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STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE: PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABLE BASIC EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined strategic leadership and governance as pathways to sustainable basic education development in Nigeria. The paper is premised on the recognition that the achievement of universal, equitable and quality basic education requires more than the expansion of school infrastructure and enrolment; it requires visionary leadership, effective governance, sustainable financing, evidence-based planning, competent teachers, inclusive policies, digital innovation and meaningful stakeholder participation. The review draws on scholarly literature and recent empirical evidence from Nigerian basic education assessments and policy reports. Evidence from the National Assessment of Learning Achievement in Basic Education (NALABE) 2022 indicates substantial learning gaps among Nigerian learners, while recent evidence also points to persistent challenges of inadequate financing, exclusion, infrastructure deficits and weak learning outcomes. For example, NALABE assessed learners across all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory and found significant differences in learners' attainment of minimum proficiency levels. The paper discusses ten major pathways: strategic policy leadership and implementation; accountability, transparency and participatory governance; evidence-based planning, monitoring and evaluation; sustainable and equitable financing; teacher and school-leader capacity development; inclusive and equitable access; infrastructure and learning environments; digital transformation; school-based instructional leadership; and community and stakeholder partnerships. The paper concludes that sustainable basic education requires an integrated governance framework in which leadership decisions are guided by evidence, resources are equitably allocated, educational personnel are continuously developed and stakeholders participate in accountability processes. It recommends stronger institutional coordination, increased and better-targeted financing, data-driven planning, improved teacher development, inclusive education strategies and strengthened community participation.

Keywords: Strategic Leadership, Governance, Universal Basic Education, Sustainable Education, Educational Development, Nigeria.

Introduction

Basic education is the foundation upon which individual capabilities, national human capital and long-term socioeconomic development are built. In Nigeria, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was established to promote free, compulsory and universal basic education

and to expand access to foundational learning. However, the attainment of universal basic education involves more than placing children in classrooms. It requires the provision of quality teaching, adequate infrastructure, qualified teachers, learning materials, effective school leadership, sustainable financing, inclusive policies and accountable governance.

The contemporary understanding of educational development has consequently shifted from an exclusive concern with access towards an integrated concern with access, equity, quality, learning outcomes, resilience and sustainability. Nigeria has made progress in expanding educational opportunities, but significant challenges remain. UNICEF reports that approximately 10.5 million children aged 5–14 years are still out of school, while attendance and educational participation vary considerably across geographical and socioeconomic groups. These challenges demonstrate that universal basic education remains an unfinished development task.

The importance of strategic leadership arises from the complexity of the Nigerian education system. Basic education involves federal institutions, state governments, State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs), local government structures, schools, teachers, communities, parents, development partners and other stakeholders. Without effective coordination among these actors, policies may be developed without corresponding implementation capacity. Strategic leadership provides the capacity to establish long-term direction, anticipate challenges, mobilise resources, coordinate stakeholders and translate educational policies into measurable outcomes.

Strategic leadership is particularly important because educational challenges are not static. Population growth, poverty, insecurity, technological change, climate-related disruptions, teacher shortages and changing labour-market requirements continuously affect educational planning. Educational leaders therefore need to develop systems that are capable of adapting to changing circumstances while maintaining clear long-term goals. Ireland and Hitt (2005) associate strategic leadership with anticipating, envisioning, maintaining flexibility and working with others to initiate changes that can create a viable future. Similarly, Boal and Hooijberg (2000) emphasise organisational learning, change and managerial wisdom as important dimensions of strategic leadership.

Governance is equally important because leadership operates through institutional structures, rules, accountability mechanisms and decision-making processes. Educational governance determines how responsibilities are distributed, how resources are allocated, how policies are implemented and how education authorities are held accountable. OECD literature emphasises that education governance involves multiple levels and actors and requires effective coordination, capacity, knowledge, stakeholder involvement and accountability (Burns & Köster, 2016; OECD, 2019).

