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REVAMPING THE FALLING STANDARD OF PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR THE UBE IN KWARA STATE

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Abstract
The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria was designed to guarantee every child access to free, compulsory, and quality basic education. Yet, in Kwara State, the declining quality of primary education continues to threaten the realisation of this goal. This paper examines the root causes and manifestations of this decline, highlighting weak policy implementation, inadequate funding, shortage of qualified and motivated teachers, ineffective supervision, and poor school infrastructure. It also explores how socio-economic factors such as poverty, child labour, and entrenched cultural practices undermine regular school attendance and pupils' learning outcomes. The study argues that revitalising basic education in Kwara State requires renewed political will, sustained investment in teacher capacity building, transparent utilisation of UBE funds, curriculum reforms responsive to local realities, and stronger community participation in school governance. Aligning state education efforts with Sustainable Development Goal 4 focused on inclusive and equitable quality education is essential. Ultimately, the paper calls for collective accountability, pragmatic reforms, and measurable performance indicators as the pathway to restoring quality and public confidence in Kwara State's basic education system.
Keywords: Basic Education, Primary Education, Qualification, Resources and Educational quality

Introduction

Primary education in Nigeria operates within the Universal Basic Education (UBE) framework, established to ensure that every child enjoys free, compulsory, and uninterrupted access to quality learning at the foundational level. As the bedrock of national development, the UBE programme aims to equip young learners with the essential literacy, numeracy, and life skills necessary for self-reliance and meaningful participation in society. It also promotes inclusivity by addressing disparities linked to gender, geography, and socio-economic background (UBEC, 2020). Implementation of the UBE is a shared responsibility: the Federal Government oversees policy direction through the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), while State Governments, via their State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs), and Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) manage funding, supervision, and daily operations (Adeyemi & Adediran, 2021). However, despite this multi-tiered arrangement, issues such as weak policy enforcement, poor supervision, and inadequate teacher deployment continue to hinder the achievement of UBE's intended goals (Ogunyemi & Sulaiman, 2022).

Primary education remains the most crucial phase of formal learning, as it lays the groundwork for intellectual, emotional, and social growth. Studies confirm that early proficiency in reading, writing, and arithmetic forms the basis for later academic success and future employability (Adebayo, 2023). Beyond academic skills, this level of education nurtures creativity, discipline, and civic responsibility qualities essential for national progress. The Federal Ministry of Education (2022) warns that nations that neglect their basic education systems often face long-term social and economic setbacks, since learning deficiencies at the early stages are difficult to correct. In this regard, achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) which seeks inclusive and equitable quality education depends largely on the strength of the primary education system (Emordi & Olufemi, 2023).

In Kwara State, however, evidence suggests a steady decline in the quality of basic education. Reports from the Kwara State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB, 2025) reveal persistent problems such as overcrowded classrooms, shortage of instructional materials, deteriorating infrastructure, and an alarming number of unqualified teachers, particularly in rural schools. Findings by Adisa and Ajibola (2022) show that many pupils struggle with

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basic literacy and numeracy due to low teacher morale and weak supervision. Likewise, Alabi (2021) attributes poor learning outcomes to uneven teacher distribution and inadequate monitoring by LGEAs. These issues reveal that the state's educational decline is not merely administrative but rooted in deeper systemic and structural deficiencies affecting access, quality, and equity.

Addressing these challenges is essential to restoring public confidence and achieving both state and national educational goals. Improving the quality of primary education in Kwara State requires comprehensive reforms focused on teacher development, fair resource allocation, transparent use of UBE funds, and greater community involvement in school administration. As Hassan and Bello (2024) emphasise, sustainable educational reforms must be inclusive, evidence-based, and community-driven. Revitalising the UBE framework in Kwara State will not only strengthen Nigeria's pursuit of SDG 4 but also nurture a generation of literate, creative, and responsible citizens capable of advancing the state's social and economic transformation.

Conceptual Clarification

The standard of education refers to the overall quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning within an educational system. It reflects how well schools meet their goals in areas such as curriculum delivery, teacher competence, learning environment, and pupils' academic performance (Okafor & Nwosu, 2021). A high standard of education produces learners who possess the knowledge, skills, and values needed to make meaningful contributions to society. Conversely, a decline in standards is seen in poor academic achievement, weak literacy and numeracy levels, and a shortage of qualified teachers and instructional resources (Eze & Adebisi, 2023). In Nigeria, the phrase falling standard of education often describes the widening gap between expected learning outcomes and pupils' actual performance especially at the primary level, where foundational learning should be strongest (Ogunleye & Lawal, 2020).

