

## BOOK REVIEW

Joseph Abiodun Balogun. *Reimagining Nigeria's Educational System: Improving Academic Performance Through High Stakes Standardized Testing*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2024. 328 pp. Illustrations. \$43.99. Paper. ISBN: 9781032483160.

Education is a cornerstone of individual and societal development, yet Nigeria's educational system faces persistent challenges that hinder academic performance and national progress. Amid many opinions on reforming Nigeria's education, Joseph Abiodun Balogun singles out the mounting calls to stop high-stakes standardized testing. While acknowledging criticism for such calls, such as associated low pass rates, questionable reliability and validity, examination malpractice, and demotivating effects on students, Balogun contends that these issues are symptoms, not causes of intrinsic and multifaceted crises. In other words, Nigeria's educational shortcomings are unrelated to high stakes standardized testing themselves, and abolishing them would cause irreversible harm to the integrity and accountability of the education system. Through an extensive literature review, statistical analysis, and comparative studies of Nigeria's education system with exemplar educational systems, Balogun identifies the intrinsic challenges and needs for reform through high-stakes standardized testing.

The introductory chapter sets a critical tone for the book. In the first page alone, Balogun reported how Nigeria's education system has been described: "worst globally," "deteriorated," "comatose," and "failed." These descriptions compellingly convey the pressing need to reform the educational system and the book's argument to rethink high-stakes standardized testing. Chapter Two situates Nigeria's educational system within a broader national context, exploring how historical developments, geographical realities, and social structures (such as politics, economics, religion, and social services) have collectively contributed to security challenges and systemic instability. These factors are shown to exert significant influence over the quality of education across the country. Building on this context, Chapter Three offers a comprehensive historical account of Western education in Nigeria and highlights the hierarchy and structure of Nigeria's education system.

Chapter Four presents a comparative analysis of ministries of education websites, where Balogun juxtaposes Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Education (FME) against those of six high-performing nations: the United States, the United Kingdom, Finland, Japan, Seychelles, and Tunisia. By examining organizational hierarchies, departmental structures, affiliated parastatals, and the sociodemographic profiles of Nigeria's education ministers, he highlights systemic inconsistencies, insufficient professional qualifications, and a pattern of

leadership instability. Chapter Five shifts focus to the current state of Nigeria's education system, identifying factors that contribute to Nigeria's alarmingly high number of out-of-school children, persistent low literacy rates, underwhelming student enrollment figures, the prevalence of underqualified graduates, infrastructural decay, chronic underfunding, and entrenched gender disparities.


In Chapter Six, Balogun critically examines the role of high-stakes standardized testing, acknowledging both its potential benefits and inherent drawbacks. He argues that Nigeria's difficulties with such assessments arise from systemic abuse and misuse, particularly within a pervasive cheating culture. Chapter Seven deepens the comparative dimension of Balogun's study by evaluating key educational outcome indicators across the same set of high-performing countries. This analysis serves to extract actionable insights and best practices that could inform policy adaptations in the Nigerian context. Chapter Eight explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Nigeria's education sector by reviewing forty-four publications around the theme. Balogun shows how Nigeria responded to the pandemic and outlines key lessons for future emergency preparedness. The final chapter synthesizes the most impactful insights drawn from the preceding comparative analyses, and Balogun distills these into a series of practical, evidence-based recommendations aimed at repositioning Nigeria's education system for global competitiveness.

*Reimagining Nigeria's Educational System* presents a multifaceted assessment of Nigeria's education crisis. Balogun proposes a comprehensive framework for assessment-driven reform that includes the introduction of early-childhood testing mechanisms designed to identify gifted and talented learners from an early stage. He also calls for Nigeria's participation in international standardized assessments, most notably the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), to enable evidence-based benchmarking and data-informed comparative studies of student performance on a global scale. In addition, he recommends the implementation of professional licensing assessments following internships or practicum experiences because this reinforces professional accountability and quality in teacher and graduate training.

Framing the book as both a critique and a pedagogical tool, Balogun structures each chapter with evaluative questions aimed at reinforcing key concepts and prompting critical reflection, thereby supporting its use as a textbook in academic settings. However, the book's reach extends beyond the classroom. With its policy-oriented recommendations and empirical grounding, *Reimagining Nigeria's Educational System* is equally relevant to policymakers, government officials, education advocates, and other stakeholders invested in national development.

While Balogun draws valuable lessons from the education systems of the exemplar countries, he is careful to acknowledge their imperfections. He emphasizes that their success lies in their sustained commitment to ongoing evaluation and systemic improvement. This nuanced positioning strengthens his comparative framework by avoiding idealization and instead promoting adaptive learning. Also, while his candid portrayal of Nigeria's education challenges is

necessary for reform discussions, the repetition of negative phrasing may feel overwhelming or discouraging to some readers.

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