

EDUCATION SECTOR REFORMS IN NIGERIA: CRITICAL ISSUES AND THE WAY FORWARD

Okon Etim Okon, Ph.D
Department of Arts Education
Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

This paper examined trends and innovations in teaching methodology, providing a conceptual framework and defining key terms. Teaching methods were identified as recurrent patterns of teacher behavior applicable to various subjects and relevant to learning. A teaching approach was defined as a general theoretical view on how instruction should be carried out based on learning principles. Teaching techniques were described as unique activities used to implement specific methods. Innovation in education implied positive change and progress, requiring ongoing, small-scale, and internally generated efforts rather than occasional major thrusts. Three major strategies for educational innovation were identified: power-coercive, rational-empirical, and normative-re-educative. The power-coercive strategy introduced changes through a centralized system, enforcing compliance through hierarchical authority. The rational-empirical strategy assumed that changes could be introduced at all levels of the education system, appealing to individuals' rational self-interest. The normative-re-educative strategy focused on re-educating staff through training programs, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Literary pedagogy involved using literature in the classroom to enhance learners' understanding through various critical theories. Effective teaching methods included creating engaging lesson plans, encouraging student participation, and using diverse learning formats. The lecture method, a traditional approach, involved the teacher presenting organized information while students passively listened. Studies highlighted its suitability for disseminating information but noted its limitations for fostering higher cognitive objectives and learner participation. In conclusion, understanding and integrating effective teaching methods, approaches, and techniques are crucial for dynamic and responsive education. Moving forward, fostering a culture of continuous innovation and professional development is essential to meet evolving educational needs and improve learning outcomes.

Keywords: Teaching, teaching methods, innovations, trends, teacher centred model, learners centered model, literary pedagogy

Introduction

Education has existed for ages, making it challenging to trace its precise origin. As an activity, it consists of a body of actions intended to induce learning through the conscious and deliberate efforts of a mature or experienced person to impart knowledge, information, skills, attitudes, beliefs, etc., to an immature or less experienced person (Adamu, 2022). In this process of teaching, a person is consciously and deliberately doing the teaching, and that person is called a teacher, who then communicates with the learner, who is called the pupil or student, with the intention of bringing about certain cognitive and psychological changes in the learner (Smith & Johnson, 2019). This change in behavior is known as learning. Learning occurs as a result of consistent interaction between the teacher and the learners, exchanging ideas in most cases, and in some cases, a straightforward transfer of knowledge in teaching literature (Brown, 2020). Teaching, therefore, is a dynamic and multifaceted process that involves various methods and strategies to ensure effective learning outcomes. The Nigerian education sector has been a focal point of numerous reforms aimed at addressing critical issues such as socio-economic disparities, outdated curricula, and inadequate teacher training programs. Adewale

(2020) highlights that socio-economic disparities significantly affect access to quality education in Nigeria, with children from lower-income families facing more considerable challenges in accessing educational opportunities. The need for curriculum reform is also emphasized by Anyanwu (2021), who argues that the current curriculum does not adequately prepare students for the demands of the modern economy.

Teacher training and professional development are crucial components of educational reform. According to Adamu (2022), many teachers in Nigeria lack the necessary training and resources to effectively deliver the curriculum, leading to suboptimal learning outcomes. Enhancing teacher training programs and providing ongoing professional development can help address this issue and improve the quality of education. In addition, integrating technology into the education system has become increasingly important. As noted by Chukwuma (2021), the adoption of digital tools and resources can enhance teaching and learning experiences, making education more accessible and engaging for students. This is particularly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has highlighted the need for resilient and adaptable education systems. Therefore, addressing the critical issues in Nigeria's education sector requires comprehensive and multifaceted reforms. By tackling socio-economic disparities, updating the curriculum, enhancing teacher training, and integrating technology, Nigeria can create a more equitable and effective education system that meets the needs of all learners.

