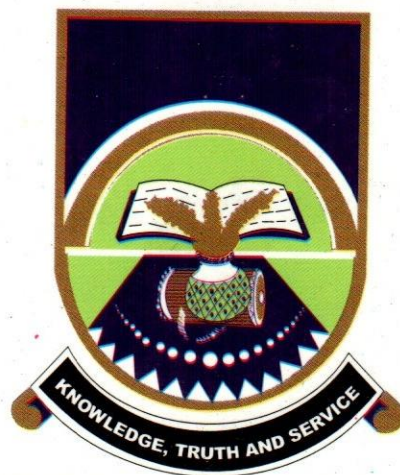


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HISTORICAL REVIEW OF NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FIFTY YEAR AFTER INDEPENDENCE: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This paper examines critically the down-toll of educational system in Nigeria since her independence in Oct 1, 1960. This historic analysis is imperative because of the noticeable and unacceptable decadence in the education sector despite all the efforts made by various levels of government and stakeholders towards reviving education in Nigeria. The paper reviews the inherited colonial education policies; its essentialism functionalism and shortcomings to the traditional values, norms, and socio-political growth and development of our nation. The reason for the change over to Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1976 made primary education free and compulsory for all. National Policy on Education (NPE) was introduced in 1977 followed by 6 – 3 – 3 – 4 education system, the Language policy, curriculum policy and other committees were set up to ensure quality. All these notwithstanding, the future of the education system still remained bleak and precarious. The paper therefore highlighted some noted problems in the policies by revealing some prospects and challenges of the system and advocated reclamation, restoration and sustenance of quality and ethics in Nigerian education system that could move the nation forward. Suggestions were made on what could be done to alleviate the poor standard of education in Nigeria.

Introduction

Education is sine-qua-non to national development and has to do with a totality of humans so, it is a right and not a privilege. A country without sound and vibrant education would remain backward. Until the coming of the missionaries to Nigeria in 1842 there was no knowledge of reading and writing. The arrival of various missionary bodies in Nigeria between September 1842 and 1860 mark the introduction of Western education in Nigeria. The primary objective of the early Christian missionaries was to convert Africans to Christians through education. The establishment of missions was always followed by the opening of primary schools. The colonial government paid little attention to education and was merely interested in using the products of the mission schools as clerks, messengers and interpreters. This kind of liberal education could not carry the nation far, hence the first government intervention in education in Nigeria was in 1872 when the colonial government made available the sum of 300 pounds in educational activities in Lagos, CMS, Wesleyan Methodist and Catholics as grants-in-aids which increased in 1877 to 200 pounds per year. By the

end of 1912 there were 59 government primary schools and 91 mission schools. One recurrent criticism of education up to that time when regions (East, North and West) were created by Richard constitution of 1946 was: education was elitist and hardly affordable by a majority of people. Hence the regions were faced with the challenge of providing education for the majority (Fafunwa 1974).

In 1955 due to the challenges, the Western region attempted proclamation of free Universal and compulsory primary education (UPE) scheme for the entire region. British education policies in Nigeria reflect other British colonial policies which at best can be described as being tailored to the immediate needs of colonial administration. Like other policies which guided colonial administration in Nigeria, the educational policies initially aimed at training the indigenous people to fill up those positions reserved for Africans in order to carry out the mechanics of imperial administration (Ejimofo, 1987). All through the 19th century and up to the early part of the 20th century, the education which Africans received was literary education which fitted them for a limited field of life work such as clerks in government departments or business offices and school teachers. It did not fit them for

the immediate work they had to do in the villages, in their farms or in their native workshops, or at the executive level in the national administration.

The responsibility for the formulation of a general education policy in the colonial Empire lay with the secretary of state for the colonies. Until the 1920's this responsibility was left primary to the Christian Missionary societies or Christian Missions (Otonti, 1964). Upon the attainment of independence on October 1st 1960, coupled with the recognition of the critical role of education and training in a nation's economic growth and development, successful Nigerian governments have developed policies, plans and budgets for the attainment of desired objectives in this sector. The major policy enunciated by the Federal Government and which has directed, shaped and influenced the course of education in Nigeria is National Policy on Education (NPE, 1977). These National Policies have been complemented through the years by assistance from multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO, among others. Yet despite all the measures, the general impression across the country is that the quality of education has fallen in the past years and the products of the educational system, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels, are ill-equipped to fit into existing job positions in government and industry and/or create employment for themselves. It is against this background of a depleting and deteriorating educational system that this paper deems it necessary to review policies and plans in the sector since independence.

