
QUALITY ASSURANCE IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM: SYMPTOMS, DIAGNOSIS AND CURE

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ABSTRACT: *The Nigerian education system has remained in the doldrums since the pre-independence period. While the colonial administrations lopsided educational policy may be blamed for this, efforts at post-independence educational reforms did not seek to correct or change the fortunes of the system. The lethargic condition the system was thrown into during the colonial administration has continued through successful regimes and republics. Consequently, this has generated questions about its relevance. While the questions on relevance are valid, it should however be said that education has continued to serve its utilitarian purpose elsewhere in more progressive societies. These symptoms of decay are diagnosed in this paper, with a view to recommending measures that would enhance quality assurance in the education system.*

KEYWORDS: Quality assurance, Education, Symptoms, Diagnosis, Cure.

INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance in the education system involves the systematic review of educational provision to maintain and improve its quality, equity and efficiency. It encompasses school self-evaluation, external evaluation (including inspection), the evaluation of teachers and school leaders, and student assessments. Quality assurance is a term that is new in education, but it has increasingly assumed an important element in education (Allais, 2009). It is a term most commonly applied in the manufacturing process to keep track of production quality – a practice which began in the second half of the twentieth century.

In education systems, quality assurance refers to checks and balances put in place to keep track of quality or standards, and to try to improve them. It is the achievement of organizational goal setting.

Linking education, economic growth and social change, education in a broad sense improves the capabilities of individuals and the capacity of institutions, and becomes a catalyst for closely interrelated economic, social, cultural and demographic changes that become defined as national development (Adams, 2002). The social and economic development of nations is fundamentally an education process in which people learn to create institutions, utilize new technologies, cope with their environment, and alter their patterns of behaviour. How these changes occur though not fully known, create problems that often frustrate attempts at national policy making and planning. However, education given a supportive environment can make all the difference by contributing to the complex processes of technology transfer, economic productivity, individual earnings,

reduction in poverty, development of healthy families, learning the responsibilities of citizenship, and the enhancement of quality of life.

The purpose of education, therefore, is to educate individual citizens within society, to prepare and qualify them for productive work in the economy as well as to integrate people into society and teach them values and morals of society. Education plays the role of socializing individuals and to keep society stable.

UNESCO, an agency of the United Nations with a mandate to promote all aspects of education, has been promoting the right of every one to education in all member nations. UNESCO is committed to a holistic and humanistic vision of quality education worldwide, and this is in the belief that education plays a fundamental role in human, social and economic development. In keeping with its mandate UNESCO (2011:21) declares:

To generate sustainable, large-scale improvements in education systems, governments must be able to plan for and manage school enrolments, assign teachers to areas where they are most needed, promote the use of relevant up-to-date curricula and materials, and facilitate pathways between the different levels and settings of education. Improving their capacity to do all this will ensure that education systems respond to all real needs of societies. This is the task before the government in Nigeria at all levels – local, state and federal – reinforcing quality, equitable, affordable and functional education with a high quality assurance content.

Pre-historic Malaise of Educational Foundation in Nigeria

The introduction of Western education in Nigeria in 1840s was not without defects. In fact, the nondescript character of the current education system in Nigeria is attributable to the faulty foundation laid by the colonial administration. The introduction of Western education in Southern Nigeria was widely welcomed whereas it was received with apprehension in Northern Nigeria where Korani education had firmly been established. The colonial administration did not run schools in Nigeria but gave minimal grants-in-aid to the missionary organizations to help them carry out their missionary activities.

Western education lacked functionality as recipients were ill-equipped to be of productive use. The semi-skilled type of education provided by Western education was aimed to produce interpreters, clerks, messengers and artisans needed by the colonial administration; and to produce semi-literate workforce to occupy low-cadre government functionaries (Ndika, 1975; Fafunwa, 1974; Ugwuoke, 2016). This kind of education only served the interest of colonial masters. It lacked all the educational apparatus and paraphernalia required of functional education.

The colonial education policy was paternalistic in character and grammar-oriented in curriculum. It was not intended to promote practical skills in the recipients. This type of education was described by the Ashby Report of 1959 as “parochial and literary” in content. The colonial education policies did not provide the impetus for a solid technological base for the nation. The education ordinances – 1882 Education Ordinance and 1887 Education Ordinance were made as a matter of administrative convenience, and did not improve the quality of education provided to the

Nigerian child. The education policies were not tailored to meet the needs and aspirations of Nigerians, but were rather alien to the local environment.