Conceptualization

A teaching method is defined as recurrent patterns of teacher behavior, applicable to various subject matters, characteristic of more than one teacher, and relevant to learning (Gage, 2010, p. 1446). The term pattern refers to a set of behaviors that occur simultaneously or in a unified sequence. The notion of recurrent means that the pattern is repeated over intervals, measured in minutes or weeks. Being applicable to more than one subject matter implies that the term teaching method is relevant across all subjects. The requirement that a teaching method must be usable by more than one teacher indicates that it must not depend on talents or trials limited to a few individuals. This universality makes teaching methods versatile tools in the educational process, ensuring that diverse subjects can be taught effectively by different educators. A teaching approach is a general theoretical view of how instruction should be carried out based on particular principles of learning (Ubahakwe, 2017). For instance, the Mastery Learning Approach is based on educational principles such as recognizing individual differences in learning rates and believing that given sufficient time, every learner can accomplish the learning task. According to Mansaray (2020), the concern of an approach to teaching is more general than that of a method, as an approach incorporates a number of methods. This broader perspective allows educators to adopt a flexible and holistic view of instruction, integrating various methods to meet diverse learning needs.

A teaching technique, on the other hand, is the least general of the three terms and has been described by Gage (2015) as a set of unique activities a teacher uses to implement a particular method. For example, anyone using the lecture method may employ one or a combination of the five lecturing techniques described by Brown (2020), such as the classical technique, the thesis technique, the problem-centered technique, or the sequential technique. Each technique provides a distinct way of delivering content, allowing teachers to choose the most effective method for their specific instructional goals. In this context, the terms method, approach, and technique are used interchangeably, though they represent different levels of instructional planning and execution.

Innovation in education differs from mere change; it implies change plus progress. Innovation involves changing something for the better and cannot be conducted simply through occasional, major, and external thrusts. Instead, it should be ongoing, small-scale, and internally generated.

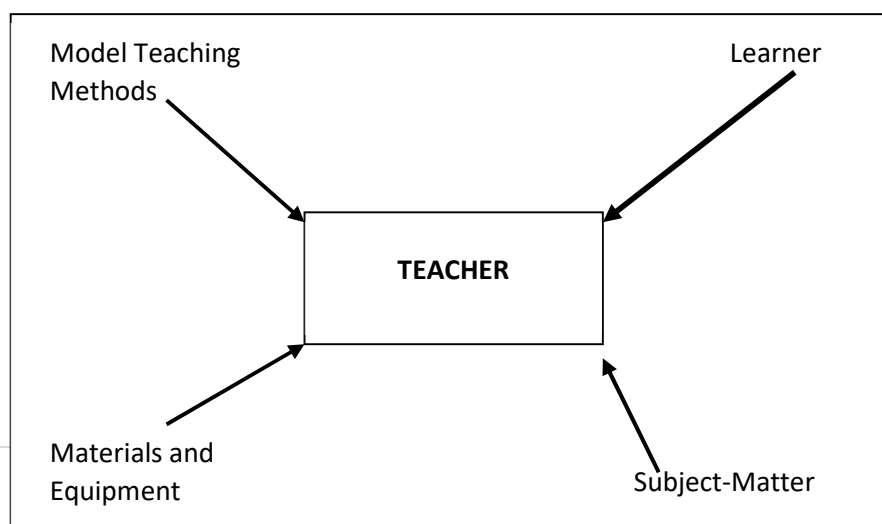
Chin and Benne (2022) identified three major strategies for innovation in education: the power-coercive, the rational-empirical, and the normative-re-educative strategies. These strategies provide frameworks for implementing changes that can lead to significant improvements in educational practice. The power-coercive strategy introduces changes through a highly centralized education system, particularly those committed to planned approaches to educational development. A decision taken by a central authority is communicated downwards through the bureaucratic hierarchy to those responsible for implementing it. These individuals, such as teachers or administrators, have no choice in the matter and must comply or face sanctions. This top-down approach ensures uniformity and compliance but may limit creativity and flexibility at the local level. The rational-empirical strategy is based on the assumption that the capacity for introducing changes is present at all levels of the education system. It recognizes the need for ongoing and regular change and adaptation in response to changing needs and circumstances. This strategy assumes that individuals are rational and will act in their self-interest if they see benefits in particular courses of action. By appealing to the logical and practical interests of educators, this strategy encourages voluntary and enthusiastic adoption of new practices.

