

Modern Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities ISSN: 2795-4846 Volume 9 (Oct-2022)

Available online: https://mjssh.academicjournal.io



Fuel Subsidy Removal as an Imperative for Enhancing Sustainable Development in Education in Nigeria

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Abstract:

Objectives: This paper looked at subsidy regime in Nigeria, how it is impacting negatively on the economy and reducing spending on other sectors of the economy like the education sector.

Methods: Content analysis was adopted for the paper. Both secondary and primary data were used in the paper to support points raised. The data were sources from national and international dailies, published, unpublished papers and articles and reference materials.

Finding: The paper discovered that funds spent on subsidy of petroleum in Nigeria can be re-invest in the other sectors of the economy especially education (tertiary education) and it would have multiplier effects on the economy in both short run and long run.

Conclusion: This paper concluded that the investment of some part of subsidy funds on the tertiary education in Nigeria would lead to adequate funding, infrastructural facilities development, adequate staff, quality research output, effective staff development, improvement international ranking, stable academic calendar and reduction in brain-drain problem.

Recommendations: The federal government should stop subsidy payment and invest the funds in the development of education (tertiary education) and other critical sectors.

Keywords: Government, Subsidy Payment, education, Institutions.

Introduction

Subsidy payment in consuming large sum of funds in the Nigerian economy. Subsidy payment has negatively affected the entire Nigerian economy. Research has it that the Federal Government has spent over N3.5tn on petrol subsidies in 2022. **The Finance Minister, Zainab Ahmed.** Akabueze noted that fuel subsidies often had a huge impact on the economy and the lives of the people (Punch, 2022b)."

The implication of subsidy payment on the economy is that **it** is consuming large amount of funds that are supposed to be used for the development of other **sectors** like health, energy, social infrastructure, social programme and education. For instance, **in** 2021, Nigeria's petrol subsidy cost around \$4.5bn, or roughly two per cent of GDP, far exceeding federal government spending on health, education, and social protection while in 2022 amended budget allocates N4tn (almost two per cent of Gross Domestic Product) for the petrol subsidy, higher than the combined budget allocated for education, health, and social protection. (Punch,2022a). The World Bank as quoted by Punch (2022a) submitted that the cost of fuel subsidy in Nigeria has exceeded the government's spending on health, education and social protection for Nigerians.

The Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning, Mrs. Zainab Ahmed described the fuel subsidy as an unplanned deficit, which has hampered the government's ability to invest in human

capital development. The finance minister observed that the government has to cut down on some investments and acquire more debts to fund fuel subsidy. She submitted that subsidy payment is impeding the government's ability to be able to invest in human capital development. N4.5tn is money that we could have invested in health or education, but we are now investing it on consumption, which is very wasteful (Punch, 2022a).

The sustained increment in the subsidy payment in the **midst** of poor revenue generation and neglect in the development of critical infrastructural facilities has made many Nigerian, international organizations and **scholars** to call on the federal government to stop the subsidy payment programme and redirect the funds into other critical sector like health, energy, social programme and education. For instance, The Director General of the Budget Office of Nigeria, Ben Akabueze, submitted **that** the trillions of naira spent on fuel subsidy can be deployed to other creative sectors, particularly education (Punch, 2022b) and Punch, (2022c) quoted Gillis-Harry who suggested to the federal government that the subsidy that is being paid on petrol should be stopped. The money should be recycled into other developmental projects such as health, refineries, etc," he told our correspondent. In-view of **these** submissions, this paper is aimed to discuss some critical areas of education that the subsidy funds can be used to develop in the educational institutions across the country.

Concept of Education

Education is an enlightening experience that illuminates the mind and enables the individual to make informed decisions about himself or herself and to constructively contribute to the development of the society. Therefore, it is the process of training an individual to develop his intellectual and mental potentials so that the person can make mature and useful decisions in various situations he finds himself (Akpan, undated). According to Froebel cited in Peerzada (2016), education is the unfolding of what is already enfolded in the man. This implies that education is a process through which a person is trained to develop his innate potentials so that it can be fully expressed externally. This means that education is the gradual or progressive development of a person's innate powers or potentials. It is development from within the individual until the person becomes conscious of his unique existence and begins to seek his own place in the society (Peerzada, 2016). Education deals with the development of the total man or the whole man. This means that education is an act that trains man in the cognitive (knowledge), affective (feelings, attitude, behavior) and psychomotor domains. Education deals with the all-round development of the person. It therefore, develops an individual into a well-educated, cultured, disciplined, employable and productive person. Education leads, guides and directs the learner to the acquisition of desirable knowledge, attitude, and healthy behavior (Akpan, 2000).

