

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) describes education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development. All over the world education is seen as a fundamental pillar of human right, democracy, sustainable development and peace. It is said to be the best legacy any nation can bequest to her citizenry. It is one of the means through which individuals can meet up with their needs. For these reasons, it has been emphasized the world over, that education should be accessible to all throughout life. A man without education has been described like a building without a foundation; just as a child without education is like a bird without wings. Education is so important that, it is often said that if we educate a child, we educate the nation. Education changes with time and age at local, national and international levels.

The Nigeria government sees education as central to the human capital development component, of the nation's transformation agenda. Therefore, education is expected to provide the means for turning the nation's teeming population into viable assets, for engendering sustainable national development. Education is on the concurrent legislative list. Nigeria also has a National Policy on Education which also provides a national framework, within which the component states are expected to operate to ensure that the unity of the nation remains secured.

Unfortunately, the story of education as we read every day is not palatable. There are challenges and woes about the sector. There is hardly any national daily that is not carrying stories of lamentation about the education sector. What are these issues? This Keynote Address will attempt to highlight some of these issues.

Contemporary Issues in Education

The dictionary meanings of the word *contemporary* include: 'modern', 'current', 'present-day' or 'existing'. This paper will discuss current issues in education. There are numerous such critical issues that need to be addressed in education in Nigeria. Such issues are barriers that get in the way of education. Seen from another perspective, they are the important elements that we need to focus on in order to move education forward so as to offer better opportunities to Nigerian learners. Some of these contemporary issues include:

1. Education and School Policies

Existing National Policies in the education sector include, the National Policy on Education (Revised 2004) UBE Act, the National Teacher Education Policy (Revised 2010), the National Policy on Gender in Basic Education (2007), National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development (2007), National Policy on HIV/AIDS, Nomadic Education Programme, Implementation Plan for the Special Needs Education Strategy (2007) and the Guidelines for the Identification of Gifted Children (2006), policy on School-Based Management Committee (SBMC) and Child Rights Act. The issue is that, most of these policies though existing, have not been domesticated in some States. In States where they have been domesticated, they are not properly implemented. Similarly, there are many school policies in Nigeria. Some of the issues relate to repeating classes, school feeding, corporal

punishment, primary six certificates, school management based committees, minimum qualification for teaching, etc. The implementation of these has also been controversial.

2. School and Curriculum Reforms

Nigeria has witnessed several school and curriculum reforms. Currently, the educational system in Nigeria is the 6-3-3-4 system. This has become a big issue especially at the primary level of education. In many schools, the primary level ends at primary 5. Many pupils are registered for primary 6 examination, which is expected to have been abolished with the UBE act from primary 5. This is an issue as one is not sure if the curriculum meant for six years is adequately covered. The curriculum has been restructured to include some practical subjects such as, introductory technology, basic science and technology, home economics. However, students are barely taught the practical aspects. NERDC recently introduced the new curriculum for primary and secondary schools. It is true that many schools do not have copies of this curriculum. Can one give what one does not have? How can schools implement what they do not have? Today, different schools are implementing different versions of the school curriculum.

3. School Environment Issues

The kind of learner a child becomes is dependent on the environment, including school environment. We need school climate where all learners can achieve their maximum potentials. The environment must be healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive. It must be one that provides adequate resources and facilities for the learner, as a means of enriching experiences. Learning can occur anywhere, but the positive learning outcomes generally sought by educational systems happen in quality learning environments. Learning environments are made up of physical, psychosocial and service delivery elements. The physical learning environments or the place in which formal learning occurs, range from relatively modern and well-equipped buildings, to safe and comfortable outdoor environments. This is an issue in education in Nigeria. Figure 1 presents quality environments for learning



Figure 1 Quality Education Environments

Contemporary Issues in Education in Nigeria

In a well-equipped classroom, learners are provided with good sitting facilities, white or chalkboard, books, ICT facilities, lightings, fans/air conditioners, etc. A child learning in such a classroom feels comfortable and safe. By implication, the attention level of the learner is enhanced. Similarly, a well equipped library is a place where learners have rich experiences. Physical and e-libraries are rich sources of teaching and learning materials. Is this the situation in Nigeria? What do we have?

4. Infrastructural Insufficiency and Infrastructural Decay

Perhaps a look at the pictures in Figure 2 will give an insight to the answers to the above two questions.



