

EDUCATION SECTOR REFORMS AND DEMOGRAPHY: ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The article explores the relationship between demographic factors and the education sector in Nigeria. The research objective is to identify the nature of the population age structure and its implications for educational planning and reforms. The study employs a qualitative research method, utilising secondary data from the 2006 census and relevant literature to analyse demographic trends and their impact on education. Major findings reveal that a significant proportion of children under 18 years have not been accurately counted, leading to resource allocation and educational planning challenges. Furthermore, the research highlights that Nigeria allocates only about 5% of its national budget to education, far below the recommended 26%, exacerbating the sector's challenges. In conclusion, the paper emphasises the critical need for accurate demographic data to inform educational policies and planning. It recommends that the government regularly update population data and align educational content with demographic realities to enhance literacy levels and educational outcomes. By addressing these issues, Nigeria can better meet the educational needs of its growing population and improve overall human development.

Keywords: Educational Reform, Development, Demographic Factors, Age-structure

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main sectors in all economies of developed and developing countries. It is important for the growth and development of all nations, including Nigeria. The sector is very vital because it affects all other sectors. Indeed, the nature of the sector often determines the state of development in most other sectors. The government has continued to make efforts to improve this sector in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the efforts would appear not to have yielded the desired results. This is because the majority of the people in Nigeria are illiterate. The country accounts for the lowest literacy rate of 59% in the World (Boyi, 2014). The education sector in Nigeria generally comprises three tiers namely; the elementary, secondary and tertiary. To attain maximum educational status, one is expected to go through the three tiers in progressive order. Hence, the human and economic resources required for the smooth running- maintenance and further construction of various infrastructures of the three tiers to meet up with the challenges of the growing population are enormous. In the mean, the dwindling economic state of most developing countries including Nigeria only enables them to make little provision for the sector in their annual budgetary allocation. The education sector should receive twenty-six per cent of the national budgetary allocation in each nation due to its significance. Nigeria has yet to implement the proposed 26% which has consistently encountered various obstacles over time. Several critical issues require attention, notably

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financing, human resources, infrastructure and curriculum development.

Demographic factors seem to be one of the major obstacles inhibiting the feasibility of achieving the desired goal for the sector (Olorunfemi & Fashagba, 2017). The demographic factors in this paper refer to the age and sex structures. They are often required for reliable developmental planning (Fashagba, 2015). These factors tend to affect the educational system when are not properly considered in planning. Whereas age and sex compositions are more important in providing adequate educational facilities for the sector that have remained the main source of training for human development, the demographic facts in Nigeria appear to be inadequate (Fashagba, 2022; Olorunfemi & Fashagba, 2018; Olorunfemi & Fashagba, 2021). From all indications, the census, the primary source of population data has not only been irregular in Nigeria, but also the documentation of age structure has been inadequate (Olorunfemi & Fashagba 2018; Fashagba, 2023). The population has continued to increase very rapidly, this rapid increase in population tends to be one of the main reasons for the increase in socio-economic problems and rise in the cost of running the education sector. Over 50% of the Nigerian population that is below the age of 25 according to the National Population Council by Idike and Eme (2015) enrol in the three tiers of education; primary, secondary and tertiary. Even though enrolment in the three tiers is pyramidal in shape, the population concentrates at the base. We know that a substantial proportion of school-age children are not in school (Olorunfemi & Fashagba 2017; Falola, 2022). This notwithstanding, the pyramid appears narrower upward because the majority of those who graduate from senior secondary school every year are unable to secure admission into higher institutions of learning. The reason for this is of course because of limited space. Thus, the focus of this paper is on education sector reforms and demography in Nigeria. The critical issues from the demographic factors are reviewed.

