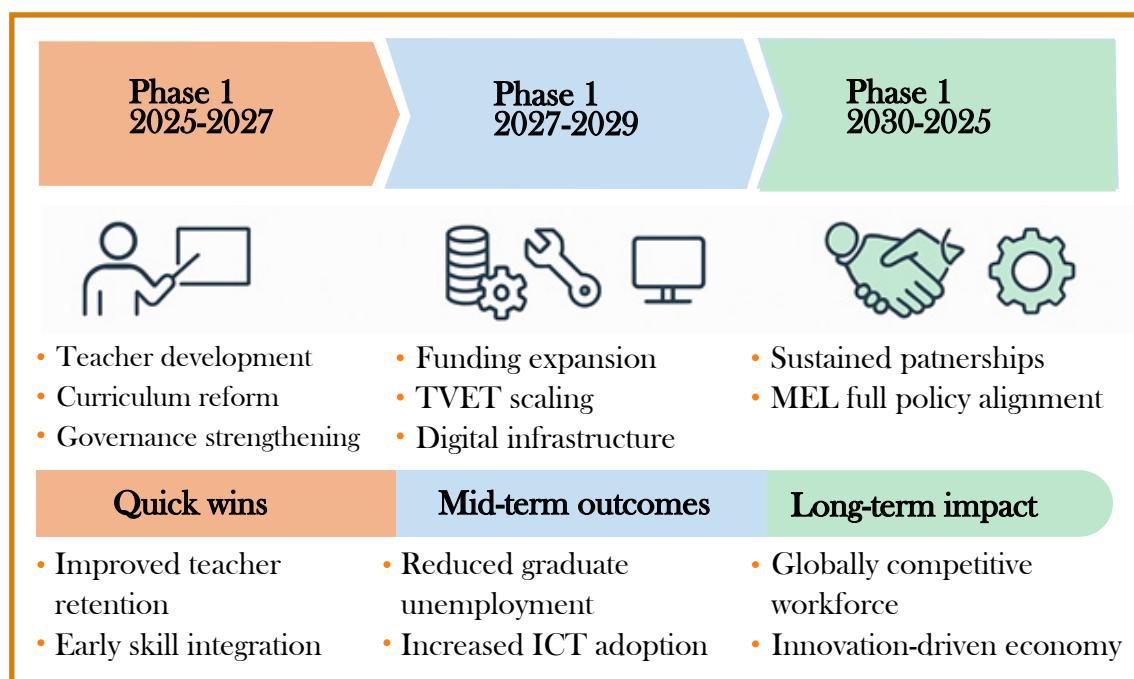


Fig 2: Reform Recommendations and Lead Implementing Institutions

Recommendations	Implementation institutional leads
Teacher training and welfare	Federal Ministry of Education (FMoE), Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria, State Ministries of Education
Curriculum Overhaul	Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, FMoE, with National Assembly
Funding Increases and Transparency	Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning, National Assembly Committees of Education
TVET Expansion	National Board for Technical Education, Industrial Training Fund and private sectors employers' associations
ICT Integration	Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission and organised private sectors
Public-Private Partnerships	Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission

To ensure effective implementation, reforms should have clearly assigned institutional leads.

Conclusion: Making Functional Education Nigeria's National Priority

Nigeria's education system stands at a decisive crossroads. The proposed 12-4 structure adjusts the framework. It will, however, remain a cosmetic shift except functional education is embedded at the heart of reform.

Investing first in teachers is the keystone. Caring for their welfare, capacity, and professional standing will build the human capital foundation on which all other reforms depend.

Sequenced, cost-aware reforms must follow with curricula aligned to industry needs, expanded vocational and digital training, and transparent funding backed by strong governance. International examples confirm this: where skills and relevance are prioritised, education becomes an engine of innovation, growth, and national cohesion.

Over the next decade, federal and state governments must commit, politically and financially, to a unified reform agenda that connects classrooms to the economy. By doing so, Nigeria can transform its demographic potential into a competitive advantage. It will equip its youth not just to survive. It will prepare them to lead in a rapidly changing world.

Author

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INEC Shortlists 14 Groups for Party Registration

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has announced that 14 political associations have met the initial requirements to proceed to the next stage of registration as political parties.

In a statement signed by National Commissioner and Chairman of the Information and Voter Education Committee, Sam Olumekun, INEC said it received 171 applications.

“Each request was assessed for compliance with Section 222 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), Section 79 of the Electoral Act 2022, and Clause 2 of the Commission’s Regulations and Guidelines for Political Parties 2022,” the statement read.

Of the applications, 14 met the requirements, while 157 did not. INEC said all associations would be formally notified of the decision within 24 hours.

<https://punchng.com/inec-shortlists-14-associations-for-political-party-registration/>

Benue Assembly Renames Moses Adasu University

The Benue State House of Assembly has once again amended the law governing the name of the state-owned university in Makurdi, settling on a shorter title.

Under the new amendment, the institution will now be officially called Father Adasu University, Makurdi, replacing the longer Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi.

The decision was reached during the September 11 plenary after consideration of the report of the House Standing Committee on Higher Education.

The institution was originally known as Benue State University (BSU), Makurdi, until it was renamed in December 2024.