The Nigerian experience demonstrates why governance and strategic leadership need to be considered together. The National Assessment of Learning Achievement in Basic Education (NALABE) 2022, conducted by UBEC in collaboration with UNICEF, assessed 75,067 Primary 3 learners, 71,041 Primary 5 learners and 23,564 Junior Secondary 2 learners across all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. The assessment was designed not only to measure learner performance but also to identify contextual factors that could inform evidence-based education policy and decision-making.

The findings provide strong evidence of the quality challenge confronting Nigerian basic education. Recent UNICEF analysis of NALABE results reports that 49% of Primary 3 learners, 67% of Primary 5 learners and 86% of Junior Secondary 2 learners did not attain minimum proficiency in mathematics in 2022. This suggests that expanding access without simultaneously improving teaching, school leadership, curriculum implementation, assessment and learning support may not produce the desired educational outcomes. The problem is further complicated by inadequate and inefficient financing. UNICEF's 2026 analysis reports that government education expenditure as a share of total government spending declined from 9.3% in 2015 to 3.6% in 2023, below the 15–20% international benchmark cited in the report. Earlier UNICEF analysis similarly identified inadequate transparency, accountability and evidence linking children's needs to budgetary allocations as challenges affecting public financing for children in Nigeria. Thus, sustainable basic education requires not only increased funding but also strategic allocation, effective utilisation and transparent monitoring of available resources.

Teacher capacity is another important component of the problem. UNICEF reports that weak teacher capacity and insufficient standardised professional development have contributed to Nigeria's learning crisis. The implication is that strategic leadership must focus on teachers and school leaders as central agents of educational improvement rather than treating infrastructure and enrolment as sufficient indicators of success. There is also a strong equity dimension. Children in disadvantaged communities may experience multiple barriers involving poverty, geographical isolation, gender, disability, insecurity and inadequate school facilities. UNICEF's evidence shows that educational marginalisation in Nigeria varies considerably according to geography and socioeconomic circumstances. Consequently, a sustainable UBE system requires differentiated strategies that direct greater support towards learners and communities facing the greatest disadvantages.

Despite the establishment of the Universal Basic Education programme and successive educational reforms, Nigeria continues to experience significant challenges in achieving sustainable universal access to quality basic education. Millions of children remain outside school, while many children

who are enrolled do not attain expected foundational learning competencies. The NALABE 2022 findings particularly demonstrate that enrolment alone does not guarantee learning, with substantial proportions of learners failing to attain minimum proficiency in core subjects.

The problem is compounded by inadequate financing, infrastructure deficits, teacher-capacity challenges, unequal access, weak coordination among educational institutions and limitations in accountability and evidence-based decision-making. The decline in the share of government expenditure devoted to education between 2015 and 2023 provides further evidence of the financial constraints confronting the sector. At the same time, population growth and changing social and technological conditions are increasing the demand for educational services. The central problem is not simply the absence of educational policies but the difficulty of translating policies into sustainable, equitable and measurable educational outcomes. This creates a need to examine how strategic leadership and effective governance can provide pathways for addressing Nigeria's basic education challenges. Against this background, the paper examines strategic leadership and governance as pathways to sustainable basic education development in Nigeria, with particular attention to policy implementation, accountability, evidence-based planning, financing, teacher development, inclusion, infrastructure, digital transformation, school leadership and stakeholder participation.

Conceptual Terms

Concept of Universal Basic Education (UBE)

The Nigerian Compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education Act, 2004 defines UBE in legal terms as the responsibility of government to provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior-secondary-school age. The Act covers six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary education ((Universal Basic Education Act, 2004). The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) describes UBE as a Nigerian government educational reform programme providing free, compulsory and continuous nine-year education, consisting of six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary education.

The UBE Act further conceptualises the programme as a federal intervention intended to assist states and local governments in achieving uniform and qualitative basic education throughout Nigeria. Thus, UBE is not merely about school attendance but also about ensuring quality and standardisation in basic education provision (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) From the broader international perspective, universal basic education can be understood in relation to the goal of ensuring that all children have access to foundational education and the knowledge and skills necessary for lifelong learning. UNESCO's Education 2030 framework places universal access, equity and quality at the centre of the international education agenda (UNESCO, 2015). For the purpose of this paper, Universal Basic Education refers

to the government-supported provision of free, compulsory, accessible and quality basic education to all eligible children, particularly through primary and junior secondary education, with the objective of achieving equitable educational opportunities and foundational learning.

