

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The central tasks of Education is to implant a will and facility for learning to produce not just a learned, but learning society. Education is consequentially about bringing out what is already within a man. This paper, sets out to examine contemporary issues in Education in Nigeria. The concept of introduction of western school system and the missionary activities was discussed. These include, Pre-Colonial Educational System, advent of western education to the First Republic, Military Intervention (1966-1979), the Second Republic (1979-1983), second coming of the Military (1983-1999) and the Democratic rule (1999-till date). The problem and prospects of Nigeria education were also discussed. It was observed that, some of the factors that affects Nigeria education is poor access to University education, poor facilities, inadequate funding, not relating to academic programmes of practical and developmental needs of the economy. Others are not placing great emphasis on skills development programmes to equip students with specific skills and mismanagement of fund. It was recommended among others that the government should provide high quality infrastructure such as laboratories, allocation of funds, and the needs to greater emphasis on skills acquisition programmes to equip students with specific skills, for national development.

Basically, the central tasks of education is to implant a will and facility for learning to produce not just a learned, but learning society. In ancient Greece, Socrates opined that education is consequentially about drawing out what was already within man. Socrates point of view of education seeks to emphasize the core essence of education which is basically centred on drawing out that latent learning ability that is already embedded with man (Kano, 2011).

In the earlier centuries the indigenous system was enriched by the quoranic schools system, and in the mid – nineteenth century it was further strengthened by the introduction of western school system, made possible largely by intensive missionary activities along the coastal areas of Nigeria (Fafunwa, 1974). This discussion is such a wide one that to attempt to do a thorough work to it within the time frame is like someone who has to attend several occasions during the weekend, he dressed up and started moving from one party to the other presenting himself to the host of each of the party for recognition but when asked to narrate the story of what happened there is an absolute impossibility. What the author intends to do therefore, according to Ajayi (1994) is to have a bird's eye view of the situation.

Nigeria has witnessed immense changes in many facets of human endeavour and like many other developing countries of the world, has for a long time expressed very strong faith in the officious role of education as a potent tool for eradicating underdevelopment and its attendant vices such as greed, ignorance, people whose proud profession is corruption, people who think they own the earth, people who made the world to bow to their wishes, bent on making all the mistakes of mankind, cheating others or taking the lives of others, always in conspiracy against their country, a society

where the hills, the rif-rafs are looking down on the mountains, the people are corrupt from the soul of the feet to the crown of the head, they are primitive. People who takes public office as a licence to steal. (Ezewu, 2009).

In other to know how education has faired in this onerous tasks, a review of what had happened in the past must be looked into for a better understanding of the present situation in which we have arrived. History is to a people while memory is to the individual. A people with no knowledge of the past would definitely not be able to understand what the present is about in order to correct the future, there is need to have a guide-post precedence to shape their course (Fafunwa,1974). Even if one has forgotten the past, the past has not forgotten one. For easy educational reforms, a reflection on previous events and policies will assist in planning any future course of action.

Pre Colonial Education System

Both Islam and Christianity offered traditional system of education in Nigeria. Before the emergence of formal western oriented education the Nigerian society had a system of education suitable for the training and education of the youths in order to enhance better manhood. The aim of traditional education is to produce an individual who is honest, respectable, skilled, co-operative and conforms to the social order of the day (Fafunwa, 1974). In the words of Ajayi (1991) the purpose was explicit. It is aimed at giving functional education to youths in order to make them useful members of the society. Its virtues is that of social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, spiritual and moral development and character training with emphasis in the system (Taiwo, 1981).

It should be borne in mind that it achieved the purpose for which it was set up. Its content organization was relevant and appropriate to the needs of the society it served. Those who sense some faults in the system must have been deceived by the spectacles of the modern system which they use in viewing the old system (Fafunwa, 1974). In the words of Okpetu, Dittimiya and Kalusi (2005) because indigenious education failed to follow the ways of Westernized system, some less well – informed scholars have considered it primitive even savage and barbaric. Though, these are errors which was used to describe African education instead of correction and uniting them to the western education to make it more reliable.

Advent of Western Education to First Republic

In the 1840s formal, Western-Oriented education was introduced by the missionaries. Even with the government showing very little interest then, completely dominated the field. The control of education in Nigeria was by the Christian missionaries, with the colonial government maintaining a safe distance. The Christian mission's enthusiasm in education is better explained in the words of Boyd (1961) when he wrote that the church undertook the business of education not because it regarded education as good in itself, but because it found that it could not do its own proper work without giving its adherents, and especially its clergy, as much of formal learning as was required for the study of the sacred writings and for the performance of their religious duties.

Anyway, the missionaries effort is commended for laying the foundation for educational system which we later built and improve upon. But the educational system was not relevant to the needs yearning and aspiration of the Nigerian populace. At a time, the British colonial masters

siphoned the wealth of the nation to improve their own country and showed little or no interest in educating the natives.

The educational system before 1952 was random and uncoordinated. Even though there was expansion in the number of schools and learners enrolment, there were problems like inadequate personnel especially teachers, inadequate material and physical resources, irrelevant nature of the education provided.

