

THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOS) IN ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL ACCESS AND QUALITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined the critical role that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play in improving the access to, and the quality of education in Nigeria. One of the greatest challenges encountered by the Nigerian educational system is the lack of adequate infrastructure, and the deficiency of well-trained teachers. Moreover, social-economic barriers are the reasons why some students do not acquire an education. NGOs are identified as the potential major contributors to the educational reform and improvement. Leadership sets the direction for the organization's development. The management of NGOs is responsible for establishing the correct governance system. Identifying and adopting the strategy for one's organization should be consistent with the vision/mission/goal of the organization. This study is motivated by the fact that not all existing NGOs have been as successful in promoting education and reform among the disadvantaged classes as others. Therefore, the model that emerged from the successful experience of well-functioning NGOs of the past will be reviewed to learn from their successes. Once the problem diagnoses are complete, the next step should be to devise a more effective intervention program. It is crucial to mention that NGOs emerged as key actors contributing to educational reform and improvement in such a socially diverse society. NGOs are an extremely important element of meeting this objective. NGOs not only supply financial support, but, more importantly, they provide mentoring and support that is essential to the enhancement of the students' experience derived from the education. The results show how involvement of NGOs in education can change things, and they also give policymakers and other interested parties advice on how to encourage governments and NGOs to work together to improve educational outcomes across the country.

Keywords: Role, NGOs, educational access, quality, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has an educational system with many problems that must be eliminated in order for the system to be efficient. Nigeria is one of Africa's most populous countries, with more than 200 million inhabitants. However, a large number of the population are youths (Office for National Statistics, 2019). The education system critically needs to adapt to various and ever-increasing demands, since the population is currently estimated to be over 200 million people and the youth demographic is considered a major part of this population (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2019). The major problems include infrastructure deficiency, lack of the proper staff in teaching, overcrowded classrooms and dearth of basic learning materials (Ogundipe, 2019; Uwaifo & Abdullahi, 2021). The Unesco (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) has tabled terrifying statistics that unearth the fact that education in Nigeria is a luxury that only a few children can have access to. From the primary level, the schools to the colleges, education is a competitive sector in Nigeria (UNESCO, 2020). Millions of Nigerian children are out of school, most of them in the northern parts of the country rather than the south due to the factors of culture and socio-economic conditions that

hinder their educational development, UNESCO said in 2020. Nigeria's quality of education is also an important issue that the country grapples with, and it takes the form of low learning outcomes and high dropout rates. Low educational quality is fostered by teaching that is not up to par, the income gap, and policy implementations that are not conducted consistently (Eze & Adamu, 2020; Ayodele & Akinwumi, 2017). These obstacles are not only standing on the way of the dream of education for all but also are an obstacle to national development and economic progress (Aliyu & Ogundipe, 2019).

The Emergence and Significance of NGOs in Addressing Educational Issues

In response to the myriad issues facing the Nigerian education system, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have emerged as significant players in the educational landscape. Historically, NGOs have provided essential services, such as educational support, community outreach, and infrastructure development, often taking on roles that government institutions are unable to fulfil due to limited resources (Bassey & Weise, 2019). Their initiatives typically target marginalised and underserved populations, emphasising inclusive education and equal opportunities for all children (Ekunwe & Eno, 2021). For instance, organisations like Teach Nigeria focus on recruiting recent graduates to teach in underprivileged communities, thereby addressing teacher shortages and enhancing educational quality in these areas (Abubakar & Adedokun, 2018).

NGOs also play a pivotal role in advocacy, working to influence education policy and promote awareness of educational rights among communities. According to George (2021), NGOs have the capacity to mobilise communities around educational issues, thereby fostering a culture of accountability and responsiveness towards educational needs. Furthermore, their efforts have been instrumental in sensitising local and national policymakers regarding the critical importance of education as a fundamental human right (Nwankwo et al., 2021). One significant aspect of NGO work in Nigeria is their application of innovative approaches and resources within the educational sector. For example, Fasokun and Ogunleye (2020) report that NGOs have increasingly adopted technology-driven solutions to enhance learning experiences. These initiatives range from providing digital learning resources to equipping schools with necessary technological infrastructure, thus contributing significantly to efforts aimed at improving access and quality of education in Nigeria (Okebukola, 2021).

