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CHALLENGES OF EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Educational reforms emanate from the basic conviction that considerable progress can be made in a nation by its people through careful engineering of the educational process. The freedom of self – rule which Nigeria was enjoying had to match with educational progress. In September 1969, there was a National Curriculum Conference held in Lagos participants at the conference were eager to see Nigeria Chat a new course in its educational system. This paper examines Challenges of Educational Reforms in Nigeria. The paper x-rays the National Policy on Education and its relevance. The effects of misguided educational reforms were also looked at and the beginning of crises in the educational system as well as the UBE Programme its prospects were examined. Lack of necessary materials such as infrastructure, machinery and text books for programme implementation and improper planning of reforms such that in many cases the programmes are commenced before the implementation details are worked out, were factors observed as the Major constraints and challenges of educational

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reforms. The paper recommended among others, that government should set up an independent committee made up of experts in education to study various reforms in the educational sector since independence and come up with a strategy that will enable the nation move forward.

Introduction

Nigeria's educational reforms dates back to the pre-independence era. The agitations for self-rule by notable Nigerians led to the British colonialists to change the educational system in operation in 1954 from 8 – 6 – 2 – 3 system, that is 8 years primary, 6 years secondary, 2 years higher school certificate and 3 years university to a new system of 6 – 5 – 2 – 3 that is 6 years primary, 5 years secondary, 2 years higher school certificate and 3 years university.

This necessitated the reduction of the number of years at primary and secondary school levels. Gasau (2008) describes the development as a "patriotic struggle to effect a change in the educational structure for the general good of the country".

The hope of educational reforms was further rekindled in the pre-independence Nigeria when notable nationalists were on the saddle. For instance, Chief Obafemi Awolowo introduced free Universal Primary Education in the Western Region of Nigeria on 17th January, 1955 – it was adjudged to be a successful programme. Followed by the 1957 UPE programme launched in the Eastern Region which was largely seen as a not-too-successful exercise.

In the post-independence era, a few other significant developments occurred. These includes: the universal primary education (UPE) experience in 1976; the takeover of schools by the government in the early 70's the development and adoption of the National Policy on Education in the 1980s along with the accompanying 6-3-3-4 system of education and the current Universal Basic education which has been in vogue since 1999.

Education is a crucial sector in any nation. Being a major investment in human capital development, it plays a critical role in long- term productivity and growth at both micro and macro levels. This explains why the state of

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education in Nigeria continues to be our national discourse at all levels (Abubakar, 2014). Consequently, the Implication of the declining quality of education at all levels has far reaching negative impact on the nation's moral, civil, cultural and economic sustainability. At this point, it is important to realize that discussions on education and its reforms to make it contribute meaningfully to national development should gradually and systematically move away from a politicalized to a more analytical approach that appreciates the complexities inherent in proffering genuine and workable solutions for revamping our educational system (Amaele, 2011).

In the Nigerian context, for the sector (i.e education) to contribute meaningfully to national development; there should be proper funding of the three tiers of government (Dauda, 2010). if this is done in the proper way, the Academic Staff Union of Universities will not have any need to embark on industrial actions as there will be improved infrastructure in the primary, secondary and post-Secondary schools; there will be no more brain – drains as research activities will be eradicated or reduced and the sector will contribute meaningfully to national development. Nurudeen (2009) stated that something urgent has to be done in the educational sector since 'illiterates' are leading Nigerians. But the problem with Nigeria is that there is no difference between an educated president and not so enlightened ones in terms of their leadership.

This paper will attempt to highlight some of these reforms, the constraining factors that affected their successes and provide recommendations.

NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION

The missionaries were the pioneers of western education in Nigeria. The Voluntary agencies and philanthropist joined in the effort to educate Nigerians. The missionary education had a very narrow curriculum. The aim was to train people for evangelism. When the colonial office became interested in education especially after Phelps Strokes Commission of Inquiry there was no

unified educational system. The education operated by the missionaries and the colonialists did not meet the scientific, economic and technological aspirations of Nigerians.

In 1969, National Curriculum Conference was held in Lagos to review the existing educational system and propose a better set of National goals. Several others were held subsequently. The recommendations eventually led to the formation of the National Policy on Education 1977 which was revised in 1981.