The normative-re-educative strategy emphasizes re-educating staff through training procedures, such as in-service training programs on new syllabuses, new methodologies, and new roles and relationships within schools and school systems. This strategy focuses on changing the norms and values of the educational community, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and adaptation. By investing in professional development and creating supportive learning environments for teachers, this approach seeks to build internal capacity for sustained innovation. Therefore, understanding the distinctions and relationships between teaching methods, approaches, and techniques is crucial for effective educational practice. Moreover, recognizing the importance of innovation and the strategies to achieve it can help educators create dynamic and responsive learning environments that meet the evolving needs of students. By integrating these elements, education systems can foster more effective, inclusive, and adaptive teaching and learning processes.

Trends and Innovations in Teaching Methods

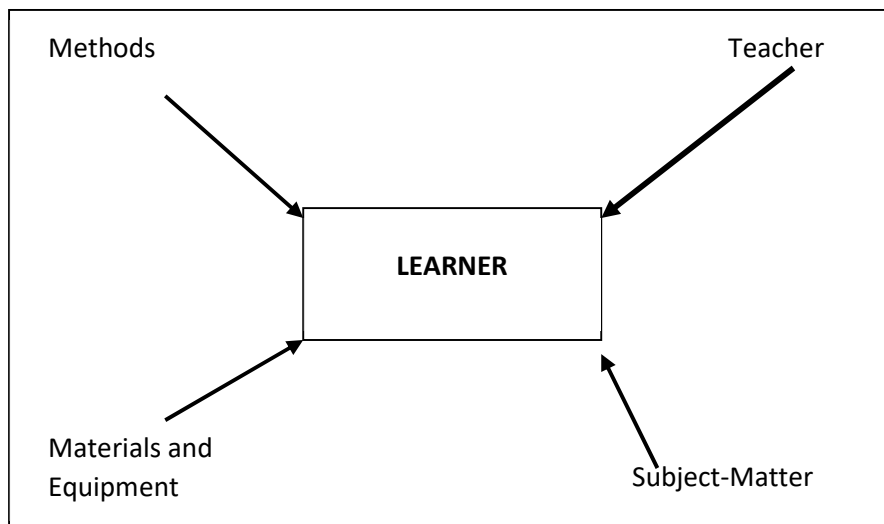
From the review of the literature on teaching methods, there are two broad categories of methods, namely, traditional and modern teaching methods. While, in this paper, the characteristics of a teacher-centred model and a learner-centred model are explained against the background of our definition of the teaching method, as a set of patterns of interaction between the teacher and learners or between learners and learning experiences, teaching methods will be discussed under four major categories. First is a teacher centred model, as shown in Figure 1.

Fig. 1 Teacher-Centred Model



The teacher-centered approach places the teacher as the central focus of the educational process. In this setup, the teacher occupies a prominent position and performs most of the tasks for or on behalf of the learner. Consequently, the learner remains a passive participant in the teaching-learning situation. The subject matter, teaching methods, and instructional materials are designed primarily to favor the teacher. This approach is not regarded as an effective educational process for several reasons. First, it does not encourage necessary interactions within the teaching-learning environment. Second, it fails to engage learners in classroom activities. Third, it does not promote the development of desirable skills. Lastly, it does not stimulate learners to use their initiative. Due to these drawbacks, the teacher-centered approach is becoming increasingly unpopular among education practitioners. Instead, there is a growing emphasis on the child-centered approach to teaching, which places the learner at the core of the educational experience.

Fig. II Learner-centred Model



This learner-centered approach addresses many disadvantages of the teacher-centered approach by placing the learner at the core of all teaching-learning activities. It encourages active participation of learners in the teaching-learning process, facilitating dynamic interactions between the learner and other components of the educational environment. This approach also promotes the development of skills and encourages learners to use their initiatives. By fostering a more engaging and interactive learning environment, this method supports a more effective and comprehensive educational experience. While the characteristics of both teacher-centered and learner-centered models have been outlined, the teaching methods in this paper are categorized into four major areas. These include the Information Transmission/Reception Methods, Cognitive Strategies Development Methods, Attitudes Development Methods, and Social Interaction Methods. Each category encompasses specific techniques and approaches that contribute to a holistic and balanced educational framework.

