

FUNCTIONAL SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR SELF-RELIANCE: THE WAY FORWARD

Amina Abdu, (Mrs)

Abstract

Education is a vital tool for national development. An educated person is empowered to take his destiny in his hands. One does not have to be a university graduate to be able to benefit from education. The present craze for tertiary education will be minimized if education right from the secondary level is made functional. Graduates of such system will be able to create jobs and become self employed instead of being job seekers. This author holds the view that the Nigerian educational system is not functional hence the high rate of unemployment, violent crimes among schools leavers and many other social vices. This paper therefore, discusses functional education and how it can be achieved in the secondary schools.

Introduction

Education in its broadest term is a continuous process of learning stretching from birth of an individual to his death. Thus it starts from a child's home and continues even after school to adulthood. Secondary education occupies a very strategic position in any nation's educational system. With its consumer and producer status, secondary education not only determines the fate but also dictates the pace of education at the primary and tertiary levels. First it consumes the products of the primary system. The number of primary school leavers who would receive secondary education is determined by the absorptive capacity of the secondary education system itself. Wastage and effectiveness at the primary levels are clearly reflected in the growth and development of secondary school leavers that various higher educational institutions draw their entrants from.

Secondary education has been taken seriously from its earliest times not only as an acceptable qualification for good job but also as the gateway to a sound higher education both academic and professional. According to Adesina (1984) the first secondary school was established in 1859 by the Church Missionary Society. Admission was particularly competitive and restrictive and by 1865 only 25 students had passed through the school. The curriculum at the CMS. Grammar School in Lagos reflected that of an English grammar school, especially classical with the usual dose of religious instructions. It was not until 1899 that the first government secondary grammar school. King's College, was established. By the turn of the 19th century, other missionary bodies had established additional educational institution in Nigeria. By the time the centenary of secondary education in Nigeria was celebrated in 1959 Nigeria had some 700 secondary grammar schools, with 5000 teachers and about 120,000 students. Same cannot be said for now for the schools, students, teacher¹, population has since doubled. Behaviour of many students from our secondary schools in Nigeria leaves nobody in doubt that the future is critical.

Some secondary school students smoke Indian hemp and Marijuana, some are alcoholics while some engage in robbing others such as lifting of goods from super market, stealing school fees of other pupils and even engaging in deflating car tyres. Many of them are dishonest, very disobedient and even fight their teachers in the classroom. One wonders what the future would look like in the face of these wide spread juvenile crimes in our secondary schools. At this rate it will be difficult for our secondary schools to inculcate in our youths skills which will equip them for making out a purposeful life for themselves in whichever field they finally decide to pursue. Where the secondary school fails to serve its legitimate purpose, youths will display behaviour maladjustment which Ayodele (1992) says "requires careful management of the teachers, parents and government".

Definition of Terms

Functional Education

This can be described as the total process of bringing up an individual to develop their potentials, cognitive, affective and psychomotor to the fullest and consequently be able to contribute maximally to the

development of the society; in this case Nigeria (Adeyemi, 1999:9). Its underlying goals are derived from the society's desire to stimulate, support, and guide development processes of the child/youth/adult in the direction of competence.

Indeed in line with the nation's philosophy in section 1, Article 2 of the National Policy on Education (1988) states that:

Nigeria's philosophy of education, therefore, is based on integration of the individual into a sound and effective (functional) citizen and equal education opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary levels both inside and outside the formal system (P:3).

Article 4 of section 1 of the policy further buttresses the above by stating that "for the philosophy to be in harmony with Nigeria's national objectives of nation buildings it has to be gear toward self-realization, economic, political, scientific and technological process". Simply put then, functional education is that type of wholesome training of an individual that makes him/her useful to himself, the community and nation as a whole, a panacea to self- reliance.

Self-Reliance

Our educational system because of it's over dependence on the colonial period lacked in basic manpower rather, there was an educational system which among other things, produced mentally subservient Nigerians, excess in the production of white collar applicants and workers: production of more art than science students and graduates. Education for now has to be geared toward living for self-reliance.

