

# AN ASSESSMENT OF THE OBJECTIVES, CONTENTS, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA - A REVIEW

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## **Abstract**

The objectives of secondary education in Nigeria are doubtless well planned. These have given rise to excellent educational curricula contents that match with the requirements of the Philosophy of Education as adopted by the UNESCO and the UNICEF. However, logistical difficulties, both the unseen and the foreseen, which to our dismay are believed to mar efficient policy implementation have led to an unexpected inability of our secondary schools to meet up all the desired objectives. These have created a lot of problems over time when the period 1976 to 2003 is studied critically as regards educational development in the country. Perhaps inadequate funding has led to poor facilities and inefficient teachers coupled with poor motivation to teach. That obviously could have been some of the hydraheaded factors that resulted in poor performance in the WAEC, SSCE and /or NECO exams. Quality of the products at labour market is also being questioned by the employers. Nevertheless, there is an increasing effort by the federal and state government to fine-tune the whole education sector from primary school through secondary school up to the university.

## **Introduction**

It is practically established that the greatest avenue through which individuals can acquire the most universally accepted level of development morally, socially, physically, and mentally is a proper educational system. This makes the members of the society to be useful to themselves and to the society in general. It is doubtless that the formal educational policy adopted in Nigeria comprises pre- primary, primary, junior secondary, senior secondary and advanced level schools. This was in order to attain the main national objectives as contained in the Second National Development Plan as enshrined in the foundation for the National Policy on Education in 1981 and as revised in 1998. The aim of this paper therefore, was to attempt a review on the objectives, content, problems and prospect of senior secondary school education in Nigeria. The article was expected to serve as an additional source of reference as far as the present state of senior secondary education in Nigeria is concerned. It is also hoped that the review would substantiate the existing body of knowledge on the universal educational issues before us.

Inomesia (1998) reviewed that; five national objectives that have been stated in the Second National Development Plan have been accepted as the foundation for the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1981). These national objectives include:

- 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 of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

These are brought for recollection sake as their relevance and actuation was obviously known to be achieved solely through educating the citizens. It is clear and unanimously agreed that the avenues for the formal education of the individual include preprimary, primary, junior secondary, senior secondary school and tertiary institutions as explained in the current 6-3-3-4 system of education (Fafunwa, 1991; NPE, 1981).

## **The Objectives of Senior Education in Nigeria**

The objectives of any level of education in Nigeria are based on the above mentioned five main national objectives as contained in the new National Policy on Education (1981). Therefore based on these the specific objectives of secondary education include:

1. Preparation for useful living within the society.
2. Preparation for higher education (colleges of education, polytechnics and universities).

3. To provide an increasing number of junior secondary school students emanating from the increasing primary school pupils opportunity for education of a higher quality irrespective of sex, social, religious and ethnic background.
4. Senior secondary education help to diversify the curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and roles possessed by or open for students after their secondary school course.
5. To equip students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology.
6. To develop and protect Nigerian culture, art language as well as the world's cultural heritage.
7. To raise a 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 objectives (stated above) and live as good citizens.
8. To foster Nigerian unity with emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity.
9. To inspire our students with a desire for achievement and self-improvement both at school and in later life; that is by way of creating adequate career opportunity.

It was already highlighted that senior secondary education is one of the components of the 6-3-3-4 systems currently in operation in Nigeria, which could be said to have been fully established by 1990 (Fafunwa, 1991). Of course the first 6 years are for general basic education in primary school, followed by three years in junior secondary school (with general education and vocational training to ensure employment opportunity). *The next three years are for senior secondary school.* This specifically encourages marketable and skill training in science and humanities to ensure employment and opportunity for higher education which takes up the last 4 years of the educational development of an individual.

### **The Content of the Senior Secondary School Curriculum in Nigeria as at 1990**

The senior secondary education is of three-year duration for those students who completed junior secondary school and who are able to pursue the course as determined by aptitude and other tests. The senior secondary school curriculum has (a) core subjects and (b) electives.

1. English language (seen as the general and official language for all Nigerians).
2. One Nigerian language (e.g. Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba).
3. One or all of the following alternative subjects as the case may be: Physics, Chemistry and Biology.
4. One of literature in English, History and Geography.
5. Agricultural science or vocational subject. According to the scheme, the core subjects are basic, which will enable students to offer arts or science in higher education (Fafunwa, 1991).

The electives depend on the choice of career. Every student would select 3 of those subjects up to the end of the second year and may drop one of the non-compulsory subjects out of the 9 subjects in the last year of study. Table 1 shows the elective subjects available for senior secondary school students.

