Quality Education as a Sustainable Development Goal in the Context of 2030 Agenda.

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ABSTRACT
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are at the forefront of government initiatives across the world. The SDGs form part of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was unanimously adopted in 2015 by all UN Member States as a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. The SDGs are primarily concerned with promoting sustainable growth via ensuring wellbeing, economic growth, environmental legislation, and academic advancement. One of the most prominent goals of the SDG is to provide learners with high-quality education (SDG 4). As a member of the United Nations, Nigeria is committed to achieving not only the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 but also the Global Goals, especially SDG 4 on equitable quality education. This paper examines the perspectives of the Sustainable Development Goal 4(SDG 4) which is geared towards providing quality education to the generality of the citizenry. Conclusion and recommendations were made towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal SDG4.

Keywords: Quality Education, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), SDG 4, 2030 Agenda

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is mostly regarded as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own development needs. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2016) concisely expressed that, sustainable development is an organizing principle for global development that supports the welfare of both people and planet. The theory of sustainable development itself has been disputed and variously affirmed with emphasis on different imperatives. It is absolutely a critical developmental paradigm for the global community given the various social, environmental and economic challenges facing the world today. In 2017, UNESCO published Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives (UNESCO 2017a). This publication draws a distinction between cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural learning objectives for all SDGs, refers to the knowledge and skills needed to fulfl these aims, the motivation and attitudes that can underpin them, and the actions needed to achieve them. In the present article, the focus is on SDG 4, which contains 10 specifc targets, addressing the needs of children, youth and adults. The idea of "lifelong learning for all" is a key components of SDG 4. While "quality education" is a goal in itself, it is important to avoid regarding the 17 SDGs as fragmented "work packages". Many of the goals can, in fact, be interpreted as correlating with each other. However this study is basically anchored on sustainable development goal 4 which is focused on

quality equitable and inclusive education for all and promote lifelong learning as a priority objective of 2030 Agenda.

Fundamentally, the SDGs cover the three dimensions of Sustainable Development, namely: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

The Prospects of SDG4
The SDGs are established objectives contained in a universal agreement to end poverty, protect all that makes the planet habitable, and ensure that everyone enjoy peace and prosperity, now and in the future (Morton, 2017). Apart from the fact that it is being based on the proposal for SDGs developed by the Open Working Group of the UN General Assembly on SDGs, the global goals are outcome of years of high-level global summits, treatises, and conferences. The 15-year SDGs framework, with a deadline of 2030, embodies 17 goals and a total of 169 targets linked to five areas of critical importance, namely: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships.

The goals according to (Morton, 2017) are as follows:
1. End poverty in all forms
2. End hunger by prom4oting sustainable agriculture
3. Healthy lives and wellbeing for all
4. Quality and equitable education
5. Gender equality and empowerment
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Sustainable energy for all
8. Sustainable economic growth
9. Sustainable industrial growth
10. Reduce inequality within and between nations
11. Sustainable shelters and cities;
12. Sustainable production and consumption
13. Combat climatic change and its impact
14. Sustainable use of marine resources
15. Protection of terrestrial ecosystems
16. Peaceful and inclusive communities and
17. Global partnerships.

The 2030 Agenda, sought to stand on the main pillars of sustainable development social inclusion, environmental sustainability and economic development. Importantly, the 2030 Agenda comprises 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 Targets which are meant to drive action up to 2030 in various areas of critical importance for 'people, planet and prosperity'. Among the aims of the SDGs are the ending of poverty and hunger, protection of human rights, promotion of gender equality, building of peaceful, just and inclusive societies and conservation of the planet's resources. These SDGs were established to help all countries achieve sustainability in development for their citizens and should result in an increase in equality among citizens (Pereira, 2019). The achievement of the 169 targets by each country is not easy feat given the complexities embedded in people and planet and the disparities that exist between countries. If the targets outlined in the 2030 Agenda are to be achieved, education must be the tool for eradicating the hegemonic influence of different countries. It therefore means that Nigeria as one of the countries must begin to define sustainable development for herself, given its resources and develop its own strategic approach to achieving the 169 targets while using the lessons from other countries.

Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG4)
Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG4) is geared towards all-inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. The emphasis under this goal has worldwide coverage of quality education from pre-school through at least secondary education, and then on to more advanced skills training (Sachs, 2015). The ambition of the goal is to build a nation that will facilitate a

realization of the full potential of each child in order that he/she can contribute to building a just, tolerant and egalitarian society. The vision of an inclusive quality education reflect on the idea of education for all, principally for those groups who are seen to be vulnerable. Particular emphasis is on equal access to all and lifelong education. It then means that those who lead education in several countries must give attention to all forms of education, both formal and non-formal. In the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, approved in May 2015 at the World Education Forum in Incheon, Republic of Korea, made the following statement: The renewed education agenda captured in Goal 4 is comprehensive, holistic, ambitious, aspirational and universal, and inspired by a vision of education that transforms the lives of persons, communities and societies, leaving no one behind. The declaration also outlines numerous critical processes to forestall impediment against the achievement of SDG 4, to include subjects of access, equity and inclusion with specific attention to gender equality, quality education and lifelong learning.

Lifelong Learning
Lifelong learning (LLL) as a component of SDG4 is a continuous learning which translates the acquisition and development of knowledge to a process that is essentially an integral part of living. Lifelong learning conceptualizes learning as the life wide, voluntary and self-motivated quest to knowledge for not only personal but professional reasons as well. It recognizes that learning is not confined to childhood or the classroom, but takes place throughout life and in a diversity of circumstances (Ates & Alsal, 2012), the ultimate goal being to enable learners to obtain more of the new skills required by the knowledge economy as well as more traditional academic skills (Soni, 2012). According to Soni (2012) four characteristics which transform education

and training into Lifelong Learning were identified. They includes: the integration of both formal and non-formal/informal learning; self-motivated learning; self-funded learning; and a commitment to universal participation in education and training. Therefore, Lifelong learning indicates an inclusive education and learning model that embraces all children, youth and adults, both as learners and as educators (Torres, 2003).

2030 Agenda and Quality Education
The Sustainable Development Goals cover all countries of the world, thus forming 2030 Agenda. It represents a major advance as a cosmopolitan proposal for a "global deal for development". It is an agenda of universal validity, not limited to the poorest countries, although it recognizes their specificity, and at the same time has the capacity to adapt to the diverse existing realities, at the regional, national, and local scales (Castillo, Da Silva, Monsueto, 2020; Zenelaj, 2013). The 2030 Agenda, sought to stand on the main pillars of sustainable development social inclusion, environmental sustainability and economic development. The aim is to create a sustainable path for economic growth, always based on respect for human rights, freedom, and the promotion of peace. In this way, 2030 Agenda makes it possible to work, from a holistic and global perspective, on the social, economic, and environmental challenges facing our reality, in an attempt to achieve harmony and shared prosperity between humanity and the planet. This is a commitment at all levels and scales, forming part of the political, social, environmental, and educational initiatives of countries, as well as the various institutions or companies that are part of the productive fabric and also play a key role (Ali, Hussain, Zhang, Nurunnabi & Li, 2018).

The new document distinguishes between cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral

learning objectives for all SDGs. It refers to the knowledge and skills needed to meet these objectives, the motivation and attitudes that can support them, and the actions needed to achieve them (Boeren, 2019). The objectives also seek to achieve equality among people, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity as part of a new Sustainable Development Agenda. They also serve to create a standard of benchmarking to measure progress towards the achievement of objectives and targets. The UN SDGs are concerned with having a global vision and being the road-map to sustainability (Bergman, Bergman, Fernandes, Grossrieder & Schneider, 2018). Quality Education is undoubtedly central to the achievement of 2030 Agenda, since it is an objective in itself and because education is not explicitly limited to Goal 4, but is linked to all the other objectives such as Goal 3 on "Ensuring a healthy life and promoting the well-being of all people at all ages". Thus, good sex education can prevent early pregnancies and deaths of women and girls and prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV (Smith & Taylor, 2016). This implies that education is a key area for the promotion and acquisition of competencies, knowledge, attitudes, social skills, healthy lifestyles, and participatory norms linked to sustainable development. Quality education is the perfect ground for current generations to internalize the importance of developing without compromising the possibility that future generations will be able to do so as well (Venkataraman, 2009). Therefore, quality education is the basis for improving our lives and for sustainable development and as well enrich people's quality of life, access to inclusive and equitable education can contribute by providing people with the tools to develop innovative solutions to the world's major problems. Based on this reality, this paper aims to examine educational quality in the context of SDGs and 2030 Agenda.

