

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN NIGERIA CHALLENGES: INTERVENTION AND THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is on educational quality improvement In Nigeria. Education in this paper has been described as the process of learning that helps in the provision of sustainable skills, training for the economic, social, cultural and political responsibilities, transmission and transformation of social, economic and cultural structure from generation to generation. Some of the areas in our educational system that needs intervention include private sector development and curriculum change among others. Funding poses a major challenge to our educational system apart from institutional unrest. It is suggested among others that the Nigerian educational system should be properly funded by both the government and private sectors. Also there should also be effective monitoring and quality control to enhance and sustain quality in Nigeria educational system.

Key words: education, quality, improvement, intervention and challenges.

Education has been described as the foundation of every society and a basic tool for national development. Education consists of organized activities which promote learning situation. Education is a lifelong process and an instrument of change a potent equalization of life chances (Odiba, 2007). According to Odiba (2012), education is a process of learning that assists in the provision of suitable skills, training the youths for economic, social, cultural and political responsibilities, transmission and transformation of social, economic and cultural structures from generation to generation. It is in recognition of this importance that the international community and governments all over the world have made commitments for citizens to have access to education. Over the years, Nigeria has expressed commitment to education and the belief that overcoming illiteracy and Ignorance can form a basis for accelerated national development. However, regardless of the incontrovertible evidence that Education is crucial to the development of the community and the nation there remains inequalities in access to education.

There are a lot of challenges facing Nigeria educational system and making it difficult for quality Education that is empowering and capable of bringing about sustainable development to be provided. Okemakinde (2010) posits that the greatest challenge facing higher education in Nigeria is inadequate funding. There is also the problem of access which has attracted a lot of attention in recent years, and the problem of infrastructures and lack of teaching and learning materials.

The main purpose of higher education in Nigeria as being identified by the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) in her National Policy on Education is to help the whole man develop physically, mentally, morally and technologically to enable him function effectively in many environments that he may find himself and become productive, self-fulfilling, self-reliant and self-actualization. Besides human capital innovation, Abubakar (2009) asserts that higher educational institutions also represent one of the viable platforms for character training and leadership development for a nation. Students from different

ethnic, religious and socio-economic background live together, learn together and compete with one another to form viable network and everlasting relationship.

Nigeria is aiming to be one of the twenty largest economies in the world by the year 2020 and at the same time is pursuing the objective of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In the face of this vision is the fall in the quality of education as manifested in the general poor quality of production from all levels of the educational system and the massive unemployment. For the country to get over this quagmire, sort out the problems and be one of the countries in the World with stable economics and democratic culture as envisaged in the vision 2020. A solid foundation laid saves the building from total collapse. The gap or difference that exist between nations of the world today is as a result of the kind of education they are exposed to. Odiba (2004) contends that nothing but education has made us to advance beyond our neighbours. However in the modern view, even where only lip service is paid to education, the truth of the matter is that quality education is the right of every citizen, not a privilege that rulers may grant or withhold (Adegbesan, 2010).

State of Higher Education Quality in Nigeria

Educational quality can be defined in terms of the inputs, processes and outputs. If a society is committed to providing high quality of educational experiences and consequences for every person, the resources (human and financial) need to be mobilized in this direction. According to Ijaiya (2001) the worth of any educational system as an investment lies in its capability to continue to serve its stakeholders better

and remain relevant. The Quality of Education is dependent upon the vision of the leaders for education at the community, the state and the nation at large. The vision sees education as a movement which encompasses honest and transparent administration , adequate resources delivered to the majority at local Teacher training which recognizes and supports professional development of teachers in pre-service and for life long learning.

Responsiveness in terms of tertiary education teaching and learning has two dimensions that is curricula and pedagogy (content and method) in today's globally competitive knowledge economy, updating of curricula needs to be almost permanent undertaking. Clark (2001) suggests that tertiary institutions need to change their curricula every two or three years in order to ensure that the content of their teaching reflect rapidly advancing frontiers of knowledge. From the stand point of pedagogy expanded access and Nigeria participation rates mean that student population become increasingly diverse in terms of their academic preparations, means, capacities, motivations and interests. At a global level, these changes are fueling a shift in pedagogical emphases from teaching to student learning (Salami, 2001).

