REFOCUISING THE TERTIARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF THE ACADEMIC LIBRARIAN

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Abstract

This paper examines refocusing education system in Nigeria. This has grown over the years from the colonial era to date, enhanced by spates of educational policies. The Ashby Commission Report of 1959, an educational policy was to project and chart the course of the development tertiary education in Nigeria. The status of Nigerian education system - primary, secondary and tertiary levels - did not make much impact on the development of the society in its entirety. Other directions were sought to attain the desired goals of this level of education by striking a comfortable compromise between two conflicting variables. These are spurious versus Authentic Data; Quantity versus Quality; Theoretical versus Practical Education; Restricted versus Liberalized, Access and Inadequate versus Adequate Funding. The role of the Academic Librarian in refocusing tertiary education is to educate the student on the essence of real value of life. This is through provision of information materials to inform the students on positive development of life and self.

Introduction

Educational activities in Nigeria are as old as the name implies. It has grown over the years from the inception of Nigeria in amalgamation year of 1914. The indices of industrialization and technological development in Nigeria augurs same for the educational structure. These years of educational development have shown spates of worthwhile intellectual input towards attaining the goal of qualitative and functional education for this country. The education system though evolved on the premise of colonialism commenced from the first level of education i.e. primary school. The Ashby Commission Report of 1959 provided for the development of post-secondary and higher (tertiary) education (Nwuzor, 1998). The path of functional education system has to be charted in order to, if need be, facilitate the attainments of the desired goals. This need for an acceptable education systems from our chequered polity based on multiple ethnic differences.

This research will examine this vexed issue of a rational focus for Nigeria’s education system in our contemporary political dispensation. This is by responding to three vital questions.

1. What is the status of the Nigerian education system in terms of structure and functionality
2. In what ways should the present democratic milieu with its apparent socio-economic concomitants influence developments in the educational system? Or
   Put differently along what direction should we be moving in order to respond to the present democratic imperatives?
3. What are the problems and prospects of attaining the desired educational goal in the political dispensation? (Mkpa, 2003).

The Status of the Nigerian Educational System

The concept of an educational system traverses the entire levels of any nation’s education - pre-primary, primary, secondary, and higher education, lots of efforts were set up at intermittent period in Nigeria via various commissions to institutionalize this concept. These were the 1916 education ordinance, which became necessary by two major developments. These were the 1914 amalgamation of Northern and Southern Protectorates. The other was the Lord Lugard educational policy (Nwuzor, 1998). The salient features includes “increased government’s financial participation in education,” also for the government’s “open schools, supervision of all schools....” This between the colonial government and missions “in management of education ... and a measure of government control over great development in Western-type education in Nigeria.

The Phelps-Stoke Commission in a form of educational policy evolution in Nigeria were to lead to Asquith and Elliot Commission for higher education in 1943. The 1948 Education Ordinance, subsequently, was a significant landmark in educational development in Nigeria. This brought about
establishment of the then University College, Ibadan, the Ashby Commission Report of 1959 guided in the development of post-secondary and higher education. The details of the structure of the current educational 6-3-3-4 system are properly articulated in the National Policy on Education in its two previous editions (FRN, 1981, 1998).

Examining our educational system from primary level it is a common practice to compare the quality of the present primary education, with what it was policy years. The verdict of many educational evaluations gave rise to the cliche “falling or fallen standard of education.”

In the present day primary school pupils in a typical Nigerian public school, there is not much achievement in terms of level of performance that his or her counterparts could demonstrate in the written English language, today's pupils are disturbingly poorer in psychomotor, any craft or technology skills. The poser is, how can they when cash has popularly become a lucrative substitute for these skills.

The poor performance of our primary school pupils was empirically recorded by the report of the research conducted jointly by the Federal Ministry of Education, UNESCO and UNICEF (Falayajo et al, 1997). In the study, Nigerian primary 4 pupils performed generally below the expected mean score. In mathematics or numeracy, the national mean score was 32.2%. In life skills, a combination of several subjects taught at primary school level, the national mean score was 36.86%. It was worst off as recorded in literacy where the national mean score was as low as 25.2%. Comparatively, the private schools (known to possess less qualified teachers) and public schools recorded mean scores of 43.08% and 30.13% respectively in numeracy, 48.4% and 34.76% respectively in life skills, and 40.8% and 15.3% respectively in literacy. For all the subjects, none of the mean scores was up to 50%.

In secondary school, the expected goals of that level of education was envisaged that school leavers should be sufficiently and more of the fact self-sustaining in absence of government employment. This is meant to reduce unemployment. The latter which is still biting hard on our youths, is not a strange phenomenon in the society.