Recording to Sulaiman (2012:9-10): “the major interest of the colonial government was political... The education ordinances that were passed... during the colonial rule significantly gave the control of education to the colonial government, who had hitherto left the education in the hands of the missionary bodies for close to a century, until it no longer served the needs of the ...Government. To demonstrate the lack of knowledge-driven education introduced by the colonial administration, the 1882 Education Ordinance stipulated as Sulaiman further reports, among others as follows:

- defining the school curriculum to include reading, writing, English Language, Arithmetic and Needlework for girls;
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- admission of pauper children into government and assisted schools;
- classification of schools into government schools and assisted schools;
- the constitution of a General Board of Education; Local Board of Education;
- grants to be made available to industrial schools.

It is also important to state that the 1887 Education Ordinance did not improve the defects in the former as it created a gap between the “assisted” and “unassisted” schools which also led to the establishment of illegal schools.

Consequently, since the post-independent era, education in Nigeria has largely become experimental. It has been marked by trial and error. The government in a bid to formulate sound educational policies that would in turn produce productive and useful citizens, has instituted several bodies to initiate workable schemes in order to achieve these objectives. The effort is aimed at educational reforms which became necessary so as to redress the imbalance inherent in the education handed to Nigeria by the former British colonial administration. The recommendations of such educational review committees are quite pragmatic but have almost always been marred by faulty implementation.

The first bold step taken by the Nigerian government which was aimed at the Nigerianization of the educational curriculum was when in 1977 the National Policy on Education was enunciated (Denga, 1986; Fafunwa, 1974). This was precursed by the National Curriculum Conference held in Lagos in September, 1969. The following five national objectives as contained in the policy are as follows:

- a. a free and democratic society;
- b. a just and egalitarian society;
- c. a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- d. a great and dynamic economy; and
- e. a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

Education is here conceived as a licence to better life. It therefore, confers on every Nigerian child the right to equal educational opportunity (and qualitative education). There is no doubt that the

achievement of this national objective is a subject open to debate. To many educational, social and political commentators, and a majority of Nigerians, this noble ideal national objective is still seen as mere ‘Letter of Intent’ – far from being implemented.

Symptoms of Decay in Nigerian Education System

Generally, no one is in doubt as to the level of decay at all levels of the educational system in Nigeria. What is in doubt, however, is how and when the rehabilitation will be done. So much of these problems as highlighted above is rooted in the colonial past. The educational system inherited by Nigeria as well as other newly independent African nations in the early 1960s were designed to serve colonial and minority interests. Overall provision of education was grossly inadequate given the needs of modern nationhood, with enrolment of the relevant age groups skyrocketing across the three tiers of education (Court and Kinyanjui, 1986). Educational opportunities were unevenly spread within the country and dependent on proximity to areas of colonial settlement, missionary presence, and levels of economic development.

Upon attainment of independence, a machinery for post-independence rehabilitation of the system was put in place. The first in the process was the convening of the National Conference on Curriculum sponsored by the Nigeria Educational Research Council in Lagos from September 8 to 12, 1969.

According to the Convener of the Conference, the Nigeria Educational Research Council, it was summoned mainly to review old and identify new national goals for education in Nigeria at all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary) and provide guidelines on what the system should be accomplishing with respect to educational needs of individual citizens and society, and the curriculum content for meeting the needs and goals (NERC, 1969). An appraisal of the functions of three levels of education will reveal if these functions have been achieved in the last five decades. For the primary school, the functions include: (1) prepare children for life; and (2) give those with the necessary background the opportunity to proceed to secondary school. For secondary school the functions include: (1) preparation for life; and (2) preparation for higher education. For university, the philosophy will include: (1) teaching; (2) research; (3) dissemination; and (4) service orientation in community service and professional training of the national high-level and intermediate manpower needs.

In spite of the functions assigned to the various levels of education and the national objectives of education contained in the National Policy of Education highlighted above, symptoms of decay are evident in the nation’s education sector. A number of education commentators and stakeholders have identified a plethora of problems symptomatic of decay in the system. Perhaps the editorial in Punch (2018), Court and Kinyanjui (1986) capture clearly the extent of decay. In the editorial, Prof. Temiday O. Oladiji thinks the classrooms in Nigeria should match what is obtainable in other countries so that when our students go abroad on exchange programmes, they should find something that matches what they have back at home. In the area of funding, another commentator, Prof. Tunde Fatunde is of the opinion that in Nigeria, politics is given the highest financial priority. Education should be given the highest priority as in other countries. And if the annual budget of

education and vocational training is high the multiplier effect will make Nigeria stand out as a sovereign nation.

