

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF STANDARD OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

BODANG, ROTKANGMWA JULIANA

**Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Sciences,
University of Jos, Nigeria**

&

PHILIP ETHER LENGKAT

**Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Sciences,
University of Jos, Nigeria**

Abstract

*The standard of education in Nigeria in reference to any educational system must be considered a cause for serious concern because of the significant impact of education in the life of people and the society and the nation at large. Education is considered as the key to economic prosperity and the potent instrument for combating diseases, tackling poverty and supporting sustainable National development. At the international level, "Education for All" {EFA} an initiative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization {UNESCO} was launched in 1990. Similarly, in 2000, Education was considered as one of the eight {8} Millenniums Development Goals {MDGs}, the target being to "ensure children of both sexes everywhere will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling". Nigeria joined 189 other countries worldwide to endorse the declaration {Ademolekun 2003}. Back home in Nigeria, different systems of education were introduced. They ranged from the Universal Primary Education {UPE}, the 6-3-3-4 {JSS/SSC} system of Education to the current Universal basic Education {UBE} scheme. The pertinent question that readily comes to mind is, " **how have these different programmes impacted positively on the life of Nigerians?**" The discourse undertaken in this presentation examines some of the key issues and challenges related to declining standards of Education in Nigeria and proffers measures to significantly improve the overall quality of education currently offer in Nigerian schools.*

Keywords: Education, Prospects, Standard, Challenges, Nigeria.

Standards of Education in Nigeria

The term ""Standards of Education"" is used throughout this presentation in its conventional dictionary sense, to mean: a level of quality or achievement, especially a level that is thought to be acceptable to the education system". Thus, standards of education pertains to the intrinsic worth of school-based instruction provided to its citizenry in terms of policies, teachers, infrastructures, instructional materials, teaching mythologies as well as the processes associated with examinations. Hence, quality in education should lead to demonstrable gains in knowledge, skills and values.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) prescribes the minimum standards of education at all levels to include:

- a. i} In Pre-primary Schools, there should not be more than 20 pupils to a Teacher and a helper {assistant};
ii} In Primary and Secondary Schools, there shall not be more than 35 and 40 pupils respectively to a class;
iii} In technical and Vocational colleges, there shall not be more than 20 pupils for practical work.
- b. Primary, Post-Primary and Tertiary Education shall be the responsibility of the local, state and Federal governments.
- c. Education boards or similar authorities shall be responsible for the management of schools and appointment, posting and discipline of teachers within defined areas of authority.
- d. Special and adequate inducement shall be provided for teachers in rural areas to make them stay on their jobs

The above statements are obviously aimed at maintaining minimum standards in our educational system at all levels. Again, the question to ask is whether the current Nigerian educational system has so far been able to maintain and, possibly, improve upon the enunciated minimum standards?

Factors Responsible for Poor Standard of Education in Nigeria

It is generally recognized fact in education circles that the competence of a teacher is proportionally linked to the level of academic attainment of his/ her students. Thus, a teacher who is academically and professionally qualified can significantly contribute to improving the standard of education within the institution in which he / she works, while an unqualified teacher can only contribute towards diminishing whatever minimum standards that may be operational in the school system. It is in this regard that teachers who do not have requisite academic and professional teaching qualifications would certainly have negative influence on the teaching and learning process that takes place within the typical school environment.

Other key factors which also frequently bring about low standards in education include the following:

- Unfavorable conditions of Service
- Trend of Examination misconduct
- Lack of basic Educational / Laboratory facility
- Poor Funding and Political will
- Ineffective administration
- Poor availability of Educational technology
- Poor teaching performance of the teachers.

Issues Concerned with Standards of Education.

A. Enrolment of Low Quality Teachers:

Several issues account for low standards of education in Nigeria. Some of these issues have direct bearing on the proper implementation of the National Policy of Education's specifications. For instance, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014).clearly specifies government's intention on minimum standard of education in terms of a class ration of "20" pupils to a

teacher for Pre- primary { Early Child-Care Development Education{ECCDE}, 35 pupils for primary and 40 pupils for Secondary, there are obvious indications in our Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary School classes that the ratio so indicated in the NPE documents have been grossly overstretched in Nigeria. It has been estimated that 10.5 million Nigerian children school going age are not attending school- possibly the highest figure in the world {Education for ALL {EFA} Global Monitoring Report 2012}. Similarly, according to the world Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report index 2011-2012, Nigeria has been ranked 40th out of 144 countries in Primary Education enrolment.

- The Present National Planning Minister Shamsuden Usman, revealed two years ago that “ Northern Nigeria harbored the highest number of school age children in the world that were out of school” {Source: Punch, 16/10/2019}
- Enrolment of children into schools in Nigeria was recorded to be as low as 12% in some states { {Source: Leadership, 11/09/2019}
- Nigeria is one of the few countries in the world that was compelled by poor educational standards to launch a unique ‘boy- child education campaign in the South-East zone of the country in June, 2019.
- In 2018 Kwara State tested 19,125 teachers in Primary four Mathematic and only seven teachers attained the minimum benchmark for the test in mathematics. Only one of 2,628 teachers with university degree was able to pass the test in question. Of this number, 10 graduates scored zero. {Source: Daily Trust, August 30th 2018}.

