

Problems and Prospects of Secondary Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Secondary education is the education which is received after the primary and before tertiary level. Apart from the acquisition of knowledge and development of higher mental faculty of the individual, secondary education aspires to develop in the student respect for the worth and dignity of the human person, faith in man's ability to make rational decisions, recognize his role as a citizen particularly in relation to others in the society, and demonstrate that he is an informed citizen, equipped with skills and attitudes for effective living and survival, as well as respect for dignity of labour. However the qualities of students who graduate from this level of our educational system over the years have continued to dwindle. This paper looks at the possible factors responsible for this development and recommends among other things, that government should pay more serious attention to moral, vocational and technical re-orientation of our secondary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the process of bringing desirable change into the behavior of human beings. It can also be defined as the process of imparting or acquiring knowledge or habits through instruction.

Education, for any nation, whether developed or developing, is to help solve the problems that affect that nation. This is why according, is to National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004:4), "Government has stated that for the benefit of all citizens, the country's educational goals shall be clearly set out in terms of their relevance to the needs of their relevance to the needs of the individual and those of the society, in consonance with the realities of our environment and the modern world".

Therefore, many nations after political independence had to turn their attentions to nations building by looking up to education as the tool to this end hoping that what is did to the "great power" it can also do for them (Williams/1970, in Omede and Omede, 2004). Education is obviously known to be an indispensable tool for national development (FRN, 2004). For education to be potent and useful, it must have to be indigenized that is, designed according to the prevailing needs of that particular society.

This explains why Nigeria educational system had since independence gone through series of reviews to commend it to the prevailing needs of the society. Yusuf and yusuf (2009) noted that the first serious attempt at reforming the educational program of the country took place in 19659 through a curriculum conference that was held in Lagos, and that the conference' recommendations led to the first post independent educational policy, tailored to meet the local needs of the nation. From independence till; now, the national policy on education, the documents that serve as the "ten commandments" for the nation's educational practices had been reviewed for more than three time- 1977 (first draft),then revised in 1981, 1998 and 2004.

The revision is necessary but suggests one thing that our educational system is yet to meet the needs of the society satisfactorily and expected. There are glaring cases of underdevelopment due to lack of technological and industrial advancements, poor and inadequate infrastructural provision, unemployment as well as low and erratic electricity supply.

THE PROBLEMS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The secondary education in Nigeria has overtime entangled with different kind of problem which has course several damage in the running of the system and has somehow resulted to the level of poor graduating student seen around our dear country. Among many problems confronting secondary education in Nigeria the following is discusses.

1. Unstable Staff: As for teaching staff in Nigeria primary and secondary school today, the problem is no longer that of unavailability, but that of instability. This does not help the development of the education system. Because of the comparatively poorer conditions of service of teachers in the Nigeria society, the tendency for many teaching in the nation's school today, as was the case with their predecessors in later colonial and independent Nigeria, is to use the teaching profession as a stepping stone to other highly esteemed and more attractive jobs.

In consequence, teaching is gradually becoming a profession for fresh graduates of universities and colleges of education who are ready to call it quit, without provocation, as soon as they find greener pasture elsewhere. From time to time, therefore the teaching staff in Nigeria educational institutions is usually unstable. Consequently, the teaching, learning process installed everywhere. Unless the conditions of service of teachers, at all levels, are improved and their status raised higher in the Nigerian society, the teaching staff of our educational institutions including the universities, shall continue to be unstable and educational progress shall continue to be retarded; but this must not be so for a country that is virtually ready to take a plunge into a world of science and technology.

2. Inadequate Classroom Accommodation: in a majority of Nigeria secondary schools, the classroom accommodation is grossly inadequate. As a result of the large enrolments in these schools, the classrooms are usually overcrowded, with up to sixty or more students receiving instructions in classroom designed for only thirty or, forty students. In most cases, the chairs and desk are not enough; you see them sharing chairs, standing up, or sitting on windows or broken desk! When students are overcrowded like this, there is a stalling of the teaching-learning process and a disruption of the children's mental activity, 'a situation that generally militates against effective teaching and intellectual development the children.