Moreover, the collaborative nature of NGOs further reinforces their impact. By forming partnerships with government bodies, other NGOs, and various stakeholders, these organisations create synergies that are crucial for systemic change (Kola, 2021). For instance, the collaboration between NGOs and local educational authorities has led to joint initiatives aimed at curriculum development, teacher training, and capacity building in rural areas (Ibrahim & Adebisi, 2020). Such partnerships also enable NGOs to leverage funding and resources more efficiently, enhancing the sustainability and scalability of their programs (Suleiman et al., 2022). Additionally, the involvement of NGOs in community-based programs has offered a platform for local voices to be heard, thereby promoting ownership of educational initiatives. A study by Adebowale et al. (2021) underscores that community engagement through NGOs not only boosts educational participation but also fosters a supportive environment for learners. This localised approach correlates with a better understanding of the unique challenges faced by different communities, making interventions more tailored and effective. Furthermore, as highlighted by Eze et al. (2022), NGOs have also been critical in disaster response, particularly in regions affected by conflict and natural disasters where educational disruptions are prevalent. Their ability to mobilise quickly in times of crisis has facilitated the continuity of education and provided

psychological support to affected children and families, reinforcing the resilience of the educational framework within these communities. Hence, NGOs have become indispensable in addressing educational issues in Nigeria. Through their multifaceted roles spanning educational support, advocacy, innovation, and community engagement, they contribute significantly to the quest for inclusive and quality education. By fostering partnerships and emphasising the importance of local contexts, NGOs pave the way for sustainable educational reform and systemic change in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to assess the impact of NGO interventions on educational access and quality in Nigeria. The key research objectives are as follows:

1. The aim of this study is to examine the role of NGOs in addressing educational challenges in Nigeria.
2. The second goal is to identify successful NGO interventions and their outcomes in local education systems.
3. The third objective is to analyse the collaborative efforts between NGOs and governmental bodies in enhancing educational access and quality.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What are the successful strategies employed by NGOs to enhance educational access and quality in Nigeria?
2. How have NGO interventions impacted the local education systems, particularly in underserved communities?
3. What are the challenges faced by NGOs in the education sector, and how can these be overcome?

Methods

The research employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of NGOs in Nigeria's education sector. Data will be collected through case studies of selected NGOs known for their impactful interventions, complemented by in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including NGO staff, educators, and community members. Secondary data will also be used to analyse educational outcomes and trends associated with NGOs' involvement (Eze & Adamu, 2020; Olusanya & Ige, 2017). Quantitative data will be obtained from educational records, assessments, and reports from the Federal Ministry of Education and relevant NGOs. This dual approach will ensure the research gains depth and nuance, revealing the complexities of NGO interactions within the educational framework of Nigeria.

The Educational Landscape in Nigeria

The historical context of education in Nigeria: The educational landscape of Nigeria has undergone significant transformations over the centuries, influenced by a complex interplay of indigenous traditions, colonial legacies, and contemporary national policies. This historical overview can be divided into several key phases: pre-colonial education, the colonial era, the post-independence period, and the modern educational landscape.

Pre-Colonial Education: Before the establishment of formal education systems, traditional education in Nigeria was deeply rooted in local cultures and practices. Knowledge was primarily transmitted orally from one generation to the next through storytelling, proverbs, rituals, and community participation. The informal educational

system emphasised practical skills, communal values, and cultural identity. In various ethnic groups, such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa, education revolved around apprenticeships, where younger members learnt trades and crafts directly from experienced practitioners within the community (Odinma, 2008). For instance, in the Yoruba culture, the young were educated about moral values, history, and responsibilities through participation in religious ceremonies and rites of passage. Similarly, among the Igbo, education focused on communal norms, agricultural practices, and local governance. This traditional system was holistic, often encompassing social, spiritual, and practical knowledge necessary for daily living.