Self-reliance is simply defined as "the ability to be independent of anybody" (Agbede, 1998; Nwankwo, 2002). This implies the competence of earning a viable livelihood. It also means one being able to live one's own without depending on others. Our 6-3-3-4 system of education which when experienced can bring about self- reliance in an individual's life and the society at large when properly implemented. The first 3 years of secondary education ought to be for the learning of a vocation, which could lead to self-reliance and economic development in the society. Education for now has to be geared towards living for self-reliance.

Secondary Education

In the national policy, secondary stage of education is defined as the "education given after the first six years of formal schooling" that is the primary education and before the tertiary level of education represented by 4 in the NPE. It is 3:3 because it is expected to be given in two segments of three years duration each. The first three years after the six years of primary education is junior secondary school (JSS) while the second three years is for the senior secondary school.

Goals and Objectives of Secondary Education

Section 4 of the National Policy on Education deals with the secondary level of education. The broad goals of secondary education according to the NPE (1998) shall be to prepare the individual for:

- (a) Useful living within the society; and
- (b) higher education.

In specific terms secondary education shall:

- (a) provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education at higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background;
- (b) offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles;
- (c) provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;

- (d) develop and promote Nigerian languages, arts and culture in the context of world cultural heritage;
- (e) Inspire its students with a desired for self-improvement and achievement of excellence;
- (f) foster national unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity;
- (g) raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens;
- (h) provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.

A close look at these objectives will reveal that:

- All primary school children are expected to have secondary education.
- Diversified curriculum is to ensure that the pupils are exposed to areas of interest.
- Pupils are to be exposed to the societal norms and values of the diverse ethnic groups in the country.
- Pupils are to be exposed to technical, vocational and technological skills.

In consonance with the objectives, the policy states that the "junior secondary school shall be both pre-vocational and academic (Section 22a), and lists the core subjects (to be offered by all students), the pre-vocational electives and the non-vocational electives from which pupils-will choose whatever interests them. The policy further states what the "senior secondary school shall be comprehensive with a core curriculum designed to broaden pupils' knowledge and outlook" (Section 23a).

Secondary Education: The Situation on the Ground

With the implementation of the 6-3-3-4- system the first set of JSS students was turned out in 1982 while the first set of SSS students graduated in 1988. In his view Aboderin (2001) has this to say about the JSS curriculum. Students are expected to offer a minimum of 10- subjects and a maximum of 13 subjects. The core subjects (compulsory subjects) which were originally seven have been increased to eight with the adoption (or is it imposition) of French, the core subjects are: English, French, Mathematics, Language other than that of the environment to be taught as L_2 (with emphasis on oracy), Integrated Science, Social Studies and Citizenship Education, and Introductory Technology.

The pre-vocational electives are: Agriculture, Business studies, Home Economics, Local Crafts, and Computer Education. The non-pre-vocational elective^ are: Religious Knowledge, physical and health education, Fine .Arts, Music and Arabic.

If we are really sincere about imparting vocational skills to the pupils, all the five subjects in the second group should go to the core subject areas in addition to English (as our language of instruction and communication in schools), Mathematics, Integrated Science, Social Studies and Citizenship education and Introductory Technology. The only language that may be added is the language of the environment since a good grounding in the pupil's language will ensure a perfect integration into his immediate community while English will ensure integration into the larger Nigerian community (among the literate population). Social Studies and Citizenship Education will undoubtedly expose the pupils to the social norms and values of other cultures in the country and thus earn due respect for such cultures. All the other subjects could be grouped under electives for a pupil to choose one or two.

A pupil who has been exposed to these subjects will certainly be able to pursue any one of his choice outside of school setting even if he cannot go further in the formal school system.

For the SSS curriculum, the distribution and options provided appear alright except for the imposition of three languages on the student in the core curriculum.; English Language, French Language, Mathematics. A major Nigerian Language, one of Biology, Chemistry, physics or Integrated science, one of Literature-in-English,' History, geography or Social Studies, and a vocational subject. The 1998 edition of the NPE now has Integrated Science and Social Studies in the Senior Secondary School; as core subjects.

