



# **The Role Of Education In Nigeria’s Becoming**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Over the years, there has been a cycle of reliance on a few macroeconomic factors — capital formation, monetary policies, and technological advancement as determinants of economic growth. The effect of this is less reliance on human development and a focus on physical variables. However, world economies have begun to explore education as a key determinant of economic growth. A case in point is the reinvention of education in Israel which has proven to be more valuable than what was previously obtainable. Therefore, if education must take its place in Nigeria, there must be a deviation from formalities to creativity in harnessing the abilities of the population. This research seeks to reveal different forms education has taken over the years in Nigeria, what development is not, and how non-formal education can be utilized to revamp Nigeria’s education system. In effect, this paper will explore the successes in different countries to discuss the role of education for development in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Development, Education, Sustainable Development Goals, Human Development, Nonprofit Organization, Economic Growth

## **INTRODUCTION**

Economic growth has become a major defining factor among nations of the world. While sophisticated technologies are major sources of economic growth, lasting growth can be measured by the extent to which human capital is promoted<sup>1</sup>. The primary tool for the promotion of human capital is education. Sadly, Nigeria is not utilizing it. Quality education paves way for the application of practical knowledge and knowledge leads to the transformation of both people and the economy. The failure to harness the abilities of a nation’s population results in a brain drain, thereby incapacitating the nation to the advantage of the immigrant country. The end result of all these is poverty, the effect of which is ravaging Nigeria’s economy. Nigeria is brimming with many expressions of poverty – unemployment, homelessness, lack of economic infrastructure, poor access to health care, and poor access to education<sup>2</sup>. All of them can be traced to one root cause — corruption in Nigeria’s government.

## **Education as a Road Map to Development in Nigeria**

The World Bank reports that **4 in 10** Nigerians live below the country’s national poverty line<sup>3</sup>. The Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics also confirms that **39.1%** of Nigerians live below the **\$1.90 per day** threshold prescribed by the World Bank.<sup>4</sup> The number is predicted to rise as inflation continually rises (**18.6%** as of June 2022 — a **0.09%** rising rate in seven consecutive months from **17.7%**)<sup>5</sup>. On the grim predicament of Nigerians, Subham Chaudhuri, Nigeria’s World Bank Country Director had this to say:

<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Barro, *Determinants of Economic Growth: A Cross-Country Empirical Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).2a. Robert J. Barro and Jong-Wha Lee, “International Comparisons of Educational Attainment,” *Journal of Monetary Economics* 32 (1993): 363–94.

<sup>2</sup> The Borgen Project, “An Expanding Country: Four of the Main Causes of Poverty in Nigeria”, [borgenproject.org](http://borgenproject.org), August 1, 2017

<sup>3</sup> A Better Future for All Nigerians: Nigeria Poverty Assessment, [World Bank Press Release](http://WorldBankPressRelease), March 22, 2022

<sup>4</sup> National Bureau of Statistics, *Consumer Price Index*, June 2022

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

*“It is clear that much needs to be done to help lift millions of Nigerians out of poverty, including boosting health and **education**, bolstering productive jobs, and expanding social protection”.*

Nigeria’s education is a recycled system of rote memorization and this is why we lack the requisite knowledge needed to spur change in Nigeria. Beyond abhorring poverty and hoping for a better Nigerian story, lacking the right knowledge to play our part will do Nigeria a great disservice. If education is harnessed in Nigeria, these other vital aspects – health, social protection, and job creation will be a natural effect.

We can begin by asking the right questions – what’s the strength of Nigeria’s education system today? How far can it go in birthing development? Yes, we know that education is a powerful force for development. Yes, we believe it’s a key human right. But what are we not doing right? Well, Nigeria’s approach to education may be impaired. The rest of this article should give you a clearer picture as we explore what’s applicable in developed nations.

Let’s consider Israel and her awe-inspiring **97.10%** global literacy. Israeli education is praised for spurring trailblazing creativity, economic development, and technological advancement. According to the OECD, about **1 in 3** Israelis would score a level 2 on literacy<sup>6</sup>, and it keeps improving! Each year, there seems to be a shift from what was previously obtainable. For them, the goal is to fit the demands of a fast-paced technological world.

