

Education in Nigeria: A Futuristic Perspective

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***Abstract:** This paper gives a broad overview of Tertiary Educational development in Nigeria with the hope of assessing how far the Nigerian schools have performed. In late 1960s, Nigerians reached a consensus about the purpose of education, unfortunately, successive governments seem not to focus on the goals of education. The implementation in policies has been the major bane to educational development in Nigeria. The paper identifies current challenges and offers suggestions for the future direction of tertiary education in Nigeria.*

***Keywords:** Implementation; Challenges; Attitudinal*

Introduction

The establishment of Yaba Higher College in 1932 marked the beginning of higher education in Nigeria. The purpose, was to produce “assistants” who would relieve colonial administrators of menial tasks. Due to problems in admission and administration, the Colonial Government then set up the Elliot Commission to specifically “examine the principles which would guide the promotion of higher education, learning and research and the development of universities in the Colonies”. The commission included three West Africans who traveled extensively for three months and later submitted two reports. The majority reports recommended that a University College should be set up in Nigeria, Gold Coast now Ghana and Sierra Leone, etc. According to Adesina (1988) five of the fourteen members of this commission wrote a minority report in which they criticized the establishment of three University Colleges on the basis that there were not enough students for these colleges. This created problems in the Colonies and a second commission, the Asquith Commissions, stressed in its reports that the new Colonial Universities should initially be University Colleges rather than full Universities. This shows that the Universities would not be free to set their own examinations or grant their own degrees but would be affiliated with foster-parent Universities.

The establishment of University College, at Ibadan in 1940, was the final metamorphic stage of Yaba Higher College. The programmes offered at UCI were narrow, as the Colonial administration did not pursue an agenda of training high-level manpower for many of the professions. To Alex Williams (1996), quoted by Okebukola (1998), the report of the Asbby Commission, which was set up to conduct an investigation in to Nigeria’s needs in the, fields of post school certificate and higher education in the next twenty years, led to the establishment of regional universities in the then three regions of the country. In the East, the University of Nigeria (1960) and in the North, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (1962) while

in West, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) (1961) while UCI, granted full fledged University status in 1962. Also in 1962, the University of Lagos, Akoka was established and as a city University, it provided courses in humanities, social sciences, medicine, law, engineering and also offered part-time programmes for workers. University of Benin was established in 1970. These six universities constitute Nigeria's first-generation universities. As of today, in 2002 there are nearly 67 colleges of education, 40 polytechnics, both State, Federal controlled and private. In addition we have 25 Federal Universities, 1 Military University, 16 State Universities and 7 private Universities making a total of 49 universities controlled by Federal, State and private institutions. The enrolment and courses offered has progressed. This success could be attributed to the National curriculum conference of 1969 where Nigerians debated their own aims and contents of education in the country, Ojelabi (1980).

The final document of this expression came into existence in 1977 and education was conceived as an instrument '*par excellence*' in achieving national unity, objectives and goals and so forth.

The policy, derives its philosophy from the five main national goals, which are:

- a. a free and democratic society
- b. a just and equalitarian 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.

The objectives of tertiary education in Nigeria, as contained in Section 6 of the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1998), defines tertiary education "as education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics" etc. It specified the following goals:

- a. Contribute to national development through high-level relevant manpower training.
- b. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and the society.
- c. Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments.
- d. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills, which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.
- e. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service.
- f. Forge and cement national unity and promote national and international understanding and interaction.

The goals show that tertiary education institutions should embark on teaching, research and development of programmes and maintain minimum educational standards. They should also seek inter-institutional co-operation and dedicated service to the community.

However laudable, the major parts of the policy are yet to be implemented due to a combination of military authoritarianism, economic crises and politics. Sansaliyu, (1991) quoted by Alaku, (1999), laments the gap between policy decisions in the field of education and implementation of those policies. For example, there is a gap between the operators and policy makers.

This paper identifies some areas either not implemented or not satisfactorily implemented.

