

Educational Quality Improvement in Nigeria: Interventions, Challenges and the Way Forward

Odiba, A. I.

Faculty of Education, Kogi State University anyigba, Nigeria

E-mail: drisaacao@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is on Educational quality improvement in Nigeria. Education in this paper has been described as a process of learning that helps, in the provision of suitable skills, training for economic, social, cultural and political responsibilities, transmission and transformation of social, economic and cultural structures from generation to generation. Some of the areas in our educational system that seek intervention include private sector development and curriculum change among others. Funding, poses a major challenge to our educational system apart from institutional unrest. It is suggested among others that the Nigerian educational system should be properly funded. By both the government and private sectors.

Keyword: *Education, Quality improvement, interventions, and challenges.*

INTRODUCTION

Education has been described as the foundation of every society and a basic tool for national development. Education consists of organized activities which promote learning situation. Education is a lifelong process and an instrument of change, a potent equalization of life chances (Odiba, 2007). According to Odiba (2012), education is a process of learning that assists in the provision of suitable skills, training the youths for economic, social, cultural and political responsibilities, transmission and transformation of social, economic and cultural structures from generation to generation. Education, certainly, is the key that opens the doors of modernization and globalization. Odiba (2004) posits that Education is a companion which no misfortune can depress, no crime can destroy, no enemy can alienate and no despotism can enslave. Education is the reason for affluence and influence, enhancing the basis for knowledge and expertise.

Considering the vital role that education plays as an agent of National development and globalization, there has been agitation for more functional and qualitative education all over the world. From historical antecedence, the agitation for quality education is contained in the Education For ALL (EFA) conferences in Jomtien (Thailand) in 1995 and Dakar in 2000 (Alaba, 2010). Alaba (2010) further posits that the effort at ensuring quality education was not left to the above bodies alone, other societies like Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education (SITE), Association for Computing in Education (AAACE) and the Infonomics Society also sponsored and organized conferences and workshops aimed at ensuring quality and access to education. No nation can afford to sacrifice educational quality on the altar of ignorance and indifference. Hence, nations the world over, spend time and resources in ensuring quality education. According to the

Federal Ministry of Education (F.M.E, 2004) the National Policy on Education states that Primary Education is the foundation of the Nigerian educational system. No wonder then, that most strategies to improve educational quality all over the world starts from Primary Education. A solid foundation laid saves the building from total collapse. At this point, the gap or difference that exists between nations of the world today is as a result of the kind of education they are exposed to. Odiba (2004) contends that nothing but education has made us to advance beyond our neighbours. However, in the modern view, even where only lip service is being paid to education, the truth of the matter is that, quality education is the right of every citizen, not a privilege that the rulers may grant or withhold (Adegbesan, 2010)

IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

That we are talking about the quality improvement of education does not mean that the quality of education has fallen beyond redemption. In fact, it is abnormal to describe education as anything that lacks quality. Reacting to the views of people on the state of education in Nigeria, Fafunwa (2006) opines that:

People say the standard has fallen. But I want to say that the standard has not fallen. It is the pattern that has fallen. Teachers are not as well trained as they used to be, and even when they are, they are poorly paid. Infrastructure is poor and there are no materials to work with. And these are some of the problems that should be addressed instead of worrying ourselves about some nebulous standards, which we have set. Even a Primary School pupil can differentiate between a fail, pass or average (p10).

At this point one would want to posit that the conceptualization of the term quality is fret with ambiguities. For instance, Arikewuyo as cited in Adegbesan (2010) opines that quality serves as determination of gradations based on standard of excellence beneath which a mark of inferiority is imposed or adduced and above which grades of superiority are defined. Also Fadokun as cited in Adegbesan (2010) views quality from three perspectives.

- i Efficiency in the meeting of its goals.
- ii Relevance to human and environmental conditions and needs.
- iii Something more that is the exploration of new ideas, the pursuit of excellence and encouragement of creativity.