Figure 2: Typical Nigerian School Environment

Most school environments in Nigeria are far from this reality. The common existing physical environments in almost all parts of the country are as shown in Figure 2. In most schools, the classroom buildings are dilapidated. Walls and ceilings are falling apart. These also constitute a danger and unsafe ground for leaning. When it rains, learners are soaked with rain water. This also has implications on their health and affects the quality of learning that can go on in the class. These classrooms cannot be said to provide comfort and safety to the learners. With dilapidated roofs, rain and sun are most likely to cause serious discomfort to the learners. Libraries do not exist in many schools. It is a “mirage” in many schools in Nigeria, especially at the primary and secondary school levels. Similarly, good toilets are necessary for good health of the learner and to avoid the spread of diseases. There are evidences of infrastructural decay, which exists not only at the lower levels, but

also at the tertiary level. Students in many tertiary institutions in Nigeria are studying under similar conditions. Classrooms are dilapidated. Hostel accommodations are in short supply. Many students squat in the few hostel facilities available, and off-campus housing for most students is the resultant alternatives. These dehumanizing and sorrowful conditions also make studying in tertiary institutions a very painful experience.

Teaching and learning can only be effective and efficient when adequate provision of educational infrastructure and physical facilities are made. Education which is considered as the overall development of an individual, physically, mentally, morally, socially and economically, can only be sound if such facilities and infrastructure are made available in adequate number.

5. Teacher Programmes and Professional Development

Teachers are the greatest assets to any educational system. They are the system's backbone. For this reason we often hear or read that, no educational system can rise above the status of its teachers (UNESCO, 2006). We need the best teachers in our classrooms. The cry that schools are failing is attributed to teachers. We need teachers who can deliver the curriculum content to build a community of learners. What do we have? The situation is that, those who become teachers are what I will call 'left overs'. Prospective teachers are those who either did not make the required credits to matriculate into choicer programmes, or did not meet the minimum cut-off for admission into the programmes. They are those seeking for 'any course'. They do not possess the interest and motivation for the profession. Figure 3 is a typical example of the situation. Figure 3 is an analysis of 2008 JAMB applicants who scored 200 and above during the University Matriculation Examination (UME) and who were to be screened into the different programmes of the University. Less than one percent of the candidates applied to the Faculty of Education.

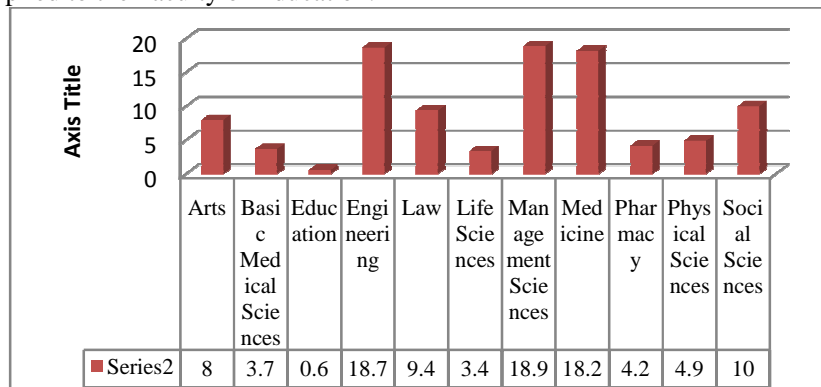


Figure 3: 2008 Post University Matriculation Examinations – UNIBEN (Omoifo, 2012)

What type of teachers do we need? The primary commodity in the world today is knowledge. This means that our world today is dominated by the Knowledge Economy. Consequently, a teacher today is someone who is expected to function and fit into this world of knowledge economy. It is for this world that today's education systems and schools have to prepare learners, who will contribute to its continued progress (Obanya, 2010). This type of teachers have the following characteristics:

- Their goal of being a teacher is not preparation for a specific job

- They possess learning to learn skills
- They have intrapersonal and interpersonal skills
- They have emotional intelligence in addition to mental and cognitive intelligence
- They are creative
- They possess hard and soft skills

The knowledge economy education no longer prepares one for specific jobs in the conventional sense, but emphasizes entrepreneurship and self-employment. Secondly, the principal goal of education in the past was certification; today, it is the inculcation of learning-to-learn skills. In the past, memorization or knowing that things happen was important. What is important today is analysis or apprehending how and why things happen. Thirdly, unlike in the past, education in the knowledge economy entails combination of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. That means that in Knowledge economy, education inculcates ‘knowing oneself’ or ‘developing the best in oneself with ‘knowing and getting along with others’. The fourth difference is that the knowledge economy emphasizes a type of human power - the emotional intelligence (the ability to manage emotions) in addition to developing mental (or cognitive) intelligence or brain power. The fifth difference is on creativity. Creativity is a willingness to explore new paths and new ways, as a major hallmark of the educated person. The sixth is that, persons who have benefited from education are now expected to have acquired a combination of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ skills.