Investment in the educational sector is very critical for the social, economic and technological development of the Country. Akpan, (undated) submitted that education is the key that opens the doors for development, modernization, civilization and industrialization of any nation. It is the means, through which a nation can harness her numerous resources, develop her manpower and improve the quality of the life of her citizens. In any country of the world, education is the backbone of scientific and technological development. It enhances self-reliance for an individual and the nation. A nation that is self-reliant does not depend on foreign goods for survival and self-reliant people do not depend on government for the provision of employment. The individual can gainfully employ himself/herself and be able to attend to his/her critical needs. In this way education reduces the level of poverty in a nation. Thus, quality functional education contributes to national development in this direction. Education liberates the people from ignorance and promotes socio-economic and political development of a nation. It is on the basis of this that Nigeria adopts education as an instrument par-excellence for national development.

Odigwe & Joseph (2019) observed that investment in education is as important as the plan for nation-building. It has the capacity to boost the human capital assets of individuals and fosters economic advancement for increased welfare and livelihood. Using computing terms, the importance of education in the economy can be likened to a computer motherboard, which houses all other

components within the system unit, as well as peripheral devices used in controlling the entire computer system. In the same manner, education is the hub which connects all other sectors, serves as the processing or coordinating unit of the economy, a veritable tool for expanding man's knowledge, and a means for enhancing rapid economic productivity.

Education also contributes immensely to technological development both in terms of the acquisition, adaptation, and capital widening and deepening (Odigwe & Joseph 2019; Omotor, 2017). An educated man is more efficient with a high degree of productive capacity and minimal waste. The significance of education can also be perceived in the sociopolitical stability of a nation. The attendant effect of this is overall economic growth and development (Omotor, 2017). It follows from these assertions that there is a clear difference between an educated man and another who is not educated in terms of socioeconomic, political, religious, and technological contributions to national development. Odigwe & Joseph (2019) and Offem, Aniah, Agunwa, and Owan (2017), concluded that the quality of human resources available in any nation is dependent on their skills, creative abilities, training, and education. If the human resource of a country is well skilled and trained then the output would also be of high quality. On the other hand, a shortage of skilled labor hampers the growth of any economy, whereas the surplus of labor is of lesser significance to economic growth. Human resources of a country should be adequate in number with required skills and abilities so that economic growth can be achieved. The educated population is a major determinant of economic growth (Offem et al., 2017). This shows that human skills cannot be developed without education (whether formal or informal). The quality of education offered in Nigeria today is not without myriad of problems. It is very disheartening to say that, education in Nigeria is at the taproot level vis-à-vis developed economies of the world who are operating at leaves and branches level. One major issue bedeviling the effective implementation of educational policies and consequently, national development in Nigeria is inadequate funding (Odigwe & Joseph 2019; Ogunode, Chijindu, & Jegede, 2022; Ogunode, Johnson, & Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022).

Concept of Subsidy

Fuel subsidy means that a fraction of the price that consumers are supposed to pay to enjoy the use of petroleum products is paid by government so as to ease the price burden (Onveizugbe & Onwuka 2012). A subsidy as defined by OCED in a study is basically government action that decreases the consumption. Energy subsidies and specifically fuel subsidies, which are the subject of this review, have a long history and have been applied in different forms with differing outcomes internationally. Two major classes of subsidies exist; production subsidies mainly a feature of developed economics and consumer subsidies, which are found in developing countries. The justifications for introduction or removal of subsidies vary markedly. In developed economies, environmental issues, international trade and maintaining competitiveness are the main drivers of policy. Whereas welfare, poverty alleviation and election cycle politics largely underpin the reasons for which subsidies are introduced in developing countries. A new factor in the current mix of policy drivers is the renewed emphasis on governance reform championed by the Breton Woods Institutions (Centre for Public Policy Alternatives, 2012). A subsidy by definition is any measure that keeps prices consumers pay for good or product below market levels for consumers or for producers above market. Subsidies take different forms. Some subsidies have a direct impact on price. These include grants, tax reductions and exemptions or price controls. Others affect prices or costs indirectly such as regulations that skew the market in favor of a particular fuel, government sponsored technology or research and development(R and D) (Adebiyi, 2011).