Issues in Actualizing Self- Reliance Through Secondary Education

In order for success to be achieved the following questions need to be answered.

- a) To what extent is the curriculum adequate to meet occupational or skill needs of the students?
- b) What facilities are available for the training and the functional level of these facilities?
- c) What quality of staff is engaged in the training and how pedagogical are they?
- d) What qualities of entrants are admitted for the programme?
- e) In the face of rapid changes, how often is the curriculum revised?

Problems of Our Present Secondary Education System and the Way Forward

Without doubt, government has laudable intent for our educational system. But over the years, there has always been the problem of implementation by successive regimes. Sofolahan (1991:37) acknowledged that "the teething problems have been largely due to insufficient dedication to the cause, finance, social norms, lack of adequate information, conservation, and more unreliable statistics for planning". Added to this is the constant change of government, lack of adequate instructional materials and qualified teaching personnel and the picture will be fairly clear why the dream could not but be frustrated.

According to Fafunwa (1994) over the years, there have been changes in the blue print on implementation of the National Policy on Education. This has been largely due to changing political and economic circumstances which made some of the proposed guidelines and recommendations either obsolete or no longer relevant in the light of socio-economic circumstances". Since the "political and economic circumstances" he referred to keep on deteriorating fast since 1987, one might wonder whether the new education policy was based on quicksand. On this note he stated problems of our secondary education to be as follows:

- 1. Transition Rate:** The 3rd National Development plan recommended 40% transition rate from primary to JSS one. In actual fact, this varies from state to state depending on the political will of the ruling party in each state. In 1988/89, for example, it varied from 17.2 in Sokoto State, to 51.10, in Imo State, 55% in Oyo State and 80% in Lagos State.
- 2. Population Explosion:** Although no state has achieved 100% transition rate to JSS 1 there is already school population explosion straining existing facilities; classrooms, laboratories, libraries, workshop etc. A betrayal of faulty planning?
- 3. Class Sizes:** About 50 years ago, principals of secondary schools ran the risk of being disciplined by government if class enrolment exceeded 30 without written approval. Today, the guideline on implementation on the new Education Policy recommended "a maximum of 40 pupils" per class, some State Ministries of Education aid and abet the enrolment of 60-70 pupils per class thus, seriously diminishing the teacher-pupil ratio to the detriment of effective teaching and learning, teachers become less dedicated and more perfunctory in keeping records.
- 4. Low Morale:** For many reasons including late payment of teachers' salaries, pupils' lack of textbooks, teachers' lack of basic classroom and laboratory equipment and over-crowded classes, teachers' morale in state schools is very low. Many schools are more than 205 under staffed and depend on the generosity of Parent-Teacher Associations to hire teachers even in sensitive subjects like English, mathematics and some of the science subjects etc.
- 5. Discipline:** Parents should cooperate with government to strengthen the hands of school authorities in the maintenance of school discipline.
- 6. The Curriculum:** In USA where secondary schools are also run in two-stages-junior high school and senior high- school- each State has a Board of Education consisting of specialists on curriculum which produces details of curriculum sources of audio-visual aid, relevant reference library books, tips about museum resources, etc. These are made available to each state school.

In addition no class does more than 5 or 6 subjects in any one year. Core subjects vary, but at the

Senior High School it must include American History, American Constitution etc. Here, a JSS one pupil takes up to 14 subjects including introduction to technology and 2 pre-vocational subjects. This is regarded as unwieldy with a crowd of 70 in a class; records of continuous assessment are often unreliable.

7. Education Finance: The Federal Government has under-funded the education sector devoting 5.2% of its total expenditure to this sector during 1986-90 and 4.1% since 1990. Ditto for states (Aluko, 1992).

The impoverished conditions of most state schools led to increasing demand for admission to other schools owned and adequately funded by the Federal Government. a. Federal Secondary Schools.