The global goals are in essence interconnected and interdependent, Mohanty and Dash (2018) have recognized a closer relationship amongst SDG4 on equitable quality education and the effective implementation of SDG16, which focuses on peace, justice, and sturdy institutions. This gives emphasis to the central position of SDG4, which envisions ensuring all-inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. In the milieu of the International Education Framework and the 2030 Agenda, SDG4 represents 10 targets, encompassing 7 outcome targets and 3 means of implementation (Global Campaign for Education, 2019).

Targets of Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG4)

The International Education Framework and the 2030 Agenda, as cited by (Global Campaign for Education, 2019) SDG4 is the education goal objectively based on guaranteeing all-inclusive and equitable education that promote lifelong opportunities for all. SDG4 targets seven outcome which includes;

1. By 2030, to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. The provision of 12 years of free, publicly-funded, inclusive, equitable, quality primary and secondary education of which at least nine years are compulsory, leading to relevant learning outcomes should be ensured for all, without discrimination.

2. By 2030, to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. The provision of at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education is encouraged, to be delivered by well-

trained educators, as well as that of early childhood development and care.

3. By 2030, to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university. It is imperative to reduce barriers to skills development and technical and vocational education and training (TVET), starting from the secondary level, as well as to tertiary education, including university, and to provide lifelong learning opportunities for youth and adults. The provision of tertiary education should be made progressively free, in line with existing international agreements.

4. By 2030, to substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. Equitable access to TVET needs to be expanded while quality is ensured. Learning opportunities should be increased and diversified, using a wide range of education and training modalities, so that all youth and adults, especially girls and women, can acquire relevant knowledge, skills and competencies for decent work and life. Beyond work-specific skills, emphasis must be placed on developing high-level cognitive and non-cognitive/transferable skills, such as problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, communication skills and conflict resolution, which can be used across a range of occupational fields.

5. By 2030, to eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations. Emphasizing on inclusion and equity, all people, irrespective of sex, age, race, colour, ethnicity, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property or birth, as well as persons with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples, and children and youth, especially those in vulnerable situations or other status, should have access to inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. Vulnerable groups that require particular attention and targeted strategies include persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities and the poor. All girls and boys, women and men, should have equal opportunity to enjoy education of high quality, achieve at equal levels and enjoy equal benefits from education. Adolescent girls and young women, who may be subject to gender-based violence, child marriage, early pregnancy and a heavy load of household chores, as well as those living in poor and remote rural areas, require special attention. In contexts in which boys are disadvantaged, targeted action should be taken for them. Policies aimed at overcoming gender inequality are more effective when they are part of an overall package that also promotes health, justice, good governance and freedom from child labour.

6. By 2030, to ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy. The principles, strategies and actions for this target are underpinned by the contemporary understanding of literacy as a continuum of proficiency levels in a given context. It goes beyond the understanding of a simple dichotomy of 'literate' versus 'illiterate'. Therefore, action for this target aims at ensuring that by 2030, all young people and adults across the world should have

achieved relevant and recognized proficiency levels in functional literacy and numeracy skills that are equivalent to levels achieved at successful completion of basic education.

7. By 2030, to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. It is vital to give a central place to strengthening education's contribution to the fulfillment of human rights, peace and responsible citizenship from local to global levels, gender equality, sustainable development and health. The content of such education must be relevant, with a focus on both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of learning. The knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required by citizens to lead productive lives, make informed decisions and assume active roles locally and globally in facing and resolving global challenges can be acquired through SDG4.

Challenges to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG4) The objectives of sustainable development goal four (SDG4) could be defeated thus;

i. **Inability to Provide Universal Education:** The Child Right Declaration of (1959) includes the right to education and any country which is unable to make provision of educational opportunities for the entire children population is not acknowledging its duty and obligation. Children are the future citizens of the country and if they receive good and quality education,

they would efficiently contribute towards the progress of the country. Education leads to development of human resources.

ii. **Inability to Recruit Children into the System**: The demand for education is normally greater as compared to supply. Lack of resources, materials, infrastructure, civic amenities, proper teaching and earning processes, instructional strategies and other facilities are the factors that cause inability to recruit students into the education system. Recruitment into the voluntary sectors of an educational system depends upon ensuring that the pupils and their families recognize the objectives and the framework of education as compatible with their own goals.

