

**BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN PARTS
OF NIGERIA : WHAT OPTIONS?**

By

DR. SANUSI USMAN JUNAIDU

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION,
USMAN DANFODIO UNIVERSITY
SOKOTO**

INTRODUCTION:

Nigeria as a nation has taken education as an instrument for National development such that its provision has been an issue very dear to all state governments in the federation as huge amount of funds had continued to be invested in the enterprise to realise the dream.

The development of education has however been saddled with so many of problems one of which is lopsidedness in its growth and this has created an educational gap between the Northern and the Southern parts of the Country. An educational gap here is meant to be the quantitative difference (ie School enrolment) in educational growth between the 16 Northern and 14 Southern States. The concern of this paper which is histo-analytical in nature is to establish the existence of the educational gap between the two parts of the country, analyse some of the factors responsible for the unwholesome development and suggest options for a way forward.

**HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EDUCATIONAL GAP
BETWEEN NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN PARTS OF NIGERIA.**

Historically, the educational disparity between the Northern and the Southern parts of the country is both a pre and post-independence phenomenon. It has however only of recent attained an alarming proportion such that both the government and the people of the country are worried and concerned about its harmful effects.

Nigeria's educational system as we all know dates as far back as the 15th century and was introduced into what is now referred to as Nigeria by the Christian Missionaries. It was however around 1842 when real serious educational work begun to take shape with the establishment of missionary stations and later Schools by the missionaries.

The colonial government's involvement in this endeavour came later around 1877 through the disbursement of grants in aid to the mission schools. Its actual and more practical involvement however came with the enactment of 1882 and later 1877 education ordinances. All these developments we should note were restricted to the southern parts of the country. It needs however to be pointed out that the introduction of the western education in Northern Nigeria also dates as far back as 1863 when the first mission school was opened at Lokoja and later at Gbede around 1865 by the Christian missionaries. The colonial government's involvement came much later after proclamation of the area in 1990. This early head-start in the provision of education which the South enjoyed could account partially for the existence of educational gap between the two areas. Such was the situation that by 1913 prior to the amalgamation of

the two protectories, the North had only 1,131 pupils in its primary schools while the South had 35,716 pupils. In addition the North had no secondary school while the South had 11 (Fafunwa, 1974). In fact by 1929 when the departments of education in the two protectories were merged, the North had not produced a single native who was sufficiently educated to enable him fill the most minor clerical post in the office of any government department (Bunting, 1962). And uptill 1949 there was only one Secondary School providing a full Secondary course in the whole North (Ozigi, 1981).

One issue which gave greater impetus to the educational development in the whole country was the political and constitutional development that brought about regionalization, an event that gave more powers to the regions to legislate on several issues including education. Indeed it was around this period that free primary education was introduced in the Western and Eastern regions and increase in enrolment was witnessed in the Northern region. For example, pupils enrolment rose from 457,000 in 1954 to 811,000 in 1955 in the Western region. While the East rose from 904,235 in 1956 to 1,209,167 in 1957; and in the North because the government did not fully commit itself to free education, there was moderate increase in the number of Schools and literacy classes (Fafunwa, 1974; Taiwo, 1980). This itself helped to widen the educational gap between the two parts. Of course this new found freedom by regions gave them opportunity (especially the Western and Eastern regions) to introduce several innovations in the type and variety of curricular at secondary school level. This period also witnessed the emergence of higher institutions, the Yaba High College and the University College Ibadan all situated in the southern part of Nigeria.

Before Nigeria's independence (1959), Ashby Commission was established to look into manpower needs of the post independent Nigeria. It was the implementation of some portions of the report that gave way to a rapid expansion at all educational levels. For example, by 1960 the year of Nigeria's independence, the Northern region had a total of 282,848 Primary School Pupils and this rose to 534,200 in 1965. While the Eastern and Midwestern regions had an enrolment of 1,124,788 and this increased to 1,128,127 by 1965. The Eastern region on the other hand witnessed a decrease in enrolment due to shortening of the Primary School course from seven to six years, its pupils population decreased from 1,430,514 in 1960 to 1,236,872 in 1965 (Taiwo, 1980). At the tertiary level, four Universities were established and these were University of Nsukka in the Eastern region and Ahmaduy Bello University, Zaria in the Northern region, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in the west, University of Lagos in the then Federal Capital and while University College Ibadan was promoted to University status. Similarly, several Colleges of Education and Advanced Teacher's Colleges were established in Lagos, Ibadan, Owerri, Zaria, Kano and Abraka.

