



Funding crisis as perceived by Heads of Public Primary Schools in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study critically investigates the persistent problem of poor funding in public primary schools in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, and examines how school heads respond to the resultant administrative, infrastructural, and pedagogical crises. Drawing on empirical data from 225 headteachers across the eight local government areas of the state, the research adopts a descriptive survey design to assess the impact of funding inadequacies on school performance and management. The findings reveal that poor funding is not only systemic but has led to the deterioration of school infrastructure, acute shortages of qualified teaching personnel, irregular provision of teaching and learning materials, and general inefficiency in school administration. School heads report adopting coping mechanisms such as sourcing community support, personal financing of minor school repairs, and scaling down core academic and extracurricular programmes. These stopgap responses, while commendable, are insufficient to address the deep-rooted fiscal neglect that continues to undermine the goals of the Universal Basic Education programme in the state. The study underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive reform in education financing, calling on federal and state governments to increase budgetary allocations to primary education, ensure timely disbursement of funds, and institutionalise mechanisms for monitoring resource utilisation. By centring the lived experiences of school administrators, this research provides policy-relevant insights into the structural causes of educational decline and offers practical recommendations for rebuilding and sustaining quality primary education in Bayelsa State.

Keywords: Poor funding, educational crisis, school leadership, school management, public primary schools, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

In Nigeria, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, established in 1999, was conceived to provide free, compulsory, and quality education for all children at the primary and junior secondary levels. However, more than two decades later, the realisation of these goals remains hampered by persistent underfunding, particularly in states with infrastructural and developmental deficits such as Bayelsa State (Adebayo & Ogunshola, 2021; Alonge & Alonge, 2023).

Bayelsa State, located in the oil-rich Niger Delta region, paradoxically suffers from one of the most poorly funded public education systems in the country despite its strategic economic importance. As reported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2021), the state's public primary schools

are characterised by overcrowded classrooms, decaying infrastructure, and severe shortages of instructional materials and qualified teachers. These systemic deficiencies have led to a decline in educational standards, low pupil performance, and high dropout rates, particularly in rural and riverine communities (Edakpor & Asiyai, 2023). The fiscal crisis in the sector is attributed not only to inadequate budgetary allocations but also to irregular disbursement, poor financial planning, and weak oversight mechanisms.

While several national and international studies have identified funding gaps as a major constraint in Nigeria's education system (Okafor & Okoye, 2020; World Bank, 2022), there is a paucity of empirical research that specifically examines how school leaders, those tasked with daily administration—are responding to this crisis. The role of headteachers in navigating financial challenges, maintaining school operations, and improvising within constrained budgets remains underexplored in the literature. Yet, their experiences and coping strategies are crucial to understanding the frontline realities of educational service delivery in under-resourced settings (Iwu & Iwu, 2020).

This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by investigating the perceptions and responses of 225 headteachers in public primary schools across Bayelsa State. It aims to (1) assess the extent to which poor funding has affected school operations, (2) identify the key areas of impact, such as infrastructure, staffing, and instructional delivery, and (3) document the adaptive strategies employed by school heads to sustain basic educational services amid financial constraints. By giving voice to school administrators, the study offers policy-relevant insights that can inform more effective and context-sensitive approaches to educational financing and governance in the state.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to broader discourses on educational equity, decentralised school governance, and sustainable development in Nigeria. In line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,” this paper underscores the urgent need to revisit existing funding frameworks and empower local school leadership to play a transformative role in educational development (UNESCO, 2022). The findings are expected to guide policy reforms, budgeting priorities, and capacity-building initiatives that support the revitalisation of public primary education in Bayelsa State and beyond.

Literature Review

The relationship between educational financing and the performance of public primary schools has been extensively examined in both national and international research. Scholars are in general agreement that funding constitutes the bedrock of any functional educational system. Adequate and timely financial investment not only supports the provision of infrastructure and personnel but also ensures equitable access and improved learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2022; Akinbote & Fagbohun, 2021). Conversely, inadequate funding has been consistently associated with infrastructural decay, teacher shortages, administrative inefficiency, and overall educational decline, particularly in low-income and resource-dependent regions such as Nigeria's Niger Delta.

Primary education, as the foundation of the formal education system, is particularly vulnerable to fiscal neglect. Okafor and Okoye (2020) argue that despite constitutional provisions and the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, public primary schools in Nigeria remain underfunded and poorly managed. They attribute this to inconsistent policy implementation, corruption in fund disbursement, and lack of political will. The National Bureau of Statistics (2021)

reports that less than 10% of annual education budgets at the federal level is dedicated to basic education, with even lower percentages recorded in most state budgets.