Concept of Sustainable Universal Basic Education

The World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainable development as development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Applied to UBE, this means developing an education system that meets today's children's educational needs while preserving the institutional, human and financial capacity required to educate future generations (WCED, 1987). UNESCO explains sustainable education as an approach that integrates sustainable-development principles into education and develops learners' knowledge, skills, values and behaviours for addressing social, economic and environmental challenges (UNESCO, n.d.)

UNESCO's Institute for Statistics defines Education for Sustainable Development as education that empowers learners to make informed decisions and take responsible action concerning environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for both present and future generations (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.). UNESCO's recent Green School framework provides a particularly useful interpretation for sustainable basic education. It describes a sustainable school as one that incorporates sustainability into governance, facilities and operations, teaching and learning, and community partnerships (UNESCO, 2026). Sustainable Universal Basic Education refers to the continuous provision of accessible, equitable, quality and adequately financed basic education through institutional systems, human resources, infrastructure, governance and community partnerships that can meet present educational needs without undermining the capacity of future generations to enjoy similar or improved educational opportunities.

Concept of Strategic Leadership

Strategic leadership around three fundamental capacities: the capacity to learn, the capacity to change and managerial wisdom. This definition emphasises the ability of leaders to understand changing circumstances, adapt organisations and make informed strategic decisions (Boal and Hooijberg 2000). Ireland and Hitt (2005) conceptualise strategic leadership as the ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, think strategically and work with others to initiate changes that can create a viable future. This definition is particularly relevant to sustainable education because it emphasises vision, flexibility, collaboration and future orientation.

Davies and Davies view strategic leadership in education as concerned with establishing the direction of an institution, understanding its present circumstances and thinking beyond immediate day-to-day activities

toward broader and longer-term organisational goals (Davies & Davies, 2010). Strategic leadership in educational institutions in relation to the initiation, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of strategic actions, while considering the institution's past, present and future circumstances and its human, physical and financial resources (Eacott, 2006). Strategic leadership refers to the process through which education leaders establish long-term direction, anticipate challenges, mobilise resources, coordinate stakeholders, implement strategic policies, adapt to changing circumstances and monitor outcomes in order to achieve sustainable educational goals.

Concept of Governance

Education governance as concerning how decision-making occurs in education systems, including the institutions and processes through which responsibilities are allocated, priorities are determined and education policies and programmes are implemented (OECD, 2019). The OECD also conceptualises governance as a process involving the establishment of priorities, provision of coherence, steering and accountability. It emphasises that governance involves multiple actors rather than government acting alone (Burns & Köster, 2016).

Governance as involving the delineation of responsibilities and mechanisms for cooperation among government ministries, local authorities and stakeholders. In education, this means that effective governance depends on coordination among different levels and actors (OECD, 2018) Strategic education governance involves interconnected domains including accountability, capacity, knowledge governance, stakeholder involvement, strategic thinking and a whole-system perspective. This definition is particularly relevant to your topic because it connects governance directly with strategic leadership and system-wide educational improvement (OECD, 2020). Governance refers to the structures, processes, relationships and mechanisms through which educational responsibilities are allocated, decisions are made, resources are managed, policies are implemented, stakeholders participate and educational institutions are held accountable for achieving agreed objectives.

Strategic Leadership and Effective Policy Implementation

Strategic leadership is fundamental to the sustainable development of basic education because educational policies only produce results when leaders possess the capacity to formulate priorities, mobilise resources, coordinate institutions and monitor implementation. In Nigeria, basic education is administered through several levels and institutions, including the Federal Ministry of Education, Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs), local authorities and individual schools. Strategic leadership is therefore required to create coordination among these institutions rather than allowing policies to operate in isolation.

