

REPOSITIONING EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

Some fundamental Considerations

This paper has been designed to examine the fundamentals of educational challenges and repositioning in Nigeria and how the country has fared from the colonial period of zero to minimal national education policy to the present era of national statutory support for fast scientific and technological advancement through education.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1998:7), clearly and rightly states as follows:

A nation's policy on education is government's way of realizing that part of the national goals which can be achieved using education as a tool. No policy on education, however, can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and goals of the nation. According to Nigeria, since her independence in 1960, has considered education as an instrument 'par excellence' for achieving her overall philosophy and national goals. Specifically, the country's overall philosophy has been to:

- a) live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principle of freedom, equity and justice;
- b) promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding.

Furthermore, Nigeria has stated her national goals which have been endorsed as the necessary basis for her national policy on education. The goals have centred on 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.

As part of her national philosophy of education therefore, Nigeria believes strongly in education as an instrument for national development and considers the formulation of ideas, their integration into national development, the interaction of persons and ideas as all aspects of education.

In order to realize fully the potential contributions of education to the achievement of national goals, Nigeria has declared in her national policy on education that "all other agencies (of government) will operate in concert with education to that end" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1998:8).

Perhaps, commitment in Section 9(a) of her National Policy on education that "education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change." The country believes that 'any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution' (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1998,8) Herein, obviously, lies the policy/fundamental basis for repositioning education in Nigeria.

It would be pertinent at this point to examine the extent "educational revolution" or repositioning has occurred in the scheme of changes in Nigeria's past and present, so that one could prognosticate and advise on future trends. Surely, an appropriate point to begin from would be the colonial era.

Repositioning Education in Nigeria's Colonial Era

For brevity, one would like to commence an examination of the events in colonial education in Nigeria from the early 1840s when Western education was introduced into Nigeria by missionaries. It was also a period when liberated slaves were coming back to their homelands, following declaration by Britain in 1807 that slave trade was illegal. Thus the missionary expedition included evangelists and humanitarian laymen. The latter saw the slave trade, though legally abolished, as still actively oppressing thousands of Africans. The religious motive, humanitarian benevolence and enduring commercial enterprise were rolled together into a "civilizing" mission. The content/objectives of the education/civilizing mission could be exemplified by reference to an official Report of the Education Committee of the British Privy Council to the

colonial office in 1847. The Report articulated the education/civilizing objectives in the following words (Butts, 1947:497).

- i) To inculcate the principles and promote the influences of Christianity by such instruction as can be given in elementary schools,
- ii) To accustom the children of these races to habits of self-control and moral discipline,
- iii) To diffuse a grammatical knowledge of the English language as the most important agent of civilization,
- iv) To make the school the means of improving the condition of the peasantry by teaching them how health may be preserved by a proper diet, cleanliness, ventilation and clothing, and by the structure of their dwellings.
- v) To give a practical training in household economy and in the cultivation of the cottage garden as well as in those common handicrafts by which a labourer may improve his domestic comfort.
- vi) To communicate such a knowledge of writing and arithmetic, and of their application to his wants and duties as may enable a peasant to economise his means, and give the small farmer the power to enter into calculations and agreements,
- vii) Improved agriculture is required to replace the system of exhausting the virgin soils, and then leaving to natural influences the virgin soils, and then leaving to natural influences alone the work of reparation. The education of the coloured races would, therefore, not be complete for the children of small farmers, unless it included this object,
- viii) Lesson books should teach the mutual interests of the mother country and her dependencies, the rational basis of this connection and the domestic and social duties of the coloured races,
- ix) Lesson books should also set forth simply the relation of wages, capital and labour, and the influence of local and general government on personal security, independence and order.

Ten years after the above Report, some repositioning of the colonial/missionary education programme was proposed following a debate over the importance to conversion to Christianity of adoption of Western manners, the teaching of practical studies and the learning of a written language. The nature and extent of repositioning could be adjudged from the following statement by the leader of the Baptist missionaries in Nigeria, Thomas J. Bowen in 1857 (Butts, 1947:503).

Our designs and hopes in regard to Africa, are not simply to bring as many individuals as possible to the knowledge of Christ. We desire to establish the Gospel in the hearts and righteousness may remain and flourish among them, without the instrumentality of foreign missionaries, this cannot be done without civilization. To establish the Gospel among any people, they must have Bibles, and therefore must have read the Bible and this implies instruction... which cannot exist without....civilization.