The document spells out the philosophy for Nigerian education and presents the goals, purpose and orientations of various levels and aspects of education in Nigeria, Pre-primary education (Age 3 to 5+), Primary education (Age 6 – 11+), Secondary education, teacher education, technical education, higher education, adult education, special education, educational services, administration of education and financing of education.

Taiwoo (1980) states that the National Policy on Education was "very ambitious and full of hopes and promises". The programme was conceived during the oil boom era but delivered during a period of tight economy. This hampered the realization of the hopes of the scheme.

The 1969 curriculum conference participants desired to see Nigeria chat a new course in its educational system. Such a system according to Gasau (2008) will empower the country towards the path of scientific and technological development". The conference further recommended changes in the system, from 6-5-2-3 system to 6-3-3-4 system, an American Model which Japan copied after 1945 and succeeded.

Has Nigeria succeeded in her attempt? I doubt. The implementers and political authority misinterpreted the policy. Careful planning was not embarked before putting the proposal into practice. This back fired and led to crises in education.

The National Policy on Education was first published, as a government white paper in 1977 and reviewed in 1981 and 2004.Okoli(2003), described the National Policy on Education as ineffective, non-dynamic and myopic in nature. It does not

make sense operating a policy that does not address the very serious and nagging problems of the nation.

THE BEGINNING OF CRISES IN EDUCATION

Crises in education started rearing its ugly face when government went all out to implement the 6-3-3-4 system without adequate planning, put in place. Adesina (1980) sees planning as the process of applying scientific or rational procedures to the process of educational growth and development so as to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the educational system. Primary education was the first to suffer the effect of inadequate planning.

Free Universal Primary Education was launched in 1976 but the policy on education itself appeared in 1977 one year after the implementation of the programme. In this kind of system where implementation is ahead of policy, confusion would certainly emerge. Needs assessment was not properly done; the end result was absence of adequate statistical data (Gasau; 2008). For instance, upon the launching of the UPE scheme, three million children showed up as against 2.3 million prepared for, a 30 percent underestimation. This had implications for classroom spaces, teachers and equipment. The exercise triggered phenomenal rise in pupil population from 8.7 million in 1976/77 to 12 million in 1979/80 and reaching 15 million in 1982, Akpan (1988).

In spite of the absence of correct data to implement the UPE, the Federal Government went ahead and took over all voluntary and mission schools and assumed full financial responsibility of running the scheme throughout the country.

Taiwo (1980) reasons that the Federal Government "underestimated the cost of the UPE and overrated its own capacity to finance the programme in such a vast county as Nigeria". This of course, coincided with the oil boom period. The Petro-dollars were not in short supply. This gave room to unprecedented financial imprudence, irrational planning and large-scale corruption that converted the

boom to doom. In the absence of comprehensive planning, the implementers of the programme had their lee way, they choose what was important and what was not. Contracts became the order of the day, substandard buildings in the name of UPE scattered all over the country, half-baked teachers populated the teaching force, ghost workers were made part and parcel of the UPE scheme (Gasau 2008).

A lot of harm was done to the country as a result of the generally low quality of teachers recruited to man the programme. The trainees were rushed through short-term, often ineffective, training programmes.

Taiwo (1980) however argues that the UPE greatly contributed to education in Africa and assisted Nigeria immensely in "mobilizing its human resources adjusting its educational imbalance and providing for the Nigerian children equal access to education". Ogbonda (2002) argues that the commitment of the Federal Government of Nigeria to the ideal and principle of establishing a just and egalitarian society is very notable to philosophy which underlies the programme.

Some scholars have nonetheless argued that free universal primary education was not designed to succeed and so destined to fail. The Murtala/Obasanjo regime executed a defective educational programme. Such ambitious programme as free universal primary education ought to have been protected from the vicissitudes of politics. It should have been kept sacrosanct.

The National Policy on Education 1998 pp 5 confirms Federal Government's insincerity to fund the scheme thus;

> *Government welcomes contributions of voluntary agencies, communities and private individuals in the establishment and management of primary schools along side those provided by the states and local governments as long as they meet the minimum standard laid down by the Federal Government.*

The programme had to collapse due to poor planning, faulty statistics and inadequate funding.

