

EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: ASSURING QUALITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY AS IT RELATES TO SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Education is the greatest force that can be used to bring about change, and make for the quick development of a nation's economic, political, sociological and human resources development. This paper examines secondary education as a base for assuring quality education in Nigeria in the twenty-first century, through the concept of education and secondary education, its functionality, qualitiveness and some factors affecting qualitative secondary education.

Introduction

The National Policy on Education was formulated for this country to inculcate a national consciousness and nationality unity; the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigeria society; the training of the mind in understanding of the world around; and the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of this society. However, Urevbu (1991:1) asserted that "Education is more than just going to school". He had a working definition of education thus: "Education describes the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, faculties trained and skills developed".

Secondary education as outlined in the National Policy on Education (2004:18) as that form of education children receive after primary education and before the tertiary stage. The broad aims of secondary education according to the National Policy on Education (2004:18) are:

- *Preparation of individual for useful living within the society and*
- *Preparation for higher education*

Olomola (2004:32) asserted that secondary education is the bedrock for national development. He went further to say thus: Secondary education is an integral part of life-long education and its success is crucial to every form of higher education as it is the solid rock beneath the earth surface to a structure above it. Secondary education is where the solid foundations of every form of post-secondary education are laid. It is the level the seed of career prospects of most of the students is sown.

It follows that at the secondary school level, the curriculum is designed to prepare pupils for relevant courses, including professional courses at the universities, polytechnics or colleges of education. It was in line with this aim that the Federal Government, in 1979, approved a new National Policy on Education that divided secondary education into six years duration, given in two stages – a junior secondary stage and a senior secondary school stage of three years duration. According to the National Policy on Education (2004:19), the junior secondary school shall be both pre-vocational and academic.

Historical Development of Education and Secondary Education in Nigeria

Education is defined as a tool for the integration of individual into the society, so that he/she can achieve self-realization, develop national consciousness, promote unity and strive for social, economic, political, scientific, cultural and technological progress (Abu, 2001).

According to Whitehead (1959), education is the art of the utilization of knowledge, i.e. the process whereby the innate potentialities of the individual are tapped for the benefit of the individual. As in Plato's conception, Whitehead's view by-passes the social significance of education, while also developing the physical and spiritual dimensions.

Starting with morphology, the word education is made up of the root "educate" and the suffix "ion". We can then say rather simplistically that education is what we do when we educate, or what we get when we are educated, or simply the process of educating. The word "education" is derived from the Latin word "educate" meaning "to bring up" "to lead out", or "to raise up". In other words, it means the process of helping the individual to grow and develop the process of leading the individual into the ways of life of the society. The process of initiating one into the society to which one has been born to live, work and die (Adeyinka, 1992).

Concept of Functional Education

For clarity, it is important at this stage to explain the two key words of "functionality and qualitative education" as they relate to secondary education to enable readers understand what the paper sets out to address. The term functionality is derived from "function", which means ability to work. In this sense, to be functional means the ability of an individual to be useful to himself or herself after secondary education. Such usefulness can be in form of higher education, acquiring skills or learning a trade in business or commerce.

Secondary education offers these opportunities because at this stage of a child's life, general education is taught. Olomola (2004:32) has these to say about secondary education and functionality:

Secondary schools are post-primary, the students age between 13 and 17. There is nothing fetish or rigid about these ages before and since the 6-3-3-4 education system. Ideally the education of adolescents should offer subjects that are essential to life in the modern world and as a way to further their education at a higher level. Secondary school students have always had rigorous teaching of their compulsory and elective subjects – their target being success at least at credit level in national examinations such as WASC/SSE, NECO, as well as matriculation examinations such as JAMB for entry into universities and Poly JAMB for entry into polytechnics and colleges of education.

Furthermore, children are exposed to the following functional subjects: introductory technology, integrated science, agricultural science, home management, fine arts, music, home economics, technical drawing, health science, food and nutrition, accounts and book-keeping, woodwork, metal work, electronics, auto-mechanics, shorthand, typewriting, computer studies etc. This is in addition to the two compulsory subjects of English Language and Mathematics. The above are in line with the National Policy on education (2004:18) which has the following specific goals:

- *Provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background;*

- Offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles;
- Provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;
- Inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence;
- Provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.