1. Development of national consciousness and unity
2. Inter institutional co-operation
3. Teaching and learning
4. Areas of need and priority
5. Open university
6. Training of staff in methods and techniques of teaching
7. Indifference on the part of Government

Development of National consciousness and unity

The admission policy introduced into our educational systems, believes in education as a veritable instrument for national development. This is based on the premise that students from different backgrounds, religion, race etc will come together to pursue a common goal, learn, interact and share experiences about themselves. This will then bring about unity, understanding, tolerance and erase biases, myths and misconceptions. This is not presently true in our tertiary education as a result of the quota system, catchments areas, and federal character, introduced into our admission policy whereby a student from a geo-political zone will be offered admission first before any other student from another geo-political zone. Another hindrance to this development of national consciousness and unity is the classification of some states as educationally disadvantaged thus having special cut off marks. This shows that a student from the South who scored a high mark may not get admitted while a student with a low mark gets admission. The issue of class, religion and federal character affects employment and admission in our tertiary institutions. The state owned schools have a ratio of 60% indigenes and 40% or less for others within the same country. This negates the fundamental rights of students to education as enshrined in the constitution. This issue has been going on unabated in the country. It does not portend good omen for the country.

Teaching and learning

The crises and cries that have bedeviled tertiary education in Nigeria are legion. The disruption of academic calendars, due to non-payment of salaries or youthful exuberance, has put a doubt on the degrees awarded by Nigerian schools. This has been a major concern to the stakeholders in the education sector in Nigeria. The Academic Staff Union of Universities held a national executive meeting at OAU, Ife in 1995 and said “it could no longer vouch for the quality of Nigerian University degrees and resolved to apologize to the nation on behalf of the Senates of Nigerian Universities” Noah (1999). Since 1995, a lot has happened that has made teaching and learning not meaningful in the country.

Though the debate on university strikes continues to attract many comments, mainly many of the stakeholders seem not to know what to do on how to bring an end to these strikes. We have witnessed strikes, counter-strikes, and sympathy strikes from one institution to another for up to months or years in the country. I believe this situation led to the President of Nigeria on the 23rd November, 2001 in his NTA National broadcast to label the lecturers as “lazy” with no contribution on their part to national development but interested in sales of handouts, harassment of female students and that above all, the Government will not negotiate on salary increase since lecturers abandon their work and retire to their staff club. (Please see the annexure on ASUU, OAU Ife response to Mr President). The above is the level of decadence

that has permeated our entire educational system. According to Shonekan (1993), Ivowi (1993) and Olujuwon, (1999) the disruption of academic calendar, non-completion of syllabus and a conducive learning environment have been attributed to a high increase in examination malpractices and anti-social behaviours like cultism and drug addiction are the effects of students not fully engaged in academic activities. Lecturers on their part are not really into research anymore due to non-payment of salaries, an un-conducive environment and inadequate motivation. They have resorted to the production of handouts instead of scholarly books and journals.

This un-academic trend is what led ASUU, LASU branch to issue a release to its members to refrain from such exploitative acts (see annexure).

Areas of need and priority

There must be research into areas of needs and priority in the development of manpower. The policy advocates 60% for science and 40% for arts but the reverse is the case. The Nigerian universities, due to inadequate funding, have resorted to monetary programmes that could generate funds for themselves, with minimal attention paid to excellence in teaching, research and information dissemination and not the overall benefit of the country. It is pathetic that some tertiary institutions have deviated from the edict by mounting programmes that are not proficient e.g. a College of Technology mounting B.Ed degree programmes, Business Administration, Accounting etc.

Training of staff in methods and techniques of teaching

The policy in Section 47 states clearly “All teachers in tertiary institutions shall be encouraged to undergo training in the methods and techniques of teaching”. This is to enhance their teaching, but this policy, laudable as it may, is yet to be implemented. The Federal Government set up a committee on the Implementation of the National Policy on Education, it is only God that knows the efforts of this Committee; what they have done or achieved. The only national expert meeting organized on the National Policy on Education was in 1983 in Enugu. The outcome of the expose was tagged the ‘Bagauda Report, which though laudable is yet to be implemented. In implementing staff training and methods in teaching, some universities have directed their academic staff to pursue a PGD in Education while others are yet to comply. It should be noted that the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities have in the past kicked against this plan and made it unworkable.

