

## COMPARING EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN NIGERIA AND JAPAN

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### ABSTRACT

Quality education remains one of the fundamental factors of development as it has the potential of enriching people's understanding of themselves and the world. It has the capacity to improve the quality of human life and leads to broad social benefits for individuals and society. In addition, it plays a very crucial role in securing economic and social progress and improving income distribution.

Nigeria, despite being the largest economy in Africa and the seventh most populous country in the world, has continued to suffer from economic and socio-political problems such as unemployment, inflation, corruption, inadequate electricity, poor infrastructure, poverty, political instability, ethnic and religious crises. The nation is yet to evolve into a progressive pattern of economic growth, human capital development, unity, and employment. It is also lacking in right framework needed to analyse the Nigerian situation and proffer suggestions as to the way forward.

These anomalies could be traceable to the failure of successive governments and policy makers to ensure qualitative education mechanisms. Against this backdrop, ensuring qualitative standard of education in its school is believed to be a formidable way to bring about effective solution and eventually drive the country into any meaningful development in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. And to help achieve this, it is expedient for Nigeria to learn from the developed countries because of their huge experiences and long historical development in education. In this case, an analysis and comparison of secondary school education in Nigeria and Japan was conducted. The discussion was focused on six broad areas- Curriculum, Class Size, Time Allotment, Grading System, Learning Infrastructure and Teaching Materials, ICT and Education during COVID-19, Parental Involvement, Gender Gap, Teachers and Continuous Professional Teacher Development, Regional Disparity in Education Participation, Quality Assurance, Academic Corruption, as well as Security Issues.

The study provided useful information for understanding the value systems, progress of the compared societies; as well as their similarities and differences amongst the two countries. The study found out that there were very little similarities in the implementation of education for secondary school students

in Nigeria when compared to their counterparts in Japan. Based on the findings, the study made several recommendations on strategies to be employed for improving the secondary school system in Nigeria.

## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a key role in the development of a country. It has been established that no country can develop beyond her educational level. This is because economic development, advancement or independence of any nation is a function of the educational capacity of the working class or the decision makers of that nation. The better the quality of education that a country has, the better the quality of human beings it has [1]. Education, being the process of teaching, learning, and training of an individual; brings about improved knowledge and the acquisition of skills. It is a veritable tool for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society, and promoting national development [2]. However, for any nation to maximize the benefits of education for sustainable development, the right system of education must be implemented [3].

Nigeria, as a developing country, aims at building a free and democratic society, a just an egalitarian society, a united strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy, and a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens [4]. It has also identified education as a veritable tool in actualizing these dreams. Its emphasis on education has continued over the years with the increase in budgetary allocation to education as well as the inauguration of various reform. How good this may seem; the efforts have been largely criticised as being centred on access to education with little attention to the quality of education offered. The consequence of this is that schools in Nigeria are increasingly becoming the preserve of the poor with generally very limited learning outcomes; and the need to get quality education has sparked a proliferation of expensive private schools as well as a high level of immigration to developed countries.

A reliable way to solve this problem is by adopting cross-country comparative analysis and evaluation in making educational policies in Nigeria. This is a system whereby the secondary education between two or more countries are compared and evaluated. With a national literacy rate of 57 percent against Japan which has 100 percent literacy rate, Nigeria has a lot to learn from the system of secondary education in Japan.

## 2.0. PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Today's world is increasingly interconnected, and growth in global migration has led to more expansion and diversity in schools worldwide. A widely used measure of learning across countries in the empirical literature on education is the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) [5].

PISA is an international assessment coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) that measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years [6]. Other widely used international standardized tests include Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Since these tests show not only what performance levels are possible by students but also how education varies across countries; it has further led to greater chances for comparison and evaluation amongst individual countries.

Several comparative studies have been conducted in different countries and regions of the world. For instance, Tupas and Matsuura [7] compared science teaching and learning in Japan and the Philippines. Setiawan [3] compared the education systems in Indonesia and Finland, while Pleshakova [8] compared vocational education systems in Germany and Turkey.

### 3.0. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper aims at examining the present situations of secondary school education in Japan and Nigeria. It will also highlight some of the similarities and structural defects in policy and implementation amongst the two countries. Thereafter, suggestions will be proffered for the revival of education as catalyst for education development in Nigeria using Japan's educational experiences as a benchmark. The discussion was aimed on 13 broad areas- Curriculum, Class Size, Time Allotment, Grading System, Learning Infrastructure and Teaching Materials, ICT and Education during COVID-19, Parental Involvement, Gender Gap, Teachers and Continuous Professional Teacher Development, Regional Disparity in Education Participation, Quality Assurance, Academic Corruption and Security Issues.