The Perspective of the Education Sector in Nigeria

The educational sector has been one of the main sectors in Nigeria. It is an essential sector that affects all other sectors of the economy. The nature of the sector at any time is reflected in the quality of personnel produced and their engagements in all sectors of the economy. In Nigeria, the education sector comprises three tiers- elementary, high school and tertiary institutions (Matthew, 2013). According to the educational system, the present structure of education in Nigeria is based on the 9-3-4 system. The new educational system requires students to complete nine years of Universal Basic Education (UBE), which is a mandatory standard. Instead of the previous system, which was 6-3-3-4, this new system was implemented. Within the framework of the UBE system, the first six years of the nine years are spent in primary school, while the remaining three years are spent in junior secondary school. The next three years are spent in school at the senior secondary level. There have been several modifications made to the subject matter that was taught in secondary schools in the past about the current system. The new one included several topics that were connected to trades to encourage graduates of secondary schools to become self-sufficient. To transform people into employment suppliers rather than job seekers is being done. A tertiary institution is where the last four years of life are spent.

All forms of developmental planning, including those in the field of education as well as those in other fields, need demographic data. Information such as age, gender, social status of profession, education, employment, and income are examples of the demographic data that are included here. When it comes to planning for the availability of human and infrastructural resources that are necessary for learning, age and gender alone are crucial ingredients to put into consideration. The functioning of the educational system or the feasibility of accomplishing the objectives that have been established may be

impacted by the quality and amount of the demographic data that is available. This may be the reason why the government of Nigeria has often participated in modifications to the educational system to provide primary education to vulnerable children. Nevertheless, it would seem that the industry is a long way from where it ought to be at present due to the lack of appropriate cash that is available to operate the system (Boyi, 2014). Over the course of the last several decades, the industry has been confronted with several difficulties.

As a population geographer, the focus extends beyond merely examining the age and sex structure of populations; it also involves an inquiry into the underlying factors that shape the observed age–sex compositions. A significant number of adults with suboptimal quality may adversely impact fertility. Indeed, a high rate of fertility has consistently led to the emergence of larger family units. This may subsequently influence the opportunities for providing sufficient education to children from these households. The composition of age and sex significantly influences the environmental system, particularly in social and economic contexts. Consequently, this paper centres on the interplay between environmental factors and demographic trends. Neglecting demographical factors in the planning of the educational sector may significantly hinder the attainment of its overarching objectives. It is well-established that a high rate of illiteracy correlates with limited technological advancement (Fashagba, 2018). This, by extension, could lead to a significant increase in poverty rates. In the following section, we will examine several significant matters. The factors encompass demographic elements, the characteristics of documented census figures, the challenges posed by an ageing population, and the ramifications of education on the Nigerian populace.

The Demographic Factors

Demographic factors are essential factors for any developmental planning as earlier mentioned. Although little attention seems to be paid to the importance of demographic factors, the availability of dependable population data would to a large extent, help in achieving various sectors' goals. In Nigeria, there has been a problem of infrequent population census administration (Fashagba & Olorunfemi, 2021). Indeed, conducting censuses consistently has never been an easy task throughout the course of the years (Ikedinma, 2020). In 2006, the most recent census was conducted, which is around 18 years old. The census that came before it was conducted in 1991, which is a duration of 28 years between censuses. Table 1 shows the 2006 population age distribution. As can be seen in the table, about 51% of the population is below the age of 18. If this large proportion of people were found in the census, it could mean a substantial proportion of the present population had probably not been counted. Surprisingly, the majority of those ages below 18 who have not been counted are presently at various levels in the three tiers of education in Nigeria. Further, 8.1% of those who were 42-59 years old in the 2006 census are already over 60 years old today. The inability of the government to document the demographic data properly and regularly through the census exercise would appear to have continued to impact its various programmes negatively.

