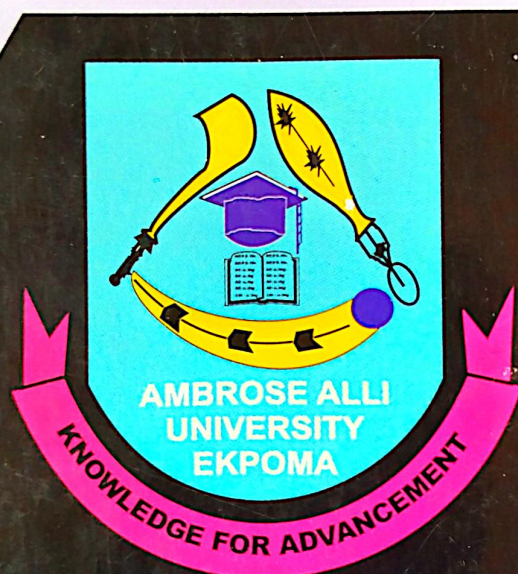


EDUCATION AND BEST PRACTICES IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

A Book of Readings



EDITORS

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Chapter Six

TOWARDS REVAMPING THE AILING QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN 21ST CENTURY NIGERIA

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Abstract

It is lamentable that majority of persons saddled with the administration of education in Nigeriatoday did not undergo their studies under the kind of condition that they provide in schoolstoday. This goes to prove that our education sector performed better under the administration ofthe colonial masters. It is against this backdrop that this paper examined the evaluation of quality of education, causes of fallenquality of education, who is to blame for the fallen quality and suggested pragmatic ways ofrevamping the ailing quality of education which includes maintenance of discipline amongstudents, paper qualification should be de-emphasized, teachers should be involved in policyformulation, there should be available data in schools for educational planning, among others. The paper concluded that the realization of education as a right and not a privilege of the citizens will spur the government and all stakeholders to redirect all available resources towards achieving the laudable objectives of education as enshrined in the National Policy on Education (2004).Only then will education be said to be a means of developing a nation technologically, scientifically, politically, economically, etc as well as making Nigeria become relevant in the global trend.

Introduction

The immense relevance of education to individuals and the nation at large has become a "national anthem" without a corresponding pragmatic action. Over the years, several commissions were set up and edicts and laws enacted to make education worthwhile. The National Policy on Education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2013) clearly states

government intentions to eradicate illiteracy through the provision of:

- a. Free compulsory and universal primary education;
- b. Free secondary education;
- c. Free university education; and
- d. Free adult literacy programme

To this end, Nigeria philosophically adopted education as an instrument for national development and social change; as well as being made to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society (FGN, 2013). The essence of education is therefore, to enable an individual to move from a negative state of mind to a positive state of mind independent of circumstances in which he finds himself. Education helps us to attain optimal attitudes that enable us to perceive accurately, think clearly, and act effectively according to self-selected goals.

It is sad, yet true, that stakeholders of education tend to agree that there is a negative far departure from the standards of old. Incidentally, many of these stakeholders were beneficiaries of the old pattern and standards, who are also operators of present system of education. Suffice it to posit that improving our education system is high stake game. It is the opinion of many Nigerians that if we don't fix our school system early, it will be too late; too late for the schools and the nation. Without well educated citizens who understand life, science, social system, economic system, history and government, we will all be at the mercy of a few who will be able to manipulate the many.

The nation is trying to solve its educational problems. There seems to be no solid consensus on what the causes of falling standards of education are, or what the solutions are. Most attempts made appeared doomed to mediocrity or failure because they do not adequately address the "underlying causes". Distributing money under any guise, smaller class size, new buildings, and even provision of computers in schools that are not in use are the problems confronting education and all these cosmetic attempts miss the mark. Training more teachers is not going to do it, unless they are taught new ideas and methods that actually address the root problems. We shall keep coming back to the question, "in years-passed, why

were teachers able to do a good job of teaching and did so without all the tools teachers have now? What has changed? What is wrong?