Open University

Distance education has always been part of the Nigerian education policy over years. For instance National Teachers’ Institute has in more than three decades provided primary teachers the opportunity of updating themselves. Distance education was however to take root until almost twenty years ago with the setting up civilian administration. The setting up also saw huge financial investment into the sector. The focus was to make higher education vis-à-vis university education available to the working class so that they can study and earn honours at their spare time.

However, the military take over of government in 1983 saw the Open University being scrapped and ever since confined to the dustbins. Meanwhile with the return of the civil rule in 1999, the government saw the need for the reintroduction of Open University system now

christened National Open University. According to the government the first batch of students will admitted to resume later in the year.

Indifference on the part of the Government

This has been the major bane of all tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It is just a case of “he who plays the pipe, dictates the tune”. This interference started in 1976, when the Head of State in Nigeria, now the Executive President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, removed some Vice-Chancellors and sacked some lecturers without recourse to the rule of law, ethics and governance. This trend continued unabated during successive governments whether in the State or Federal controlled institutions. The issue of promotion, selection and other issues that have to do with University administration is now controlled by government. It should be noted that in 1993, the Federal Government appointed a Major General as the sole administrator for Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. In the year 2000, under the democratic process, the Registrar of Lagos State University was re-deployed to the Ministry in Alausa. It is pathetic that Provosts, Vice-Chancellors, and Rectors are at the mercy of Governors, Commissioners of Education and the like.

The tertiary institutions are being inundated with requests of admit the bearer either for employment, admission or contracts, especially during this political era. This attitude and the likes do not make for good university administration. It has made some tertiary heads become politicians, proud etc due to their closeness with powers that be. Some of them violate Court Orders with impunity. Good example could be seen at the University of Ilorin that sacked university lecturers. Later the President in January this year at the institution’s convocation ceremony said that he supported the Vice Chancellor’s decision to sack the affected lecturers.

The issues of what to teach, how to teach it and what should be the role of the tertiary institutions in society or co-operation within the local community: are not being addressed at all. What each institution is after is how to generate funds; funds at the expense of academics. The issue in question is the proliferation and creation of satellite campuses. This has commercialized education to the highest bidder. The commercial centers do not have facilities at all. This went on unabated until the federal government and the National Universities Commission woke up from their slumber and banned all these satellite campuses. It is ironical that some universities within the geographical zone of these satellite campuses are taking them over as their campuses. It is a known scenerio that a businessman will offer his facilities for the establishment of these centres. To have credibility they will approach some lecturers who will in turn lobby the school for approval to use the school’s name and logo, thereby legitimizing the ‘study centres’ and then charge exorbitant fees. This idea is not about access to education but commercialization. This idea of establishment of satellite campuses presently introduced in the country negates the original idea whereby a satellite campus will turn into a full fledged university. Notably among these were University of Ibadan, Jos Campus which later became University of Jos and University of Lagos Abeokuta Campus now University of Agriculture Abeokuta. These universities were run and controlled by the Federal Government.

Inter-institutional cooperation

Inter-universities co-operation will contribute to national development in the area of research, joint co-operation, mutual respect and understanding as enunciated in the national policy on education. It is noteworthy here that in 1998 an agreement was reached between Lagos State

University and the then Ogun State University now Olabisi Onabanjo University to render academic assistance among themselves in the area of law and agriculture respectively. It seems this co-operation has died as a result of the demise of the Vice Chancellor of LASU and the removal of the Vice Chancellor of OOU. Another good example is the academic linkages between LASU and Austin Peay University in the USA in the 90s. The two universities were to exchange academics and students. These started on a bright note when LASU academics and students went to Austin Peay for one academic session. LASU could not reciprocate the kind gesture due to inadequate infrastructure, a non-conducive teaching and learning environment due to strikes, and above all, the exit of the initiator of this linkage, Professor Enitan Bababunmi, the then Vice Chancellor of LASU.