It can be seen that in these missionary/humanitarian endeavours, which indeed led to the establishment of some schools, little was considered about the general empowerment/emancipation of the African natives, including Nigerians. Besides, there was no official education policy, and this resulted in a number of deficiencies including (Fafunwa. 1974):

- 1) Absence of a common syllabus, standard textbooks, regular school schedules and so on.
- 2) Inadequate financial support
- 3) Absence of a central examination system.

Such was the situation until the creation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria in 1899, with a follow-up of government intervention in education which led to the establishment of an Education Department in the Southern Protectorate in 1903 and the enactment of an Education Ordinance in 1908. The Education Department was later expanded to accommodate the enormity of the work it had to cope with following the merging of the Colony and protectorate of Lagos with the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1906. All in all, some improvements were introduced via the Education ordinance and the reorganized Education Department. Notable among such improvements was the increase in number of government schools and their funding. However, much of the funding came from public rather than government sources. The Northern Protectorate also experienced some improvement in education provision, including the establishment of a Department of Education.

The above noted interventions, however, were not based on any defined British government educational

policy for Nigeria as a colony. Much of the attitude of the colonial government was laissez-faire- leaving local administrators in consultation with the local Christian missions and their home offices to manage the educational enterprise as best they could up to the early 1920s.

This unsavory educational scene prompted the Phelps-Stokes Fund of America to sponsor a Commission in 1920 to study the educational provisions made by the colonialists for the African peoples vis-a-vis the educational needs of the people. The Commission made its Report public in 1922, emphasizing, among other things that:

- 1) In spite of the creditable work being done by missionaries, many of the missions did not realize the full significance of education in the development of the African people. There was no clear-cut objective for African education.
- 2) The education providers failed to adapt school work to African conditions.
- 3) The colonial government and the missions did not apply sound principles of administration to their educational work.
- 4) The education of the masses and native leadership had been neglected.
- 5) There was inadequate provision for the training of teachers, especially at the higher levels.

These findings by the Phelps-Stokes Commission rattle the British government from its lackadaisical position into positive action (Fafunwa, 1974). Accordingly, the government issues its first policy on education in 1925. This policy repositioned some aspects of education in the colonies, including Nigeria. For instance:

- 1) Education was to be adapted to local conditions, traditions and social organization.
- 2) .. Voluntary Agency schools were to be more strictly supervised and those which qualified were to be provided with grants-in-aid.
- 3) Teacher training institutions were to be established to provide the necessary qualified teachers.
- 4) Technical and vocational education and training were to be provided for
- 5) Education of women and the girl child would become an integral part of the whole educational system.

These elements of educational repositioning formed the fulcrum for the educational expansions that were witnessed between 1930 and the 1950s, specially at the primary, secondary and technical/vocational levels.

In the particular case of higher education in Nigeria, it is noteworthy that the report of the Elliot Commission appointed in 1943 led to establishment of the University College, Ibadan in 1948 with London and Cambridge Universities serving as models to the College, mention also needs to be made of the earlier establishment of the Yaba Higher College on 19 January, 1959 has been put at three hundred (Adesina, 1977). Higher education in Nigeria, obviously, need to be repositioned soon after independence in 1960. Accordingly, at the eve of independence (precisely April, 1959), the Federal Government of Nigeria appointed a Commission under sir Eric Ashby "to conduct an' investigation into Nigeria's needs in the fields of Post-Certificate and Higher education over the next twenty years,' that is up to 1980 (Ashby, 1960:2). The findings and recommendations of the Ashby. Commission have led to significant repositioning of post school certificate and higher education in-; -Nigeria since independence, it would be right at this stage to examine the educational scenario in Nigeria during the post independence era.

Educational Progress/Repositioning in Post Independence Nigeria

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, a lot has happened at the various levels of education in the country. The administrative and structural deficiencies of the colonial period have been faced squarely. Post independence Nigeria has effected massive repositioning of the various forms and levels of the educational enterprise. Perhaps, a convenient way to highlight the changes that have taken place within the limited space available here might be to summarize them under some generic headings.