This is a sorry state of the educational sector as a whole in Nigeria. This is the reason behind this paper's intentions to critically analyze social and physical factors as well as instructional resources in order to comprehend their impact on the success or failure rate of students- which is hinged on education system and standard. The worrying spiral downward trends in success of candidates who have written examination are depressing and counter-productive to the human capital development of this country. This paper presents some ideas as to what the problems are, why they exist, and what can be done to revamp ailing quality of education.

The 21st Century School System in Nigeria

It should be expected that in the 21st century, there should be greater performance in our schools with better, more enlightened and well informed school leavers or graduates than we had between the 18th and 20th centuries. Today's Nigeria mainly calls for examinations in the assessment of people's aptitude and abilities. That social reality means that there is skewness towards a positive relationship between examination results and academic performance.

It is sad, yet true, that our educational institutions are monumentally ineffective. It is observed that students are given harvested and even cut fruits when they should be taught how to raise the plant that produces the fruits (Huber, 2014). Many things have gone tragically wrong in the education sector in Nigeria which has led to the concern about the ailing quality of education. This should not be the case in Nigeria in the 21st century-a period in which nations of the world are achieving high technological and scientific advancements.

The 21st century school system should be seen to be developing in children creative minds, critical thinking, relevant skills, and competencies, global awareness, media and information literacy as well as training children to become global citizens. Emerging technologies and globalization provide unlimited possibilities for existing new discoveries and development, thus our development as a nation can be no swifter than our development in education. The unanswered questions in the minds of stakeholders of

educations are: is emerging technologies more of a hindrance than a help to our educational system in the 21st century? Should access to counter-productive content be barred from students? If yes, how? With all the new learning technologies in the 21st century Nigeria, why is the quality of education lower than the past centuries (Obedun, 2015).

Evaluation of Quality of Education

Educational standards define the knowledge and skills students should possess at critical points in their educational career. "Standards serve as a basis of educational reforms across the nation as educators and policy makers respond to the call for a clear definition of desired outcome of schooling and a way to measure students success in terms of these outcomes" (Barrel, 2013). National, state and local educators play important roles in improving students learning through development and implementation of standards throughout the country.

To Woolsey (2009), standards of education are evaluated in terms of how universities contribute to knowledge and solving problems besetting mankind. In fact, some people use written and spoken English as a yardstick for measuring standards of education. A study was carried out in West Africa by the University of London. The result showed that teachers trained by the colonial masters were better than those trained by indigenous teachers (Woods, 2009).

While Obedun (2015) looked at education standards from the outcome of the products of schools i.e., how school leavers contribute positively to society in terms of their cognitive affective and psychomotive skills, Dike (2016) viewed standard from the perspective of how it contributes to the public health, socio-political and economic development of a nation. Still, the standard of education is assessed by their passing or failing of external examinations conducted by West African Examination Council, National Examination Council, NABTEB, JAMB, e.t.c.

Babalola (2006) addressed this concept from the perspectives of admission of Nigerian universities graduates into universities in developed countries, i.e. how many graduates in Nigeria are admitted in Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge and London into post graduate courses? He identified six universities in Nigeria (Ibadan, Lagos, Ile-

Ife, Benin, Zaria and Nsukka) to have such standards. Students from these institution put up exceptional brilliant performance and on graduation, such students were employed by the best multi-national companies and cooperate bodies globally. Today, no Nigerian university is among the top 600 in the world. What an educational opprobrium!

The foregoing parameters are note worthy when standard of education is elucidated along the achievement of educational goals. Thus, if a teacher is able to make learners acquire and utilize desired knowledge and skills for meaningful development, the school would be said to have achieved the desired standard. However, it can be argued that we cannot measure educational standard devoid of considering such variables as infrastructure, instructional materials, level of learners, quality of teachers, environment under which learning takes place, method of admission into schools, teacher-student ratio, e.t.c.

