

EDUCATION



Why Public Secondary Schools Underperform *UTME Outcomes and Management Failure in Nigerian Education*

Blessed Oladiran • Anita Olatunde

Issues in the News

- Enugu to Begin Construction of 660MW Coal-Fired Power Plant in July
- Akwa Ibom Injects N5.9bn into Basic Education Projects
- FG Bans Honorary Degree Holders From Using "Dr" Title
- INEC Announces Final Phase of Continuous Voter Registration Exercise

Regional Update

- State of Emergency Declared in Lake Chad Province
- Cameroon Conducts Fourth National Population, Housing and Agricultural Census
- Niger Reports Major Mineral Reserves and Rise in Mining Revenue
- Benin Sets New Mandatory Fees for Associations and Foundations

Athena Centre for Policy and Leadership operates as an independent, non-partisan think tank in compliance with Nigerian laws and regulations, committed to promoting good governance, transparency, and accountability.

Our mission is to conduct rigorous research and provide evidence-based recommendations that contribute to the development of a prosperous and forward-looking society in Nigeria.

© Athena Perspective, Vol. 3, Issue 18, 5-11 May 2026

Cover Image: Candidates sitting for the JAMB Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) at a Computer Based Test (CBT) center.

Nigeria's secondary education system has expanded significantly over the past two decades. However, improvements in learning outcomes have not kept pace with this expansion. Persistent disparities in performance in the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), the principal gateway to tertiary education, continue to raise questions about the effectiveness and equity of public secondary schooling.

This Athena Perspective advances an institutional explanation for these disparities. It argues that observed differences in UTME outcomes between public and private secondary schools are less likely to reflect examination design or intrinsic differences in school quality alone, and more plausibly reflect variation in management capacity, incentive structures, data use, and accountability arrangements within Nigeria's public education system.

It is important to note at the outset that this analysis does not seek to establish definitive numerical superiority of one school type over another based on UTME data. The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) does not publish UTME results disaggregated by school ownership. As such, precise comparative performance estimates cannot be derived from official examination data alone. The analysis, therefore, draws on aggregate score distributions, existing empirical studies on learning outcomes, and documented institutional patterns across states to explore structural factors associated with observed performance differences.

Where differences in outcomes appear to exist, available evidence suggests they may be associated with variation in how schools respond to performance information. In some settings, private schools may operate within tighter feedback environments in which examination outcomes are more directly linked to management decisions. Public secondary schools, by contrast, often function within systems where such feedback is weaker, and where examination data are less consistently integrated into supervision, staffing, or resource allocation decisions

Nigeria possesses a range of educational policies, institutions, and assessment systems. The central challenge, as this Athena Perspective suggests, lies in the extent to which performance information is systematically translated into administrative action.

Strengthening this linkage between data and decision-making is presented here as a key consideration in efforts to improve learning outcomes.

Why Secondary School Performance Has Become a Policy Priority

Nigeria is approaching a critical juncture in its education reform trajectory. Three developments have converged to sharpen policy attention on secondary school outcomes.

First, the stabilisation of computer-based testing (CBT) for the UTME has reduced concerns about examination integrity and operational volatility, increasing confidence in score distributions as system-level signals rather than [technical artefacts](#). Second, demographic pressures, driven by a rapidly growing youth population, are intensifying competition for limited tertiary education spaces, amplifying the stakes of secondary [school](#) performance. Third, fiscal constraints at both federal and state levels are heightening scrutiny of whether education spending is translating into measurable learning gains.

UTME outcomes matter acutely within this context because they sit at the intersection of access, merit-based selection, and labour-market signalling. As demand for tertiary education continues to exceed available capacity, UTME performance increasingly determines not only whether students gain admission but also the quality of institutions and programmes they can access. Persistent underperformance among large cohorts therefore has implications extending beyond education policy to workforce development, inequality, and long-term productivity.

Public secondary schools enrol the majority of Nigerian students, particularly those from lower-income households and [rural communities](#). Systematic underperformance in this segment thus carries distributional consequences that private school success alone cannot offset. Improving public secondary school outcomes is therefore not a marginal concern; it is central to Nigeria's human capital trajectory.