**Table 1: Most Available Subjects Offered in Secondary School Curriculum**

Biology	Islamic Knowledge
Chemistry	Arabic Studies
General Mathematics	Physics
Additional Maths	Metal Work
Book Keeping	Electronics
Economics	Technical Drawing
Typewriting	Wood Work
Shorthand	Auto- Mechanics
History	Music
English Literature	Art
Geography	French
Agric Science	Physical Education
Home Economics	Health Science
	Government

The final senior secondary leaving certificate is based on a national examination and continuous assessment over a period of 3 years.

### **Problems and Prospects of Senior Secondary Education Curriculum**

The implementation of the 3-year senior secondary school system was achieved through the conversion of secondary schools from 5 to 6 years course. Technical, commercial and other vocational courses were included to make senior secondary school leavers employable. The emergence of the 3-year senior secondary school led also to the restricting of the duration of first degree in the university from 3 years to 4 years to cater for six year secondary school system.

The sixth form colleges and schools of basic studies were said to be phased out gradually since those pupils who entered secondary school before and in 1981 will follow the old 5 year course throughout up to 1988 when the first SSCE (WAEC) administered previously by only West African Examination Council was conducted. Recently another body NECO- The National Examination Council of Nigeria, appears also to go parallel with the WAEC as at year 2000.

As an integral part of the new national policy education, the government welcomed contributions of voluntary agencies, communities or private individuals in the establishment and management of secondary schools, in addition to those provided by the federal and state governments.

The progress of the system to its full blown successful level is however presently deterred by the problem of inefficient utilization of the education funds provided by the government of Nigeria. Moreover, less care is given to the implementers of this curriculum. That is, teachers do not receive adequate salaries and other incentives leading to loss of interest in the job.

PTF and ETF as at 1996/97 exerted an improvement. As well the 1998/99-salary increase helped in waking up the teachers. The Obasanjo led government of Nigeria is also advancing in making sure that education at all levels was given top priority. The year 2000 budget set over 20 billion Naira (8% - 10% of the total national budget) to education sector for an overall development, in 2001, the allocation to education was 28.743 billion Naira indicating a progressive increase when compared with the value for 2000. In the year 2002 however, only 6% of the year's budget was allocated to education and this has created a lot of hurdles against the smooth running of educational activities (due to prolonged teachers strikes ASUU, 2003). In the year 2003, 15 billion Naira (4.6% of the total budget) was allocated to education. This was despite an accepted effort by the ASUU to make the Federal Government provide 26% as recommended by the UNESCO and UNICEF (even though facing a lot of resistance from the executive and the legislative arms of government) of its annual budget to education. However, it was expected that proper funding of education will be receiving greatest priority in the 2004 budget as indicated by the Minister of Education Prof. Fabian Osuji. But he maintained that any determination of overall expenses made in education must be synergized with that made by the state governments (Okpani, 2003).

**Problems** It appears difficult to employ those school leavers because of gross incompetence due to a falling standard of education. Presently, employers of labour realized that many products of **the** system do not perform to the expectations. It is also beyond doubt that the system, at maturity presently produced some graduates that appear with very poor potential of output. This indicates lapse and limitations of the policy. This may be coupled with the lack of commitment and dedication on **the** part of the community/society.

Another problem is that imposed by the necessary involvement of so many unqualified teachers where cases even the certificate brought with the application for employment was borrowed from someone (Anon, 2000).

Moreover, the recruitment of auxiliary teachers as at 1976 to teach the first experimental UPE, the then new 6 year primary school pupils who became the students of the junior secondary school and later the senior secondary school certainly appeared as the retrogressing factor for the system.

Nevertheless, there is now a provision in the Nigerian education system that even at the primary school, the minimum teaching qualification is NCE and that should be a degree or its equivalent in the senior secondary school.

The then Babangida National Directorate for Employment of 1987 attempted to take care of the employment need of the senior secondary products that could not succeed in securing admission into higher educational institutions. The future surely will be science and technology based which will thus allow for an overall development of Nigeria. This however, reminds us that much of the existing schools today lack adequate science facilities coupled with enough and well trained teachers as well as laboratory personnel or technologists.

### **Conclusion**

Senior secondary educational curriculum is by extension from primary school the mid part of the educational pathway an individual must traverse in order to become well prepared for the higher educational level. It also prepares individuals for employment opportunities that do not require advanced skills.

There are however, problems of unexpectedly poor results in terms of performances at WAEC and NECO examinations as well as at labour market. In addition, although the curriculum has provided room for vocational training, many of the secondary school leavers wander around for employment but could not secure an appropriate one.

More funds, qualified teachers, personnel motivation and an objective supervision are some of the factors, which must be taken care of, in order to achieve fully the well planned policy of education in Nigeria today.

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