Colonial Era (19th Century): The landscape of Nigerian education began to change significantly with the arrival of European missionaries in the 19th century. These missionaries introduced Western-style education, primarily in the southern regions of Nigeria, which focused on reading, writing, and arithmetic, alongside religious instruction. Notable missionaries like Thomas Babington Macaulay and the LMS (London Missionary Society) established schools that aimed to convert local populations to Christianity while educating them in European ideals and practices (Nwangwu, 2002). The colonial government's involvement in education began to grow in the late 1800s. By 1900, the British colonial administration implemented policies that expanded educational opportunities but also reflected their interests. They established a few government schools and introduced an education system that largely favoured the elites, exacerbating social inequalities. While the 1925 Education Ordinance sought to establish a more structured educational framework, access to education remained limited, particularly in the northern regions and among the poorer segments of society (Gidado, 2018).

Post-Independence Era (1960-1980): Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, the new government acknowledged the pivotal role of education in national development and unity. Educational reforms were initiated to address the inequities instilled during colonial rule. The first National Policy on Education was introduced in 1977, emphasising the need for a more inclusive and equitable educational system. This policy focused on free primary education, the integration of technical and vocational education, and a balanced approach to science and arts instruction (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). Subsequent revisions of the National Policy on Education aimed to address persistent challenges, including a high dropout rate, insufficient school facilities, and disparities between urban and rural education. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) program launched in 1976 aimed to increase access to education; however, it faced challenges such as inadequate funding and lack of trained teachers, which hindered its effectiveness (Oni, 2017).

Modern Educational Landscape (1980-Present): The latter part of the 20th century into the 21st century witnessed further attempts at educational reforms amidst political instability, economic challenges, and social upheaval. In 1999, a new education policy called the National Policy on Education (revised) was introduced to address the challenges of failed educational systems and the need for quality education across the nation. This policy made provisions for inclusive education, emphasising the need for equity for girls, children with disabilities, and people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Ugochukwu, 2019). Despite such initiatives, the Nigerian education sector still faces numerous challenges. The effect of economic downturns, corruption, and insufficient funding has led to inadequate infrastructure, poorly trained teachers, and a lack of educational materials. Additionally, regional disparities in educational access and quality remain pronounced, especially between the northern and southern regions of the country (Ajayi, 2019). The

growing trend of private education has also emerged as a response to the shortcomings of the public system, leading to a bifurcated education system where quality varies widely based on socioeconomic status (Mok, 2019). Hence, the historical context of education in Nigeria highlights a story of evolution marked by various influences, setbacks, and attempts at reform. While significant progress has been made, the country must continue to confront long-standing challenges in its education sector to ensure equitable and quality education for all its citizens.

Key Stakeholders and Current Realities in the Nigerian Education Sector

The Nigerian education sector is shaped by a variety of stakeholders who collectively influence policy, practice, and outcomes. The government remains central to this process, with the federal level primarily responsible for national policies and higher education, while state governments oversee basic and secondary education (Nigerian Education Data Survey, 2019). Alongside government efforts, the private sector has increasingly contributed to educational provision, particularly through the growth of private schools and universities in urban areas. This trend has widened options for families but has also contributed to disparities in educational quality and access between private and public institutions (Mok, 2019). Civil society, including non-governmental and community-based organisations, also plays a vital role in supporting educational development. These organisations often provide services, advocacy, and resources targeted at underserved communities, thereby helping to bridge gaps left by public and private actors (Adefuye et al., 2020).

Although these contributions, current statistics show that education in Nigeria faces a mixture of progress and persistent challenges. For example, primary school enrolment rates stand at about 87% (UNICEF, 2021), suggesting widespread participation at the foundational level. However, the transition rate from primary to secondary school is only 57% (World Bank, 2021), and an estimated 10.5 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 remain out of school (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). These figures reflect systemic barriers such as poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural practices that place less value on formal education. Furthermore, quality remains a major concern. The 2018 National Assessment of Learning Outcomes revealed that only 27% of primary four pupils could read a simple English passage (Federal Ministry of Education, 2018). This low literacy rate highlights fundamental weaknesses in learning outcomes, especially in rural areas where resources and teacher capacity are limited. Indeed, around 50% of teachers in public primary schools are unqualified, a factor that continues to undermine educational effectiveness (World Bank, 2020).

