

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION

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Introduction

Contemporary issues in Nigerian education has become a food for thought for all well meaning individuals both at home and diaspora. It has several times been argued that Nigeria education system is at the cross-road, and at the verge of being collapsed. The claims of these oral authors and critiques are that, things have been lopsided in this industry. However, the revitalization of the lost hope rests upon the shoulders of men and women of wisdom and knowledge. According to Omolewa (2001:1):

Education is a great importance to every nation. It, therefore, attracts considerable attention. At the family, community, state and federal government levels, education is discussed, planned and processed. It is believed that education makes both the person and the nation; it also influences values and attitudes. The professions are similarly built through the training and preparing people for different careers in life.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) once observed that, since wars begin in the minds of men, it is also in the minds of men that defences of peace must be constructed. It is evident in studies that education has great potentials for transforming the individual and the society. The approach to the functionality of education in the contemporary form is holistically over viewed from the power point of indigenous or traditional African technology. Africans have their ways of educating the young ones before the advent of the European educationists. Therefore, the transformation we are witnessing now has a long time of historical settings in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Olubadewo (2006) believe that, the faith of the people of developing countries including Nigeria, in education is as strong as their faith in their religions. This is evident in the farming communities of the remote villages, and the training of their young ones in the professions of the families that form the bedrock upon which the modern education hinges. This believe has given a new definition that sees education as a cure for all societal ailments: be it poverty, ignorance, unemployment, improvement in agricultural practices, science and technological development, inventions and discovery, manufacturing and several others must be in place. There has been a firm belief that without education, development cannot occur. It has been generally conceived that only educated population can command the skills necessary for sustainable economic growth and a better quality of life.

The National Policy

Education in Nigeria has transcendent the bonds of an ordinary man's understanding. The crucial important of education as the key to genuine development and the enhancement of a people's capability and talents has led to the struggle for the control of education by the federal government (Omolewa, 2001:3). This understanding of the place of education made the national government of Nigeria to believe that educational goals in terms of its benefit and relevance to the needs of the individual as well as in terms of kind of society desired goals in relation to the environment and the realities of the modern world and rapid social changes should be clearly set out (NPE, 2004). As being claimed by the National Policy, education is no more a private enterprise but a huge government venture. Though this venture has witnessed a progressive evolution of government's complete and dynamic intervention and active participation, but the adoption of education as an instrument for excellence for effecting national development has opened up wounds to be healed.

The economic and financial constraints placed on education since the recent past in Nigeria had had increasingly adverse effects on quantitative as well as qualitative aspects of education and training in all forms. At the same time, poor capacity for educational planning, administration and management has manifested from one government to the other, which are regarded as the sine qua non of successful implementation of educational innovations.

We are not here examining the philosophy as set out in the nation's working document because a re-examination may cause a total deviation, hence the contemporary issues would be the focus.

People's Participation in the Provision of Education

From the dawn of history of education in Nigeria, communities, mission agencies, individuals and other accredited bodies participated and still participating in the provision, supervision and management of education in Nigeria. Education before government's intervention was adjusted to be of high standard. The quest for further control and increased participation made the federal government take over the schools. A typical example is the education edict of 1970 enacted by the then East Central State as part of its post-war education policies. This step was later followed by the national government taking over the control of all schools without considering the consequences of funding, provision of learning facilities, infrastructure and control of the increased population of the new entrants into these so called government institutions.

Events of time past in Nigeria proved that, the total control as assumed by the federal government led to further instability in the standard of education and a near total collapse due to military government's intervention in the management and proffering solutions to the ills and problems of education in Nigeria.

Political Social and Economic Situation

Never before the inception of the present Obasanjo's administration has Nigeria as a country witnessed such a popular commitment to programmes of action for economic recovery and development, structural changes and human-resources development. However, this commitment is far from being a general consensus among the segments of the people to adopt "packages" proposed by others. These packages need to be modified according to the political, social and economic conditions of each sector of the country.

The political background of education ushered us into knowing that Nigeria among other African countries in the 1980s participated in conferences and summits that proposed several aggressive strategies for new foundations for education (e.g. Lagos Plan of Action, 1980, the Harare Conference of Ministries of Education, 1982, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), 1985, the Khartoum Declaration, 1988, etc (Chinapah, 1991).

