DEREGULATION OF PROVISION OF EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: MYTH, REALITY OR THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

The paper examined the real meaning of deregulation and its relevance to the educational system. Deregulation is a governmental policy that allows greater participation of (he individuals, communities and other bodies in the provision, supervision and financing of educational costs. Examples were drawn from the history of greater participation by Nigerians and mission bodies, Americans experience and the gain so far in the deregulatory system. The probable harms and benefits were equally enunciated in this paper.

Introduction

Deregulation of provision of education does not mean government's handoff from education or handicapping government regulations on education matters. Deregulation in its real sense means, minimum involvement by the government in the provision, financing and regulation of education in a nation where this is practiced.

According to Babalola and Adedeji (2004) deregulation involves a deliberate elimination of wrong regulations, directives, rules, guidelines, laws, policies and practices (such as subsidization) that stand as barriers to free market and competitive system of education.

Deregulation therefore eliminates virtually all government involvement in education, though naturally increases parental autonomy, it is really a power shift from government total control to parents over the influences to which their children are exposed, and they can efficiently pass on their family religions and political traditions to the next generation. The National Policy on Education in Nigeria has not at any point in time stipulated deregulation of the educational system. Neither has it been spelt out in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that education would be deregulated at particular stage of its development. However, what the country education system has been witnessing and experiencing from time immemorial is a greater participation of private individuals, groups, agencies, and well meaning Nigerians in the control, provision and management of the system.

Historical Antecendent

History of education in Nigeria recorded concerted efforts of the missionaries, individuals, communities and agencies in, the participation in the provision, supervision, management and control of education along side with governments when governments came to be involved in education matters.

Right from beginning, education in Nigeria was not provided on equal basis. Education (Western type) came to Nigeria through different missionary societies as recorded by Omolewa (1977:70) who said:

The first European made contact with Nigerians in 1515 which served as a point of departure from history. For in that year, the seed of western education was sown at Benin with (he Portuguese Priests and the Oba of Benin working out the status of western education in Nigeria. Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, several Education Ordinances, Codes, Acts and Decrees were promulgated. These legislations, the content of which have been correctly recognized as important mile-stones in the history of education in Nigeria.

In allusion to Omolewa's exposition Taiwo (1985) wrote that; there were government schools, controlled by the government and maintained with public funds and with subscriptions put forward by the chiefs from locality of the respective schools.
This shows dial even the chiefs as individuals were participating in the provision of education right from the dawn of history in Nigeria. Taiwo (1985:32) exposed the reality of events further that:

There were the assisted schools owned and maintained by the missions over other bodies such as the Delta Native Pastorate, but which submitted to government inspection so that they qualified for grant-in-aids. Such schools were subject to education proclamation and the rules made under it.

Going by the historical antecedent of education as briefly narrated above, one finds that education as a social service and as well as a business enterprise had witnessed over involvement by various other bodies. The missions, bodies and individuals providing the education were allowed either by the societal demands for education or the quest to make profit from established industry fixed the price of education by themselves. They were made to compete with the government in the provision of education and even proved in some cases a better provider of such services. By government allowing free market competition in this case, it means that, education has been on the verge of deregulation, though without legislation.

State Take Over of Schools in Nigeria

It was after the civil war in 1970 that this was a spate of schools take-over by both the States and the Federal Government. Between 1970 and 1979, Nigerian governments’ attempted to get more involved in the education sector. The ownership and management of schools, colleges and universities in Nigeria became the prerogative of the governments. Private providers of education, including the missions, individuals and other bodies were compelled to hand over their institutions to the governments. Thereafter, Federal Government of Nigeria took over the existing Universities and there after built more new ones. This made the government to be more financially involved and committed to the provision of education. On Monday, September 6, 1976, the National government introduced on a national basis, the Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) and along side, there were some teachers' training colleges established and solely funded by the government.

In the bid to show more commitment to education, the 1979 Constitution entrenched in it that, the government shall strive to provide:

i. Free, compulsory and universal primary education; ii. Free secondary education, and iii. Free adult literacy programme (Section 18, Sub-sections 1-3).