The World Bank's review of Nigeria's basic education system identifies institutional coordination and implementation capacity as important elements of effective education delivery. UBEC has a statutory coordinating role, while state-level institutions are central to implementation. The 2025 UBEC strategic blueprint similarly identifies institutional systems, leadership, coordination, monitoring and evaluation as priorities for improving basic education delivery. Empirically, the need for stronger leadership is demonstrated by the persistence of differences in access and learning outcomes despite decades of educational reforms. The NALABE 2022 assessment was specifically designed to provide evidence for policy and decision-making, indicating that leadership decisions should be increasingly guided by actual learning data rather than policy intentions alone (UBEC & UNICEF, 2025). Strategic leaders at federal, state and school levels should therefore establish clear performance targets, assign responsibilities, strengthen intergovernmental coordination and regularly assess whether policies are producing improvements in enrolment, retention, literacy, numeracy, teacher effectiveness and completion. Sustainable basic education development will depend on moving from policy formulation to policy implementation, monitoring and measurable results.

Strengthening Accountability, Transparency and Participatory Governance

Effective governance is another important pathway to sustainable basic education development. Governance involves the processes through which educational institutions are directed, resources are managed, decisions are made and stakeholders are held accountable. In the Nigerian basic education system, accountability should operate at federal, state, local-government and school levels. The importance of this pathway is reflected in UBEC's current strategic direction, which includes strengthening financial management, transparency, institutional systems, monitoring and evaluation. Its 2025–2030 strategic blueprint explicitly identifies financial transparency, performance management and quality assurance as important components of reform. School-based participation is also important. UBEC's programmes include School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs), which provide a mechanism through which parents, communities and other stakeholders can participate in school governance. In 2024, UBEC reported that SBMC-School Improvement Programme support funds were disbursed to 1,171 schools across the 36 states and the FCT. Furthermore, UBEC's collaboration with development partners has specifically included strengthening school-level management and accountability. Empirically, community participation can improve the relevance and monitoring of school interventions because local stakeholders possess information about school attendance, teacher behaviour, infrastructure conditions and learners' needs that may not be immediately visible to higher-level administrators. Participatory

governance can therefore reduce the distance between educational policy and community realities. For sustainability, educational authorities should publish information on the allocation and utilisation of basic education resources, strengthen school-level accountability mechanisms, empower SBMCs, conduct regular audits and create accessible channels through which parents, teachers and communities can report implementation problems.

Evidence-Based Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

Sustainable basic education development requires decisions based on reliable evidence. Strategic leadership should therefore make educational data central to planning, budgeting, teacher deployment, infrastructure provision and assessment of learning outcomes. Nigeria has made important progress in generating evidence. The NALABE 2022 assessment covered 75,067 Primary 3 learners, 71,041 Primary 5 learners and 23,564 Junior Secondary 2 learners, sampled from all 36 states and the FCT. It assessed mathematics, English studies, basic science and technology, and social studies, while also examining the contexts in which learning takes place (UBEC & UNICEF, 2025). Such nationally representative evidence gives policymakers a basis for identifying weaknesses and targeting interventions. The importance of evidence becomes clearer when learning outcomes are considered. UNICEF's 2026 analysis reports that 49% of Primary 3 learners, 67% of Primary 5 learners and 86% of Junior Secondary 2 learners did not attain minimum proficiency in mathematics in the 2022 assessment. These findings demonstrate that increasing access to school is not sufficient; leaders must also monitor what learners actually learn. Similarly, the World Bank's human-capital expenditure and institutional review identifies financing and governance constraints affecting basic education delivery in Nigeria (Belay et al., 2024). Federal and state education authorities should institutionalise data-driven planning. Education Management Information Systems, school census information, learning assessments, teacher data, enrolment statistics and infrastructure inventories should be integrated into annual planning. Monitoring and evaluation should also go beyond counting projects completed to determining whether interventions improve learning, equity, retention and completion.