In Nigeria, three pieces of evidence suggest the need for greater attention to innovation in both curricula and pedagogy. First student success seems limited and dropout rates appear to be high through institutional statistics are notoriously unreliable and tertiary institutions do not seem to monitor their dropout rates, the NUC attempted to control dropout rates within the Federal University system. Its preliminary findings revealed that the dropout rates were as high as 30% (NUC, 2002).

Second, public and private employers of tertiary institutions graduates, as well as the government itself, consider the quality of such graduates to be inadequate. A study of the labour market for graduates found that employers believed that tertiary institutions are poorly trained and unproductive on the job, and shortcomings are particularly severe in oral and written communication and in applied technical skills (Dabalén, Oni & Adekola, 2001). Third the tertiary institutions curricula lack quality (NUC 2002).

The factors responsible for the poor quality of tertiary institutions programmes (and graduates) appear to be both internal and external to the institutions. Internal factors include strike, lack of

employees' motivation and weak accountability for educational performance. External factors compromise teachers' shortages, corruption and inconsistency funding efforts by government and administrators based on quota system rather than on merit.

Quality control practices in Nigeria education are based essentially on education supervision, monitoring and control. While such resources are appropriate for obtaining data on policy implementation and for strategic planning and aid public accountability, they are of little impact when it comes to managing classroom learning process (West-Barnham, 1994). Also, while the provision and rehabilitation of school facilities in the delivery of quality, some interventions needed to plan and utilize such facilities are not evident in the teaching – learning process.

The worth of any management is based on its ability to produce quality products and satisfy clients and other stakeholders. Its tasks therefore include identifying and solving any problem that militates against quality delivery. Such a problem solving approach will be directed at taking preventive measures against wastage. It should be noted that quality delivery begins from policy makers to resource providers, policy implementation and students (that is, it is the responsibility of stake holders). Both the input and the processing contribute to the quality of the products, thus institution based quality management should put in place preventive measures against failure and waste. Efforts should be made to identify learners needs, problem would be identified and underlying causes addressed (Ijarya, 2001).

Role of Teachers In Quality Improvement In Education

Teacher are the most important refined human beings that skillfully identify, develop and nurture the potentials of productive citizenry for meaningful creation of wealth of pleasure and services which will usher in quality life. Relevance of teachers to individual and national development is wholly dependant on their role in providing functional education and training to the learners within the school setting. Efficient educated professional and other enlightened artisans are the refined products of teachers from education industry. Hence, teachers are the present agents of human engineering for survival (Ogunwuy, 2010).

Ogunwuyi (2010) believes that the conduct, manner, attitude, action and personality of practicing teacher should gloriously radiate exemplary academic excellence and loving-kindness with sympatric understanding of the learners needs. Government should therefore involve practicing teachers in education policy formulation and implementation for sustainable capacity building in the achievement of developmental objectives. The quality of work undertaking by teachers has significant affects upon his students. Furthermore, those who pay teachers salaries wish to be assured that they are receiving value for the money. Ways to measure the quality work of individual teachers, education system as a whole, are therefore often sought. Assessment of teachers performance may be undertaken with a view to identifying teachers needs for additional training or development, or in extreme case to identify those teachers that should be required to leave the profession. In some countries, teachers are required to re-apply periodically for their decision to teach and in so doing, to prove they still have the requisite skills.

Improvement of Quality of Education in Nigeria

The way we are talking about the quality improvement of education does not mean that the quality of education has fallen beyond redemption. In fact, it is abnormal to describe education as anything that lacks quality. Reacting to the views of people on the state of education in Nigeria, Fafunwa (2008) opines that:

People say the standard has fallen but I want to say that the standard has not fallen. It is the pattern that has fallen. Teachers are not as well trained as they used to be, and even when they are, they are poorly paid. Infrastructure is poor and there are no materials to work with.