- b. Air Force Children's School.
- c. Police Children Schools.
- d. Army Children's Schools.
- e. Navy Children's Schools.
- f. Schools for gifted Children,

Compared with 2,723,791 pupils in all state schools in 1987, the 45 Federal Secondary Schools' total enrolment was 47,674 or 1.75% judging from per capita expenditure in all the schools, one may suggest that the unity of this country could have a greater prospect. If all state schools were equally funded so that all children, irrespective of their tribe and tongue, can live and learn together in schools of their parents' choice within the linguistic and culture group where children grow up and their parents are domiciled. This will ensure equality of opportunity through education.

Recommendations

Diversification of revenue base, is a possible solution to the problem of education financing. It is therefore recommended that:

1. Local communities should, as in the past, be involved early in the decision to establish secondary school in their areas to enable them appreciate the initial sacrifice required to provide fund for minimum basic infrastructure of some suitable classroom buildings. The old spirit of self-reliance would attract their affluent citizens working away from home. This should be done in the full knowledge of the Local Government/Local Education Authority.
2. The Local Government or Education Authority should supplement community resources substantially for the provision and maintenance of adequate building services like water and electricity, supply of teachers' stationery like chalk, register etc. Calculated annually per head of the school population.

In this regard at least one representative of the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) should serve as a member of the Local Education Committee as required by Education Law of Western Nigerian 1955.

3. State Governments
 - a) Should ensure that class sizes do not exceed the stipulated 35-40 even if it means creation of additional streams and employment of more teachers.
 - b) They should provide capital grant for the building of laboratories, school examination halls, workshops, libraries and administrative block. They should ensure that workshops, laboratories and domestic science rooms are built to specification before supplying equipment which should be procured by bulk purchase.
 - c) Teaching should be professionalised completely and teachers exposed from time to time to modern trends in education.
 - d) Government should pay the salaries, allowances and superannuating benefits of the teaching staff and approved on non-teaching staff as an when due.
 - e) State governments should engage in constant dialogue with professional bodies like NUT and conference of principals of secondary schools to promote mutual understanding.

- f. Advisor}' Board of Education should be resuscitated in each state and be made functional.

Federal Government

There is a need to examine the relationship between the federal government on the one hand and the state and local governments on the other with regard to the provision and financing of education at all levels just like in other federal countries like India, USA, Canada and Germany. Ideally the Federal Government ought to be limited to policy making, setting of national standards, and the development and design of curriculum.

The allocation of funds from the federation account must therefore reflect the great responsibility the State Governments have to carry as far as education is concerned. The cost of education should be spread among parents, Local Communities, Local Government or Local Education Authorities, State Governments and the Federal Government.

Using local artisans to teach some vocational courses. Identification of workshops in the community under a special apprenticeship scheme and for the re-organization of school hours such that the afternoon period are devoted to the learning of the pre-vocational subjects in such workshop.

More active involvement of other school personnel such as guidance counselors to help guide students in the choice of subjects and administrators whose responsibility will be to guide planning and implementation at the local level, monitor the progress of the teachers and learners, supervise all activities and evaluate outcome of plans rather than students' achievements only.

Conclusion

Education is a vital tool for every facet of human development and progress. Education is also a vehicle for the economic prosperity of any nation. Therefore, every nation should spend the larger percentage of their annual budget for financing education. UNESCO recommends that every nation should spend at least 26% of its annual budget for the running of an effective and efficient system that will meet the yearnings of its people. Though Nigeria has made tremendous progress we are yet to reap the rewards of our investment. This is because our system lacks functionality. Even though the 6-3-3-4 is intended to achieve functionality it is badly operated. We produce more graduates in humanities rather than in science technology and vocational education which emphasizes skill acquisition for self-reliance. The catastrophic consequence of this poorly run system is the high rate of unemployment, crimes and all kinds of unimaginable evils. To overcome these malaise the country needs to re-visit the 6-3-3-4 system especially at the secondary level to make it functional. If this is not addressed urgently the time bomb called "unemployment" will explode pitching our youths against us.

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