

# VISION AND MISSION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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## Abstract

Nigeria, along with the rest of the world, has sauntered overtime, from the primitive age through the industrial or automotive age and the jet age to the present computer age in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the 'society develops and progresses, a regular review of knowledge and skills is necessary so as not to be left behind. This new dynamics is occasioned by dramatic changes in the socio-political, economic and technological spheres thereby changing both the individual and national goals, values, social relations and the economic mode of production, breaking down both communication and socio economic barriers. These changes have to be reflected in our educational system to match the new challenges of the new millennium. Our present Secondary education is in shambles with the facilities, where they exist, in bad shape, a very low moral tone in the schools and a waning moral of the staff. Such sorry situations lead to examination fraud, poor academic performance and consequently, ill-equipped graduates. A society that invests heavily on the improvement of the skills and abilities of its young people would expect a great positive change in the economic and social performance of its citizens in years ahead. Nigeria should therefore make education, indeed secondary education, a practical priority in order to enhance the desired development to meet the dynamics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Introduction

The societies of pre-colonial Africa varied greatly in size, complexity and degree of stratification. Although our country, Nigeria, consists of many ethnic groups and societies, each with its own culture and tradition, we all had common educational goals and objectives. Thakur and Ezenne(1980) observed that traditional education is the oldest form of education in Nigeria and that it preceded both the Islamic and Christian influences. According to the National Teachers Institute (1990), education is as old as mankind. From ancient times, traditional education was used to train young adults to become acceptable members of their various societies. As they grew, the contents of their education (boys and girls) began to differ. Whatever it was, it was aimed at making the young adult functional in the society.

The production of practically oriented persons who should perform in their chosen occupational areas has been the main aim of our education system. Regrettably, products of our present institutions are faced with the challenges of not being able to practice in their chosen fields because they lack the requisite knowledge and skills to do so. Many persons and even products of vocational and technical institutions, find it very difficult to even effectively operate and use some household appliances. The dynamics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria and beyond calls for new knowledge and skills to be imparted on learners -our future leaders.

The computer age of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by dramatic changes in the social, political, economic and technological spheres in Nigeria and beyond. These in turn have changed both the individual and national goals, values and social relations and the economic mode of production -this is globalization. The world has become a global village such that communication barriers have given way to easy human mobility, communication and businesses across international boundaries. These changes have had some profound impact on the nations, communities and individuals. Since the traditional role of education is to provide answers to national and personal problems, goals and needs, the mode of education also has to change to match the new challenges at the international, national, community and personal levels in the new millennium.

Since, according to Ejembi (2004:6) the secondary school has become the pool from which all the tertiary institutions draw their candidates, secondary education is therefore very central to the production of quality professionals for our dream Nigeria. Our young ones have to acquire the creative and innovative skills right from the secondary schools, which have to be staffed with teachers with requisite knowledge, creativity and innovative skills for such.

To say that formal secondary education is very crucial for human development is :: understate the obvious. Education, generally, enable, people to live fulfilled and dignified lives b increasingly valuing and recognizing human diversities, focusing not only on the occupations; attainment of the modern society but also on the analysis of both social stratification, social mobility-and tolerance for one another in a pluralistic society like our dear country, Nigeria.

### **Definition of Terms**

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (2000) defines vision as something seen in the imagination or ability to plan into the future. The same dictionary defines mission as a purpose for which a person or group of people is sent. The new National Policy on Education (1998) defines secondary education as the education children receive after primary-education and before the tertiary stage. From these definitions, one can safely assert that mission and vision of secondary education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century means the ability to plan into the future so that from our secondary schools, one can achieve the desired functional, creative and innovative education that will adequately compete with the other nations of the world to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century computer world.

### **Education Over the Years**

The colonial masters who introduced Western education in Nigeria trained people to serve their economic and evangelical purposes and their products served as interpreters and clerks in the colonial organizations. As the society developed, the goals of the education system changed along with it. In the last century, emphasis was placed on the production of graduates with more of "book knowledge" than the technical know-how. Odo (1991) attributes the present high rate of unemployment among school leavers and graduates to lack of skills and competencies required in the world of work. Uzoagulu (1985) agrees that many unemployed school leavers do not possess the necessary skills and competencies, which the modern economy demands. The poor and inadequate facilities in schools and the low morale of staff have led to poor performance in examinations which in turn produces poor quality graduates which invariably affects productivity, nationally.