The above summation shows that Nigeria has witnessed several educational reforms which started at pre-independence. It was to the credit of Nigerians notably agitators for self-rule that led the British colonial rule to change the educational system in operation in 1954 from -6-8-2-3 system, that is, 8 year primary, 6 year secondary and 2 year higher school certificate and 3 year university. It was viewed as a patriotic struggle to effect a change in the educational structure for the general good of the country. The hope in educational reforms continued to rekindle after independence. The freedom of self rule Nigeria was enjoying had to match with educational progress. By 1969, colonial education was criticized as lacking vitality and relevance. The conference of 1969 recommended changes in the system from 6-5-2-3 system to 6-3-3-4 system, this in conformity with American and Japanese system of education.

Objectives of the Paper

The general objective of the study is to assess and review various plans and policies in the Nigerian educational sector since the time of independence while the specific objectives include.

- (a) Strengthening Nigerian Educational Institutions at all levels.
- (b) Improving the manpower planning function and linking it to educational programmes to enhance relevance.

Outline of the Study

The remaining part of this paper is organized as follows: section two contains various reforms in the Nigerian educational system since independence, while section three deals with prospects and challenges of these reforms; and the observed constraints in the Nigerian education sector. Finally, section four contains conclusions and policy recommendations.

Reforms in Educational Sector.

The Federal Government of Nigeria in 1977 formulated the first National Policy on Education (NPE) and this was revised in 1981 and 1991. the policy was informed by the need to identify and chart a new direction to, as well as evolve an appropriate educational system for the country. Its framework covers all educational activities and functions from the provision of educational services to administration, planning, and financing. Specifically the policy seeks to attain universal free and compulsory primary education, continuous assessment of pupils, free junior secondary education, free University tuition, nation-wide mass literacy, free and "special" education for handicapped and gifted children, and up grading of teachers' qualifications. Some of the goals set out in the policy include the expansion of Universal Basic Education (UBE) to six years primary and three years of Junior Secondary; new primary school and federally funded Universities were to be established to ensure even geographical coverage. Emphasis was to be placed on the establishment of new technical and teaching colleges while new state funded universities were to be discouraged. The norms were sets out to inculcate some core norms and values in the polity such as the desirability for national unity; the importance of the training of the man in the understanding of the world around him; and the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of society. Some core aspects of the NPE are as follows:

A. Universal Primary Education (UPE)

The National UPE scheme, which made primary education free and compulsory, was launched in 1976 although, states in the former Western region had enjoyed the scheme since the 1950s. The financial burden of implementing the scheme on the Federal government became onerous and the responsibility was transferred to states and

Local Governments such that by 1981, Federal Government funding of primary education was completely phased out. Between the states and Local Government, with the exception of Lagos state, most states transferred the greater part of the burden of funding primary education to Local Government with as high as 53 percent of the funding coming from the Local Government.

B. The 6 – 3 – 3 – 4 System

Uniformity in duration of education came with the NPE which stipulated a 6-year primary education and 3 – 3 structure (3 years of Junior Secondary School and 3 years of Senior Secondary School) leading to the Junior Secondary Certificate (JSC) and Senior Secondary Certificate (SSC), respectively. Also, a uniform entry procedure to universities, through a University Matriculation Examination (UME) conducted by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), replaced the former system of preliminary admission for holders of GCE O – level and Direct entry for holders of GCE A – level and 4 years became the basic minimum for a bachelor's degree in a university.

C. The Language Policy

The NPE recommends that the medium of instruction in primary schools initially should be the "Mother – tongue" or the Language of the Immediate Community and, at a later stage, English. In the Junior Secondary Schools, in selecting two Nigerian languages, students should study the language of their own area in addition to any of the three main Nigerian languages, which are "Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba".

D. The Curriculum Policy

The change in the education structure was accompanied by some changes in curricula recommended for the various levels of education. The Nigeria Education Research & Development Council (NERDC) is charged with the duty of curricula development. As at 1993, the council had prepared several curricular and text – books for pre-primary and primary levels. At the secondary level the curriculum is more discipline based and covers nine subjects.

E. Policy on the Education of Women

Out of the 44 Federal Government Colleges in Nigeria, 22 enroll girls only while the rest are mixed. Some state governments have enacted laws towards preventing the withdrawal of girls from schools for early marriage. National awareness campaign on women had been launched in Lagos and other states and Local Government and women education branches have been set up in Federal and state ministries of Education. As at 1992, 88 women education model centre's had been established by

the Federal Ministry of Education all over the Federation.

