

RE-ENGINEERING LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SELF PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Nigerian Education System has been subject to efforts (or may be non-efforts) meant to restructure and reform the sector since 1979 when the first national policy on Education was formulated to noavail. Therefore, this paper focuses on Language Education, Nigeria's Education Sector Roadmap, the restructuring components, employment and how these components could be re-engineered towards self relevance in Nigeria.

At a national curriculum conference in (1969) during which it was concluded that an emergorging modern Nigeria required an overhauled school curriculum to meet the development challenges that were eminent for the country in the ensuing decades (Fafunwa, 1974). The resolutions of that conference were to form the key reference points for the first national policy on education for Nigeria in 1979 shortly after in 1981 a revised policy emerged with prescriptions for structuring the Nigerian Education System into the 6-3-3-4 system. Thus, had began the journey of the search for restructuring and reforming the Nigerian Education System.

As the Education Sector System policy prescription were either ignored, jettisoned or bungled year after year, so did the free fall of the Nigerian education standards continue uncontrolled between 1981 till date (2012). It will be a herculean task recounting the damages in the various subsectors of the system that has resulted today in the substance of "Education" (or miseducation) from school system resulting in the majority of barely literate, unemployable and unemployed school leavers all over the place. Inline with the fundamental issues raised above. Kolo, (2006) observed that:

Much of the present problems of the sector such as decayed infrastructure, inadequacy of teaching and learning facilities, politization of access and opportunities, early school leaving and out of school syndrome, cultism, exam malpractices etc" were all borne out of the issues on the ground --- collective guilt of trivialization of the value and relevance of education, lack of political will and commitment by government, funding and under funding factors, the lacuna of a dynamic and appropriate curriculum and a static teacher education system (Kolo, 2006:6).

However, the most radical of the restructuring and reforms prescription reports is the one conceived during the short-lived period of the Obiageli Ezekwesili era as Minister of Education. The report contains several reform packages which included the enactment of partnerships with stake holders and the private sector to revamp school structures, widening access by conversion of higher institutions into university campuses, re-invigoration of the inspectorate services to become more proactive in educational planning and development; ensuring that all communities are reached with one programme or the other, development of models schools/institutions and the entrepreneurship and enterprise institutes etc. Certainly, if the package of reforms is implemented and well managed, there is no doubt that the ministry of education would have been on some path to restructuring and reforming the education sector in Nigeria by now.

Probably what the Ezekwesili Reforms Agenada lacked more precisely is the strategic frame work for achieving results. Indeed, this was the basis of much of the criticism that greeted the announcement of the package. Probably also, it was the reason the Sam Egwu administration in the FME evolved the roadmap approach (FME, 2009).

Nigeria's Education Sector Roadmap

The road map for the implementation of strategies developed to ensure an entire sectoral transformation built around four priority areas which include the following:-

- * Access and Equity
- * Standards and Quality Assurance
- * Technical and Vocational Education and Training

The report contain detailed analysis of the challenges in the education sector along the four priority areas and some general issues cutting across the various sub-sectors. Specifically, the four priority areas were examined at basic, post basic and tertiary education levels with specific challenges identified, strategies for addressing them proffered and timelines articulated.

Cross cutting edges affecting the implementation strategies for the successful transformation of the sector were also identified with specific reference to the following areas:-

- * Policy, planning and implementation management.
- * Education Management Information System (EMIS).
- * Legislative review and reform.
- * Stake holder partnerships and collaborations.

The Restructuring Components

The structure of the education sector in Nigeria presently is essentially one of an almighty Ministry of Education at federal and state levels with appendage as local Government Education Department. The ministry also has a number of departments, branches and units (Primary and Secondary Education, Inspectorate Services, Support Services, Tertiary Education etc) meant to foster bureaucracy in the Education sector.

Has this structure enabled us to deliver quality education? Has it fostered access and created more opportunities? Has it made the sector responsive to national and even sectoral challenges? These are ten million dollar questions for true consciences.

Critical issues that has been raised regarding the present structure of the Nigerian education in respect of the evident lack of desirable impact include the enormity of the sector for a single ministry to meet bureaucratic precision, over lapping mandates and functions in service delivery, the unnecessary number of parastatals, especially at the federal level and the lack of focus by some departments or parastatals. One would say here that, this dispensation can be restructured to achieve efficiency and effectiveness, given the challenges in the education sector today.

