

Poverty Eradication and Access to Quality Education in Nigeria: Moving Targets in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

Access to quality education has been the main target and goal of developed countries from time immemorial due to its capability to eradicate poverty among people and accelerate the development of nations. Nigerian governments at all levels of governance have also emulated the advanced nations in order to reduce significantly the poverty level due to the fact that Nigeria has been identified as the world poverty capital with 40 percent of her total population or 83 million people live below the country's poverty line of 137,430 Naira (\$381.75) per year. The Federal Government of Nigeria introduced many programmes to alleviate the suffering of its citizens such as Small and Medium Enterprises, Poverty Alleviation Programme, National Poverty Eradication Programme and recently TRADERmoni, MARKETmoni, FARMERmoni, N-Power among others. It is based on this, that the paper examined poverty eradication and access to quality education in Nigeria: Moving the targets in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Poverty alleviation Programmes, Access to quality education, Fiscal federalism, Nigeria economy, Inequality gap.

Introduction

Education is the major instrument for the social, cultural, political and technological development of any given society. Its contributions towards the realisation of national development are not measurable and this has justified why governments at all levels attach importance to education to improve the literacy rate in the country and consequently reduce poverty rate in Nigeria. The disparity in poverty and inequality level within nations as reported by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2019, revealed that the states of Sokoto and Taraba had the largest percentage of people living below the poverty line while Lagos and Ekiti states had the lowest percentage of people living below the poverty line in Nigeria. In accordance with the report revealed, an individual is considered poor in Nigeria when that individual has

less than 137,430 thousand Naira (roughly 361 U.S. dollars) per year. [Nigerian Living Standards Survey \(NLSS\) report](#) released by the NBS covering the year 2019, 40.1% of Nigerians are classified as poor by national standards as shown in table 1.

Table 1 : Poverty Head Count Rate in Nigeria as of 2019

Zone	States	Poverty Head Count
South West	Ekiti	2.8%
	Lagos	4.5%
	Osun	8.5%
	Ondo	12.5%
	Ogun	9.3%
	Oyo	9.8%

Zone	States	Poverty Headcount
South East	Abia	30.7%
	Anambra	14.8%
	Ebonyi	79.76%
	Enugu	83.13%
	Imo	28.9%

Zone	State	Poverty Headcount
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Zone	States	Poverty Headcount
South South	Akwalborn	26.8%
	Bayelsa	22.6%
	Cross River	36.3%
	Delta	6%
	Edo	12%
Rivers		23.8%

North Central	Benue	32.9%
	FCT	38.7%
	Kogi	28.5%
	Kwara	20.4%
	Nasarawa	57.3%
	Niger	66.11%
	Plateau	55.1%

Zone	State	Poverty Headcount
North-East	Adamawa	75.1%
	Bauchi	61.53%
	Gombe	62.31%
	Taraba	87.72%
	Yobe	72.34%

Zone	State	Poverty Headcount
North West	Kaduna	43.5%
	Katsina	56.42%
	Kano	55.1%
	Kebbi	50.2%
	Sokoto	87.73%
	Jigawa	87.02%
	Zamfara	73.98%

Source: Statista, 2021

Nigeria as a country, like other nations of the world give priority to education because of the impact it could have on other sectors of the economy such as security, agriculture, health, communications among others that depend on it for survival. The government of Nigeria has demonstrated this by making basic education free and compulsory for all the citizens irrespective of religious affiliation, race, gender, status and health conditions. Similarly, while governments subsidise education in state owned universities, tuition is free in Federal Government owned Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This will allow everyone within the nation to have equal access to quality education, as some citizens will remain illiterates without subsidising it, particularly, tertiary education, because, they would not be able to afford it. In addition to this fact, government also make provisions for all the school resources to enable products compete favourably with their counterparts outside Nigeria. One of the aims of making provisions for all these by the government is to make sure that quality education is received by the recipients which will assist in the eradication of poverty which has been a bane for development in the country through employment opportunities and economic prosperity. Nigeria literacy rate for 2018 was 62.02%, a 10.94% increase from 2008, 2008 was 51.08%, a 19.12% decline from 2006, for 2006 was 70.20%, a 15.43% increase from 2003 and these are unconnected to the poverty level (World Bank, 2018). Furthermore, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), before now, has launched various Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAP) such as operation feed the Nation, green revolution, better life for rural women, family economic advancement programme etc. Eventually, all these programmes become an avenue for corruption and paving ways for embezzlement (Ismail, 2010).

