

## Democratization of Education in Nigeria: Challenges and the Way Forward.

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### **Abstract**

*Education is the most powerful weapon that can be used to change the world, but it is rather unfortunate that this indispensable tool for changing the world has not been accessed by all. This paper therefore looked at the democratization of education in Nigeria, its challenges and the way forward. In the process, the paper looked at the history of the development of education in Nigeria. It pointed out the importance of education which makes it indispensable in the development of an individual and the society at large. It also discussed the factors that contributed to the democratization of education in Nigeria and the problems associated with the democratization of education in Nigeria (i.e. making education accessible to all). Among the problems are poor planning, under-funding, unregulated establishment of private schools among others. It was recommended among others that before any worthwhile educational programme is embarked upon, there should be proper planning to forecast and estimate the resource implication of such an educational programme.*

**Keywords:** Democratization; Education; Universal Declaration of Human Right.

### **Introduction**

The success of any nation is greatly hinged on the quality and effectiveness of her educational sector. Education itself has been seen as an instrument per excellence for effecting national growth and development for a sustainable economy . It is regarded as a panacea to all political, social and economic ills of the developing nations. Education is the vehicle for improving the quality of life of individuals in a nation as well as the society's growth and development, it is the greatest instrument for change and national development.

Education has come to be seen as the major mechanism for the upliftment and integration of the youths and citizens of a nation at large into the social, economic and political fabrics of the society. According to a book reviewed by Jhingham (1980) in Agabi (2002,p.59), one of the most important factors contributing to the growth in the American economy has been relatively increasing outlays on education. To Galbraith, "we now get the larger part of our industrial growth not from more capital investment but from investment in men and improvement brought about by improved men. (Jhingham, 1980,p.316) in Agabi (2002,p.59)

In recognition of the above parents, communities, traditional rulers, politicians, states, nations etc are jostling to bring education to every citizen. This is therefore one of the basis that led to the democratization of education in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Overview**

Education is a process of discovering the hidden talents of individuals, providing experiences that nurtures, trains and causes these innate potentials to develop optimally. The term Education has been variously defined by different scholars. Definitions given by different

authors abound: The systematic influencing of people's knowledge, skills and attitudes (Nduka,2006); the development of man to enable him create and recreate himself (Okorosanye-Orubite, 2008); the pursuit of a wide range of activities planned and managed for the benefit of the society and its members (Audu,2004).

From the foregoing, it is clear that education is a veritable tool and an important technique for the total emancipation and development of an individual and the nation at large. The importance of education towards the general wellbeing of individuals in a society and the society itself cannot be overemphasized. Education makes man ethical; develops commitment to societal goals in the citizens; prepares the young members of a society for the future; enhances the productive abilities of citizens and also makes the citizens to be self reliant. This therefore provides the basis for the need to democratize education.

The term "Democratization" is originally a political term, it is one of the most commonly used terms in the political science lexicon. It simply implies embedding democracy to its core in a society. Its processes requires that all limitations to the effective practice of democracy are removed. Democratization entails participation, equality, equity, justice, rule of law etc. in relation to education, democratization is the equal and equitable provision of education to all the citizens of a particular society regardless of their social status, religion, ethnicity, tribe etc. in the words of Babarinda(1995) in Ibaba(2009), democratization of education pertains to the making of education accessible to all irrespective of class, religion, ethnic or political affiliations or other discriminatory factors.

However, democratization of education is not just about increased access to schooling. The mistake people usually make is to equate attendance or access to schooling with receiving education. Education is not just about building new schools and providing places in the classroom where the teacher for most part of the school period use chalk, talk, drill and rote. But, efforts should be made to provide an environment conducive for high quality learning and education that is relevant to the recipient and the society at large.

The idea that every citizen of any society should have access to affordable and a functional education is not nascent idea. Education is seen as a service which has to be provided for all those who are qualified for and are willing to acquire it. This idea holds that government should provide education for all, and this is in consonance with the opinion of the Netherlands Economic Institute which states that

*If a sufficiently qualified citizen stands at the door of any type of school, he must be admitted, and that it is the responsibility of the appropriate government authorities to anticipate his request so that school capacity will be adequate to accommodate him.* (Vaizey, Norris, Scheehan, Lynch and Leite) in Agabi (2012,p.39)

### **Brief History of the Development of Western Education in Nigeria**

Western education came to Nigeria consequently with the arrival of the Christian missionaries in the 1840s. The Christian missions were the pioneers of western education in Nigeria. On arrival, they realized that the task of converting adults to Christianity would be a Herculean one, and so, turned their attention to the children whom they hoped to catch through school education. The first organized place of formal learning by the name- "Nursery of the Infant church " was founded by Mr. and Mrs. William De Graft at Badagry in 1843. In the words of Mkpa(2014), education on the 4Rs(reading, writing, arithmetic and religion) was

predominant, this type of education prepared the recipients for new job opportunities as teachers, evangelists, pastors, interpreters and clerks.

