

A REVIEW ON EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: PUBLIC POLICIES, APPROACHES AND ISSUES

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Abstract

Education is a veritable tool for sustainable human development. Educational policies in Nigeria have evolved over time and have been influenced by environmental and human factors, thereby generating issues and approaches. This paper captures Nigeria's major educational policies and the issues and approaches arising therefrom. It recommends that the 2007 education reform programme of the federal government should be given a chance.

Introduction

Education is the oldest industry whose origins became obscured in prehistory. At the time people lived together as hunters and food gatherers, education was certainly a primary vocation. Children were taught the arts of survival and the teachers were presumably parents and other members of the family group. Efficiency in education was a matter of life and death, as those unable to learn the arts of survival did not in fact survive. The situation today is still not radically different. Education tends to follow social change. Therefore, education is not an end in itself but a process (Egonmwan, 1991; Enueme, 2004).

Ukeje (1976) refers to education as “a process,” “a product,” and “a discipline.” As a process, education is an instrument used by every society to preserve, maintain and upgrade its social equilibrium.

Through this process of education, people are acclimatized to the environment into which they are born in order that they may advance it. As a product, education is anything that is done consciously and unconsciously to influence the thoughts, behaviour and attitudes of people and bring about behavioral change (Ogbonnaya, 2003).

As a discipline, education is the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, faculties trained and skills developed (Farant, 1980). The things needed for us to know and do in order to meet the needs and the problems of the age and live completely and effectively are the things which education has to teach (Ukeje, 1966). As a discipline, education has branches, such as education foundation, education psychology, education curriculum and methodology, education administration, etc.

The federal government has the greatest authority in the formulation of national education policy as a guide to state governments. It directs and co-ordinates the general planning activities for educational development in Nigeria. Matters affecting the national philosophy of education, aims and objectives, various aspects of curricula development of educational institutions rest squarely on the federal government (Ukeje, 1976).

Besides, the federal government assists the state governments in financing educational programmes. It does this in order to make sure that there is rapid and even development among the various states in the federation. This was mainly for higher education, until 1973 when the federal government came into the secondary and primary education (Ogbonnaya and Ajagbaonwu, 1997).

Public Education Policies in Nigeria

According to Egonmwan (1991), public policy is a plan of action to guide decisions and actions. The term may apply to government, private sector organizations and groups and individuals. It is a basic plan of action that establishes limits within which freedom judgment can be exercised. It may originate from constitution, from statute and from customary patterns of formal behaviour. It is futuristic, addressing future problems. Policy must:

- Reflect the general environment in which the organization operates.
- Include direction for implementation either by implication or broad explanation.
- Be impartial to deal uniformly with all concerned.
- Omit non-relevant details that might need to change from time to time.
- Grant the authority to act.

Education at the national level needs a sound policy formulation without which there is bound to be very serious variations in the standard and quality of education across the country (Osagie and Gbenecho, 1993). According to the Federal Government of Nigeria (1981), education in Nigeria is no more a private enterprise (hitherto run by the Missions and individuals), but a huge government venture that has witnessed a progressive evolution of government's complete dynamic intervention and active participation. The federal government of Nigeria adopted education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development.

The Phelps-Stokes Report of 1925 represents an important landmark in African education. It guided Nigeria's education from 1925 to 1945 (Fafunwa, 1974). Sir Sidney Philipson Commission was established to review the policy and produced a comprehensive report which identified the problems inherent in grant-in-aid aspect of education and proffered solutions. The report, which was adopted in 1948, became the pivot around which all grants-in-aid were based up to the 1960s. The regionalization of government in Nigeria (Eastern and Western Regions in 1957 and Northern Region in 1959) made a huge impact on education, and prepared grounds for independence in 1960 (Ajagbaonwu, 1997).

According to the National Educational Research Council, NERC (1969), the Ashby Commission was set up in April 1959 to conduct investigations into Nigeria's needs in the fields of post-secondary school certificate and higher education over the next 20 years (1960-1980). This led to accelerated development in education in the three Regions of Nigeria. A national conference was held in Lagos

in 1969 on Nigeria's education curriculum development, in order to change the colonial orientation of the Nigeria's education system. A follow-up national conference was held in 1973. This gave birth to "The Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education," published in 1977. The 5 main national goals endorsed as the necessary foundation are:

- A free and democratic society;
- A just and egalitarian society;
- A united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- A great and dynamic economy;
- A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

The policy was revised in 1981 to:

- Clarify the philosophy and objectives that underlie the federal government's massive investment in education and spell out in clear and unequivocal terms the policies that guide the government's educational efforts.
- Remove the existing contradictions and ambiguities and lack of uniformity in education practices in different parts of the country.
- Clearly set out for the benefit of all citizens, the country's educational goals in terms of its relevance to the needs of the individual as well as in terms of the kind of society desired in relation to the government and the realities of the modern world and rapid social changes.

The National Policy on Education, 4th Edition, was published in 2004, and is in the course of revision. There is a general opinion that past education plans have not met the people's expectations. In a recent review, Eneh (2008) noted that:

Thirty-seven years after the National Policy on Education was adopted, none of the five cardinal goals has been achieved. The country has been more militarized than democratized. There is injustice and insecurity, with lots of human right abuses and extra-judicial killings, high crime rates, grave menace of cultism, ritual murder, child abuse,

religious riots and ethnic militia activities. The country appears to be little united, with tribal and religious ties – not patriotism – underlying its brand of federalism. Although politically independent since 1960 and republic since 1963, the nation remains economically self-unreliant, with prolonged era of import-dependency, brain-drain and weak economy. It is far from being a land with bright opportunities for all citizens, but a land of failed people, with corruption, looting of public treasury and unemployment characterizing the Nigerian society.

