

## Qualitative Education for Self-Reliant: A Veritable Tool for National Integration

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### Abstract

Self-reliant is a trait that individual should have in order to be functional and productive member of the any human society. Nigeria as a nation cannot attain national integration in a situation where majority of her population are either unemployed or underemployed, due to the nature of the education which they receive. This paper discusses the state of educational system in Nigeria, the challenges which hinder our educational system from producing graduates who would be employers of labour rather than seekers labour which is not always available. The paper conclude that, for our educational system to be qualitative in nature government, private and non-governmental organization should help in funding the system effectively in order to produce meaning result.

### Introduction

Education has been described as the bedrock of every society and tool for nation building. For quality education to be achieved in a nation the principal actors of learning who the teachers, learners are and the environment must be cooperatively organized. In other words, the teacher must be adequate in quality and quantity, the students must be well trained and facilities must be provided as well. In recent time, the upspring and rapid establishment of private schools and institution in Nigeria is as a result of lack of confidence the Nigeria's education system which has adverse effect in the development of the nation.

Adepoju (1999) was right when he implied that, people and nations are what they are because of the nature and types of education they have been exposed to. However, the modern view, even where only lip service is being paid to it, is that, quality education is the right of every citizen, not a privileged that the rulers may grant or withhold.

Education today must have the effect of making it possible for a country to have a steady supply of highly creative citizens who help to keep improving the living conditions of the general citizenry, and to solve the existential problems that are thrown up from time to time. Such problems are now being further and it is complicated by the theory and reality of the so-called global village.

As is well known, the problem that government has is in reconciling access with quality in the provision of education. But, it is abnormal to describe education as anything that lacks quality. (Yoloye, 2005) agrees that quality must characterize education at every stage and the real problem that governments have to face is deciding the mix of levels

Qualitative education is a human right that should be accorded to all human beings solely by reason of being human. There are a lot of international human rights instruments that provide for education as a fundamental human right. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981). The relationship between qualitative education and national integration is well established such that education is a key index of national integration of both society and individual. It has been documented that schooling improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life such as child labour as well as bringing about empowerment which leads to self-reliant (Education for All, 2002). This is why there has been a lot of emphasis particularly in recent times for all citizens of the world to have access to qualitative basic education. This called for why the international community and governments all over the world have made commitments for citizens to have access to education.

Over the years, Nigeria has expressed a commitment to education, in the belief that overcoming illiteracy and ignorance will form a basis for accelerated self-reliant which will eventually bring about national integration. However, regardless of the incontrovertible evidence that education is crucial to the development of the community and individual.

A person who is self-reliant is self-sufficient, is able to think and function independently, is not risk-averse and solves problems rather than worries about them. Such a person would trust his own judgment, rarely needing to consult others for advice or guidance. A self-reliant person has better control of his life and can handle any curveball that may throw his way.

This paper discusses the state of education in Nigeria and the challenges that flow therefrom. It then discusses what can be done to improve that state of education in Nigeria in order to make it qualitative in nature, so as to bring about self-reliant.

### **The State of Education in Nigeria**

The severe decline of the oil market in the early eighties, combined with the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), led to drastic reductions in spending on education. The result was unpaid teacher salaries, degradation of education facilities at all levels and strikes in Universities and schools. The end result is declining literacy rates in the country. The poor state of education in Nigeria is aptly captured in the National Empowerment Development Strategy as follows:

the delivery of education in Nigeria has suffered from years of neglect, compounded by inadequate attention to policy frameworks within the sector. Findings from an ongoing educational sector analysis confirm the poor state of education in Nigeria. The national literacy rate is currently 57 percent. Some 49 percent of the teaching force is unqualified. There are acute shortages of infrastructure and facilities at all levels. Access to basic education is inhibited by gender issues and socio-cultural beliefs and practices, location (rural, urban or border areas), among other factors. Wide disparities persist in educational standards and learning achievements. The system emphasizes theoretical knowledge at the expense of technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial education. School curricula need urgent review to make them relevant and practice oriented (NEEDS).

Meanwhile, the education system in Nigeria is guided by the broad National objectives which are articulated in the National Policy on Education. At its inception in 2004, in response to the challenges in the primary education sector, the fourth Republic administration launched the Universal Basic Education Programme. Specifically, the Universal Basic Education Act (2004) and the Child Rights Act provide the legal framework for the implementation of the Programme, which makes basic education not only free but also compulsory. In addition, as a signatory to the 2000 World Education Conference, and the 6 Dakar Goals towards achieving Education for All (EFA), Government has also established a National EFA Coordination unit under the Federal Ministry of Education mandated to prepare a National Action Plan for the delivery of EFA in Nigeria.