3. Poorly Equipped Libraries, Laboratories And Subject Rooms:

For effective teaching and learning, well equipped laboratories and subject rooms are needed; but the truth is that a major of Nigerian secondary schools today lack these essential facilities. Many schools and colleges have buildings that the call libraries, but most of these are not equipped with essential books and current journals and magazines. Also, many schools and colleges do not have science laboratories while a good number of those that have, do not possess the basic tolls or equipments as microscopes, dissecting instruments and specimens.

Also, many schools do have "special rooms for teaching such basic subjects as history, geography and French. In such a situation as this, the teachers cannot put in their best; and the students, too, cannot teaching-learning process is stalled and the overall development of the children, within the school system is retarded.

4. Scarcity and Prohibitive Cost of Book: Again, SAP and FEM have adversely affected the production, distribution and cost of books in Nigeria. The implication of a weak Naira for the book production/distribution industry is that the production cost of each book would be higher than before. It does not matter whether the books are imported or produced locally. If imported, the cost of buying them in Europe or America and the cost of transporting them to Nigeria would be very high. If they are printed locally (i.e in Nigeria), the cost of importing raw materials (paper, ink a related printed materials) would still be high, shooting up the overall production

cost. In either case, therefore, the unit cost of every school or college book in Nigeria is high; and many titles are out of print. The resulted are a dearth of essential books for teaching and learning in Nigeria educational institutions and prohibitive cost of the ones available. Again, this factor militates against effective teaching and learning and the overall development of the Nigerian education system.

5. Poor Preparation and Malpractices: Experts in the education sector has been able to identify examination malpractices with poor preparation of students for an examination, and lack of self confidence. In view of the rising costs of education (school fees, enrolment fees, cost of books and other material student and even their parents will not ordinarily want to be held back by any form of deficit or failure in any6 of the required subjects, hence will go to any length to ensure success. In some cases, some teachers at the secondary school level are involved by way of encouraging student to contribute money (cooperation fees) in order to secure the needed assistance during such examinations because they, the teachers are left with no other alternative considering the fact that they are aware of the inadequate preparation of their students as well as the lack of facilities to get them properly prepared before examination. Interview with 50 school heads in Benin City, reveals that more than 50% of our secondary school students on annual basis choose to enroll and write their final year external examination in schools and the interior and some private schools where they are very sure of success at the end of the day. In 1996, the military government in Edo State sent home secondary school teachers that have served 28 years and above as well as those that were recruited in 1991 and after, few weeks before final year examination. Some schools were left with one teacher and a security man. And a near replication of same happened in the years 2000, this time for those that have served 28 years and above. This is how the government indirectly legitimized irregularities in schools that is today unabated. Today the paucity of teachers in our secondary and primary schools, indicate that the state is yet to fully recover from this shock, (Omofonmwan, 2001). Between 1999 and the year 2000, the Bauchi State Government terminated the services of teachers who were non-indigene from its teaching services. A situation which resulted in acute shortage of teachers in virtually all schools in the state without a prior provision for replacement. Some practices have also been observed in some other states of the federation. In similar vein, Zamfara State government in the year 2004 imposed fees on students that is not only religious and indigene-ship bias, but also gender discriminatory, such discriminatory educational policy hampers the quest for goal attainment in both educational and national development. Efforts of state government like Bayelsa and Ebonyi, since 1999 towards overhauling and speedy transformation of its educational system from the primary to the tertiary level as well as sponsorship of its indigenes for oversea educational progammes and payment of student's examination enrolment fees should be recognized applauded and emulated by other.

6. Exploitation and Educational Standard: A close assessment of activities in schools have revealed that, students are made to suffer undue amount of exploitation by school heads at both private and public schools in the name of enrolment fees and assurances of success in their examination and this they do in collaboration with the ministry officials who are supposed to inspect and monitor activities in school to ensure standard compliance. Despite the fact that most of the schools lack basic learning facilities and a complete set of teachers, in some cases, a school with the services of an English Language teacher will lack that of a Mathematics teacher. This is the more reason why one may not have the gut to quarry the mass promotion syndrome being practice in schools because the system itself in not balanced. In like manner, students are being surcharged in a number of ways in tertiary institution either in the name of dues that are not accounted for, force purchase of reading and other learning materials are exorbitant rate or on

services of which staff are being paid for as assigned responsibility and official provision made by the respective institution. All these lead to lowering of the academic ability of student.