### 4.0. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION

4.1. CURRICULUM: There are too many subjects that secondary school students in Nigeria must take. The reverse is the case in Japan where a typical lower secondary school spends an average of five to six hours of classroom time is provided per day, Monday through Friday. Too many subjects may mean that not enough focus on the important content areas of English Language, Mathematics, Science, and extracurricular activities. Secondary schools should employ adequate number of qualified teachers and reduce the number of subjects that the junior secondary school student in Nigeria must take.

Table 1: Comparison of the Curriculum for the junior secondary or middle years in Nigeria and Japan. Adapted from: [19] and [20]

Nigeria - Junior Secondary School Subjects		Japan - Junior Secondary School Subjects	
Core	Electives	Core	Electives
1. English Studies 2. Nigerian Language (Hausa/Igbo/Yoruba) 3. Mathematics 4. Basic Science 5. Social studies 6. Creative and Cultural Arts 7. The religions (CRK /IRK) 8. Physical & Health Education 9. French Language 10. Basic Technology 11. Civic Education 12. Computer studies/ICT	1. Agricultural science 2. Home Economics 3. Arabic Language 4. Business Studies Note: Must offer 1 elective but not more than 3.	1. Japanese 2. Mathematics 3. Science (comprising physics, chemistry, biology, and geosciences) 4. Social Studies 5. Music 6. Fine Arts 7. Health and physical education 8. Technology/home economics 9. English language	Languages other than English can be chosen

4.2. CLASS SIZE: The average number of school children in one class in Japan stands at 40. This implies that the class size is within the range of the optimum size. This is not the same with schools in Nigeria where teachers deal with an average of 100 students in a class in public schools and as high as 50 students in a class in some private schools [9]. The burden of overcrowding is overwhelming to the point that public schools in big cities have two shifts per day-- morning and evening shifts. Class size reduction approach should be adopted by schools where students are more than forty in a class.

4.3. TIME ALLOTMENT: Schools in Japan ensure full compliance of the provision of the timetable. There is also adequate time allotted for science experiments, sports, and other club activities. In Nigeria, however, the timetable could be contradicted outrightly.

Students could be stopped from going for a break session to participate in something not contained in the timetable. Sometimes, periods allotted for a subject would be used for a different subject altogether. Schools in Nigeria should be made to ensure full compliance of the provision of the timetable.

4.4. GRADING SYSTEM: In Japan, children do not have exams until the fourth grade because a higher emphasis is placed on building a good manner and develop their character development. In a similar vein, all students in elementary and middle school are promoted to the next grade level even if they failed the exam or not. That shows that every student is valued and respected regardless of his or academic performances. Sadly, the same is not held in Nigeria. Policy guidelines for achieving national uniformity in evaluation and assessment should be made across schools in Nigeria.

4.5. LEARNING MATERIALS AND INFRASTRUCTURE: Secondary schools in Japan have working and sufficient learning materials and infrastructures. But in Nigeria, public secondary schools have these facilities in obsolete and dilapidated form [10]. Poor building conditions such as leaking toilets, smelly cafeterias, broken furniture, poor ventilation, mouldy walls and falling off ceilings make students feel irritated about their school's norms and expectations. Education stakeholders in Nigeria should ensure adequate provision of necessary infrastructures and instructional materials needed for teaching and learning.

4.6. ICT AND EDUCATION DURING COVID-19: Figure 1 showed how Coronavirus pandemic affected educational systems worldwide, and lead to the widespread closures of schools. But in countries like Japan that have inculcated the use of ICT in their educational system, education was sustained despite the closure of schools. Teachers were required to teach remotely, and students only needed little adjustments to the online teaching and learning techniques. The transition to online education posed a challenge to learners in countries like Nigeria where there were no concrete infrastructures and facilities that facilitate online education; hence education was halted. Efforts should be made towards adopting online education in Nigeria.