Nigeria's fuel subsidy continues to crowd out other development spending. By comparison, Nigeria's total allocation for education is about \$2.2 billion and it is not much higher for health care. Infant mortality in Nigeria remains unacceptably high at 90.4 per 1,000 live births. In 2004, it was estimated that only 15 percent of the country's roads were paved. The \$8 billion from the fuel subsidy could help to address some of these issues. The Federal Government had previously disclosed through the Minister of Information, that it spent N10.413 trillion on fuel subsidies between 2006 and 2019 (Vanguard, 2022b).

Usage of Subsidy Funds on Education for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The part of subsidy funds can be used to address the various problems facing the educational sector namely; funding of education, employment of professional teachers, infrastructural facilities development, capacity building, provision of learning material and ICT facilities, reduce out of school children and solved admission crisis problem in higher institutions and problem of brain-drain.

Funding of Education

The educational sector in Nigeria is poorly funded and this is affecting the performance of the sector. The budgetary allocation to the education is poor and below the UNESCO 26% recommendation for education. A review of the performance of Federal government of Nigeria in terms of education funding shows that Nigeria spends below 10 percent of the total government expenditure on education. Study by Blueprint (2021) indicated that in 2011, education got N393.8 billion or 9.3 per cent of the total budget; N468.3 billion or 9.86 per cent in 2012; N499.7 billion or 10.1 per cent in 2013; N494.7 billion or 10.5 per cent in 2014; N484.2 billion or 10.7 per cent in 2015; N369.6 billion or 7.9 per cent of the total budget in 2016; N550. 5 billion in 2017 representing 7.4 per cent of the total budget; N605.8 billion in 2018 or 7.04 per cent; N620.5 billion or 7.05 per cent in 2019 and N671.07 billion or 6.7 per cent in 2020 and N742.5 billion or 5.68 per cent of the total budget in 2021 (Blueprint 2021). 2022 got the sum of 7% of the total budget. There are many factors responsible for the poor funding of education in Nigeria. Ogunode (2020) identified lack of political will to implement UNESCO 26% for education, poor internally generated revenue, corruption and insecurity problems and subsidy payment as factors responsible for the poor funding. The problem of shortage of funds in the Nigerian educational sector can be solved by using some fraction of subsidy funds in the educational sector. This position is supported by Former President of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mr Goodie Ibru who was quoted by Vanguard (2022a) and submitted that subsidy money should be used in education and health. Musa (2019) observes that the application of subsidy money in the education sector would yield more impact to the general **public** than the few individual benefiting the funds.

Employment of Professional Teachers

The problem of shortage of professional teachers at all level of educational institutions in Nigeria can be solved by using some part of subsidy money in the sector. Shortage of teachers have been identified in the Nigerian educational institutions by different scholars. For instance, the 2018 National audit report on Universal basic education programme in Nigeria revealed that there was a deficit of 135,319 teachers at the Early Childhood Care Development Education, 139,772 deficits in primary schools and 2,446 shortages in Junior Secondary Schools across the nation. 27756 teachers at the early child education programme, 3564 teachers at the basic schools (Independent, 2019). Shortage of professional teachers was identified at the public secondary schools in Nigeria by Ogunode (2021) and Peter, 2016). Also, the National Universities Commission (2021) submitted that universities should be isolated from the Federal Government's circular on new employment owing to the shortage of lecturers. The commission noted that 100,000 academic staff members were attending to 2.1 million students in Nigerian universities. The NUC disclosed that the commission was supervising over 200 universities consisting of 48 belonging to the Federal Government; 54 states and 99 private institutions. NUC observed that —The entire system has about 2.1 million students and staff strength of about 170,000 non-teaching and 100,000 academic staff. —Some of the problems facing the system include increased running cost, meagre budgetary allocations, issue of power shortages and shortages of manpower. The above problem of professional teachers' shortage in almost all forms of education can be tackled with the deployment of some subsidy funds into the educational sector. This position is supported by Ifeanyi Okowa, the governor of Delta State, who recommended the redirection of fuel subsidy funds to healthcare, education (Guardian, 2021a) while World-bank (2022) advised the government to stop the subsidy payment and redirect the funds in other sector that are more significant to the general public such as education and health. Musa (2019) concludes that the stoppage of subsidy payment and the reinvestment of such funds in other **sectors** of the economy would help to solve many challenges in the country especially in the educational sector.

