



Breaking the Mismatch: Government Structure vs. School Participation

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March 2024 / HCD-PB-ICC-007

Key messages

- North-South disparities in school participation persist in Nigeria despite the implementation of two large-scale school expansion programmes.
- Areas with complex pre-colonial government structure are seemingly recording higher school enrolment in Nigeria, while those with heavy investment in Koranic education reports otherwise.
- However, areas with more complex pre-colonial government structure report poorer school enrolment when they have invested more in Koranic education.

- There is evidence of a mismatch between modern economic demands and skills possessed by learners in Nigeria.
- There is the need to develop a school curriculum that integrates both elements of western and Koranic education.

What is the issue?

Nigeria has made significant strides in expanding access to education through large-scale programmes such as UPE and UBE. However, despite these efforts, disparities in school participation persist across different regions of the country. This study aims to shed light on the historical factors that contribute to these disparities, specifically looking at the relationship between pre-colonial centralization and investment in Koranic education on school participation.

One of the key findings of this study is that areas under highly centralized political systems are more likely to participate in large-scale school expansion programmes such as UPE and UBE. This is in line with previous research that has shown a positive relationship between state centralization and development outcomes. However, the study also finds that areas with heavy investment in Koranic education have a negative effect on school enrolment, even when these areas before colonialism had highly centralized political structure.

The findings highlight the mismatch between the demands of modern economic life and the skills possessed by a large section of the population. The contemporary world does not require Koranic education to make either regional or national advancement possible, yet many areas with heavy investment in Koranic education are falling behind in the education race. This calls for well-thought-out policies to address this mismatch and accelerate inclusive economic development.

Why is this issue important?

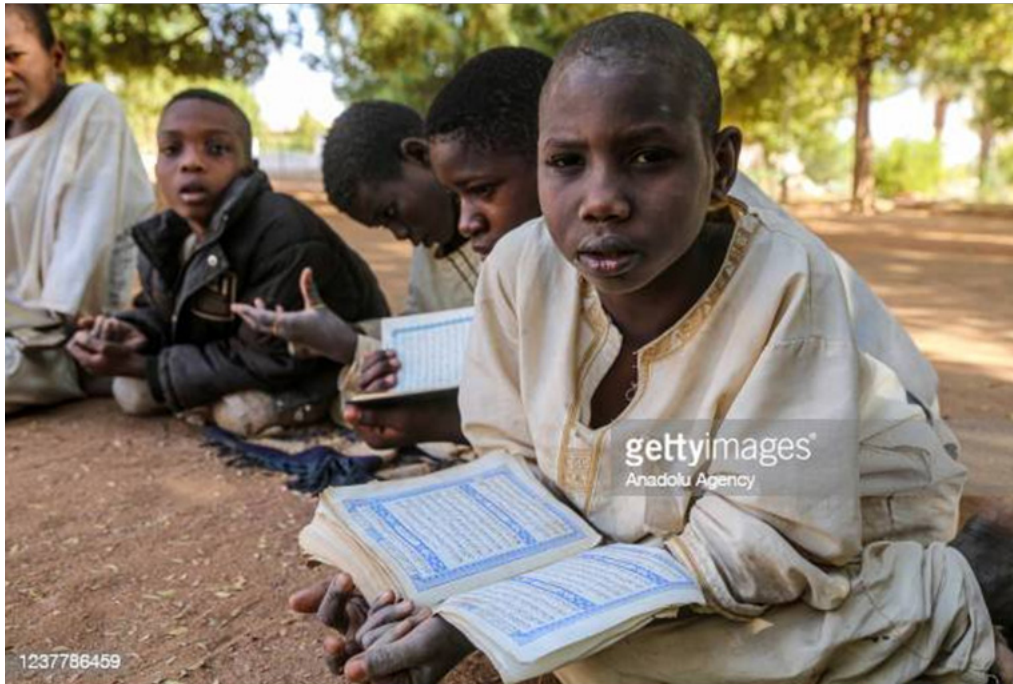
The theoretical and empirical literature has stressed the important role human capital plays in economic development. Formal education could help to reduce poverty, crime, reduce mortality, fertility, improve health, increase labour productivity, social cohesion, earnings, and promote civic consciousness.



Children in Koranic Schools
Source: Google Photos (Getty Images)



Out of school children .
Source: Google Photos (Getty Images)



Out of school children in Koranic school.
Source: Google Photos (Getty Images)

It is for these reasons that private and public sectors have initiated a number of policy initiatives to encourage mass education, including those related to Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5. In Nigeria, the first nationwide large-scale primary school expansion programme was launched in 1976 by the federal government of Nigeria and re-introduced at the onset of the civilian rule in 1999 as Universal Basic Education (UBE). However, data from households and 2006 Census indicate school enrolment is still very low, especially in many areas of Northern Nigeria. For UPE-cohorts, the non-enrolment rate is as high as 93 % in some districts and as low as approximately 3 percent in others. The picture is not much different for 1993 UBE programme. Therefore, it is not surprising that Nigeria still has more than 13 million out of school children. The continued spatial disparity in school enrolment across different regions of the country tends to map into significant socio-economic differences across various parts of the country. This is particularly concerning given that a number of studies have shown that pronounced disparity along regional and ethnic dimensions have serious implications for social cohesion, cooperation and conflicts.

Next steps for the policy-makers

Another important policy option is to address the cultural and religious concerns of regions with low school participation rates and considerable investment in Koranic education. This may involve working with religious and community leaders to promote

the value of formal education. Efforts aimed at inculcating desirable Islamic values into formal western education curriculum could help bring many out of school children in Northern Nigeria into the school orbit.

While addressing the religion, concerns of some regions is an important starting point. The skill mismatch problem must be addressed by fashioning out policies and should focus on promoting skill acquisition and boosting school quality generally.

Overall, this study has important implications for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 10, which focus on quality education and reducing inequalities. By addressing the historical effects of pre-colonial centralization and Koranic education, policies can help break the cycle of low school participation and accelerate inclusive economic development. There is a clear need for well-thought-out policies that are tailored to the unique circumstances of different regions in Nigeria. Failure to address this disparity in schooling access may exacerbate existing state of conflicts, especially along religious and ethnic lines.



Madrasa school system: Western and Koranic education in one place
Source: Google Photos (5729 Madrasa School Premium High Res Photos -Getty Images).

Source cited

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