This Athena Perspective is directed at federal and state education authorities, members of the National Council on Education, legislators overseeing education budgets, and development partners engaged in learning outcome reform. Its purpose is not to advocate for any schooling model but to clarify which institutional levers matter most and how they can realistically be strengthened within Nigeria's existing governance framework.

Nigeria's Core Education Governance Failure

Despite expanded enrolment and repeated policy reforms, Nigeria's public secondary education system lacks institutional mechanisms that translate performance data, teacher deployment authority, and funding flows into consistent [learning outcomes](#). This weakness underpins persistent UTME performance gaps and explains why increased spending or policy announcements have yielded limited returns.

The binding constraint is not the absence of examinations, curricula, or legal frameworks. Nigeria has all three. Rather, the constraint lies in how information is used, how authority is fragmented, and how incentives shape institutional behaviour.

In most Nigerian states, examination outcomes do not systematically inform school supervision, principal evaluation, teacher deployment, or budget prioritisation. UTME results are released annually, widely discussed in the media, and then largely disconnected from administrative response. Without institutionalised feedback loops, poor performance persists without consequence, and improvement remains episodic rather than systemic.

This policy brief anchors its analysis on this institutional failure: performance data exist, but they do not govern behaviour.

What UTME Data Reveal – and What They Do Not

The UTME is the most consequential standardised examination in Nigeria's education system. Administered annually by JAMB, it determines eligibility and competitiveness for admission into universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education.

Official JAMB statistical bulletins consistently show that a majority of candidates score below commonly cited competitive [thresholds](#). In the 2025 UTME cycle, fewer than one-third of candidates scored [200](#) or above, and only a very small fraction reached the highest score bands. These distributions point to systemic learning challenges rather than marginal underperformance.

However, a critical limitation must be stated clearly. JAMB does not publish UTME results disaggregated by school ownership. As a result, precise year-by-year comparisons between public and private secondary school candidates cannot be verified using official UTME data alone. Any claim suggesting exact numerical differences would therefore lack evidentiary grounding.

This policy brief avoids such overreach. Instead, it relies on three defensible sources of evidence:

- 1. Aggregate UTME score distributions**, which reveal the overall scale and persistence of underperformance.
- 2. Peer-reviewed and multilateral studies** comparing learning outcomes across school types using household surveys, standardised assessments, and longitudinal data.
- 3. Consistent qualitative patterns** documented across multiple examination cycles, including state-level variations and school-level practices.

Across these sources, findings consistently indicate that students from private secondary schools are disproportionately represented among higher-performing cohorts, while candidates from public schools dominate lower [score ranges](#). The persistence of this pattern across time and geography suggests institutional rather than episodic explanations.

Importantly, this does not imply inherent superiority of private schools. It indicates that incentive structures, management practices, and accountability mechanisms differ in ways that systematically affect outcomes.

Why UTME Performance Patterns Matter Systemically

UTME outcomes function as more than individual achievement indicators. They serve as system-level signals of how effectively secondary education institutions convert inputs, teachers, infrastructure, curriculum, and instructional time into learning outcomes.

Persistent underperformance generates several systemic effects.

First, it restricts access to competitive tertiary programmes, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields that are critical for economic transformation. Second, it reinforces socioeconomic stratification by increasing reliance on private tutoring, remedial programmes, and fee-paying institutions. Third, it contributes to misalignment between education outputs and labour-market needs, as employers increasingly question the preparedness of secondary school [graduates](#).

These effects are magnified because public secondary schools educate the majority of Nigerian students. When underperformance is concentrated in this segment, national averages decline, and inequality widens.

Governance Failures in Public Secondary Education

Nigeria's secondary education system operates within a fragmented governance framework defined by the 1999 Constitution and the National Policy on Education. Federal authorities set broad policy direction, while state governments finance, manage, and supervise public secondary [schools](#).

In practice, this arrangement produces wide variation in outcomes. States differ significantly in budget execution capacity, teacher deployment efficiency, school inspection quality, and data utilisation. National standards often fail to translate into classroom-level improvements where state capacity and political commitment are weak.

Weak Budget Execution and Resource Targeting

A recurring weakness lies not in budget allocation but in budget execution. Education budgets frequently experience delayed releases, high proportions of recurrent spending, and weak monitoring of capital projects. Schools operate with uncertainty about resource availability, undermining planning and instructional continuity.