The lack of continuity in quality programmes that has hindered development in Nigeria has reared its ugly head in university governance. The lack of trust, openness and sincerity of purpose in projects done and embarked upon by predecessors are being discarded because the incumbents do not want to ride on the glory of the predecessors thus being tagged ineffective men with lack of ideas. This attitude of mistrust has now made governance in tertiary institution complex due to lack of genuine interest in the schools. Personal interests are being ranked above academic interest. Any project that will not immediately have impact on the administrator and his acolytes will not see the light of the day.

Tertiary institutions are in a big crisis. Most lecturers are now either contractors, that is, supplying goods and services to the schools or engage in commercial business within and outside the school at the detriment of the academic calling and purposes. Some lecturers have turned their offices to commercial centres either doing typesetting services or engaging in buying and selling. Some have turned to selling cars, for example. That is, helping people to bring cars across the border and ferry them into the country. Some of them argue that they have to resort to this to augment their salaries, which are meager and not regular. It is unfortunate that the agreement reached between Government and ASUU on salary in 1992 still lingers on while successive governments do not want to respect the agreement since “they” were not part of the negotiation. On this salary issue, the State controlled institutions were the worst hit. For example the Governor of Lagos State said that he would not implement any agreement reached between Federal Government and ASUU on salaries. So the academics after reaching an agreement with the Federal Government have to beg and cajole their respective Governors to pay. There is a salary discrepancy between Federal and State owned university lecturers on the same scale. This wage differentiation in the same type of job violates the International Covenant, Economic Social and Cultural rights which Nigeria has acceded to. It also violates the goals of the National Policy on Education, which stress unity, co-operation, tolerance and understanding.

The tertiary institutions that are established to promote intellectual excellence, good virtues etc. have deviated. We are faced daily with report of students caught in armed robbery, rape, assassination etc. The majority of these institutions have misplaced their goals and allowed social, political factors of their environment to create crises in their academic community. It is a known fact that tertiary institutions do not get their entire approved annual budget. The question is where is the short fall? That is why the new Executive Secretary of NUC published recently in a national newspaper the grants released to Federal Universities, the first of its kind in the country.

Conclusions and recommendations

The success of any educational system hinges on proper planning, efficient administration, adequate funding and motivation. The government needs to re-access and reinforce the implementation of the policy with particular reference to the following:

1. The Teachers Registration Council established two years ago could be made relevant by being removed from the ambit of the Minister of Education. This will enable the council to be independent and make itself relevant to its duties and goals and not be moribound like the former council.
2. In an effort to have quality teachers in the country, the Joint Admission and Matriculation Examination into tertiary institution should be conducted in the same day, so as to check the influx of students to universities at the detriment of Polytechnics and Colleges of Education.
3. Government as a matter of priority must put in place machinery to streamline institutions in their areas of specialization so as to avoid duplication, general courses and above all the much-needed funds could be channeled judiciously and it will enhance quality manpower for the country.
4. The Government must as a priority stop paying lip service to the full restoration of autonomy in our institutions. The interference in selection, promotion of staff in institutions by Government will boomerang by having mediocrity at the helms of affairs, bickering, and other social vices as a result of the above could be stopped.
5. The stakeholders in the education sector should ensure that programmes to be embarked upon by the institutions, should be tailored to the needs and aspiration of Nigerians, the availability of facilities for such programmes.
6. In this era of global age, Nigerian institutions must have communication facilities so as to be abreast with latest information and be in tune with development. Its provision will enhance good academic proficiency and reduce stress and burnouts.
7. In an effort to put minimize the funding problem, a lifeline of two billion naira should be given to tertiary institutions to solve their funding problems. This will stop the disruption of academic calendars, half- baked students and so forth.
8. Since an adage says “no man is an island”, there must be in place a framework of pulling together, resources and expertise of tertiary institutions. It will create understanding, co-operation and good academic input into various issues.

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