

INNOVATIONS IN NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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The role of education as a tool for sustainable human development in all societies of the world cannot be underestimated. This explains why all countries of the world attach priority to education of her citizens. Education can therefore be said to be long term investment by state to make the society a better place to live in.

The Nigerian state in this regard has giant strides and taken strident steps in promoting the educational sector from pre-colonial period to date. These efforts among others include the establishment of primary schools, secondary and tertiary institutions, training of teachers and provision of school aid. This explains why Akinbote et al (2001) acknowledges the contribution of the Richard constitution of 1946 to the development of education in Nigeria. They observe that, it was this constitution that divided the country into three regions as a result of which the educational administration was also decentralized.

The 1957 Macpherson constitution similarly empowered the regimes to make some laws in which education issues were also considered. The three regimes therefore started making education laws (Taiwo 1985). These laws indeed laid the foundation for the development of education in Nigeria.

After independence, the Nigerian state continued to make progressive efforts in stabilizing and promoting education so as to position it meet the challenges of manpower development necessary for human and material development. These efforts were indeed very commendable and yielded fruitful results including the establishment of more primary schools, secondary and tertiary schools, the increasing of literacy rate, the production of graduates with technical discipline, training of more teachers, promotion of conducive atmosphere for learning, research and development.

These achievements however have not been adequately sustained deriving from the crisis the educational sector has been facing due to inconsistency of educational development in line with Nigeria's national development objectives. This can be attested to by the collapse of technical education as well as failure of educational process such as Universal Primary Education, Universal Basic Education among others.

This paper therefore examines the challenges of transformation in the Nigerian educational system and the prospects for improvement in order to have a viable educational system in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification.

Education

Ortyoyande (2005 cf Locke) in asserting that the mind of a new born child is like a blank tablet (tabula rasa) upon which experience writes ideas. That is to say that, education is acquired through initiation and inculcation. This process involves content (knowledge) and methodology. Hence education takes place through inculcation of moral values, observation, discovery, experience, information as well as training some one to acquire skills.

To Angacgh (1989), education refers to a set of techniques for imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes. It also involves a set of theories which purport to explain or justify the use of these techniques. Education also involves a set of values or ideas embodied and expressed in the purpose for which knowledge, skills and attitudes are imparted. Giving in the long range of time involved in achieving and imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes, education is often seen as a process. This

explains why Ngbea (2008) defines education as a strategy and process towards human capacity development as well as the key tool for societal development.

The above submissions show that education entails inculcation of values, as well as training the citizens to contribute meaningfully to national development.

Objectives of Nigerian Educational System.

The National Policy on Education (1987) outlines the Nigerian national educational aims and objectives as follows:

- i. The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and Nigerian society.
- ii. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world.
- iii. The acquisition of appropriate skills and competencies both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

Several educational policies and strategies have been put in place to address the implementation of these objectives. These policies and strategies are: establishment of unity schools, development of citizenship education curriculum, language education policy, the introduction of social studies curriculum among others.

The question now is: to what extent have these objectives been achieved to attain sustainable educational development of the youth or citizens. This is where the need to assess the challenges of innovation in Nigerian educational system becomes imperative.

Innovation in Nigerian Educational System

The educational system in Nigeria has witnessed several innovations and transformation since the advent of western education in Nigeria in 1882 (Denga 1986) the foundation of western education in Nigeria was indeed laid by Christian Missionaries from Sierra-Leone, England, Ireland, Scotland and later Paris, Rome and the United State of America. Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman and Mr. and Mrs. William de Graft of western missionary society arrival at Badagry on 24th September, 1882 indeed marked the birth of western education in Nigeria. However, the first Missionary group that indeed made a significant impact in the establishment of western education was the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) which established schools in Badagry and Lagos in 1882. Later, the Methodist and the Rome Catholic Church penetrated the hinterland.

It is significant and imperative to observe however, that the kind of education provided by early missionaries aimed at training people to understand foreign language in order to translate the Bible into native languages. This means, education at this time was not geared toward producing the total man.