Education the world over is “instrument par excellence for effecting national development” (FGN, 2004). It is inevitable tool for sustainable development. It is the vehicle for advancing the frontier of knowledge (Fadipe, 2000; Abdulkareem, 2001). It is a tool for human capital development necessary for economic growth and development (Ojogho & Ogunu, 2003). Education stimulates and accelerates development in other sectors of society. It is the bedrock of national integration in Nigeria (Jaja, 2007; Agba, Ushie & Agba, 2007; Agba, 2007). The economic, social and political status of any nation, indeed the very fabric of human society depends on education (Kelly, 1995). Despite the centrality of education in national development, the Nigerian educational system is at a cross road (Agba, 2007). The system is at a state of serious and rapids collapse (Denga, & Denga, 1998). The educational system is in deep, infectious and outrageous crisis that is yearning for the urgent attention of all stakeholders (Erinosho, Akindele, Obasi & John-Odepe, 2001). According to Ajekigbe (2005:15) the “quality of education in Nigeria has steadily worsened in the past 20 years”. Similarly, Agba, Ushie & Agba (2010) posit that the standard of education in Nigeria is falling everyday. Ekaette (2001) observed that the decline in the educational system is obviously affecting all other indices and is obstructing the country’s march towards national development, progress and stability.

### **Challenges Facing Education in Nigeria**

There are a lot of challenges facing education system at all levels in Nigeria, this hinders it effective production of self-reliant individuals, who are capable of promoting the culture of peaceful living and national integration. Researches has shown that the following factors constitute challenges to education system in Nigeria;

The first and perhaps the greatest challenges facing education is inadequate funding by federal, states and local governments, to the extent that funding has been in response to conditionalities imposed by international financial institutions (IFIs). Statistics show that federal government expenditure on education between 1997 and 2000 has been below 10% of overall expenditure. The national expenditure on education cannot be computed because various states expenditure on education cannot be determined, in relation to the UNESCO recommendation of 26% of national budgets. This seems to be responsible for poorly-equipped libraries, laboratories and subject rooms. This is needed for effective teaching and learning, well equipped laboratories and subject rooms are needed; but the truth is that a major of Nigerian secondary schools today lack these essential facilities Many schools and colleges have buildings that they call libraries, but most of these are not equipped with essential books and current journals and magazines. Also, many schools and colleges do not have science laboratories while a good number of those that have, do not possess the basic tools or equipments as microscopes, dissecting instruments and specimens. Also, many schools do not have "special rooms for teaching such basic subjects as history, geography and French. In such a situation as this, the teachers cannot put in their best; and the students, too, cannot derive maximum benefit from the instruction being given. Again, the teaching-learning process is stalled and the overall development of the children, within the school system is retarded.

Problem of access which has attracted a lot of attention particularly in recent years. Studies have been

conducted on the reasons why people do not go to school; the people that are usually excluded and the impact of the introduction of user fees. A study conducted by Action Aid published in 2003 showed that the reason why pupils do not go to primary schools include costs of schooling, opportunity costs, illness and hunger, limited economic costs of education and low quality of schooling (ActionAid, 2003). The costs of schooling include the costs of books, stationery and basic equipment, uniforms, admission fees, registration and examination fees, contribution towards building and maintenance fund, construction fees, transportation, mid-day meals, Parents/Teachers Association (PTA) fees, sports fees, library fees and extra tuition fees. The opportunity cost for parents sending children to school is the children's time that could have been of economic importance to the family either in terms of income generating activities or in supporting the functioning of the household. Illness and hunger either of the children themselves or members of the family can prevent children from going to school. Limited economic benefits in terms of the fact that those who have completed school have no jobs do dissuade people from going to school. Finally, low quality of schooling particularly with regards to poor physical infrastructures, lack of motivated staff, poor utilization of resources, content of curriculum, nature of teaching methods and relationship of the school and teachers with the wider community can negatively impact on the urge to go to school (ActionAid, 2003).

**Unstable curriculum and subject syllabuses** Because of the need for schools and colleges to meet the requirements of certain examining bodies, Nigerian educational institutions, particularly at the pre-tertiary level have to change their syllabuses from time to time Even when the national subject curricula are constant for some years, the school subject syllabuses are subject to change or modification by teachers, particularly where subject teachers are changed frequently. This is particularly the case with rural schools where teachers frequently ask for transfer to urban primary or secondary schools. In effect, rural schools are usually filled with itinerant teachers: Youth-Coopers, fresh graduates on state service or other categories of newly-employed teachers who have no other option. The tendency for these categories of teachers is usually to modify the syllabus to embody their newly acquired knowledge.

