

CONTRIBUTIONS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Secondary education in Nigeria is a link between the primary and tertiary levels of education. In addition to this function, it also provided some semi skilled labour for the economy. Despite this indispensable position in the educational system of Nigeria, the secondary education is abandoned in the hands of the various state governments, which treat its affairs shabbily. This paper discussed the evolution of secondary education in Nigeria up to when it became technologically involved and having junior and senior departments (JSS and SS). Its objectives were stated and its recent trends in the country were reviewed. Some contributions like the provision of basic and literacy skills, self-awareness, political awareness, religious tolerance, a source of students for the higher institution and employment opportunities etc. were discussed. Four recommendations were highlighted.

Introduction

Secondary education as the name implies is the education offered to pupils after the primary school. It is the form of education children receive after primary education and 'before the tertiary stage. Specifically secondary education is the education meant for children between 11⁺ to 17⁺ (FGN, 1998). The secondary education is meant to prepare the beneficiaries towards useful living within the society and higher education for those willing and able to withstand it. Consequently, the secondary level of education is not only a bridge between the primary and the tertiary level of education; it .is also a means of living and fitting well into society for those who may not aspire further.

Before independence and up to 1982, the secondary school education lasted for five years. After these five years, those who obtained the necessary qualifications continued for the two years of higher school certificate examination to qualify for university education. In order to enrich the curriculum with science and technical subjects the secondary school duration was changed from 5 years to 6 years. This 6-years course was divided into two stages of three years each called the junior and senior schools. While the junior secondary is both academic and pre-vocationally oriented, the senior secondary stage provides comprehensive education preparing the students for higher education work and living.

The junior secondary school leaving certificate is based on continual assessment while the senior secondary school certificate is based on a national final examination (The West African Examinations Council and the National Examinations Council Examination).

In the Nigerian situation, secondary education is the basic or raw material provider for the desired future manpower resources. Taiwo (1986) observed that secondary education is of great importance to the nation because it is a source of mid level manpower production that is necessary to sustain and improve the economy.

Objectives of Secondary Education in Nigeria

The objectives for secondary education in Nigeria are to:

- (a) Provide an increasing number of primary school pupils with the opportunity for education of a higher quality, irrespective of sex, or social, religious and ethnic background.

- (b) Diversify its curriculum to cater for the differences in talents opportunities and roles possessed by or open to students after (heir secondary school course.
- (c) Equip students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology.
- (d) Develop and project Nigerian culture, art and language as well as the world's cultural

heritage.

- (e) Raise generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour and appreciate those values specified under our broad national aims and live as good citizens.
- (f) Foster Nigerian unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity.
- (g) Inspire students with a desire for achievement and self-improvement both at school and in later life (Obanya 2002).

If the above objectives for secondary education are properly implemented the secondary education level will be a dependable source of manpower supply for specialized skilled production at the tertiary level. This will increase the nation's production and hence the entire economy.

Recent Trends in Secondary Education in Nigeria

The secondary education level, which is an indispensable bridge between the primary and the university or tertiary level of education in Nigeria has not received adequate treatment for decades even in the phase of democracy. In fact, its success has been left to fate. Its administration has been left in the hands of the different states of the federation, which now treat its affairs at the least echelon of government action. Many state governments have displayed their lack of interest in the secondary education affairs entrusted to them by the Federal Government of Nigeria. They have numerous times attempted to hand over these secondary schools to the voluntary agencies and other interested lenders but prevented by the relentless opposition of the Nigerian National Union of Teachers and some other public opinion pools. It is unfortunate that these ill-nurtured plans by the different states appeared to have the approval of the Federal Government of Nigeria because there has been no policy statement against the handover of schools. More to that, the Federal Government has no effective commission to take care of this cardinal level of education. Ezeocha (1985) noted that the establishment of a body for any level of education will always protect it from all emerging predicaments in that country for better result oriented programmes.

Unlike the primary and the tertiary levels of education, which have the National Primary Education Commission and the National Universities Commission, the secondary level of education has mere boards to see about its daily affairs. Consequently, the fate of the secondary education in Nigeria remains the sole private concern of the different states just like a twig being tossed by the high tides of the ocean waves.

The differential administrative policies by the different states are responsible for different closing and resumption dates, salary structures, treatment of the retired, late and serving staff from one state to the other. It is possible for the methodology and the curriculum to differ to some extent. It is also very common to have all the economic readjustment policies by the various states geared towards a reduction of mostly the secondary school staff.

Dukey (2003) beholds that the best way to reduce the work force is to run amalgamation policies of the civil service beginning with the secondary schools where there is a high level of duplication everywhere. Alicro (2002) suggested that these numerous grammar schools should be put together at strategic centres for the purposes of efficiency, cost reduction and staff control. This

suggestion negates the policy of neighbourhood schools by the Federal Government of Nigeria in order to bring education to the doorstep of its citizens,

Indeed the only universal meeting points for the secondary schools in Nigeria are the National Policy on Education which remains a beautiful framework for operation and the West African Examinations Council Examination taken at the end of the programme annually to evaluate the students. Between these two points there are no universally or nationally agreed structural policies affecting the systems and whatever happens at the implementation stage is a responsibility of the state government who implement their policies and programmes. This is quite unfortunate for the secondary education in Nigeria, which is a major link to the tertiary education and an indispensable stakeholder in manpower production in the country. Obanya (2002) contended that secondary education is the backbone of education in Nigeria.