The new curriculum on social studies, religious, and moral instruction were meant to cultivate a generation of well bred, disciplined and responsible Nigerians. Regarding the expected goal of youth discipline in Nigeria has been attained, youth indiscipline is still on the increase. They have become more vulnerable crime today than was the case before National policy was enunciated. They are closely associated with secret cults, rape, arson, looting, restiveness, etc.

The practical agriculture introduced into curriculum was to stimulate interest of Nigerian youths in Agriculture, thus redress the lopsided emphasis on petroleum products as the mainstay, of the nation’s economy. Two decades after the policy was put into effect, the agricultural sector is still in its comatose condition. The goal of popularizing agriculture is yet to be attained by the curriculum.

The Continuous Assessment (CA) mode of evaluation is sought to reduce the incidence of examination malpractice in our schools. This is for them to get used to examination and be less inclined to cheating. That is in what would have been a “one-shot” examination. Currently the examination malpractice is on the increase. The strategies for cheating are constantly being perfected for both internal and external examinations. In terms of curriculum relevance, utility, functionality, and primary goals of our curriculum reforms of the past, good and dependable educational system report is still a mirage.

Secondary school teachers are not better off. The poor performance of students in the sciences, specifically, mathematics, physics and chemistry, also in English language, implies that quality of teaching is very poor. This is partly blamed on dearth of instructional materials. Second!), on adequate motivation for teachers whose monthly salaries are irregular and other variables. Unequivocally students do not perform indicative of unsatisfactory teachers as professionals.

Tertiary institutions are expected to produce high-level manpower resources for engineering national development. The production of skilled manpower at this level is to move Nigeria into committee of technologically advanced nations. Fifty years after the first university was established in Nigeria, technologically we are still dependent on foreign experts and their expertise. This is with all the professors of engineering, many of whom made first class honours in engineering. Nigeria in a way drain foreign exchange earnings to pay foreigners to maintain and sustain our technological structures and productivity.
The Direction of the Tertiary Educational System

Given the status of the tertiary educational system, other directions need to be sought to succeed in attaining the goals of this level of education. This new direction should seek to strike a comfortable compromise between two conflicting variables in a number of areas. These conflicting variables include Spurious versus Authentic Data; Quantity versus Quality; Theoretical versus Practical Education; Restricted versus Liberalized Access; and Inadequate versus Adequate Funding.

(i) Spurious Versus Authentic Data

The requirement for qualitative education is the availability of a reliable and authentic statistical data for educational planning. Developing a functional educational infrastructure is an acceptable way of equity on knowledge distribution. This is attained by utilization of this requisite data. Equity is sabotaged when this is misleading. In this regard there is this over dependence on political zoning as a premise for infrastructural development in Nigeria including education.

In states there are dependence on polity input as passing bills into law to establish a university. This is one of the spurious attractions of modernity. An ego-boosting image for the state administrative machinery. Such reliable data as 50 acres needed for infrastructural development of the university, a standard University Library of minimum 100,000 volumes of information materials, at least 2 standard lecture theatres, basic science laboratories for science courses, a head and 3 fully employed and qualified staff for each of the departments, etc are not taken into consideration. At this situation there is no real line distinction between the state polity and an administrative need for the establishment of the tertiary institutions. The obvious proliferation of universities in our states implies that the products from these educational institutions are overly suspect.

(ii) Quantity Versus Quality

The phenomenal expansion of our educational institutions from primary level through tertiary level compels us to grapple with the problem of conflict between quantity and quality. Between 1970 and 1994, the number of universities rose from 6 in 1970 to 41 in 1994 (Ajaegbu, II.I., Matthew- Daniel, B.J. Uya, O.E, 2000). The obvious fact now is that the proliferation tendencies to establish more universities in the states are still there. Suffice to say that more education bills are awaiting to be passed into law.

Most Colleges of Education admit as many as 2,000 new intakes every session even unto last week before first semester examination. Distance learning programme has geometrically increased with most of these Colleges of Education. They are more of financial base for these institutions and their lecturers than quality education. Weak female or male students involved in "sorting out" with their lecturers and emerging in flying colours have perfected their strategies.

(iii) Theory Versus Practical Education

This trend has gained prominence in curriculum delivery programme christened "alternative to practical.” You cannot achieve high degree of professionalism in such fields as computer, engineering, electronics, industrial chemistry and the like without intensive focus on practical. Theory must not be divorced from practice. The laboratory facilities have no substitute and so must be provided for. The products of these tertiary institutions are the type of human resources for the nation’s development. What is tenable now in Nigerian contemporary circumstances are theoreticians that can postulate with every ease (Mkpa, 2003).

