

An Exploration into the Education Innovations in Nigeria in the Last Two Decades

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Abstract

Nigeria education system has gone through various developments and changes which have been brought about by the government, individuals and organisations from the colonial era till date. The dynamic nature of education in Nigeria calls for repeated study of the history of educational development in Nigeria. This study focuses on the educational innovations in Nigeria with special attention on those that took place in the last two decades that witnessed both military and civilian administration.

Keywords: National policy on education, distance education, open learning, ICT, tertiary institutions in Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Societies through ages have one form of education or the other, whether formal or non-formal. This is because education is as essential to man as life itself. Education varies from place to place and from time to time. In fact, it is a very important means of developing any nation. The term education has not lent itself to any strict consensual definition as it depends on the perspective from which one views it. It can be considered as the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, interest, abilities, competence and the cultural norms of a society by people to transmit its life to the coming generations so as to enhance perpetual development of the society. History had it that long before the advent of both Islamic and western education; Nigeria has an indigenous type of education (i.e. education for the survival of the people known as subsistence education). However, modern influences, robbed the country of its indigenous education to a great extent. For instance, Christian education was promoted by the colonial administration to suit its purpose of colonisation.

Change in time witnessed change in the purpose of education in Nigeria as education later changed its focus towards developing individuals to contribute to the development of the nation and ultimately in preparation for self government at independence. Even after independence, a critical examination of the education shows that it was inadequate and unsatisfactory to the nation's aspirations. There have been different changes and innovations to make the educational system relevant to the needs, yearnings and aspiration of Nigeria people. Some of these innovations would be considered in this study but attention will be placed on those that took place in the last-two decades (1991—2011).

Nigeria's National Policy on Education

The Nigeria's National Policy on Education was published in 1977 but revised in 1981, 1990 and 2004. The policy document was revised to ensure that the policies address the perceived needs of the government in power and to try to ensure that the education sector is supportive of government developmental goals. Following the recent political changes, which saw the reintroduction of democracy in the country, 1999 to be precise, the government acknowledged the need to revise and update the National Policy on Education once more to ensure that education system meets the needs of a new democracy. Government initiatives to reform the education system in the 1990s apart from the revision of the National Policy on Education also include two studies on the education sector. The first study 'A Situation Analysis Policy Study' (SAPA) was conducted in cooperation with the United Nation Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) (1992). The study was undertaken to analyse the factors that inhibit access to education and factors that affect the quality of education. This study was conducted between 1991 and 1992. The second study was conducted in 1997 for the purpose of assessing learning achievements of Nigerian Primary School Children at Level Four. The results of this study indicated that children lacked basic numeracy and literacy competencies.

The problem with policy changes in Nigeria is implementation crises. These problems could be removed through the following suggestions: (1) there is a need for a shift from theoretical and paper certification to a practical knowledge necessary for future and self-employment; (2) there should be compulsory training for all teachers and instructors

on changes in curriculum; (3) new experts should also be trained locally or abroad and experts should be recruited from abroad in disciplines where no qualified Nigerians are yet available.

Universal Primary Education

Universal Primary Education has been a stated priority of every Nigerian government since its introduction in the seventies. The actual commitment of the different governments to the scheme, however, has varied substantially. For instance, Abdulsalam's administration in recognition of the need for greater participation of the stakeholders in the implementation of the scheme, passed legislation that spells out the responsibilities of different levels of government and those of various stakeholders. Other initiatives included the reinstatement of the National Primary Education Commission and other management structures from 1993.

National Primary Education Commission was established in 1988, abolished in 1991 and re-established by Decree No. 96 of 1993. The Commission has been unable to meet the demand of implementing Universal Basic Education scheme due to the limited financial resources at their disposal. The objective of UBE at that time was to improve the management of the education system. A number of initiatives have also been taken as basic steps to promote increased access to education since 1990.

Obasanjo's government re-launched the Universal Basic Education in 1999 as one of its top priorities. The re-launch of Universal Basic Education in 1999 is aimed at providing free universal basic education for all, to enable all citizens to acquire appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, communicative, manipulative and life skills. The intention is to provide nine years of compulsory education that would span primary and secondary levels. Access to basic education as a national priority includes literacy and adult education, science and vocational training. His government has also committed itself to implementing international agreements such as the implementation of 'Education for All by the Year 2000' which was adopted at the 'World Declaration on Education for All' at the Jomtien (Thailand) World Conference in 1990. The funding and management of primary education have also been changed while the functions of the National Primary Education Commission have been restructured to exclude the management of the primary education budget. The new role is more professional in nature and includes planning for the implementation of Universal Primary Education and the need to address issues of quality, equity and access in the system, with emphasis on gender issues.