Sustainable and Equitable Financing of Basic Education

Adequate, predictable and efficiently managed financing is indispensable to sustainable basic education development. Schools require funding for teachers, infrastructure, instructional materials, technology, school feeding where applicable, maintenance, assessment and learner support. Strategic leadership must therefore ensure that available resources are allocated according to educational needs and that funds are used transparently. Recent evidence demonstrates the seriousness of the financing challenge. UNICEF's 2026 analysis reports that government education expenditure as a

proportion of total government expenditure declined from 9.3% in 2015 to 3.6% in 2023, below the international benchmark of 15–20% cited in the report. The same report links inadequate financing with continuing problems of access and learning outcomes. UBEC's current strategy recognises financing reform as one of its four major strategic pillars. The strategy emphasises improving access to UBEC funds, strengthening financing mechanisms, increasing fund utilisation and improving financial management and expenditure transparency. The issue is therefore not simply how much money is allocated to education but also how effectively, equitably and transparently the money is utilised. Strategic leaders should prioritise disadvantaged communities, rural schools, children with disabilities and areas experiencing teacher and infrastructure shortages. Funding formulas should reflect actual educational needs rather than relying exclusively on uniform allocations. Sustainable financing should also involve complementary partnerships with development organisations, communities and responsible private-sector actors. However, partnerships should complement rather than replace the government's responsibility to provide adequately financed public basic education.

Investment in Teachers, School Leadership and Professional Capacity

Teachers and school leaders are central to converting educational policies and financial investments into actual learning. Strategic leadership must therefore treat teacher development and school leadership capacity as long-term investments rather than occasional interventions. UBEC's 2024 Annual Report documents training and workshops for educators, head teachers, education managers and other field officers as part of efforts to improve basic education quality. It also reports the distribution of instructional materials and assistive technologies to schools. In 2025, UBEC and the Federal Ministry of Education launched School-Based Management Committee–School Improvement Programme and Teacher Professional Development initiatives intended to reach more than 223,000 teachers and school administrators nationwide. The empirical significance of teacher capacity is evident from the NALABE results: when substantial proportions of learners are unable to attain minimum proficiency, teacher quality, instructional practices, curriculum implementation and school leadership become important areas for investigation and intervention (UBEC & UNICEF, 2025). Strategic leadership should therefore establish continuous professional development based on identified classroom needs. Training should cover subject knowledge, learner-centred pedagogy, assessment, inclusive education, digital teaching, classroom management and psychosocial support. School heads should also receive leadership training in instructional supervision, data use, staff motivation, resource management and community engagement. Teacher development should further be linked to professional standards, mentoring, performance support and career progression.

Such an approach is more sustainable than relying on isolated workshops because it creates an institutional culture of continuous improvement.

Strengthening Inclusive and Equitable Access to Basic Education

Strategic leadership should ensure that basic education development reaches all children irrespective of geographical location, gender, disability, socioeconomic background or other circumstances. Sustainable education development cannot be achieved when substantial numbers of children remain excluded from school or experience unequal learning opportunities. In Nigeria, inequities are particularly evident between urban and rural communities and across socioeconomic groups. UNICEF (2024) reports that millions of children in Nigeria remain out of school, with poverty, insecurity, social norms, disability and inadequate school infrastructure among the factors contributing to exclusion. The World Bank (2024) similarly identifies inequitable access and weak human-capital outcomes as major development challenges. These conditions require strategic leaders to move beyond uniform education policies and adopt needs-based planning. Effective governance should therefore identify underserved communities through reliable education data and direct resources towards areas with the greatest deficits. Rural schools may require additional classrooms, teachers, water and sanitation facilities, learning materials and transportation support. Children with disabilities require accessible buildings, assistive technologies and appropriately trained teachers. Empirical evidence from the NALABE assessment further indicates that educational participation does not automatically translate into adequate learning achievement (UBEC & UNICEF, 2025). Strategic leadership must consequently address both access and quality. Sustainable basic education should be measured not only by the number of children enrolled but also by attendance, retention, completion, inclusion and learning outcomes.