To revamp education means to reform and rebuild the system to make it more efficient, relevant, and responsive to current realities. It involves deep, strategic changes in policy direction, teacher development, funding priorities, and administrative practices (Ibrahim & Adekunle, 2022). Within the Universal Basic Education (UBE) framework, revamping implies strengthening every aspect of implementation from ensuring access and quality assurance to promoting transparency and accountability across all levels of government (UBEC, 2023). Although the UBE Act guarantees free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 15 years, achieving this objective depends on continuous evaluation of teaching quality, infrastructure, and the extent of community participation (Olayemi & Hassan, 2024).

Education quality, access, and learning outcomes are inseparable. Quality determines how well pupils learn, while access ensures that no child is left behind. However, expanding access without maintaining quality results in poor learning, just as focusing solely on quality without inclusiveness breeds inequality (Adebayo, 2023). Sustainable educational reform must therefore balance both, ensuring that every child not only attends school but also learns effectively in a supportive environment. As Adewumi and Yusuf (2022) note, improving learning outcomes in basic education goes beyond constructing classrooms it requires dedicated teachers, innovative teaching, and strong community involvement. Consequently, revamping the declining standard of education under the UBE in Kwara State must address access, quality, and accountability together to achieve meaningful and lasting improvement.

Overview of Primary Education under UBE in Kwara State

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Kwara State was introduced as part of Nigeria's national commitment to providing every child with free, compulsory, and continuous basic education. At the state level, the Kwara State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) oversees implementation in partnership with Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs), ensuring that national education policies are effectively translated into practical actions in schools. SUBEB is responsible for teacher recruitment and deployment, infrastructure development, curriculum support, and management of UBE intervention funds. The LGEAs handle school supervision, record keeping, and coordination at local levels, while head teachers serve as the key drivers of teaching, learning, and community engagement (Kwara SUBEB, 2025; UBEC, 2022).

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Although the structure mirrors the national UBE framework, Kwara State has adapted it through initiatives such as the HOPE Edu Workplan and a five-year education strategy focused on school renovation, teacher mapping, and improved data systems (Kwara State Ministry of Finance, 2025). A 2025 baseline survey by SUBEB revealed that the state has over 1,200 public basic schools, about 10,000 teachers, and roughly 150,000 learners. However, the study also exposed a major challenge qualified teachers are concentrated in urban areas, leaving many rural schools understaffed (Kwara SUBEB, 2025). Recent statistics present a mixed picture. While enrolment levels are relatively stable, only about 40.6% of pupils reportedly complete primary school, reflecting high dropout rates and poor learning outcomes (Kwara State Education Trust Fund, 2025). Overcrowded classrooms, uneven teacher–pupil ratios, and mismatched teacher qualifications continue to hinder effective teaching and learning (UBEC, 2024).

Infrastructure gaps remain another pressing issue. Many schools still lack basic facilities such as classrooms, toilets, clean water, and adequate teaching materials, particularly in rural communities (Kwara SUBEB, 2025; Kwara State Ministry of Finance, 2025). These deficiencies contribute to weak literacy and numeracy performance among pupils, a trend that aligns with national reports on early grade learning challenges (UBEC, 2022). Nonetheless, progress is being made. Kwara State has initiated teacher-mapping exercises, opened competitive bids for intervention projects, strengthened transparency through public reporting, and launched renovation and teacher-training programmes. These efforts signal growing political commitment and provide a solid foundation for broader reforms. In summary, while Kwara's UBE system possesses the institutional framework and initial momentum needed for transformation, persistent challenges especially in teacher distribution, infrastructure, and learning quality must be urgently addressed to ensure that every child receives meaningful and equitable basic education.

Indicators of the Falling Standard of Primary Education

One of the clearest signs that the quality of primary education is declining is pupils' poor performance in basic literacy and numeracy. National and state-level assessments in Nigeria consistently reveal that many children struggle to read with understanding or solve simple arithmetic problems by the end of the early grades (UNICEF Nigeria, 2022). This weakness limits further learning and reflects deep systemic issues rather than isolated classroom failures. Studies show that pupils from low-income families and rural areas perform far worse, suggesting that inequality and poor educational support are at the root of the problem (Azubuike, 2024).