Educational Planning and Administration Since Independence

At independence, Nigeria was made up to four Regions - North, East, West and Mid-West. In May, 1967, the four Regions were balkanized into twelve States. Nigeria has since been further subdivided into nineteen, twenty -one, and currently thirty-six States. These developments not only altered the context of national educational planning and plan priorities, but also strengthen the case for greater decentralization,

collaboration and co-ordination. The problems of educational development have become more glaring and imbalances have continued to manifest. National educational development plans are hardly receiving much advocacy, except for mass education programmes. The tendency has been for the various Regions {when they existed} or the States (as we have them today) to plan and implement most of their educational programmes with minimal reference to the Federal Government. Until recently, for instance, Universal Primary Education was planned and implemented by some Regional/State governments without getting a nod from the Federal. Two particular examples could be cited with the Western Regions which introduced Universal Primary Education in 1955 and 1957 respectively without reference to the Federal

Government. The inference is that the States tend to reposition education, especially at the primary and secondary levels to serve their local purposes. However, there are still areas where the state and federal Governments co-operate, especially in matters bordering on national policy.

Curricular and Structural Changes in Primary and Secondary Education in Nigeria Since Independence

Nine years after independence (September, 1969), Nigeria organized a National Curriculum Conference which involved not only experts in education, but also representatives of various trade unions, farmers' unions, women organization, religious bodies, university teachers' associations and so on. The objective of the Conference was to review old and identify new national goals for Nigerian education, bearing in mind the growing and changing needs of youths and adults in the task of nation-building and national reconstruction for social and economic well-being of the individual and the Nigerian society at large. The Conference identified a number of critical decision areas which formed the basis for achieving its objectives. The areas identified included (Fafunwa, 1974):

- 1) National philosophy of education.
- 2) Goal/objectives/purposes of primary, secondary and tertiary education in the country,
- 3) The place of women's education.
- 4) The place of teacher education.
- 5) 'Control of public education.

Much of the deliberations of the Conference eventually formed the bedrock of the National-Policy on Education first published in 1977.

Primary and Secondary education have undergone curricular and structural changes over time in response to the National Policy on Education and developments in Education Psychology, science and technology. The introduction of science, language and computer education into the primary school curriculum, for instance, has been a post-independence experience meant to reposition education at that level to meet developmental demands. The secondary school system has also been bombarded with new ideas in the areas of mathematics. Quantitative and verbal Reasoning, Science and Technological studies.

Again, Technical and Vocational Education have been introduced either as part of regular school subjects or as Non-Formal Adult/Mass Education programmes.

Furthermore, to extend educational opportunities to the less well-placed, special education programmes have been introduced for physically challenged people nomadic pastoralists and migrant fisher folk all over Nigeria.

In terms of primary and secondary education structures, Nigeria, since independence, has effected changes from a 7-5-2-3 to a 6-5-2-3 and now a 6-3-3-4 structure. Under the 7-5-2-3 structure, the country operated seven years of primary education, five years of secondary education, two years of post-secondary and three years of university education. In the 6-5-2-3 system, Nigeria operated six years of primary education, five years of secondary schooling, two years of post-secondary and three years of university education. In the 6-3-3-4 structure, pupils pass through six years of primary education; those of secondary school age pass through three years of Junior Secondary and three years of Senior Secondary Schooling and later four years of university education. The current (6-3-3-4) structure is an attempt to provide opportunities for the development of the potentials of technically inclined students who would be identified at the end of their Junior Secondary schooling.

These structural changes, definitely, are patterns of repositioning education to develop individual potentials as well as meet social and innovation demands, what one worries about is the level of political will being accorded to the actual practical implementation of the innovative changes. For instance, how much is allocated by government in the annual budget for procurement, installation and

maintenance of technical equipment for servicing the 3-3 secondary education system? Again how many of the schools are provided with electricity to power such equipment? These questions suggest that there is still more to do in the education repositioning process than just mere innovative policy declarations without corresponding implementation provisions.

Teacher Education in Post Independence Nigeria

The 1925 Report of the Phelps-Stocks Commission-regarding inadequate teacher training provisions made some impact on the colonial government, as noted earlier. Following the government's reaction, the number of teacher training institutions rose to fifty-three, with a student population of about 3,026 (Fafunwa, 1974). This number, however, was not adequate as it comprised mainly Grades III and II teachers. Based on the paucity of the high grade teachers, the Ashby Commission target for graduate and grade I teachers by 1970 (as shown in the table I below), was indeed revealing. As the data in the table under reference shows, the teacher training colleges themselves seriously needed high grades of teaching staff. Repositioning of teacher education therefore was most desirable.