Strengthening Educational Infrastructure and the Learning Environment

Adequate infrastructure is another important pathway to sustainable basic education development. Effective strategic leaders should regard classrooms, laboratories, libraries, water facilities, sanitation, electricity, ICT facilities and other learning resources as essential components of educational quality rather than merely physical projects. The World Bank (2024) identifies inadequate educational infrastructure and service-delivery constraints as factors affecting human-capital development in Nigeria. Similarly, UNICEF (2024) has highlighted deficits in learning environments and basic services in many Nigerian schools. Such deficiencies can affect attendance, teacher effectiveness, learner concentration and ultimately educational outcomes. Governance is particularly important because infrastructure projects require appropriate planning, procurement, supervision and maintenance. Poorly planned projects may result in abandoned buildings, inadequate facilities or infrastructure that does not correspond with

actual school needs. Strategic leadership should therefore introduce school infrastructure needs assessments before approving projects. Education authorities should prioritise schools according to enrolment, classroom conditions, population growth, geographical disadvantage and safety requirements. Infrastructure funding should also include maintenance provisions. Furthermore, school construction should incorporate climate resilience, accessibility for learners with disabilities, adequate ventilation, safe water, sanitation and electricity. Sustainable infrastructure planning will help ensure that public investment continues to benefit learners over a long period rather than producing short-term projects without adequate maintenance.

Promoting Digital Transformation and Technology-Supported Education

Digital transformation provides another pathway for improving the efficiency and quality of basic education in Nigeria. Strategic educational leaders can use digital technologies to support teaching, learning, teacher development, educational management, data collection and communication among schools and education authorities. The UNESCO (2023) *Global Education Monitoring Report* emphasises that technology can contribute to education when it is appropriately integrated into pedagogical and institutional systems. However, the report also warns that technology does not automatically improve learning; its effectiveness depends on appropriate infrastructure, teacher capacity, educational content and governance. In Nigeria, the digital divide remains an important concern because many schools, particularly those in rural and disadvantaged communities, experience limited electricity, internet connectivity and access to digital devices. Strategic leadership should therefore avoid introducing technology without addressing these foundational requirements. Digital governance can also strengthen educational administration. School data can be collected electronically, teacher attendance can be monitored, learning materials can be distributed digitally and professional development can be delivered through online platforms. Artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies may additionally support personalised learning, educational assessment and administrative decision-making when used responsibly. For sustainability, government should develop a coordinated digital education framework covering connectivity, electricity, devices, digital content, teacher training, cybersecurity, data protection and maintenance. Technology should complement rather than replace teachers and should be deployed according to clearly identified educational needs.

Strengthening School-Based Leadership and Instructional Supervision

Sustainable basic education requires effective leadership at the school level. While federal and state authorities establish broad policies, school heads and other educational leaders translate those policies into daily practices. Consequently, strategic leadership should strengthen the capacity of head

teachers and principals to manage people, resources, instruction and community relationships. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020) argue that school leadership is an important contributor to school improvement, particularly when leaders focus on teaching and learning, build staff capacity and establish conditions that support effective instruction. This supports the argument that educational leadership should move beyond administrative routines towards instructional leadership. In the Nigerian context, school leaders should regularly monitor lesson preparation, classroom instruction, learner assessment, teacher attendance and learners' progress. However, supervision should not be reduced to fault-finding. It should include mentoring, professional support and constructive feedback. UBEC's teacher professional development and school improvement initiatives also recognise the importance of strengthening school administrators and teachers as part of improving basic education delivery (UBEC, 2024). Such initiatives can be made more sustainable when school-based leadership becomes an institutional responsibility rather than an occasional intervention. Strategic leadership should therefore provide regular training for school heads in instructional supervision, data interpretation, staff motivation, conflict management, financial management, inclusive education and community engagement. School leaders should also receive clearly defined performance indicators linked to school improvement plans.

Strengthening Community, Parent and Stakeholder Partnerships

Community and stakeholder participation constitutes another important pathway to sustainable basic education development. Schools operate within communities, and educational programmes are more likely to be sustained when parents, traditional leaders, civil society organisations, teachers, learners and other stakeholders participate in decision-making and monitoring. The World Bank (2017) identified community participation and school-level accountability as relevant components of improving basic education service delivery in Nigeria. UBEC has also promoted School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) as mechanisms for involving communities in school improvement and governance (UBEC, 2024). Participatory governance can provide several benefits. Parents and community members can help identify local educational needs, monitor infrastructure projects, encourage school attendance and support the protection of school facilities. Community participation can also strengthen accountability because stakeholders have opportunities to ask questions about resources allocated to their schools. Participation should be meaningful rather than symbolic. Strategic leaders should provide stakeholders with relevant information and clearly define their responsibilities. SBMCs and parent associations should receive appropriate orientation in school governance, budgeting, monitoring and advocacy. Partnerships with civil society organisations, development agencies and responsible private-sector

organisations can also mobilise additional technical and financial resources. Nevertheless, such partnerships should operate within transparent regulatory frameworks and should complement rather than substitute the government's responsibility for providing universal basic education.