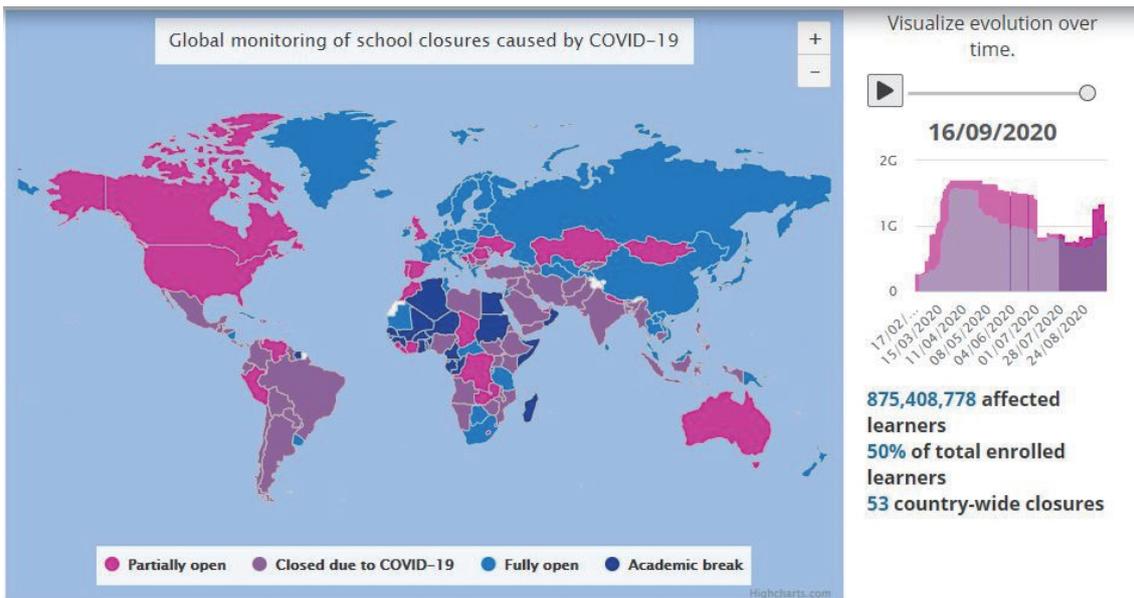


Figure 1: Global Monitoring of School Closures Caused by COVID-19 [18]

4.7. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: There is the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) in Japan as well as in Nigeria. But more than their Nigerian counterparts, parents in Japan give great importance to education of their children. As a cultural value, Japanese mothers dedicate themselves to their children and become their teacher and advisor. These women are often referred to as `Kyoiku Mama` which literally translates to `Education Mom`. In addition, every month parents are accorded an hour to observe lessons in their children's classes [11]. The practice of involving parents as significant stakeholders in school programmes make them inspired to volunteer and work in schools, adjusting their personal programmes and schedules to meet school goals. Parents in Nigeria should provide adequate educational support to their children.

4.8. GENDER GAP: Unlike Japan which have an appreciably high-level of balance in student enrolment, female students are heavily underrepresented in science and technology courses in Nigerian educational system from primary to the tertiary institutions. These differences in gender enrolment are largely because of cultural belief, traditional, early marriage, parental educational background, and religious belief [12]. From the Figure 2, we see the distribution of enrolment in Junior Secondary Schools in Nigeria by year and sex. Nigeria should, therefore, ensure the provision of incentives for school-age girls especially in the educationally disadvantaged areas.