The above explains why government deliberately embarked on certain policies and programs aimed at transforming the educational sector in such a manner as to inculcate national consciousness, training of the mind and most importantly acquisition of skills to contribute to the development of his society. So education in Nigeria is development oriented which emphasizes employment skills, science and technology.

The Nigeria educational system as derived from the national policy on education is the change from 7-5-4 to the 6-3-3-4 system, which comprises of six years of primary education; six year of secondary education which is divided into two tiers of three years each, known as the junior and senior secondary respectively: and four years of tertiary education. The main innovation here is the split of the secondary into two tiers. Common courses are taught to all pupils at the lower tier, during which a close attention is paid to the aptitudes of the individual students. Therefore, and after junior secondary examination, the pupils are shunted into two streams, the “academic” and technical and vocational streams. The latter are separated to specialize in practical vocational and technical skills leading to polytechnic education, while the former would pursue liberal and scientific education leading to universities through selective national entrance examinations. Accordingly, workshops for

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technical and skills learning and acquisition are separated to be established in each secondary school, adequate to cater for all pupils during the junior secondary, and for the vocational stream at the senior secondary.

Similarly at the tertiary level, there are mainly two parallel systems: the polytechnics which concentrate on applied technology and management skills on the one hand, on the other hand, the universities which pursue degree course both in the sciences, technology and humanities. At the university, following a recommendation of the National manpower Board in 1964, enrollment is expected to be in the proportion of 60% for success, and technological disciplines, and 40% for the liberal arts, humanities and social sciences (Yesufu 1996).

Another innovation in the Nigerian educational system is the National schools curriculum review conference which came up with a wide range of recommendations on the curriculum aspects provisions of national policy on education at the primary and secondary level. The Universal Primary Education which came up in 1975 aimed at ensuring education for all by the year 2000 has already failed due to poor implementation.

Recently, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was introduced by the Obasanjo administration in order to develop and ensure free and compulsory education at the six years of primary education and at the first three years of secondary education known as junior secondary school. According to Idowu (2003), the implementation strategies for this policy include enactment of necessary legislation and articulation of enabling policies, mobilization and sensitization of target groups, adequate funding, regular supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the scheme. Other strategies includes adequate motivation of teachers for effective teaching, and maintenance of discipline in schools.

It is unfortunate that, these strategies have not worked to achieve free, compulsory and universal primary education as children are still hawking groundnuts and other items, instead of being in school. In order to ensure that all Nigerians attain education and be literate, decree No 14 of 2989 introduced and formalized education for nomadic children and people. The Nomadic education which is an innovation in educational system in Nigeria is part of effort of the federal government to provide equal education opportunities for all children in all communities in Nigeria. The program of a nomadic education is to make the nomadic children attain functional literacy in the short term while in long term, the program is to ensure attitudinal changes in skills relevant to their life- styles and occupational roles. The program which was originally conceived in the context of the cattle-rearing communities of Northern Nigeria, was later extended to include other communities such as the fishing communities of Niger Delta areas. As Yesufu (1996) has argued by 1993, the program had covered over half of the states of the federation with 242 schools, 14,088 enrolment and 630 teacher.

The federation government as away of reforming the education sector for higher productivity established special centres and scientific research institutes to promote the learning of mathematics, as well as research which underpins plans for national economic and social development serve to highlight the modern technological and scientific focus of the national education.

Furthermore, the objective of using education for promoting national unity led to the establishment of unity schools in each state of the federation. The policy aimed to draw enrollment from all states of the federation and who through interaction and living together, would develop mutual sense for common belonging, patriotism, and common nationality and brotherhood.

The above analysis shows that innovations in the Nigeria educational system clearly indicated how the National Policy on Education has all the necessary ingredients for making the Nigerian educational system functional and relevant to the needs of the people. It has provision for training Nigerians of tomorrow for living in the world of technological age. The content of education was to help in the relationships among individuals and to the state (Obebe 1991).

The essence of education is therefore economic. Ask any secondary or university student why he wants education, the answer would be that, it is to prepare or qualify him for a job, to have a meal ticket. That is why government and all others who establish, fund and manage the education system see it as a source of supply of manpower required for national development.