F. Private Institutions

The Governments Policy on education allows persons whether corporate or sole to establish and run educational institutions from the pre-primary up to tertiary levels within the framework of guidelines and regulations laid down by the federal and state ministries of Education. In some states of the Federation, there has been an increase in private schools, many of which are of good quality and profitable. In 1990, about 20 percent of secondary schools were under private pro-prietorship for the country as a whole although the share is likely to be smaller in terms of enrolment.

G. Supervisory and Regulatory Bodies

The National Primary Education Committee (NPEC). NPEC was re-established by decree No. 96 of 1993 as the apex regulatory body of primary school education and placed under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Education. The committee is charged with the responsibility of distributing funds for primary education management to state primary Education Boards (SPEB) and Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAS) and supervising the activities of the state and local government boards. NPEC was established in the wake of almost virtual collapse of the primary education system in the country when the system was characterized by poor infrastructure, low enrolment levels, and non-payment of teachers' salaries, which led to strikes and closures. Another function of the commission is to prescribe minimum standards and conduct since inception, the committee has been faced by instability and general lack of focus and widespread misappropriation of funds, which has led to the committee being disbanded once more.

National Commission for Colleges of Education

The NCCE is the apex regulatory body for colleges of Education in Nigeria. It was established by Decree NO. 3 of January 1989 and under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Education. Its functions are to coordinate all institutions other than universities and polytechnics. It is also expected to make recommendations on the national policy necessary for full development of teacher education and the training of teachers: lay down minimum standards for all programmes of teacher education and accreditation of their certificates and other academics awards; and approve guidelines setting out criteria for accreditation of all colleges of education in Nigeria.

National Board for Technical Education (NBTE)

In 1980, a two – tier system of National Diploma (ND) and higher National Diploma (HND) was introduced into the polytechnic tertiary system. The responsibility for ensuring minimum standards in Diploma courses in polytechnics is that of the NBTE which was established by Decree 9 of 1977. The Board's functions are to determine the general programmes to be pursued by polytechnics and colleges of Technology in order to maximize the use of available facilities and avoid unnecessary duplication, while ensuring that they are adequate to the manpower needs of the country. The Board is also to advise on, and take steps to harmonise entry requirements and duration to courses at technical institutions; and to lay down standards of skills to be attained and to continually review such standards as necessitated by technology and national needs.

Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC)

The NUC was established in 1962 as an apex regulatory body for universities. It initially existed as an Administrative Department of the cabinet office but became a stator body in 1975. The commission's functions are; to ensure orderly development of universities education in Nigeria; maintain high standards; and ensure adequate funding. Decree 16 of 1985 conferred additional responsibilities and powers on the NUC; of laying minimum academic programmes and the power to enforce these minimum standards and carry out accreditation of degrees and academic programmes.

University Education:

The government has majority control of University education. Nigeria university are grouped into first generation universities and 2nd generation universities..Five of these first generation were established between 1948 and 1965 following the recommendation of Ashby Commission set up by the British Colonial Government to study the needs for university education for Nigeria. These universities were fully funded by the Federal Government to meet the manpower needs of Nigeria and set basic standards for university education in the country. The universities have continued to play their roles for manpower developments and provision of standards which have helped to guide the subsequent establishments of other generations and state universities in Nigeria. With the increasing population of qualified students for university education in Nigeria and the growing needs for scientific and technological development, setting up more universities became imperative. Between 1970 and 1985, 12 additional university were established and located in various part of the country.

National Commission for Nomadic Education

The National Commission for Nomadic Education is the apex regulatory body for nomadic education in Nigeria. It is charged with the responsibilities of formulating policy issues and guidelines for nomadic education and providing funds for research and personnel development for the improvement of nomadic education in Nigeria. It also has the responsibility to make provision for equipment, teaching aids and other instructional materials and construct classrooms and other facilities relating to nomadic education; arranged effectives monitoring and evaluation of the activities of agencies concerned with nomadic education; and establish, manage and maintain primary tools for nomadic education. A 1984-1988 UNESCO / UNDP survey highlighted the problems providing education to nomads in Nigeria. According to the study, only 200,000 out of 6million pastoral nomads in the country were literate. As at 1990, 329 nomadic schools had been established in 18 states of the federation with an enrolment of 18,331 students. (FGN / UNICEF, 1996).

Introduction of Education Funding Scheme.