### **Present State of Secondary Education**

That education has sunk to its nadir, needs no elaboration as it is evident from the parlous state of our public schools. Public post primary schools, which used to be the source for recruitment of personnel into the economy is now a shell of its former self. This state of decay has been attributed to poor funding by the government, which barely takes care of overheads, let alone budgeting for research and provision of educational facilities. With poorly paid and unmotivated teachers, they are bound to be restive and not keen or even physically able to give their best leading to incessant strikes resulting in loss of valuable hours and the dislocation of the social cohesion that is very vital in the school system. The non-availability of functional infrastructure in our schools, and where available at all, they are in a state of disrepair, forces most students to, for instance, carry their seats to school daily from home. In this regard, Ezeh (2003) observes that educational facilities are important for functional education and that Nigerian schools have to be well equipped to enhance learning. Ahmed (2004) posits that expenditure on education is the foregoing of present enjoyment in order to increase the future flow of benefits, which Nigeria has to do now.

The secondary school education system in Nigeria needs to be critically re-assessed as, according to Ahmed (2004), an educated and disciplined citizenry makes for a great nation. With this poor subvention, a restive personnel, incessant industrial unrest etc, discipline among the youths and academic proficiency in schools will be the foremost casualties. The youths, according to Nwangwu (2003), constitute the strength of the nation in terms of number and vibrancy, and they are the future leaders of the nation, so, undisciplined youths invariably mean an undisciplined nation. These cumulative negative effects manifest themselves in poor performance in the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination. Hence, most students now take to alternative means to "pass" for now because of our present mode of education -"the bookish knowledge"- but, as we journey into the new millennium, such a practice will spell doom for this nation. Ogbu (2000) advocates that industrialization is the bedrock of every nation aspiring for growth and development. Eya (2004) observes that the problems working against meeting the demands of the new millennium include

maladjustment, which inhibits the individual's ability to cope with the new dynamics, choice of career, unrest in schools due to indiscipline and improper training and unemployment because education in Nigeria aim at paper qualification which may be obtained through foul or fair means. Unfortunately, the general lack of the knowledge of vocational education has militated against education at the secondary school level performing its primary role. Most Nigerians see it as education for the mentally retarded, physically handicapped and socially maladjusted students -Udo (1997).

According to Ada and Okedi (2004) the present number of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education earmarked for the training of personnel under the Technical Teachers' Training Programme (T.T.T.P) are inadequate and their departments also need expansion. The lack of standard industries that can provide practical experience to students during the Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) is also a stumbling block in the system.

The poor and wrong attitudes towards manipulative skills, inherent in vocational education as well as the lack of interest in anything manual or practical work by Nigerians also inhibit the opportunities offered to trainees at the secondary level to acquire the skills, attitudes, interest and knowledge to perform socially and economically, the occupation that is beneficial not only to them but to the society Olaitan (1985),

There is therefore a great need to train the secondary school teachers to adopt the child-centred approaches rather than the present content-centered or teacher—centered approach such as lecture, note taking, dictation, handouts etc. which, rather than encourage learning and creative potentials, end up graduating learners who have not learnt how to learn and are not creative in thought and personal -problem solving in real life. In the child-centered approach, the teacher is trained to be a facilitator rather than a depositor of knowledge. The teacher, according to Akinmade (1996) creates an enabling environment for the learners to apply new ideas, think divergently and creatively, use emotions intelligently etc. which are the rightful ingredients for preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ortese (2004) recommends the use of a number of teaching methods at the secondary schools such as the discovery (enquiry), play, modeling, questioning, demonstration, discussion, projects, field trips and lecture. Yoloye (1982) posits that it is the lecture and discussion methods mostly used which unfortunately make our students passive and lazy in learning. Thus, Sund and Trowbridge (1973) lament that, even though teachers emphasize the product of science, they often fail to give students an understanding of solving problems scientifically. Tabotndip (2002) believes that, the flow of technological devices into the country from the global market will help Nigerians to see the need to, and improve on the technical know how of her citizens hence preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> century dynamics.