Challenges and Problems Affecting the Nigerian Education

The educational system in Nigeria has experienced several problems over the years. Some of these are:

Funding: the major problem affecting education in Nigeria is the issue of funding. This has to do with wrong application, use and direction of resources for the development of education in Nigeria. In spite of huge budgetary allocations to education, the issue of management and control of funds has become a serious problem. The Universal Basic Education Program has not achieved much in spite of the huge resources and money for the program. Much of these resources are diverted and used for personal gains. Apart from misappropriation, the total percentage of budgetary allocation is not adequate. This explains why academic staff union of universities often go on strike demanding for proper funding of education in order to achieve national productivity.

Poor Remuneration and Lack of Motivation for Teachers: The funding and salary structure, delay and non-payment of salaries and general poor condition of services characterizing the education sector, the context of teachers training and work, can hardly serve as instruments of national development. The issue here is that, a person who is supposed to be highly motivated and arrow head of development has become so undervalued, demoralized, marginalized and virtually irrelevant to the development process. This captured by Ukeje (1996) who observed that.

With this state of affairs we can hardly expect much quality education in the schools and consequently cannot make the desired impact on national development... a phenomenon termed "lack of job satisfaction" is blamed on the instability in Nigerian education. If teachers are the real builders of tomorrow, we cannot build tomorrow with inefficient and disgruntled builders.

It therefore means that, until teachers' welfare issues are energized and tackled realistically, discussed and upgraded, Nigerian education in its present nature and scope cannot fully and systematically inculcate high moral values and high professional and entrepreneurial skills in the people to promote national development.

Inadequate Facilities and Infrastructure

Onyeachu (2009) argues that facilities such as building, furniture such as tables, chairs, which enable a worker to perform effectively are lacking in most schools in the country. To worsen the situation is the condition under which pupils in most public schools today sit under mango tree and the floor or in log of woods to read. These facilities are indeed inadequate and in deteriorated conditions. There is also lack of reading aid in most schools and this has affected the quality of education in the country.

Political Factor: This has to do with the decision by political leaders pertaining, establishment, management and provision of infrastructure such as school aids to schools. Most public school lack government patronage due to the character of political leadership. This has affected the performance of public schools in the country.

The challenges facing the Nigerian educational system are indeed enormous. However, inspite of these problems and challenges, there are still prospects for improvement in order to instill positive values and skills into the people.

Prospects of the Nigerian Education System

The prospects for improvement in the present state of the Nigerian educational system are very minimal. One of the reasons is that of corruption which has made it difficult for people charged with the responsibility of planning and administering schools and institutions of learning. This has often given rise to diversion of resources meant for the development of education in Nigeria. The nature of the Nigerian state and leadership are geared toward primitive accumulation to the detriment of the masses.

To reposition the Nigerian educational system to achieve the goals of National Education Policy, policy makers and implementers should shun politics of primitive accumulation of wealth. Also, the Nigerian state should restructure the school system and curriculum to be based on indigenous culture of the people. The level at which China has developed cannot be divorced from the cultural revolution that took place in their society.

Furthermore, government has to intensify efforts at funding of education so as to meet up with the challenges of today. Adequate remuneration to teachers and provision of infrastructure should be intensified in order to attain quality and effective teaching and learning in schools.

Above all is the issue of adequate and proper planning. No human endeavour can be successfully carried out without planning ahead, therefore all educational programs should be properly and adequately planned before implementation to ensure success.

Conclusion

This paper examines the challenges as well as the prospects of innovation in the Nigerian educational system and has established that, the educational sector of the Nigerian state has undergone series of innovations since the advent of western Education in the country in the 18th century. Most of these innovations have brought about some level of improvement, however, most of the policies and programs have failed due to inadequate funding, corruption, poor remuneration, poor planning as well as implementation. In order to reposition the Nigerian educational system for higher productivity to achieve the goals of National Policy on Education, government should increase funding, check corrupt practices and ensure proper planning and implementation so as to instill positive skills, values and attitudes in the people in order to achieve national development in Nigeria.

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