Review of 6-3-3-4 to the new 9-3-4 System of Education

The Federal Government of Nigeria, after independence and in an attempt to find the type of education best suited to Nigeria's development, identified 6-3-3-4 system of education dated back to 8th September 1969 during the (International Literacy Day). The Federal Government stated that the programme was conceived as an instrument of national unity and, also to inject functionality into the Nigerian School System. The 6-3-3-4 was fashioned to produce graduates who would be able to make use of their Hands, the Head and the Heart (the 3Hs of education). This programme however was fully introduced in 1982 and continued into the 1990s. This programme was seen as a laudable one capable of ushering in an educational revolution in Nigeria and also tends towards the technological development of the nation. However, the current situation on ground is far from the ideal. The programme seems to be suffering from poor implementation.

Under 6-3-3-4 system, the recipient of the education would spend six years in the primary school, three years in the junior secondary school, three years in the senior secondary school and four years in the tertiary institutions. In these stages, we have primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions. The primary schools are for children between the ages of 6 to 11 years, which is the foundation for education, upon it others are built. It determines the success and failure of the whole system. The junior and senior secondary schools are simply called secondary schools where education is received after the primary schools and before the tertiary institution.

The new 9-3-4 system of education, that is, Universal Basic Education (UBE), which took off in 2006, has the first 9 years of basic and compulsory education up to the JSS III level, three years in the senior secondary school and four years in the tertiary institution. It was designed to streamline the overcrowded nature of subject offered at the basic education level. The new curriculum for the 9-3-4 system is expected to be realigned to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Distance Education and Open Learning

The year 1983 marks a turning point in the history of Open Distance Education (ODE) in Nigeria. From this date onwards, the educational history of Nigeria towards her strives to achieve Education For All (EFA) Nigerians received a surge. At the two world milestones of basic education, Jomtien and Dakar, world leaders reiterated on the deplorable and slow progress towards the achievement of the goals of EFA. Various statistics indicate that majority of Nigerians are yet to be reached through one form of education or the other. When we therefore consider her population of 120 million (Common Country

Assessment, 2001), her poverty rate of 67.8% and her 70% rural population (Jegade, 2003), what we visualise and the conclusion drawn is the tremendous need to meet the demands for education at all cost. In a country of continental dimensions such as Nigeria, distance education has emerged as a mediated form of instruction, and has all the attributes to become a major factor in overcoming the serious challenges faced by Nigerian society. Among these challenges, complete insertion into the knowledge economy—in which schooling and prior professional experience matter more than ever—is the most urgent. To do so, it is necessary to define and implement programmes able to address the needs of a society seeking more and improved educational opportunities. What then is distance education and open learning?

According to Omovo (2006), distance education is the means by which the teacher is taken literally to the student. It is a teaching and learning process in which students are separated from the teachers by a physical distance, which is often bridged by communication technologies. Paraton (2001) sees distance education as an education process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by 'someone' removed in space and time from the learner. The link between that 'someone' and the learner is therefore necessarily provided by different means of communication and instruction. Distance education is a learner-centred educational process, which means departing from a conventional teaching and learning, culture to one which employs a wide range of tools to effect learning outcomes. These tools recognise and are designed for self-learning. They include printed course units and readers, tutor- and computer-marked assignment and feedback systems, radio and television broadcasts, audio and video tapes, home kits, individualised counselling, and help through telephone, or electronic mail.

Open learning refers to policies and practices that permit entry to learning with none or minimum barriers with respect to age, gender or time constraints and with recognition of prior learning (Glen, 2005). The distance educational mode ensures that broad availability of educational opportunities reach as many segments of the population as possible. This mode of learning, as it has been argued elsewhere (Jain, 2001 and Jegede, 2003) can accommodate diverse learning styles, and provide access to remote and normally inaccessible under-represented groups and people in different circumstances. They have further argued that this type of learning has proved to be efficient world over.