The lack of reliable and updated demographic data significantly hampers effective planning and implementation of educational reforms. The irregularity of census exercises and poor documentation of age structures contribute to this issue. A large proportion of children under the age of 18 have not been counted since the last census in 2006, leading to a misrepresentation of the population that requires educational services. The education sector in Nigeria suffers from inadequate funding, which is exacerbated by the higher budgetary allocations to defence and security compared to education. The current curriculum may not adequately address the demographic realities, particularly the

age distribution of the population, which affects literacy and educational outcomes. Demographic factors, particularly age and sex structures, are often overlooked in educational planning, leading to insufficient educational facilities and resources. The first objective is to identify and analyze the nature of the population age structure as documented in the 2006 census, focusing on the implications for educational planning. The second objective is to evaluate the nature of census figures documented in the 2006 exercise, assessing their accuracy and relevance to current educational needs. The third objective is to examine the challenges posed by ongoing population ageing and its impact on the education sector, particularly regarding the demographic shift and its implications for future educational policies. The final objective is to recommend strategies for the regular updating of population data and the review of educational content to align with demographic realities, thereby improving literacy levels and educational outcomes. These research problems and objectives are crucial for addressing the multifaceted challenges facing the education sector in Nigeria and for formulating effective reforms that can lead to sustainable development.

The research presents a unique examination of the interplay between demographic factors and the education sector in Nigeria, focusing specifically on age and sex structures. Unlike previous studies that may have addressed educational reforms in isolation, this paper integrates demographic analysis to highlight how these factors significantly influence educational planning and outcomes. By utilizing secondary data from the 2006 census, the research sheds light on the inadequacies in demographic data collection and its implications for educational policy, thus offering a fresh perspective on the challenges faced by the education sector in Nigeria. The urgency of this research is underscored by the rapid population growth in Nigeria, which has led to increasing socio-economic challenges and a strain on educational resources. The paper emphasizes that the demographic data currently available is outdated and insufficient for effective planning, making it critical to address these gaps promptly. The findings indicate that a large proportion of children below 18 years have not been adequately counted since the last census, which poses a significant barrier to achieving educational goals. This urgency is further highlighted by the need for timely updates to population data to inform educational reforms and improve literacy levels across the country. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between demographic factors and educational outcomes in Nigeria. It identifies specific challenges related to population ageing and the inadequacies in census data, which are often overlooked in educational planning. The recommendations made in the study, such as the need for regular updates to population data and a review of educational content in line with age distribution, aim to enhance the effectiveness of the education sector. By addressing these issues, the research not only informs policymakers but also serves as a foundation for future studies in the field, ultimately contributing to the improvement of educational quality and accessibility in Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on the examination of demographic factors and their implications on the education sector in Nigeria. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the issues at hand, particularly how demographic data influences educational reforms and policies. The research primarily utilizes secondary data sources, including census data, government reports, and existing literature on education and demographic trends in Nigeria. This data is crucial for analyzing the population age structure and the challenges faced by the education sector

since the 2006 census. The study involves a thorough review of relevant documents that provide insights into the educational policies and demographic statistics in Nigeria. This includes analyzing budgetary allocations to the education sector and comparing them with other sectors, such as defence and security. The research focuses on demographic data from the 2006 census, specifically targeting age structures and the enumeration of children below 18 years. This demographic focus is essential for understanding the implications of population changes on educational needs and resources. The analysis involves a comparative approach, examining the discrepancies in census figures and the implications of these discrepancies on educational planning and resource allocation. The study highlights the need for accurate demographic data to inform development planning and educational reforms. Statistical methods may be employed to analyze trends in demographic data, particularly focusing on age distribution and its impact on educational outcomes. The research identifies the challenges faced by the education sector due to demographic shifts and inadequate data. It recommends that population data should be regularly updated and that educational content should be aligned with demographic realities to improve literacy levels and educational outcomes. The study acknowledges potential limitations, such as the reliance on secondary data, which may not always be up-to-date or comprehensive. Additionally, the focus on demographic factors may overlook other critical aspects affecting the education sector.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. The Age Structure of the 2006 National Population Census