Emphasis was laid more on primary schools in those early days to the neglect of secondary schools and tertiary institutions. However, in 1859, the Anglican Church Missionary Society established the first secondary school- C.M.S Grammar School, Lagos. Other earlier secondary schools founded within that period includes Methodist Boys High School, Lagos (1878), Methodist Girls High School, Lagos (1879), Boys High School, Bonny (1893), Saint Anne's Secondary School , Ibadan (1896) among others.

Around 1882, the government for the first time showed interest in education by enacting laws, regulations and guidelines on the management of schools. In 1959, the colonial government took another step by setting up a commission(Sir Eric Ashby's commission) to conduct an investigation into Nigeria's needs in the field of post secondary school certification and higher education. Among the commission's recommendation was the establishment of four federal universities to help meet up the country's growing manpower needs. Presently, Nigeria has more than 100 universities(federal, state and private) with numerous polytechnics and colleges of education.

Nigeria's National policy on education was formulated in 1977, revised 1981, 1989, 2004. The national education goals and objectives as enshrined in the national policy on education includes:

- a. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity.
- b. The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigeria society.
- c. The training of the mind in understanding of the world around, and
- d. The acquisition of appropriate skills, and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competences as empowerment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society. (FRN 2004, P.8).

### **Importance of Education**

Although we have looked at some of the benefits derived from the education of the citizens of a country, nevertheless, the importance of education cannot be exhaustively discussed. According to United Nations Resources for speakers on Global Issues, education is important because of the following reasons:

- Education beat poverty: education confers on its recipients an earning power. One extra year of learning can increase a person's earning by up to 10%.
- Education promotes gender equality: gender equality confers the same right and opportunities on both the male and female without any form of discrimination on the basis of gender differences. This can help the women control how many children they have without being subjected to a child-making machine by the man with its attendant risks.
- Education reduces child mortality: a child born to a mother who can read is at least 50% more likely to survive past age five. A research in Indonesia for example shows that child vaccination rates are 19% when mothers have no education and 68% when mothers have atleast secondary school education.
- Education contributes to improved maternal health: women with higher levels of education are most likely to delay and space out pregnancies and to seek health care and support.

- Education helps combat HIV, malaria and other preventable diseases: Education helps in combating these preventable diseases and in addition facilitates access to treatment and fights against stigma and discrimination through information made available on them.
- Education encourages environmental sustainability: it helps people make decisions that meet the needs of the present without compromising those of future generations.
- Education facilitates global development.

### **Contributory Factors to the Democratization of Education in Nigeria.**

Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to education and that education shall be free, at least at the elementary and fundamental stages. The article also stated that education at the elementary stage shall be compulsory and that higher education shall be made equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Here, education is seen as a right, just like the right to life, freedom of speech, association etc. Thus, this made it obligatory for the government to make education accessible to all its citizens especially at the fundamental stages.

The demand for education also contributed to the rapid growth of educational institutions. In the words of Ocho (1972) in Chukwu (2009,p.13), the demand for education in the southern part of Nigeria for example was like a great river in flood which a weak man has been trying to restrict to its normal channel. He further remarked that anything that had the name “school” attached to it was sure to be patronized by the education hungry citizens. The consequence of the above was the proliferation of schools.

Another factor that contributed to the democratization of education in Nigeria was the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s EFA (Education For All) goals. In 2000, the International Community met at the World Education forum in Dakar, Senegal, the forum took stock of the fact that many countries were far from having reached the goals established at the World Conference on Education for all in 1990. They re-affirmed their commitment to achieving Education for All by the year 2015 and identified six key measurable education goals which aim at meeting the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015, the goals are:

1. Expand early childhood care and education;
2. Provide free and compulsory primary education for all.
3. Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults.
4. Increase adult literacy by 50%
5. Achieve gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015.
6. Improve the quality of education.