7. Poor Parenting/Guidance: Parenting entails caring, protection, guidance, provision of basic needs for a child up keep in order for him or her to be properly equipped to meet with the challenges of life, in accordance with the laws of the land. In desperation, many parents have decided to bring in additional innovation by way of not only involve in encouraging, but also finance activities in and around examination venues to effect malpractices in order to brighten the chance of their children or ward in qualifying examination to higher institutions and some even progress on this act through the tertiary level of education. Interview with two sets of university students from various department engaged in clustered group discussion revealed that their parents influence over their choice course of study has negative effect on their level of performance.

8. Poverty and fall in Standard: Acquisition of education knowledge is supposed to help us fight against poverty, ignorance and disease. The process of acquiring this well desired knowledge has gradually turned money spinning venture for many of those in dire need of the knowledge and skill. It is not a source of exploitation from the service seekers with little or no consideration for quality of service rendered and facilities on ground, and made an offer for the highest bidder. A trend which has cut across all levels of education, from nursery school to tertiary institution. The concept, “poverty”, refers to a situation and process of serious deprivation or lack of resources and materials necessary for living within a minimum standard conducive for human dignity and well being (NEST, 1992:16). Admission and being in school today is merely an ability to pay what is demanded in monetary terms by school operators and not on what could be offered academically. And this in essence widens the scope of poverty prevalence as well as the gap between the rich and the poor which education is designed to bridge. Little wonder why graduates from many of the institution exhibits ignorance toward society realities and lack of creativity, due to the inadequacies associated with the learning and training process which is also observed to be partly because many of those that offer this service do so with greed.

9. Politicization Education: The politicization of education is another major problem of educational development in Nigeria today. In an attempt to catch up with their counterparts, many states in Nigeria, particularly the new ones, indulge in the opening and running of many educational institution, even when they are least prepared to do so, this result in the lowering of standards and in various educational projects collapsing mid-way. This was particular the case during the Second Republic (1979-1983) and the activities of the various state governments during and after the Second Republic clearly show that education is still being politicized on Nigeria. We are likely to see more of it during the Third Republic.

10. Procurement and Servicing of Equipment: A majority of the educational institution in the country demanded in monetary terms by school operators and not on what could be offered academically. And this in essence widens the scope of poverty prevalence as well as the gap between the rich and the poor which education is designed to bridge. Little wonder why graduates from many of the institution exhibits ignorance towards society realities and lack of creativity, due to the inadequacies associated with the learning and training process which is also observed to be party because many of those that offer this service do so with greed.

11. The problems of relating the curricula to national manpower needs: One major aspect of Nigeria educational that has been quite often criticized is the curriculum. The early

critics include members of the Phelps-Stokes and Advisory commissions who submitted their separate reports in 1925. They observed that education in Africa generally had not been adapted to the needs and aspirations of the people. In their various reports, the commission suggested that related to African life and culture. A subject like history for example, should emphasize the activities of the African (chief, heroes, warriors, educator, etc) rather than those of the Europeans. It is interesting to note that a few decades after the publication of the Phelps-Stokes and Advisory Committee Reports, particularly after World War II, slight adjustments were made in school' curriculums which were not slightly oriented towards Africa life. But the progress in this direction was not remarkable, for as late as the 1960s, education in African schools, particular in Nigeria grammar schools, was still "too literary; not practical, not adapted to the needs of the developing agricultural nation". Those types of academic education only "tends to produce proud. Lazy people who dislike manual labour and prefer white-collar job". (Ajayi, 1963). This assertion by Ajayi (1963) is representative of the opinions of later critics on Africa education curricula generally.

The flaws in the aspect of Africa education have been traced to missionary influence. Formal education was introduced into many parts of Africa by the Christian Mission. In Nigeria, for example, they arrived between 1842 and the late 1840s. First to come were the Wesleyan Methodists, followed in quick succession by the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S), the Baptists and finally the Roman Catholics. As soon as they came, the Missionaries, particularly the Methodists and the C.M.S., opened a number of primary schools for the general education of the converts. Instructions were given in four R's: reading Writing, Arithmetic and Religion.