The Reform Components

Education sector reforms require revisiting and modifying tangibles and inputs for effective systems performance and impact-oriented service delivery. Despite huge budgeting allocations and assisted programme and project input into the education sector in Nigeria today, impact is hardly visible or where visible, only in isolated cases as against the expectation of massive turn around of the system. The implication is that there is no input mechanisms (funding sources and approaches, mobilization of resources, planning, impact creation etc). There must be subject to obsolete reforms for desirable out comes and outputs (good schools, quality and functional education, teacher commitment etc). Hence, the reform focus components will necessarily have to include re-channeling funding of the different levels of education, re-defining the mobilization of sources of implementing education agenda, re-enacting partnerships that work, redesigning curriculum and delivery models at all levels.

Redefining the Sources of Funding Education

Public education funding in Nigeria is largely seen and accepted as government responsibility alone. It was possible for government to shoulder that responsibility when schools and educational institutions were few. Not any longer, there must be what it takes to functionally educate children and the youths at all levels and share the responsibilities between stakeholders (parents, communities, politicians and political office holders, philanthropists, investors, explorers of our resources etc) and

government. If the desire functional and quality education in Nigeria, is not geared toward funding it rather than sharing the cost by some agreeable formula of social responsibility. The government will only continue to allocate whatever it can among competing social services demands. This is what has led us to the hue and cry over under funding and the crises of funding.

Strengthening Partnerships

Although, sustainable participation in the education system has become inevitable, if the sector is to be moved forward for visible impact in Nigeria, UBEC has started partnership communities and NGOs in constructing schools, renovating structures and provisions of services. The results have been encouraging and there is nothing wrong in expanding such projects to even as much as 50% of public funding of education. Bench marks and standards for compliance need to be created for such public community private partnerships to rescue the Education sector from decay.

Re-Designing Teacher Education

That the quality of teachers both at the N.C.E and university degree level is far below expected standard is an incontrovertible fact. Teacher education needs to be strengthened in terms of standard and quality of academic content as well as professional preparation. Teacher career preparation colleges (not grade II teachers colleges) may be required for school leavers who interned to enter into the Colleges of Education. The three years residency programmes in the Colleges of Education need to be dedicated more to academic subjects knowledge acquisition along with micro and clinical teaching preparation. The present one semester or so teaching practice (that has become a charade). Need to be shifted outside the three years residency in the colleges to become one year supervised internship in the model in which UBEC currently organizes the National Teachers voluntary services scheme. However, the function needs to be beefed up and taken over by TRCN. In redesigning teacher education, (Kolo 2005:19) is of the view that:“

..... the proposal is to have the NCE and B.ed programmes become transitional with the one year internship in between and run at the colleges of education level. The idea allows pre-service preparation become integral to both NCE and B.ed programmes and enables students to opt out of teacher preparation after three years of NCE to obtain admission the university on-education courses rather than train them without interest in”.

Consequently, teacher education has to be adequately funded in terms of infrastructure, teaching and learning facilities and lectures capacity development and welfare.

Teacher Professionalism and Welfare

The dictum that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers must be taken more seriously. Laudable initiatives of capacity development and mandatory professional development programmes are already in place by Teacher’s Registration Council of Nigeria TRCN, with Education Trust Fund ETF, complementing within its resources to re-build teacher professionalism in Nigeria. TRCN in particular, must be further strengthened and encouraged to partner with ETF and other stake holders National Union of Teacher NUT, Academics Staff Union of University ASUU, Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics ASUP, College of Education Academic Staff Union COEASU, private sector, development partners etc).

NTI should come under the ambit of TRCN strictly for developing and implementing only capacity development and mandatory professional development programmes rather than engaging in pre-service and related in-service programme on its own as the case today.” (Olaofe 2005 15).

However, these professional programmes must be tied to enhanced teachers remunerations and welfare. The various needs to be directly supported especially in term of implementing teachers welfare schemes while differential salary structures for qualified professional teachers at all levels must not be compromised.