Government lack of commitment and political will is yet another problem militating against the efficient functioning of the system. Government has shown apparent lack of interest in the system. This is what ASUU Chairman, Ambrose Ali University refers to as “paying lip service” – an indication that the government is not interested in trying to bring back the good days that we once had in the sector. He insists that government leaders know they are not doing well – hence they send their children abroad and promoting the establishment of private universities in Nigeria. From the primary school level through the post-primary to the tertiary levels the evidence is glaring. Common among such is the lack of basic human and material resources and infrastructure. It is the view of Dr. Philipps Okolo (Senior Lecturer) that at all levels of the sector, there is deficiency in human and material resources with no improvement in sight. Decay in educational infrastructure makes a mockery of the entire system.

To Prof. Siyan Oyeweso (Fellow, Nigeria Academy of Letters), the system across the levels lacks good libraries stocked with current books and ICT compliant. Teachers are poorly remunerated and owed backlog of salaries.

It must be noted here that the expansion of enrolments at all levels has exceeded the capacity of corresponding facilities in the education system. As a result, the efficiency of educational provision and the quality of instruction have significantly deteriorated.

However, in spite of the growing enrolments, the overall provision of education remains inadequate in terms of both economic requirements and issues of equity. Contributing to a study for the Committee on African Development Strategies, Court and Kinyanjui (1986) report that there is a growing consensus that the low level of human resource development across Africa relative to other inputs accounts for poor economic conditions in most of the continent. Across Africa, institutions and projects are languishing or inoperable for lack of trained personnel to run them.

Similarly, economic benefits that result from extended education in the form of greater agricultural productivity, labour efficiency etc are low. Major non-economic benefits derivable from education which lead to improved community health, nutrition, fertility control, and general responsiveness to technological innovation also record poor indices in many African countries including Nigeria. Quota system is another dimension of the problem identified from the current decay in education. In Nigeria, quota system is an official principle applied by government as a way of responding to the threat to national integration posed by differing educational access. In spite of this official government policy to restructure the Nigerian society along egalitarian lines, regional inequalities still persist and on the increase.

Related to the problem of “quota system”, is that it has provided an open access with a consequent explosion in primary and secondary school-leaver unemployment. This is because graduates of primary and secondary schools are not equipped with skills for middle-level employment. This

catalogue of symptoms of decay in the Nigerian education system no doubt calls for government quick intervention.

Diagnosis of Chronic Symptoms of Decay in Nigerian Education System

A catalogue of symptoms of decay in Nigerian education system does exist. A specimen catalogue of these symptoms will suffice here, and this is in no order of precedence as follows:

- increasing enrolment
- inadequate qualified teaching personnel
- inadequate infrastructure/facilities
- dysfunctional curriculum
- high level educational malpractice at all levels

Increasing Enrolment

It is important that selection for initial or further education and training at all levels of education be based on competence. It should be for those best equipped to make good use of it. This is particularly so for secondary and tertiary education. It is a departure from what currently prevails, where attending school becomes a matter of social convention and not based on individual aptitude. In this case education acquires a mercantile value – to be traded on and not to render service and transform society.

Inadequate Funding

While greater investment in human resources is needed, government has shown lack of commitment to allocating sufficient funds to finance development or even maintenance of school plants. This is because education receives paltry budget allocation while other sectors receive bumper allocation. This has resulted in steady deterioration of facilities, demoralization of teachers, and the ritualization and impoverishment of the learning process.

Inadequate Qualified Teaching Personnel

Poor remuneration has led to lack of motivation of teachers and inevitable snobbery of the teaching profession, and brain drain at tertiary level. Low funding of the education sector means that the best brains shun teaching as a career. The conditions of service for teachers are abysmally poor, forcing many in the profession to resort to self-help as a means of survival. Regrettably, this has caused charlatans and hangers-on to flock into the field creating scandal for the profession that was once noble.

Inadequate Infrastructure/facilities

Educational standards has assumed an all-time low because infrastructure is deplorable – ranging from classroom faculties, office facilities, buildings, libraries, laboratories, etc. to instructional materials. How deplorable one would say! The question that arises from this deplorable state of affairs in the education sector is, what is the role of education in the national scheme of development? Perhaps only an honest answer to this question can reverse the ugly trend.

