

REAPPRAISING ECONOMICS EDUCATION FOR FUNCTIONALITY AND SELF-RELIANCE

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Abstract

There is no doubt that education is a potent tool for national growth and development. As a developing and progress bound nation, Nigeria aspires to attain high levels in the economic and technological spheres through a well-articulated and functional educational system. Education is the engine of growth that is expected to produce the highly efficient man power needed to bring about the desired national growth and increased productivity. For the educational system to meet up with the onerous task of feeding the dynamic and growing society with highly efficient man power, its curriculum and policy need to be reappraised. This paper reappraised critically the current National Policy on Education with regard to Economics Education by examining the specifics of the current National Policy on Education; its shortcomings in terms of implementation and appropriate recommendations were made in order to launch the economy on the path of functionality and self-reliance.

Introduction

In our society today, there is a yawning gap between the skills acquired in our formal educational institutions and the required skills in the labour market. This is evidenced by the fact that many employers currently organize intensive training and orientation programme for fresh graduates before they are absorbed into their systems. Often times they demand for job experience of five years and above for job placement.

The shortcomings of our educational institutions call for a reappraisal of the National Policy on Education and its curriculum in order for

it to be able to put the economy on the path of functionality and self-reliance.

Oxford (1948) defined reappraisal as “the act of examining something again to see if it needs to be changed”. In reappraising economics education for functionality and self reliance, this paper examines the specifics of the current National Policy on Education with regard to economics education, the short comings of the current policy in terms of implementation and appropriate recommendations were made in order to overcome those identified shortcomings.

An Overview of the Current National Policy on Education

“The five main national goals of Nigeria, which have been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education are the building of:-

- (a). a free and democratic society;
- (b). a just and egalitarian society;
- (c). a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- (d). a great and dynamic economy;
- (e). a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens”. NERDC (2004).

Education being a potent instrument for national development, the government of Nigeria hope to realize these five main national goals using education as a tool. The extent to which these goals have been achieved live much to be desired, hence the need for a reappraisal of the policy instrument itself.

For example an extract from the National Policy on Education reveals that Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on:- the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen

- the full integration of the individual into the community;
- the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.....
- the inculcation of National consciousness and national unity.
- The inculcation of the right type of values and attitude for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.
- The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around and
- The acquisition of appropriate skills and development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society" NERDC (2004).

To what extent have we achieved this policy statements?.

To what extent are the citizens being integrated into the community with such a large number of unemployed school leavers of various categories rooming the streets?

How appropriate are the skills acquired when employer of labour seek for employees with five years on the job experience and above?

How equal are the access to educational opportunities with a decaying public school system ostensibly for the children of the exploited, toiling down trodden masses/workers, and a modern functional private education for children of the affluent and powerful?

It is obvious that the beautiful ideas put in black and white in the National Policy on Education is far from been realized in practice.

Identifying the Areas of Problems

It is pertinent to point out that our educational system presently is in a shamble. This is as a result of the following factors:

The curriculum used in our school is not only archaic but has been rendered obsolete by technological advancement. This can be evidenced by the fact that many employers currently organize intensive training and orientation programme for fresh graduates before they are absorbed into their system. To buttress this fact, the National Council on Education (NCE) in the just concluded 54th meeting approved all 42 senior secondary education curricular (SSEC) and 34 vocational Trade/Entrepreneurships curricular developed by the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC). These New Curricular will be implemented at the Senior Secondary Education level from September, 2010. The New SSEC is structured to ensure that every Senior Secondary School graduate should have been well prepared for higher education as well as acquired relevant functional trade/Entrepreneurship skills needed for poverty eradication, job creation and wealth generation; and in the process strengthen further the foundations for ethical, moral and civic values acquired at the basic education level.

However the problem identified by the National Council on Education (NCE) with regard to the implementation of these new curricula is the fact that the present Teacher Education programmes in Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education may not produce secondary school teachers with the capacity, skills, knowledge and pedagogy required for the new SSEC. Godswill, (2010).

Secondly, is the infrastructural decadence, squalor and degeneration of public schools at all levels.

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Thirdly, the economic problems in our country have resulted in the deterioration in the quantity as well as the quality of educational inputs (e.g. facilities are ill-maintained, teachers are insufficiently trained, shortages of textbooks as well as school supplies and equipment are rampant). School drop out rates are high, especially at the primary school level. Of the children enrolling in primary 1, it is established that less than 2 percent would ever reach higher education. United Nations Population Fund (1996).

These factors have led obviously to the scandalous operation of two system of education in our country today viz: a decaying public school system ostensibly for the children of the exploited, toiling down trodden masses/workers, and a modern functional private education for children of the affluent and powerful. Ironically, those people in governance who oversee, design, implement policies and operate the public educational system send their children to highly fancied private schools, or abroad. Sometimes to neighbouring countries like Ghana, Togo and Republic of Benin. Edukugho (2009).