Poverty Dynamics in Nigeria

Nigeria like other nations of the world sees education as an instrument for national development. Due to this, citizens of the country attach great importance to education and strive to acquire it within and outside the country. It is also on this premise that at least, an educated person will be found in every household in Nigeria due to many returns individuals acquiring it would get and for the survival of the society at large. It is based on the benefits attached to education that many Nigerians struggle to get education either by sponsorship or a self-financed one outside and within the country. However, it is a regrettable fact that a large percentage of Nigerians still live in abject poverty due to factors such as low per capita income (PCI), persistent rise in general price level of goods and services (inflation), mismanagement and misappropriation of public funds, unemployment, redundancy, laziness on the part of some people in the working class, over reliance on white collar job, corruption, inability to be creative and economic meltdown being experienced year in and out in Nigeria. Most of these aforementioned problems affect the various regions in Nigeria differently. There are vast regional disparities in socio-economic outcomes in Nigeria, with the North registering the highest levels of poverty and social deprivation compared to the South as shown in table 1. The differences in regional poverty rates still remain a pressing issue in Nigeria due to the disparity between the Northern and Southern regions. Disparities in poverty rates were rising in Nigeria mainly because of the sharp variations in the economic performance among theregions. The Northern region had a poverty rate of 58% in 2004, and it increased to 66.2% in 2010, implying an increase in the poverty rate of 7.6 percentage points. This change is higher than the change in the national poverty rate (6.5 percentage points) . Therefore, the goal of education which centres on eradication of poverty in the society through functional education is being jeopardised. Poverty has been defined differently by many scholars, writers, researchers and organisations. For instance, UNESCO (2008) viewed poverty as an inability to discharge one's responsibility effectively in one's society. Furthermore, Sule and Adamu (2019) viewed poverty as a description of repulsive life which urgently requires a remedy. According to Preece (2007), poverty is a condition characterised by chronic deprivation of the financial strength and sustenance of an acceptable standard of living and other rights expected to be enjoyed by members of the society. Poverty goes beyond condition of lack of resources as Adebayo (2012) opined that it also includes social inequality, lack of security, inability to attend schools ,non availability of good health system, personal growth and self-realisation restriction. Ayo (2007) viewed poverty within the context for contradiction between resources available to an individual and the demand and condition of environment.

Poverty as viewed by the authors is the inability of an individual living in particular vicinity to cope financially i.e. having low per capita income, thereby leading to low disposable income and consequently affecting the propensity to consume. In other words, poverty can be said to mean inability to make provisions

for the basic needs or necessity of life without depending on others.

Poverty dynamics will assist government and members of the society to understand and analyse the level by which poverty exists over time, distinguish between households wallowing in poverty, those never poor and the consistently poor. However, it has not received much attention in the poverty literature in Nigeria, largely due to the lack of nationally representative panel data that track the poverty status of households over time (Adepoju, 2012). The National Bureau of Statistics (2021) reported that 40 percent of the total population, or almost 83 million people, live below the country's poverty line of 137,430 Naira (\$381.75) per year. Gafar, Mukaila, Raji and Michael (2011) affirmed that the dynamism of poverty in Nigeria is not static as it always fluctuates over time. For instance, in table 2, North-East had the highest aggregate poverty incidence for the years under consideration. Followed suit by North-West, it top the poverty level in 1980 and 1996 while North-East was highest in 1985, 1992 and 2004. The data suggest that poverty from 1980 to 2004 increased and Northern part of the country has more poverty household than the southern part (Bello & Roselan, 2010).

