

An Overview of Educational Issues in Nigeria: Thoughts and Reflections

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Abstract

There is no doubt that Nigeria as a nation had witnessed a series of Educational Systems since its birth in 1914. Immediately after independence in Nigeria, there were a lot of ills and shortcomings in Nigerian educational system as it was based on the British educational system which did not pave way for yearning needs, interests and aspirations of Nigerian society. This gave birth to 1969 curriculum conference that focused on Nigerian children in Nigerian society with National policies on Education in 1977, 1981, 1998 and 2004 respectively (FRN, 1977; 1981; 1998; 2004), all with the prime purpose of improving the quality of Nigerian Education.

For the purpose of this paper, emphasis was on four educational systems in Nigeria. These are: 6.3.3.4 (Fabunmi, 1986) system of education, Nomadic education, Distance and Open Learning Education and Universal Basic Education. Their strengths and weaknesses were examined and conclusion made.

Background to the study

Nigeria as a country is multi-ethnic with diverse cultural diversities of not less than 350 distinct ethnic groups and diverse indigenous languages with about 140 million in population. Education is the best legacy a country can give to her citizens. Iguzor (2006) in stressing the importance of education stated that Education is a human right that should be accorded to all human beings solely by reason of being human.

Obani (1996) has earlier expressed his view that education improves the development of any society and the youths who occupy significant positions in that country should be properly educated in order to improve the society. Therefore, schools at various levels are expected to educate future leaders and develop the high level technical capacities needed for economic growth and development (Osokoya, 2008).

The utmost importance attached to education in Nigeria was clearly underscored in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004). The Federal Republic of Nigeria, in this policy, adopted education as an instrument "par excellence" for effecting national development. But despite the government's commitment to education, the quality of education in our schools has been declining tremendously, thereby giving successive government's serious concern. The question has become, what is wrong with the Nigeria educational system?

Statement of problem

It is no gainsaying that due to laudable programmes put in place by various governments in Nigeria in improving the quality of Education in Nigerian society, much has not been achieved in really carving out policies that will suit the entire society. This then calls for an awareness of some issues in education at the grassroot level paramount for the sustenance of Nigerian society.

1. 6-3-3-4 System of Education

The introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education according to Fabunmi (1986) pre-supposed that the old system of education (6-5-4) was archaic, whereas the new system is modern, dynamic and progressive. It should be recalled that early education policies failed to provide Nigerian goals and objectives because it placed great emphasis on paper qualification.

However, for the proper understanding of 6-3-3-4 system of education, it is necessary to state the national objectives and philosophy of education which include:

- a. a free 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 full of bright opportunities for all citizens. (FRN, 2004, p. 1)

It is believed that the above objectives were geared towards self realization, better human relationship, national consciousness, national unity as well as social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress. However, it needed to say that the system 6-3-3-4 (Fabunmi, 1986) has helped in these areas:

- (i) It has assisted in the attainment of some of the objectives of National policy on education i.e. emphasis is now placed on yearning and aspirations of Nigerian society
- (ii) Students (both boys and girls) to some extent are now staying longer in schools
- (iii) The system has produced more matured youths who are able to take decisions on their own.
- (iv) The system has reduced to some extent the rate of dropout in schools as opportunities are made available for students to develop their talents to the fullest.
- (v) The system has helped Nigeria nation to develop technologically as we have various technical colleges, polytechnic and universities of technology in the country today that have produced more technicians and technologists.
- (vi) The system to some extent has helped in catering for individual differences which pre-supposes differences in intelligence, physical ability, interest and individual achievement oriented goal and aspirations. This affords the individual learner the opportunity to develop his/her potentials

However, with all these lofty achievements, the system has failed. It is an understatement that the system of education being implemented in Nigeria today has lost the quality of 6-3-3-4 (Fabunmi, 1986). If not for a handful of Nigerians who, through dint of handwork, still reflect the indices of being educated, we should be talking of a total collapse of the sector. The following are the predicaments to its proper execution:

- (i) Problem of implementing the language policy, this arises as a result of non availability of adequate textbooks for the language as well as shortage of teachers.
- (ii) Political problem: The idea for the system was conceived by military government that favoured centralization. However, there has been change(s) in the leadership structure of the nation which eventually prevented co-oriented approach at the implementation of the policy.
- (iii) Financial problem: Since the success of any educational programme depends heavily on fund made available, most of the equipments and facilities required for the system could not be bought as they are to be imported from abroad.
- (iv) Public Enlightenment: The general public seemed to be unaware of the benefit of the programme, hence it becomes a failure.
- (v) Inadequate statistics: There is an inability to obtain detailed and up-to-date statistical data needed for effective educational planning.

2. Nomadic Education

According to Olokede (2004), Nomadic education is a planned programme introduced by the Federal Government to ensure education for all. It is designed to acclimatize the beneficiaries into effective participation in the national development. The constant move of the nomads in search of greenland for their cattle has made it difficult to integrate their children into conventional school.

After independence, concerted efforts were made by both the States and the Federal Government at different levels to settle the nomads (Daramola, 1994). For example, the Federal Government under General Gowon in the 1970s attempted to settle the herdsman in some states of the federation.