Inadequate school infrastructure and overcrowded classrooms also worsen learning conditions. Reports from UBEC and other agencies indicate severe classroom shortages across Nigeria, including Kwara State, leading to high pupil–teacher ratios that make effective teaching difficult (UBEC, 2022). In schools where pupils lack safe classrooms, drinking water, toilets, or learning materials, attendance drops, concentration suffers, and both teaching and learning become ineffective (Education Sector Analysis, 2021). Another major indicator is the shortage of qualified and motivated teachers. Many primary schools, especially in remote communities, rely on untrained or poorly paid contract teachers with little access to professional development. Research links weak teacher training, poor remuneration, and lack of supervision to declining teaching quality and absenteeism (Okorie & Eze, 2023). Even where qualified teachers exist, they are often concentrated in urban centres, leaving rural pupils at a disadvantage (UBEC, 2024).

Outdated curricula and inadequate instructional materials further contribute to poor learning outcomes. Although Nigeria's curriculum aims to promote relevant skills, many classrooms still depend on rote learning and outdated materials. Teachers often lack access to modern, locally adapted resources or tools for interactive teaching (Adewumi & Yusuf, 2022). This disconnects between policy and practice widens the learning gap, particularly in reading and mathematics. Weak supervision and poor quality assurance compound the crisis. Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) and SUBEB officers often lack the funds, personnel, or transport to carry out regular monitoring. As a result, poor teaching practices, absenteeism, and administrative lapses persist unchecked (Education Sector Analysis, 2021).

Low parental involvement and minimal community participation also aggravate the situation. When parents and School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) are inactive or uninformed, school accountability declines,

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attendance drops, and dropout rates increase (IJOTRE, 2023). Conversely, schools with active community engagement record better infrastructure maintenance and improved academic outcomes. In Kwara State, these national challenges are deeply entrenched. The state's declining education standard stems from a combination of weak policies, chronic underfunding, and administrative inefficiency. Despite the UBE's promise of free and quality education, implementation in Kwara is undermined by limited financial commitment and mismanagement of funds. Many projects aimed at improving infrastructure or teacher welfare stall because the state struggles to meet counterpart funding requirements for UBEC grants (Ogunode, 2021). Lack of transparency and poor accountability further weaken public confidence (Adeyemi & Jimoh, 2022).

Teachers play a central role in this decline. Many lack up-to-date training and qualifications, and most receive low and irregular salaries. Such conditions breed frustration, absenteeism, and poor classroom performance (Adebayo & Olanrewaju, 2023). Limited digital literacy also prevents teachers from integrating technology into teaching, which is crucial for 21st-century learning (Yusuf & Olatunji, 2020). Administrative inefficiency worsens the situation. LGEAs, which are supposed to monitor schools, often lack adequate logistics and manpower. As a result, teacher absenteeism, poor lesson delivery, and exam malpractice frequently go unchecked (Ogunbameru, 2022). Weak leadership among some head teachers also contributes to poor accountability and ineffective policy implementation (Okebukola, 2021). Socio-economic challenges further compound these problems. Poverty drives many children into street trading, farm work, or domestic labour, reducing school attendance. Some parents, struggling to survive, see education as a luxury rather than a necessity. In certain rural communities, cultural norms especially those promoting early marriage or limiting girls' education remain a barrier to enrolment and completion (Aliyu & Mustapha, 2020).

The condition of school infrastructure paints an equally troubling picture. Many schools operate from dilapidated buildings without furniture, libraries, or basic sanitation. UBEC (2022) reports that several public schools in Kwara still lack functional classrooms, science kits, or ICT facilities, making effective teaching and learning almost impossible. The decline in the standard of primary education in Kwara State is not due to a single cause but to a web of interrelated challenges ranging from poor policy execution and weak funding to inadequate teacher capacity, poor supervision, and minimal community engagement. Reviving the system will require collective and sustained action: adequate funding, continuous teacher development, effective monitoring, active community involvement, and strong political will. Only through these coordinated efforts can Kwara State restore the quality of its primary education and achieve the true goals of the UBE programme.

Strategies for Revamping Primary Education

Transforming primary education in Kwara State demands more than short-term fixes it calls for a coordinated, people-centred reform that blends sound policy, skilled teachers, transparent governance, and active community participation.

Policy and Accountability Reform: Real progress begins when education policies focus on learning results rather than paperwork. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) framework in Kwara should prioritise concrete outcomes such as pupils' literacy, teacher presence, and classroom performance. To achieve this, there should be regular monitoring and evaluation at both state and local levels. SUBEB and Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) must have clear performance targets, and funding should depend on progress made. Making these reports public will promote accountability and ensure that policies produce visible results in schools rather than remain theoretical.