The Information Transmission/Reception Methods

The Information Transmission/Reception Methods: This category includes methods such as lecturing, recitation, and textbook assignments. For the purpose of this discussion, the focus will be on the lecture method. The lecture method dates back to the Middle Ages when it was

a prevalent teaching technique among Jewish educators. During that time, the teacher's words held such significance that Jewish pupils had to memorize them verbatim. In Nigerian schools, the lecture method is the oldest traditional method of teaching. It involves the teacher presenting a body of organized information on a subject to students over a specific period through talking and physical activities. In this method, students are passive listeners, primarily engaged in note-taking, which often results in minimal learning. Studies have indicated that the lecture method is appropriate in certain contexts (Bligh, 2022; Costin, 2021). It is suitable when the primary purpose is to disseminate information, when the material is not available elsewhere, when the material must be organized and presented in a specific way for a particular group, when the material needs to be remembered only for a short time, and when it is necessary to provide an introduction to an area or directions for learning tasks that will be pursued through other teaching methods. However, these authors also highlight the limitations of the lecture method. It is inappropriate when objectives beyond the acquisition of information are sought, when long-term retention is desired, when the material is complex, detailed, or abstract, when learner participation is essential to achieving the objectives, when higher cognitive objectives such as analysis, synthesis, or integration are being pursued, or when the students are of average or below average intelligence or educational experience.

Cognitive Strategies Development Methods

The methods under this section are those that not only teach a learner some information but also how to learn by developing in him some cognitive strategies such as concept formation, interpretation of data and application of rules of principles. The work of Rousseau, Montessori and Dewey, support the view that knowledge lies within the learner and simply awaits to be awakened when the core of what he already knows is struck. Both discussion and activity methods will be discussed.

- **The Discussion Technique-** Gall and Gall (2015) describe the discussion technique as a group of persons communicating and interacting to achieve specific objectives. The most critical element in successful discussion is group size. Most authorities agreed that if you work with groups, the number should be kept to five. Below this number, group participation is limited; there is an insufficient pool of ideas. As numbers increase a few members tend to dominate the discussion and others become passive participants. The discussion method involves the class in an oral exchange of ideas, facts, and opinions about a topic of mental concern and interest to students. The teacher draws upon the experience and knowledge of the group instead of leaving them to rely entirely upon their ideas. He acts as a teacher and directs or redirects ideas and information produced by them. Discussion thereby makes for active participation of students. Stimulates them to think creatively and individually and learn to express themselves freely. It helps the teacher to evaluate students' interest and learning. It also encourages them to develop clear thinking, self-assurance and sometimes leadership traits. It is valuable as a way of helping them to realize that many subjects must be looked at from several points of view; and that different factors or opinions must be taken into account.
- **Activity Methods:** The modern-day school is an activity school which emphasizes the creative aspect of experience. It is recognized that directed activities give reality to learning and effective teaching uses all available sources. The activity method is founded on the view that the learner must be involved in the process of learning. It is similar to experience. An activity in a social environment involves physical and mental action. Such activities help in the establishment of stimulating environment for creative expression. Through participation in activities, the child learns to apply principles and knowledge he has already acquired to solve problems. For example, learners may be led during a geography project to apply the physical geography and map reading principles they have learnt in building a

model of the physical features in Nigeria. Also during science laboratory practical sessions, learners are involved in activity by learning to conduct experiments, make and record scientific observations.

- **The Project Method:** This method is derived from the educational ideas of John Dewey, one of the great educators of American origin. He argued that education should not prepare a child for the future that is unknown, but rather that it should fit him rightly into his present society. He advocated that one of the best ways to do this is to allow the child to take full part in the life of his village and the wider neighborhood. Later, the followers of Dewey further developed his ideas into what can be called in schools: "The Project Method". Simply put, it is a project that involves a cooperative study of real-life situation(s) by either a class or the whole school usually under the expert guidance of a teacher. According to Bello (2020) a well planned and carefully executed project will assist the children in first, bringing them into actual contact with the lives and activities of their neighborhood. Second, presenting with real-life problems which they should be able to solve by thinking and working together in cooperation. Third, by the end of the project, the children would have gained more and acquire new knowledge about the topic. In the process they develop more skills.

The Attitudes Development Methods

The four methods that come under this category are useful particularly in developing social behaviours related to achievement and school work as well as in the development of interpersonal behaviours. These are role playing dramatization, modelling and laboratory and inquiry methods, which are briefly discussed in the section that follows.

