CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF NOMADIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Nations across the globe are painstakingly fighting hard to educate their citizens. This is because education presents the best opportunity for the development and prosperity of any nation on earth. To this end, this research work sets out to critically analyze nomadic education in Nigeria. Analyzing the data collected from secondary sources, the work discovers that poor funding, corruption, unsuitable curricula, sectarian and cultural issues among others, some of the challenges confronting nomadic education in Nigeria. The work notes however that the prospects of nomadic education in Nigeria overwhelm the challenges. The research recommends among others, that policy making on nomadic education should be bottom to top not top to bottom as has always been the case.

It is an existential truism that education serves as the spring board for social and economic change. No wonder Wennergren, A ntholt and Whitaker (1984) affirmed that “all who have mediated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of an empire depends on the education of the youth”. To remove the chronic illiteracy among the mobile population of Nigeria, the government introduces the nomadic education program. The programme has three broad goals; to raise the living standard of the rural community; to harness the potentials of the Fulani; and to bridge the literacy gap between the Fulani and the rest of the society.

Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights. As an empowering right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities. According to (UNESCO, 2003), education has a vital role in empowering women, street working children from exploitative and hazardous labour and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment, and controlling population growth.
Clearly, achieving the right to education for all is one of the biggest challenges of our times. Educating Nigeria’s nomadic population via distance education (and using mobile learning methods), can be viewed as a positive step towards effective implementation of the provision of Nigeria’s National Policy on Education (NPE) on equal access and brighter opportunities for all its citizens regardless of where they live.

We shall therefore execute this work in phases beginning with nomadic education in Nigeria followed by approaches to nomadic education, benefits of nomadic education, challenges and prospects of nomadic education in Nigeria. We shall then draw a conclusion and make some recommendations.

**Nomadic Education in Nigeria**

According to Akinpelu (1993), the contemporary definition of ‘nomadic’ refers to any type of existence characterized by the absence of a fixed domicile. He identifies three categories of nomadic groups as; hunters/food gatherers, itinerant fishermen, and pastoralists (a.k.a, herdsmen). In Nigeria, there are six nomadic groups as identified by Akinpelu (1993), which are;

1. the Fulani
2. The Shuwa
3. The Buduman
4. The Kwayan
5. The Badawi
6. The Fishermen

The last group, ‘The fishermen’, is concentrated in Rivers, Ondo, Edo, Delta, Cross River, and Akwa-Ibom States. The first five nomadic groups listed are considered pastoralist nomads. Delivering educational services to the children of all nomadic groups has tended to follow the lines of the formal school system. Special attention was paid to these groups by the Nigerian government when it set-up the National Commission for Nomadic Education by Decree 41 of 12 December 1989.

Of the estimated 9.3 million people that currently comprise Nigeria’s nomadic groups, approximately one third, that is 3.1 million are of school and pre-school age.

The pastoral nomads are more highly disadvantaged than the migrant fishermen, in terms of access to education primarily because they are more itinerant. As a result, the literacy rate of pastoral nomads is only 0.28 percent, while that of the migrant fishermen is about 20 percent.

The basic responsibility of the commission for Nomadic Education among others is to provide primary education to the children of pastoralist nomads- a responsibility shared with the states and local governments. To provide education to its nomads, a multifaceted strategy has been adopted by the commission, which includes on-site schools, the “shift system”, schools with alternative intake, and Islamiyya (Islamic) schools. The current mobile school system in the strictest sense remains sparingly
used, primarily due to the enormity of problems associated with this model.

No doubt, nomadic education in Nigeria draws its strength from section 10 subsection 94(ii) of the National Policy on Education (2004). This section states that “the children of nomadic pastoralists, migrant fisher folks, migrant farmers, hunters etc who, due to their lifestyles and means of livelihood, are unable to have access to the conventional educational provision and therefore require special education to cater for their particular /peculiar needs and circumstances”. We shall now look at some of the approaches used in actualizing this section 10 subsection 94 (ii).