The purpose of this early education was to train teacher-catechist, interpreters, servants and cooks. Education beyond primary school was not an aim of the missionaries. It was only late that the few educated Nigerians in Lagos began to clamour for a kind of post primary academic education that would enable their children to become doctors, lawyers, engineers, civil servants and the like. The result was the opening of the Lagos Anglican Grammar school in June 1859. The early curriculum of the school was wide and instructive, including Religious Knowledge, English Grammar and Composition, History, Geography, Book-Keeping, Euclid and National Philosophy (Ajayi, 1963). Other grammar schools that were opened in Nigeria after 1859 followed the same or similar curriculum as that of Lagos Grammar school, one significant point to note in the discussion of the curriculum is that the curriculum of the academic grammar schools was popular while that of other institution was not. This may explain why there was a constant rush to the grammar schools while enrollment in vocational schools, agricultural institutes and trade centres was correspondingly poor. No wonder, then that the Catholic Agricultural Training Institution at Topo (in Badagry Division) and the Blaize Memorial Institute at Abeokuta dwindled while St. Gregory's College, Lagos, and Abeokuta Grammar School continued to flourish because they were recognized and patronized. Commenting this state of affair, John W, Hanson Stated:

It is understandable why the European and American experts who still an influential role in education in most African nations should cherish the educational system by which they themselves were nourished. What is not as clearly recognized by those who have been anticipating an essential change in education following independence is that the first generation in most nations face equal or even greater, intellectual and emotional difficulties in breaking with the past they are as frequently as conservative concerning the educational status quo as are most traditional of the "colonialist" (Hanson, 1986).

Today, all educational authorities in Nigeria are aware of the pressing need to relate our curricula, at all levels of education, to our national manpower needs. Conferences on Curriculum Development and the utterances of renowned professors of education and government officials are a proof of the people's awareness, of this major flow in our educational system and

of the pressing need for reforms at all levels of education. For example the Curriculum Innovation Workshop held at the University of Ibadan, July 16-29, 1972, considered the possibility of initiating some reforms in teacher education programmes. Similarly, the National Workshop on Teacher Education Curriculum, April 1972, offered some useful suggestions on what should be the content of teacher education in Nigeria. At continental level, the UNESCO-sponsored Addis Ababa Conference of African State of the Development of Education in Africa, 1961, gave ample space to the discussion of the schools' curricula in African countries. A few years later, S.J. Cookey, the Federal Adviser on education, expressed the view that the purpose of Nigeria education should be reviewed with a view to relating the curriculum to the needs and aspirations of the society (Cookey, 1970). And currently the Nigeria National Policy on Education emphasizes the need to relate school curricula to national manpower needs.

12. The Prevalence of Multiples Systems of Education: Another major problem of educational development in Nigeria today is the prevalence of multiple systems of education. As of today there are thirty-one systems of education in the country: the national system, or Federal (Abuja) system, and the thirty one state systems. Each education system is unique, backed up by the Federal or State Education Laws. In a situation like this, uniformity is virtually impossible and this has the potential for disrupting the education of the children of Federal staff moving from one part of the country to the other. However, the gap that this multiple systems could create, particularly at the senior secondary school level could be closed or narrowed by the existence of a common curriculum and the influence of a common external examining body.

This writer believes that the national education system should supersede the State systems. In other words, the nation (the Federal Government) should set a standard, a pattern of operation to be adopted by all the states, the present system whereby each state followed its own way, particularly in the operation of the primary and secondary schools in the various states. This is because each state system is independent in this area of academic activity. Thus, there is no central examining body to organize a joint School Leaving Certificate Examination for children in the final year classes of the primary and junior secondary schools, as the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) does for the senior secondary school leavers,