### **The New National Policy on Education**

The new National Policy on Education, according to Ejembi (2004), represents Nigeria's boldest attempt at articulating our collective educational aspirations aimed at correcting the previous ills of the system for building a virile, progressive and united Nigeria ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The secondary school level is the period of character formation and self-actualization of the individual and so, should not be toyed with. Strict discipline should be emphasized at this level. Parents according to Ezeh (2002) should lay the foundation for positive moral upbringing, cultural values and the norms of the society for the school to build upon.

The birth of the new National Policy on Education (NPE) has given rise to the hope for good, functional and qualitative education. Among others, the policy aims at:

- i Providing all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background, ii Offering diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles.
- iii Providing trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades, iv Providing technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.
- v Developing and promoting the Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of the global cultural heritage etc (NPE, 1998).

To achieve these goals, secondary education shall be of six years duration, given in two stages -a junior secondary stage and a senior secondary stage, each shall be of three years duration. The N.P.E recommends that the junior stage shall be both pre-vocational and academic, tuition free, universal and compulsory. The students offer a minimum of eleven and maximum of thirteen subjects spanning the arts, sciences, technical and commercial fields grouped into Core, Pre-vocational and Non-vocational electives. At the end of the junior secondary stages, the students are streamed into:

- a) The senior secondary school.
- b) The technical school.
- c) The out-of school vocational.
- d) The apprenticeship scheme.

The senior secondary schools, the N.P.E recommends, shall be comprehensive with a core-curriculum with every student taking the whole seven core subjects and one or two others from the electives making either eight or nine subjects to be offered by each student. The N.P.E further recommends co-curricular activities which should be encouraged as well as inter-state exchange visit of students. For certification, both junior and senior school certificate shall be based on continuous assessments and examinations conducted by either State Examination Board (for JSSCE) and National Examination Boards (for the SSCE).

Despite this laudable policy, the nation in reality has many secondary schools being organized and managed exactly as they were before the birth of this new policy, the only difference being the increase in the number of subjects, the delay of students for one extra year instead of the previous five years. We still continue to produce graduates versed in the theories but dangerously wanting in the practical application of scientific and technological concepts (Ejembi, 2004).

Why is the system still living in the past in spite of the laudable intentions of government through the new policy? The answer to this is not far fetched. It lies in the lack of adequate funding. The funding of education in Nigeria has been a thorny issue for the Government as it is not adequately done. The UNESCO guidelines on education demand that 26 percent of a country's annual budget should be committed to education. Unfortunately no administration in Nigeria has ever got near this recommendation. An example is seen in the data below on funding.

#### **Budgetary Allocation to Education 1996-2001**

Year	Percentage
1996	10.80
1997	11.60
1998	9.70
1999	9.90
2000	8.00
2001	7.00

**Source:** Aina (1999) and Adekeye (2001).

This type of poor funding cannot guarantee adequate human development in this computer age. In a country where it is estimated that only about 62.5% (male) and 39.5% (female) population are literate-Nwangwu (2000), education deserves more than this pitiable budgetary allocation. The obvious consequence of this poor funding is a steady deterioration of education leading to a near collapse of the system with the quality of education and its graduates increasingly becoming deplorable. It was only the 2003 Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike that jolted the Federal Government into increasing the allocation to 14.6% in the 2004 budget.

The recent World Bank report on Nigerian graduates rates them very low. According to the report, university graduates are poorly trained and unproductive on the job. Graduates' skills have steadily deteriorated over the past decade. Shortcomings are particularly severe in oral and written communication and applied technical skills (*The Guardian*, 2001 (No. 18) 39).

The report goes ahead to attribute the cause of these effects to the following factors:

- a) Inadequate funding.
- b) Insufficient and irrelevant learning materials.

- c) Poorly paid and trained academic staff.
- d) Outmoded and inflexible managerial structures.
- e) Unplanned expansion of enrolment leading to oversupply of under trained graduates.
- f) Irrelevant curriculum (*The Guardian*, 2001 (No. 18) 39).