Hard skills entail having cognitive intelligence, self-expression, logical reasoning, computational skills, design and manipulative skills and conceptual skills. Someone with hard skills is able to express self orally or in writing, is analytical and has problem solving skills, has skill for quantitative reasoning, has technical reasoning and has skills for generating ideas and translating them into actions. On the contrary, soft skills entail having emotional intelligence, character formation, intrapersonal, interpersonal, lifelong learning and perseverance skills. A teacher in the knowledge economy is expected to have both skills and not just the hard skills. The knowledge based economy teacher is a transformational teacher who shifts from the ‘know all’ to the ‘seeking to know how to know’, from the talker to the listener, from the transmitter of knowledge and information to the co-seeker of awareness and insight, from the conductor of learning to the joint organizer of learning, from ‘this is the answer’ to ‘there are multiple ways of looking at the issue at hand’, from dictating to encouraging the search for solutions, from promoting the solo learner to building up the team-player. Do we have such teachers? We need to research on how to develop such teachers.

6. Ethical Issues

In addition to not having teachers in the knowledge economy, there are current ethical issues in teacher education. These include: non-payment of teachers’ salary, preferential promotion and placements, bribes, illegal fees for admission and examinations by teachers. Another important and crucial issue is teacher absenteeism. This issue has great implication to the quality of learners in Nigeria. Teachers’ absenteeism results in poor pupils’ achievement, poor school reputation and poor interest in schooling.

7. Students’ Academic Performance

This refers to issues on how students deal with their studies. Such issues include students’ achievements, school dropout rate, etc. The performance of Nigerian learners at different levels of education can best be described as poor. Students’ performances at the 2011 WAEC Nov/Dec examination are presented in Figure 4.

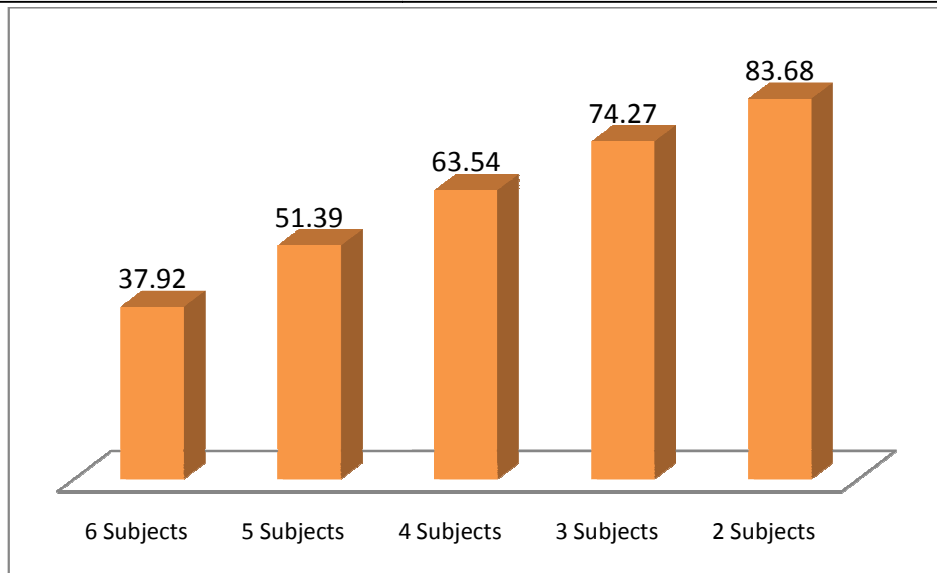


Figure 4: Percentage of Students with Credits and Above By Number of Subjects in 2011 WAEC November/December Examination

It is evident from Figure 4 that, the percentage of students with credits in six subjects is below 40. Although, about 51.39 percent of the students had credits in five subjects, the highest percentage of students 74.27 and 83.68 passed in only three and two subjects respectively. A summary of the performances of students (Mathematics and English inclusive) for May/June WAEC examination for four years (2011 to 2014) is represented in Figure 5.