<https://dailypost.ng/2025/09/11/again-benue-assembly-renames-moses-adasu-university/>

Court Sentences Ansaru Commander Usman to 15 Years in Prison

The Federal High Court sitting in Abuja on Thursday convicted a commander of the Ansaru terrorist sect, Mahmud Usman, and sentenced him to 15 years’ imprisonment.

The verdict followed a guilty plea entered by the defendant, also known by several aliases including Abu Bara’a, Abbas, and Mukhtar. Usman admitted before the court that he engaged in illegal mining and used the proceeds to acquire arms for terrorism and kidnapping operations.

He was arraigned on a 32-count charge alongside his deputy, Abubakar Abba, also known as Mahmud Al-Nigeri or Isah Adam/Mallam Mamuda. While Usman pleaded guilty to one count, his co-defendant maintained his innocence on all counts.

In addition to sentencing Usman to 15 years, trial judge Justice Emeka Nwite ordered that both men be remanded in the custody of the Department of State Services (DSS) pending determination of the remaining 31 counts.

In the charge marked FHC/ABJ/CR/464/2025, the Federal Government alleged that Usman, from Okene Local Government Area of Kogi State, and Mahmud Al-Nigeri, from Daura LGA of Katsina State, aided and abetted terrorist

ISSUES IN THE NEWS

attacks across Nigeria between 2013 and 2015.

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/09/terrorism-court-sentences-ansaru-commander-usman-to-15-yrs-in-prison/>

Resident Doctors Begin 5-day Warning Strike

The National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) on Friday, September 12, 2025, began a five-day warning strike after a 24-hour ultimatum to the Federal Government expired. The ultimatum followed an earlier 10-day deadline, which lapsed on September 10 without resolution.

In a notice titled Declaration of Strike Action, NARD Secretary-General Dr Oluwasa Odunbaku confirmed the strike commenced at 8 am on Friday.

The doctors’ demands include immediate payment of the 2025 Medical Residency Training Fund, settlement of five months’ arrears from the 25–35 per cent Consolidated Medical Salary Structure review, outstanding salary backlogs, and the 2024 accoutrement allowance arrears. They are also seeking prompt disbursement of specialist allowances, recognition of West African postgraduate membership certificates, issuance of certificates by the National Postgraduate Medical College of Nigeria, implementation of the 2024 CONMESS, resolution of welfare issues in Kaduna State, and redress for resident doctors at LAUTECH Teaching Hospital, Ogbomoso.

<https://dailytrust.com/breaking-resident-doctors-shut-down-hospitals-nationwide/>



REGIONAL UPDATES



Benin Raises 33bn CFA in Oversubscribed Treasury Bills Auction

Benin raised 33 billion CFA francs in a Treasury bills auction organised by Umoa-Titres on September 4, 2025.

The 91-day securities, maturing on December 7, drew bids worth 84.207 billion CFA francs against an offer of 30 billion, a coverage rate of 280.69%. Thirteen participants submitted 24 bids, with an absorption rate of 39.19% and an average yield of 5.06%.

Beninese investors took 21.2 billion CFA francs of the allocation, while Côte d'Ivoire and Togo secured 7.867 billion and 3.933 billion respectively. The issuance reflects investor confidence and supports Benin's short-term financing strategy. Value date is September 8, with repayment on December 7, 2025.

<https://fr.apanews.net/news/le-benin-leve-33-milliards-fcfa-sur-le-marche-des-titres-publics-de-lumoa/>

Cameroon Opposition Leaders Meet Ahead of Election

Maurice Kamto, president of the MRC, hosted opposition candidate Issa Tchiroma Bakary of the FSNC at his residence on Friday. Kamto described their talks as “frank and cordial,” while Tchiroma called the visit a gesture of “respect and solidarity” and a step towards a united opposition.

The meeting follows Kamto's resignation from MANIDEM on September 12 after the Constitutional Council barred his candidacy, which he decried as a political manoeuvre. Despite being excluded, Kamto vowed: “the struggle continues,” as President Paul Biya seeks an eighth term.

<https://fr.apanews.net/news/cameroun-kamto-recoit-issa-tchiroma-candidat-face-a-biya/>

Floods Submerge Maradi Cemetery After Nigerian Dam Release

Niger faced severe consequences following heavy rains. The “Nassalé” Muslim cemetery in Maradi and its surroundings have been flooded following the opening of the gates of the Jibiya dam in Nigeria. The governor of the region warned of the health risks and announced emergency measures, including the distribution of medicines and water purification. He further said a new cemetery will be created, far from the bed of the Goulbi, to prevent further disasters.

<https://fr.apanews.net/news/presse-afrique-de-louest-crise-economiques-et-sociales/>



Chad Government Denies Miski Attack Rumours

The Chadian government and Miski Self-Defence Committee have denied reports of an attack in Tibesti, affirming that peace agreements are being implemented.

The government says social media claims of assaults on civilians are false, with Defence Forces deployed to maintain security. Peace accords signed since 2019 aim to preserve regional stability.

The Miski Committee confirmed there is no conflict with authorities and recent grievances were resolved through dialogue. It reaffirmed commitment to the April 20, 2025 Peace Agreement, including suspension of mining permits and oversight by the National Monitoring Commission.

Military presence is managed transparently under the Mediator of the Republic and official facilitation team, as accepted by locals.

<https://fr.apanews.net/news/tchad-le-gouvernement-de-mient-le-rumeurs-dattaque-a-miski/>



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