A good instance is the freedom students have to leverage the Apprenticeship Law. With this law, youths can choose not to continue with formal or conventional education. They rather enroll at an approved vocational institution to train for a trade. The Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labor affiliates with these vocational institutions to make this work. The programs are designed to ensure expertise — two years of classroom study, then one of two years of part-time study and learning. Even more, academic assessment in Israel is becoming more innovative than standardized. Assessments are currently **70%** standardized and **30%** customization by teachers. This is as opposed to the **100%** standardized test that was previously obtainable.

According to Eyal Ram of the Israel Ministry of Education, the less Israel relies on standardized assessments, the more innovation will be promoted in Israel. In Israel, being part of a local youth movement is also a thing. These programs are set up to promote social change and action in the country. Young Israelis are introduced to this movement as early as fourth grade. They soon become leaders of these movements as they go to high school. Needless to say how their culture of informality has created an atmosphere of assertiveness and responsibility. The military training given to young Israelis, especially in the use of guns is also instructive. Well, while every Nigerian may not need to be taught how to use guns, we can learn a lot from the bravery of Israelis.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

The following are the principal outcomes of this research:

### **We Have the Right Population to Cause Change**

As of 1990, Nigeria’s population was growing at a rate of **3.75%** per year<sup>7</sup>. This data implied that Nigeria’s population will double every 22 years. However, in 2021, Nigeria ranked 6th for population growth with a growth rate of **2.57%**. As the largest country in Africa, the United Nations has projected a population of **401.31 million** by the end of 2050. Meanwhile, Nigeria already boasts of a population of

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<sup>6</sup> OECD (2019), *Skills Matter: Additional Results from the Survey of Adult Skills, OECD Skills Studies*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1f029d8f-en>.

<sup>7</sup> Okpala, A.O., Scand, J., and Dev Altern, “Nigerian Population Growth and its Implications for Economic Development”, National Library of Medicine, December, 1990

**216,952,132 in 2022.**<sup>8</sup> The United States Census Bureau has also predicted that Nigeria's population will surpass America's in 2047<sup>9</sup>

On a continental scale, the World Bank predicts that Africa will be home to **20%** of the world's population by 2050. The reality is that no country wants to boast of numbers without commensurate evidence of development to show for it. But is population a big problem? Well, yes, depending on the circumstance. Population growth is a key determinant of development, so when the conflict that comes with handling a large population arises, the effect is always negative. However, Nigeria can make good use of her number, while putting safety measures in place to control the population.

For now, the population must be engaged to produce positive results. We must ask ourselves even more questions. Why's only a meager percentage of Nigerians educated? What scheme can be introduced to address this? How can we reach those at the grassroots? Nigeria has the greatest population in its rural areas. It goes to show that information on adequate birth control measures is sparse in those locations. You will also record the highest number of illiterates in rural areas. This is why human development is key to accessing economic development. Human development is all about having more choices, especially in a populated country like Nigeria.

According to the UNDP, human development is about expanding the richness of human lives rather than the richness of the economy. The three foundations of human development are healthy and creative living, knowledge, and access to resources needed for a decent standard of living<sup>10</sup>. Therefore it is safe to say that the human development approach is a realignment of our focus, from the nation to the people of the nation. Without the people, there is no nation. Simply put, human development is a road map to economic development.

### **Non-Formal / Prevocational Education is a Valid Type of Education**

According to Amartya Sen, the basic purpose of development is to enlarge the capabilities of its recipients<sup>11</sup>. Following this, the sole objective of every nation should be the development of its people. However, with corruption as a root cause of poverty in Nigeria, it is easy to lose focus. To understand the role of non-formal education in Nigeria's economy, a clear difference must be drawn between formal, non-formal, and informal education.

Formal education involves organized, structured training in an institution (mostly recognized or set up by the government) with a specified curriculum, to the end that some compulsory degrees are obtained.<sup>12</sup> The primary, secondary, and tertiary education in Nigeria are the levels of formal education we have in Nigeria. Non-formal education is systematic and planned, but does not necessarily have the issuance of a degree certificate as its end goal. The goal of non-formal education is that beneficiaries are trained in a specific field, depending on their interests. A prevocational training institution is a good example of this kind of education.