Capital investments, where they occur, are often poorly targeted. Infrastructure upgrades are not consistently prioritised for the lowest-performing schools, limiting their impact on learning outcomes.

Teacher Deployment Without Accountability

Teacher deployment illustrates the political economy constraints shaping public school performance. Although qualification standards are regulated by the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria, enforcement varies widely [across states](#). Teacher absenteeism, uneven distribution, and limited in-service training remain persistent challenges.

Supervision mechanisms are frequently compliance-oriented rather than performance-driven. School inspections focus on record-keeping rather than instructional quality, and inspection findings rarely trigger corrective action.

Performance Data Without Administrative Response

Perhaps the most consequential failure is the weak integration of performance data into management decisions. UTME, WASSCE, and BECE results are not systematically analysed at the school level, nor are they linked to principal evaluation, teacher support, or resource allocation.

In contrast, private secondary schools operate under incentive structures where enrolment, revenue, and reputation depend directly on examination outcomes. This creates strong internal pressure to monitor performance, support teachers, and adjust instruction. Public schools generally do not face equivalent signals, producing predictable differences in behaviour without implying intrinsic [institutional superiority](#).

How Institutional Weakness Appears in Practice

The abstract language of “governance failure” becomes clearer when grounded in Nigerian practice.

Weak School Inspection Systems: In several states, teacher absenteeism remains high, particularly in rural schools, with limited consequences due to weak supervision. School inspectors are often under-resourced, poorly trained, or politically constrained. Delayed salary payments and promotion backlogs further weaken motivation.

Politicised Leadership Appointments: Principal appointments are frequently politicised, prioritising seniority or patronage over instructional leadership. Once appointed, principals face limited performance expectations tied to student outcomes.

The Absence of Real-Time Performance Monitoring: Crucially, no state currently operates a comprehensive school-level performance dashboard integrating examination results, attendance data, teacher deployment, and inspection findings. Without such tools, systemic learning improvement remains aspirational rather than operational.

Comparative Lessons from Other African Education Systems

International experience reinforces the argument that public-private performance gaps are not inevitable.

South Africa: Spending Without Governance Reform: In South Africa, high public education spending has not eliminated outcome disparities due to persistent governance and management [weaknesses](#).

Ghana: Access Expansion and Management Capacity: Ghana’s Free Senior High School reforms expanded access rapidly, but learning gains were strongest where enrolment growth coincided with investments in teacher support and [school management](#).

Uganda: Accountability in Publicly Financed Provision: Uganda’s Universal Secondary Education programme demonstrates that publicly financed private provision can perform at national averages when monitoring and supervision systems are enforced [consistently](#). Across cases, institutional design and incentive alignment, not programme proliferation, determine performance outcomes

Policy Priorities for Performance Improvement

Policy recommendations must be prioritised rather than presented as equal options. The most binding constraint is weak performance management, and reforms should proceed accordingly.

1. Build State-Level Learning Management Systems

Institutions: Federal Ministry of Education; State Ministries of Education; Education Management Information Systems Units.

By 2027, at least 24 states should publish annual secondary school performance dashboards integrating UTME, WASSCE, BECE, attendance, teacher deployment, and inspection data.

KPIs:

- Number of states publishing dashboards
- Evidence of data informing staffing and budget decisions

2. Reform Teacher Deployment and Evaluation

Institutions: Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria; State Education Boards.

Within three years, states should adopt standardised teacher evaluation frameworks linked to professional development and deployment decisions.

KPIs:

- Share of teachers evaluated annually
- Participation in targeted training programmes

3. Target Infrastructure to Low-Performing Schools

Institutions: Universal Basic Education Commission; State Governments.

Infrastructure upgrades should prioritise the lowest-performing quartile of public secondary schools over a five-year horizon.

KPIs:

- Facility utilisation rates
- Student-teacher ratios

4. Publish School-Level Performance Data

Institutions: State Ministries of Education.

States should release accessible performance summaries within two years, avoiding sensationalist league tables while enabling accountability.