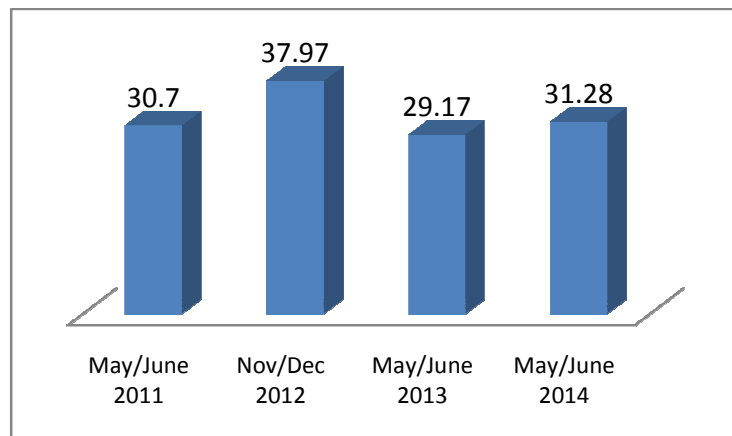


Figure 5: Percentage of Students with 5 Credits including Mathematics and English

The trend that is established in these examinations shows that for all years, less than 40 percent of the students passed in five subjects, including mathematics and English language.

Similar issue has dominated discussions among Nigerians in recent times, about the quality of graduates of tertiary education institutions. Recent developments have shown that, no Nigerian university (nor tertiary education institution) is among the best 1000 universities in the world. The best Nigerian university is mentioned only after about 1600 other world universities in the webometric ranking (which measures web presence and content). Ranking, which concentrates on the quality of programme and instructional content, has not mentioned any Nigerian university. This situation cannot be described as good and it is a great issue in education.

8. Testing, Assessment and Evaluation

The major method of assessing learners in Nigeria is through testing. The popular use of objective test is an issue. Students engage in practising examples and memorizing answers. They are not able to solve real life experience problems.

9. Discipline and Security

This is also an issue of great concern. Today, there is the expression of violence in our educational institutions. Cultism, gangsterism, kidnapping, sexual harassments exist at all levels of education.

10. Inadequate coverage and unsatisfactory level of meaningful access

The challenge lies in the inability of the government to provide access to education, to all school age children in the States, including the physically challenged people. Schools are not sited in some locations to provide access to school children. The distance to school in some places is far.

11. Attainment of Education for All and Millennium Development Goals

The alarming rate of drop outs and illiteracy in many countries in the twentieth century was a great concern to all. Consequently in 1990, a world conference on education was held in Jomtein, Thailand, which was popularly called Education for All (EFA). The outcome of this world conference on education was to be adopted by all countries, in a bid to reduce drop outs and illiteracy rate in every society. The six EFA goals to be attained by the year 2015 were:

- expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
- ensuring that by 2015, all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
- ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;
- achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
- eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2015, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality; and
- improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all, so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills

EFA goals can thus be said to revolve around contemporary issues on:

- Early child education,
- Universal Primary Education,
- Adult Education,
- Gender Equality and
- Provision of quality education.

Report (Obanya, 2014) shows that Nigeria's progress towards the attainment of EFA goals is much slower than the African regional average, at least on the four goals for which data are available as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Regional EFA Goals Attainment

| REGION | GOAL ONE (pre-primary) | | GOAL TWO (primary) | | GOAL THREE (Youth Literacy) | | GOAL FOUR (Adult Literacy) | |
|---------|---------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|--------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|---|
| World | 5 | 0 | 9 | 1 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 4 |
| S S A | 1 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 0 | 5 | 9 |
| Nigeria | 1 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 1 |

Factors that frustrate realization of EFA goals are also contemporary issues in education. These are political, economic and social ideological differences. The political issues are

- unstable government,
- poor educational planning

Economic issues include:

- Poverty,
- Low level GDP
- Low level science and technology,
- Poor transportation and communication systems.

The social factors include:

- Gender bias,
- Ethnic differences and conflicts,
- Unemployment,
- Weak curriculum,
- Diseases and
- High birth rate.

By the close of the twentieth century remarkable transformation had occurred in education, science and technology. Nigeria was among the 189 countries that endorsed the MDGs in New York in September 2000. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight in all.

- Eradicate poverty and hunger
- Achieve Universal Primary Education
- Promote Gender equity and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health

- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop global partnerships for development

MDGs are closely related to the EFA goals. Both targeted 2015 as the upper time line to achieve the goals.

12. Out of School Children

A report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2005) indicates that one out of every five Nigerian children is out of school. Consequently, Nigeria tops the list of nations with the highest number of out of school children since 1999. Obanya (2015), gave a summary of Nigerians' out of school learners as shown in Figure 6.