The Education Tax fund (ETF) of 1993 mandated that two percent of the assessable profit of a company should be collected by the Federal Board of Internal Revenue (FBIR) paid into an Education Tax (ETF) managed by the Education Tax Board of Trustees with representation from the Federal Ministry of Education and Youth Development (FMEYD) and beneficiary parastatals. The funds are to be used for work centres, staff development, conference attendance and the library system at all the three levels of government. According to the decree higher education will get 50 percent of the fund primary education 40 percent and secondary education will get the remaining 10 percent

Education Bank

In 1939, an Education Bank `was set up with an initial allocation of #100 million. The Bank was to take over the responsibilities of the student Loans Board in assisting students who would need financing assistance tertiary education. A #250 million Naira revolving credit loan scheme administered by the Scholarship Board, was set up in 1991 for University education. The 1994 rolling plan also included a reference to a revolving fund for text books but there were no details as to the start up date or operational procedures of the bank.

Prospects of Nigeria Education Sector.

The Universal Primary Education system was initiated to ensure everyone access to reading and writing. The UBE education system was formulated to maintain an interrupted access to 9

year formal education for child of school age (6-15 years). Drastic reduction in incidence of school dropout and enthronement of relevance, quality and efficiency in the sub-system. It provides acquisition of literacy, numeracy life skills and appropriate values for lifelong education and useful living. It also ensure removal of distortions by reinforcing the implementation of the 9-3-4, (formally 6-3-3-4) system of education. Enhancement of community participation in decision making process in school with a view to engendering community interest is shown. The new 9 year curriculum as developed by (NERDC) has imbedded in the curriculum, the objectives of NEEDS (National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy) and MDGs (Millenium Development Goals) is another added advantage. It is basic and necessary to provide a child with diverse basic knowledge, skills for entrepreneurship, wealth generation and educational advancement inculcating right values for independent thinking and providing opportunities for the child to develop manipulative skills that will enable functionality in the society and realize her full potential (UBEC,2008).

The Identified Challenges of Nigeria Education Sector

Much have been adjudged and debated widely of failed educational policies in Nigeria. It was due to some of under-listed factors:

- Poor financing of the education sector of the nation has been discussed as the bane of failed policies designed and implemented in Nigeria.
- Issue of inadequate fund appears to be one of the most chronic challenges facing education sector.
- Ezekwensilli (2007) declares that there is no thorough supervision of schools in decade. Lack of supervision of schools in the past has been another problem. A system not supervised and evaluated is in dire need of collapse. The national policy on Education (NPE,2004) sees supervision as an aspect to ensure quality and continuous monitoring of instruction and other educational services.
- Adequate planning was not put in place to implement 6-3-3-4 system. During the launching of UPE, government hesitantly took over all voluntary and mission schools and assumed full responsibility of running the scheme. This shows that they were chewing more than they could bite.
- The enormous responsibility of Federal government of Nigeria took in respect of the UPE programme could not be sustained.
- There is still high percentage of school drop-out rate.

- Teachers were poorly trained and poorly motivated.
- Incessant school drop-out rate has not been abated.

Key Issues and Observed Constraints In Nigeria Education Sector.

The World Conference in Jointing, Thailand on education held in 1990, marked the emergence of an international consensus that education is the single most vital element in combating poverty, empowering women, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment and controlling population growth. Previously, education had been assessed in terms of gross enrolment rates at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. At Jointien, it became clear that as essential as is counting the number of children sitting on school benches is only part of the picture. The expanded vision of education that emerged included emphasis on basic education early childhood care and development, and learning through adolescence and adulthood. Other key elements included making girls' education a major priority; the recognition that learning begins at birth, the importance of children's need for care and stimulation in their early years and the acknowledgement that new partnerships among governments and groups at all. Another philosophy in world circles at present is that learning is a lifelong occupation. Education systems are devising more accurate methods of measuring actual learning. (FON/ World Bank, 2000). It is against this background of world indicators and ideals that the following constraints that serve as impediments to the realization of an effective and ideal educational system in Nigeria are presented. The observed constraints are from the Draft report of National Capacity Assessment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria organized by the Federal Ministry of Finance in collaboration with the World Bank (FON / World Bank, 2000).

- i. The number and the percentage of children within the age range of 2 - 5 years enrolled in Nursery Schools were considerably low. This was due to the fact that parents had a low understanding of the importance of Nursery education, and also the impression that fees payable for nursery education was high. The "drop-out" rate was found to be equally high and inability to pay fees was held largely accountable
- ii. The curriculum for nursery schools are found to be adequate but the medium of teaching is English language in at least 93 percent of cases contrary to NPE, which specifies the mother tongue as the language of instruction at that age.