The discrepancy as can be seen is larger at this level where with exception of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and two Colleges of Education situated in Zaria and Kano all the higher Institutions were situated in the Southern part of the country. This unwholesome development however assumed a more serious dimension in subsequent years as we shall see in tables one and two. Figures in these tables clearly show that, despite their numerical advantage the Northern states still lag behind their Southern counterparts at both the primary and the post primary levels as at 1991. Infact as Tables 3 and 4 would show, the disparity is at all levels.

**Table 1 : Statistics of Primary Education in Nigeria
Number of Schools and Total Enrolment(1991)**

State	No. of Schools	Total Enrolment
Abuja	204	48,988
Akwa-Ibom	1032	623,203
Anambra	2091	920,805
Bauchi	1476	310,038
Bendel	1816	1,071,153
Benue	2464	686,306
Borno	1618	513,392
Cross-River	593	331,133
Gongola	1465	406,464
Imo	2044	920,337
Kaduna	1383	493,357
Kano	3297	932,824
Katsina	1640	889,893
Kwara	1348	379,968
Lagos	879	869,958
Niger	1066	173,173
Ogun	1281	433,911
Ondo	1600	610,488
Oyo	2547	1,147,246
Plateau	1577	498,651
Rivers	1165	488,125
Sokoto	2504	363,778

**Source: Monitoring and Evaluation Report on
Primary Education in Nigeria, Special
Program Unit, Federal Ministry of Education.**

The table above shows that as at 1991, there were a total of 35,078 primary schools in the whole country. 19,811 were located in the Northern states while 15,267 in the Southern states a difference of 2,534 in favour of the former. Similarly there were a total of 13,114,881 primary school pupils in the country. Out of this number, 5,649,844 came from Northern states while 7,465,037 were from the southern states a difference of 1,815,193 in favour of the latter. This shows that more primary schools were located in the Northern states while on the other hand more pupils were enrolled in the Southern part. One typical example is that between Sokoto state and Lagos state. The former had 2,504 Primary Schools with a pupil enrolment of 363,778, while the latter had 879 primary schools with pupils enrolment of 869,568. It thus showed that, while Sokoto state has more than double the number of primary schools in Lagos state, the latter has equally done the same in terms of pupil enrolment.

**Table 2: Statistics of Post-Primary Education in Nigeria ,
Number of Schools and Total Enrolment by states in 1989.**

State	No. of Schools	Total Enrolment
Akwa-Ibom	239	69,533
Anambra	465	181,356
Bauchi	125	57,144
Bendel	497	198,618
Benue	291	111,874
Borno	98	77,063
Cross-River	114	50,440
Gongola	123	61,222
Imo	745	251,240
Kaduna	110	151,509
Kano	203	100,459
Katsina	104	39,572
Kwara	343	107,214
Lagos	329	351,670
Niger	150	94,539
Ogun	257	112,243
Ondo	362	140,938
Oyo	627	313,608
Plateau	239	81,237
Rivers	269	80,605
Sokoto	161	66,421
FCT	27	26,188

**Source: Statistics Branch, Federal Ministry of Education,
Lagos.**

Figures in the table above show that, out of 5,868 secondary schools in Nigeria 1,994 were located in the Northern states of Nigeria including the Federal Capital Territory (because it is located in the North), while 3,894 are located in the Southern states. These give a difference of 1,920 secondary schools in favour of the latter. In addition, out of a total of 2,723,791 students enrolled country wide, 974,140 came from the Northern states including Abuja while 1,749,140 came from the Southern States this gives a difference of 775,511. This difference is actually great and what makes it more alarming is the fact that it is from this stage that candidates are prepared for the labour market and selected into the tertiary institutions for middle and high level manpower training. Thus, one could imagine the difference in terms of numbers in relation to those employed in private and public sectors among the people that came from the Northern and Southern states of the country. The difference from all indications is likely to favour the latter.

In fact figures in table 3 below depict the most frightening desparity in admission into the Nigerian Universities. For example, during the 1978/79 academic

session only 19.5% of the candidates that secured admission into the Universities were from the then 11 Northern states while clearly over 80% came from the then nine Southern states.