Prevocational education also has a non-formal context, and it seeks to prepare people for a vocation in a certain field of study. A good example is a gap year program just before one goes into the university. The Israelis call their prevocational scheme the *Mechina* program. Informal education on the other hand is picked up from the activities of one's daily life. Since it is often in the context of family, the teacher may be a parent, guardian, or friend. In practice, the difference between non-formal and informal education is often blurred.

<sup>8</sup> World Population Review 2022 (Live) [worldpopulationreview.com](http://worldpopulationreview.com), accessed on 19th of July, 2022

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Human Development Report Office Outreach, "*What is Human Development*", United Nations Development Programme, [hdr.undp.org](http://hdr.undp.org)

<sup>11</sup> Sen, Amartya (1985). Well-Being, Agency and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 82, No. 4, 169-221

<sup>12</sup> Colin Latchem, "Informal Learning and Non-Formal Education for Development", *Journal of Learning for Development*, Vol 1, No 1 (2014)

However, UNESCO<sup>13</sup> defines non-formal education as “*organized and sustained educational activities that do not correspond exactly to the definition of formal education [and] may have different durations and may or may not confer certification*”. Over the years, Nigerians have relied on formal education to provide jobs and give them some sense of expertise in a fast dwindling economy. However, the Council of Europe<sup>14</sup> acknowledges that systems of formal education alone cannot address the challenges of modern society. Thus, these systems require reinforcements by informal (non-formal) educational practices.

There is proof that reduced formality in learning enhances a child’s ability to retain the knowledge acquired. Informal education is a practical example. As mentioned earlier, it consists of a set of informal instructions picked up from the family, social groups, or the community. Though these instructions are neither deliberate nor planned, they remain powerful. David Cofer’s research on informal workplace learning shows that **70-90%** of human learning is informal. His two-year study showed that an hour of formal learning equals four hours of informal learning (that is, a ratio of 4:1).<sup>15</sup>

Non-formal education on the other hand has gained wide traction in the international field. It’s no surprise that growth in these nations can be traced to the great value placed on non-formal education. It goes to show that non-formal education is valuable and fundamental on its own. Neither informal nor non-formal education should ever be regarded as inferior to formal education. They are not ordinary precursors to formal education, and should not be tagged so.<sup>16</sup>

To birth development, Nigeria must take advantage of non-formal education. There is a need for more Nigerians to discover their abilities, hone them, and bring change to their environment. This way, we can break out of the traditional method of learning and transcend into innovative dimensions. The humanist definition of education is instructive in this regard –

*“the process of developing the natural potentials of a person to enable them thrive and function in his environment according to his interests, abilities, and needs”*<sup>17</sup>.

This should be the purpose of education in Nigeria. It is only this way that citizens can become change makers in their environments

In 2008, the Education and Policy Center organized a survey in 28 countries. This survey sought to assess non-formal education by four yardsticks — the impact of non-formal education, the extent of attendance and attainment of non-formal education, gender and urban/rural distribution, and the connection of education to household income. Only seven countries — Chad, Burundi, The Gambia, Niger, Myanmar, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal scored above **5%** in one or more of the four yardsticks. Six counties scored between **1-5%**. The 15 remaining countries had less than 1% in the four yardsticks<sup>18</sup>.

This survey also strengthens UNESCO’s findings that the poor and least educated people in developing economies are likely to be discouraged from non-formal education due to situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers<sup>19</sup>. As of 2020, only **10.5** percent of Nigerians between the of ages **15 - 35**

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO, (1997). International Standard Classification of Education ISCED 1997, Pg. 41. Paris: UNESCO.

<sup>14</sup> Council of Europe. (2000). Recommendation 1437. (2000). Non-formal education. Assembly debate on 24 January 2000 (1st Sitting). Text adopted by the Assembly on 24 January 2000 (1st Sitting).

<sup>15</sup> Cofer, D. (2000). Informal workplace learning: Practice application brief, NO 10. US Department of Education: Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education.