Iloeje (1996) associated the public schools with the falling standard in education, indiscipline, lack of planning and physical facilities and equipment, lack of finance, mismanagement/maladministration, crime, incapability on the part of the principal, unqualified staff, delay in payment of teacher's salaries, population explosion, examination malpractice, lack of involvement of community members and parents, lack of motivation of teachers by parents and lack of communication.

As a result, education reform process was initiated in 2007 to address key issues of access, equity and quality in the educational system in Nigeria. It is tagged the 10-Year Strategic Plan - Vision 2020 (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2007).

In justifying the planned education reforms for the Nigerian education sector, the Ministry of Education admitted that Nigeria's education sector was in shambles and that there was the need for a total overhauling of the entire sector. The Ministry also rightly realised that any nation whose educational sector is in crisis can never grow economically, and that any country that ignored the leading role of education in the drive for development risked producing citizens who "could become weapons of mass destruction."

The planned comprehensive reform for the nation's educational system is expected to generate positive influence on the three levels of education in Nigeria, namely, primary, secondary and tertiary. It is said to have the potentials of enhancing and sustaining standards in teaching, learning, examination and research activities in tertiary institutions and overall delivery in Nigeria. It also has good emphasis

on the employability of products of educational institutions from Nigeria, which in turn, will help to curb the growing rate of unemployment and the corresponding rise in crime rate in the country (FGN, 2007).

The Federal Ministry of Education Ten-Year Strategic Plan: Vision 2020

It is a national framework outlining policies, strategies and targets designed to respond to the urgent needs of the education system in the country. It was formulated through a consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and aimed at ensuring consistency in direction. It recognizes that no single document can capture detailed strategic and operational plans for the whole federating units of the country, and lays foundation on which the federal government and state governments can build their own individual plans (Table 12.I).

Table 12.1: Responsibilities of the three tiers of government

	Federal	State	Local
Basic (early childhood and development, primary and junior secondary schools)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Policy 2. Allocation of resources through UBEC* 3. Maintenance of standards inspection & monitoring (FIS) 	Implementation through SUBEB**	Management of primary schools
Senior Secondary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Policy 2. Curriculum 3. Inspectorate 4. Examination through WAEC & NECO*** 5. Management of Unity Schools 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Policy 2. Implementation 3. Inspectorate 4. Technical College 	
Tertiary Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Policy 2. Universities 3. Polytechnics 4. Colleges of Education 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Universities 2. Polytechnics 3. Colleges of Education 	
Adult Education	Policy Co-ordination Monitoring	Implementation	Implementation
Special Education	Policy	Implementation	Implementation

Source: Federal Government of Nigeria (2004)

*Universal Basic Education Commission

** State Universal Basic Education Board

*** West African Examination Council & National Examination Council

The education reform has eleven task teams for:

- 1) Education, economy and competitiveness;
- 2) Curriculum, instruction and teacher quality;
- 3) Reform of the federal ministry of education and parastatals;
- 4) Information and communication technology (ICT);
- 5) Physical infrastructure;
- 6) Standards, accountability and academic assessment;
- 7) Examination ethics and campus safety;
- 8) Communication strategy;
- 9) Equity;
- 10) Governance and politics;
- 11) Education finance.

The aim of these tasks is to have an educational system:

- (i) In which every Nigerian shall have a right to equal educational opportunity irrespective of gender, social status, age, religion, ethnic background, geographical location and any peculiar challenges.
- (ii) That identifies, develops and responds to individual needs, talents and aspirations.
- (iii) That nurtures the mind and inculcates the right values and morals.
- (iv) That provides life-long learning.
- (v) That is relevant in terms of knowledge and skills to the needs of the Nigerian economy in the 21st century.
- (vi) That ensures the provision of a learner-friendly environment.
- (vii) That motivates by promoting and providing incentives for students, teachers, education personnel and other stakeholders.
- (viii) That provides an excellent work environment, good work conditions and incentives for all.
- (ix) That provides continuity professional development for all.
- (x) That is efficient and effective.
- (xi) That is accountable and transparent.

- (xii) That ensures the dissemination of education data and information for good governance.
- (xiii) That provides for planning with all stakeholders.

In fulfilling its mission, the Federal Ministry of Education will at all levels:

- (a) Ensure and sustain unfettered access to education for total development.
- (b) Establish effective quality assurance procedures in all spheres of education.
- (c) Promote functional education for life-skills acquisition, job creation and poverty eradication.
- (d) Ensure periodic review, effectiveness and relevance of the curriculum at all levels to meet the needs of the society and the world of work.
- (e) Establish partnerships to support delivery of quality education.
- (f) Enhance performance through the use of ICT.
- (g) Entrench a value system that develops the individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has highlighted the various education policies in Nigeria from 1925 to date, as well as the 2007 education reform programme. Sound policies and reform agenda have never been the problem, much as implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and review. Every government wants to have its own programmes to be identified with, abandoning the predecessor's projects. There is also the problem of chicken-heartedness in the execution of its own projects, hence every new programme is justified by the failure of the one before it.

Nonetheless, it is recommended that the education reform should be given a chance.

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