Suggestions for Improvement

Based on the discussions so far, the following suggestions are made:

1. Strengthen strategic educational leadership: Federal and state education authorities should establish clear long-term basic education targets and align policies, budgets and implementation plans with measurable outcomes in access, equity, learning and completion.
2. Institutionalise evidence-based decision-making: NALABE and other education data should be systematically used to identify learning gaps, target disadvantaged learners and determine where teachers, infrastructure, instructional materials and other resources are most needed. NALABE itself was designed to facilitate evidence-based policy and decision-making.
3. Improve education financing and expenditure accountability: Government should progressively increase education financing while strengthening budget transparency, expenditure tracking, auditing and results-based budgeting so that available resources translate into improved educational outcomes.
4. Strengthen teacher professional development: Continuous professional development should be institutionalised and linked to actual classroom needs, particularly foundational literacy and numeracy, assessment, inclusive pedagogy, digital teaching and classroom management.
5. Strengthen school-based leadership: Head teachers and principals should be trained in instructional leadership, data use, teacher supervision, resource management, community engagement and school improvement planning.
6. Promote equity in resource allocation: Funding and educational interventions should prioritise underserved rural communities, children with disabilities, economically disadvantaged learners and areas affected by insecurity or other barriers to education.
7. Improve educational infrastructure: Government should provide safe, accessible and adequately maintained classrooms, water and sanitation facilities, electricity, libraries, instructional materials and appropriate digital infrastructure.

8. Expand responsible digital education: Digital platforms should be integrated into basic education planning and delivery while addressing electricity, connectivity, device availability, teacher capacity, data protection and the digital divide. Nigeria's Learning Passport demonstrates how digital technology can support continuity of learning, including for learners in remote and emergency settings.
9. Strengthen participatory governance: School-Based Management Committees, parents, communities, teachers, civil society organisations and development partners should be meaningfully involved in school planning, monitoring and accountability.
10. Establish stronger monitoring and evaluation systems: Education authorities should move beyond measuring inputs and projects completed to routinely measuring learning outcomes, attendance, retention, completion, equity and the effectiveness of interventions. This will enable leaders to discontinue ineffective approaches and expand interventions supported by evidence.

Conclusion

Strategic leadership and effective governance are central to the achievement of sustainable basic education development in Nigeria. The review demonstrates that the challenges confronting Nigerian basic education are interconnected and cannot be adequately addressed through isolated interventions. Persistent learning deficits, out-of-school children, inadequate financing, teacher-capacity limitations, infrastructure challenges and educational inequalities require coordinated and long-term responses. Empirical evidence from NALABE demonstrates that a substantial proportion of learners do not attain minimum proficiency in important areas of learning, confirming that the challenge extends beyond access to the quality and effectiveness of education. Similarly, evidence on public financing demonstrates the importance of strengthening both the level and efficiency of education expenditure. The review identifies ten interconnected pathways: strategic policy leadership; accountable and participatory governance; evidence-based planning and monitoring; sustainable financing; teacher and school-leader capacity building; inclusive access; adequate infrastructure; digital transformation; instructional school leadership; and community and stakeholder partnerships. Sustainable UBE therefore requires a shift from an input-oriented approach that primarily measures schools constructed, teachers employed or children enrolled towards an outcome-oriented approach that measures learning, equity, retention, completion and the long-term resilience of the education system. Strategic leaders at federal, state and school levels must create institutional systems capable of learning from evidence, responding to

emerging challenges and sustaining educational improvements over time.

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