Functional education according to Obanya (2003:37) is an evolutionary concept. He distinguished between two early conceptions of Functional Education: The American view – which is education that comes spontaneously from the influence of the environment, a kind of undirected, natural education that is different from deliberate goal-oriented education. On the other hand, the Western European view is concerned with the child's interest as a mechanism for activating him towards his desirable activities; its purpose is to develop the life of the mind that acts from the wholeness of organic life, with relation to practical life in the present and in future. Obanya (2003:37) outlined the following key principles of Functional Education:

- Developing the intellectual and non-intellectual abilities of the child, rather than 'force-feeding' the child with facts that are readily forgotten because they are like foreign substances without any connection to the child's life.
- The use of 'Functional Instruction', to enable the learner develop habits and technical skills that would aid in solving practical problems

Concept of Functional Skills Education

The concept of functional skills education can be seen from the point of view that education is not just a preparation for life, but life itself. In the twenty-first century, in Nigeria, emphasis has shifted from just 'functional' to 'functional skills education' that enables the child to acquire basic skills in secondary schools before the tertiary level or apprenticeship system of supervised training leading to certification in a designed trade, occupation or craft in an organization or outside organization.

Obanya (2003:38) sees functional skills education as follows:

Functional skills education posits that the purpose of education is to acquire the skills of understanding life situations, adapting to it and acting to influence it and contributing to its development. It requires specific skills which education should seek to inculcate.

To this end, functional skills education can be applied to the various aspects of education. For example, in basic literacy programmes such as Computer Literacy, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Internet Exploration etc. It refers to the skills needed to overcome the disabilities in vocational education, the skills needed by the labour market, in science education – abilities required to consolidate the habits of scientific behaviour and training of teachers. It is the aptitudes and abilities needed to promote learning, and get out the best from learners. Functional skills education in a nutshell, focuses on the learners, within the context of their becoming a functioning member of society; and with a view to equipping them with skills needed for doing so in a meaningful manner.

Concept of Qualitative Education

The term qualitative refers to a situation where something is of high quality. Qualitative therefore, is concerned with the quality of products, services or goods including education. Oguntimehin (2004:143) defines quality as a concept which emphasizes the worth or appropriateness of the resources available to education. According to Oxford Dictionary of English Language (2000), quality is a degree or level of excellence, degree of conformity to standard and interest or enduring good traits or characteristics that make a person somewhat special or superior.

Furthermore, Adebule (2005:175) asserted that:

The quality of any educational system is related to its internal and external criteria such as performance of students in external examinations such as WAEC, NECO, NTI, JAMB etc. Quality in education therefore, is a means by which an educational system ensures that the education it delivers will serve the purpose for which it is intended.

In a nutshell, qualitative education at the secondary school level be devoid of the various problems and malpractices in the sector. For example, parents 'hiring' people to write public examinations such as WASC, NECO and JAMB for their children, cultism, corruption in the educational sector, poor reading culture, over population of students with the ratio of teachers to students unmanageable. Others are lack of basic facilities, including laboratory facilities for teaching and learning process, sub-standard private secondary schools with unqualified and barely educated teachers, shortage of desks and chairs and poorly motivated teachers who are not paid their monthly salaries and leave allowances as at when due. Recently, some students were caught using cell phones (handsets) in JAMB examination halls to cheat, and this was considered as a new dimension to cheating. It follows, therefore, that without qualitative education, Nigeria will be left behind in the twenty-first century advancement and globalization.

Need to Implement Functional Skills Education in Secondary Schools in Nigeria

Section 1, sub-section (d) of the National Policy on Education (2004:7) states as follows:

There is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria; to this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive, while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction and education.

These were the laudable ideas that informed the adoption of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria. The policy has been revised many times with the current one being that of 2004 (4th Edition). So far noting concrete has been done to fully implement the 6-3-3-4 system of education. The 6-3-3-4 system of education would have enabled pupils at the junior secondary school level to have personal development for contribution to social transformation. A variety of pre-vocational electives introduced at the junior secondary school level would have helped those who could not continue at the senior secondary school level to learn skills for survival.

At the moment, secondary education is more of the old system 6-5-4 system of education than the so called 6-3-3-4 system of education. The latter is in name as the implementation was done halfway with features like continuous assessment, teacher-pupils ratio of 1:40 and junior secondary schools as neighbourhood schools not implemented.

The National Policy on Education (2004:20) specifically states that students who complete junior secondary school shall be streamed into the following four categories:

1. the secondary school;
2. the technical college;
3. an out-of-school vocational training centre;
4. an apprenticeship scheme

So far only number one above was implemented. Numbers 2-4 that have functional skills development features were not implemented and that would have made the difference between the old system of 6-5-4 and the new system of 6-3-3-4 of education.

Some Factors Affecting Qualitative Secondary Education in Nigeria

The standard of education and the level of achievement can be measure by the quality of its input, as well as output. It is no gainsaying that the standard of education in Nigeria has fallen. So many factors can be advanced for the fallen standard of secondary education.