iii. **Inability to Retain Students within the System**: The retaining capacity of the educational system in both its voluntary and its compulsory sectors depends upon external and internal factors. The social and economic conditions of the educational institutions are primarily responsible for retaining students. Good quality education, extra-curricular activities, kind and approachable teachers, proper infrastructure and facilities and amiable environmental conditions of the schools are the primary factors that contribute in retaining students. Absence of any of these factors may cause drop-out of students from schools, therefore causing educational wastage.

iv. **Inability to Set Appropriate Objectives**: In the present world, there are differences among nations in setting objectives for the entire education system and its components. In most cases, the strongest single influence in the determination of objectives arises from a traditional conception of what an educated person should be. The curriculum content and processes,

which have promoted this view of the educated man, over many decades still continues to have a considerable influence upon the concept of what education would make one achieve. Inability to achieve a balance between the demands of education in leading to operative growth and progression of the individuals, the inculcation of values, morality and ethics among them, and the production of trained and skilled human resources needed by the economy, characterizes the incompetence of the educational system. Educational goals and objectives should be such that will enable the nation achieve the objectives of SDG4.

v. **Inability to Achieve Objectives**: One thing is to set a goal, another thing is to achieve the goal. Achievement of goals require certain qualities. Every educational institution has certain goals and objectives. The goals of enhancement of the educational system, leading to operative growth and development of the students, making use of modern and innovative strategies and methods and making provision of necessary facilities and equipment are some of the common goals. In order to achieve these goals, it is vital for the individuals to be skilled, aware, competent and knowledgeable. They need to possess the traits of diligence, conscientiousness and resourcefulness to meet the desired goals and objectives. The individuals are required to work in collaboration and share with each other, ideas and suggestions. It is vital for them to create an amiable atmosphere within the school environment and implement truthfulness, honesty and ethics. Absence of any of these factors would result to inability in the achievement of objectives.

Conclusion

The 2030 Agenda comprises 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 Targets which are meant to drive action up to 2030 in various areas of critical importance for 'people, planet and prosperity'. Among the aims of the SDGs are the ending of poverty and hunger, protection of human rights, promotion of gender equality, building of peaceful, just and inclusive societies and conservation of the planet's resources. These SDGs were established to help all countries achieve sustainability in development for their citizens and should result in an increase in equality among citizens. Quality education can facilitate changes in values, world views and behaviour at the level of the individual, the community and society as a whole and as well facilitate reflective or critical learning, knowledge and skills acquisition and greater agency to address complex sustainability issues. Nigeria is committed to achieving Global Goals embodied in the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasizes equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. However, for this to be attain, the study recommends measures towards achieving SDG4. Based on evaluation of perspectives, the study concluded that Nigeria is still a long way to achieving the SDG4.

Recommendations

Recognizing the importance of the objectives of SDG4, it is therefore paramount to state that these objectives can be achieved and sustained if stakeholders (educational authorities, institutions, teachers, community members, government at all levels) consider the following measures:

➢ **Re-organization of Curriculum and Instructional Methods**: The provision of curriculum and instructional methods has to be in accordance to the needs and requirements of the students. The

teachers have to ensure that students are able to adequately understand the lesson plans. The reorganization of the curriculum and instructional methods enables all-inclusive, quality equitable education that will ensure students acquisition of relevant academic concepts, so that they are able to promote academic excellence. It does not only lead to alleviation of educational sustainability, but teachers are able to earn appreciation from the students and acquire job satisfaction.

➢ **Sociable and Agreeable Atmosphere**: Within the home and in school, the atmosphere should be sociable and agreeable. Equal educational opportunities need to be provided to both boys and girls. In rural and backward areas, individuals usually are of the view that girls are meant to perform the household chores and education is not meant for them. Hence most people take interest in sending their male children to schools, thereby discouraging the girls from obtaining education. In order to reduce educational inequality to realize SDG4 objectives, it is important that sociable and agreeable atmosphere should be created within homes and schools. Both girls and boys should be encouraged towards acquisition of education.

➢ **Health**: To make effective use of education, it is vital to maintain good health. When an individual is healthy and well, he would be able to develop rational thinking and make use of his education to not only sustain the living conditions of his family, but also to bring about well-being of the community. The poverty stricken families are unable to take care of the nutritional requirements of their children. In schools, there should be provision of mid-day meal scheme, where nutritious meals are provided to the students. When students are provided with nutritious meals, they do feel motivated towards learning. It is necessary that meals should be prepared in a clean and hygienic environment, proper ingredients should be used and the system should be properly organized as physical development is necessary for the mental development of the students.