Approaches to Nomadic Education in Nigeria

To improve the literacy rate of Nigeria’s nomads, the National Commission for Nomadic Education employed various approaches such as on – site schools, the ‘shift system’ schools with alternative intake, and Islamiyya (Islamic) schools to provide literacy education to the nomads. It is interesting to note that, the Nigerian government has set up different agencies to implement education for the nomads. These agencies include the federal ministry of Education, school Management Board, National Commission for Nomadic Education, Agency for mass Literacy and the scholarship Board. Together, all these agencies offer mobile school system wherein the schools and the teachers move with the Fulani children. The following are some of the approaches;

Radio and Television Education:- the pastoral Fulani as a captive audience for radio television programme have radios which they carry along during herding.

The literate world can, thus, reach itinerants Fulani without disrupting their nomadic life or livelihood. To improve literacy, especially in the rural areas, the Nigerian Government has introduced radio, television, and electric generators, and built viewing rooms for public use.

Although the Nigerian government has spent millions of naira to support its nomadic education programme, education attainment among the Fulani remains low and the quality of education among them is mediocre at best. The current form of nomadic education, therefore, has truly yet to lift the literacy and living standards of the Fulani people as children of farmers rather than Fulani’s constitute up to 80 percent of the pupils in nomadic schools. In Plateau state, for example, only six of 100 children in the Mozaropp nomadic school are Fulani (Iro, 2006).

Mobile Schools/Mobile Learning

The government is also using this approach in order to bring education to the door step of nomads in Nigeria. Mobile schools use collapsible classrooms that can be assembled or disassembled within minutes and carried conveniently by pack animals. While a whole classroom and its furniture can be hauled by only four pack animals, motor caravans are gradually replacing pack animals to move the classrooms. A typical mobile unit consists
of three classrooms, each with spaces equipped with audio-visual teaching aids to serve 15 to 20 children.

Mobile learning is the use of any mobile or wireless device for learning on the move. It is any service or facility that supplies a learner with general electronic information and educational content that aids their acquisition of knowledge, regardless of location and time (Lehner and Nosekabel 2002). Kinshuk (2003) cited in Sharples (2002) suggests that there are three ways in which learning can be considered mobile; (i) Learning is mobile in terms of space; (ii) In different areas of life; and (3) with respect to time. These definitions, according to Kinshuk (2003) suggest that mobile learning systems should be capable of delivering educational content to learners anytime and anywhere they need it.

Mobile learning, as a novel educational approach, encourages flexibility; students do not need to be a specific age, gender, or member of a specific group or geography to participate in learning opportunities as restriction of time, space and place have been lifted.

Educating Nigeria’s nomadic population via distance education and using mobile learning methods, can be viewed as a positive step towards effective implementation of the provision of Nigeria’s National Policy on Education (NPE) on equal access and brighter opportunities for all its citizens regardless of where they live.

In recent years, there has been a steady growth in Nigeria’s mobile telephone infrastructure and a concomitant acquisition and hence, use of mobile telephones amongst Nigerians. Increasing rates of accessibility through Nigeria is encouraging more and more people to have access to, or purchase, a mobile phone. Service providers in Nigeria are also on the increase to meet this growing demand, and over time interconnectivity is projected to be both easier and more affordable, especially for Nigeria’s nomadic population.

On the strength of the above, there are many benefits that Nigeria’s nomadic population can draw upon when mobile learning would have been properly integrated into Nigeria’s current nomadic education programme. Such projected benefits are:

1. Mobile learning will afford Nigeria’s nomadic people the opportunity to acquire literacy skills with little disruption to their nomadic lifestyles and livelihood.

2. The establishment of nomadic schools, in fixed locations, appears to be a misguided educational policy. Indeed, the inherent nature of Nigeria’s nomads as groups of wandering people was not taken into consideration during the formulation of this policy. Therefore, one viable option available for these wandering people is to learn through a mobile learning system.
3. One major problem usually faced by Nigeria’s nomads in their wandering activities, is that they lack “interactional and transactional” skills with the people they come across during their travels. The acquisition of literacy skills through the mobile learning system will, to a large extent, equip them with valuable interactional and transactional skills needed to enhance their relationships with the people they meet.