Infrastructural Facilities Development

The use of subsidy fund in the Nigerian educational sector would help to fix the problems of infrastructural deficit. According to Ogunode (2020c) infrastructural facilities refers to facilities aiding delivery of academic and non-academic services in educational institutions. Infrastructural facilities include; libraries, laboratories, halls, offices, administrative blocks, hostels, road facilities, water, electricity, internet, etc. The availability of the infrastructural facilities in adequate quantities will support effective administration of educational institutions and the inadequacies will prevent effective administration of educational institutions. As important as facilities to the development and sustainability of the educational institutions in Nigeria, it is unfortunate to realize that many public educational institutions in the country do not have adequate facilities. Shortage of infrastructural facilities was mentioned by Ogunode (2020a) in the Basic schools while Ogunode (2021b) listed inadequate infrastructural facilities as one of the major problems hindering the development of secondary schools in Nigeria. At the tertiary institutions, Ogunode (2020c) submitted that many public universities in Nigeria do not have adequate lecture halls, laboratories and offices for both students and academic staff. Many academic and non-academic staff do not have offices and peradventure they have one is been shared by five to six lecturers. The offices of the deans and heads of departments are not something to write home about. The Students do not have adequate lecture halls and hostel accommodations (Ogunode & Abubakar, 2020). Shortage of infrastructural facilities in all the forms of education can also be fixed with the subsidy funds (**Abdul**, 2019). The **proper** utilization of subsidy money in the educational sector would help to reposition the sector to be more productive and effective. Musa (2019) suggested to the federal government to remove the subsidy on petrol product and invest it on education to help tackle the problem of infrastructural deficits in all the educational institutions across the country. Thisday (2022) quoted Marco Hernandez, World Bank Lead Economist for Nigeria suggested redirecting fiscal resources to investments in infrastructure, education, and health services; increasing "pro-health taxes", and improving tax compliance. Punch (2022g) quoted Professor of Energy Economics at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Uche Nwogwugwu, stressed the need to invest the subsidy funds in capital projects rather than on consumption in order to take many Nigerians off the poverty class.

Capacity Building

Capacity building is very critical to the development of education. It is one of the **programmes** contributing to the development of education. The capacity building programme in the educational sector in Nigeria is not effective due to many challenges such as poor funding at all level of educational institutions. For instance, at the Basic education, Ogunode, Adah, **Audu & Pajo** (2021) and Osiesi (2020) identified issue of poor funding while at the second school level, Ogunode (2020b) **disclosed that** the underfunding of capacity building programme is responsible for the ineffectiveness of the programme. At the higher education, **Ogunode, & Oluseun, (2020) concluded** that poor funding of higher education is **affecting the development of capacity building programme**. Subsidy funds can be very useful in this area of educational system. The subsidy funds can be used to improve the capacity building programme of the teachers in the educational institutions. This suggestion is supported by Ben Akabueze, director-general of the Budget Office, who suggested that the trillions of dollars spent on fuel subsidies in Nigeria could be used in education and support educational programme like human capital development (Businessday,2022).