And these are some of the problems that should be addressed instead of worrying ourselves about some nebulous standards which we have set. Even a primary school pupil can differentiate between a fail, pass or average.

At this point, one would like to adduce that the conception of the term quality is fret with ambiguities. For instance, Anikewuju as cited in Adegbesan (2010) opines that quality serves as determination of graduation based on standard of excellent beneath which a mark of inferiority is imposed or adduced and above which grade of superiority are defined. Also Fadokun as cited in Adegbesan (2010) views quality from three perspectives:

- i. Efficiency in the meeting of its goals.
- ii. Relevance to human and environmental conditions and needs
- iii. Something more, are the exploration of new ideas, the pursuit of excellence and encouragement of creativity.

Quality significantly pertains to changes in the system itself in the nature of its inputs, objectives, curriculum and technologies in the socio-economic and cultural environment. Quality education is the education that best fits the present and future needs of the learners in question and the community, given the particular circumstances and prospects. The quality concept also has to embrace the development of the potentials of every member of each new generation. Again, quality education is an education that provides students with the tools to deal with and find solutions to the challenges confronting mankind. Quality assurance is the weapon for quality improvement of our educational systems. It then means that quality assurance is the mechanism used to evaluate the efficiency and appropriateness of teaching and learning in our educational institutions in order to ensure the delivery of high quality education. It is also a holistic method of identifying and resolving problems within the education system in order to ensure continuous quality improvement (Alaba, 2010). According to Bateman as cited in Alaba (2010) quality assurance include defined standards of achievement, documented procedures for all identified process, established ways of responding to issues and clear accountability for outcomes. This view is in line

with the contentions of Ajayi and Adegbesan (2010) that quality assurance is related to accountability both of which are concerned with maximizing the effectiveness and efficiency of educational systems and services in relation to their contact, missions and stated objectives. Bateman as cited in Alaba (2010) posits that some of the benefits associated with consistent quality assurance and continuous quality improvement measures in education include:

- a. The establishment of high standard academic excellent which will go a long way to enhance the school's reputations and image.
- b. Improve communication across the school system
- c. Improvement of outcomes so that the policies and procedures are constantly revisited through analysis and the delivery of teaching and learning.
- d. Identification of systems' strengths and weaknesses.
- e. Determination of the programme effectiveness and tracking of the integrity and
- f. Increase in capacity of secure funding and refinement service delivery.

In Nigeria the minister of education has the responsibility amongst others to maintain standards and quality of education. According to National Policy on Education, the National Minimum Standard on Education and the establishment of Institutions Act 16 of 1985, the ministry of education is saddled with the responsibility of maintaining education standards and quality. The ministry of education through its agencies or parastatals performs these functions for instance, the inspectorate department of the ministry of education, at all levels is fully saddled with this function. There exists a legal backing for ensuring quality assurance and improvement at the basic functions, or activities of the inspectorate department of the ministry of education. Quality assurance and improvement in Nigeria education system moved from the form of school inspection that is characterized by fault finding (snoopervision) to consistent and continuous supervision in the form of monitoring, evaluation and quality improvement method that is

geared towards instructional improvement in both teaching and learning. The F.M.E. (2004) posits that the National Education Quality Assurance Policy revolves round the following:

- Learners achievement and standard
- Learners welfare and participation
- Care guide and support
- Leadership and management
- School community relationship
- Teaching and learning aid
- Curriculum and other activities

The above components of the quality assurance policy of Nigeria should not be taken for granted, since the need for quality assurance and improvement of our educational system cannot be over-emphasized. For the avoidance of doubts, the need for quality assurance in Nigeria school role is enumerated by Adegbesan (2010). These include:

- To serve as indispensable component of quality control strategy in education.
- To ensure and maintain high standard of education at all levels.
- To assist in monitoring and supervision of education programmes
- To determine the number of classroom needed.
- To determine the level of adequacy of the facilities available for quality control aids
- To ensure how the financial resources available could be prudently and judiciously utilized.