Table 2: Incidence of Poverty in Nigeria (%), 1980-2004

Regions	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004
South-South	13.2	45.7	40.8	58.2	35.1
South-East	12.9	30.4	41.0	53.5	26.7
South-West	13.4	38.6	43.1	60.9	43.0
North-Central	32.2	50.8	46.0	64.7	67.0
North-East	35.6	54.9	54.0	70.1	72.2
North-North	37.7	52.1	36.5	77.2	71.2

Source: National; NBS (2005) Poverty Profile for Nigeria, pp. 22-24.

Records show that, while the nation recorded growth in the economy, it did not lead to development as official figures are being published daily to show that the Nigerian economy is fast growing, nevertheless, average quality of life for Nigerians is still low as captured by the Human Development Index (Abraham & Ahmed, 2011).

In Nigeria, as in most other developing nations, the situation of poverty is terrible and surprising, especially in the Northern part of the country and some rural areas in other geo-political zones. For instance, 54.4% of the population lived below the poverty line in 2004 out of which 36.6% of the total population were living in extreme poverty (NBS, 2005). Findings carried out in 2006 by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) revealed that 67.0% or two-thirds of Nigeria's rural population were poor compared to 57.9% in urban areas. Also, Abdulkareem (2016) established that many parents/guidance in Nigeria do not enrol their children/wards in private or public institutions due to poverty. Specifically, 40.1% of the total population were found to

be living below the poverty line (NBS, 2019).

Consumption expenditure is used for poverty indicator in Nigeria rather than the income consumption. The consumption expenditure is targeted as a result of the following:

1. The marginal propensity to consume or consumption expenditure shows the attainment of a particular level of welfare while opportunity of reaching certain level of well being is what per capital income represented.
2. One of the advantages of consumption expenditure is that it can easily be tabulated for calculation, while family income may be difficult to remember and trace as there is likelihood to be from different sources, across different seasons.
3. Many households rarely give accurate and reliable information about their income in order to evade tax or for personal reasons (NBS, 2019). However, for informing policies and in the design of various poverty reduction strategies and programmes, cross-sectional household survey data are still being employed.
4. In spite of these various policies, strategies and programmes (such as Green Revolution, National Fadama Development Project I, II and III, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), Seven Point Agenda, Vision 20-2020 among others) aimed at improving the conditions of the poor; the number of poor people continues to increase. This could be owing to the fact that in using static poverty measures based on cross-sectional data, generally expressed by indicators such as the headcount ratio and the poverty gap, identifying the poor is based on how far consumption, expenditure or income lies below the poverty line.

Nigerian Economy and Poverty Eradication Initiatives: Is there a light at the end of the tunnel?

In 1960, Nigeria got her independence and immediately after that, there was war that gave room for coups, counter coups, changes of government and unforgettable civil war that occurred between 1966 and 1979. The ambition and greed among the top ranking military to control the affairs of the country affected economic policies which eventually had adverse effects on all other sectors in the country (Samson & Augustine, 2014). The administration and management of the country's resources were completely controlled and handled by the military with different policies and laws that were inimical to the economic development of the nation (Adams, 2019). Different economic policies formulated by the military governments did not assist Nigeria but rather the doomsday was postponed as those making policies were not experts in administration. It was also noted at this period that, government deliberately formulated policies which reduced the power of foreigners to partake in the economic policies of Nigeria such as the indigenization decrees of 1972 and 1977

(Samson & Augustine, 2014). Nigeria and her people witnessed this scenario for a long time, particularly, during the military era as intellectuals, technocrats and specialists were not allowed to make their own input in the economic affairs of the nation.

World Bank (2010) reported that Nigeria was one of the countries in the world that had highest economic growth rates averaging 9.4% which made her to be the 'Giant of Africa' until there was a drop in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to 2.7% in 2015 after the collapse of the oil price at the international market between 2014 and 2016 coupled with over dependence on foreign goods and commodities. This situation affected many sectors of the economy and private business owners were not safe from the national scourge. In 2018, the economic growth rate was lower than expectation as the population growth rate led to a slight rise in poverty. Based on the report by World Bank in 2018, almost half the population of Nigerians is living below the international poverty line of \$2/day and unemployment peaked at 23.1%. In fact, according to Sylvester and Ekpenyong (2014), at inception in May 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo expressed deep concern about the rise of poverty in Nigeria with the emphasis that if nothing is done to control it, the country will be in a stale state in the coming year.