Quality significantly pertains to changes in the system itself in the nature of its inputs, objectives, curriculum and technologies in its socio-economic, cultural and political environment. Quality education is the education that best fits the present and future needs of the learners in question and the community, given the peculiar circumstances and prospects. The quality concept also has to embrace the development of the potential of every member of each new generation. Again, quality education is an education that provides students with the tools to deal with and to find the solutions to the challenges confronting mankind. Quality assurance is the weapon for quality improvement of our educational systems. It then means that quality assurance is the mechanism used to evaluate the efficiency and appropriateness of teaching and learning in our educational institutions in order to ensure the delivery of high quality education. It is also a holistic method of identifying and resolving problem within the education system in order to ensure continuous quality

improvement (Alaba, 2010). According to Bateman as cited in Alaba (2010) quality assurance includes defined standards of achievement, documented procedures for all identified processes, established ways of responding to issues and clear accountability for outcomes. This view is in line with the contentions of Ajayi and Adegbesan cited by Adegbesan (2010) that quality assurance is related to accountability both of which are concerned with maximizing the effectiveness and efficiency of educational systems and services in relation to their contact, missions and stated objectives. Quality assurance in our educational system should be sustained on a continuous basis. Bateman as cited in Alaba (2010) opines that some of the benefits associated with consistent quality assurance and continuous quality improvement measures in education include:

- (a) The establishment of high standard academic excellence which will go a long way to enhance the school's reputation and image.
- (b) Improve communication across the school system.
- (c) Improvement of outcome so that the policies and procedures are constantly revisited through analysis and the delivery of teaching and learning.
- (d) Identification of systems' strengths and weaknesses.
- (e) Determination of the programme effectiveness and tracking of its integrity and;
- (f) Increase in capacity to secure funding and refinement service delivery.

In Nigeria, the Minister of Education has the responsibility among others to maintain standards and quality of education. According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2004), the National Policy on Education, the National Minimum standards on Education and Establishment of institutions Act 16 of 1985 the Ministry of Education is saddled with the responsibility of maintaining education standards and quality. The Ministry of Education through its agencies or parastatals performs these functions. For instance, the inspectorate department of the Ministry of Education at all levels is fully saddled with this function. There exists a legal backing for ensuring quality assurance and improvement at the basic functions, or activities of the inspectorate department of the Ministry of Education. Quality assurance and improvement in Nigeria education system moved from the form of school inspection that is characterized by fault finding (snoopervision) to consistent and continuous supervision in the form of monitoring, evaluation and quality improvement method that is geared towards instructional improvement in both teaching and learning. The F.M.E (2004) posits that the National Educational Quality Assurance policy revolves round the following:

- a) Learners' achievement and standards
- b) Learners' welfare and participation
- c) Care guidance and support
- d) Leadership and management
- e) School community relationship
- f) Learning environment
- g) Teaching and learning aid
- h) Curriculum and other activities.

The afore-mentioned components of the quality assurance policy of Nigeria should not be taken for granted, since the need for quality assurance and improvement of our

educational system cannot be over stressed. For the avoidance of doubt, the need for quality assurance in Nigerian schools is fathomed by Adegbesan (2010),

- i To serve as indispensable component of quality control strategy in Education.
- ii To ensure and maintain high standard of education at all levels.
- iii To assist in monitoring and supervision of education programmes.
- iv To determine the number of classrooms needed.
- v To determine the level of adequacy of the facilities available for quality control aids.
- vi To ensure how the financial resources available could be prudently and judiciously utilized.

CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN NIGERIA

The educational system in Nigeria is confronted by a lot of challenges. The challenge of funding is the most pronounced among others. Education has suffered inadequate funding since independence. Basically the current funding of educational institutions is not commensurate with the level of expansion in the education sector. Odiba (2004) contends that the underfunding status of our educational institutions has manifested itself in the poor state of infrastructural facilities and materials for teaching and learning. In fact the budgetary allocation to the educational sector in Nigeria is below the 26% recommended by UNESCO. The Nigeria Educational development has risen so fast to a level that she is finding it difficult to sustain, because various state governments were establishing tertiary institutions purely on political grounds rather than well-articulated needs. Poor funding has grossly resulted in having an army of poorly educated school teachers and graduates in varied disciplines.

Economic Challenge: Most lecturers in institutions of higher learning feel there is nothing dignifying and satisfying without money. The dignity and envy of the ivory tower have been thrown to the dogs. Examination malpractice is a problem in the nation's higher educational institutions.