4. Lastly, the modern world is knocking on their doors; nomads need to develop a sense of belonging to the larger, modern world wherein learning is a key commodity for survival.

**How Mobile Learning can be Used as a Distance Learning Approach in Nomadic Education**

Many scholars have wondered how mobile learning can be used to educate nomads who are always on the move in the remotes part of Nigeria. That genuine worry has however been tackled. In a recent mobile Telecommunication Nigeria (MTN) advertisement, a Fulani pastoralist is depicted making a call and telling other Fulani friends that MTN network was now available, even in the remotest regions. This advertisement portrays the fact that pastoralists- like other Nigerians- can also use mobile telephones wherever and for whatever reason. According to Ojokheta and Olojede (2007), the processes of using mobile phones for educational purposes can be illustrated as;

1. Mobile schools that can be dismantled and quickly moved have proven their worth and appear to fit with Nigeria’s nomadic peoples’ peripatetic culture, lifestyle and livelihood.

2. The National Commission for Nomadic Education can enter into contractual agreement with the network providers to procure relatively inexpensive mobile phones, which can then be distributed to the nomads in their schools.

3. Designated learning centers can be established at strategic locations along the nomads traveling routes, providing a place where a facilitator can attend to the needs of the nomads. Other materials such as learning manuals and programme syllabi, can also be distributed from these strategic locations.

4. Facilitators, via a simple call using their mobile telephones can call the nomads to track their students’ progress in their studies, and to determine and address any problems that any learner whether they are stationary or mobile-typically face in mastering the course materials and learning objectives. Similarly, the Nomadic learners can also be regularly encouraged to call the course facilitator on their mobile phones, should they encounter any problems or require clarification or
help. Facilitators are also encouraged to call and network with their fellow facilitators. Use of mobile phone in one’s native language, helps to establish a cordial and hence, sustainable learning atmosphere based on trust and collegiality.

**Challenges of Nomadic Education in Nigeria**

Nomadic Education in Nigeria is affected by defective policy, inadequate finance, faulty school placement, incessant migration of students, unreliable and obsolete data, and cultural and religious taboos. While some of these problems are solved by policy and infrastructure interventions, most of the problems are complex and difficult to solve. The persistence of these problems is causing the roaming Fulani to remain educationally backward. Other challenges are:

1. A top-to-bottom planning of nomadic education programme, where the Fulani are the recipients rather than the planners of their education, dominates the nomadic education policies. For instance, during the first national workshop on nomadic education, only a few Fulani were invited to attend. Ironically, it was at that workshop that far-reaching decisions that will affect the lives of the Fulani were taken.

2. It has been established that, because of the non-participation of the Fulani in decision making, a simplistic approach to educational planning is adopted. Advice on nomadic education is sometimes emotional, factless, and ill-intentioned. Planners fail to take account of the government’s inability to provide specialized services. For example, just to impress the public, the government has rushed into policy pronouncements for mobile school system without considering the difficulties in getting teachers, monitoring students, and developing suitable curricula.

3. The nomadic education curricula are unsuitable, if not an impediment to learning. For example, the use of English for instruction at the elementary school level is inappropriate. Learning in the English language is difficult for the Fulani children who are yet to master their own language. The problem is that due to cost the government cannot develop Fulfulde language to replace English as a medium of instruction in schools.

4. Instead of teaching pastoral procedures, formal schools spend too much time on teaching history and cultures of societies the pastoralists least know or want to know about. Conventional education ignores the desirability of the apprenticeship model, thereby closing a vital channel of skill transfer (Aleyidiewo 1985).

5. The shortage of funds limits government efforts to provide formal education in Nigeria. The under –
funding of nomadic education is partly blamed on inaccurate demographic data. The lack of reliable statistics on the nomads leads to planning based on guessing.

6. Nomadic schools are stationed inappropriately, few in densely populated areas, and may in sparsely populated areas. On the one hand, having many schools in the pastoral areas attracts non-Fulani children and accentuates competition for other resources. On the other hand, having few schools discourages the Fulani from participating in education.