All these defects are traceable to finance. It is an axiom that education is capital intensive and very slow in yielding dividends because it involves every facet of human development. As in the words of Patterson (1999), education is increasingly occupying a prime position in national issues such that George Bush, during his presidential campaign, vowed to become, "the education president" in America. But in Nigeria, this is not the case. The government only pays lip service to education such that our secondary school libraries, laboratories, technology workshops etc are but employment offices or rooms without even the basic textbooks. Students most of the time are ill prepared for examinations because of poor teaching and learning conditions in many Nigerian schools, so they resort to cheating in examinations because they badly need the certificates for jobs and admissions. We used to have staff quarters within or very close to the schools. This used to help in the tone of the school, but, alas! they are no more. As a result of poor remunerations, many of the teachers take to other means of survival such as aiding examination malpractices, hawking wares within the school premises, even during classes, or exploiting the students in every possible way. Eze (2002) has suggested that Nigerian teachers be well trained and paid, and adequate facilities for teaching and learning be provided in schools if examination malpractices and other vices have to stop.

### **The Way Forward for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The production of practically oriented persons who should perform in their chosen occupations has to be the main focus of education in Nigeria. Grassroot's enlightenment programme should be created through the media (electronic and print) to enlighten Nigerians on the true meaning, scope and content of vocational and technical education to discard from their minds, the wrong notion about that area of study.

Incentives like scholarships, grants and special prizes by Philanthropists and Foundations can encourage good performance. Governments, NGOs philanthropists and businessmen should establish more factories for vocational and technical education students to benefit from, during their SIWES.

The government should adopt the recommendations of Wuyep (1996) and Atainmade (1996) that the Process Approach (PA) which equips the learners with skills of scientific enquiry be used in schools. Students, Yoleye (1982) posits must be made to learn discovery and from discoveries.

The faulty assumption that the quota system of "Federal Character" will ensure national unity, consciousness and cohesion and consequently bring about educational development is more apparently unreal than real. The quota system waters down the quality of admissions and consequently, the poor quality graduates. This should be done with a lot of moderation -Ikeoha (2004).

The reduction of prejudice through attitude change by the various ethnic groups in Nigeria will undoubtedly enable Nigerians derive substantial educational, socio-economic, psychological and scientific strength with which to move the nation forward in the new millennium. It is globally accepted that globalization is a blessing to the world. Globalization has economic undertones, since, in a way, it is internationalization of business.

Unfortunately, it has its adverse effects too. While wages continue to rise in wealthy countries the impoverished countries have actually seen a decline in their average income over the past ten years. No wonder, they continue to pester the creditor nations to write off their external debts.

Globalization also breeds inequalities not only in economic terms but also in other facets of life. The residents are not all fairly treated, they do not have the same opportunities even in the United Nations Organization as some have to be permanent members while others continue to be temporary members of the security council. Globalization also carries with it, crime and terrorism. Drug cartels, for instance, take advantage of it to launder their billion-dollar profits in the name of internationalization of business. This global phenomenon has also encouraged the spread of HIV/AIDS and SARS as well as other pestilences at a global scale unprecedented in history -Anyachonkeya (2004). In spite of all these adverse aspects of globalization, Nigeria should be

friendly with other nations so as to elicit their economic and educational support to build up our educational system to meet the standards for the new millennium.

### **Recommendations**

The government, knowing fully well that expenditure on education is the foregoing of present enjoyment in order to increase the future flow of benefits, should adequately fund the education system in Nigeria. Good and adequate motivation in the form of timely payment of teachers' salaries, special salary scale for the teaching profession and regular promotions and even demotions for deserving staff of the school system should be adopted. Adequate provision of infrastructures and teaching materials are highly necessary if the Nigerian schools have to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The teachers have to be well trained to be able to meet the challenges of the classroom of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The inspection and supervision apparatus of the Ministry of Education have to be strengthened and constantly updated to meet the dynamics of the new millennium. The Ministry should also ensure that the curriculum and syllabus are constantly updated to reflect the needs of the nation aspiring for development. The apparatus for discipline both within and outside the school should be strengthened.

### **Conclusion**

The importance of secondary education, in Nigeria's bid to realize the mission and vision of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, cannot be overemphasized. This is the formative stage of the man, so education of that stage should be able to mould the youth in the areas of discipline, skills and knowledge acquisition, positive morale and cultural values and scientific and technological know how. With these in place, well-equipped laboratories, workshops and well trained and motivated teachers, using up to date syllabus, the nation, Nigeria, will be ready to march proudly into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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*Vision and Mission of Secondary Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

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