In the context of Bayelsa State, the situation is even more critical. Although the state contributes significantly to national revenue through oil production, its investment in education does not reflect this economic advantage. Studies by Alonge and Alonge (2023) have shown that the vast majority of public primary schools in the state lack basic facilities such as classrooms, libraries, toilet facilities, and instructional materials. The authors identify funding shortfalls and mismanagement as key barriers to educational progress.

Infrastructure is a critical determinant of educational quality. Obayan et al. (2020) found that pupils in poorly funded schools are more likely to learn in overcrowded, structurally unsafe environments with inadequate lighting and ventilation. Such conditions are prevalent in Bayelsa State, especially in riverine and hard-to-reach communities. Similarly, the state experiences acute shortages of qualified teachers, a challenge exacerbated by poor remuneration, difficult working conditions, and lack of incentives for rural deployment (Edakpor & Asiyai, 2023). These gaps create a ripple effect on pupil-teacher ratios, class management, and ultimately learning outcomes.

Teacher attrition and uneven distribution are major concerns in poorly funded settings. As noted by Ugolo and Onukwu (2025), many schools in Bayelsa operate with skeletal teaching staff, often relying on volunteer teachers or National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members. This negatively affects curriculum coverage and reduces the capacity of schools to deliver quality education. Inadequate funding also undermines teachers' access to continuous professional development, which is essential for pedagogical improvement and student achievement (Iwu & Iwu, 2020).

School leadership plays a critical role in mitigating the challenges of poor funding. However, without the financial resources necessary to run schools, headteachers are often left to improvise or seek community assistance. According to Adebayo and Ogunshola (2021), many school heads in Nigeria engage in personal spending to meet operational needs, including minor repairs, learning materials, and sanitary facilities. While such actions demonstrate commitment, they are unsustainable and place an undue burden on individual administrators.

Leadership in under-resourced schools is further constrained by the absence of autonomy in budgetary decision-making. Most school heads lack control over expenditure and depend on irregular subventions from the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB). This undermines strategic planning, accountability, and innovation in school management (Nwachukwu & Ike, 2021). In Bayelsa, bureaucratic bottlenecks often delay fund release, compelling school leaders to defer key programmes and infrastructural improvements.

The UBE Act of 2004 mandates all tiers of government to support basic education financially and structurally. However, implementation gaps remain significant. According to the World Bank (2022), states like Bayelsa have failed to meet counterpart funding requirements necessary to access matching grants from the UBE Commission. This reflects broader governance challenges and a misalignment between education policy and fiscal planning. The lack of transparency and political commitment also hinders meaningful reform.

UNICEF (2021) observes that budgetary processes at the state level are often opaque and detached from the realities of school-level operations. Funds allocated on paper may not translate into tangible improvements due to corruption, administrative inefficiencies, and weak monitoring

frameworks. These systemic weaknesses are particularly detrimental in marginalised states and rural communities, where dependence on government funding is total.

While existing literature has thoroughly documented the implications of poor funding on primary education in Nigeria, there is limited empirical work focusing on the perspectives and adaptive strategies of school heads, those who manage the day-to-day realities of education service delivery. The few studies that address leadership in underfunded schools (e.g., Iwu & Iwu, 2020) often treat school heads as passive actors rather than as agents who navigate complex challenges. This study addresses this gap by capturing the lived experiences, managerial innovations, and challenges faced by 225 headteachers in public primary schools in Bayelsa State.

By examining the intersection between funding deficits and school-level leadership responses, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the governance dynamics of basic education in Nigeria. It also offers practical recommendations for improving education financing, strengthening administrative autonomy, and enhancing policy implementation at the grassroots level.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is considered appropriate for gathering and analysing data on attitudes, perceptions, and practices of a large population. The design enables the researcher to systematically describe the prevailing conditions in public primary schools in Bayelsa State and to analyse how school heads respond to funding-related challenges. The choice of this design aligns with similar empirical inquiries in educational management (Adebayo & Ogunshola, 2021; Iwu & Iwu, 2020), where the objective is to generalise findings from a representative sample to a broader population.