Socio-Economic Contexts

Socio-economic and structural imbalances in Nigeria development are often approached in a polarized manner. The zig-zag approach that was the invention of the instability of government and the attendant policies; from one unachieved policy objectives to an unrealistic another and in the final analysis, education was and is still the worse hit. The social situation that lingered from the mid-1980s has deteriorated in many ways and has been marked by crisis in most areas of human development-health, nutrition, housing, education and employment. Poverty has become a wide hydra headed monster in both the urban and rural areas of the country affecting large population of the people. The difficult economic situation has not remarkably changed from the past, rather this has been renewed by disrupted transport routes and uprooted communities (flood areas) affecting both economic and political situations of the country. Serious economic dissatisfaction originates from rapid inflation, distribution and structural imbalances, wage-policy problems, harsh staple food-price adjustments and marked reduction in people's living standards. The above socio-economic problems are further aggravated by terrible housing conditions of low-income earners, poor nutrition, low resistance to disease, the looming menace of AIDS and serious drug abuse problems among the youths in the urban and semi-urban areas of the country.

Present Situation

Although, it is almost impossible to take stock of the achievements and shortcomings of educational development and propose future educational actions for such a heterogeneous, varied and complex environment as Nigeria. Education in some parts of this country has lost its most cherished values, while in some areas, it is being adored. Probably this is the reason why Davydou (1991:11),

wrote that:

Education is losing its cultural, moral and personal context meaning as well as any content and meaning as regards subject - matter and subject related activities. This means that, a gap is opening up between education and culture, between education and real life, and even between education and science.

If the full focus of our education is to revitalize the system, a reawakening of school enrolments that has been stagnated due to the changing economic situation and the quest for getting rich quick among the populace of this country should be readdressed.

School Enrolments

Before the advent of UBE in Nigeria, some parts of the country did not believe or have faith in the values and benefits of the formal education. This unbelieving might be related to hard economic situations which made majority of the school aged children to fall away from schooling. For example, children especially girls, are kept away from school because they become the sources of family economic upliftment. This poverty level has caused malnutrition and poor health, which in itself reduces the number of educable children, and accounts for part of the lack of success at school.

Table 1: Enrolments At All Level of Education in Nigeria 1996 - 2002

Year	Education Level: Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
1996	19,794,082	5,389,619	689,619	76.5	20.8	2.7
1997	20,390,790	5,578,255	862,023	76	20.8	3.2
1998	22,473,886	5,795,807	941,329	76.9	19.9	3.2
1999	23,709,949	6,056,618	983,689	77.1	19.7	3.2
2000	24,895,446	6,359,449	10,322,873	77.1	19.7	3.2
2001	27,384,991	6,995,394	1,136,160	77.1	19.7	3.2
2002	29,575,790	7,485,072	1,249,776	77.1	19.7	3.2

Table 1 - Sources: Federal Ministry of Education, Statistics of Education in Nigeria (Various Issues)

Table 2: Pattern of Federal Government Funding of Education Levels 1996 - 2002

Year	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
1996	9.7	10.4	79.9
1997	9.8	11.3	78.9
1998	16.9	14.6	68.4
1999	12.2	18.7	69.1
2000	8.9	15.3	75.8
2001	16.4	15.5	68.1
2002	7.5	15.6	76.9

Table 2 - Sources: Federal Government of Nigerian Annual Budgets (1996 - 2006).

The pattern of enrolments at all levels of education in Nigeria show a disparity in the funding of education system by years. A closer look at the increase in enrolment pattern, show a decline in the funding of education by the government of this nation.

This pattern of funding not corresponding with the enrolments by years showed the lack of interest in education system by the national government of Nigeria. Adequate attention has not been given to education in the area of funding in the country.

The Quality of Education Has Declined At All Levels

Among the explanations that could be given for the claim are the low expenditure per student and the ineffective allocation of existing resources where available at all. Looking at the table above,

the funding of primary school that is regarded as the foundation level of education has been very low from the year 2000 to 2002, taking into cognizance the increase in the enrolment level and facilities to be consumed by this population of children. Another contributing factor is that over the years, little progress has been made in improving teaching-learning conditions, that is, unavailability or shortage of relevant textbooks, lack of curriculum relevance to the needs of the society and poor supervision management at all levels of education in Nigeria.