Distance education can be delivered through several modalities which include, but not limited to video cassettes, audio cassettes, online or traditional face-to-face tutoring. Whatever the mode of delivery, the objective is to increase access to education to those

who have difficulty in accessing it within the mainstream. It is therefore a vulnerable tool that typically meets the needs of people who cannot be removed from their houses or job places for a long time. It reaches people in communities in which they would otherwise be deprived of opportunities to learn. It equally makes a significant contribution by increasing people access to the education system and lastly, it gives room for people to start applying what they have learned almost immediately as their training laboratory (Jegade, 2003). It is currently being promoted by international organisations as an appropriate policy option for developing countries.

Literature reviewed reveals that distance education and open learning have thrived in the last two decades. For instance, distance learning was regarded by the Federal Government as important for the implementation of the UPE programme introduced in 1976 and the UBE programme introduced in 1976 and the UBE programme introduced in 1999. Even though this programme (distance learning) initially faced a lot of bottlenecks that nearly crippled the institute, some of which were the undeveloped structure the print technology, the inefficient postal system and the unfamiliarity with that of distant study centres, distance learning has justified its establishment. Over a period of eight years, for instance, the institute contributed immensely in the growth of primary education teacher graduates from 45,150 to over 300,000. In two years alone, between 1990 and 1992, the NTI, a form of distance learning, graduated 21,000 students in Certificate in Education. This figure compares with the combined total of 58,000 teachers graduated by the nation's 58 conventional Colleges of Education (Gallimore & Stigler, 2003).

The history of Open University Education started in Nigeria in 1983 by the Second Republic government of President Shehu Shagari who introduced the Open University of Nigeria as a new feature of tertiary education to facilitate and enhance access to higher education for Nigeria. This innovative idea died in the embryonic stage when the military government of General Muhammadu Buhari on April 25, 1984 suspended the project indefinitely. Pressure was put on Obasanjo's governments to take closer look at education in the country. Genuine and legitimate grievances about the standard of education in Nigeria and the alarming growth rate of the population were placed before his government. It was argued that Nigeria has the challenge to provide access to higher institutions of learning to meet the social career and employment needs amongst Nigerians. For instance, according to *This Day*, January 27, 2004:6, Nigerian conventional universities were able to cope with 15% of more than 1.5 million qualified applicants for Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB).

However, in the search for an education framework in Nigeria that can take care of accessibility, qualitative and cost effective education, the organisation of the national workshop on distance education was set up by the Federal Ministry of Education and the office of the Special Adviser on Education to the President in September, 2005. The workshop reiterated that open and distance delivery is crucial to educational development in Nigeria. For the Open University and distance education to achieve the desired result, there must be collaborative efforts between the government, international agencies and institution (for training purpose) and private sector to make the programmes work.

Information and Communication Technology in the Nigerian Educational System

Nigeria, as a nation, has recognised the potentials of information and that of information and communication technology in the school system. This is evidence in the educational reform policies aimed at integrating the use of ICT, particularly the computer, in the Nigerian school system. The first national programme on ICT was the Federal Government 1988 policy document, that is, National Policy on Computer Education (FME, 1988). The document emphasised the needs for primary school pupils to be introduced into basic computer skills, the use of the computer to facilitate learning, and rudimentary use for test writing, computation and data entry. For secondary schools the goals were as identified for primary schools, but to be pursued at a higher level. The additions were the organisation of curriculum for secondary school students on computer education, and the decision to use the unity schools as the pilot institutions for computer education. The tertiary institutions were also required to teach computer science as a subject discipline, and also integrate it into the school administration and instruction. Other components of the document include equipment requirement, teacher training, and specific recommendations on different tertiary institutions. However, as noted earlier, the implementation was not effective. The National Policy on Education as revised in 1998 and 2004, re-emphasised the need for integration of ICT in the Nigerian education system.

The first holistic attempt at introducing ICT in all facets of the country's life was the approval by the Federal Government of a national policy on ICT. The Nigerian National Policy for Information Technology (FRN, 2001), recognised the need for ICT to be used for education, and three major objectives among several objectives emphasised the need to empower youths with ICT skills. This is to prepare them for competitiveness in a global environment, integrate ICT into the mainstream of education and training, and establishment of multifaceted ICT institutions as centres of excellence on ICT. The document

specifically noted the need for 'Restructuring the education system at all levels to respond effectively to the challenges and imagined impact of the information age and in particular, the allocation of a special IT development fund for education at all levels.