The challenge of corruption: Corruption is a serious cankerworm that has eaten so deep into the various sectors of the Nigerian national life. Corruption is a symptom of numerous difficulties within contemporary societies. Ale (2012) posits that corruption is contagious and a form of organized crime. An analysis of the antigraft/ anti corruption laws in Nigeria portrays that corruption will continue in spite of the laws because the perpetrators do not fear any consequences. Ale (2012) further argues that it is now dawning on the Nigerian public that the so-called private enterprise and legislators are free from scrutiny and governors claim to be immuned to prosecution. Corruption is found in the award of contracts, promotion of staff, dispensation of justice and misuse of public offices, publications, documents, valuables, security, embezzlement of public fund etc. Suffice it to say that corruption in Nigeria is endemic and is grained in our system and psyche as it pervades every sphere of our national life not sparing the low and the highly placed. Corruption mortgages the economic future of our nation and makes our children inherit poverty and penury. Understand kindly that corrupt leaders cart the future of our country through

greed, personal aggrandizement and kleptomania. Ale (2012) contends that indolence, lethargy, mediocrity, lacking in depth and vision, round pegs in square holes, administrative myopias and non accountability are all forms of corruption and the genesis of all forms of corruption, when the rulers are not accountable through checks and balances and they rule without legislative oversight, with military fiat, it also endangers corruption, sleaze, reckless impunity, bias discrimination and nepotism in the corridors of power and these gradually kill the system and the economy as a whole. It is vital to mention that corruption includes all forms of fiscal indiscipline, wrong attitude to public work and mismanagement of public service project priorities, inability to take sound economic judgement and prudence in the management of public wealth (Ale, 2012).

Challenge of institutional unrest: Institutions of learning in Nigeria are regular victims of violence and strike actions. Our educational system is constantly a bride of uncertainty and instability. The common violence in schools are students' unrest, mal-administration, strikes, secret cult clashes, examination malpractices and indecent dressing. These activities if witnessed in any given institution, disrupts teaching and learning process. The print media are replete with cases of students' violence, for instance, the 1963 violence in the University of Ibadan over the controversial election into the western House of Assembly, the 1965/66 violence in the University of Lagos over the appointment of the Vice Chancellor, the 1971 students' unrest in the University of Ibadan over what the students tagged "lukewarm attitude of the University authorities", the 1977 riot in Emmanuel College, Owerri over non-reconstruction of their civil war damaged classrooms and dormitory. Time will not permit me to talk about the Balawa College students, Zaria who revolted over what they called "rotten bread" served to them as breakfast in 1977.

Youtya (2009) reasons that in 1978, there was a nationwide student unrest caused by two Principal reasons; one was the abolition of the federal government scholarship and the other was increase in tuition fee. 1980s was not left out of students' unrest. Academic Staff Union of Universities went on indefinite strike actions in 1989 and even 1992, 1993, 1994. These strike actions drew the academic wall clock of our institutions backwards. What can we say about wanton destruction in most institutions of learning? That of Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa is a sad story to tell. Secret cult activities and indecent dressing pose serious dangers to attaining educational quality in Nigeria. One is in doubt if there exist any public institution in Nigeria that has not witnessed academic disruption by cultists. The tale stories of cultism are unpleasant ones.

The challenge of staffing: No education system can rise above the quality of its teachers as the standard of our teachers invariably affects the performance of the pupils and students. N.P.E (2009) succinctly stipulates that one of the major challenges of our educational development is teacher quality. The entire system is characterized by:

- (a) Lack of adequate staffing in terms of quality and quantity. Out of a total of 180,540 teachers in the secondary school, 141,517 only are qualified (NPE, 2009).
- (b) Poor staff development schemes at all levels.
- (c) Difficulty in attracting and retaining top talent in the teaching profession, Odiba

(2011) posits that re-thinking teacher quality in the present dispensation has no substitute.

INTERVENTIONS STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS

The Nigeria education sector has witnessed a lot of interventions from both the public and private spheres. The possible areas of interventions include the following:

Private sector participation in educational development: The place of the private sector in the development of education cannot be over stressed. From the primary school level to the University, private institutions abound. Hardly is there any community in Nigeria without a private school. These private institutions serve as the mirror for measuring standard and quality of our educational system. Products of these institutions compete favourably with their counterparts elsewhere in the world. Again, the financial contribution of the private sector to educational improvement is a case in point. Education Tax fund draw its main revenue from the private sector. In fact, a certain percentage of profits of our industries and businesses are paid to service education by way of infrastructural development in institutions of learning.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT): Technologies are transforming the world. The potential of ICT in fostering sustainable national development generally and quality education delivery in particular, is globally recognized. As a result, concerted efforts have the inclusion of ICT skills into pupils curriculum from the Basic Education level (FME, 2009). Our institutions offer ICT programmes in Nigeria and a good percentage of our students are computer literate.