Strengthening Teacher Capacity and Professionalism: Teachers are the backbone of quality education. Improving standards must therefore begin with continuous professional support not just occasional seminars. Structured, hands-on training, classroom mentoring, and peer learning groups should be introduced. Teachers need regular guidance in literacy and numeracy teaching, classroom management, and the creative use of simple teaching aids. Evidence from Nigerian states shows that continuous coaching and collaboration improve both teaching and learning. Kwara can adopt a regular teacher development schedule combining central training with in-school mentoring.

Transparency in Education Financing: Transparency builds trust and ensures that resources reach the classrooms. All education expenditures teacher incentives, school renovations, and learning materials should be properly tracked and published. Introducing simple digital systems for payments and reporting will make spending

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visible and discourage corruption. SUBEB should publicly release expenditure reports, while School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) can help monitor fund usage. Strengthening the Kwara State Education Trust Fund will further guarantee accountability and consistent support for schools.

Pragmatic Curriculum Reform: The curriculum should focus on what matters most reading, writing, numeracy, and life skills. It should also connect learning to pupils' daily experiences through local culture and examples. Early-grade lessons should help children think, question, and communicate clearly. Digital learning tools can be introduced gradually to build technological confidence. Kwara can learn from EdoBEST's example, which simplified the curriculum and supported teachers to achieve better results without huge costs.

Infrastructure Renewal and Learning Environment: Improving learning conditions goes beyond building new schools. Simple upgrades fixing roofs, providing desks, ensuring clean water, and creating safe classrooms can have a major impact. A clean, well-equipped school motivates teachers and attracts pupils. Community participation, such as providing labour or local materials, can reduce costs and increase ownership. Model schools equipped with basic digital facilities can serve as examples of what is possible with minimal resources.

Community Participation and Ownership: Revamping education requires shared responsibility. Communities must not see schools as government property alone. Active SBMCs can monitor teacher attendance, support minor repairs, and mobilise local resources. When parents and community leaders are involved, school performance improves. Kwara should introduce a broad-based training programme for SBMCs and support them with small grants linked to specific goals like improving literacy or enrolment.

Revamping primary education in Kwara State requires unity of purpose and consistent effort. With effective policies, motivated teachers, transparent financing, active communities, supportive supervision, and strategic partnerships, the state can rebuild a strong foundation for learning. A revitalised system will restore public confidence in education and nurture a new generation of creative, disciplined, and responsible citizens ready to shape Kwara's future.

Suggestions

Reviving the quality of primary education in Kwara State under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme demands deliberate, inclusive, and lasting measures that prioritise access, quality, and accountability. The following recommendations outline practical steps for the Kwara State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), the Ministry of Education, and other partners to strengthen the system and achieve sustainable progress.

1. Kwara SUBEB should establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to track school attendance, teacher performance, funding use, and learning outcomes. Regular audits, digital data systems, and open publication of results will help improve transparency.
2. Teachers are the heartbeat of the education system, and reform cannot succeed without investing in them. Kwara should support teachers through continuous professional development, mentoring, and fair welfare packages.
3. Education funding must be both adequate and accountable. SUBEB should introduce digital tools to track all UBE expenditures and project progress. The state government should aim to meet the UNESCO benchmark of allocating 15–20% of its annual budget to education.
4. The curriculum should balance academic learning with practical life skills. Introducing early exposure to entrepreneurship, vocational education, and civic responsibility will make learning more engaging and useful.

Conclusion

The urgent need to reform primary education in Kwara State is no longer a subject for debate it is a necessity that demands immediate action. Primary schools are the foundation of lifelong learning, shaping children's literacy, numeracy, and social values. When this foundation collapses, the damage spreads through families, communities, and the economy. Without deliberate and focused reforms, Kwara risks deepening its education crisis, which could take decades and vast resources to correct. Rebuilding the education system means protecting children's potential and strengthening the state's human capital. Studies across Nigeria show that success in early learning strongly determines later academic and career achievements. When pupils fail to master basic literacy and numeracy, their chances of contributing meaningfully to the economy diminish. By investing in teacher training, structured learning support, and relevant curricula, Kwara can turn this challenge into an opportunity building a generation equipped with the skills to drive progress. For reforms to last, they must be embedded within existing institutions rather than depend on temporary projects or donor funding. SUBEB and the Ministry of Education need stable

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budgets for teacher development, transparent financial systems, and a functional Education Management Information System (EMIS) to guide policy and track progress. Sustainable reform also requires inclusivity ensuring that girls, children with disabilities, and those in rural communities benefit equally. Targeted initiatives like scholarships, feeding programmes, and community engagement can help keep all children in school.

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