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EDUCATIONAL REFORMS AND SUPERVISION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper highlighted some critical issues in the educational systems of Nigeria, with particular focus on the lack of responsive and appropriate supervision in the educational sub-sector. The reform efforts in education have not been yielding appropriate result because many of them are mere political rhetoric without necessary supervision and follow up actions. Nigeria therefore needs to re-arrange her priorities and values by providing adequate funding and supervision for a healthy teaching/learning process in educational institutions in Nigeria so as to be able to socially, politically and economically contribute to the development of the Nation.

Keywords: Educational reforms, planning, supervision, UPE, teachers

Introduction

Nigeria has witnessed several educational reforms, which started at pre-independence. Educational reforms emanate from the basic conviction that considerable progress can be made in a nation by its people through careful engineering of the educational process (Omolewa, 2007). It was to the credit of Nigeria's notable agitators for self- rule that led the British colonial rulers to change the educational system in operation in 1954 from 8-6-2-3 system that is 8year primary, 6year secondary, 2year higher school certificate and 3year

university to a new system 6-5-2-3 that is 6year primary, 5year secondary, 2year higher school certificate and 3year university. The change resulted in reducing the number of years at the primary and secondary school levels (Gusau, 2008).

The hope in the educational reforms continued to rekindle after independence. In September 1969, there was a National curriculum conference held in Lagos. The conference recommended changes in the system, from 6-5-2-3 system to 6-3-3-4 system; that is 6-year primary, 3-year junior secondary, 3-year senior secondary and 4year university education. Such a system they reasoned will empower the country towards the path of scientific and technological development. The effectiveness of these systems depends largely on the school personnel; the administrators and the teachers. There is therefore need for proper supervision of the educational resources especially the human resources in the schools to ensure they perform at optima level towards achieving the goals of the educational system. With the uncompromising, insensitive, and unprofessional educational administrators/supervisors at local, state and federal levels, teachers need to improve on their teaching methods (Dike, 2007)

Without any doubt, many administrators are experts in their respective academic fields. But how many of the administrators are trained supervisor? Because of lack of professional training, some of them would threaten, balk, and intimidate the teachers that they are supposed to encourage and work with to improve student's performance; Administrators are unaware that learners and teachers operate better in non-threatening environment. Therefore, it takes adequate resources, motivation and commitment of the entire educational team to focus on standards, assessment of programs, and proper implementation of educational policy and employ responsive instructional strategies to assist students learn, succeed, and improve national educational standards.

Educational Reforms at Primary School Level and Supervision

The inadequate supervision led to crisis in the educational system of Nigeria. Crisis in education started manifesting itself when government went all out to implement 6-3-3-4 system without adequate planning/supervision put in place (Adesina, 1980). The lower education, specifically primary education, was the first to suffer the effect of inadequate planning/supervision. Free Universal Primary Education was launched in 1976 but the policy on education itself appeared in 1977 one year after implementation of the programme. In this kind of situation where implementation is ahead of policy, confusion would certainly

emerge. Needs assessment was not properly done; the end result was absence of adequate statistical data. For example on the launching of UPE three million children showed up as against 2.3million prepared for, a 30 percent underestimation (Gusau, 2008). This has implications for classroom space, teachers, and equipment (Akpa 1988). The exercise triggered phenomenal rise in pupil population from 8.7million in 1976/77 to 12.5million in 1979/80 and reaching 15million in 1982.

Notwithstanding the absence of correct data to implement the UPE, the Federal Government went ahead and took over all voluntary and mission schools and assumed full financial responsibility of running the scheme throughout the country. This was the period of boom; the government is washed with petro-dollars. Ismaila (1988) commented, that 1975-1983 witnessed the launching of the gigantic educational programme in Nigeria. Above all, it was a period of unprecedented financial imprudence, irrational planning/supervision, large scale corruption that culminated in a steep decline from boom to doom. In the absence of any comprehensive planning, the implementers of the programme have their leeway; they chose what was important and what was not important. Emergency contractors executing fictitious contracts became the norm, substandard buildings in the name of UPE were scattered all over the country, half-baked teachers populated the teaching force and ghost workers were made part of the UPE programme. All these happened due to lack of proper supervision.

The enormous responsibility Federal Government of Nigeria took in respect of the UPE programme cannot be sustained. The financial burden became too great that government began to shy away from its undertakings. As a face saving measure, the then Obasanjo administration placed Primary education under joint control of States and Local Governments in the 1979 Constitution, where Local Governments had direct control over primary schools. To worsen the situation some states in the federation started reversing the policy by returning back voluntary and mission schools to their former owners. The falling prices of petroleum in the international market passed a death sentence on UPE programme. States and Local Governments could not fund primary education as such began to charge fees and what was left; UPE programme was neither free nor universal.

To notify Nigerians that UPE is dead, the revised National policy on Education 1998, pp 15 stated:

Government welcomes contributions of voluntary agencies.

communities and private individuals in the establishment and management of primary schools alongside those provided by the states and local Governments as long as they meet the minimum standards laid down by the Federal Government.