Things did not improve much, with the attainment of regional autonomy in the 50's eventually various commissions was set up from the East, West and North, to examine the educational system and make appropriate recommendations.

Shortly before independence, the Federal Government, set up Ashby Commission in April, 1959 to conduct an investigation into Nigeria's needs in the field of post-school certificate and higher education over the next 20years. The commission examined both the post secondary education and the other levels and also constituted the basis for educational development in the country.

Due to the various commission's recommendations and government's reactions to them, a change in the educational system was witnessed throughout Nigeria. All enrolment was on the high side, more universities were established and more funds committed. Because of the transformed educational priority the project of the various governments, budgetary allocation to the education sector increased with implications on the economy, and all aspect of the life of Nigerians. However, due to inadequate planning, defective implementation strategies poor management, mismanagement of funds, political instability, over politicization of education, and host of other vices at a time of immense growth and development in a country full of hope like Nigeria, gave cause for sadness and joy. Even with what was done, the problems of the educational system still remain unsolved and were transferred to the next era of military intervention (Ajayi 1991). No wonder the saying that the colonial Britain introduced corruption to Nigeria.

Military intervention (1966 – 1979)

The military intervention into Nigeria's politics for the first time lasted for about 13 years before handing over power to a democratically elected government on October 1, 1979. They have remained a big force to be reckoned with. The regime was expected to be a corrective one, this is in all aspects of Nigeria's national life, including education which at that time, needed a completely new sense of direction and effective planning and coordination of efforts.

The regime witnessed the Federal Ministry of Education providing leadership in curriculum development at the primary secondary and teacher training levels through its various bodies like NERC and CESAC. These efforts resulted in the production at a "new" National Policy on Education, popularly tagged the 6 – 3 – 3 – 4 system, in 1977 a policy that expected to bring in a new lease of life into the country's educational system, but which unfortunately, has not achieved the intended purpose due to defective implementation strategies, inadequate funding and others.

The Establishment of a Federal inspectorate borne out of the strong concern for quality education and the maintenance of educational standards in schools and colleges was witnessed by the regime. Due to the inspectorate numerous problems, they were not able to achieve much improvement instead it keep falling. The Federal control during the period was based on financial than operating former universal primary education (UPE) in 1976 was launched. The scheme this time was to cover learners of primary and junior secondary school and would henceforth be known as the universal

Basic Education. The UPE scheme brought about over centralization of educational financing, with Federal Government bearing the largest share of the burden.

The UPE scheme was a waste of money and a failure despite the huge investment. Between 1970 and 1975, strict financial control was exercised because the economy was buoyant. No effective body was set up to check how the money disbursed was spent especially in the states, behold, money meant for the UPE was diverted to other uses or misappropriated. Educational policy formulation and implementation were never consistent, it was contradictory at all time. They no longer plan before executing, they forgot to realize that any failure to plan has planned to fail. Despite all this, the regime still wanted to claim credit for it, having regarded it as one of its greatest achievement.

They did not want the civilian government that would take over to reap where they did not sow. The UPE was hurriedly launched in 1979 as against the expert advise given that it should be launched in 1979 so that there could be proper planning.

The Transfer of higher education to the exclusive legislative list in 1972 became counter productive because instead of aiding the cause of university education, it causes erosion of university autonomy, debasement of academic freedom, financial strangulation and exodus of staff to other jobs. Teachers did not receive adequate attention. Besides, the period witnessed the highest race of students unrest in the history of higher education in Nigeria (Ajayi, 1994).

The Second Republic (1979 – 1983)

This was the era of expansion in the educational sector. Education was a major campaign issue by all the political parties. The era was of free universal education with immediate effect versus free qualitative education according to the constitution. Because of the emphasis placed on mass education by the political parties a population explosion was witnessed in both primary and secondary schools all over the country.

When politics became introduced to the education during the second republic things became more complex. Imagine people who were not professionally competent, made statements concerning education during political debates. But after, the elections to see such people gaining political leadership attempting to implement these unworkable promises in the form of government educational policies without sound and objective professional advice put education in a cross – road.

In this regime, many learners in the primary sector went to school with their own benches and desks while those who could not provide any furniture used the floor and their laps for the purpose of sitting and writing. Most of the school buildings were not completed and many are not up to standard. Churches, mosques, community halls and available space were turned to classrooms and teachers were not provided with basic teaching materials, final year students performed their WASC examinations, practical without seeing chemicals, and other materials before, and university students had to hang around the windows and corridors, the researcher in many cases sat under lecturer's table to receive lectures, this was due to overcrowded lecture rooms for lectures. These happened in the country irrespective of the political party in control. It was a situation of growth without development. Such was the level of absurdity to which education was politicized with state and federal government flexing muscles that caused some state Government to start implementing the National policy of education in 1982 when some vowed never to have anything to do with it because it was seen as an NPN document (Ajayi, 1991).