Causes of Falling Quality of Education

Although, there appear not to be a general consensus on the relative causes of the evident fall in standard of education in 21st century Nigeria, researchers and educators have come out with a plethora of causes, no matter how remote. For the purpose of this paper, the following causes are worth considering:

1. Policy problem. Politicians see education as the cheapest and easiest bait to garner support from the electorate and so every party that is coming on board comes with a new educational policy and ideology. Educational policies change rapidly and we formulate such policies without recourse to our culture and environment. At times, we adopt foreign policies rather than formulating policies that will address our peculiar needs. Uwamenye (2014) berated the imposition of intolerable or short-sighted policies on education by those exercising political authority without knowing their implication as a major policy blizzard that is a cause for falling standard of education; stressing that "politicians pervasively dominate and dictate educational policies in a reckless manner that jeopardizes the educational aims and objectives of the school. Uwamenye (2014) noted that there is conflict between the policy on quota system as a policy and the

policy on freedom from discrimination of all citizens as enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

2. Quest for paper qualification. The quest for paper qualification has given rise to examination malpractice and forging of certificates in order to secure jobs or political positions. With the upsurge in students enrolment-leading to overcrowded classrooms and inadequate instructional facilities, teaching-learning process is observably "rote learning to fulfill all righteousness" in the classroom. Since paper qualification is the proof of competence in Nigeria (at the expense of the acquisition of competent dexterities) everything is humanly and inhumanly done to obtain the certificate as they say the end justifies the means
3. Teacher's problem. Lack of adequate and relevant teachers as well as teachers' welfare constitute a problem. The teacher-student ratio is 1:2500+ (in most universities) and 1:100+ (in secondary schools). Besides, successive governments have handled teachers' welfare with reckless abandonment. If teachers must be heard, they must speak the language of force through strikes. Incentives that other professionals enjoy are evidently not enjoyed by teachers. Health insurance scheme, car loans, housing loans, e.t.c that might serve as morale boosters are not there for teachers. Regrettably, agreements reached by government and teachers are delayed at implementation or when implemented, the money is either delayed or fragmented (paid in technical installments). Also, the inability of government to recruit enough qualified teachers into the education system is another problem.
4. All tiers of education presently lack adequate qualified teachers. Suffice it to depose, that an unenthusiastic and unsatisfied teacher will not be motivated to effectively and efficiently perform his teaching task, thus negatively influencing the standard of education. In the same view, teachers are relegated to the background by government. For example, the appointment of ministers of education from other disciplines is an anathema to the teaching profession. More-so, teachers are not considered during the formulation of education policies. As a cover up, government involves retired teachers whose brains have decayed due to disuse. However, poor remuneration of teachers, denial or delay of teachers' promotion, lack of incentives for teachers and failure to

send teachers on in-service training to update their knowledge for the improvement of their performance culminate in low teachers' morale and consequently affect standard of education. It is said in education parlance that the standard of education cannot rise above the quality of the teachers.

5. **Infrastructural problem:** Inadequate classrooms, infrastructure and furniture constitute danger to good standard of education. Lack of facilities in schools such as libraries, science laboratory, technical workshops, computers, counseling rooms, e.t.c. are problems that are working against good standard of education. There is pressure on the existing infrastructures giving room to over admission in schools as well as the establishment of mushroom schools. The result is low standard of education.
6. **Militarization of education:** long military rule in Nigeria has adversely affected the standard of education in Nigeria. Confiscation of mission and other private schools by the military government gave a false impression that government can do everything for the people. Thus, the involvement of the private sector in educational development was seen by the military as unworthy. It is sad, yet true, that the premature introduction of free primary school (UPE) in 1976 by the military government was the first step that brought down the dignity of teachers and lowered the standard of education. Untrained or non professionals were brought into the school system since there were no enough trained teachers to meet the needs of the pupils, nor were the enabling infrastructures made available to meet the influx of school pupils.
7. **Problem of Indiscipline:** Cultism has crept into the fabrics of virtually all levels of our school system. This is occasioned by over population, wrong admission (not based on merit, etc), favouritism and ethnicity. Students join cults under oath and they operate at the detriment of others; while they make the school environment unconducive for learning. Peer group pressure, bullying, truancy and laziness on the part of the students, coupled with lack of commitment to duty by teachers as a result of poor condition of service interplay to manifest sub-standard quality of education.