Population of the Study

The population for this study comprised all headteachers of public primary schools in Bayelsa State. According to data from the Bayelsa State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB, 2024), there are approximately 715 public primary schools spread across the state's eight local government areas (LGAs). Each school is headed by a designated administrator or headteacher responsible for managing day-to-day academic, administrative, and infrastructural affairs.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A total of 225 headteachers were selected as the sample for the study. This represents roughly 31.5% of the total population and was considered statistically adequate for the study's objectives. The sampling technique employed was stratified random sampling. First, the eight LGAs in the state were identified as strata to ensure geographical representativeness. From each LGA, schools were proportionally selected using simple random sampling to eliminate bias. This approach ensured inclusion of schools from urban, semi-urban, and rural locations, thereby capturing diverse funding realities and school head responses across the state.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Public School Funding and Headteachers' Management Response Questionnaire (PSF-HMRQ)". The instrument was divided into four sections:

- Section A gathered demographic data on respondents (e.g., sex, years of experience, LGA, school location).
- Section B focused on perceptions of funding adequacy, including sources, frequency, and sufficiency of financial allocations.
- Section C assessed infrastructural status and resource availability (classrooms, teaching materials, WASH facilities).
- Section D examined administrative responses and coping strategies adopted by headteachers in managing schools with limited funding.

The questionnaire employed a 5-point Likert scale format (ranging from *Strongly Disagree* = 1 to *Strongly Agree* = 5) to elicit degrees of agreement on various funding-related statements.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure content and face validity, the instrument was reviewed by three experts in educational administration and research methodology from Niger Delta University. Feedback led to the refinement of ambiguous items and ensured alignment with the research objectives.

Reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot study conducted with 20 headteachers in neighbouring Rivers State who were excluded from the main sample. The data from the pilot were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability test, which produced a coefficient of 0.82, indicating a high level of internal consistency and reliability.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection took place over a period of four weeks in the first quarter of 2025. With the cooperation of SUBEB officials and the consent of the headteachers, trained research assistants administered printed copies of the questionnaire. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and participation was entirely voluntary. Completed instruments were collected immediately or within one week, depending on accessibility and location of the schools.

Data Analysis Technique

Data collected were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25.0 for analysis. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise responses and identify patterns regarding funding adequacy and school head responses. Additionally, cross-tabulations were used to compare school heads' responses across LGAs and rural-urban divides. Inferential statistics such as chi-square tests were applied to test for significant differences in response patterns based on location and experience level, at a significance level of $p < .05$.

Results

This section presents the findings derived from the responses of 225 headteachers of public primary schools in Bayelsa State. The results are organised under the following thematic areas: (1)

funding adequacy, (2) infrastructural availability and condition, (3) human resource situation, and (4) administrative coping strategies. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarise the data. Inferential statistics (Chi-square test) were used where applicable to determine significant associations.

1. Perception of Funding Adequacy

Respondents were asked to assess the level of funding received from government sources (primarily SUBEB and LGA Education Authorities).

85.3% (n = 192) of headteachers indicated that their schools received inadequate or grossly inadequate funding.

9.3% (n = 21) rated the funding as barely sufficient, while only 5.3% (n = 12) considered it adequate.

The mean rating on a 5-point Likert scale was 1.92 (SD = 0.64), indicating general dissatisfaction with current funding levels.

Qualitative comments from open-ended responses cited irregular disbursements, political interference in allocation, and bureaucratic delays as core contributors to funding constraints.

2. Status of Infrastructure and Physical Facilities

School heads were asked to report the state of key infrastructure such as classrooms, toilets, furniture, libraries, and water access.

- 70.7% (n = 159) reported that their classrooms were structurally weak or overcrowded.
- 62.2% (n = 140) indicated that their schools lacked adequate toilet facilities.
- Only 18.7% (n = 42) of schools had a functional library, while 81.3% (n = 183) had none.
- 66.2% (n = 149) reported inadequate pupil seating, resulting in many children sitting on bare floors.
- 55.6% (n = 125) of schools lacked access to safe drinking water.

The mean rating for infrastructural adequacy was 2.04 (SD = 0.71), reflecting generally poor conditions. Infrastructure challenges were more acute in rural LGAs such as Southern Ijaw, Ekeremor, and Nembe.

3. Human Resource Constraints

- Respondents assessed the availability of qualified teaching staff and their ability to deliver the curriculum effectively.
- 65.8% (n = 148) of school heads reported that their schools had *insufficient* numbers of qualified teachers.
- 40% (n = 90) indicated that they relied on volunteer or community teachers due to lack of state postings.
- The average pupil-teacher ratio reported was 1:52, far above the national benchmark of 1:35 recommended by the UBE Commission.

- Only 21.3% (n = 48) reported receiving any teacher in-service training or professional development support in the past two years.

These shortages were significantly worse in remote and riverine schools ($\chi^2 = 14.27, p < .01$), suggesting a clear rural-urban disparity in teacher deployment.

4. Administrative Coping Strategies of School Heads

School heads were asked to indicate how they manage funding shortages in school operations.