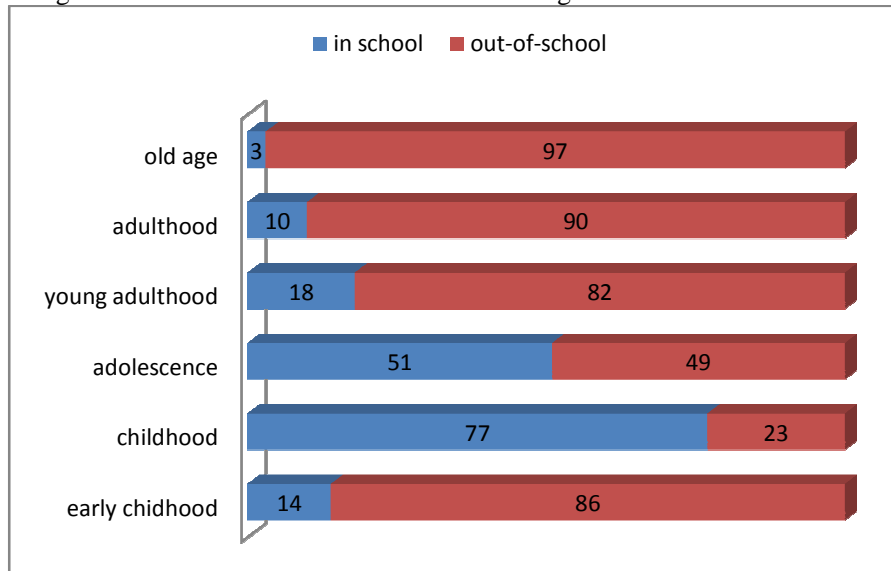


Figure 6: Nigeria's out of school population

The high percentage of out of school learners is among early childhood (86%), young adults (82%), adulthood (90%) and old age (97%). In 2011, Nigeria was listed as the fourth country with worsened out of school children between 2006 and 2011, as shown in Table 2

Table 2: Out of School Children in Selected Countries

| C o u n t r y | 2 0 0 6 (000) | 2 0 1 1 (000) | I n c r e a s e (%) |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| 1. P a r a g u | 5 7 | 1 3 6 | 1 3 9 |
| 2. C o l u m b | 2 0 6 | 4 3 5 | 1 1 2 |
| 3. T h a i l a | 3 8 7 | 6 1 1 | 5 8 |
| 4. N i g e r | 7 , 1 5 0 | 1 0 , 5 4 2 | 4 7 |
| 5. E r i t r | 2 9 5 | 4 2 2 | 4 3 |
| 6. G a m b | 6 5 | 8 6 | 3 3 |
| 7. S o u t h A f | 5 1 9 | 6 7 9 | 3 1 |
| 8. L i b e r | 3 2 5 | 3 8 6 | 1 9 |
| 9. M a u r i t a | 1 1 3 | 1 3 1 | 1 6 |
| 10. Y e m | 8 5 3 | 9 4 9 | 1 1 |

Source: PaiObanya (2015)

13. Poverty and Quality Learners for Early Child Education

The quality of children’s lives before beginning formal education is known to greatly influence the kind of learners they can be. Some elements which go into making a quality learner include their health, early childhood experience and home support. Physically and psychosocially healthy children learn well. Adequate nutrition is critical for normal brain development in the early years. Prevention of infection, disease and injury prior to school enrolment, are also critical to the early development of a quality learner. Specialists have also argued that higher levels of parental involvement, better psychosocial development influence the brain development necessary for emotional regulation, arousal, and behavioural management. Do we have such children to ensure quality early child education in Nigeria? Figure 7 shows the plight of many Nigerian children.



Figure 7: Early Childhood

14. Non-sustainable Funding and Inadequate Resourcing

This issue is associated with delay in implementation of budget, poor budget performance and declining budgetary allocation to the education sector.

15. Political Interference

This has resulted in the misuse of human resource management and favouritism. Consider the qualification and professionalism of Commissioners and Ministers of Education in Nigeria. Is it that we in the relevant profession are not qualified? This is an issue.

Conclusion

The list of contemporary issues in education presented here is by no means conclusive. There are many more. One important assignment before us as an association is to begin to seek solutions to these issues. This presentation is key or summary. It is my hope that presentations by Lead Paper presenters will highlight many more contemporary issues and give more detailed presentations. I wish all a successful and fruitful deliberations.

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