Education System Curriculum Innovation

Quality and functionality are two indices most compromised in the Nigerian education system today. Good enough, NERDC is already taking the lead in re-enacting the entire education curriculum. NUC is also taking initiatives in developing entrepreneurship education for the universities. The two agencies must go beyond the rhetoric of it all to ensure concrete steps for implementation. Hands-on components of all subjects at Basic and secondary education levels while curricular review for re-nomenclating and making the present traditional subjects in the other tertiary institutions and universities development-oriented still remain crucial to a more whole some education curriculum innovation proposed here with.

Implementation Framework

The Road Map strategy is aimed at ensuring results-focused implementation of reforms at the school level. The focus is to transform carefully selected schools, including unity schools from their current status to high performing schools through a comprehensive intervention in each school to be replicated in other schools.

The strategic implementation model utilizes Demonstration projects to implement proposed turn-around strategies that address the priority issues. The lesson learned from the demonstration sites will then be mainstreamed into other schools and institutions across the sub-sectors i.e. basic, post-basic and tertiary levels.

The selection of the Demonstration Schools must ensure spread in terms of critical variables such as urban and rural, co-educational, single gender, etc.

Implementation of Action Plan

The Action Plan of Road Map contains a detailed plan for each of the four priority areas at each level of education and is rendered in a matrix format with the following categorizations.

The entire Action Plan is challenge-driven and based on a three year timelines, i.e. 2009-2011 etc, within which period the turnaround strategies would have impacted. These strategies are do-able and achievable actions targeted at specific challenges. The deliverables are tangible, visible, quantifiable, specific, measurable and verifiable indicators/results-targeted.

Source of funding for the activities range from budgetary allocation, (FG, FME and State Governments); Private Sector, Inland Petroleum Distribution System IPDS, Chesapeake Bay Observing System CBOS, Education Trust Fund ETF, Petroleum Training Development Fund PTDF,.

Characteristic of Nigerian politics, lack of continuity followed the departure of Egwu as Education Minister as the entire Ministry simply went to sleep over such an important Reforms Agenda unit late 2010 when another minister was appointed. Given the shortness of time on the basis of the minister's appointment and the 2011 General Elections after which Cabinets would be dissolved, again, what was called a Strategic Implementation Plan to carry out those things which were dimmed achievable within a space of one year was re-conceived. The Task Force put in place to develop the Quick Win Strategy Plan claimed to have kept the Roadmap on track. Given the outcomes of the Quick-Win Strategic Plan in terms of Access and Enhancement of Facilities is subject to debate as to whether any impact was truly created or if indeed the Roadmap was kept faith with. Good a thing is the reappointment of the same Minister back to the Education portfolio. The new Minister also has right on her table, a far-reaching Restructuring and Reforms Agenda prescription put together by a Team led by the renowned African Educationists of International Repute Pai Obayan.

Emergent Critical Mandate Strategies

More than ever before, strategic planning and mandates are becoming essential for rethinking and re-developing the education sector of developing countries.

Development partner collaborations, private and target stakeholder partnerships, resource input redefinition, education systems management initiatives, etc are becoming more critical restructuring factors for achieving Education Sector Reforms aimed at impact-creation and value-

realization (Kagia, 2006). Many Ministries of Education are appointing Desk Officers to coordinate Development Partner Programme Interventions. While this is working well in many cases, one must be wary of donor fatigue. One must also seek to paddle out of donor or development partner dependency to initiate strategies for institutionalizing sustainable development inputs and outcomes in the sector. Specific efforts are also needed to engender and sustain quality in the education sector of today.

Initiatives worthy of strengthening at all levels of the Education Sector for the transformation of the education system include the establishment of functional strategic planning and budgeting agencies, the transformation of the Inspectorate Divisions into Quality Assurance Agencies and as well as the establishment of stakeholders and school based management committee units. These strategies can either be enacted by transformation of the mandate of existing department or parastatals, or by infusion of these mandates into the functions of existing department or parastatals.

Conclusion

Some of the key component of restructuring and reforming the Nigerian Education Sector from 2011 and beyond has been discussed in this paper. The Nigeria education system today requires rebuilding and re-inventing to achieve the desired results of creating the necessary impact and change. Specific aspects of the sector such as sources of funding, teacher education, teacher professionalism and welfare, curriculum innovation system etc. must be restructured and certain aspects of the sub-systems reformed.

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