S/N	Age	Population	%
1	0-18	71548,643	51.0
2	19-41	49,010,694	36.0
3	42-59	14,511,120	8.1
4	60 & above	6,987,047	4.9
	Total	140,431,790	100

Source: Author's compilation, 2024. The figures were compiled from the 2006 population census

Nature of Census Figures Documented in Nigeria

The results of the figures documented in the 2006 census appeared inadequate as earlier stated. Some of the figures revealed in the headcount, especially from age 30 and above show some inadequacies, as can be seen in Table 2. According to the table, the 3,929,318 total number of people enumerated from age 31-34 is just a little above the 3,538,869 people enumerated for age 35 alone. It is surprising to know that the number of people enumerated for age 40 alone far exceeds those enumerated for age 36 to 39. The situation is the same with those figures enumerated for ages 50, 60 70 and 80. The number of people enumerated for each year ending with "0" from age 40 to 80 is higher than the sum of the last four years preceding each of them. It is unlikely for such distributions to occur. This distribution suggests three things: first, that false information was supplied to the enumerators; second, the figures obtained from the headcount were manipulated; and third, the information supplied was wrongly computed. However, as can be seen in Table 1, the age of majority (illiterates) was computed into the years ending with zero. Without any doubt, the manipulated demographic data would continue to affect government developmental programmes. As already manifesting in the economy, even though the majority of Nigerians are in the working population, the country is faced with the problem of lack of adequate qualified personnel in not only the three tiers of education

but also in most other sectors in Nigeria.

Table 2. Four Years Age-grouping Compared with year ending with Zero in 2006 Census

S/No	Age	Population
1	31-34	3,929,318
2	35	3,538,869*
3	36-39	3,792,886
4	40	4,156,871*
5	46-49	2,231,666
6	50	2,862,363*
7	56-59	1,099,086
8	60	1,791,258*
9	76-79	243,007
10	80	586,064*

Source: Author's compilation from the NPC federal Republic of Nigeria 2006 Population and Housing Census priority table volume iv. The figures aesthetic are the years ending with zero

The Challenge of Population Aging

Population ageing is a contemporary issue. In recent times, the population of older persons has been fast increasing. In most developing countries, including Nigeria, the age structure has been tending towards ageing. Ageing is an essential aspect of the current demographic shift. Generally, ageing is demographically defined as the change in the age composition of a population such that there is an increase in the proportion of older persons (Fashagba, 2023). The current increase in life expectancy together with the declining death rates that resulted from improvement in health-related issues led to an increase in the median age of people in Nigeria (Agyepong et al., 2017; Sede & Ohemeng, 2015). The increase witnessed in life expectancy alone has single-handedly put the total number of people that are 60 years and above ahead of the Under 5 children since 2018. Current population projections indicate that the proportion of the elderly will surpass that of adolescents and young individuals in the coming decades. Okoh et al. (2020) and Skoufias and Vinha (2021) suggest that the decline in the number of children in Nigeria may lead to positive development outcomes. The reduction in the workforce dedicated to children would parallel trends observed in countries such as Japan, Germany, and Sweden. Over the past several decades, there has been an increase in the number of unemployed individuals. Wolf and Amirkhanyan (2010) indicate that population changes will have several implications for the general public.

The sudden demographic shift would result in a reduction of those below the age of 18 and that would of course affect the education sector. It becomes necessary that the sector should be prepared to train the young ones to enable them to be independent in future. When the issue of employment is addressed, the increasing rate of unemployment will decline. This by extension can address the high poverty rate among those who are ageing. With this, the young Ones can be given adequate educational training.

Implications of Education on Population

Education serves as a catalyst for individual growth and progress within any economy. Conversely, Nigeria's population growth is characterized by an increase in quantity rather than quality. The quality of individuals is often a significant factor influencing economic growth. Education is undoubtedly the source of essential technologies that may drive the economy. The underutilized natural resources in Nigeria could be effectively harnessed with appropriate emphasis on education. Education is a critical factor that can drive progress across all sectors of the economy. The sector

typically receives a minimal portion of the overall budget allocation, which is a regrettable circumstance. Table 3 presents the allocation of Nigeria's budget for the year 2024.