Provision of Learning Material and ICT Facilities

Learning materials are very important in the attainment of educational objectives. Learning materials is key to leaners' development. The learners or students' **need** these materials to support their learning programme in the schools. Learning materials include textbooks, books, calculators, mathematical set, drawing board etc. World-bank (2017) reported that many basic **schools**' children in Nigeria do not have adequate learning materials to support their learning programme. The problem of shortage of

learning materials in Nigerian schools has been associated to the poor funding of the sector (Ogunode, 2020). Subsidy funds can be very useful in this area. The subsidy money can be used to procure and distribute these materials to students in the various educational institutions in Nigeria. Also, Information and Communication Technology (s) have been described as educational tools that both the school administrators, teachers and students **need** to realize the objectives of education. ICT according to FRN (2019) and National Policy on ICT (2019) is the art and applied sciences that deal with data and information. It encompasses all (equipment including computational machinery computers, hardware, software, firmware etc., tools, methods, practices, processes, procedures, concepts, principles and the sciences) that come into play in the conduct of the information activities: acquisition, representation, processing, presentation, security, interchange, transfer, management, organization, storage and retrieval of data and information. The Information and Communication Technology facilities according Johnson, (2017) and Abubakar, (2018) include the computer system, office systems, consumer electronics, network infrastructures that utilizes GSM phones, internet, Smart Board, Web cam, Cam coders, CD RW, CD ROM, visual library, multimedia and projector among others while Abubakar (2016) stated that Information Communication Technology (ICT) consisted of audio sets, TV, PCs, projectors, Optical fiber cables, Telephones, Mobile devices, Handhold devices, Fax machines, Internet, Intranet, CD-ROM, PPT slides, electronic board, digital multi-media, video/VCD, **DVD machines**, etc. **Ogunode**, **Ahmed**, & **Ojo** (2021); Ogunode, Babayo, Jegede & Abubakar (2020); Ogunode, Garba, Ajape (2021) ascertained that many educational institutions in Nigeria do not have adequate ICT facilities as a result of poor funding. This problem of poor funding can be addressed by using some part of subsidy funds in the educational sector to address the problems of ICT facilities deficit. Thisday (2022) quoted Marco Hernandez, World Bank Lead Economist for Nigeria who suggested the redirecting fiscal resources to investments in infrastructure, education, and health services.

Out of School Children and Admission Crisis

Subsidy funds can be deployed to tackle the problem of out of school children and admission crisis into the various higher institutions in Nigeria. Ojelade, Aiyedun & Aregebesola, (2019) viewed that out of school children are aged school children that are supposed to be in schools but are not in schools due to parental failure and governmental failure to provide accessible quality education for them. Out of school children are young children in the age group of 1 to 12 that are **roaming the** street without access to a functional educational system. Out of school children are the children that the government and the parents have failed to provide quality basic education (Ogunode, & Adanna, **2022**). UNICEF (2022) observed that about 18.5 million children, the majority of whom are girls, do not have access to education in Nigeria, a figure up sharply compared with 2021, the U.N children's fund says about estimated 10.5 million children were out of school in Africa's most populous country. "Currently in Nigeria, there are 18.5 million out-of-school children, 60% of whom are girls," (Voannews 2022; UNICEF 2022). Poor funding of education in Nigeria was identified by Ogunode, & Adanna, (2022) as one of the major reasons for the large out of school children. The problem of out of school children can be addressed using some part of subsidy funds. This position is supported by Punch (2022g) that observes that if the Federal Government decides to suspend the petrol subsidy and plough the money into the education system, each of the 8.7 million out-of-school children can have a budget of N459, 770, which should be enough for each child to stay in school for at least two years.

Also, the subsidy money can be used to solve the problem of admission crisis in the higher institutions especially the public universities. Yearly millions of **Nigerian youths** are **denied** tertiary education admission due to shortage of higher institutions and lack of expansion plans (Ogunode, **Akinjobi**, & **Olatunde-**Aiyedun, 2022). Ogunode, **Akinjobi** & **Abubakar** (2022) opined that many Nigerians are faced with admission problems in Nigeria. Every year millions of Nigerians are not admitted into the higher institutions because of limited space. The Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB) is a Nigerian entrance examination board for tertiary institutions. The board conducts an examination that determines if a student will be admitted into a university, the result from the examination is valid for only a year. The grade range is between 0-400. The general pass mark for most universities is

200/400. Students have to meet the pass mark to continue the admission process. Students with scores less than the pass mark are automatically disqualified from the admission process for most universities (Stearsbusiness, 2021). The challenges of admission crisis in Nigeria are linked to the problem of underfunding of higher institutions (Ogunode, Akinjobi, & Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022). The problem of admission in the various higher institutions can be solved by using some part of subsidy money. This position is supported by Professor of Energy Economics at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Uche Nwogwugwu, who condemned the N4tn petrol subsidy, saying that it was a tax on consumption. According to him, the amount was enough to subsidise the cost of local refining, noting that channeling Nigeria's scarce resources to subsidy when issues of funding education, infrastructure and security were on the front burner was a waste of money (Punch (2022g).