There is the problem of poor infrastructures and lack of teaching and learning materials. A huge number of primary, secondary and tertiary school buildings and facilities are dilapidated and unfriendly to pupils. The environment of teaching and learning is not conducive.

Fourthly, there is the problem of irrelevant curriculum: It is a shame that 48 years after independence, our children are still being taught that Mungo Park discovered River Niger. He may have discovered it for Europeans but certainly not to Nigerians who were fishing and collecting water from River Niger before Mungo park came to Nigeria.

It is interesting to note that when parents find persons who have received good education unable to get employment in the formal sector, they are dissuaded from sending their children to school. Similarly, parents and guardians would be reluctant to send their children and wards to dilapidated school buildings, to be taught by ill-motivated teachers. They would be reluctant to send their children and wards to school if the education that the kids are getting is not in any way relevant to their circumstances, or if there is a danger that they can be abused by teachers or members of the community on their way to school.

**Unstable staff, as for teaching staff** In Nigerian primary and secondary schools today, the problem is no longer that of unavailability, but that of instability. This does not help the development of the education system. Because of the comparatively poorer conditions of service of teachers In the Nigerian society, the tendency for many teachers In the nation's schools today, as was the case with their predecessors In late colonial and independent Nigeria, Is to use the teaching profession as a stepping stone to other highly esteemed and more attractive jobs. In consequence, teaching is gradually becoming a profession for fresh graduates of Universities and Colleges of education who are ready to call It quit, without provocation, as soon as they find greener pastures elsewhere. From time to time, therefore, the teaching staff In Nigerian educational Institutions is usually unstable. Consequently, the teaching-learning process In stalled everywhere. Unless the conditions of service of teachers, at all levels, are Improved and their status raised higher In the Nigerian society, the teaching staff of our educational institutions, including the universities, shall continue to be unstable and educational progress shall continue to be retarded; but this must not be so for a country that is virtually ready to take a plunge into a world of science and technology!

**Procurement and servicing of equipments:** A majority of the educational institutions in the country lack the various equipments needed for effective teaching and learning, particularly equipments needed for teaching and learning such subjects as Introductory Technology, Woodwork, Metalwork, Home Economics etc. Governments, at Federal and State levels, always claim that they do not seem to have enough funds to provide these essential equipments for schools; and where they are available there are no stores to put them in. Like the vehicles that we use everyday, these equipments need regular service so that they can serve well and last long. The experience in several secondary schools is that there is usually no adequate provision for servicing the equipments, and when any of them gets damaged, it is always difficult, sometimes impossible, to get it repaired.

## The Way Forward

What needs to be done to face the challenges of Education in Nigeria include:

- Implementation of the UBE Act and ensuring that all forms of user fees are abolished
- The provision of quality education demands attention to the content of the curriculum, the nature of the teaching and the quality of the learning environment. It implies a need for the creation of flexible, effective and respectful learning environments that are responsive to the needs of all children.
- *A broad, relevant and inclusive curriculum:* Common guidance is provided in all the key human rights treaties for the development of the curriculum, indicating an underlying global consensus on the content and scope necessary for a rights-based education. This is why Raja (2006) suggested that the curriculum must enable every child to acquire the core academic curriculum and basic cognitive skills, together with essential life skills that equip children to face life challenges, make well balanced decisions and develop a healthy lifestyle, good social relationships, critical thinking and the capacity for non-violent conflict resolution.
- Dealing with the quality issues including size of classes, number of teachers and provision of materials, as well as promotion of child friendly and teacher friendly school environment
- Massive investment by both private and Non-governmental organization, in infrastructures in all levels of education.
- Tracking of resources to ensure proper, adequate and accountable utilization of resources budgeted for education by the management in of the school.
- Improvement of teacher quality through employment of professional and qualified teacher educators, in-service training and retraining and implementation of the teacher salary structure (TSS) in order to yield positive result.

## Conclusion

The provision of good quality education at all levels of Nigeria education system would enhance and also improve individual in two fundamental perspectives. First, cognitive development is a primary objective of education, with the effectiveness of education measured against its success in achieving this objective. Second, education must promote creative and emotional development, supporting the objectives of peace, citizenship and security, fostering equality and passing global and local cultural values down to future generations.

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