(iv) Restricted Versus Liberalized Access

In Nigeria, all that qualify are not really being educated. By traditional belief early marriage and women in ‘Purda’ are usually restricted from enjoying the full benefits of formal education in Northern Nigeria. This child dropout syndrome has remained a formidable problem. The ratio of the male students to female students has considerably increased to 1: 50 in Colleges of Education in Igbo speaking areas. This a restricted access as against conventional liberalized access.

(v) Inadequate Versus Adequate Funding

The problem of inadequate funding has remained a recurrent decimal in the political arithmetic of our nation. This has persistently frustrated the actualization of ideas as implied on most
of the policies enunciated in our country. It has led to irredeemable loss of precious time in the nation’s academic calendar. Inadequate funding of the educational sector has led to protracted periods of strike, which alternated in quick succession with briefer periods of academic work. All these to the detriment of the nation. Persuading government to make adequate budgeting allocation to the educational sector seems a desirous task. For it is in this act can qualitative education be guaranteed ensuring that whatever amount allocated to the education sector and to our tertiary institutions are judiciously utilized for productive ends (Mkpa, 2003).

The Role of the Academic Librarian

The Academic Librarians can assist enormously to aid on refocusing the degenerating values of our level of education. Mis academic training encompasses not only to procure the desired and requisite educational resources and informational materials, but also to educate the readers, encouraging them on how best to utilize these resources. This can be actualized regarding the Librarian’s financial relationship with the institution’s administrator. This concerned effort of the Librarian will redirect the degenerated value of readership in our educational institutions.

Basic Role

The Academic Librarian performs his role within the context of carrying out his duties and responsibilities in the library. These roles differ from each other in many aspects but they all have the same basic function, which is to aid the parent institution in carrying out its objectives (Onwuazo, 2000). The Academic Librarian ensures to the realization of these objectives. He subsequently supports the total programme by acquiring and making available the books, information materials and services which are needed by the students.

Other roles

Provision of Library Resources

Library resources are a variety of all published and unpublished information materials in various forms readable with naked eyes or readable with aid (projecting equipment). There is no doubt as to the educational value depending on the type of library system (Dike, 1995). Where the funds are available, the necessary and relevant materials are procured (Onwuazo, 1999). With these materials available, students are refocused with positive values of the degenerated society.

Use of Library Instruction

The professional Librarian (not classroom) gives instructions on the use of the library by planned/formal classes such as lectures, or equally periodical orientation on the library practices and services. Formal lectures embedded in the school are most ideal. This gives the librarian the opportunity to adequately inform the students on what the library is in essence with organized practical classes. In the process, the students are consciously and appropriately informed of the value of education by the Librarian. He uses the premise of instructing the students on the use of library to readdress them on societal anomalies. This is such that can negatively influence the positive values of their lives. This measure is to articulate the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains of the students. On this, the students will have their educational and societal perception redirected.

Exchange of Library Materials

Lack of funds has considerably affected acquisition of library materials in Nigeria. Most Librarians that found themselves in this quagmire are involved in de-selection activities in order to sustain their services. They usually make provision to acquire these materials through exchange of library materials with other libraries. Exchange of library materials depends on personal relationship between Librarians of different libraries. This is based on information materials found lacking in their respective libraries. The aim of this library practice is to avert circumstances whereby the positive values of human resources are endangered by information drought.

Conclusion

Tertiary education is the pivot for societal development. In Nigeria, to date it has shown such degeneration tendencies towards positive societal development, spurious data instead authentic data
are often used to attract development in educational sector. This is because these data are more or less influenced by Nigerian polity than administrative machinery of our educational system. The prevailing proliferation of these tertiary institutions is alarming and has smeared quality education. In course of learning, it is discovered that theoretical postulations have assumed edge over practical education creating wide dimensions in implementation of ideas. The alternative to practices in scientific and technological related courses is a proven case. The cultural sentiment as well as “dropout syndrome” has considerably affected our educational system. This is such that in most tertiary institutions proportional difference between the sexes are alarmingly wide. The Academic Librarian is never daunted by these anomalies and seeks to readdress them. He ensures that library materials do not lack, and further educates readers on the essence of positive value of knowledge in developing self and the society at large. These indices no doubt will refocus the degenerated tertiary educational system in Nigeria.

References