Challenges of Education Quality Improvement in Nigeria.

At different levels of the education system in Nigeria, poor quality is being experienced and this is exhibited in many ways. At the lower and middle levels of education, according to Adedeji and Bamidele (2003), there are reported cases of increase in the rate of absenteeism and ineffective teaching in schools and the inability of students (school outputs) to read and write effectively and be capable of critical thinking and problem solving. It has also been documented that graduates of tertiary institutions are often not suitably qualified to fill available vacancies or to contribute effectively to national development.

However, it is wrong to attribute the low level of literacy and school achievement to school related factors alone. This is because other factors such as the home, the society, government and personal characteristics are also important in education development (Olaniyan & Okemakinde 2010). Much as Nigerian government may be aware of the need to provide more resources to improve the quality of education, there is a limit of the amount of resources that these governments can allocate to education annually. For the education industry to carry out its function of developing quality human capital, there is need for checks and balances by regular and effective educational supervision and control. Unfortunately, the inspectorate services both at the State and Federal level have not lived up to expectation. This is because the inspectorate service is plagued by a number of issues and challenges (Okugbe, 2010).

Major source of these problems can be traced largely to insufficient funding of the education system. In fact funding shortfall have been the norm for many years as enrolments have increase more geometrically than the government's capacity to maintain its proportional financial support. Simply put, education sector has not had the financial resources necessary to maintain educational quality in the midst of significant enrollment expansion (Okemakinde 2010). Besides insufficient funding has been compounded by inefficient management and an absence of strategic vision (NUC, 2002).

Much of higher institutions' teaching in Nigeria according to NUC (2002) is based on traditional pedagogy and conventional curriculum and does not even meet the government's own standards in these

areas. In today's world the content and method of Nigerian higher institution teaching is often outdated, not responsive to employers requirements and disconnected from the labour market. Likewise, its research output is extremely low and unable to prompt innovation and productivity gain. To increase the relevance and effectiveness of teaching and research, class dynamics may need to focus more on students learning performance, academic programmes may seek stronger linkages with employers, and higher institution system might pursue knowledge coalitions with other intuitions that possess comparative advantage in respect of teaching research.

Continued expansion of the higher education system has now exceeded government capacity to serve as the principal financier of growth Under these conditions, local income generation takes an added importance and also serves to reinforce policies promotion, decentralization and institutional autonomy. Odiba (2004) contends that the underfunding status of our educational institutions has manifested itself in the poor state of infrastructural facilities and materials for teaching and learning.

Again, corruption is a canker worm that has eaten so deep into the various sectors of the Nigerian National Life. Ale (2012) argues that it is now dawning on the Nigerian public that the so-called private enterprise and legislators are free from security and Governors claim to be immune to persecution. Corruption is found in the award of contracts, promotion of staff, dispensation of justice and misuse of public office, publication, document, valuables, embezzlement of public fund etc. Suffice it to say that corruption in Nigeria is endemic and is grained in our system and psyche as it pervades every sphere of over national life not sparing the low and the highly placed. Corruption mortgages the economic future of our nation and makes our children inherit poverty and penury. It is vital to mention that corruption includes all forms of fiscal indiscipline, wrong attitude to work and mismanagement of public work and mismanagement of public service project priorities, inability to take sound economic judgment and

prudence in the management of public wealth (AE,2012).

Equally, institutions of learning in Nigeria are regular victims of violence and strike actions. Our educational system is constantly a bridge of uncertainty and instability. The common violence in schools are students unrest, maladministration, strikes, secret cults clashes, examination malpractices and indecent dressing. These activities if witnessed in any given institution disrupts teaching and learning processes. These activities drew the academic wall clock of our institutions backwards. In fact, secret cult activities and indecent dressing pose serious dangers to attaining educational qualities in Nigeria. One is in doubt if there exist any possible institution in Nigeria that has not witnessed academic disruption by cultists.