School Failure

This could be alluded to the early and later drop-outs (or non-attempted to enroll) and poor academic standards. This phenomenon deserves special attention in relation to its vast implications for the cost of education, which are also reverberated at subsequent stages of education. According to Chinapah (1991:30), "in terms of quantitative research, the problem is quite well documented, and the statistical reports of the problem given cause for much concern".

Millennium Challenges of Education

Education is been regarded as the saviour of this nation and yet, it's the worse treated if compared with other sectors of the national economy. Fagbamiye (2004:123) believed that, many Nigerians are justifiably apprehensive that in spite of the fact that so much money is being expended on providing social welfare services, particularly education, we are comparatively worse off in 2003 than we were in 1976 when Universal Primary Education programme was introduced nation-wide. However, Fafunwa (2003) provided a contrary opinion that the standard of education is not what is at issue, "what is actually falling is our ability to meet the set standards".

The implication and challenges of this statement is that, good standards have been set for education sector but we have not often succeeded in ensuring that such standards can be attained or maintained.

Issues Concerning Education

Among so many concerns of the education system for development and national upliftment are, provision of adequate facilities that will match with teaching/learning at all levels of education. This has witnessed a sorry state in Nigerian schools:

Cultism ~ This has become a wide spread phenomena among students of both secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Our education curriculum needs reorientation towards solving this threatening situation in the country.

Drug Abuse - Drug abuse has become a common practice among the young ones at all levels of the national education system. In most of the time, the addicts who are supposed to be the pride of the nation are left in the hands of the law enforcement agents. They become wastes. Schools and colleges, mosques and churches and social organizations in the country need to rise against this destroyer of the future nation builders.

Corruption - This has become the order of the day in all the sectors and levels in Nigeria. Corruptions of various types has plagued and blinded our sense of judgement and reality of life in Nigeria. In high places government money is being tampered with at the expense of the generality of the people of this nation. Miller (1947:93) in Omolewa (2001) lamented that:

Bribery and corruption is rampant in all offices. In the African hospitals, drugs, injections and even treatment are illegally sold... Theft is becoming so universal and there is a callousness towards suffering and pain.

In all its facets, this situation is getting worse and worse in Nigeria. It was almost institutionalized before the promogation of law against this most devastating practice in high places in Nigeria.

Universal Basic Education - A Salvage to Ignorance

The proponents of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria probably did not know or think deeply of the bridging of the gap between the educational disparities among the segments of the society. The issue of privileged few accessibility to what should be the birth right of an individual child of school age that has the ability to gain from the education system is one of the major reasons why the UBE was introduced.

The blueprint on Basic Education was published by the Federal Ministry of Education in January, 1999. The paper defines basic education as "early childhood and pre-primary education, primary education, the first three years of secondary education, and basic and functional literacy for out-of-school children, youth and adult". The paper further said, "it's an organized, multi-sectoral, community-based education which consists of acquisition of the skills of reading, writing and numeracy, as well as functional knowledge and generative skills determined by the environment". The later part of the statement of the blueprint is totally in alliance with item number four (4) of the National Policy on Education aims and objectives which states that, "the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

At the time when accessibility to education was becoming a mirage to vast majority, the UBE as a means of lifting up hopeless ones was introduced since the broad aim of UBE is to lay the foundation for life long learning through the inculcation of appropriate 1 earning-to-learn, self- awareness, and life skills. It should not be considered as a static term that is related to years of schooling or limited to formal schooling. It is a process to be determined by every nation according to its evolutionary development needs (Ajayi, 2002).

Further examination of UBE reveals that, the syllabus of offering at the junior secondary stage paves the way for a kind of diversity education. This means that, at the end of the first three years, a child who has no ability for the rigours of academic work can go into vocational or technical education, which makes the child to be self-reliant in future. Really, what Nigeria needs most in this millennium is science and technological education. Our technological foundation could be found in building up skills acquisition in the products of the Universal Basic Education beneficiaries.

The Nigerian Educational System stands to be challenged by non-adherence on the total execution of the provisions of the UBE objectives. This is the only way forward. Provide education to all citizens who have the ability to benefit and remove poverty, ignorance and diseases among the people.

Conclusion

It is evident that education is the greatest instrument of nation building. Nigeria with its fame and population is yet to come of age to solve her problems by applying knowledge in all areas. If the country should move forward, the education system should be reviewed focusing on the areas that can and will promote technical, vocational and science oriented programmes. This is not to say that Nigeria is saturated in other areas but will need to move abreast of other countries of the world.

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