KPIs:

- Timeliness of publication
- Stakeholder engagement metrics

Conclusion: Nigeria's Education Crisis Is a Management Crisis

Persistent disparities in UTME outcomes reflect governance and incentive failures, not examination design or policy intent alone. As long as performance data remain weakly connected to institutional response, expanded access will not translate into equitable learning outcomes.

Nigeria already possesses the examinations, agencies, and policy frameworks required to address these challenges. What it lacks is the discipline to convert data into management action. Strengthening this discipline, through performance management, accountability, and execution, is the most credible path to improving public secondary school outcomes.

Human capital formation is not constrained by ambition or rhetoric. It is constrained by institutions that fail to learn from their own data. Addressing this failure is essential for Nigeria's social mobility, economic resilience, and long-term development.

Authors

Blessed Oladiran and **Anita Olatunde** are research assistants at Athena Centre for Policy and Leadership.



Enugu to Begin Construction of 660MW Coal-Fired Power Plant in July

The Enugu State Government has unveiled plans to commence construction of a 660-megawatt coal-fired power plant in July 2026 as part of efforts to drive economic growth and improve electricity supply in the state.

Governor Peter Mbah disclosed this during a solidarity visit by the Organised Private Sector Nigeria (OPSN), Enugu State chapter, at the Government House, Enugu, on May 6, 2026.

Mbah said the project forms part of his administration's strategy to expand the state's economy from \$4.4 billion to \$30 billion.

<https://www.thisdaylive.com/2026/05/07/enugu-targets-660mw-coal-fired-power-plant-sets-july-ground-breaking-date/>
(<https://www.thisdaylive.com/2026/05/07/enugu-targets-660mw-coal-fired-power-plant-sets-july-ground-breaking-date/>)

Akwa Ibom Injects N5.9bn into Basic Education Projects

The Akwa Ibom State Government has injected N5.9 billion into the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) for 2025 and 2026 intervention projects aimed at improving learning conditions in public schools.

The Chairman of SUBEB, Anietie Etuk, disclosed this during a briefing on May 6, 2026, stating that the intervention would shift from partial renovations to more comprehensive school upgrades.

According to him, "Intervention will no longer be piecemeal. When we go to a school, we will handle it holistically, classrooms, water, toilets, electricity and provide everything required to make the environment suitable for learning. "However, government cannot continue to commit huge resources only for facilities to be vandalised. Communities must take responsibility to protect what is provided for them."

<https://businessday.ng/news/article/eno-approves-n5-9bn-for-basic-education-reforms-in-akwa-ibom/>
(<https://businessday.ng/news/article/eno-approves-n5-9bn-for-basic-education-reforms-in-akwa-ibom/>)

FG Bans Honorary Degree Holders from Using "Dr" Title

The Federal Government has banned recipients of honorary degrees from using the "Dr" prefix before their names in official, academic and

professional settings, describing the practice as a misrepresentation of academic qualifications. The government also warned that individuals who present honorary degrees as earned academic titles would henceforth be regarded as engaging in academic fraud, with possible legal and reputational consequences.

<https://thenationonlineng.net/just-in-fg-bans-honorary-degree-holders-from-using-of-dr-title/>
(<https://thenationonlineng.net/just-in-fg-bans-honorary-degree-holders-from-using-of-dr-title/>)

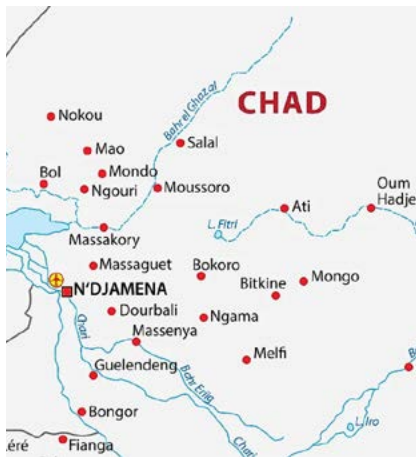
INEC Announces Final Phase of Continuous Voter Registration Exercise

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has announced the commencement of the third and final phase of the Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) exercise nationwide.

In a statement issued by Mohammed Kudu Haruna, Chairman of the Information and Voter Education Committee, the commission said the exercise would resume on Monday, 11 May 2026.