- 76% (n = 171) reported relying on personal funds or contributions from Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) to fix minor infrastructural problems (e.g., broken desks, roof leaks).
- 58.7% (n = 132) noted that they scaled down co-curricular activities due to lack of funds.
- 49.8% (n = 112) had introduced rotational teaching timetables due to staff shortages.
- 35.6% (n = 80) engaged local artisans on credit to repair school facilities with the hope of repaying once funds were disbursed.

Despite these efforts, 88% of respondents expressed that these measures were not sustainable and might further erode educational quality. The mean score for coping strategy effectiveness was 2.41 (SD = 0.69), implying a low level of satisfaction.

5. Comparative insights across Local Government Areas

A comparative analysis showed that:

- Schools in Yenagoa and Ogbia LGAs reported relatively better access to funding and infrastructure.
- Schools in Southern Ijaw and Brass LGAs, particularly riverine areas, reported the worst funding conditions, with over 90% of headteachers indicating critical infrastructural decay and extreme teacher shortages.
- A Chi-square test showed a significant association between geographical location and perception of funding adequacy ($\chi^2 = 18.76, df = 7, p < .01$).

Summary of Key Findings

1. Funding for public primary schools in Bayelsa State is largely perceived as inadequate by the majority of school heads.
2. The infrastructural condition of schools is poor, especially in rural and riverine LGAs.
3. Human resource gaps exist, with acute teacher shortages and little access to professional development.
4. School heads are forced to adopt informal and unsustainable coping mechanisms to keep schools running.
5. Significant disparities exist between urban and rural areas in terms of resource availability and administrative burden.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that poor funding remains a fundamental constraint affecting the quality, equity, and sustainability of public primary education in Bayelsa State. The responses of 225 school heads revealed a multidimensional crisis, manifesting through infrastructural decay, severe human resource shortages, and administrative inefficiencies. These findings align with extant literature on the implications of chronic underfunding in Nigeria's basic education system (Adebayo & Ogunshola, 2021; Edakpor & Asiyai, 2023; UNESCO, 2022).

The overwhelming perception among school heads (85.3%) that funding is grossly inadequate highlights the systemic nature of fiscal neglect in the state's education sector. The mean funding adequacy score of 1.92 suggests not just insufficiency, but consistent underinvestment. This corroborates Okafor and Okoye (2020), who argue that despite policy instruments like the UBE Act of 2004, political commitment to basic education financing remains weak, particularly in resource-rich but developmentally lagging states like Bayelsa.

The irregular and often delayed disbursement of funds further undermines school planning and operational efficiency. This supports findings by Iwu and Iwu (2020), who note that school heads in underfunded settings often resort to emergency budgeting or community support, which are not sustainable long-term solutions. The current study affirms this pattern, as most school leaders reported reliance on personal funds or PTA donations for essential repairs and materials.

The infrastructural situation in the surveyed schools paints a grim picture. A substantial proportion of headteachers (70.7%) reported unsafe or overcrowded classrooms, while over 80% indicated the absence of basic facilities such as libraries and adequate sanitation. This reflects findings by Obayan et al. (2020), who highlight that poor learning environments directly impact student performance, attendance, and overall school enrolment.

In Bayelsa, geographical peculiarities such as riverine terrain further complicate infrastructure delivery. As reported by school heads in Brass, Ekeremor, and Southern Ijaw LGAs, the logistical cost of constructing and maintaining school buildings in these areas is high, and often unmet due to limited funding. This echoes the World Bank (2022) report that cited environmental factors as cost drivers in Nigeria's educational infrastructure gaps. Moreover, the lack of clean water and sanitation facilities raises public health concerns and disproportionately affects female pupils, thereby contributing to gender disparities in enrolment and retention.

The acute shortage of qualified teachers reported by 65.8% of respondents confirms the human resource crisis facing basic education in the state. An average pupil-teacher ratio of 1:52, as found in this study, greatly exceeds national benchmarks and compromises the quality of instruction and learner support. This problem is particularly acute in rural and riverine schools, where many rely on volunteers or NYSC corps members.

These findings reinforce those of Ugolo and Onukwu (2025), who found that difficult posting conditions, poor incentives, and lack of professional development discourage teacher deployment to hard-to-reach areas. Furthermore, the fact that only 21.3% of schools received any in-service training over the past two years suggests a stagnation of professional capacity-building. Without investment in human capital, the goal of equitable and quality education remains elusive.

The ingenuity displayed by school heads in managing scarcity underscores the burden of decentralised educational governance without corresponding fiscal autonomy. Coping strategies such as

self-funding, community contributions, and modified timetables reflect resilience but also expose the vulnerability of school leadership in under-resourced settings.