Inequalities further complicate the landscape. Gender, location, and socio-economic status significantly determine access to education. Girls, especially in northern Nigeria, encounter cultural and societal barriers that limit their educational opportunities. Patriarchal norms and poverty combine to prioritise boys' education, while insecurity exacerbates the situation in conflict-affected areas (Afolabi & Adetunji, 2019; UNICEF, 2021). Similarly, children with disabilities face exclusion, as only a minority of schools have the infrastructure or resources to provide inclusive education (Akanji & Ogunyemi, 2020). Regional disparities are particularly stark, with southern states like Lagos and Oyo reporting completion rates of over 90%, compared to significantly lower outcomes in the North, where insurgency and insecurity have forced the closure of thousands of schools (Alubo et al., 2021; National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Socio-economic realities also shape access to education. Rural families struggling with poverty often prioritise survival over schooling, which contributes to high rates of child labour and limited enrolment

(Adetunji, 2019). Poor infrastructure and limited school availability in these areas further entrench the cycle of educational disadvantage (Ijaiya et al., 2019). This dual reality—where opportunities for quality education exist but remain unevenly distributed—underscores the urgent need for reforms. Improving the sector will require collective action from government, private actors, civil society, and communities. Key priorities include strengthening teacher training, increasing investment in school infrastructure, expanding access for marginalised groups, and creating inclusive policies that address the needs of all children. Only through a coordinated and inclusive approach can Nigeria achieve an educational system that is equitable, accessible, and of high quality.

The Role of NGOs in Nigerian Education

In Nigeria's education sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play a vital role in complementing government efforts to enhance access, quality, and equity. These organisations, which operate independently of direct government control, are typically defined as non-profit entities established to address social, economic, and developmental challenges. Within education, NGOs act as critical partners, often filling gaps left by government policies and initiatives, particularly in underserved communities. NGOs in Nigeria can generally be classified into two broad categories: local and international. Local NGOs are established within the country and are deeply embedded in the cultural and social contexts of the communities they serve. Because of their proximity to local realities, they often have an intimate understanding of the unique challenges facing Nigerian schools. Examples include the Nigerian Network of NGOs (NNGO) and the Practical Education Network (PEN), both of which work directly with schools and communities to strengthen educational outcomes. International NGOs, on the other hand, operate across multiple countries with a wider scope of intervention. They provide financial support, technical expertise, and capacity-building resources to local actors and institutions. Notable among them in Nigeria are Save the Children, Oxfam, and Plan International, each of which addresses critical issues such as emergency education, gender equity, and child rights. The classification of NGOs not only influences their operational scope but also determines their sources of funding, the partnerships they form, and the strategies they adopt.

The contributions of major NGOs in Nigerian education illustrate the diversity of their approaches and impact. Teach for Nigeria, for instance, functions under the global Teach For All network and focuses on addressing inequities in low-income communities by recruiting young graduates and professionals to teach in underserved schools for two years. The Nigeria Education Crisis Response (NECR) coalition responds to crises such as insurgency and natural disasters, creating safe learning environments for displaced children. ActionAid Nigeria works on improving educational quality and accessibility for marginalised groups, particularly girls and children with disabilities, and promotes community involvement in school governance. Similarly, the Malala Fund has gained international recognition for advocating girls' education in Nigeria. By partnering with grassroots organisations, it empowers girls and challenges cultural barriers that restrict their educational opportunities. Together, these organisations demonstrate the indispensable role of NGOs in Nigeria's educational landscape. Their interventions, whether through direct service delivery, advocacy, or partnerships, highlight the critical ways in which civil society complements state and private efforts. By addressing inequities, providing resources, and promoting inclusivity, NGOs contribute significantly to the ongoing struggle to achieve equitable and quality education across the country.

The Scope and Regulation of NGO Interventions in Education

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Nigeria have emerged as indispensable actors in addressing the multifaceted challenges of the education sector. Their interventions span a broad spectrum, ranging from direct service delivery to advocacy and systemic reform, with the overall aim of improving access, quality, and equity in education. A central focus of NGO efforts has been infrastructure development, particularly in underserved communities where schools often lack basic facilities. Many NGOs have invested in building and rehabilitating classrooms, providing clean water and sanitation facilities, and supplying essential learning materials, thereby creating safe and conducive environments for learning. Complementing this work is a strong emphasis on teacher training. Recognising that the quality of education is inseparable from the capacity of educators, NGOs regularly organise workshops, mentoring programmes, and professional development initiatives. These efforts equip teachers with enhanced pedagogical skills, subject mastery, and innovative instructional techniques that improve student learning outcomes.