Table 3 Enrolment into Nigerian Universities 1978/79 Academic Session

State	No. of Admitted	Percentage of National Total	population 1963
Anambra	1,740	12.0	
Bauchi	140	1.0	2,431,296
Bendel	2,100	14.6	2,460,962
Benue	510	3.5	2,427,017
Borno	150	1.0	2,997,498
Cross-River	770	5.4	3,478,131
Gongola	150	1.0	2,605,263
Imo	2,080	14.5	3,672,654
Kaduna	355	2.5	4,098,306
Kano	200	1.4	5,714,485
Kwara	860	6.0	1,714,485
Lagos	290	2.0	1,443,568
Niger	130	0.9	1,194,508
Ogun	1,095	7.6	1,550,966
Ondo	1,265	8.8	2,729,690
Oyo	1,670	11.6	5,208,884
Plateau	220	1.5	2,026,657
Rivers	550	3.8	1,719,925
Sokoto	95	0.7	4,538,787

Source: New Nigerian Newspaper, 5th March, 1979.

Actually the difference between states is quite frightening. For example a state like Kano with a population of of 5,714,485 had only 1.4% out of the candidates admitted while Bendel with a population of 2,460,962 got 14.6%.

The disparity is not only restricted to the total number enrolled but even in the type of courses offered by the Universities. Infact as Table 4 and 5 showed more candidates from the Southern States got course that are more marketable and much more relevant in the development of the country than those from the Northern States. For example, courses like medical science, agriculture, sciences, law, etc attract larger percentage of candidates from the Southern states than their Northern counterpart. Infact there are more candidates in all fields from the Southern states when compared to the North. In addition, the Southern states got about 80 percent of the total number of candidates admitted into the Nigerian Universities while less than 30 percent came from the Northern states.

As Table 6 would show, the educational disparity at the Tertiary level is not restricted to Universities alone but almost all higher institutions.

Table 4: Admissions into Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Universities by State 1990/91 and 1991/92 Sessions

States	Polytechnics		College of Education		Universities	
	1990/91	1991/92	1990/91	1991/92	1990/91	1991/92
Oyo/Oshun	951	3,195	921	4,023	5,037	75,692
Imo/Abia	780	3,587	588	2,544	4,731	7,409
Delta/Edo	1,149	4,032	456	2,463	6,790	8,756
Anam/Enugu	610	4,261	427	2,195	4,917	6,887
Ondo	820	2,262	577	1,844	2,810	4,196
Ogun	989	2,778	585	1,626	4,147	3,781
Kwara/Kogi	525	1,690	294	1,204	2,746	3,736
Rivers	341	1,426	345	1,141	2,686	2,401
Benue	326	683	196	105	1,527	2,406
Lagos	469	1,640	301	807	2,936	2,247
Kano/Jigawa	83	297	168	819	856	1,334
C/River	121	1,082	101	729	972	1,081
Niger	177	288	171	447	573	1,032
Borno/Yabo	22	144	14	393	463	1,130
Plateau	209	302	144	349	840	1,324
Adam/Taraba	138	183	155	385	541	1,120
Bauchi	80	175	72	375	366	717
Akwa Ibom	115	1,070	70	306	1,334	1,828
Kaduna	161	263	122	303	707	1,105
Sok/Kebbi	66	188	67	432	487	1,085
Katsina	61	192	154	209	155	396
Non-Nig.	-	49	3	19	676	816
Total	8,193	29,737	5,951	23,674	48,504	61,419

Infact states from the Northern part of the Country have fewer number of enrolment at all the three tertiary Institutions. One reason behind this is that there are more students at the Primary and Post Primary level in the South than the North and this logically follows that more applicants from that area for admissions into the tertiary level may emerge than the North hence the larger number of those admitted. This by implication also means that the bulk population of Nigerians qualified manpower shall continue to come from the South as long as this educational gap continues to exist.

