

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF POOR ACCESSIBILITY TO COUNTERPART FUNDING AND FEDERAL GRANTS. FOR BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This position paper examines strategies for addressing the problem of poor accessibility to counterpart funding and federal grants for basic education in Nigeria. Anchored on Stakeholder Theory, the study adopts a qualitative, analytical, and normative research design, relying on an extensive review of policy documents, institutional reports, academic literature, and international best practices in education financing and governance. The paper analyses the structural, legal, administrative, and informational factors responsible for low grant accessibility and highlights the implications of these challenges for educational equity, school effectiveness, and national development. Findings from the analysis indicate that improving access to federal intervention grants requires a multi-dimensional strategy that integrates legal and policy reforms, strengthened transparency and accountability mechanisms, enhanced institutional and administrative capacity, improved communication and awareness, active stakeholder engagement, and the deployment of digital platforms for grant management. The paper argues that reviewing and strengthening the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, simplifying grant procedures, building the capacity of school administrators, and fostering community participation are critical to ensuring that intervention funds reach intended beneficiaries and are effectively utilized. The study concludes that equitable and timely access to counterpart funding and federal grants is central to strengthening Nigeria's basic education system and achieving national education goals. It therefore provides policy-oriented recommendations aimed at promoting inclusive access, efficient utilization, and sustainable management of basic education funding in Nigeria.

Keywords: Basic education, Federal intervention grants, Counterpart funding, UBE Act, Education financing, Stakeholder engagement, Nigeria

1.0 Introduction

Access to quality basic education is a critical foundation for national development, social equity, and economic growth. In Nigeria, the Federal Government provides intervention grants aimed at supporting public primary and junior secondary schools, improving infrastructure, supplying teaching and learning materials, and enhancing overall educational outcomes. Despite these interventions, many schools, particularly in rural and underserved communities, face significant challenges in accessing these grants. Factors such as bureaucratic delays, poor dissemination of information, lack of awareness among school administrators, corruption, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms have limited the effective utilization of government support.

The problem of poor access to federal intervention grants undermines the objectives of the Basic Education Programme, exacerbates educational inequalities, and hinders the achievement of universal basic education targets. State government that fail to benefit from these grants often struggle with inadequate facilities, insufficient instructional materials, and poor teacher motivation, which directly affect the quality of education delivered to children.

Addressing these challenges requires deliberate and targeted strategies to improve grant distribution, enhance transparency, increase awareness, and ensure accountability in the management of federal education resources. By identifying effective strategies, policymakers, educational authorities, and stakeholders can ensure that intervention grants reach the intended beneficiaries, thereby strengthening the capacity of basic schools, improving educational outcomes, and contributing to national development.

2.1 Literature Review

2.2 Concept of Basic Education

The Universal Declaration of Human Right in article 13 (1) of the convention stated that “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality”. It also added in Article 13(2) that primary education must be universal, ensure that basic learning needs of all children are satisfied and take into account the culture, needs and opportunities of the community. The above stated policies and conventions have serious implication for the financing and management of educational programmes and provision of funds for the realization of the objectives of basic education (Fabuni, 2012).

Against this background, all over the world, primary education has been regarded as the most important as well as the most patronized by people. This perhaps may be due to the fact that it is the foundation of the whole educational pursuit, which is expected to provide literacy and

enlightenment to the citizens. The importance of primary education can therefore be seen in the sense that all beneficiaries of the other levels of education by necessity have to pass through this level. What this means is that primary education defined as the education given in an institution for children aged 6-11 years plus constitute the bedrock upon which the entire education system is built. Indeed, the success and failure of the entire education systems are determined by it and it is at the heart of the concept of basic education which is also defined as universalization of access of education (Okebukola, 2017).

2.3 Concept of UBE ACT on Federal Government Intervention Grants

2.4 Current Situation of UBE Accessibility of Intervention Grant

The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) has raised the alarm over the persistent failure of many states across Nigeria to either access or utilise billions of naira allocated for improving foundational education across the country.

Despite steady federal allocations, as of July 2025, an estimated ₦250 billion remains unutilised by the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The amount represents grants already disbursed by UBEC but left dormant in state coffers due to what officials describe as “systemic inefficiencies and slow implementation.” “As of today, over ₦250 billion is still lying dormant in the coffers of the 36 SUBEBs and the FCT UBEB due to slow utilisation and systemic inefficiencies,” said UBEC Executive Secretary, Dr Aisha Garba, during an official event on July 21, 2025.

This follows a December 2024 report from the Commission which revealed that ₦263.04 billion in matching grants had gone unaccessed by 34 states and the FCT, largely due to failure to meet the basic requirements for accessing funds.

Under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004, states must provide 50 percent counterpart funding and submit a UBEC approved action plan before accessing quarterly federal grants. However, many states have failed to comply, either by neglecting to submit the required plans or failing to allocate their counterpart funding.