It was during the regime of General Babangida when the national cap was put on nomadic education. The Federal Government launched the programme on 1st November 1988 by the then Minister of Education in person of Professor Jubril Aminu who inaugurated a thirty two member National Advisory Committee on Nomadic Education headed by retired Colonel Belo Khaliel concomitantly with the establishment of the National Commission for Nomadic Education, was the backing up of the Decree No 41 of December 1989 (FRN, 1989).

Objectives of Nomadic Education

According to Lar (1997), the aims and objectives of nomadic education are as follows:

- a. To expose the nomadic child to formal education

- b. To inculcate the spirit of humanity and make him realize himself as a member of the Nigeria Society.
- c. Enable the nomadic child take part in the development of his immediate environment and the country in general.
- d. Make the nomadic child able to improve his living conditions, thus eliminating the hardships and constraints in his life.
- e. To help modernize his techniques of herdsmanship and animal management.
- f. To help the nomadic child to appreciate moral and religious practices.
- g. To assist the nomadic child to develop rapidly, fully, physically and intellectually so as to cope with the demands of the contemporary world.
- h. To help the nomadic child to develop initiative. (pp11-12)

Problems confronting Nomadic Education

According to Abdulkareem (1992), in spite of the laudable objectives stated for Nomadic Education Programme in Nigeria, the programme has not been progressive in the country due to a number of constraints such as:

- Political Constraint: In spite of the lofty objectives behind the establishment of nomadic education since the programme was mainly politically motivated by the then federal government, subsequent governments have not taken serious steps on nomadic education, thus Nigerians are still awaiting more of the positive resultant effect of nomadic education
- Financial Constraint: The lack of fund syndrome that has become the slogan of Nigeria government also draw the programme backward. Due to insufficient fund the programme has suffered greatly.
- Lack of facilities: This compounds the problem of nomadic education more than other problems. The worst of this could be seen in the areas of infrastructural facilities and instructional materials.
- Unpreparedness of the nomads: Some of the nomads saw the programme as a disruption to their culture: on several occasions' exhibit hostility to the nomadic teachers.
- Ineffective implementation strategies: The programme is also faced with general lack of supervision and monitoring from both the local and state supervisors and inspectors for the state and local authorities hardly take pains to find out what transpire.
- Lack of manpower: Nomadic education is a unique kind of programme demanding dedicated and qualified teachers.

3. Distance and Open Learning

According to Osuji and Salawu (2006) Open and Distance learning is a concept made up of open learning and distance education. It is one of the most recent manifestations of a trend towards the democratization of education.

According to Alaezi (2005), it refers to educational patterns as approaches and strategies that permit people to learn with no barriers in respect of time and space, age and previous educational

qualifications no entry qualification, no age limit, no regard to sex, race, tribe, state of origin, etc. It can be regarded as a new stage along the path of socio-educational evolution. Also, Jegede (2005) was of the view that Distance and Open learning has developed from a modest and inconsequential beginning through correspondence courses to a full-fledged modern day technology-facilitated, flexible and learner driven, self directed learning, which involves learners who are often in locations remote from the institution or the instructional or tutorial facilitator.

The government embarked on the distance and open learning programme so as to:

- i. satisfy the educational aspirations of many citizens.
- ii. make education accessible, affordable and equitable to all Nigerians.

Constraints to Distance and Open Learning Programme

- Learners' Problem: The problems of new intake that have not experienced the sweetness and bitterness of taking up a distance or an open learning programme often start with the mixed feelings exhibited by the learners.
- Facilitators Problem: No educational programme can succeed with weak facilitators. The contact educators or tutorial facilitators have greater part to play.
- Administrative Problem: There are problems of record keeping and effective management.
- Financial Problem: There is danger of commercialization of the programme when the government fails to give sufficient fund to assist the programme most especially in this dispensation of privatisation.
- Level of Nigeria Technology: This programme requires a high level of sophisticated technology which is lacking in Nigeria.

4. Universal Basic Education (UBE)

Universal Basic Education is a foundation for acquisition of further knowledge, skills and competencies in diverse fields. It involves a variety of formal and non-formal educational activities. The UBE Scheme was formally launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo on September, 1999. According to the FRN (2000) UBE's Blueprint aims at equipping an individual with knowledge, skills and attitudes which would enable him:

- ❖ live a meaningful and fulfilling life;
- ❖ contribute to the development of the society;
- ❖ derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from the society and discharge civic obligations competently.

In fulfillment of the Federal government dream to entrench the new educational scheme, on May 27th 2000, the head of State, Chief Obasanjo did officially register pupils for UBE in Abuja.

The specific objectives of UBE released by the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2000 were:-

- developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- the provision of free universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age;
- ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills, as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning. p. 14

Problems confronting UBE

- i. Increase enrolment in the face of scarcity of resources.
- ii. Data accuracy
- iii. Societal attitude
- iv. Financial problem
- v. Implementation strategies etc.

Conclusion

It must be borne in mind that education is just an integral part of a people's life. Making teachers comfortable and alive to their responsibilities is tantamount to satisfying an aspect of the polity. And since the polity is a system made up of different interrelated and interdependent parts, it is incumbent on those whose responsibility is to dispense national resources and wealth to carry out that onerous task without rendering a part inconsequential.

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