In addition to all these, one should note that out of the thirty six (36) existing Universities in the country as at 1991/92 session, 12 were situated in the sixteen Northern states while the remaining 24 in the fourteen Southern states. Out of the 36 Universities, 12 of them are owned by the states, 2 states in the North Kano and Benue while 10 states in the South. In reality the two states Universities in the North are yet to take off properly due to serious manpower shortages among other logistic problems. It is no wonder therefore that 15 out of the 16 Northern states that include Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Jigawa, Kaduna, Katsina, Kano, Kebbi, Niger, Plateau, Sokoto,

Taraba and Yobe are officially recognised as educationally less developed states. While only 2 states Rivers and Cross Rivers from the South fall into this category (Joint Admission and Matriculation Brochure, 1992). To cap it all, the situation as of the 1992/93 academic session is that, the sixteen Northern states together have not been able to produce up to 30 percent of the overall candidates admitted into the Nigerian Universities. In actual fact about 80 percent are from the fourteen Southern states.

From the above discussion it is clear that an educational gap does exist between the Northern and Southern parts of the country and serious efforts need to be done to salvage the situation but before then we need to look at some of the factors responsible for this lopsidedness in the educational growth.

Factors responsible for the educational gap between the Northern and Southern Parts of the Country

A number of factors had been blamed for the educational gap between the two parts of the country and this include Islamic religion, the influence of christian missionaries and colonial administrators, customs and culture of the people historical and geographical factors and political leadership Tibendarana (1974); Amuchiezi (1984); Alabi (1985) Abdulkadir (1992); Junaidu (1994); Bunza (1995); and Sambo (1995).

It has however been argued by Fafunwa (1974) that Islamic religion has not been hinderance in the pursuit of western education by its adherants. Infact it has been found in Junaidu (1994) that rather than hinder Muslims from acquiring western education, Islamic religion has helped to encourage them in the persuit of knowledge. Similarly it is now widely held that it is high time that people stop using Christian missioneries and colonial administrators, customs and culture of the people, history and geography as factors responsible for the educational gap. It is argued that Nigerians have been managing their educational systems for too long that whatever influence any of those factors might have had could have wane by now. Furthermore, increase in people's awareness about other people's existence and the role of education as a catalyst for development has helped to change whatever pre-conceived idea that people of the North might have had about western education. (For more detected discussion on these factors refer to Junaidu, 1995).

It is strongly suggested that a serious examination of the relevance of the present educational system (ie curriculum, provision of teaching and learning facilities and equipment etc) viz-a-viz the needs and aspirations of the people in addition to the appropriateness of the educational strategies often used in providing education to the people could help to give us a clearer understanding of the whole issue.

Options for a way forward

One point that has been emphasised by many writers (Junaidu 1995, Malami et al 1995, Aljannare 1995) is that people of the North are highly supportive of any educational venture so long as it conforms with their religion and cultural beliefs as well as satisfies their needs and solve their problems. Hence it is in this light that this paper strongly suggest a modification of the present system of education in such a way that the school curriculum reflects the ways of lives, aspirations expectations, cultural and religious beliefs of the Northerners especially the Muslims who appear to be more affected than any other group. It should also be one that could help in making its recipients capable of solving their short and long term socio-economic and political problems like moral decadence, subsistence and poor living condition, poor agricultural

yields, unemployment etc. This may help to motivate them to realise the bountiful opportunities and benefits they have been missing by their poor participation in this form of education. This could then help in our march towards filling the existing educational gap.

The current literacy campaigns by the government of the Northern states should be reinvigorated and seriously and sincerely pursued to make it more effective and result oriented. This way certain policies and strategies designed to promote people's participation in educational programmes could be better explained and made more meaningful to the citizens so that they could appreciate the government's efforts. This is likely to attract people's interest and improve school enrolment.

In addition the government should as much as possible involve its citizens from the grassroot in the educational affairs of each state at the Ministries of Education, Zonal Education offices, Primary education Boards, Local governments Education Authorities and at the school level. They could be appointed as Chairmen or members of various committees, Boards, commissions, supervisory bodies, Investigation panels, curriculum development, monitoring and evaluation committees and many others that are essential to the efficient running of the educational system. This may help in understanding their views, needs, aspirations, expectations and apprehensions about their children's schooling. This way efforts could be made to reflect them in the educational policies, programmes and activities which would undoubtedly help to make the education provided relevant to the people for whom it is meant. This is in addition to giving them an opportunity to air their views and determine the future of their children. All these are options that could help us move forward in our march towards bridging the educational gap.

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