EFFECTS OF MISGUIDED EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

What had happened to primary and secondary education would invariably meet up tertiary education. the absence of specific agenda for the Nigerian education manifested itself in the tertiary institutions. These institutions especially universities became disorganized when compared with their counterparts in other developing countries such as South Africa, Ghana India etc. Closure of the universities become the norms and so the dismissal of lecturers. Unconducive teaching environment, poor remuneration and threat of dismissal all tend to dampen lectures moral. The university dons could not continue to tolerate the way and manner Federal Government is handling education; therefore, they take to militancy by resorting to strike actions, an NLC (Nigerian Labor Congress) style. It is painful our dons are made to behave unbecoming of their status. Academic Staff Union of University (ASUU) and Federal Government engage in running battles from the time of Babangida Administration and continuing up to today with occasional truth brokered by self-style elders, traditional rulers and politicians. The Yaradua administration inherited this fiasco which lapsed and relapsed depending on the situation.

It is a failure of education reforms that made Nigerian obsessed with paper qualifications and chains of diplomas and degrees, which is most cases are not in the science or technology, some so -called big men simply purchase their certificated in the open market. We forget that we go to school to learn skills which will enable us to make a decent living, to acquire knowledge which will help us reason rationality. Education is much more than acquiring certificates, it's alife-long pursuit. Education should help students fashion his future needs, makes him dream of possibilities and help him contribute productively in the development of his country. Bill gate the Microsoft guru and one of the richest men in the world was so overwhelmed by his dream that he dropped from university and pursue his dream of implying computers of users, a cutting-edge technology that only few people understood. Because he dropped from school does not mean he stopped learning. He continued to study and work hard, to

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bill gate and his like, education is not just acquiring knowledge for its intrinsic value, it is a competitive enterprise that one has to continue updating himself as well as pushing the frontiers of knowledge forward. We want an education that can nurture such kind of people who can think ahead.

A mere change of government in the Nigerian context can result in educational reforms which in most cases are thoughtless exercise, mindless of future consequences. On the funniest education reform hits students' nutrition. Food issue is delicate to learner, but Nigerians being what we are seem to believe that we can get the best out of our universities and other tertiary institutions, whereas learners going to classes with empty stomachs. Students lost privilege to subsidize food since 1984 when General Muhammad Buhari upstage President Shehu Shagari from power, since then it is common campus language to hear some unusual numerical terminologies, 100, 010, 001 etc. these figures signify how many times per day you ate. If it is one time it could be 100 (breakfast), 010 (lunch), 001 (dinner). Our students are busy fasting as well as battling with their studies. Students began to lose weight and so their studies also lose weight. One would like to ask, when did hunger and learning become friends?

I am of the opinion that a lot of people were discriminated from access to tertiary education due to poverty. I believe food situation at our tertiary institutions is one of the issues the new administration in the country should seriously look into with a view to ameliorate discomfort associated with nutrition.

THE UBE PROGRAMME

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was formally launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo on 30th September, 1999, as part of "Nigeria's efforts to uphold and renew its commitment to the provision and promotion of basic education for all as required by a number of covenants and protocols to which Nigeria is a signatory" UBE (2002). Universal Basic Education is all about universalizing assess to education Ubulom (2009).

The broad aim of basic education as contained in the Jomtien Declaration according to Nwagwu in Ajayi (2002) was "to lay the foundations for self-awareness life-long learning and acquisition of life skills and competencies" that will enable individuals to:

(i) Live meaningful and fulfilling lives;

(ii) Contribute to the development of the society;

(iii) Derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefit from the society; and

(iv) Discharge their civic obligations competently. Famade in Ajayi (2002).

The UBE programme is an improved education programme when
Compared to the UPE scheme launched in 1976. This is so because while the UPE was restricted to the primary education system, the new UBE scheme moved a step forward to comprise:

(i) Formal basic education encompassing the first nine years of schooling (primary and junior secondary education) for all children

(ii) Nomadic education for school age children of pastoral nomads and migrant fishermen; and

(iii) Literacy and non-formal education for out of school children, youth, illiterate adults.