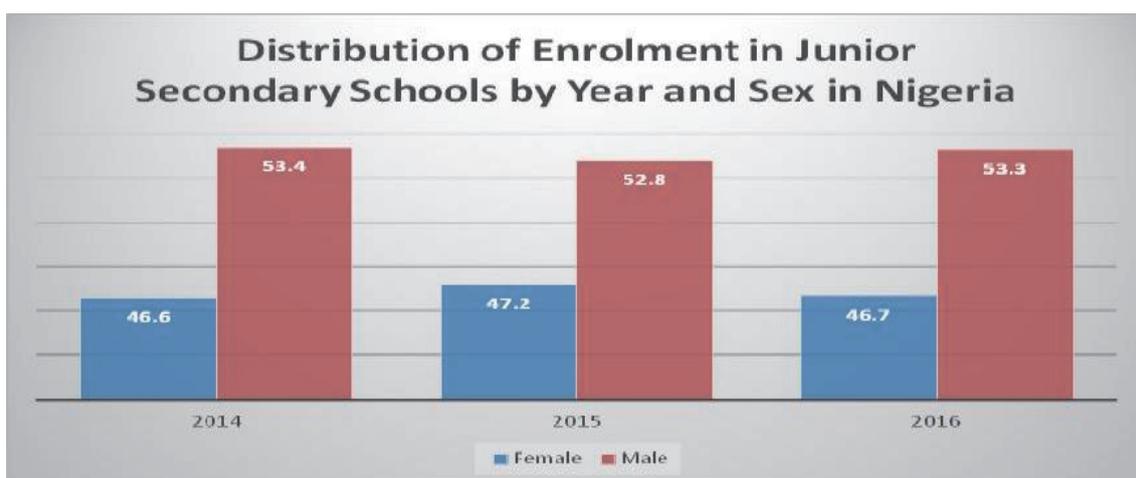


Figure 2: Distribution of enrolment in Junior Secondary Schools in Nigeria by year and sex [16]

#### 4.9. TEACHERS AND CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT:

An education system that aims to offer quality education for all young people should be able to count on teachers who are professionally trained. This is because the quality of teachers determines the quality of their output. Japan has leveraged on this understanding and has established a powerful teacher union and a policy which limited the validity of the teaching license to ten years after which it expected to be renewed. However, teaching profession in Nigeria is laden with the continual recruitment of unqualified teachers, fragmentation of teachers into various weak associations, and inadequate emphasis on Continuous Professional Teacher Development. Nigeria should, therefore, ensure that only qualified teachers are employed, and organize training and retraining programs for them.

4.10. REGIONAL DISPARITY IN EDUCATION PARTICIPATION: Regional disparities in terms of participation in education exists between the northern and southern part of Nigeria as children in Southern Nigeria were more likely to attend school than children in Northern Nigeria. This is unlike Japan where attendance and completion in school is void of regional disparity. Nigeria should ensure good implementation of regional planning policies, and equitable distribution of development funds among the various regions of Nigeria.

4.11. QUALITY ASSURANCE: Nigeria education system is burdened by poor quality assurance which is majorly attributed to institutional weakness. Government stakeholders in education like the Federal Ministry of Education (FME); Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC); Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) tend to focus more on public schools and less on private schools [13], and that has resulted in large

disparity between public and private schools in Nigeria. Some of their regulation are, sometimes, deemed as unfit in the 21st-century environment of global competitiveness. Conversely, the government of Japan, through MEXT, ensures adequate controls on standards, admission rates and tuition in both public and private schools in Japan. Nigeria should ensure adequate assessment of the quality of school using nationally agreed criteria.

4.12. **ACADEMIC CORRUPTION:** A report published by the Transparency International in 2016 scores Nigeria low on the global Corruption Perception Index (CPI), placing Nigeria at 136th among 174 countries [14]. Japan, on the other hand, have been able to maintain a less corrupt society as evidenced in their 7th position on CPI. Table 2 outlines the various forms of corruption in Nigeria. Core values of integrity, hard work, responsibility, honesty, and obedience should, therefore, be promoted in schools, while strict sanctions should be meted against corrupt stakeholders as deterrent to others. Table 2 outlines the various forms it takes.

Table 2: Forms of corruption prevalent in secondary education in Nigeria [17]

1	Examination malpractice
2	Illegal charges by principals
3	Recruitment corruption
4	Registration for external examination corruption
5	Extortion of money from students
6	Withholding of books allocated to schools
7	Collection of kickbacks from contractors
8	Favouritism
9	Irregular movement of teachers during school hours
10	Absenteeism by teachers
11	Collection of gifts from students
12	Bribing for admission into federal government schools
13	Keeping files of ghost staff

4.13. **SECURITY ISSUES:** The insurgency in the north-eastern part of Nigeria, the militancy in the Niger-Delta, and the farmers-herdsmen clashes in the Middle Belt region

of Nigeria, all constitute security threats. They interfere with schooling and cause educational setbacks [15], as millions of people, old and young, flee their homes in search of safety. Many parents have also become sceptical in releasing their female children to attend schools away from their homes due to fears of child kidnapping and sexual assault. In the Japanese society, however, there is little or no security threats. Secondary school students could be seen returning from late at night without any fear of harassment or assault. Insecurity should be tackled through a combination of good governance, infrastructural development, and other political measures. Proper reorientation and mental-health programs should also be employed to counsel students and families who are victims of the crises.

## 5.0. CONCLUSION

These findings demonstrate the vast disparities in the system of secondary school education between Nigeria and Japan and the importance of considering multiple systems of education to fully understand the missing links between the two systems. Researchers, educators, and policy makers should adopt the recommendations suggested in this study for a more effective secondary education.

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