

# THE CHALLENGES OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

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## **Abstract**

*Nigerian educational system has undergone various stages of development with great impact on the Nigerian society. The secondary education which is acquired after primary education and before the tertiary stage is faced with numerous obstacles in Nigeria. This calls for urgent attention to redeem it from total collapse. This paper identifies the aims and objectives of secondary education in Nigeria and examines the challenges faced by secondary education in Nigeria. The paper concludes that secondary education is decrepit and unless urgent attention is given to the sector by the government and the private sector, the system is most likely to collapse. Suggestions are made for a way forward to include increased budgetary allocation of funds to the education sector.*

Secondary education is education children receive after primary education and before the tertiary stage (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN] p18). Secondary education in Nigeria started in the year 1859 when the CMS Grammar School Lagos was opened. This was followed by Methodist High School Lagos. It is interesting to note that the first Government Secondary school, Kings College Lagos was established in 1927.(NTI as cited by Nyamibo, 2006). Today there are many schools found by private, community, faith based institutions and the government at various levels. The management of these schools has been in the hands of the government and these private individuals and groups. These schools have contributed in no small measure to the educational development in Nigeria and manpower needs of the nation. Of course secondary schools serve as the recruitment grounds for the tertiary institutions in the country. In the contemporary Nigeria, it appears they are producing more than the tertiary institutions can absorb.

The place of secondary school education in the country's educational system is of paramount importance. However, it appears that secondary schools are not living up to expectation in discharging their obligations. Omoregie (2005) lamented that the products of today's secondary system can either usefully live in the society or move into higher institution without their parents' aid or forgery. They cannot in fact think for

### *Pristine*

themselves or respect the views and feelings of others. In other words, they have no iota of dignity of labour except for the things that will give them quick money. It must be stressed here that education cannot be an instrument par excellence for achieving national development where secondary education is not effectively managed to accomplish its aims and objectives. According to Ajayi (2002) and Omoregi (2005) secondary education in Nigeria is riddled with crises of various dimensions and magnitude all of which combine to suggest that the system is at the cross road. It is against this background that this paper examines the concept, aims and objectives of secondary education with the challenges facing it in the country.

The secondary education which is acquired after primary education and before the tertiary stage

### **Aims of Secondary Education in Nigeria**

The Federal Government of Nigeria has clearly spelt the aims and objectives of secondary education in the country to include preparation for:

- (a) Useful living within the society; and
- (b) Higher education

### **In Specific Terms Secondary Education Shall**

- (a) Provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background.
- (b) Offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles,
- (c) Provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades,
- (d) Develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage,
- (e) Inspire students with a desire for self improvement and achievement of excellence,
- (f) Foster national unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity,
- (g) Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feeling of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens;
- (h) Provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development (FRN p.18-19).

The above stated aims and objectives of secondary education give a sense of direction as to what secondary education should be in Nigeria. There is no doubt that these objectives are likely achieved. For instance secondary schools have remained the recruitment grounds for tertiary institutions in Nigeria while absorbing the end products of the primary education. What is alarming is the rate and quality of the products produced nowadays when compared and contrasted with the yesteryears. It appears

*S. T. Mbayuav*

secondary schools do not meet up with the societal demand in terms of quality. It appears that secondary education is bedeviled by a lot of challenges that are pulling down the system at a faster rate.

### **Challenges That Have Been Facing Secondary Education in Nigeria**

It is interesting to note that both primary and secondary schools had undergone series of transformations or changes partly due to changes in leadership in the country. There is no denying the fact that education in Nigeria has passed through varying degrees of problems in the process of planning and implementation. In some cases these problems defy solution, for instance explosive demand for education and the apparent lack of preparation and plan to cope with the situation have combined to aggravate the problems associated with the process of education in the country.

**Poor Primary Education** Primary education is the recruitment ground for secondary education. If this section of education is weak it will affect the secondary education in the country. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) was launched in 1976 to boost primary education in Nigeria. This was a good scheme but did not last due to premature way it was launched. There is no doubt that the UPE programme, had it been that it was properly given some time and adequate preparation for the implementation, it would have been one of the best programmes that Nigeria education ever had. And now the Universal Basic Education [UBE] has been introduced, the society is yet to see its success or failure. Consequently, the products of primary education could not prepare adequate grounds for quality production of secondary education products.

### **Unnecessary Changes in School Curriculum**

Another problem is that of frequent changes in school curriculum. Both primary and secondary education suffered unnecessary changes in curriculum, the reason being that every in-coming administration would like to effect a change whether positive or negative. The moment there is a change in primary school curriculum it will definitely affect the secondary education. To buttress this point further, it is important to examine the structural flowchart of the National Policy on Education (NPE). The structure or flow chart of NPE does not help matters much. If there is any thing worth while, the structure did not minimize the problem the education sector is now experiencing. For instance education in Nigeria is heavily geared towards the acquisition of certificates and nothing more than that. A Close look at the flow-chart of the NPE shows that the beginning of the entire major segments of education invariably terminate at the university level. For example the base line of our education is the new 3-3-secondary school system.