<sup>16</sup> Coffield, F. (2000). (Ed.). The necessity of informal learning. Bristol: The Policy Press.

<sup>17</sup> Malyn-Smith, J. (2004). Power users of technology - who are they? Where are they going? Why does it matter? UN Chronicle, pp. 58-61.

<sup>18</sup> Education and Policy Data Center. (2008). The extent and impact of nonformal education in 28 developing countries. Washington, DC: Education Policy and Data Center. Retrieved July 5, 2013

<sup>19</sup> UNESCO. (2009). Global Report on Adult Learning and Education. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Retrieved July 5, 2013

participated in informal (non-formal) education<sup>20</sup>. Is it a ‘Nigerian’ problem? Or is it a ‘Nigeria’ problem? Are there enough institutions providing non-formal education? Or are Nigerians lackadaisical to acquiring it?

Non-formal education has a wide scope. Here are some:

- Basic literacy education for adults, school dropouts, and youths that are out of school.
- Community development and mobilization
- Issues on gender
- Skill development
- Inclusive education of people with disabilities
- Information on democracy, civil & human rights.

These forms of non-formal education are done by some public institutions, NGOs, trade unions, international agencies, and the like. With the innovative modes of learning employed by these institutions, there is a shift from rote memorization to innovative learning modes. On the excessive formality of education, Hassan Bealaway, an adviser to the Ministry of Education in Egypt expressed that learning has become more about systems, standards, and deference rather than experimentation. Emphasis on standardization has shaped an education policy that defines success by measuring inputs rather than outcomes.

Today, Israel is modeling something of great value through the Apprenticeship Law — making it easy for youths to find their feet in their creative trades. If anything, Nigeria needs all the creativity it can get to build a nation that will last.

### **Charity is NOT Development**

While there’s a place for charity in Nigeria, charity cannot solve deep-seated issues of poverty in Nigeria. This is a conversation most nonprofits are not ready to have. In his book, *Toxic Charity*, Robert D. Lupton<sup>21</sup> expresses that all humanitarian efforts to eliminate poverty only succeeded in creating a permanent underclass, dismantling family structures, and eroding work ethic. Above all, the poor continue to become poorer. He says we miss the crucial aspect of evaluating our charitable work.

As compassionate people, we evaluate our charity by the rewards we receive through service as opposed to evaluating the benefits received by the people we served. The instinct to perform a compassionate act at the sight of a desperate circumstance has become our greatest shortcoming. Since we dwell so much on crisis relief, we never get to shift from relief to the more complex work of development. Without a timeous transition from relief to development, compassion and charity become toxic.

We owe these beneficiaries the empowerment needed to make wealth. They need more than relief materials — and informal education is a good place to start. In response to the fashion of giving out free food and keeping the people independent, Robert Lupton says that food is a chronic poverty need, not a life-threatening one. When we respond to a chronic need as though it were a crisis, then we can be sure to predict toxic results: dependency, disempowerment, and deception.

You may wonder why we keep giving food away when we know it fosters dependency. The answer is the same reason charity is popular – it’s easier! Charity is easy and fast, but it soon fades away. Development is tough and time-consuming, but its effect is impactful. The road to development is a narrow path, and only a few economies take it. If we are going to give value, then recipients must become authors of the existing rules, dispensers of even more value, and builders of communities. Charity is NOT enough.

### **Education Will Spur Development**

When education is combined with a drive for change, a nation experiences tremendous success. This was the story of Israel. Israel even went as far as leveraging immigration as a major tool to boost its economy.

<sup>20</sup> Statista, ‘Popularity of Informal Education in Nigeria 2020’, [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com)

<sup>21</sup> Robert D. Lupton, ‘*Toxic Charity: How the Church Hurts Those They Help and How to Reverse it*’, New York: HarperCollins Publishers (2011)

However, in exploring this tool, the government noticed that education did not just cut it. There had to be more.