➢ **Proper Teaching Methods**: The teaching methods that have been prevalent in the present circumstance, seem to be counter productive. For instance, there have been cases of senior secondary students, unable to read junior secondary textbooks. This shows that proper teaching methods have not been implemented by the teachers. It is vital for the teachers to make use of proper teaching methods, so that students are able to acquire understanding of the academic concepts and subject areas in an appropriate manner. Students should be encouraged and motivated, to generate keen interest and enthusiasm towards learning. The teachers should be qualified and experienced. As qualified and experienced teachers would possess adequate knowledge regarding utilization of proper teaching methods for SDG4.

➢ **Professional Competence:** The teachers and the staff members, who are part of the educational institutions, should be professional in their conduct. Students may drop out of school due to harsh treatment obtained or unapproachable attitude of the teachers. Even when the teachers are dissatisfied with the performance of the students, they should provide explanation in a polite manner, so that they obtain desirable results in future. Improvements in the professional competence of the teachers are made by providing training facilities, both pre-service and in-service. Within the

course of one's job, the teachers have to undergo training programs to acquire knowledge of modern and innovative strategies and methods. They are required to be skilled and knowledgeable in training the students, regarding how to make use of their knowledge and skills in order to live enhanced lives and to bring about well-being of the community.

➢ **Appropriate Evaluation Procedures**: For SDG4 to be achieved, when examinations are conducted, it is appropriate to set up a passing percentage. The teachers employed, work hard towards completion of the course curriculum. Before exams, it is up to the students to adequately prepare themselves in order to obtain good grades. The evaluation procedures that should be put into practice should be fair and motivating to the students. The main purpose is to assess the performance of the students and identify any kinds of flaws and inconsistencies. Grading should entirely be based upon the performance of the students. Various evaluation procedures that are usually put into practice include, class assignments, home-work assignments, tests, exams, participation in competitions, workshops and so forth.

➢ **Provision of Scholarships and Financial Assistance**: As it has been stated that marginalized, deprived and economically weak sections of the society are unable to meet the educational needs and requirements of their children. Financial problems have been a matter of concern to rural people. On the other hand, provision of scholarships and any kind of assistance if made available would to these students would enable them to attain education. At present, some states are providing mid-day meals, books, stationary, bags, uniform to the students

in schools. Financial assistance could also be obtained in the form of grants and scholarships. Financial assistance in the form of grants, scholarships or fellowships would help in enhancing the achievement of SDG 4 in Nigeria.

➢ **Effective Communication**: Within educational institutions at all levels, education and learning can take place in an optimal manner, when the individuals are involved into effective communication with each other. There should be mutual understanding and they should learn how to work in collaboration with each other. Effective communication not only leads to enhancement of learning, but also proper performance of job duties and functioning of the educational institutions. The teachers should be kind and approachable towards the students. It is vital for the teachers to ensure that they do not feel vulnerable or apprehensive within the school environment. The students should feel that they can approach their teachers when experiencing any problems. Fellow students also need to maintain good communication terms with each other and be helpful and supportive.

➢ **Elimination of Criminal and Violent Acts**: In educational institutions, students do drop out and leave education, before obtaining the degree, due to prevalence of criminal and violent acts. There have been cases of sexual harassment and mistreatment against especially girls at all levels of education. When they experience such types of acts, they not only drop out of school, but also feel vulnerable in going out of their homes. Experiencing criminal and violent acts, such as verbal abuse, physical abuse rap. Hence, in order to have access to sustainable development goal four (SDG4), it is vital to eliminate various kinds of criminal and violent acts.

➢ **Activities and Creative Actions**: It is essential for the individuals to get engaged into various kinds of activities and creative actions. These does not only motivate them towards learning, but also stimulates their mind-sets. For instance, in schools, extra-curricular activities are promoted, which include, singing, dancing, artworks, handicrafts, sports, games, physical activities etc. When an individual does not perform well in academic subjects, he may develop his skills and competence in other areas. For instance, students may develop interest in sports, music, dance etc. and adopt them as professions in their lives. Therefore, learning some other area in educational institutions and utilizing them to lead to progress and development may encourage the achievement of SDG4.

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