Table 1

Number of High Grade Teachers Needed By Various Categories of National Education Services by 1970

Categories of Educational Services	Levels of Teachers Needed	
	Graduate	Grade 1
Teacher training colleges	1,750	1,750
Secondary grammar schools	3,750	3,750
Technical institutes	200	200
Teachers of agriculture	-	250
Sixth Forms	400	-
Grade 1 training programmes	400	-
Supervising Teachers	500	500
Grade I teachers for primary	-	11,650
Total	7,000	18,100

Source: adapted from Ashby, E. (1960), "Target for 1970"; p.85

In February 1961, that is four months after independence, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka convened a Conference with the Theme, "Teacher Education in Nigeria." The Conference which was financed by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, drew its participants from among Nigerian school principals, Professors of Education officers, and voluntary agencies. At the end of deliberations, the Conference agreed that the old tradition of a degree plus a nine-month diploma course in education was not a satisfactory method for preparing graduate teachers. It noted that many of the teachers so produced lacked dedication and professional aptitude and were only interested in teaching as a stepping stone to another job. In the alternative, the Conference recommended a three or four-year Bachelor of Arts or Science combined honours degree in education with a teaching subject.

In September, 1961, the new graduate teacher training programme was launched at the University of Nigeria with fifty students. The programme has since been adopted by most universities in the country. This repositioning of graduate teacher education has improved the commitment of the graduate teacher and enhanced the professional content of his training. Nonetheless, the National Universities Commission has recently observed programme lapses in some Faculties of Education. Such lapses must have to be studied for proper repositioning of graduate teacher education in the country.

Higher Education in Nigeria Since Independence

The growth of higher education institutions in Nigeria-universities, polytechnics, colleges of institutions in Nigeria - universities, polytechnics, colleges of education - has been quite spectacular, apparently in response to the target set by Ashby (1960).

In case of the university system, which was virtually at zero level in 1960, six had been established by 1970. The number rose to thirteen seven years has come up to 73. Of this number, 26 are owned by the Federal Government, 24 by State Governments 23 by the private sector. A notable development in the

establishment of universities in Nigeria today is the high numbers of Universities of Technology and those of Agriculture. University education has indeed undergone repositioning in Nigeria to meet contemporary demands for scientific, technological and agricultural advancements. At the other levels of higher education, nearly every State in Nigeria today has a College of Education and a polytechnic college to help produce the professional teachers and technical manpower needed in the ever-growing education and industrial sectors respectively.

Contemporary Issues in Nigerian Education

The above discourse on education in Nigeria since the colonial period may paint a picture of how hard the nation has worked to close the yawning gaps in educational practice occasioned by the laissez-faire attitude of the colonial administrators.

Indeed, Nigeria has done well so far, but there is yet more to be done to reposition education at various levels and in its various forms to achieve greater individual self-dependency and national self-sufficiency. Indeed, there is hardly any week or month that passes without one reading from the national dailies some suggestion for a revision or reorientation of the content of education at various levels in Nigeria towards the development of skills, knowledge and the acumen for self-employment, entrepreneurship and invention. This points to a felt need for systematic repositioning of education at various levels to achieve individual and national developmental goals.

Awareness must be created among educational practitioners and administrators of what the national goals are. The will, among other things, help to shake off the lingering vestiges of inherited colonial lapses. In this wise, educational practitioners and administrators must be conversant with the provisions of the National Policy on Education, not just to internalize them, but also to be able to constantly-assess the relevance of the provisions to contemporary issues and changes. A situation where in a Conference of educational practitioners less than 20% of the participants possess or even have seen the national Policy on Education document does not augur well for the proper implementation of planned educational programmes or the timely repositioning of both the programmes and the policy provisions.

Summary and Conclusion

Nigeria has come a long way in the process of shaping her educational destiny from the near stagnating improprieties of a colonial administration. The advancement in the various forms and levels of education has been tremendous. Over time, the country has attempted in various ways to reposition her educational programmes to meet declared goals. There is, however, a need to caution against complacency as there is still more to be done to meet the challenges of fast advancing technological age and the growing needs for individual and national self-dependency and self-sufficiency. There is, equally, the need to periodically review the provisions of the country's national policy on Education to ensure their currency.

There has to be also a determination not to allow the negative vestiges of colonial legacy to tint the advancement endeavours. Nigeria must continue to reposition various aspects of her education system as and whenever the need arises.

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