8. **Problem of Funding:** Poor budgetary allocation for education in Nigeria is a major bane to enviable standard of education. Poor funding occasioned by the deliberate refusal by successive and present governments to allocate the minimum 27% of annual budget to education, has inadvertently resulted in inadequate infrastructural facilities and learning inputs. It has also impeded payment of teachers' salaries as at when due. Needless to mention that the little funds allocated to education is siphoned through corruption by people in authority. The resultant effect is low standard of education.
9. **Problem of Politics:** Education has been so politicized to the extent that merit has no place in considering who should be employed. Technocrats are usually side-lined. The main issue or concern is "who do you know?" and not what one can do or what can one deliver. The placements of persons in positions or admissions are not based on merit. It is therefore putting round peg in square hole.
10. Another major cause is poor teaching methods used by teachers and skipping of some topics during teaching by teachers. This problem is compounded by poor reading culture and studying habits in both teachers and students. In this internet era, there is the inability of schools and bodies responsible for educational administration to keep accurate data for the purpose of educational planning, etc.

How to Revamp the Ailing Quality of Education

The following measures will go a long way in addressing the issues of ailing quality in our education sector:

- ❖ Paper qualification should be de-emphasized.
- ❖ Education policy makers should consider the culture of the learners and their environment and the peculiarities therein.
- ❖ Maintenance and enhancement of discipline among teachers and students in schools.
- ❖ Eradicate or minimize cultism in schools.
- ❖ Educational politicking should be stopped and professionalism of the sector to be ensured.
- ❖ Teachers should be involved in policy formulation so that their field experiences can have a bearing on the policy.

- ❖ Government should make deliberate efforts towards funding education.
- ❖ More teachers should be trained and employed to meet the ever increasing population of students.
- ❖ More infrastructural facilities should be provided and maintained to make the school environment attractive for teaching-learning.
- ❖ There should be proper monitoring and inspection of schools with well defined guidelines for the establishment and operation of schools for quality assurance.
- ❖ There should be available data in schools for educational planning.
- ❖ There is need for regular training and retraining of teachers to update their knowledge to commensurate with the challenges of the times.
- ❖ Government at local, state and federal levels should increase their sensitivity on educational issues, considering the fact that education is the only vehicle for the transformation and development of society.

Conclusion

We must first of all realize that education is the right of citizens of Nigeria and not a privilege. We must as a nation recognize and appreciate the fact that education is the only tool for the emancipation of mankind from socio-political and economic thralldom as well as other facets of human endeavor; and to give us true independence as a nation. Education, therefore, is the only means through which we can develop technologically, scientifically, politically, economically and otherwise, if we must be relevant in the global trend.

We cannot exploit and harness our God-given resources and have them orchestrated into meaningful development if we lack quality education. We stand a big risk of insecurity and becoming slaves in Nigeria amidst abundant resources that would have truly made it a "Giant of Africa". Can it be justifiably asserted here that the falling standard of our education and its failure to address our corporate life that brought about the emergence of the most dreaded Islamic sect-Boko Haram; and other violent groups in Nigeria? This is subject to critical analysis though.

We cannot and must not continue to depend on our nations of the world for food, technology, policies and other needs in this 21st century. We must therefore, evolve new education policies that would in no distant future look at our practice of education and be ashamed that we could tolerate something so primitive in this country.

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