The Way Forward for Nigeria

(i). Globalizing School Curriculum in Economics Education:

According to Okeke in Omo-Ojugo (2009) “the idea of adding or removing item in the curriculum implies revision, or innovation or removal. To renew a curriculum is to revise or modify an existing curriculum with the hope of providing a better programme”. Whenever any change occurs in any stage of the curriculum process, or in the entire curriculum, it will result in a change in the learning experiences to which the learners are exposed. To globalize the curriculum therefore implies modifying the existing curriculum in order to incorporate learning experiences available worldwide either through information communications technology (ICT) or any other method deemed fit by the curriculum designers.

The reasons for curriculum innovation/globalization can be summarized as follows;

- (i). To take account of change in the social order, that is societal values, beliefs, ideas and purposes.
According to Smith in Omo-Ojugo (2009) “curriculum is interwoven with the social order that sustains it”. As the societal value change, the curriculum must change so as to reflect the new values.
- (ii). A dissatisfaction with an existing system or curriculum always brings about the need to change or innovate.
- (iii). The discovery of new knowledge as knowledge is not static.
- iv. When there are new facilities that can aid learning, it becomes necessary to change the curriculum so that better learning experiences can be organized to meet the intended objectives which may or may not have altered.

The Challenges of Curriculum Innovation:

(i). **Lack of Clarity about the Innovation:** Certain problems militate against curriculum innovation. One of such problems is the lack of clarity about the innovation. Teachers who are supposed to implement a change in a curriculum sometimes cannot even identify its main features.

(ii). **Inadequate Funds:** Inadequate funds can create problems in the implementation of an innovation. It will be difficult to implement an innovation fully and effectively if there is not enough money to provide essential materials, equipment and facilities. An innovation may also run into problems of lack of sufficient money to train the teachers who will implement it.

(iii). Inadequate Resources: Inadequate resources is another factor which can militate against curriculum innovation. Almost every curriculum change requires additional resources during the period of change. These resources include materials, equipment and qualified teachers. The provision of these facilities are often difficult as they are expensive.

(iv). Dependency on other countries for the provision of essential materials for curriculum innovation can hinder it.

(v). The School Social System: The social system of a school refers to the beliefs, attitude, knowledge, skills and the aspirations of the teachers and the relationship, which exist between the school authority, the teachers and the learners. Any innovation which is out of tune with the social system of adopting or implementing school does not have a chance of success. Taba in Omo-Ojugo (2009) said that “we cannot change curriculum without changing the people”.

The Prospect of Curriculum Innovation In Economics Education

The prospect of curriculum innovation in economics education is very bright. Recently, the Federal Government charged all stakeholders in the education sector in the country to work for the successful implementation of the newly introduced nine-year Basic Education Curriculum, and Senior Secondary Education Curriculum structure. In the same vein the Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), Professor Godswill Obioma, called on the State Government recently at a one-day sensitization and Advocacy/Interview Workshop held in Oshogbo, Osun State, to provide adequate funds and enhance the professional standards of teachers and ensure equitable remuneration to make the curriculum workable. According to him, “the implementation of the 9-year basic education curriculum and indeed the Senior Secondary

Education curriculum is a task for all of us to tackle. We all have a stake in the successful implementation of the programme” Olarinoye (2009).

Conclusion

Conclusively, it is pertinent to point out that the school system will not only produce functional, skillful and self reliant graduates but they will also produce people who are capable of putting the nation on the part of rapid national growth and productivity if the following recommendations are implemented.

Recommendations

First and foremost, economics as a social science should not base its study on the theoretical knowledge alone, but should also provide opportunities for scholars to carry out empirical study to test theoretical knowledge within and outside the country. It is not enough to organize field trip to one industry or the other, but a period of practical study or industrial attachment to areas of interest should be included in the school curriculum.

Secondly, because of the importance of education in modern society, it should be given high priority to the extent that educational policies should entail lengthy, exhaustive dialogue and consultation between government and society. This will enable all stake holders in the educational sector to make an input in the redesigning of a global curriculum that will be of benefit to all.

More also, at the implementation stage, both the government and all stake holders (employers of labour, educationist, institutions of learning etc) are required to provide massive support and contribution to ensure that the output of manpower produced from such enhanced global curriculum translate into increase in productivity. The

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curriculum should be redesigned to meet changing demand globally.

Also required is the establishment of educational infrastructural agency, sufficiently funded to renovate, refurbish, rehabilitate and even construct new facilities required for effective education delivery.

Computers and internet facilities should be made accessible to all students of secondary and tertiary institutions, as this will enable them browse for relevant information globally.

There should be a stepping up of regulatory, supervisory, monitoring of educational activities to conform to standards and quality, laying emphasis on skills acquisition for the world of work.

The Federal Ministry of Education and indeed all the State Education Ministries should established Quality Assurance Department for monitoring all the operations in the system and get feedback for subsequent follow-up actions.

The Government should strive and attain the twenty six present benchmark of National Budget for education as recommended by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Edukugho (2009).

Another way forward in our education system is to reduce excessive bureaucracy and staff duplication. Probity, accountability and transparency in the spending of education fund should be enshrined in the management of the system.

Avenues have to be devised to curb wastages, misuse, misapplication, diversion, abuse and out-right stealing and embezzlement of education funds by government officials.

Improved teachers welfare and better salary structure will eliminate frustration and enhance professional devotion and productivity. Pay adequate attention to research, and encourage establishment of exchange and linkage collaboration with foreign educational institution.

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