- **Role-Playing:** This is a method in which students act as if they are involved in a real-life situation or incident. It involves the selection of a suitable problem before the roles are acted out. Role-playing makes students assume real situations which lead to a very rewarding experience for them. The approach involves problem-solving and activity approaches, instead of the teacher talking about the issues or problems, the students perform the action. This is a very good approach in the teaching of Literature in English. It can also be used to further improve upon skills which had been acquired through other methods so that these skills can become automatic to the child.
- **Dramatization:** The method is different from role-playing. In dramatization, the parts to be played are decided upon in advance and closely following the original material on which the dramatization is based. Dramatization has been used in literature where sections of a novel or a poem may be acted. It is useful in some social sciences or social studies subjects as well. The acting out of situations helps the learners work out the inter-personal relations among the characters involved.
- **Modelling:** To use this method, a human model that portrays the desired learning outcomes is made available to the learners. The learners observe the model while he makes his own choice and receives reinforcement for the appropriate decisions. For the learner to acquire the attitudes, he is induced to imitate the model and is also rewarded, if he makes the right choices. This will act as re-inforcement and will also motivate the learner to repeat the desired behaviour.
- **Laboratory and Inquiry Methods:** These methods have to do with acquisition of knowledge through experimentation and observation and are mostly used in science. In using these methods, certain steps are followed; namely, confrontation with a puzzling situation or problem, verification, experimentation, organisation and explanation of data, and reflection.

Cognitive and Motor Skills Development Methods

Demonstration and Guided Instruction methods come under this category.

- **Demonstration:** This is a method of teaching in which sight rather than hearing is the major means of communication, although the two senses are often combined. It is effective because most people can easily remember what they see rather than what they only hear. Demonstration, involves a process in which the learner has to follow a number of steps.
- **Guided Instruction:** This method is based on the assumption that the teacher will guide the learner's progress by means of commands and cues. The works of Skinner, Gagne and Ausubel are relevant to guided instruction. This method ensures that the procedures are presented to the learner in gradual steps that he can practice with guidance from a teacher or a teacher- mediating source such as printed instructions and television based instruction. It incorporated discussion and questions intended to guide the learner to move from one step to the next, following the procedure. It also constitutes strategies for providing the learner with informative feedback.