Problem of Brain-drain

Nigerian teachers are among the world most poor motivated. Every day professional teachers are leaving the educational sector to other sector of the economy where **personnels** are well motivated. At the Basic schools, Ogunode, (2020a); Jegede, Ajape (2021); Ogunode, & Abashi, (2020) report of many teachers leaving because of poor working environment while at the secondary schools, Ogunode, (2020b) and Ige (2012) that many teachers are migrating to other sectors like the Banking and oil and gas. The higher education is the worst halted, Ogunode (2020c) submitted that many lecturers and researchers are leaving public universities in Nigeria to other parts of African countries and Europe for a better job offer and conducive working environment. Ogunode & Adamu (2020) submitted that poor motivation is another fundamental reason for shortage of academic staff in the Nigerian public higher institutions. Academic staff working in the Nigerian higher institutions is poorly motivated. Their salaries are not good like other professionals, their working condition and welfare packages are poor and their salaries are not paid until months elapsed. Many qualified trained teachers will not want to work in the educational institutions in Nigeria because of the level of motivation they are getting from the government. Stakeholders attributed skill and personnel shortage to a number of factors, among which are poor salaries and low social prestige accorded teachers especially at the basic level of the education sector. Respondents expressed the view that teaching is generally viewed as the last resort of jobseekers because of the harsh economic realities and poor prestige accorded teachers in the society. Most newly recruited teachers would not mind leaving the profession if and when more attractive jobs become available in the public and private sectors (NEEDS, 2014). The problem of brain-drain can be addressed in the Nigerian educational system through the use of some part of subsidy fund in the educational system in Nigeria. The investment of subsidy funds in the educational sector and other sector would help in addressing many problems such as poor salaries, human capital development and facilities deficit. Punch (2022b) quoted Akabueze who asserted that the subsidy funds could be used to end the Academic Staff Union of Universities strike and increase the pay of government staff. "The truth is that public servants need to be paid far better than they are now. It's like the ongoing issue regarding ASUU and the pay for lecturers. I haven't come across anyone in government who thinks that lecturers are adequately paid or who thinks lecturers should not be paid significantly more. The crux of the ASUU matter is the ability to pay. It is why this matter has dragged on because the government has refused to commit to a number that it does not have the ability to pay," he said.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper looked at areas where subsidy funds can be used to develop in the educational institutions. The paper identified funding of education, employment of professional teachers, infrastructural facilities development, capacity **building**, **provision** of learning material and ICT **facilities**, **out** of school children **and admission** crisis problem in higher institutions and problem of brain-drain as areas where the subsidy funds can be used in the educational institutions to fix some of the problems. The paper also recommends that;

Modern Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities | ISSN 2795-4846 | Volume 9 | Oct-2022

- 1. The federal, state and local government should **call** media resources to educate **Nigerians** on the importance of fuel subsidy removal. This will help to reduce opposition from labour unions and ordinary Nigerians.
- 2. The federal government should come up with investment plans on the subsidy funds. Percentage that will go to each sector of the economy and when it will be released
- 3. A committee should be **set** by the government where individual interest groups will nominate their representation across the thirty **six** states including Federal capital Territory, Abuja. This is to prevent corruption in the management of the funds
- 4. The percentage allocated to public universities should be handled by stakeholders in the universities sector.
- 5. The federal government should appoint some professionals who should do comparative studies of how it worked for the developed countries that made them maintain good economy and standard education.
- 6. Based on the recommendation 3 above, law should be made as deterrence for those who might be found corrupt, and ready to be implemented and executed by neutral enforcement agency.

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