To achieve these objectives, nine major strategies were outlined, these include: making the use of ICT compulsory at all educational institutions, developing of ICT circular for all levels of education, using ICT in distance education, and ICT companies investment in education. Others include giving study grant and scholarship on ICT, training the trainers' scheme for youth corp members on ICT, ICT capacity building at the zonal, state and local government levels, establishing private and public dedicated ICT institutions, and working with international and domestic initiatives to transfer ICT knowledge. However, Yusuf (2005) noted in his analysis of the Nigerian National Policy for Information Technology (FRN, 2001) that the policy was inadequate for positive impact on the Nigerian education system. This, he noted, stems from the fact that the philosophical frame of reference is market driven, and that there is little emphasis on the integration of ICT in instruction.

It should be noted that none of the policy documents, National Policy on Computer Education (FME, 1988), National Policy on Education (2004). And the Nigerian National Policy for Information Technology (FRN, 2001) recognised the need to use the computer or ICT to provide access to education for people with disability. This underscores a major inadequacy in the policy document. In addition, strategies outlined in the document were not followed. Another significant document on ICT was the Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 2004), Ministerial Initiative on e-Education for Nigerian Education System. Unlike the previous documents, the initiative was drawn based on input from major educational and human development commissions and board (National Universities Commission, National Colleges of Education Commission, National Board for Technical Education, Education For All, Universal Basic Education, etc). Also, for the first time, the need to integrate ICT in special education, particularly for people with disability was emphasised. However the document could not be implemented because the Minister who initiated the document was removed. Thus causing the death of the document which was meant to leap-frog the Nigerian educational institutions into ICT compliant ones. Since then, no national document had been developed on the integration of ICT in Nigerian educational institutions. As a matter of fact, information and communication technology has the potential for enhancing the tools and environment for learning as it allows materials to be presented in multiple media,

motivates and engages students in the learning process, fosters inquiry and exploration, and provides access to worldwide information resources, among others. The education reforms act of 2007 (FME, 2007) clearly highlighted the need to: improve the quality of instruction in Nigerian school, provide enriched learning environment, need to provide more access to education, and provide the students with knowledge and skills necessary for the 21st century work place, among others, as the motivating factor for the educational reforms. It must be underscored that information and communication technologies will assist in ensuring the achievement of these goals of the educational reforms. In specific terms, manpower that are competent and constantly given developmental training will be required for the success of the reforms. First, ICT can be relevant in the teachers' professional development, to give them guides to sources of knowledge. Teachers in contemporary society require large, rich and easily accessible knowledge-based which can be provided through ICT technologies that support teacher professional development (Gallimore & Stigler, 2003). Teachers need to be life-long learners to keep abreast of new knowledge, pedagogical ideas, and technology, relevant to successful implementation of Nigerian educational reforms. Through the digital libraries, virtual institutions and other internet resources teachers can easily have access to relevant and current resources in their areas. Thus, they must be competent in the use of ICT to husband its potentials.

Furthermore, the quality of students' learning will be enhanced through their access to the needed content through ICT facilities (especially the internet). Information and communication technology can enhance learning by doing, and increase the information available to learners, thereby engendering collaborative learning (World Bank, 2003).

Moreover, ICT can provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities to have access to quality education. They can be relevant as assistive technology, adaptive technology, and as a tool for knowledge and support. In addition, information and communication technologies are essentials in the sensitisation of Nigerians, particularly educational stakeholders on the nature and aspects of the education reforms, the resources and needs for its proper implementation, and the evaluation of the reforms, among others. It is possible to promote institutional linkages, collaboration between various stakeholders, and dissemination of information on educational reforms through ICT.

Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Higher education system in Nigeria witnessed a lot of changes in the last twenty years, despite the

distortions and constraints imposed by the different military government. The distortions include the fact that the government interfered in the university affairs by directly appointing the vice-chancellors. The university autonomy continued to be usurped by the central government and incentives and rewards for research productivity, teaching excellence and associated innovations gradually disappeared. In consequence, research output dropped, educational quality declined and management structures redefined.

There were also problems like poor working conditions and political repression on campuses which generated series of stag and student strikes during the 1990s. Despite the recommendations of different commissions on the need to deal with these problems, the government refused to act on them. The democratically elected government that came into Nigeria in 1999 instituted institutional reforms in higher education. Some of these reforms include institutional audits of all universities and associated parastatals, revocation of the vice-chancellors' former privileges, reconstruction of all university governing councils, the licensing of many private universities, exemption of university staff from public service, salary scales and regulations and a 180% increase in funding of the university system.