There are at least five possible routes that can be followed after the three years of junior or three-year senior secondary school to get university education.

### **Other Possible Routes to University**

- i. Route 1 through NCE for a 3-year or 2-year degree programme
- ii. Route 2 through the senior School certificate (SSCE)4-year degree programme

### *Pristine*

- iii. Route 3 through remedial Including schools of Basic Studies 3 or 4-year degree course
- iv. Route 4 through HND for a 3 or 4-year degree programme
- v. Route 5 through OND a 4-year degree course

**Source:** Adamu 2002: 9

In summary, the aspiration of the products of each level of education ladder is to finish up at the university. This does not augur well for the future of Nigeria education and for that reason; something needs to be done to arrest the situation before it goes out of hand. Using internal criteria for measuring the quality of Nigerian education, it is hoped that enough statistics can be collated to show that the country is not doing too badly in school certificate, teacher education, technical education and other examinations.

Moreno (2006) states that educational reform all over the world is increasingly in curriculum based, as mounting pressures and demands for change tend to target and focus on both the structure and the content of school curricula. Arising from the revolution in objectives, some radical changes were made in content. At primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, the contents of subjects studied were reviewed so that they would gear towards achieving the set objectives. The provision for a core curriculum is also a significant change. The aims of these changes are to guarantee an all round education for the learners and to bring some degree of diversity into the curriculum level, ten subjects are to be taken. Two of these ten subjects, agriculture and home economics are to be deferred to later years of primary school. At the junior secondary school level, a student is required to take eleven subjects, nine of which shall be common to all core subjects. A major innovation here is the requirement for technical and vocational subjects tagged as pre-vocational subjects. In all, a student may take a minimum of eleven subjects and a maximum of thirteen subjects. The electives are in three groups. Every student is expected to take all seven core subjects, a minimum of one and a maximum of three from the list of elective subjects offered at the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) In addition, a range of new courses and programmes have been introduced that are relevant to today's needs and problems such as the issues of HIV/AIDS, moral philosophy, gender and given a core status in their relevant levels of education.

**Examination Malpractice.** Closely related to the above is the issue of examination malpractice. Admittedly we have had to contend with examination malpractices at all levels of examinations and these have almost called to question our integrity and the worthiness of some of our certificates and diplomas inclusive. No wonder then that the examination malpractice has come to stay in Nigeria permanently. Adamu (2002: 9) commented on the level of educational standard in Nigeria and has this to say:

## **S. T. Mbayuav**

Nigeria has however reached an educational cross road bedeviled with one crises or the other that demands a change in direction, a change in our understanding and acceptance of what educational standards and quality are. If educational standards are to be meaningful and to serve a useful purpose, they must be judged by the extent to which they fit the real needs and values of our country, it must be viewed in relation to particular purpose, place and time.

Many products of secondary schools with good grades in certificate examinations cannot defend these grades when the need arises. This has effects on the tertiary institutions in the country in the society in general.

### **Education and Politics**

Education in Nigeria has been severally politicized to the extent that both the state and federal governments have committed themselves for political reasons to establishing schools, colleges and universities beyond what the country can reasonably sustain compared with the school increasing figures of about 30 years ago.

However, despite the remarkable rise in enrolments in primary schools, colleges and universities, the rise does not seem to be keeping pace with the ever growing social demand for education. The gap between the desire for education and the available spaces in the educational system that has widened at all levels; primary school enrolment is less than 50 percent of the total population of eligible school age children. The secondary school system is hardly able to absorb more than 25 percent of those eligible and qualified to enter the next level of educational ladder. For instance, the application received sometimes in 1983/84 by JAMB for admission exercise shows that over 1,911,583 candidates applied for places in the universities while 201,140 applied in 1984/85 session. The figures as stated here under are for both direct entry and joint matriculation examination applications. For at least two years, applications from six states selected from the list in 1984 show the figures as follows:

Imo state - 32,243 (1.5%)

Edo (Bendel) State - 29,800 (14.8%)

Anambra state - 26,729 (13.3%)

Oyo state - 25,789 (12.8%)

Ogun state - 16,628 (8.3%)

Ondo state - 16,500 (8.2%)

**Source:** JAMB unpublished statistical report 1984.

In all, about 75 percent of the total applications for admission came from only six states of the federation. The increase in the demand for education can be easily related to the causes listed above. The projected enrolment in Nigeria's three major educational ladder is given as 13.6 million for primary schools, 2.24million for junior secondary schools and 130,000 for universities what has become apparent is that both the state and federal governments appeared to have been taken by surprise by the explosion in demand(Baikie,2002,4).

## *Pristine*

The crisis in which education sector now finds itself is always traced to the colonial influence. The education introduced by colonial masters was meant to train those who would serve the system and acquire its values. Apparently, development of education in Nigeria was not rooted in any philosophy. If there were any at all, there were not designed to meet Nigerian needs but rather to meet the needs and aspirations or the wishes of the people based far away in Britain.