Table 3. Nigeria's Budgetary Allocation for First 10 Top Sectors in 2024

S/No	Ministry	Total in Trillion (#)	%
1	Ministry of Defence	1.38	6.3
2	Federal Ministry of Education	1.07	4.93
3	Federal Ministry of Health	1.07	4.93
4	Federal Ministry of Police Affairs	838.05bn	3.84
5	Federal Ministry of Work and Housing	534.45bn	2.45
6	Federal Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development	426.98bn	1.96
7	Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Mgt & Social Development	382.35bn	1.75
8	Federal Ministry of Power	258.49bn	1.18
9	National Security Adviser	242.93bn	1.13
10	Federal Ministry of Water Resources	242.22bn	1.11

Source: Budget office, 2024.

The education sector would appear not to have the right share following the United Nations 2021 recommendation that 26% of the total national budgetary allocation of every country should be given to the education sector as earlier stated. In Nigeria, only about 5% of the budgetary allocation is given to the sector. This explains why there are often industrial strike actions among the government tertiary institutions every time. The infrastructural facilities available in most of the government's higher institutions are greatly inadequate. Not only that but most lecture rooms are overcrowded (plate 1). True teaching cannot be said to have taken place in such a situation (Fashagba & Olorunfemi, 2017).



Figure 1. One of the lecture rooms in Nigeria's higher institution

The unavailability of adequate training programmes seems to be one of the major factors responsible for the current high level of insecurity. The money that would have been used to develop the children is being used to fight insurgency. Hence, the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Security Adviser together have over 7.4% of the budgetary allocation in 2024 (Table 3). Ministries of Agriculture and water resources that are supposed to have a higher share jointly have a little above 2% of the budgetary allocation. In the mean, the agricultural sector alone often contributes as much as 30% to the GDP (Table 4). The poor support given to agriculture is perhaps the reason why the poverty level is on the increase every year. The poor support given to education has remained the

main reason why a high number of school-age children have not school for the last few decades.

Table 4. Some Major Economic Sectors in Nigeria

S/N	Sector	GDP
1	Agriculture	31.2
2	Crude Oil and Natural Gas	28.6
3	Telecommunication	1.6
4	Wholesale and retail	18.8
5	Hotel and Restaurant	0.4
6	Solid mineral	0.2
7	Manufacturer	1.7
8	Finance and insurance	1.8
9	Building construction	2.7
10	Others (tourism, transportation industries etc)	13

Source: Author's compilation, 2017

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the education sector and demographic trends in Nigeria. The growing population has required substantial human and economic resources to operate the education sector. While the recommended national budgetary allocation for education is approximately 26% for each country, Nigeria allocates only about 5%. Consequently, the sector has faced various challenges. The situation is exacerbated by a significant portion of the total population being under the age of 18, comprising over two-fifths. Most of these individuals are engaged in different stages of the three tiers of education. However, the total number of individuals under 18 has not been accurately accounted for, hindering the government's ability to ascertain the actual number of children anticipated in elementary, high, and higher education institutions. The lack of sufficient training is a significant factor contributing to the current high levels of insecurity. The implication is that funds that could have been allocated for children's education are being redirected to combat insurgency. The Ministry of Defense and the Security Adviser received a significant allocation of 7.4% in the 2024 budget. This is, of course, greater than the percentage designated for the education sector in that year. In conclusion, the paper asserts the necessity of generating accurate social demographic data for development planning purposes. Accurate computation of results is essential whenever a head count is conducted in Nigeria. The education sector must be organized and strengthened to equip youth for future employment challenges. The sector should facilitate training that promotes self-reliance rather than fostering a dependency on job seeking. This may prevent an increase in poverty levels in the future. Nigeria can achieve its desired economic transformation through this approach.

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