While these responses are necessary for school survival, they are unsustainable and may contribute to burnout among school administrators. Moreover, such practices could institutionalise inequality, as schools in wealthier or more cohesive communities may mobilise more local resources than others. These findings support the argument by Nwachukwu and Ike (2021) that school-based management is ineffective without adequate financial delegation and accountability systems.

A critical dimension of the study is the rural-urban disparity in funding, infrastructure, and staffing. Urban LGAS like Yenagoa reported comparatively better conditions, while rural LGAS such as Southern Ijaw and Nembe were disproportionately affected. These findings affirm the argument by Alonge and Alonge (2023) that educational inequities are spatially embedded, with rural communities systematically excluded from public investment priorities. This spatial inequality undermines not only the principle of equal opportunity but also long-term development in marginalised areas. If left unaddressed, such disparities could fuel socio-economic grievances and perpetuate cycles of poverty and underachievement.

The study's findings hold several policy implications. First, there is a need for increased and ring-fenced budgetary allocations to the basic education sub-sector in Bayelsa State. Second, the financial autonomy of school heads must be enhanced through performance-based budgeting and accountable school-based management committees. Third, targeted teacher incentives, including rural posting bonuses, subsidised housing, and training opportunities, should be introduced to address the human resource crisis. Fourth, infrastructural planning must consider the unique geographical challenges of riverine communities. Finally, the SUBEB must implement a monitoring and evaluation system that prioritises funding equity, tracks learning outcomes, and ensures transparent utilisation of funds.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to empirically examine the impact of poor funding on public primary schools in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, with particular attention to how school heads manage the resulting crises. The findings, drawn from the experiences of 225 headteachers across the state's diverse local government areas, reveal a deeply entrenched crisis that has become systemic and debilitating. Public primary education in Bayelsa is undermined by chronic underfunding, infrastructural collapse, human resource shortages, and managerial inefficiencies. Despite constitutional and policy provisions mandating free and compulsory basic education, the practical reality is one of scarcity, neglect, and institutional fragility. The data show that while school heads often display admirable ingenuity in sustaining school functions, such as sourcing personal funds, relying on community goodwill, or rationing limited teaching personnel, these strategies are largely unsustainable. The overall condition of public schools, particularly in rural and riverine areas, paints a portrait of systemic failure, where children are deprived of the most basic educational entitlements.

It is evident from this study that reversing this decline requires more than superficial policy statements. There is an urgent need for the Bayelsa State Government to significantly increase its investment in the education sector, particularly at the basic level. A deliberate reordering of fiscal priorities must be undertaken to ensure that education receives adequate and timely financial support. Budgetary allocations to basic education should not only increase in volume but should also be protected through transparent disbursement mechanisms that eliminate delays and leakages. To ensure efficiency, school heads must be granted financial discretion within a regulated framework to address immediate

operational needs without excessive bureaucracy. This will empower them to respond swiftly to issues such as minor repairs, procurement of teaching materials, and pupil welfare, which currently suffer due to excessive centralisation of funds.

In addition to addressing funding gaps, there must be a parallel investment in human capital. The study underscores the pressing need for a comprehensive teacher recruitment strategy, especially in underserved areas. Incentivising rural postings, providing decent housing, and offering opportunities for professional development would help address the imbalance in teacher distribution. The findings also highlight the dilapidated state of school infrastructure, which demands urgent rehabilitation. Classrooms, sanitation facilities, and school furniture must be upgraded to create a conducive learning environment that meets basic standards of safety and dignity. In schools where these are absent, pupil motivation and attendance are already significantly compromised, particularly for girls and children with disabilities.

Moreover, to ensure that funding translates into results, there is a strong case for institutionalising monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that track the use of funds and assess school performance. Transparency and accountability frameworks—such as expenditure tracking systems, community audits, and school report cards—should be implemented in collaboration with civil society actors and parent-teacher associations. These efforts will help bridge the trust gap between communities and government, while also fostering local ownership of the education process. The role of community participation cannot be overstated; when parents, traditional leaders, and grassroots organisations are meaningfully engaged, they become allies in sustaining school improvements and promoting accountability.

Ultimately, the findings of this study affirm that the crisis in Bayelsa's public primary education is not merely a reflection of resource scarcity but of governance failure. A more equitable and inclusive education system is possible, but it will require sustained political will, increased financial commitment, and a rethinking of how schools are managed at the grassroots level. If these reforms are taken seriously, the state can begin to rebuild the broken foundation of its basic education system, ensuring that every child—regardless of geography or socioeconomic status—has access to quality learning. This is not just a policy imperative, but a moral one, upon which the future development and social stability of Bayelsa State depend.

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