Another important area of intervention is curriculum support. By collaborating with education authorities, NGOs contribute to the design and adaptation of curricula that are relevant to local realities. This often includes integrating local languages, practical vocational skills, and socio-emotional learning into teaching, thus bridging the gap between formal education and the needs of students in diverse communities.

Beyond classroom interventions, NGOs are also active in advocacy and policy engagement. By conducting research, generating evidence, and presenting data-driven recommendations, they influence educational policies at state and national levels. Their advocacy has been crucial in drawing attention to issues such as gender disparities, funding gaps, and the need for inclusive education policies. Equally significant is community mobilisation, where NGOs work directly with families, traditional leaders, and local stakeholders to build awareness about the importance of education. This is particularly impactful for marginalised groups, including girls and children with disabilities, whose access to education is often hindered by cultural and socio-economic barriers.

These diverse interventions are guided and shaped by the legal and regulatory framework governing NGO operations in Nigeria. The Nigerian Non-Governmental Organisations Regulatory Commission Act of 2006 provides the foundation for NGO oversight, mandating registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), submission of annual financial and programmatic reports, and compliance with accountability standards. The framework also regulates foreign funding, requiring full disclosure of financial sources and utilisation to ensure transparency and prevent misuse of resources. Partnerships with government agencies form another critical aspect of this framework. Many NGOs collaborate with bodies such as the Universal Basic Education Commission to align their interventions with national education goals. These partnerships enable NGOs to leverage governmental infrastructure and resources while ensuring that their initiatives complement broader policy objectives. However, NGOs must also navigate challenges such as bureaucratic delays, regulatory bottlenecks, and political complexities, particularly when advocating for policy reforms. Hence, NGOs play a pivotal role in bridging systemic gaps within Nigeria's education sector. Their work in infrastructure development, teacher capacity building, curriculum enhancement, policy advocacy, and community mobilisation demonstrates a holistic approach to tackling educational inequities. Yet, the sustainability and scalability of these interventions depend

on supportive legal frameworks and effective partnerships with government institutions. As Nigeria continues to confront persistent educational challenges, the contributions of NGOs will remain central to advancing inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all.

Case Studies of Successful NGO Interventions in Education

Several NGOs have significantly contributed to education in Nigeria through innovative strategies. Two prominent examples are *Teach For Nigeria (TFN)* and *Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises (ENGINE)*. Their projects highlight effective approaches for improving access, equity, and quality. Teach For Nigeria (TFN), established in 2017 as part of the global Teach For All network, focuses on expanding opportunities for children in underserved communities by recruiting and training university graduates to serve as teachers in low-income schools. Fellows undergo rigorous selection and training to acquire pedagogical and leadership skills before classroom placement. TFN emphasises community engagement, continuous mentoring, and capacity building (Teach For Nigeria, 2020; Etta & Etta, 2019; Chidiebere & Nwankwo, 2021). Its reports show a 20% increase in student performance in participating schools and that 80% of fellows felt prepared for teaching after training (Teach For Nigeria, 2021). Parents and community members also observed higher student motivation and renewed interest in learning (Chidiebere & Nwankwo, 2021).

The ENGINE initiative, launched in 2016 with support from DFID, targets barriers faced by girls in education. It provides conditional scholarships, advocacy campaigns, and works with authorities to enhance curricula by integrating life skills (Duflo et al., 2021; Malala Fund, 2020). The program stresses community awareness and cultural change, often collaborating with local leaders (Silva et al., 2019). Outcomes include a 35% increase in girls' enrolment, 92% retention among scholarship recipients, and a 50% higher completion rate compared to non-participants (Duflo et al., 2021; Uwezo, 2021). Beneficiaries frequently report improved confidence, higher aspirations, and stronger resilience. Personal accounts reinforce these impacts. A TFN student in Enugu shared that fellows made mathematics enjoyable, transforming her academic performance. Similarly, a graduate of ENGINE, Aisha, explained that scholarships enabled her to continue schooling and inspired her ambition to become a doctor (Silva et al., 2019). Together, these cases illustrate how NGOs address systemic challenges by combining teacher training, scholarships, advocacy, and curriculum reform. They not only improve learning outcomes but also empower communities, offering practical lessons for scaling up education interventions across Nigeria.