B. Students Poor Performance Records

Available records on students' overall performance in different categories of examinations in Nigeria over the years have revealed the recurrently low standards of education in the country. Elemukan {2019} reported the percentages of students who obtained at least five credits, including English and Mathematics in the May / June WAEC over the last five years to be improving only marginally: 23% {2015} 26% {2016}; 24% {2017, 31% in 2018 and 39% in 2019.

- In NECO, the failure rate was 98% in 2015, 88% in 2016, 89% in 2017, 92% in 2018 and 68% in 2019.
- According to the World Economic Forums Global Competitiveness Report Index, 2016- 2017, Nigeria was ranked 120th out of 144 in secondary education enrolment. With this there is a significant decline in performance of students over the years, what then can we say is the standard of Education in Nigeria, is it high or low?
- The entire Nigeria university system also not immune to the deterioration in educational standards.
- The most ridiculed indication of the rot in our universities was the recent reputed dismissal of three graduates in the Enugu State University of Science and Technology from the National Youth Service Corps Scheme for falling below the standard expected of graduates” The University was reported to have declared an academic emergency on this matter {Punch Editorial, 14th/12/ 2019}.

C. Crisis of Manpower

In order to maintain the requisite educational standards, the federal government stated that” special and adequate inducement shall be provided for teachers in rural areas to make them stay on their jobs (Manga & Ogundele (2019). What obtains now is not just the issue of “inducement” the actual implementation of the incentives promised to teachers in terms of

salaries, promotion and basic allowances. Teacher's salaries, especially at the primary levels are hardly paid as at when due; promotions are either not given or not implemented and allowances accruing to them are often withheld without adequate explanations. These shortcomings in implementation are definitely affecting improvements in the overall standards of education in the country.

More fundamentally is the issue of Nigeria's university system. Instead of having no less than 80% of University –level academics with PhDs, only 43% are PhD holders while the remaining 57% are not. And instead of 75% of such academics being either senior Lecturers or Professors, only about 44% are within the bracket. The remaining 56% are not. The staff mix in some of the recently established state owned universities is alarming. For example, Kano State University, Wudi {established in 2001} has only one substantive Professor and 25 other PhD holders {Source: Committee on Needs Assessment of Nigeria Public Universities: Main Report 2018}.

From the above, it can be deduced that, there is a general inadequacy of teachers of various qualifications at all levels of our educational system. The few available are not sufficiently remunerated to mitigate brain drain. These staff shortages obviously have severe consequences on the prevailing standards of education in the country. In addition, the standards of education are adversely affected whenever schools are closed down during the course of either staff union strikes civil unrests in the wider society.

Challenges in the Education System

Several factors pose serious threats to the improvement of standards of education in Nigeria. These are:

A. Examination Malpractice

These could be seen as an improper and dishonest act associated with institutional examinations, with a view to obtaining unmerited advantage. Examination malpractice is any act of omission or commission that contravenes the rules and regulation of school examinations to the extent of undermining the validity and reliability of the tests and ultimately the integrity of the certificates issued. Studies have shown that examination malpractice was first reported in Nigeria in 1914, when the question papers of the Senior Cambridge Local Examinations were reportedly seen by candidates before the scheduled date of the examinations. Examinations leakages have since this date occurred quite frequently in different forms, including the use of foreign materials, getting outsiders to write for examinations candidates, cheating, giving gratifications and more recently the use of handset/ cell phones. All of these malpractice activities significantly affect the standards of examination and by extension standard of education {Simdung, 2013}.

B. Inadequate Basic Infrastructure

Though the efforts of the Federal Government of Nigeria through its Millennium Development Goal {MDGs} and UBE programme are quite commendable in terms of the provision of school infrastructures and textbooks, vast majority of the schools across the federation still remain, dilapidated, with collapsed structures, roofs and inadequate classroom / office furniture. In many schools, the children are observed to take lessons sitting on bare classrooms floors or other rudimentary seats. Some are under trees, with no basic

infrastructural facilities does not only hampers learning but serves to significantly lower the standards of education. In the last three to four decades, textbooks, exercise books, pencils / pens, school uniforms used to be provided free of charge. This is perhaps the thrust of the policy behind the current UBE programme for Universal, free and compulsory education for all at the Primary and JSS levels of education. As things now stand, the reverse is now the case, as the education is neither “free” nor universal for children for which it is originally designed.(Oke (2017).