- iii. There was inadequacy of qualified teaching staff in the nursery schools. At least 15 percent of the current teachers do not have the required minimum qualification of Teacher Grade 11 certificate and 10 percent of the teachers teach in areas outside their subject specialization. To meet the minimum number of teachers required by the schools, the current total number should be increased by at least 30 percent.
- iv. 13.89 percent of primary school teachers teach in areas outside their subject specialization. This impacts negatively on the quality of knowledge transfer and underscores the need for the requirement of more teachers with special competencies. In particular, primary schools are critically short-staffed in the subject areas of Mathematics, English, Science, Physical and Health Education and Arts and crafts.
- v. Primary Schools suffer severely and critically from infrastructure inadequacy. There are not enough school buildings and the available ones are in severe state of disrepair. At least 4.9 percent of schools in the country have no school buildings. Teaching materials and aids and other facilities that assist in producing an environment conducive for learning are generally either unavailable or inadequate. This is more endemic in public primary schools. SAPA survey report found that 77 percent of children had no textbooks, one third lacked writing materials, 38.5 percent of the classrooms had no ceilings. Over-enrolment in the schools further compounds the problem of inadequacy of facilities.
- vi. The current teaching ratio of 1:28 in 1997 in secondary schools needs to be reduced to the internationally acceptable level of about 1:20. Also secondary schools are critically short-staffed in the subject areas of mathematics, Physics, English and Introductory technology.
- vii. School terms are often interrupted because of teacher's strikes and the most common causes of such strikes are delay in payment of salaries and poor conditions of services. Teachers also change teaching jobs often for better job opportunities.
- viii. 44 percent of the higher or tertiary institutions have been unable to carry out research in their priority areas (food production, adaptation of technology and local raw material utilization) because of inability to secure the minimum amount of research grants required.

- ix. Incessant strikes are the bane of tertiary institutions but these seem to be abating. The desired institutional framework for regulating tertiary institutions is available but its impact had not been significant and effective. The regulatory bodies of Tertiary Institutions need to be free of executive interference and must be allowed more free hand to operate.

Conclusion

Judging Nigerian from appalling state of affairs in practically every aspect of her nation life there is a general consensus that Nigeria has not lived up to expectation at fifty. A lot have gone amiss beginning for redemption and among such which needs immediate intervention is the education sector. The President of Nigeria, of recent made laboratories lamentation that the 6 - 3 - 3 - 4 system of education in vogue has failed Nigerians, and moves is on to transcend to another education system. The big question that will the newly introduced system be capable to transform Nigeria.

Policies, plans and budgets must be understood to be a dynamic process, which will entail developing rehabilitation, strengthening and reinvigorating individuals as well as institutions to enable them to perform at their optimum. (FGN / World Bank, 2000). Within the education sector, polices plans and budgets must focus on methods of increasing knowledge among the citizenry regardless of age. Knowledge is power and it is a proven veritable tool for sustainable national development. Nigeria and other developing nations suffer knowledge gaps in critical sectors and only the properly conceived educational policies and purposeful and focused implementation of educational programmes can narrow these gaps. The most critical gaps that must he narrowed promptly are technology and information / communication gaps. The easier methods open to developing nations is to create an avenue to acquire and adapt existing knowledge rather than seek to invent knowledge, and also seek to absorb knowledge. Absorbing knowledge would involve ensuring basic education, with special emphasis on extending education to girls and other traditionally disadvantaged groups, recognizing the importance of and encouraging life long learning for all, and supporting tertiary education especially in science and technology. Addressing information problems means seeking even out the distribution of information by employing modern methods of communication. The convergence of computing and telecommunication in the current information age surpasses the past achievements in that area and now makes it possible to send vast amounts of information anywhere in the world in seconds at an ever decreasing cost. This new technology greatly facilitates the acquisition and absorption of

knowledge, offering Nigeria and other developing nations phenomenon opportunities to enhance educational systems, improve policy formulation and execution, and widen the range of opportunities.

Policy Recommendation

For the Nigerian educational system to be able to combat poverty, empowering women, promoting human rights and democracy, The Nigeria's policy on Education must evolve around the following.

- a. Create a vision, formulate sound policies strategies and programmes that would portray

an appreciation of the importance of knowledge creation, adaptation and absorption to national development.

- b. Provide institutional framework for pre-service teacher training and in-service training; and
- c. Continually assess and evaluate curricula in all levels of educational institutions and seek to meet the needs of the current world-wide technological and information requirements and also assess skill requirement of industries and be able to deliver such skilled graduates.

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