Second Coming of the Military (1983 – 1999)

The military took over again from the politicians in December, 1983. The military have never ruled without using civilians in their cabinets. So any failure in these regime the civilians too contributed to it because they were their advisers, policy makers and implementations. This regime appointed six ministers of education within a period of ten years. With this situation one can best imagine the effect on a nations educational system. We can understand why policy formulation and implementation cannot be continued in education. This was expected in view of the fact that the economy was already in a precarious state as a result of the mismanagement by politicians of the second republic. A five-man panel was set up under the chairmanship of Prof. Fafunwa (who later became the minister of Education) to advise the Federal Government on the funding of education (Ajayi 1994). The panel among others, came up with the recommendation that education should be a joint responsibility of the federal, state and local government together with parents and contributions from the populace in general.

With this, the system became down. The system is definitely at point of coma. One can authoritatively say the system did not have any control nor direction. Fees of various dimension was introduced by some states while some called on the federal Government to come to their aid. The growth in education became quantitative and not qualitative. Most of the primary, secondary and tertiary schools was closed for several months in a year yet it was assumed the session has been completed. How can learning take place when most of the time, if teachers are not on strike, the students are demonstrating. The regime was a failure, teachers was not paid their salaries many teachers were unemployed and somewhere not even employed.

There was admission problem especially into the tertiary institutions. The existing secondary schools was not able to admit all the graduates of primary school who are qualified. Similarly the existing tertiary institutions could not admit all post secondary school products that was qualified. As a result of the situation, many youths have taken to other vocations they were least prepared for while some have joined the group of dropouts and undesirable elements called “area boys” Apart from the psychological strain on the individual applicant the untold embarrassment and frustration to parents cannot be quantified (Ajayi 1991).

Democratic Rule (1999-till Date)

The military handed over to the politicians in 1999 and are still in control till today. Again all the political parties made education a major campaign issue. It is the era of free universal basic education (UBE) with immediate effect versus free, quantitative education as usual. Population increase was witnessed in both primary and secondary schools all over the country. The set was expected to be a corrective one-corrective in all aspect of Nigeria’s national life because one will expect that they must have learnt from others mistakes. Not long after they arrived education which is one of the major campaign started declining. There was increases in the establishment of private primary, and secondary school and university .It is no news that the rate of unemployment in the country increases by the day and the situation has been worsened by the declining economic fortune of the country. At present most of the state’s primary, secondary and tertiary schools are closed for one reason or the other.

The Problem of Education in Nigeria

According to Gana (2016), while addressing people at the university chapel on the topic “Making Education Count” professor of Geography and former minister of information and orientation identified three fundamental factors that have almost rendered Nigerian graduates largely irrelevant in the global market thus.

- **Poor access to university education:** Where too many students compete for too few admission places. According to him, as at April 2016, Nigeria had a total of 142 universities, comprising of 40 federal, 42 state owned and 61 private and faith-based Universities state like Ondo, Ogun, Oyo, Edo and Rivers have up to two state owned universities while Zamfara and Bornu have none, but there is at least one federal university in each state
- **Poor facilities and inadequate staffing:** The professor hinged his argument on the outcome of the 2014 weeds assessment report. The report revealed paucity of academic staff. With a total of population of 37,504 teaching staff, out of whom 43 percent did not have doctorate degree, hence majority of the academic staff only had degrees. The report also indicated that in terms of teacher-student ratio as approved by the National University commission (NUC), there was a 30 percent shortfall of teaching staff in the system. He also said that Nigerian has the problems of poor facilities for teaching and research and concluded that Nigerian universities have a huge quality control gap.
- **Most universities do not make serious efforts to relate academic programmes to the practical and developmental needs of the economy:** He made a remark by saying that the question of relevance greatly affects the rate of employability and concluded this as the heart of the problems.
- Moses Hassan (2016) blamed the government for not providing enough funds in the budget and complete autonomy to the universities. The professor too believed that adequate funding will see to the provision of high quality infrastructure of laboratories, lecture halls, classrooms, power supply, teaching aids and equipment as well as employment of high quality staff.
- Another means of restoring academic excellence in the Nigerian universities is placing great emphasis on skills development programmes to equip students with special skills. Gana (2016) stressed that skill acquisition by graduate is as high as 76 percent in Germany, 80 in Japan, 92 in South Korea, 23 in India and less than 10 percent in Nigeria.
- Lack of effective government supervision or monitoring as a result of the ineffectiveness of the inspectorate system in most of the ministries of education and even at the federal level (Ajayi, 1991).

Conclusion

It was believed that if the situation is not quickly tackled, the country may be heading for a monumental disaster. What we actually need now is full commitment on the part of the government to fully implement the various recommendations contained below. We definitely need a system of education that will be functional and realistic. The driving force of the development process in the world today is know-how, not mere education with certificates.

Those with skills are most likely to be people of ideas and creativity, especially in their areas of expertise.

Emphasized that quality education is fundamental to sustainable national transformation and advancement. He warned that failure to pursue this would increase vices and poverty.

Recommendation

- Adequate funding of schools should be the responsibilities of the government and other stakeholders in education. This is to ensure that there is provision of high quality of infrastructure, laboratories, lecture halls, classrooms, power supply, teaching aids and equipments.
- Much emphasis should be placed on skills development programmes to equip students with specific skills.
- Government must ensure that inspectors of schools should do their work more effectively. This is by ensuring that they visit schools from time to time to do supervision.

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