In order to eradicate poverty in Nigeria, various efforts were made by governments, non-governmental organisations and individuals in the country. According to Ogwumike (2001), poverty eradication indicators implemented so far in Nigeria focused majorly on economic growth, basic needs and rural development strategies. The scholar further explained that the economic growth approach focuses attention on rapid economic growth as measured by the rate of growth in real per capita GDP or per capital income, price stability and declining unemployment among others, which are achievable through proper harmonization of monetary and fiscal policies. The basic need approach focuses attention on the basic necessities of life such as food, health care, education, shelter, clothing, transport, water and sanitation, which could enable the poor to live a decent life. The rural development approach focuses attention on the total emancipation and empowerment of the rural environment.

Supporting this assertion, Ogwumike (2001) grouped the strategies for poverty reduction in Nigeria into three eras: the pre-Structural Adjustment Programme era, the Structural Adjustment Programme era and the democratic era. The pre-SAP era was the Operation Feed the Nation, the River Basin Development Authorities, the Agricultural Development Programmes, the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme, the Rural Electrification Scheme and the Green Revolution. In the SAP era, the following poverty reduction measures were introduced; the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures, the National Directorate of Employment, the Better Life Programme, the Peoples' Bank, the Community Banks, the Family Support Programme and the Family Economic Advancement Programme. The democratic era witnessed introduction of the Poverty Alleviation

Programme (PAP) meant to provide employment to 200,000 citizens all over the country. It was also aimed at inculcating and improving better attitudes towards a maintenance culture in highways, urban and rural roads and public buildings. In 2001, PAP was phased out and fused into the newly created National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) which was an integral part of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). Also, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was also included in the programme designed to eradicate poverty in Nigeria. Recently, the Federal Government of Nigeria put in place, the National Youth Investment Fund comprising; the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Survival Fund, Farmermoni, Tradermoni, Marketmoni, N-Power, N-Tech and N-Agro.

Despite all the efforts made through various programmes and initiatives, poverty rate in Nigeria is still increasing everyday among many citizens of the country and this has raised a great question on the mind of people as “is there light at the end of the tunnel of all these initiatives”. Nigeria has future tendency to maximally reduce the rate of poverty amongst her citizens in the country, provided, initiative programmes are being controlled by honest people, as corruption, mismanagement of public funds, inadequate supervision of programmes, bribery and self-centredness are great challenges militating against the achievement of the goal of eradicating poverty through initiative programmes in Nigeria. If adequate attention is given to all these areas, Nigeria will experience a significant reduction in poverty rate and the citizens of the country will appreciate the natural endowments possesses by the country.

Fiscal Federalism and Inequality Gap in Nigeria

Nigeria is a pluralistic country with abundant resources being coordinated at both macro and micro levels. The country is blessed with plethora resources which are usually controlled by the governments at all levels. The political office holders are selected by their community members to represent them and to stand as intermediaries between them and the government. Fiscal federalism is practised in Nigeria starting from the military era to the democratically elected people. Fiscal federalism refers to the principles that define the allocation of fiscal powers and responsibilities to the various tiers of government, while fiscal decentralization is the actual practice of the principles of fiscal federalism (Ewetan, 2012). According to Raji (2004), fiscal federalism connotes having more than one level of government in a country with the autonomy of creating revenue and incur expenditure without any control from external forces. There has been an increasing interest in fiscal decentralization in recent years because of the potential benefits to be derived from its adoption. Fiscal decentralization occurs when sub-national governments are given power by the constitution to tax and carry out spending activities within clearly established legal criteria (Ewetan, 2013). International organisation, such as the World Bank, African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and Inter-American Development

have been urging and encouraging their members countries to carry out decentralisation of their economies as a strategy for enhancing public sector efficiency (Amagoh& Amin, 2012). Decentralization no doubt has become the centre piece of national discourse in many developing and transition countries which has been seen as a strategy of fast tracking balanced development of their economies. Decentralization of their economies as part of a broader strategy for enhancing public sector efficiency (Amagoh &Amin, 2012). The dismal performance of the public sector since the first half of the 1980s has brought to the front burner the issue of fiscal federalism which has remained dominant and most contentious in Nigeria's polity (Ewetan, 2013). There is a general consensus in the literature that the Nigerian federation is quite highly centralised due to long years of military rule (Elaigwu, 2007). The current fiscal arrangement promotes indolence, militancy and insecurity, false population figures, corruption, and enriches a parasitic class (Olabanji, 2015).