Economists – Dan Senor and Saul Singer<sup>22</sup> explain that these immigrants had more than an obsession with education. You could see this high-level tenacity for excellence spread across Israel’s technology sector. According to them, if education was the only factor explaining Israel’s orientation toward entrepreneurialism and technology, then countries like Singapore would be start-up incubators as well. On the contrary, these immigrants came with something more radical – DRIVE.

Drive is common among most dynamic economies, and that’s the boost that education needs. It’s a statement of going all in to attain a goal – not every Israeli had that. Erel Margalit, Israel Venture Capitalist explained why this drive existed among immigrants. Here’s what he had to say:

*“In France, if you are from a very established family, and you work in an established pharmaceutical company for instance – with a big office, secretary, and all the other good stuff, would you risk everything by getting up to leave to create something new somewhere else? You would not! And that’s because you’re too comfortable. But if you’re an immigrant in a new place, and you’re poor, or you were once rich and your family was stripped of its wealth – then you have drive. You don’t see what you’ve got to lose; you only see what you could win”<sup>23</sup>.*

In other words, immigrants do not necessarily excel because immigrant countries offer them platters from their thriving economies. They thrive because a certain level of tenacity comes upon them when they leave the shores of their country. The assurance of a system that works is enough confidence to work at anything. We can learn a lot from these immigrants; this is the kind of drive Nigerians must have to birth development in Nigeria.

### **Well Educated Women are Assets to a Nation’s Economy**

*“The best barometer of an economy’s growth potential lies in the legal rights and status of its women. To deny women is to deprive a country of labor and talent ... [and] to undermine the drive to the achievement of boys and men”.*

- David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*<sup>24</sup>

While female literacy in Nigeria is considerably higher than in other West African countries, the gap in literacy rates among both genders is still wide. As of 2018, the male literacy rate was **60%** as opposed to the **35%** female literacy in rural Nigeria. In urban Nigeria, there’s only about a **10%** difference (**86.4% and 74%**) in both cases<sup>25</sup>. This calls for attention in the rural areas of Nigeria. The more a girl in the rural area is left uneducated, the more exposed she is to child pregnancy. Child pregnancy is bad for development because it forestalls the enlargement of capacities. This also calls for the intervention of non-state actors to create an atmosphere of non-formal education capable of spurring positive change at the grassroots.

The failure of the United Arab Emirates economy can be traced to the status of women and the quality of education there. Not investing in women and education is bad business for any nation. The Arab world has one of the highest global illiteracy rates because it fails to build Research and Development institutions necessary for innovation. This is as opposed to Israel where R & D universities abound with a

<sup>22</sup> Dan Senor and Saul Singer, *Start Up Nation: The Story of Israel’s Economic Miracle*, Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2011. Print. Turabian (6th ed.).

<sup>23</sup> Dan Senor and Saul Singer, *Ibid*

<sup>24</sup> MLA (7th ed.) Landes, David S. *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are so Rich and Some so Poor*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998

<sup>25</sup> Doris Dokua Sasu, “Literacy rate in Nigeria 2018, by area and gender”, [statista.com](https://www.statista.com)

key focus on building people, rather than giving a reputation to their nation. Economic development is a ripple effect when the focus is on the people.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

There's a place for non-state actors in Nigeria's becoming — especially in the delivery of non-formal education. The government must commit to redistributing Nigeria's population by integrating favorable distribution policies as an effective way to stir up development. Rather than situate all government offices in urban areas, locating them in rural areas would boost development in these areas.

Educational institutions and startups must also begin to take root in rural areas. They can be given incentives to help them set up in rural areas. Again, free prevocational education should be considered a viable means of preparing youths for the future. Nation-building schemes should also be introduced at the early stages of education. Just like in Israel, social change and action should be top priorities for young Nigerians. Only strong institutions can champion this.

To end well, I would like to state clearly that education is not a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development in Nigeria. However, beyond theory, Nigeria is in dire need of practical knowledge. If practical knowledge were not important, the OECD would never include problem-solving as part of its assessment yardstick for the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).

Amongst other details like fiscal policies and foreign direct investments, education is key to economic development. Thus, it cannot be ignored or given less attention in the journey to birthing real development in Nigeria. What porcelain is to China is what education is to development in Nigeria.