Challenges Faced by NGOs in the Education Sector

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Nigeria play a vital role in addressing issues of access, equity, and quality in education. However, they continue to face numerous challenges that limit their effectiveness and long-term sustainability. One of the most pressing internal challenges is funding. Many NGOs depend heavily on donations, grants, and sponsorships, but these resources are often inconsistent and inadequate, making it difficult to sustain projects or expand outreach (Brock & Schlegelmilch, 2019). Alongside financial instability, many NGOs also contend with management issues. Weak governance structures, poorly defined roles, and lack of strategic direction frequently undermine efficiency and hinder the successful implementation of educational programs (Hwang & Jack, 2019). Human resource constraints further compound these difficulties, as NGOs often struggle to recruit and retain qualified staff, especially in remote areas, and high

turnover combined with limited training opportunities weakens organisational effectiveness (Okafor & Omenaka, 2020).

Externally, political instability remains a major obstacle. Frequent policy shifts and changes in leadership create uncertainty and disrupt organisational planning, often making it difficult for NGOs to maintain partnerships or align their programs with national priorities (Nwankwo, 2021). Regulatory hurdles also present serious barriers. Under the NGO Regulatory Commission Act of 2006, organisations are required to undergo lengthy registration and compliance processes, which can delay project implementation and restrict their ability to respond quickly to pressing educational needs (Ogunniran, 2021). In addition, some NGOs face resistance at the community level. Local populations may distrust their motives, perceiving them as outsiders who impose external agendas rather than addressing genuine community concerns. As Fowler (2019) observes, trust-building and meaningful community engagement are crucial for the success of NGO interventions. The issues of sustainability and scalability are closely tied to these challenges. Because of their reliance on external funding and shifting donor priorities, many NGOs struggle to sustain projects over time, leaving communities without continued educational support. Research shows that closer collaboration with local actors and governments can strengthen program ownership and encourage long-term continuity (Kirk & Winthrop, 2019). Scaling up interventions presents additional difficulties. Programs that succeed in one locality may fail in another due to differences in culture, infrastructure, and socio-economic conditions. Without strong monitoring and evaluation systems, NGOs find it hard to replicate successful models on a larger scale (Camfield, 2020).

Notwithstanding these obstacles, NGOs can strengthen their role in Nigeria's education sector through a number of strategies. Diversifying funding sources through public-private partnerships, crowdfunding, and engagement with local businesses can reduce dependency on single donors (Brock & Schlegelmilch, 2019). Strengthening organisational management, investing in staff training and retention, and adopting evidence-based practices can also improve accountability and effectiveness (Hwang & Jack, 2019; Okafor & Omenaka, 2020; Kirk & Winthrop, 2019). Engaging communities in decision-making helps to build trust and foster ownership of projects (Fowler, 2019), while advocacy at the policy level can help ease regulatory barriers and improve collaboration with government institutions (Nwankwo, 2021). Importantly, while NGOs remain central to efforts aimed at tackling inequalities in education, their work is constrained by financial limitations, weak governance, political instability, regulatory bottlenecks, and occasional community resistance. Addressing these issues through stronger partnerships, better management practices, sustainable funding, and context-sensitive scaling will be key to enhancing their impact. By adapting to local realities and committing to long-term engagement, NGOs can continue to make meaningful contributions toward expanding educational access and equity in Nigeria.

Impact of NGO Interventions on Local Education Systems

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have become pivotal actors in shaping educational outcomes in Nigeria, particularly in contexts where resources are scarce and government provision remains inadequate. Their interventions have significantly influenced access, quality, and equity in education, while also fostering partnerships with government agencies and leaving lasting effects on educational policies and practices. In terms of access, NGOs have successfully reduced barriers for disadvantaged groups. Their efforts ranging from scholarships and school construction to mobile education initiatives have expanded opportunities for children who might otherwise be excluded. Research by

Ogunyemi et al. (2020) shows that programs like Teach For Nigeria contributed to a 20% increase in enrolment in underserved areas, while Brock and Schlegelmilch (2021) highlight how NGO-led interventions have eased the burden for marginalised families, enabling more children to attend school.