Tackling inequality is an important task of the public sector in a country where optimum welfare is sought after, through decentralised fiscal federalism and not that of the centralized system where the federal government among the three the tiers of government controls the fiscal resources neglecting the other tiers of government's. Based on the discussion above, in what ways can the distribution or sharing of fiscal resources among the tiers of government reduce economic inequality (gap between the poor and the rich, income equality, wealth disparity, or wealth and income differences) in the country? According to Brain (2019), one consequence of economic inequality is that sharing of country's wealth is held and controlled by a small group of people. Based on authors' view, our expectation is that fiscal federalism will have a significant impact on eliminating the gap which tends to induce income inequalities through the mechanism of equitable redistribution of resources among the three tiers of government.

Education Quality in Nigeria

Education can be defined as the process of preparing young ones for future endeavour through interactions between a teacher and a student or a crop of students. Nigerian government like her counterparts in other continents spend a lot on education as they believe that it is a means for societal transformation. Before the aim of education can be completely achieved, various inputs are required quantitatively and qualitatively such as; teaching and non-teaching staff, equipment, facilities, finance and materials must be supplied in the right quality and quantity for effective management of the school and in order to have products who will be able to transform educational aim into reality. However, the quality of Nigerian education today has become the topic of debate amongst researchers, writers, parents and other stakeholders in the nation as there have been lamentations by Nigerian citizens over the quality of education system being provided. Raji (2005) expressed that education in Nigeria has experienced many crises such like students' demonstrations, brain-drain, industrial actions and others as a result of government's lackadaisical attitude

to make provisions for infrastructure or facilities that are beneficial to the university community. Also, Abdulkareem (2016) clarified that gone were the days when a primary school leavers could impeccably read and write in English and native languages, while the students of nowadays occasionally could read and write fluent English. Furthermore, Fasasi and Ijaiya (2017) expressed that educational system in Nigeria today is facing quality challenges. They stated further that poor academic performance, competency challenge by the graduates of tertiary institutions and poor skills acquisition are occurrences being experienced at all levels of education for the past few years. This has been established and demonstrated at different fora by the so called tertiary institutions' graduates.

Provision of quality education has some indices which a serious government should not handle with levity. For instance, Blessing and Dorothy (2016) stated the following as indices of education quality:

- i) Proper funding
- ii) Effective quality control (to enforce standard)
- iii) Conducive and appropriate teaching and learning environment
- iv) Sufficient staff quarters and classrooms in schools
- v) Adequate and proper equipment and staffing
- vi) Motivation

Nigerian Schools Position on the Indices of Quality Education

- Proper funding: ownership of schools determines who finances education in Nigeria. The federal government is responsible for the funding of all federal schools and has been the major financier of those schools. However, government has not met up with the international standard due to fragile economy and other competing sectors seeking for national cake. This has not made quality education to be given to students (Blessing and Dorothy 2016).
- Effective Quality Control: both the state and the federal governments are saddled with the responsibility of controlling state and federal institutions. They achieve this through the establishment of NUC, NBTE, NCCE, State Ministry of Education and Federal Ministry of Education among others. Though, their responsibilities have been manoeuvred by corruption and this affects quality education in the country (Blessing and Dorothy 2016).
- Conducive and Appropriate Teaching and Learning Environment: most of the classrooms where teaching and learning activities are being done are not conducive for both teachers and students. There are some instances where teachers sit under trees, because there are no offices for them, while some classes are also overcrowded (Blessing and Dorothy 2016).
- Sufficient Staff Quarters and Classrooms in Schools: This has eroded like a morning cloud in Nigerian schools due to bad maintenance culture on the parts of the governments and the occupants. This has contributed significantly to falling standard of education in Nigeria (Blessing and Dorothy 2016).