<https://dailypost.ng/2026/05/06/2027-inec-gives-final-opportunity-for-nigerians-to-get-voters-card/>
(<https://dailypost.ng/2026/05/06/2027-inec-gives-final-opportunity-for-nigerians-to-get-voters-card/>)

REGIONAL UPDATES



Chad Declares State of Emergency in Lake Chad Province

Faced with the persistent terrorist threat, the Chadian government has taken a further step by declaring a state of emergency in the Lake Province for a period of twenty days, starting from May 7, 2026.

The decree was issued pursuant to Article 135 of the Constitution. This exceptional measure entered into force at midnight on May 7, 2026, and remained in effect until midnight on May 27, 2026.

This decision comes in the wake of the deadly attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram on May 4 and 6, 2026, against the Barka Tolorom military base, which cost the lives of several dozen Chadian soldiers and forced the government to declare three days of national mourning.

<https://dailypost.ng/2026/05/06/2027-ine-c-gives-final-opportunity-for-nigerians-to-get-voters-card/>(<https://dailypost.ng/2026/05/06/2027-ine-c-gives-final-opportunity-for-nigerians-to-get-voters-card/>)

Cameroon Conducts Fourth National Population, Housing and Agricultural Census

Cameroon is undertaking its fourth General Population, Housing and Agricultural Census as part of efforts to modernise national planning and update critical socio-demographic, socio-economic, and agro-pastoral data required for development policy formulation and implementation.

The exercise is aimed at providing reliable statistical information to support the design, execution, and monitoring of government programmes and projects across the country.

Since gaining independence in 1960, Cameroon has conducted three general population and housing censuses, in 1976, 1987, and 2005, as well as a single census on agriculture and livestock in 1984.

<https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/76380/en.html/population-census-headcount-update-data>(<https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/76380/en.html/population-census-headcount-update-data>)

Niger Reports Major Mineral Reserves and Rise in Mining Revenue

Speaking on RTN Radio on Monday, 4 May 2026, the Minister of Mines outlined Niger's strategic mineral resources and the sector's performance in 2025.

He said the country has over one billion tonnes of phosphate reserves, with

about 7.3 million tonnes located in the Tahoua region, particularly in Aneker and Gaweye.

He also highlighted lithium reserves, estimated between 300,000 and 350,000 tonnes in the Téra area, especially in Diblo, as well as parts of the Air and Damagaram regions.

<https://www.anp.ne/mi-nes-plus-de-18-milliards>

Benin Sets New Mandatory Fees for Associations and Foundations

The Minister of the Interior and Public Security and the Minister of Economy and Finance have signed Interministerial Decree No. 160-2026, introducing new mandatory fees for associations and foundations in the Republic of Benin.

The decree, signed on Thursday, 7 May 2026, fixes the total payment required from each organisation at 90,000 CFA francs, to be paid into the national budget.

According to the new provisions, the amount includes 50,000 CFA francs for registration of existence in the Register of Associations and Foundations in the Republic of Benin, and 40,000 CFA francs for the publication of the registration receipt, as well as other statutory publications required in the Official Gazette of the register.

<https://levenementprecis.bj/vie-associative-au-benin-le-gouvernement-fixe-les-frais-denregistrement-et-de-publication-a-90-000-fcfa/>

Disclaimer:

The insights, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Athena Centre, its affiliates, or its Board of Trustees. The information contained in this publication is believed to be based on sources that are accurate and reliable; however, Athena Centre makes no claims or guarantees regarding the completeness, accuracy, or timeliness of the data and assumes no legal liability or responsibility for any errors or omissions.

This report is intended for educational and informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice or an endorsement of any specific policies, individuals, agencies, or entities. Decisions based on the content of this report are the sole responsibility of the reader. Athena Centre advises readers to seek independent verification and professional counsel before making any decisions based on the information herein.



-  Block A10, Phase 2, Sani Zangon
Daura Estates, Kado, FCT.
-  info.centre@athenacentre.org
-  [facebook.com/Athena Centre for
Policy and Leadership](https://facebook.com/Athena_Centre_for_Policy_and_Leadership)
-  x.com/Athena_Centre
-  [@Athenacentrepl](https://instagram.com/Athenacentrepl)
-  [Athena Centre for Policy and Leadership](https://www.linkedin.com/company/Athena_Centre_for_Policy_and_Leadership)