C. Poor Monitoring and Maintenance of Minimum Standard

Although government has established Inspectorate Services Divisions in various Ministries of Education at both the state and Federal levels, with the primary goal of setting, maintaining and improving standards in all aspects of the Nigerian school system; and ensuring uniform standard and quality control {NPE, 2015. p.60}, it is unfortunate that the activities of these monitoring arms of government leaves much to be desired. First, there is a kind of “square peg in a round hole” syndrome, whereby school principals are often ranked higher in functional status than the Inspectors of education, instead of the other way round. This kind of situation tends to make it difficult for such Inspectors to effectively discharge their assigned duties and responsibilities. In practical terms many Education Inspectors tend to succumb to the dictates of school principals and heads, even when such heads fail to adhere to prescribed minimum standards of education in their various schools (.Durosaro,2011,

D. Poor Funding

Generally, our educational system has been funded. This can be attested to by the progressive decline in budgetary allocation for Education over the year. Money is urgently needed but little or none is provided for purchases of instructional materials / equipment for use in various schools. The prompt payment of entitlements of teachers which could have used to boost academic excellence in schools has consistently been overlooked or delayed. For many years, many mission-run schools that provided qualitative education to Nigerians were taken over by state governments with the intended goal of providing better funding and infrastructural development. However, such schools were unfortunately reduced to pitiable levels of mediocrity and neglect due to low salaries, poor working environment and lack of incentives. The result was poor levels of academic performance by students. Efforts aimed at restoring teacher professionalism that could, in turn raise standards and enable the education sector to regain credibility have so far recorded limited success {Ademolekun, 2018}.

Prospects of Education in Nigeria

1. Proper Implementation of Policies and Laws

The currently operative National Policy on Education is the major Statutory document that spells out the key policies and implementation strategies of the Federal Government on Education, alongside the UBE Act of 2004 and other international Conventions and Charters, {such as Education for ALL, MDGs} provide the principal legal documents through which the Federal Government of Nigeria should promote and implement a regime of ‘Better Education for All’. But unfortunately most of these pronouncements and laws are not fully implemented. For instance, both the National Policy on Education and the blue print of the Universal Basic Education {UBE} programme state that “Education shall be free at all levels., but the reality on ground is that increasingly exorbitant school fees are still being paid even at the primary

school level. This obviously negates the provision of the Nations educational policies and laws which should be urgently redressed (Ogundele, 2019).

2. Increase Funding for Education

It is important to restate that Nigeria has sufficient financial resources to ensure adequate financing of Education at All levels. Ademolekun {2018} has reported that about \$400 billion oil money was either out rightly stolen or mismanaged in Nigeria between 1960 and mid-2018 of which \$ 250 billion was wasted between 1999 and mid-2018. The author also reported that between 2016 and 2019, Federal Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies {including law-enforcement units} failed to remit about ~~N~~4 trillion to the Federation account. That translates to ~~N~~1 trillion per annum or 25% of the annual budget for those years. (Oyedepi (2013)

Furthermore, the gap in the funding pattern in public Universities remains quite worrisome. Today, most universities in Nigeria have increased school fees. Private Universities are the affected by the development. School fees within this category of Universities have increased beyond the reach of the average Nigerian parent / guardian. There is an urgent need for policy reform at all levels of Education to provide appropriate mix of scholarships, bursaries and loans that would ensure that no Nigerian who is qualified for a university education in a public institution is denied the opportunity because of his/ her inability to pay prescribed fees. Olasehinde (2014)

3. Provision of Infrastructures

These include building of more classrooms, as currently being undertaken by UBEC across the Federation. State SUBEBs must also follow suit and ensure the massive upgrading of existing school infrastructures. There is the need to rehabilitate the existing structures as most of the old buildings have collapsed nee renovation or have roofs that are leaking. It is also necessary to state that the structures within the school system must be furnished and equipped with modern gadgets {white board, marker, ICT and accessories}, in order to create much better learning environments at all levels of education.(Morohunfoye &Ogundele (2013).

4. Enhance Institutional Autonomy

Institutional autonomy should guarantee some level of independence for the administration of the university sector. Several issues are involved here. The right to screen and admit only qualified students should be the sole responsibility of each university and not JAMB. The centralized admission policies which give 60% of the prospective students to Science and 40% to Arts has created a significant measure of imbalance in the education system. This is because in may instances, it is clear that graduates applying for admission in the Arts- related disciplines are usually more in number than those interested in Science disciplines. The ratio which restricts admissions into Art- based disciplines to only 40% intake is obviously discriminatory and clearly denies many deserving candidates equitable access to education. Therefore both Public and Private universities should be allowed to determine their own admission practices but maintain the minimum entry requirements of {5} O/L credits including English and Mathematics in WAEC and NECO.

Another issue has to do with the politicization of appointment of either the University Vice Chancellors, Provosts of Colleges of Education and Rectors of Polytechnics. Under normal circumstances, the most qualified person should be appointed, on the basis of competitive selection and interview processes. But unfortunately the situation is not always so, due to other mitigating external factors, which are detrimental to true university autonomy. Vice chancellors and other heads of higher institutions should ideally be appointed in the bases of merit.(Ogundele (2018)

Conclusion

Getting the universal goals for ALL education is the pre-eminent condition for attaining Prosperity, Literacy in Society and Peaceful Co-existence. Get it wrong, and Poverty, alongside with insecurity, would continue to persist. For Nigeria to escape from its miserably low educational standards. The best brains at all levels of Education must be retained and properly remunerated, facilities must be provided and there should be upward increase in budgetary allocation to Education. This, in summary, is the panacea for attaining rapid economic, social, political and technological development in our country, Nigeria.

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