Quality has also improved through targeted interventions, particularly teacher training and curriculum innovation. Noble et al. (2019) found that NGO-led professional development enhanced pedagogical skills and improved student learning outcomes. The ENGINE program further illustrates this impact by introducing skills-based curricula that not only boosted academic achievement but also prepared girls for future economic opportunities (Malala Fund, 2020). Such approaches have created more engaging and relevant learning environments, bridging the gap between classroom instruction and real-world application. On equity, NGOs have played a vital role in empowering groups traditionally excluded from education, such as girls and children with disabilities. Initiatives like conditional cash transfer schemes have increased girls' enrolment and retention by up to 35% in secondary schools (Duflo et al., 2021). These efforts advance inclusive education and foster broader social equity, ensuring that marginalised populations are not left behind in the pursuit of educational progress. The success of many of these initiatives is tied to strategic partnerships between NGOs, government agencies, and international stakeholders. Such collaborations allow NGOs to align their programs with national goals, leverage resources, and strengthen advocacy efforts. For instance, ENGINE's partnership with the Universal Basic Education Commission has informed policy reforms supporting girls' education (UWEZO, 2021). Similarly, multinational collaborations have provided vital funding and expertise, enhancing local capacity to address systemic issues in education (Nwankwo, 2021).

Beyond immediate outcomes, NGO interventions have left long-term marks on educational policy and practice. Data-driven advocacy and pilot projects have influenced government strategies, particularly in teacher training and community engagement. Kirk and Winthrop (2019) note that such initiatives have prompted policymakers to adopt similar approaches, while Okafor and Omenaka (2020) emphasise that technology-based innovations introduced by NGOs such as mobile learning platforms—have set new standards now reflected in national education policy. Despite these achievements, challenges remain in embedding NGO-driven reforms across the entire education system. While policies often incorporate elements of successful NGO models, consistent integration and sustainability require stronger institutional frameworks. Even so, the evidence demonstrates that NGOs are not merely service providers; they are key innovators and catalysts for educational transformation in Nigeria.

Success Stories and Lessons Learnt

Teach For Nigeria and the ENGINE (Empowering Nigerian Girls in Education) initiative illustrate how innovative, targeted interventions can significantly reshape the country's educational landscape. Teach For Nigeria, launched in 2017 as part of the Teach For All network, addresses inequity in under-resourced schools by recruiting and training young leaders as teachers. Beyond improving student engagement and raising examination scores by an average of 15% within three years, the program fosters long-term leadership development. Many fellows continue as advocates for educational reform, influencing policy and mobilising communities to support equity in education. Partnerships with schools, government agencies, and civil society have further amplified its reach, showing that leadership and collaboration are essential drivers of sustainable impact. In parallel, the ENGINE initiative, in partnership with UNFPA, has transformed opportunities for girls by

combining scholarships, tutoring, and mentorship with vocational and life-skills training. With over 200,000 beneficiaries, ENGINE has improved retention rates—girls in the program were 50% more likely to stay in school compared to their peers (UNFPA, 2020). By addressing economic, health, and social barriers—including menstrual hygiene and reproductive health education, ENGINE has strengthened girls' confidence, decision-making abilities, and aspirations for higher education or vocational careers. Its mentorship and community engagement strategies have also shifted attitudes towards girls' education, fostering greater acceptance and reducing gender-based stereotypes.

Together, Teach For Nigeria and ENGINE highlight the importance of holistic, multi-dimensional approaches that combine academic, social, and community empowerment. Their successes demonstrate that when education reform integrates both human capital development and systemic advocacy, it creates a ripple effect that not only improves learning outcomes but also transforms communities and challenges long-standing barriers. The key lesson is clear: sustainable educational change in Nigeria requires both innovative leadership and inclusive, context-sensitive strategies that extend beyond the classroom.