7. The mismanagement of money by officials of national commission for nomadic education (NCNE) and the ministries of education in purchases, contract awards and payments of teachers has also hampered the progress of the nomadic educational programme.

8. The progress of the mobile schools has been curtailed by the shortage of roads and Lorries in the rural areas.

9. Lack of money has also forced government to rely on volunteers or unqualified teachers. The poor salaries paid to nomadic education teachers cannot attract a caliber of staff with the commitment to educational enrichment of the Fulani.

10. The uncertainties of the movement of the Fulani make educational planning and student monitoring difficult. Unscheduled out-migration due to environmental failures or conflicts between the farmers and the pastoral Fulani disrupts schools operations and classroom composition.

11. Nomadic educational program is constrained by sectarian and cultural issues. The predominantly Muslim Fulani reject the nomadic schools, fearing that their children will become Christianized. On this assertion Fafunwa (1974) agrees with the Fulani and states that “since the missionary schools were established primarily to convert children and young adults to the Christian faith, the Muslims in the north and south saw this as a definite threat to their own faith”.

12. Nigeria’s nomads may not wish or be willing to embrace mobile learning. On this note Rogers, (1995) avers that, indeed, it is a well known fact that innovations like mobile phones and mobile learning, typically take time to take root and take hold to eventually become more widely accepted.

13. The sheer cost of procuring enough mobile phones of distribution among Nigeria’s nomads and literacy facilitators may be seen by some as too costly an endeavour to undertake.

14. Effective monitoring and evaluation of mobile learning in Nigeria, remains
a big challenge. Without effective monitoring and evaluation, effective implementation of this new learning mode might not be realized.

**Prospects of Nomadic Education in Nigeria**

In spite of the challenges outlined above, there are good signs that pastoralists are gradually embracing education and improving their literacy. Many pastoralists today, are interested in formal education. Some Nigerian newspapers are reporting a growing interest in schools among the Fulani, as indicated by an increase in the demand for such schools. In some places, the Fulani, have even built their own schools through community effort and have asked the government to send teachers and teaching materials.

Again, the Fulani have realized that the herding sector cannot absorb all the children, and that not every child who would like to stay in herding will have the chance to do so. Considering the bleak future of nomadic pastoralism, many Fulani are looking for an alternative to herding and school seems a good option. The Fulani have also understood that part of their problems stem from the lack of educational men and women. And according to Wright (1988), “the absence of these men and women in governance and policy making has put the Fulani at the mercy of their more educated counterparts in the society.

The pastoralists now believe that sending their children to school is the key to active participation in governance and the best way to fight for the rights denied them for so long.

**Conclusion**

Any nation that neglects the education of her people, presents a doomed future for such people. As we know, education plays a pivotal role in the socio-economic development of every society including the Nigerian society. It is in realization of the centrality of education in human existence that the Nigerian government has continued to do all it can to educate the nomads in Nigeria by way of establishing nomadic schools.

These efforts of bringing education to the door steps of every Nigerian, especially the nomads have met with a mountain of challenges which include but not restricted to poor funding, corruption, sectarian and cultural issues, unsuitable curricula etc. Overwhelming, as these challenges might be, the prospects of nomadic education flourishing in Nigeria are even more overwhelming.

**Recommendations**

In order that nomadic education will stand the test of time in Nigeria, the following recommendations should be considered;

1. Non-governmental and community based organizations should be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the nomadic mobile learning programme
2. Policy making on nomadic education should be bottom to top not top to bottom as is always the case. When
the nomads propose these policies themselves, such policies when implemented would stand the test of time.

3. Adequate funding should be pumped into nomadic education and adequate mechanisms should be put in place to check mismanagement of such funds.

4. Mobile learning should be encouraged by government. This should be done through effective monitoring and evaluation of mobile learning in nomadic education programme in Nigeria.

5. Adequate enlightenment programmes should be intensified. This should be done so as to allay the fear of the nomads that their children will be Christianized.

References