For about three-decades under the military rule, education witnessed serious failure. The industry witnessed crises of poor trainees, poor teachers, poor textbooks, poor teaching and poor funding (Babalola and Adeaiedi, 2004:3). Almost all the tertiary education in Nigeria was at the brink of collapsing. At all levels, public education increasingly ineffective and less efficient in meeting the needs of the society, and those of the individual who had gone through the system. This loss of confidence in public system of education paved the way for private education to strive. When they were established (private primary and secondary schools) they proved their worth and convinced Nigerians that they can provide for the needs of the people. Deregulation then became a rubber stamp to give legal backing to the already existing system of private participations in the provision of education.

Reality About Deregulation From American's Experience

Deregulation sounds very strange in the educational circle since the terminology is the premise of the market economy. However, deregulation in the United States of America according to Sterling (2004), is largely a bi-partisan effort, he said:

This fundamental shift in the Federal Communications Commission's approach to radio and television regulation began in the mid-1970s as a search for relatively minor “regulatory underbrush” which could be cleared away for more efficient and cost effective administration of the important rules that would remain.

Deregulatory moves did not start with education in the United States of America, which claims the right of parents to the type and style of education they want for their children. Agitation for deregulation was based on the economic gains by (he industries and companies that were deregulated. Nigeria was fast to follow the styles of the United States of America when the Obasanjo's administration mooted the idea of deregulating some sectors of the national economy. The process of deregulating some sectors of the national economy in Nigeria started with privatization and commercialization principles. This privatization was also
based on the deregulatory principles, when in July 1999, at the inauguration by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria demonstrated the commitment to the new Institutional reforms necessary for the conclusion of the programme.

Obasanjo (1999: 1) opined:

The enterprises to be privatized suffered fundamental problems such as; defective capital structure, excessive bureaucratic control or intervention, inappropriate technology, gross incompetence and mismanagement, blatant corruption and crippling complacency which monopoly often engenders. Inevitably, these shortcomings take a heavy toll on the national economy. These are the compelling reasons to divest government of the burden of running these companies at a loss. Instead, the private sector which can do the job better is now invited to acquire them.

Following the history of deregulation from American experience, Nigeria is following the American style by starting from her industries. In America, there is more and more of deregulation of the provision of education between 1994 and 2003 (Findlaw, 2004). Morgan (2002) in his narrations of the levels of education that is concerned with deregulation said that:

In the K-12 education, parents have become less and less willing to share control of schools with government in order to further civic ends. As a result, we are seeing more and more instances of deregulation- the reduction of government authority and guidance in an effort to increase the autonomy of individual parents to control their children's schooling.

From parental participation in decision-making and control over the life of their children, one can say that deregulation of educational system is a laudable idea but it does not go without a price. A price that may not be paid in the lifetime of some parents.

Probable Harms of Deregulating Education in Nigeria

From American experience, deregulation created enormous turmoil in the affected industries. New competitions surfaced which led to employing low-waged workers. Deregulation of the communication system in Nigeria is seriously affecting the image and compelling of NITEL as the national carrier. People lend to shift attention to where there seems to be efficient services with minimum pay.

If education is deregulated, parents will have more authority over the types and forms of curriculum offerings, while the school officials and the governments will have less authority. Education may be more removed from the communities which they are meant to serve. The private school with its exorbitant fees will be out of reach of the poor parented children.

The Way Forward

The gains of deregulation in America include increased choice owing to multiplicity of alternate producers, low prices of services and quality improvement owing to competition among numerous producers and lack of monopolistic practices especially by government monopolies. As in the case of telephone services in Nigeria, increases in demand and general economic boom in the market are likely to ginger up deregulation in education sector quicker than expected.

Education is a veritable instrument for social and economic developments, therefore its control and administration is important for the realization of the national objectives. The provision and control of education has not been solely the prerogative of the governments, therefore the dual provision of it at all levels should be encouraged.

Conclusion

The debate on the provision, management and control of education in Nigeria is a continuous exercise. In the 21st century, Nigeria like any other nation will continue to witness increase in population of the school age children. This new generation needs to be provided for educationally. The spaces in our public schools are becoming inadequate for the teeming population, therefore the support for private institution with government's supervision. Based on the foregone expositions.
Recommendations
This paper therefore recommends that:
• Private provision of education at all levels should be encouraged in order to increase access and quality of education.
• Teacher education curriculum should be reviewed periodically and be enriched to meet the demands of this technological age.
• Policy implementation should be thoroughly monitored by the Federal organs assigned to do this.

References