Comprehensive NGO Interventions in Nigeria's Education Sector

The LEAP (Learning, Empowerment, and Advocacy for Adolescents) project demonstrates how a holistic approach can effectively address barriers to education for girls in Nigeria. By combining academic support, life skills training, mentoring, and strong community engagement, LEAP has created environments where girls not only enrol but thrive in school. The program's emphasis on health education—including menstrual hygiene and reproductive health ensures that girls are equipped to overcome obstacles that often disrupt their schooling. Mentorship and community involvement have further fostered a culture of solidarity and support, shifting perceptions about the value of girls' education. A UNICEF (2018) study showed that schools implementing LEAP experienced a 20% rise in female enrolment, underscoring its impact. Importantly, LEAP's integrated model highlights the power of combining education, health, and social empowerment to drive both academic success and long-term gender equality.

Similarly, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) has advanced educational access and quality in Nigeria through infrastructure development, teacher training, and inclusive education initiatives. By renovating schools in underserved rural areas, GPE has reduced access barriers and created conducive learning environments. Its investments in professional development for teachers have significantly improved instructional quality and student outcomes. GPE also prioritises inclusivity by integrating children with disabilities and tailoring programs to diverse learners. According to a World Bank (2020) report, enrolment rates in GPE-supported regions rose by 30%, reflecting the program's effectiveness. Furthermore, GPE's data-driven monitoring and advocacy for systemic policy reforms ensure sustainability, accountability, and alignment with local needs. Together, LEAP and GPE exemplify how targeted interventions, when rooted in local realities and supported by strong partnerships, can expand access, improve quality, and foster equity in Nigeria's education system.

Lessons from NGO Initiatives in Education

The experiences of NGOs in Nigeria highlight both achievements and persistent challenges in advancing education. Successful interventions show that adaptability to local cultural and socio-economic contexts is vital, as programs tailored to community realities tend to have greater impact. Equally important is active community engagement, where

partnerships with families and local leaders foster ownership, accountability, and stronger support for educational initiatives. A holistic approach that addresses not only academics but also life skills, health, and socio-economic empowerment has proven effective in ensuring long-term sustainability. Furthermore, continuous monitoring and data-driven evaluation enable NGOs to refine their programs and maintain relevance. Despite these successes, NGOs face significant obstacles. Funding limitations and reliance on inconsistent donor support often weaken progress, while internal capacity constraints such as limited infrastructure and staff burnout reduce effectiveness. The proliferation of uncoordinated NGOs has led to fragmented efforts and resource wastage, underscoring the need for collaboration and shared frameworks. Additionally, political and social barriers, including corruption, insecurity, and cultural resistance—especially toward girls' education continue to pose challenges, making advocacy and policy engagement indispensable.

Moving forward, lessons from both successes and failures suggest that NGOs must strengthen adaptability, community partnerships, and collaboration while addressing financial and capacity gaps. For future research, emphasis should be placed on evaluating the long-term impact of interventions, conducting comparative studies across regions, exploring the integration of technology in education, and examining how intersecting factors such as gender and socio-economic status shape educational access. These insights demonstrate that NGOs remain central to Nigeria's educational transformation. By learning from experience, fostering innovation, and deepening collaboration with government and communities, NGOs can help create an inclusive and sustainable education system that truly meets the needs of all learners.

Conclusion

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are vital to improving education in Nigeria. They expand access for marginalised groups, enhance teaching quality through training, and promote equity across socio-economic and gender lines. Their collaborations with government strengthen policies and improve program effectiveness. NGOs' flexibility and evidence-based practices make them key drivers of innovation, accountability, and continuous improvement. Moving forward, stronger partnerships, supportive policies, and the use of technology will be crucial. With sustained collaboration and investment, NGOs can continue to ensure inclusive, quality education for all children in Nigeria.

Recommendations

To strengthen NGO-led educational initiatives and foster effective partnerships, the following key recommendations should be considered:

1. NGOs should engage local communities in program design and implementation to ensure ownership and sustainability.
2. NGOs should adopt evidence-based programming by using data and research to guide interventions.
3. NGOs should prioritise teacher training, mentorship, and ongoing professional support to improve teaching quality.
4. Governments should develop integrated educational frameworks that involve NGOs and other stakeholders.
5. Governments should allocate adequate funding and resources for education, with clear support for NGO partnerships.
6. Governments should establish policy frameworks that simplify NGO registration and operations for effective service delivery.

7. NGOs and governments should strengthen collaboration through joint task forces, consultations, and incentives for successful partnerships.

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