The UBE programme is all embracing all encompassing. Therefore, it requires careful planning and systematic implementation so as not to fall into the pitfalls of the UPE scheme.

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THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE UBE PROGRAMME

The following are some of the possible ways to move the UBE programme forward:

1) Provision of infrastructural facilities and community participation: The government should mount awareness campaign towards effective community participation in the life of the school. The government through appropriate agencies should be responsible for adequate provision of school furniture/fittings as well as maintenance of school buildings; toilets and wall fencing. Hence, the government and

community should strive to provide enough conducive space in both primary and Jss to all eligible children to guarantee access to quality learning. Also, government should become more responsive to the demand of education by fulfilling its obligations of counterpart funds which will enable the quick accessing of the UBE intervention funds to implement school projects.

2) Teachers' quality and condition of service: Due attention should be paid to adequate training of all personnel willing to enter into teaching profession and be fully registered with Teachers Registration Council TRC. Teacher's condition of service should be improved for "no significant change in education can take place in any country unless it teaching staff were well trained and retained" Fafunwa (1976).

3) Adequate funding, planning and projection: Funding is central to the overall development of education in Nigeria as no educational programme can be successful in the face of inadequate funding. The UBE programme can only succeed when there is proper planning and adequate projections concerning expected enrolment, required teachers, infrastructural needs and equipment.

4) Training and Retraining of teachers: Training equips the teachers with on the job skills and its transfer to the beneficiaries. Indeed, the acquisition of new skills or information triggers the teachers to put in their best performance in their assigned jobs "Munzali (2009). We are in a changing world and teachers of the UBE must keep pace with fast technological changes.

CONSTRAINTS TO EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN NIGERIA

The standard and quality of education in the country is observed by many as declining. Aghenta in Abidogun (2008) contends that the Nigerian educational system has been ineffective in accelerating national development due to the policies adopted and access to quality issues.

That the reforms have failed to achieve intended goals is attested to by the continued poor state of our education system. Adamu in Abidogun (2008) identified the problems constraining education reforms in Nigeria as:

(i) Improper planning of reforms such that in many cases the programmes are commenced before the implementation details are worked out;

(ii) Delay in implementation such that implementation is commenced under an economic situation that is different from those projected in the plan

(iii) Lack of necessary materials such as infrastructures, machinery and text books for programme implementation;

(iv) Disregards for systematic planning estimation of project cost;

(v) Frequent changes in government which often translate into changes in political/educational ideas.

To be effective, reforms in education should cover such aspects as innovations in the educational delivery process and development of appropriate financing arrangements.

CONCLUSION

The failure of any educational system to discharge the purpose for which it was set up is often the reason for calls for its reform. It must therefore be noted that the history of educational development in Nigeria is riddled with various attempts at innovations and reforms. Some of these reform programmes are the Universal primary Educational (UPE) in the Western (1955) and Eastern (1957) regions of the country, the free UPE of Federal Government (1976), the development and adoption of the National Policy on Education in the 1980s including the 6-3-3-4 system of Education and the current Universal Basic Education (UBE) which started in 1999.

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Several problems have continued to plague the educational system in Nigeria. Problem of discipline and funding are yet to be seriously addressed. It should be one of the major policy thrust of the present dispensation at both federal and state to address.

It takes years for any meaningful educational reform to yield fruits. Nigeria must learn to plan its educational policies and implement it with commitment and sense of direction for the greater good of all its citizens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Towards improving the system, the following recommendations are hereby proffered.

1) Development of adequate capacity for initiating., planning and implementing sustainable innovations/reforms in the education sector.
2) Accountability must be enshrined in our socio-economic philosophies and policies. The anti-corruption crusade must be intensified.
3) Government should set up an independent committee made up of experts in education to study various reforms in the education sector since independence and come up with a strategy that will enable the nation move forward.
4) Qualitative and affordable education be made available for all.
5) Government and the private sector should put more resources towards the development of education.
6) Teachers' conditions of service should be improved and welfare prioritized.

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