- Motivation: the teachers of nowadays are not well-motivated by their employees. Some use up to eight years before moving to higher level while salaries at times are not forthcoming. All these indices are fully or partially neglected by the Nigerian governments at all levels and this affects negatively the quality of education being delivered and received by teachers and students respectively (Blessing and Dorothy 2016).

The UNESCO's (2004) framework on the variables of educational quality includes enabling input;(learners' and teachers' characteristics and contexts), process(teaching and learning) and outputs. The learners' characteristics include their readiness, self-motivation; prior knowledge etc. Teaching and learning as an input include the teachers' teaching methods, the class size as well as the teachers' assessment methods and procedures. The outcome as an indicator includes the skills and knowledge acquired by the students while the context includes the resources availability, peer influence, labour market demands among others. The quality of education provided right from the primary school to the tertiary education level has raised great questions which definite answer is yet to be provided. The said declining quality of education has been attributed to be the function of teachers' quality, resources availability, students' motivation, government policy, availability of instructional materials among other factors.

Access to Quality Education in Nigeria: The efforts, achievements and challenges

Access to quality education is a right of every citizen in Nigeria, as enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FGN, 1999). It provides, with respect to the nation's educational objectives that: Government shall through its policy ensure that equal and adequate educational opportunities are provided at all levels (Handsome, 2018). Access to quality education refers to the government policies that ensure that children have equal access to education and are not denied the right to the education required of them for survival. According to Agile (2018), equality in educational opportunity refers to individuals having equal access to education. Ene (2005) states that access to education is making sure that all sections of the society get fair share of any kind of educational opportunities that is available to the society.

Over the years, appreciative efforts have been made in order to ensure equal access to education by Nigerian government. Among such efforts according to Agile (2018) include the establishment of the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) through Decree No 2 of 1978, the Distance Learning, Universal Basic Education, Private universities as well as the establishment of the National Open University all of which are to increase access to quality education. Another area the government tried to ensure equal access to quality education was the introduction of quota system in the admission policy. The policy enhances opportunities for

indigents of educationally disadvantaged states to have access to education. The quota system may have certain shortcomings such as the admission of less-qualified candidates; however, it has helped greatly in the area of education equality and equity. In support of the above, Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009) emphasized that the quota system and catchment area policy is to ensure fairness in the admission policy in the higher institutions as well as unity schools. Contrarily, Akpan and Undie (2007) opposes that using the quota system to guide and regulate access to university education has an unfair effect; the entire system reflects privilege and differentiation. This is an attempt to represent another source of intended denials from educational opportunities for many Nigerian students.

To support this, Oduwaiye (2011) was of the opinion that the fact that educationally disadvantaged states are encouraged through the quota system policy it should not be at the detriment of other states in order to maintain standards.

Government has achieved unquantifiable heights in its efforts to make provision for access to quality education in Nigeria and its efforts will not go unnoticed. Private individuals were given permission to establish tertiary institutions so that candidates are not admitted into public HEIS will have opportunities to attend private ones, provided they have the financial strength to support their programmes. Through this, many private tertiary institutions are available for students. In fact, few of them also give scholarships in certain programmes in order to catch the attention of admission seekers. Moreover, the establishment of nomadic education, adult education, distance education and many sandwich programmes being controlled by different universities, polytechnics and colleges of education have also given citizens, particularly, those who are already gainfully employed to go for further studies without any hindrance to their means of livelihood.

However, despite unflinching efforts of the government to make education available for all and sundry, there have been different challenges ranging from commercialization of programmes by schools, exorbitant private cost, corruption, inadequate supervision, favouritism, examination malpractice, unqualified personnel, finance among others to optimally utilize the opportunities by the citizens.

Conclusion

The purpose of having quality education in a nation is not for only national development, but also to eradicate or minimise poverty among the citizens. Many Nigerians are deprived of quality education due to many factors such as family income, government policy, corruption, cultural heritage, lack of proper guidance and unemployment issue. It is now the responsibility of the government at all levels in Nigeria to formulate a policies which caters for all educational needs of the recipients from basic to secondary school levels where they might have gotten functional education.

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