The lip service being paid to secondary education will tantamount to producing low quality material for the labour market and tertiary institutions, These processes lead to half-baked production of students for the tertiary institutions, contributed greatly to crime wave in the country; ranging from cultism, armed robbery, examination malpractices to prostitution, etc. Ajai (2003) said that crime wave in the Nigerian

Universities is mainly due to poor admission policies and certificate racketeering. This incident will surely create a very negative impact in the entire economy of Nigeria. The epileptic payment of salaries and allowances of staff members of the secondary schools as well as maltreatment of the retired teachers is responsible for the laissez faire attitude of teachers leading to truancy, strike and non-commitment in the job or total abandonment. Igwe (1990), Uwazurike (1991), Mkpa (1991), Nwagbo and Nosiri (1997), observed that it was poor treatment of the teachers that made the teaching profession uninteresting. Bad treatment of teachers is responsible for double standards of teaching job across the nation.

The products of the secondary schools under this dispensation cannot be anything other than the half-baked products with very difficult multi-lateral problems to themselves and the society as a whole.

Achievements of Secondary Education in Nigeria

Secondary education in Nigeria provides the beneficiaries both with literary and basic skills, which the individual can use for himself or in the industries and government establishments while performing a task for living. Taiwo (1986) observed that most workers of pre-independent Nigeria were products of the voluntary agency grammar schools. The Federal Government of Nigeria recognized the importance of the secondary school as an institution that provided the bulk of its workers and introduced the basic technological skills within the first three years. This led to the establishment of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. Obanya (2000), Tabotndip (2000), Gidado (2001) said that the Universal Basic Education stretches up to the secondary school in order to add functional technological skills to literary skills being offered the students.

The secondary education level in Nigeria is the foundation for higher manpower skills being offered in the tertiary institutions. It provides the source of fueling and re-fueling the tertiary institutions and other stakeholders in secondary education. Consequently, the country depends on the viability of the secondary schools in the country. Mkpa (1991) noted that proper handling of the secondary students will yield good results at the university in terms of character and learning.

After the secondary education, the individual develops a deeper awareness, understanding and control of one's self. This development will help him or her to fit into his society with a sense of belonging. Campbell, Corbally, Ramseyer (1988) observed that the secondary school brings to bear on the children self awareness and the urge to perform better for greatness. The implication of the above is that when the citizenry seek for individual greatness this could affect the nation as a whole.

The products of secondary schools who decide to go in individual business outfits will make valuable contribution to the national income. They will also improve upon their own standard of living for the better. Mafe (2000) found that the advancement of a nation depended on the efforts of the nationals of that nation. Those who engage in individual business outfits will help to create employment, thereby fighting the unemployment problems of the country. By this measure, such persons will be reducing poverty among others in the country thereby supporting the Poverty Alleviation Programme mounted by the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Graduates of secondary education who are interested in politics will understudy the Nigerian constitution and other relevant literature to know what they need. This will help them to refrain from being used as thugs by politicians who later drop them to fate. It implies that such graduates cannot decipher their left from their right as it concerns political matters and hence create peace, which is very necessary for governance and the government. Maduekwe (2002) said that what Nigeria needs is to grow its young democracy in peace, wisdom and sincerity of purpose that comes from within all Nigerians. In fact, peace, wisdom and sincerity of purpose can only come through experience and learning as offered in our secondary school system.

People after developing a wider horizon from their studies at the secondary school level will tolerate others view points, culture and in fact accommodate each other easily. This could help reduce the religious intolerance that has time without number disturbed the economic, social and political activities in many places in Nigeria. Mbang (2002) suggested that it is only education for all that can gradually erase religious fanaticism and intolerance that create fear among Nigerians. Instead of people taking the law into their hands, it will be a matter of seeking redress in law courts for the purpose of establishing their cases. This understanding will create peace and stability making room for growth and development of the nation.

Secondary education is an essential ingredient towards nation building. There is the need for the products of secondary education to be effectively and efficiently treated to achieve the noble objectives of

their founding fathers.

Recommendations

1. The Federal Government of Nigeria should constitute a commission *to take care of secondary education* in the country just like those for the primary and the tertiary institutions.
2. The affairs of secondary education should be removed from the various states as the sole administration.
3. The Federal Government of Nigeria should inject high level motivation among the workers at the secondary education level.
4. The Federal Government should also provide materials and equipment to facilitate the job of those engaged in *educating the adolescents of this nation*.

Conclusion

Secondary education is an essential level of education that acts not only as a bridge between the primary and the tertiary levels of education but also as a backbone of the country's work force.

It is therefore necessary to establish a body that will be responsible for its effective implementation process to achieving the desired objectives. Anything short of this will cause the secondary education system to continuously produce half-baked products that will compound Nigeria's economic, social and political problems.

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