Educational Reforms at Secondary School Level and Supervision

Upon all the recommendations in the 1969 National curriculum conference, the three-year Junior Secondary School known as JSS is the most revolutionary. According to Igwe (1988), the JSS is the most bastardized, confused and poorly implemented segment of 6-3-3-4 system. Junior Secondary School was initially conceived as a stage itself made up of 3 year duration. The curriculum is a hybrid of prevocational and academic subjects. The essence is to impart knowledge in Science, Arts and Technology. The 5 year Secondary education is discounted as too academic and bookish and does not give room to those who are terminating their studies at that level to be useful and productive members of the society. Igwe (1988) opined that, the advantage of 3-3 system of secondary education therefore, is that it will equip its product both intellectually and vocationally depending on their areas of interest, aptitude and capability.

JSS sector was meant to cut unemployment level among our youths by arming them with self-reliant skills. Lack of proper supervision jeopardized the scheme. From the onset, the Government purchased technology products from the Eastern Europe Markets; such as Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Romania. These products required steady supply of electricity to function. Neither National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) nor its successor Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) has the needed electricity to power these machines. Likewise alternative power arrangement was not made. Similarly the teachers required to operate these machines and teach students were not available. The end result was that the machines were left to rust, stolen or wasted. The prevocational subjects which were meant to launch Nigeria into a respectable industrialized state with abundant pool of lower level manpower became a mirage. Prevocational subjects ended up having neither workshop nor qualified teachers. Subjects were theoretically taught just like social studies. The hope that the reform will enable schools to fabricate some of their basic needs such as chairs, desks, chalk-board, and beds never materialized, in fact some JSS students sit on the bare floor to receive lectures in contrast to the aims and objectives of the National Policy on Education (Gusau, 2008).

Educational Reforms at Tertiary Education Level and Supervision

As at 1970 there were only six universities in Nigeria, they rose to thirteen in 1979 now we have over Ninety. To establish as many qualitative universities is not just necessary but also desirable, on the other hand, unplanned creation of universities is not just undesirable but also dangerous.

In Nigeria for the last decade, the National Universities Commission (NUC) indiscriminately issued licenses to all sorts of interest groups; State Governments, Religious bodies, Business tycoons (like Al-Hikma University owned by Alhaji Oladimeji and Covenant University owned by Redeem Church of God). It is imperative to ask. Are there adequate supervision put in place? Do we have enough qualified supervisors and supervisory equipment to monitor all these new institutions? Do the newly licensed universities adhere to policy requirements of 60:40 sciences to arts admission ratio? Do these newly licensed universities have equipments and personnel for teaching and research?

The Inspectorate Services and Supervision

One of the consequences of misguided reforms is the relegation of the Inspectorate Services, the quality control watchdog in the education sector to the periphery (Omolewa, 2007). Inspection is indispensable to acquisition of quality education. No educational programme will function effectively without a quality inspectorate service. The concept of inspection has now been changed to supervision. The change is necessitated by the perception of school inspectors as no less than police inspectors with a colonial mentality. They function as enforcers of discipline, their presence in a school is both fearsome and awesome to school teachers and administrators. They brook no nonsense as such do not tolerate incompetence to duty. However despite the shortcomings of the colonial inherited inspectorate services from the colonial master, the system is by far better than what we have today (Omolewa, 2007). School supervisors have lost their powers to ensure schools run according to the National Policy on Education, they are now of little significance in the education sector.

The repercussions of relegating the inspectorate services to periphery have manifested itself in the quality of education delivery. The standard of education has fallen, discipline in the schools has relaxed, and schools curriculums are not fully implemented. Hence, what we end up having are examination malpractices. Students struggle to acquire certificates at all cost

without actually fulfilling the required educative process.

Supervision of schools should involve some element of inspection to reduce workers' laziness, carelessness and non performance that may result from friend-like nature of supervision. This is because, the Friend-like Supervision as it is happening today is of so many significances but once the subordinate is confident that there is no punishment if he/she fails to perform well, workers tend to relax, become lazy and careless. These reduce rather than increase teachers' performance. Supervisors should therefore instil discipline in the workers without turning it into a commando-like inspection.

Conclusions

Reforming education is not an easy task, it has to take care of all the relevant parameters such as; national needs, wider consultations, commitment, reliable statistical data, practicability, sustainability and quest for development that would make the reform desirable and useful to the society. Process of education reforms must march modern scientific and technological innovations for it to remain relevant to the learner and the nation. To achieve these, adequate supervision need to be put in place at different stages.

Recommendations

- ◆ Supervision should be objective and should not be too loose to the extent of losing its focus.
- ◆ Government should set up an independent committee made up of experts in the education sector to study the various reforms since independence and come up with a strategy that will enable the nation improve on the present situation.
- ◆ Government should establish secondary education commission as a watchdog to secondary education in the country. The essence is to give secondary education the deserved priority that aims at arming our youth with sellable skills and knowledge to continue with their studies. Secondary Education Commission (SEC) should be established to take care of Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary Schools. It will be a specialized commission that would monitor and control the quality of teaching and learning in tune with the National Policy on Education expected of secondary education, since universities have National

Universities Commission (NUC), Colleges of Education have National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), Polytechnics have National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), Primary Education has Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC)

- ◆ Nigeria education should aspire for manpower training.
- ◆ It takes years for any meaningful educational reform to yield fruits. Nigeria must learn to plan and supervise its education and also implement it with commitment and sense of direction for the greater good of all its citizens.
- ◆ Government should revisit licensing of universities and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This is to ensure quality.
- ◆ Proper supervision should be the starting point. Thus, the NUC should do a better job on its supervisory roles and be certain that the schools have the manpower and tools to offer the courses they say they could offer. Merely conducting accreditation exercises and granting operational licenses to individuals (organizations) to set up private universities is not enough.

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