The points made above and some other factors contributed to the rapid growth of educational institutions.

### **Associated Problems with Democratizing Education in Nigeria.**

The aim of democratizing our education system is fraught with many challenges which has made the education democratization process difficult to achieve fully.

Poor planning is one the challenges that affects or influences democratization of education in Nigeria. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) of 1976 is a good example, the planning of that programme was very poor that provisions were not made for funding that would sustain the programme, also well trained teachers that would carry on the programme were not provided, and half-baked teachers populated the teaching force. The outcome of the widely

criticized UPE programme of 1976 validates the assertion that “failure to plan is planning to fail”. Every other thing was available except adequate funding and quality teaching force. The students were ready, classrooms were filled, but there was a short supply of the teaching force.

Similar to the above factor is the problem of under-funding. Paradoxically, in spite of her enormous natural and human resources, Nigeria’s educational system is bedeviled with the challenges of under-funding and thus poor infrastructure, inadequate classrooms, teaching aids etc. The importance of money in the implementation of any educational programme cannot be overemphasized. Adequate funding is a critical factor for any worthwhile educational programme to be achieved. The National policy on Education(2004) section 13, subsection 120 states that education is an expensive social service that requires adequate financial provision for a successful implementation of the educational programmes. The issues of poor funding has been recurrent, Nigeria has not been able to meet up with the 26% recommendation made by the UNESCO for developing countries to allocate to their education sector in the annual budgetary allocation. The table below shows the Federal government annual budgetary allocation to education from1994 to 2014.

**Federal Government Annual Percentage Budgetary Allocation to Education:**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Percentage allocated to education</b>
1994	7.83
1995	12.83
1996	12.32
1997	11.50
1998	10.72
1999	11.12
2000	8.71
2001	7.13
2002	6.90
2003	7.75
2004	5.24
2005	8.21

2006	10.43
2007	9.75
2008	10.04

2009	8.79
2010	7.39
2011	9.32
2012	9.86
2013	10.21
2014	10.7

Source: Adapted from Nwakudu (2014, p.157) with modification.

Okeke (2007) raised an alarm that massive growth of education not backed up by financial resource is operated at the expense of quality.

There is this wrong notion of people about education, some people see the certificate of completion of an education programme as a meal ticket, for this reason they try by all means to acquire certificate no matter how, such persons are ready to cut corners, pay their way through or even out-rightly buy the certificates as they will say that the end justifies the means.

Democratization of education has opened the flood gate for application to the NUC and other bodies for the establishment, ownership, management and control of educational institution by just anyone who wish to be a school proprietor. Many people who should not have any business running schools because they lack both the aptitude, attitude and the necessary credentials bribe their way through to having their institutions approved.

The above factor has led to the proliferation of private educational institutions to the extent that government bodies in charge of education cannot control and regulate the establishment of educational institutions properly. For example in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, you hardly go through any street without seeing at least one private primary or secondary school. Most of these schools are not approved and are operating at the expense of quality. This mushroom schools engage half-baked and untrained teachers, the truth is that one cannot give what he does not have. Such one man business ventures are more likely to be profit driven than quality driven.

## Conclusion

The role of education towards the development of an individual and the society as a whole is no longer debatable. Education has been and still is a vehicle for improving quality of

life of individuals in a society and that of the society too. Hence, there is the need to make it equally accessible to all without any form of discrimination. However, in making education accessible to all, care should be taken so that quality is not compromised. The making of quality education accessible to all in Nigeria should be one of the utmost priorities of government. Unfortunately, this has been hindered by myriads of problems ranging from poor planning, under-funding, unregulated proliferation of private schools etc. It behoves on government to tackle and find solutions to these problems through various recommendations that has been proffered over the years by various researchers.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations will help solve the problems associated with the democratization of education and consequently make education accessible by all.

1. Government through its education management agencies should embark on proper planning which will involve forecasting and estimating the financial, human and material resources implication of any educational programme before embarking on such a programme.
2. The Nigerian government should improve its funding of the education sector. It should abide by the 26% recommended by the UNESCO for developing countries to the education sector from the budgetary allocation.
3. Entrepreneurial education should be given more attention to in our education system, this will produce self-reliant and independent citizens. The importance placed on certificates should be de-emphasized.
4. There should be a regulation of the establishment of private educational institutions to make sure that only schools that are up to atleast the minimum standards are approved.
5. Education should be made available and affordable for all and sundry by the government.

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