In an attempt to crown these efforts, there was also a new government policy on autonomy for universities announced on July 21, 2000 (FME, 2000) which gave full responsibility for institutional government including the appointment of senior officers. It also restored block grant funding to universities, circumscribed the powers of the National Universities Commission, vested university senates with the authority to decide on curricula, returned to universities the right to set admissions criteria and select students and laid the groundwork for new minimum academic standards. In March 2002, national Summit on Higher Education was held to examine specific policy issues arising from the government university autonomy policy. About 1,200 stakeholders attended and the topics addressed included management, funding, access, curriculum relevance and social problems (FME, 2002).

In May 2002, a set of legislative proposals designed to reform existing higher education laws and establish a permanent legal basis for these changes was approved by the Federal Executive Council and forwarded to the National Assembly for deliberation. The proposals would give university council the responsibility for setting institutional policies, hiring top management and forwarding institutional budgets, give institutions control over their own students' administration, limit the role of NUC to quality assurance and system coordination, place

curbs on the right of employees to strike and legally de-link the universities from the public service.

Despite the above innovations and changes, some problems are still evident in the tertiary education in Nigeria. Some of these problems include lack of access to higher institutions by many Nigerians and low enrolment to higher institutions in comparison to the growing population. The content and method of our educational system also needs to be modified. The need for this is portrayed through the dropout rate, which still appears to be high even though the institutional statistics may be unreliable because universities do not monitor their dropout rates.

Similarly, public and private employers of university graduates as well as government itself, consider the quality of university graduates to be inadequate (Dabaleri & Adekola, 2000). In terms of finance, enrolments have increased more quickly than the government's capacity to maintain its proportional financial support. Simply put, the educational system in Nigeria has not had the financial resources to maintain educational quality in most of the significant expansion. For example, the government grants for universities was 530 million Naira in 1988 but 9.6 billion Naira in 1999. In real terms, the grants per student in 1999 were one-third of their level in 1990 (Hartnett, 2000).

Literature reviewed also reveals that the NUC is staffed with people of no professional training in the management of higher education. This has affected the management of higher education in Nigeria apart from the fact that the efforts to improve university system management have been confounded by a culture of corruption within Nigerian society. It is observed that the grants for higher education should be proportionate to the growth rate in enrolment and cost-sharing should evolve through individual institutional decisions of universities.

CONCLUSION

Education in Nigeria in the last two decades had undergone a series of tremendous structuring and restructuring. Policies were formulated and reformulated for the purpose of realising the national goals and objectives on education. All these attempts and efforts had not been able to yield the expected results. The Nigerian society is becoming more complex and complicated as a result of population explosion that necessitated increase in the number of students' enrolment in all the levels of our education system. This makes admission issue to tertiary institutions an hydra-headed problems. As a matter of fact Nigeria is at 2011 having about 117 universities (26 owned by states, 36 owned by the federal government and 45 owned by private individuals and organisations). These institutions are still grossly inadequate for the candidates seeking admission.

Even the few ones admitted cannot be adjudged to be well-grounded in quality and functional education as a result of lack of infrastructures and adequate personnel. As a matter of fact, the government policies on education for the last two decades had been adjudged nationally and internationally good and beautiful but lacked thorough implementation and prosecution. The military administration during this period, though built structures in schools but bastardised education in all ramifications. As a result of political instability in the country during the period under review, the educational system is badly affected, this is because, as government changes, education policies were either obstructed, changed or modified. This is why we cannot boast of any reasonable educational philosophy for the country.

Presently, the government both at the federal and state levels are now talking of information and communication technology (ICT) in our primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Can ICT survive without electricity; or without well-trained manpower? How sincere are the leaders in the implementation of the new policies especially the ICT? What is the government doing about all these? As a matter of fact, in the current school systems, the level of intellectual ability has decreased to the point where many high school graduates are incapable of reading, writing and solving simple mathematical problems at any mediocre level of competence. The public schools through mandated curricula and teaching methodology have minimised the importance of development of mental thinking-cognitive skills and instead have placed greater attention on the alteration of beliefs, values and behaviours. Due to a combination of current thinking disability of Nigerian students and the inability of teachers to uniformly get the psycho-oriented materials applied, too-often not result of the application of methods such as values clarification is a general reduction in ethical standards and a rise of crime and immorality.

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