Fig. III Variables Affecting the Choice of Teaching Methods

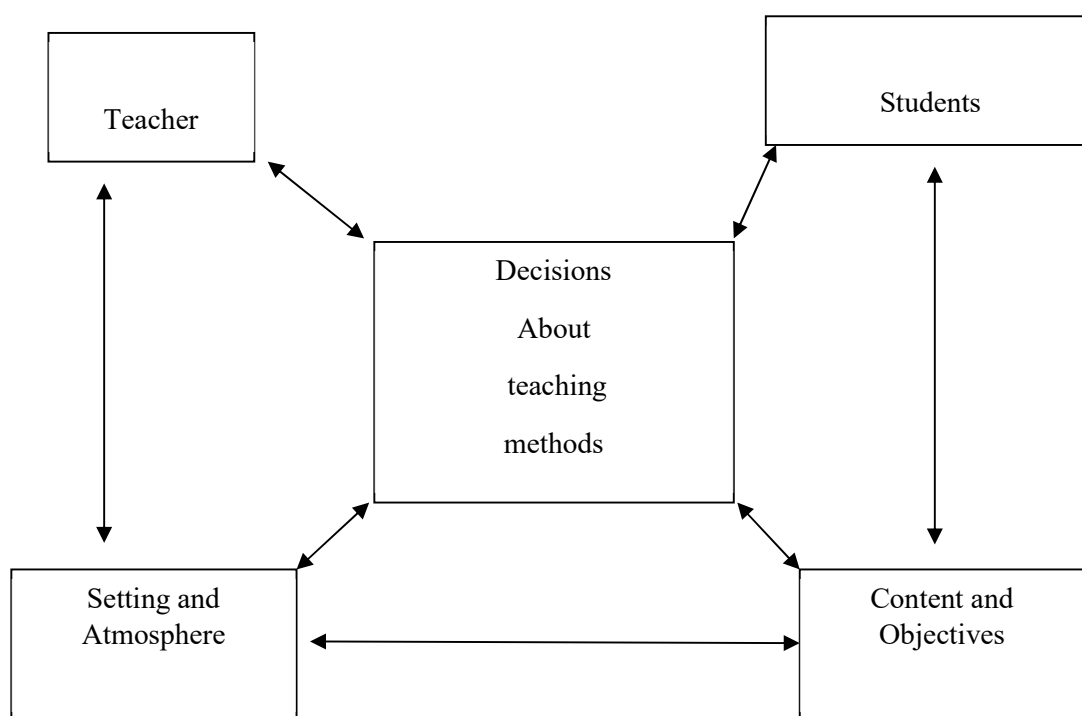


Figure III shows the relationship between the variables.

The teacher as a person has a set of personal strengths, abilities, previous learning and experience to rely on when selecting teaching methods. The students' experiences, needs and backgrounds are considered in the selection of methods. Just as every teacher brings some unique skills and preferences to the learning situation, so too every student enters the classroom with a special combination of likes, dislikes, interests, values, abilities and needs. Considering that no two individuals behave alike in selecting teaching materials, the pupils variable is important. Appropriate decision must be made by the teacher on which teaching method will be used on the basis of the purpose or desired ends of the learning experiences. If the desired learning is in the affective domain, different methods will be needed than if a psycho-motor skill is being sought. The physical environment including such related element of time, place and context of the learning situation is important consideration. In judging the adequacy of teaching methods used in schools, there is substantial disagreement on the criteria to be used.

Some methods are strongly advocated, because they are or are expected to be effective in acquainting students with the concepts and principles that constitute the theoretical parts of what they learn in their coursework. Other methods are often represented as preferable alternatives but, when the arguments of their proponents are examined, it is often found that they are not in effect claiming superior effectiveness on their behalf, but that they are championing them rather on the plausible grounds that these methods are the ones most likely to be found serviceable in schools.

Literary pedagogy

Literary pedagogy involves the strategic integration of diverse critical literary theories and methodologies into classroom practices, aiming to deepen students' comprehension and analytical skills in literature. According to Odunusi and Nneji (2021), literary pedagogy enhances learners' understanding by incorporating various theoretical approaches, enabling students to discuss and develop a nuanced appreciation of literature. Pedagogy itself is a multifaceted concept that encompasses both theoretical frameworks and practical teaching methods. It is rooted in educators' beliefs, cultural contexts, and the interplay between different learning styles. Essentially, pedagogy is a set of practices and principles guiding how teachers impart knowledge. Hence, when applying pedagogical approaches to teaching literature, educators should first establish their core teaching philosophies and values, which serve as the foundation for their instructional methods. Developing engaging lesson plans is crucial to capturing students' interest and fostering a love for literature. Encouraging students to ask questions and challenge ideas is vital for promoting critical thinking and a deeper understanding of literary texts. Additionally, helping students increase their self-awareness and reflection enhances their learning experiences and personal growth.

However, using different learning formats is another key aspect of effective literary pedagogy. This involves incorporating various teaching methods, such as lectures, discussions, multimedia presentations, and interactive activities, to cater to diverse learning preferences. Spending adequate time on complex passages or terms ensures that students fully grasp challenging concepts and appreciate the intricacies of literary works. Practically, teachers may need to adapt their approaches when teaching specific literary forms, such as poems or short stories. For instance, beginning with a short story can provide a relatable entry point for students before tackling a poem. Focusing on a story's elements, such as plot, character, setting, and theme, helps students understand the structure and meaning of the text (Odunusi and Nneji, 2021). Employing different reading methods, such as aloud reading, silent reading, and guided reading, can enhance students' engagement and comprehension. Modeling effective reading practices by reading out the poem or story first sets a standard for students to follow. Using engaging texts and age-related examples makes the material more relatable and interesting for students. Visualizing concepts through graphic organizers, illustrations, and other visual aids helps students better understand abstract ideas. Meeting students one-on-one provides personalized support and addresses individual learning needs. Assigning small-group discussions encourages collaborative learning and allows students to share perspectives and insights, deepening their understanding through peer interaction (Odunusi and Nneji, 2021). Consequently, literary pedagogy involves a comprehensive approach to teaching literature that integrates diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives. By establishing core teaching philosophies, developing engaging lesson plans, fostering inquiry and self-awareness, using varied learning formats, and adapting specific strategies for different literary forms, educators can create a rich and dynamic learning environment that enhances students' understanding and appreciation of literature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, addressing the critical issues in Nigeria's education sector requires a sustained and conducive climate for innovation. For education to respond flexibly to developmental needs, it is imperative to create both an environment and an internal capacity for change. Innovation in education should not rely solely on occasional, large-scale, external interventions. Instead, it should be a continuous, small-scale, and internally driven process. Achieving this necessitates robust support from the government, particularly through the Ministry of Education, to various educational institutions. Such support will ensure that reforms are effectively implemented; fostering an adaptive and resilient education system capable of meeting Nigeria's evolving socio-economic and cultural demands.