Curriculum Change: The curriculum of our educational system has been designed to address the national educational goals, which are based on the Nigeria Philosophy of Education. According to the National Policy on Education (NPE) (2009) one of the goals of the Nigeria Education system is the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society. This goal when vigorously pursued would lead to education for self-reliance that is Entrepreneurial Education. The entire curriculum of all levels of our educational system recognizes entrepreneurial training. For instance, the NPE (2009) contends that each state and local government, in cooperation with appropriate agencies, shall organize relevant apprenticeship schemes and also entrepreneurial training. This venture will not only improve our education quality but also reduce the incidence of unemployment among the products of our institutions of learning. The global economic melt-down since 2007, has not only forced millions of workers into unemployment but has also made many companies to redesign, restructure and re-strategize in response to the challenges. One of the veritable approaches to economic growth is through entrepreneurship. The government of Nigeria is interested in producing graduates who can create wealth and not on those for employment and economic survival. A close look at the curriculum of all our Universities both public and private shows that since 2009/2010 academic session, a minimum of two entrepreneurship courses are studied compulsorily by all under graduates irrespective of discipline (Odiba, 2011).

THE WAY FORWARD:

Educational quality improvement is the sincere song of development. Quality assurance is the weapon for the actualization of societal goals. Educational quality is a total process concerned with ensuring integrity of outcomes. No nation can afford to sacrifice educational quality on the altar of ignorance and indifference. The hands of both the government and the private sector are involved in the intervention process to ensure high educational quality; the challenges notwithstanding. When challenges exist, for sure, solutions would abound. As a matter of fact, the following suggestions will help in keeping the Nigerian education system above her neighbours. There should be effective supervision of institutions and the entire government programme on education. The inspectorate department of the ministry of education should imbibe the modern supervision strategies. There is need to improve or utilize the modern teaching methods and techniques in the classroom. Government should endeavour to properly fund education institutions.

REFERENCES

- Adegbesan, S. O.** (2010). Establishing quality assurance in Nigerian education system. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 5(7), 380-384.
- Alaba, S. O.** (2010). Improving the standard and quality of Primary Education in Nigeria: A case study of Oyo and Osun States. *International Journal for Cross Disciplinary subjects in Education*, 1 (3), 156-160.
- Ale, S.** (2012). Creating a sustainable knowledge based and innovation driven National economy. Being a text of the convocation lecture at the 4th annual convocation lecture of the Kogi State University, Anyigba.
- Fafunwa, B.** (2006). *Panorama*. Lagos: Tell magazine.
- Federal Ministry of Education** (2004). National Policy on Education Lagos. NERDC.
- National Policy on Education** (2009). Roadmap for Nigerian Education sector. Lagos NERDC.
- Odiba, A. I.** (2004). The place of teacher education in Manpower development. *Journal of the knowledge* 9(6) PP. 49-54.
- Odiba, A. I.** (2011). *Re-thinking teacher quality in Nigeria. Implications for Manpower development* In E. A. Arubayi, N. E. Akputu and Oghuvbu (eds). *Education and Training for Entrepreneurship*. Abraka: NAEAP Publications
- Odiba, A. I. and Akagwu, D. A.** (2011). Challenges of funding Nigeria's tertiary education in the face of global meltdown. Nigeria Educational Forum. *Journal of the Institute of Education*, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. Vol.1 (2) pp437-446.
- Odiba, I. A.** (2012). Strategic Planning as a Tool for Managing Nigeria's Tertiary Education for National Economic Development. *International Journal of Economic Development Research and Investment*, 3(2), 118-123
- Odiba, A. I.** (2007). *Comparative education*. Kaduna: Euneeks & Associates.
- Youtya, C. A.** (2009). Crisis in the Nigerian Educational system: The way forward. *Benue State University Journal of Education*, 9 (1), 104-114.