13. Inadequate Research Development: Everyone who cherish genuine growth and sustainable development- Government, private and corporate organization, non-governmental organization and individuals should as a matter of due responsibility encourage and finance research programmes, inventions and mass production of invented products as a way of discouraging prospective students from indulging in any form of academic irregularities, who may not have seen anything good or meaningful on the part of those who have been hardworking and creative, research and invention wise in terms of reward for their effort. Currently research interest by the government at all levels and corporate organization is nothing to area of human Endeavour got frustrated and discouraged due to lack of assistance and encouragement resulting in brain to other parts of the world, where such innovations are well recognized and encouraged, despite the amount of knowledge and experience claimed to have been acquired or possess by some scholars, occupying some prestigious and sensitive units as heads still try to thwart the effort of fellow scholars and that of upcoming ones as a underdevelopment of the society as its resultant effect. Suffices to say, that these sets of scholars have thrown modesty and excellence (they are supposed to hold on to jealously) to the wind. According to Professor L. Erinsho "there is no doubt that universities have a pivotal role to play because they, as institution, bear a part of the responsibility for the collapse of the academia. There are a number of challenges facing universities in Nigeria today, the first of which is to tackle declining standards which, as was previously observed, is being orchestrated by scholars". This research sub-sector that is grossly neglected in Nigeria and play upon indiscriminately is the basis for the socio economic,

political, scientific and technological advancement of our most admired developed nations of the world today. Therefore, conscious efforts towards qualitative and durable educational system need to be put in place for posterity in Nigeria (its land, mineral resources etc) and the numbers of its people, their level of skills, altitudes to work and desire for self improvement wrong to say that there is no good and favourable market for researchers in Nigeria.

14. Organization Influence on Educational Standard: Many viewers have observed that, most corporate organizations today in the country are found of employing series of measures which are have effect bias and unproductive. They indulge in an unfair selective judgement on applicants seeking employment opportunity into their establishment, by way of using certificate grades as well as institution attended as a prerequisite for interview attendance and recruitment. In some cases, they rather prefer candidates with first class and second class grade certificate and those that attended the first generation universities at the detriment of some others with lesser grade who might be better if given equal opportunity. This is their own way of encouraging irregularities and malpractices in the process compromising standard and perpetual dependence on the services of foreign expatriates for both medium and high teacher services.

PROSPECT FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

- i. Government and the private sector should pull in more effort and resources towards the development of education.
- ii. Educating and re-orientation of teachers, parents and students on the need to discourage examination malpractice in schools.
- iii. More vocational and technical education centres be establish and the few existing ones property equipped and staffed.
- iv. An independent inspectorate committee should be put in place to regularly monitor activities in schools as the existing inspectorate unit has seize to function effectively.
- v. Government should take over payment of enrolment fees for both primary six examinations and secondary schools external examination.
- vi. Qualitative and affordable education by made available for all
- vii. Schools should be properly staffed and equipped.
- viii. Applicants seeking job replacement irrespective of grades obtained and institution attendee should be given fair and equal opportunity to compete for placement.
- ix. More modern learning aids such as computers, internet Web sites facilities, overhead projectors, firms etc should be provided in schools.
- x. Online registration being introduced now for school e3xamination enrolment, by the Nation Examination Body should be encouraged; this will reduce the exploitative tendency by school.
- xi. Review of school curricula for promoting relevant learning and extra-curricular activities.
- xii. Quality assurance in terms of class size, number of teachers and instructional material.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

In order to remove some of the major problems of educational development in Nigeria, the issue of responsibility and control must be resolved and a uniform system of education introduced and operated nation-wide. This would mean the abolition of the present school system whereby children of the privileged class and attend special schools. Further, special concession should be granted to Nigeria educational institutions to import books, stationeries and other educational equipments, duty-free. Also, Nigerian publishers and printing industries should be allowed to import newsprint and other material needed for book production without paying any import duties. The cost of books would thus be reduced. All secondary schools should be provided with adequate equipments and facilities for teaching and learning.

In addition, frequent changes of subject syllabuses should be discouraged while teachers of all categories should be encouraged to remain in the same school for many years so that a tradition of teaching and learning could be established in each school. Finally, the federal and State Government should Endeavour to remove or at least minimize the adverse effect off ASP and FEM on teachers and learner by increasing their salaries of all categories of teachers in the nation's educational institutions and providing substantial financial assistance to all pupils and students.

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