The Way Forward for Nigeria's Education Sector Reforms

In navigating the complex landscape of educational reform in Nigeria, it is imperative to outline a strategic path forward that addresses critical challenges while leveraging opportunities for improvement. This roadmap encompasses multifaceted approaches aimed at enhancing educational policies, empowering educators, revitalizing curriculum frameworks, ensuring adequate resource allocation, fostering community engagement, integrating technology, implementing robust monitoring mechanisms, addressing socio-economic barriers, and promoting innovation and research. These initiatives collectively aim to build a resilient and inclusive education system capable of meeting the evolving needs of Nigeria's diverse population and driving sustainable socio-economic development.

Strengthening Educational Policies: Developing and implementing comprehensive, evidence-based educational policies is crucial for addressing the unique challenges and needs of Nigeria's diverse population. Policies should be inclusive, equitable, and adaptable to societal and economic changes. Engaging stakeholders in policy formulation ensures that the reforms are grounded in practical realities and are more likely to succeed.

Enhancing Teacher Training and Development: Investing in continuous professional development for teachers ensures they are well-equipped with modern teaching methodologies, technological skills, and cultural competencies. Providing adequate resources and support for teacher training programs is essential for improving the quality of education. This also includes creating pathways for career advancement and recognizing the contributions of educators.

Promoting Curriculum Reforms: Updating and revising the curriculum to reflect contemporary knowledge, skills, and cultural relevance is necessary. Incorporating diverse perspectives and local content make education more relatable and engaging for students, fostering a deeper connection to their learning. Curriculum reforms should also emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills to prepare students for the future workforce.

Increasing Funding and Resource Allocation: Ensuring adequate funding for the education sector is crucial. This involves allocating sufficient resources for infrastructure development, learning materials, teacher salaries, and technology integration. Transparency and accountability in the utilization of funds are also essential to build trust and ensure that resources are used effectively.

Fostering Community and Stakeholder Engagement: Encouraging active participation from parents, communities, and other stakeholders in the education process helps tailor educational initiatives to better meet local needs and creates a supportive learning environment. Building strong partnerships between schools and communities can enhance the educational experience and outcomes for students.

Leveraging Technology in Education: Integrating technology into the education system enhances learning experiences and expands access to quality education, especially in remote

and underserved areas. Investing in digital infrastructure and providing training for both teachers and students is vital. Technology can also facilitate innovative teaching methods and provide students with the skills needed in a digital economy.

Implementing Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms: Establishing robust systems for monitoring and evaluating educational programs and reforms helps identify gaps, measure progress, and ensure accountability. Continuous assessment and feedback loops are necessary for adapting strategies and achieving desired educational outcomes.

Addressing Socio-Economic Barriers: Tackling issues such as poverty, gender inequality, and other socio-economic factors that hinder access to education is critical. Providing scholarships, financial aid, and support services can help bridge these gaps and ensure that all children have the opportunity to receive quality education. Efforts should also be made to make education affordable and accessible to all segments of society.

Encouraging Innovation and Research: Promoting a culture of innovation and research within educational institutions is essential. Supporting research initiatives that explore new teaching methods, educational technologies, and policy impacts can lead to more effective and sustainable reforms. Encouraging collaboration between researchers, educators, and policymakers can drive continuous improvement in the education sector. For this reason, through focusing on these strategies, Nigeria can create a more resilient, inclusive, and effective education system that meets the needs of its population and supports the country's overall development goals.

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