Intervention Strategies

The Nigeria education sector has witnessed a lot of interventions from both the public and private sectors. The possible areas of intervention include:

- i. Private sector participation in educational development. The role of private sector in the development of education cannot be over emphasized. From the primary school level to the university, private institutions abound. These private institutions serve as the mirror for measuring standard and quality of our educational system. Products of these institutions compete favorably with their counterparts elsewhere in the world. Again the financial contributions of the private sector to educational improvement is a case in point. Infact, a certain percentage of profits of our industries and businesses are paid to service education by way of infrastructural development in institutions of learning.
- ii. Information and communication technology. The potentials of ICT In fostering sustainable national development and quality education delivery is globally recognized. As a result concerted efforts should be made toward the inclusion of ICT skill into students curriculum

- from this basic education level (FME 2001). Our institutions of learning are now offering ICT programmes in Nigeria and a good percentage of our students are computer literate.
- iii. Curriculum change: The curriculum of our educational system has been designed to address the national educational goods which are based on the National Policy on Education. According to the National Policies on Education (NPE 2004) one of the goods of the Nigeria education system is the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society. The goal when vigorously realized would lend to education for self reliance (entrepreneurial education). The entire curriculum at all levels of our educational system recognizes entrepreneurial training. For instance, the NPE (2014) contends that each state and local government, in cooperation with appropriate agencies, shall organize relevant apprenticeship schemes and also entrepreneurship training. This venture will not only improve our education quality but also reduce the incidence of unemployment among the products of our institutions of learning. A close look at the curriculum of our Universities both public and private shows that since 2009/2010 academic session, a minimum of two entrepreneurship courses are studied compulsorily by all undergraduate irrespective of discipline (Odiba, 2011).
- iv. Role Of Teachers In Quality Assurance In Education:
Teachers are the most important refined human beings that skillfully identify, develop and nurture the potentials of productive citizenry for meaningful creation of wealth pleasure which will sustain quality of life. Relevance of teachers to individual and national development is wholly independent on their role in providing functional education and training of the learners within the school setting. Efficient educated professionals and other enlightened artisans are the refined products of teachers from education industry. Hence teachers are the potent agents of human engineering and survival (Ogunwuyi 2015).

Ogunwuyi (2010) posits that the whole conduct, manner, attitude, action and personality of practicing teachers should gloriously radiate academic excellence and loving kindness with sympathetic understanding of the learners needs. Government should therefore involve practicing teachers in Education Policy formulation and implementation for sustainable capacity building in the achievement of developmental objectives. The quality of work undertaken by teachers has significant effects upon his students. Furthermore, those who pay teachers salaries wish to be assured that they are receiving value for their money. Ways to measure the quality of work of individual teachers of education system as whole, are therefore often sought. Assessment of teachers performance may be undertaken with a view to identifying teachers needs for additional training or development or in extreme cases, identifying those teachers that should be required to leave the profession. In some countries, teachers are required to re-apply periodically to teach and in so doing to prove that they still have the requisite skills.

Conclusion

Educational quality improvement is the sincere song of development. Quality assurance is the weapon for the actualization of societal goals Educational quality is a total process concerned with ensuring integrity of outcomes. No nation can afford to sacrifice educational quality on the alter of ignorance and indifference. The hands of both the government and the private sectors are involved in the intervention process to ensure high educational quality. When challenges exist, for sure, solutions abound.

Recommendations

It is thus recommended that government and policy makers should put in place strategies that would inform the quality of education and teaching in order to improve students academic achievement. The following recommendations are needed to face the challenges of education in Nigeria.

- Adequate resourcing will be needed to build new schools, train more teachers and enhance teaching-learning process. Dealing with the quality issues including size of classes, numbers of teachers and provision of educational materials.
- Massive investment in infrastructure in all levels of education as one level has the tendency of positively or negatively influencing others.
- Promotion of student and teacher friendly school environment
- Review of school curricula to promote critical and relevant learning
- Respect and protection of the right of student and protection of the learning.
- Tracking of resources to ensure proper, adequate and accountable utilization of resources.
- Improvement of teacher quality through employment of professional and qualified teachers and provision of in-service training and retraining.

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