Besides, the educational scene in Nigeria today faced with many crises which are the products of many factors which include:

**Inadequate Facilities** School facilities are the material resources that facilitate effective teaching and learning in schools. Jaiyeoba and Atanda (2005) posited that educational facilities are those things which enable a skilled teacher to achieve a reasonable level of instructional effectiveness that far exceeds what is possible when they are not provided. The state of infrastructural decay in many secondary schools in Nigeria is a manifestation of poor funding of the system. Ahmed (2003) revealed that in most of the country's secondary schools, teaching and learning take place under unconducive environment, lacking the basic materials and thus hinder the fulfillment of educational objective

**Staff Low Morale** Teachers are the centre piece of any educational system; no education can rise above the quality of its teachers. Teachers whose morale are low are not likely to perform as expected in the school system According to Agayi and Oguntoye (2003). The numerous problems permeating the entire educational system in Nigeria such as cultism, examination malpractice drug abuse, indiscipline, persistent poor academic performance of students in public examinations and many more seem to suggest that teachers have not been performing their job as expected. Fadipe (2003) commented that teachers, apart from students are the largest most crucial inputs of an educational system. They influence to a great extent the quality of the educational output. Teachers' irregular promotions, low pay package, societal perception of the job and many more have dampened the morale of teachers. When teachers are not motivated, their level of job commitment may be low and the objectives of the school may not be accomplished.

### **Poor Supervision of Schools**

Effective instructional delivery and maintenance of standards in the school system are enhanced through regular internal and external supervision. Ayodele (2002) argued that secondary schools are presently supervised by two categories of people namely (i) internal supervision within the school, supervisors as principals, vice principals and the heads of department. (ii) External supervisors outside the school such as, supervisors who are formally designated officials from the inspectorate division of the ministry of education and the area or zonal education offices. The primary responsibility of inspectors is to see that high standards are maintained and that schools are run in accordance with the laid down regulations while it has been argued that the principals

*S. T. Mbayuav*

have been discharging their duties as internal supervisors, the external supervisors from the ministry of education appear none functional as they seldom visit schools to monitor the operation in these schools. This has invariably hindered effective teaching-learning in schools generally.

### **Poor Funding**

The gross under funding of the educational sector in the country in general and the neglect of the maintenance of the physical facilities; Instructional and living conditions have deteriorated in many of these schools; classrooms blocks, libraries and laboratories are nothing to write home about, all leading to decline in academic standards. Attention must be focused on these areas too if these educational institutions are to get out of the woods and this is only possible through adequate funding. Since 1986 when the federal military government introduced the structural adjustment programme (SAP), allocation of financial resources started to fall coupled with the consistent decline in the value of local currency till date, which have also consistently affected the procurement of imported technical and scientific equipment like books, journals and other instructional needs in the educational system.

The Educational system in Nigeria today needs a total overhauling and restructuring, this reform is required to improve the performance of higher education in the country. The emphasis should be more heavily on technical and scientific knowledge so that the nation entered the 21<sup>st</sup> Century would be prepared to cope or compete in the global economy.

It is however, pertinent for the government of the day to design suitable guidelines for the funding of education. For instance, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has recommended that 26 percent of the total budget of a nation should be allocated to education. But Longe commission of 1991 observed that the percentage of recurrent budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria has never exceeded 10 percent. Though the system is expensive to keep afloat, quality however in any form is partly a function of the total budget of a nation total fund made available to the system and judiciously utilized for the purpose to which it is meant for, funds are required and are necessary to maintain both the human and material resources of the system in order to achieve desired goals. In addition, there is the need for an effective monitoring of the management of the fund presently being allocated to the sector as effort should be intensified to improve on what is currently being allocated to the system.

### **Conclusion**

The products of secondary schools today are of poor quality. They do not meet up the with demand of the society. The poor quality however, has been linked with the numerous problems bedeviling the system such as inadequate funding, lack of physical facilities, low morale of staff, poor supervision of schools and frequent changes in

## *Pristine*

government policies on education. This calls for urgent attention by the government and the private sector.

## **The Way Forward**

Based on the issues examined above, it is suggested that:

- ▶ Government should increase budgetary allocation of funds to the education sector. this will enhance sponsorship of seminars, conferences and provision of basic facilities in secondary schools
- ▶ \primary education which serves as a recruitment ground for secondary schools should be given proper funding, supervision and regular recruitment of teachers to enhance quality products. This is so because the quality of the primary education products have direct consequences on the quality produced by secondary education
- ▶ Government should refrain from frequent change of educational policies that are ambiguous with marked difference from the existing ones that may leave the school principals confused in the process of implementation
- ▶ The government should make teaching a very attractive profession by promptly paying her teachers salaries and other benefits. This will curtail frequent industrial actions often embarked upon by teachers.

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**S. T. Mbayuav**

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