In late 2024, human rights lawyer Femi Falana (SAN) sued the Federal Government and 34 state governments for failing to access over ₦135 billion in UBEC matching grants, arguing that the failure violates the constitutional right of children to free and compulsory education. Delays in accessing and utilising funds are not just administrative issues, Data from UBEC reveals a consistent pattern of noncompliance and fund abandonment by several states:

In 2020, all states and the FCT accessed matching grants except Abia and Ogun. In 2021, Abia, Imo, and Ogun again failed to access the funds. In 2022, seven states — Abia, Adamawa, Anambra, Ebonyi, Imo, Ogun, and Oyo — did not access their grants. In 2023, only 12 states accessed their grants, totalling ₦15.47 billion out of ₦51.64 billion appropriated. These included

Borno, Cross River, Delta, Enugu, Jigawa, Nasarawa, Ondo, Sokoto, Taraba, and Zamfara. As of July 2025, only Kaduna and Katsina had accessed their first and second quarter grants for 2024. Thirty four states and the FCT had not accessed any portion of the ₦263.04 billion allocation for that year.

2.5 Theoretical Framework: Stakeholder Theory

The Stakeholder Theory, popularized by R. Edward Freeman in 1984, posits that organizations must consider the interests, needs, and influence of all relevant stakeholders in decision-making and policy implementation. Stakeholders are individuals or groups that can affect or are affected by an organization's actions, policies, or objectives. In the context of basic education, stakeholders include the federal and state governments, school administrators, teachers, students, parents, local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international development agencies.

The theory emphasizes engagement, accountability, and mutual benefit, arguing that organizational success depends on addressing the legitimate interests of all stakeholders rather than prioritizing a single group. It is widely applied in governance, public policy, corporate management, and educational development, especially in contexts requiring participatory decision-making and equitable resource allocation.

Application of Stakeholder Theory to Federal Intervention Grants

Applying Stakeholder Theory to the problem of poor access to federal intervention grants highlights the need for inclusive policies, participatory processes, and accountability mechanisms

1. Inclusive Policy Design: Policies governing grant distribution should consider the perspectives and needs of all stakeholders—federal and state authorities, local education boards, teachers, parents, and community leaders—to ensure equitable access and relevance.
2. Stakeholder Engagement: Active participation of school administrators, parents, and community representatives in identifying needs, applying for grants, and monitoring fund utilization ensures that resources reach intended beneficiaries and are used effectively.
3. Accountability and Transparency: By involving multiple stakeholders in oversight, schools and government agencies can minimize corruption and fund mismanagement, enhancing trust and efficiency in grant administration.
4. Collaborative Problem-Solving: Stakeholder Theory encourages collaboration between government bodies, NGOs, and private partners to address logistical, informational, or infrastructural barriers to grant access.

In essence, the theory provides a conceptual framework to understand why access to federal grants fails when stakeholders are excluded, uninformed, or disengaged and how systematic engagement can improve equitable distribution and effective utilization.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopts a position paper methodology to examine strategies for improving access to federal intervention grants for basic education in Nigeria, with a focus on stakeholder engagement and systemic reforms. The position paper approach is suitable because the study aims to provide an evidence-based argument, policy recommendations, and strategic insights, rather than generating primary quantitative data.

Research Design

The research design is qualitative, analytical, and normative, emphasizing conceptual evaluation, critical analysis, and policy discussion. It involves a thorough review of secondary sources, identification of challenges, and the development of reasoned arguments and recommendations for improving grant access.

Sources of Evidence

The study relies on the following secondary data sources:

- i. Policy and Legal Documents: Analysis of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, federal grant guidelines, UBEC operational manuals, and government circulars regarding grant disbursement.
- ii. Academic Literature: Peer-reviewed articles, books, and conference proceedings on public resource management, education financing, and stakeholder engagement in the education sector.
- iii. Institutional Reports: Reports from the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), federal and state education ministries, and NGOs on the administration and utilization of intervention grants.
- iv. International Best Practices: Case studies from countries with effective education grant systems, illustrating successful strategies for inclusive access, transparency, and accountability.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis involves:

- Critical Review of Existing Challenges: Identifying systemic barriers to grant access, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of awareness, and corruption.
- Stakeholder Mapping Applying Stakeholder Theory to identify key actors in the grant process and their influence, interests, and responsibilities.
- Policy and Strategy Assessment: Evaluating existing policies and programs in light of stakeholder engagement principles, transparency, and inclusivity.

- Recommendation Formulation: Developing actionable strategies that promote equitable access, accountability, and sustainability based on theoretical insights and empirical evidence.

4.0 Result and Discussion on Strategies to Address the Problem of Poor Access to Federal Government Intervention Grants for Basic Education in Nigeria

To address these issues, a combination of strategic, policy-driven, and institutional measures is required.