According to Gowon (2005:18) it is difficult to know where the decay in education crept into the system. He has these to say:

This vital stage of education, secondary education is largely under state control and is on the exclusive legislative list for states. Why then the fall in standards in most of the state secondary schools nationwide? One get the response – lack of funds for the employment of good teachers, for the supply of books, materials and necessary equipment etc. By these responses, a case is already made for non-performance.

Secondary education system can be considered as a boat on a stormy sea with everything in shambles and at a point of collapse due to insensitivity by stakeholders and politicization of secondary education. For example free education in states where government cannot pay teachers' salaries or even provide chalk for class instruction, as well as inconsistencies in policy formulation.

Another factor responsible for the decreasing standard of education according to Martin (2003:15) includes:

Inadequate staff. Some schools do not have enough teachers. And so the few teachers in the school would not be able to handle all the subjects being taught in the school. Even in some schools, for example, the biology or geography teacher would be assigned to teach English Language or Mathematics. How can he/she teach the subject he/she did not specialize in?

Other factors responsible for the low quality of secondary education in Nigeria are: inadequate classrooms with many students in a small classroom. Such classrooms are uncomfortable for the teaching and learning process to effectively take place. There is also inadequate school facilities and equipment. Some secondary schools do not have science laboratory where the students can carry out science practical. In addition, lack of good library where students can read and look for educational materials, as well as lip-service paid to education generally.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper looked at secondary education as the gateway to further education and training in professions. The purpose of secondary education therefore, is to acquire common knowledge to prepare youths for either higher education or vocation or train directly to a profession.

It was in view of this that the Federal Government approved the National Policy on Education in 1979 to cater for the two categories of students in secondary school. Those that will end up at the junior secondary school stage and move to a technical college or out-of-school vocational training centre or an apprenticeship scheme. The other students who are academically sound would move to the senior secondary school level that will enable them gain admission into tertiary institutions, if successful in WASC or NECO and JAMB examinations.

According to Gowon (2005:18) the broad intention of initiating the policy change in education was to make secondary education less theoretical and academic to a more functional system that would accommodate other children development phases and make school leavers independent and self-sustaining. Secondary education is needed in skills acquisition because at this adolescent stage, pupils are very receptive to what they are taught, as they have no family or problems of life to think about.

For secondary education to achieve these objectives, it must be qualitative in nature. For over a decade now, there has been decreasing standard of education in Nigeria. Secondary education as the foundation to other form of education is seriously affected. The quality of teaching staff and students produce in Nigerian secondary schools for sometimes now is very low. Some secondary school leavers cannot speak good English and write application letter for employment. Gowon (2005:18) says that one of the reasons for the fallen standard in secondary school is examination malpractices in various forms. The other is cultism or truancy. According to him, all the problems identified at this level are replicated at the tertiary education level, even in dangerous dimensions. For secondary education to take its rightful place there is need to look into the recommendations above, with a view to implementing them.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, the researcher made the following recommendations:

1. The National Policy on Education, as it relates to pre-vocational electives and all the requirements of technical college and out-of-school vocational training centre and apprenticeship scheme should be implemented. It is not enough to review the policy periodically without full implementation.
2. The streaming of students at the junior secondary school level based on the result of tests to determine academic ability, aptitude and vocation interest, to achieve a transition ratio of 50:50 should be implemented to the letter.
3. There is also the need to fully implement continuous assessment, which is one of the features of certification in the 6-3-3-4 system of education in secondary schools in Nigeria. This can be done by having Continuous Assessment Committee in each school to monitor continuous assessment.
4. A functional skills education programme at the secondary school level will reduce unemployment and provide the trained manpower required at this level.
5. To achieve qualitative education, policy makers should be sensitive and avoid politicization of secondary education.
6. Teachers in secondary schools all over the country should be paid as at when due. There is need to have a Secondary School Commission that will oversee all secondary schools in Nigeria, in terms of policy guidelines.
7. The Federal and State Governments should ensure that there are no shortage of teaching staff, materials and necessary equipment in secondary schools.

8. A curriculum that provides for a variety of learning experiences should be adopted for secondary education.
9. Cultism or truancy among secondary school students should be monitored by the school authorities, with a view to disciplining students involved. This is necessary because cultism, for some students, start at the secondary school level. There is also the need for the school authorities to be alert when students from the neighbouring tertiary institution visit their students, as they may infiltrate their students and introduce them into cultism.
10. Examination malpractices in any form should be stopped. Principals of secondary schools should stop collecting 'co-operation fee' to bribe the invigilators to their schools during public examinations.
11. Parents should allow their children to use their brain to write public examinations instead of paying to 'mercenaries' to write WASC, NECO or JAMB examinations for their children and wards.

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