Review and Strengthening of the UBE Act

A critical strategy is the review of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act to ensure that it effectively facilitates equitable access to federal intervention grants. The current UBE Act, while providing a legal framework for funding and administration of basic education, contains provisions that may be outdated or ambiguous regarding grant disbursement, accountability, and monitoring. Reviewing the Act would involve updating the eligibility criteria for schools, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of federal, state, and local education authorities, and introducing stronger provisions for transparency and sanctioning mismanagement. Legal reforms would ensure that the UBE framework aligns with contemporary educational needs, promotes inclusivity, and strengthens mechanisms for timely and efficient grant access.

Strengthening Policy Frameworks and Guidelines

Beyond legal reforms, clear operational guidelines are necessary to ensure the smooth application and utilization of intervention grants. Policies should define eligibility criteria, establish standardized application procedures, and set timelines for review, approval, and disbursement. Clear guidelines reduce bureaucratic delays, minimize ambiguity, and facilitate accountability at all levels of the education system (Musa & Ogunode, 2021). By standardizing procedures, schools across Nigeria urban and rural alike can access federal support without unnecessary obstacles, ensuring that intervention grants achieve their intended impact (Ogunode, & Josiah, 2021; Ogunode, Audu, & Musa, 2023).

Enhancing Transparency and Accountability Mechanisms

Corruption and mismanagement remain major impediments to equitable grant access. To address this, the federal government should implement digital financial management systems, enabling schools to apply for grants, track disbursements, and report expenditures online. Independent audits, combined with publicly accessible reports, can ensure accountability and reduce fund diversion. Involving local communities, parent-teacher associations, and civil society organizations in monitoring grant use strengthens transparency and ensures that resources directly benefit students and school (Ogundele, 2015; Oluwatobi 2025).

Capacity Building for School Administrators and Local Authorities

Many school administrators and local education officials lack the skills required to navigate grant processes effectively. Targeted capacity-building programs should train head teachers, bursars, and local education officers in grant application, financial management, reporting, and compliance procedures. Regular workshops, seminars, and digital tutorials can equip staff with the skills to optimize the use of intervention grants, improving school operations, and fostering greater accountability in fund utilization. (Ogunode, 2025)

Improving Communication and Awareness

Lack of awareness is a significant barrier to accessing federal grants. Many schools, especially in rural areas, are not informed about available resources or the application process. The government, in partnership with the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), should implement awareness campaigns using radio, television, online platforms, community meetings, and school networks to ensure all stakeholders are informed. Clear and accessible information on eligibility, documentation, deadlines, and reporting requirements is essential for promoting widespread participation and grant uptake (Maifada, 2018; Musa & Sa‘idu, 2020; Ogunode, 2019)..

Promoting Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Involving local communities, parent-teacher associations, civil society organizations, and NGOs in the grant process can enhance accountability and ensure that funds meet the priority needs of schools. Stakeholder engagement ensures that grant allocations reflect the actual infrastructural and academic requirements of each school. Community participation also promotes a sense of ownership, reduces misuse of funds, and strengthens oversight at the grassroots level (Krueger, & Rouse, 2020; Maifada, 2018; Musa, & Sa‘idu, 2020)

Leveraging Technology and Digital Platforms

Digital platforms can significantly reduce bureaucratic delays and improve the efficiency of grant distribution. Online portals should facilitate grant applications, approval workflows, disbursement tracking, and expenditure reporting. Mobile applications and dashboards can allow real-time monitoring by federal, state, and local education authorities, enabling prompt intervention when challenges arise. Technology-driven solutions reduce paperwork, minimize opportunities for corruption, and ensure transparency in the distribution and utilization of funds (Irewole, & Akinsuroju, 2018; Umare, 2019; Krueger, & Rouse, 2020).

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement

To ensure long-term effectiveness, federal intervention grants must be accompanied by structured monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. Periodic assessments should evaluate grant accessibility, disbursement efficiency, fund utilization, and impact on school infrastructure and

learning outcomes. Feedback from schools, administrators, and local authorities should inform policy adjustments, legal reforms, and resource allocation. Continuous M&E ensures that federal grants remain responsive to the needs of schools and contribute meaningfully to achieving the goals of universal basic education in Nigeria. (Akpan, 2015; Durobaro 2013; Igbineweka, & Anukaenyi, 2016).

4.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

The provision of federal intervention grants for basic education in Nigeria is a critical mechanism for ensuring equitable access to quality education, improving school infrastructure, providing learning materials, and enhancing the overall outcomes of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program. However, many schools, particularly in rural and underserved areas, continue to face challenges in accessing these funds due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of awareness, corruption, inadequate monitoring, and gaps in the existing legal and policy framework.

Addressing poor access to federal government intervention grants for basic education in Nigeria requires a multi-layered approach combining legal reform, policy enhancement, transparency, capacity building, awareness creation, stakeholder engagement, and technology integration. Reviewing and strengthening the UBE Act is central to creating a robust legal foundation that supports equitable grant access and accountability. When implemented holistically, these strategies can ensure that intervention grants reach the intended beneficiaries, improve educational infrastructure, enhance learning outcomes, and contribute to national development by strengthening the foundation of basic education in Nigeria.

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