Dysfunctional Curriculum

Public trust in education is beginning to erode. This is as a result of a mismatch between theory and practice. Unemployment among the educated is a common phenomenon thus causing many

people to begin to doubt the wisdom of their investment in education. The link between schooling and jobs in the wage economy has forced educational planners to reexamine the purpose of education to see how it can anticipate the conditions of rural life that most students will encounter. As the ratio of students to job opportunities increases, a new rationale for schooling other than preparation for a paid job must be developed. Anticipating self-employment has become one of the most popular re-interpretations of the purpose of schooling. The expectation is not that schools can create self-employment any more than they can create paid jobs, but that they can improve the quality and variety of the skills that students bring to their rural communities. One way to achieve this is through innovative curriculum development that will make education more practical-oriented. For the moment, education is divorced from the general life of society thereby exacerbating unemployment and educated under-employment.

High level educational malpractice at all levels

The phenomenon of educational malpractice is on the increase. To curb this trend, emphasis should be on apprenticeship schemes and vocational education at secondary and tertiary levels. This will jettison rote learning that characterize present education curriculum. It is therefore possible to use an examination not only for identifying an elite group through selection, but also for developing skills and competence among the school-going population. It is also possible to focus attention on curriculum content relevant to terminal primary and secondary education irrespective of individual motivations and inclinations for secondary and tertiary education. Examinations provide a means of defining, encouraging, and evaluating quality.

A final note on standards would be that the education system must strive to maintain international standards. The world has become a global village with cutting-edge ITs permeating every strata of society without exception. For just as knowledge is mobile and transferable, so is skill, across international boundaries. The challenge for the universities, therefore, is to remain the principal means of regenerating scientific and professional expertise and occupying one of the few heavens of reflection and critical thought in society.

Strategic Cure for Improving Quality Assurance in Nigerian Education System

As a remedy to the symptoms of decay in Nigerian education system, an attempt is made here to offer some recipe. Since education is an important driver for growth and development, and a tool for human empowerment, it should be made a priority in the scheme of development. One way to start is by increased funding. The current trend of allocating resources to other sectors at the expense of education to a disapprovingly level should be discontinued. The Guardian editorial (2020) alludes to this by pointing out that the public sector struggle with inadequate funding and teacher shortages. It further reports that only 7.02% of the 8.83 trillion in 2019 budget was allocated to education which is low compared to UNESCO's minimum recommendation of 15 – 20% of budgetary allocation to enable developing countries to meet rising demands. InfoGuide (2020) also laments the poor funding of the education sector in Nigeria stating that contrary to UNESCO's recommendation, budgetary allocation to education has never appreciated to 10%.

In response to increasing enrolment, government through its relevant agencies must take deliberate measures to ensure the quality of educational output and to strengthen the conditions that promote

and increase high standards at strategic points within the system. Again, government should establish vocational and technical centres properly staffed and equipped to cater for increasing claimants for education. InfoGuide agrees that more centres need to be set up to cater for the growing population. To succeed, appropriate structures for lifelong learning, non-formal education and community education should be established. This should be within a coherent framework of providing self-reliant education and a wider access to school-age population.

To enhance the number and quality of teaching personnel, a new salary structure must be worked out for teachers at all levels. This cannot be done without improving their conditions of work to motivate and enhance productivity. Staff development scheme (in-service on-the-job training, further education, seminars, conferences, symposia etc) should of necessity be part of the recurrent training for teachers.

As part of efforts to improve infrastructure/facilities, government should ensure that schools are equipped and staffed so as to possess the ambient conditions of a learning climate to stimulate creativity and imaginative thinking for both teachers and learners. This will uplift education in Nigeria to compete favourably with the global environment.

Dealing with dysfunctional curriculum requires a complete review of content, methods and materials of education to meet local needs and international best practices/standards. Given the colonial experience of Nigeria – inheriting an educational curriculum infused with European content, practice, and ethos – the educational system was ill-designed for the economic and social needs of a newly independent nation. Subsequent efforts to chart a new curricula were largely experimental and a matter of trial and error. Education, to a large extent defines nationhood, therefore, any attempt at curriculum review must be comprehensive, all-encompassing and all-inclusive incorporating the social, economic, political, and cultural development priorities that Nigeria truly desires at this defining moment of its history.

The fight to overcome educational malpractice, “an academic locust”, which destroys the educational fruitage of the nation must be done with vigour, relentlessly and with patriotic zeal. Education can only foster genuine development in Nigeria when educational malpractice is effectively extinguished. Only then can genuine success be measured with genuine efforts, and genuine individual success will ultimately lead to genuine development.

CONCLUSIONS

To fashion a new education for Nigeria that will foster genuine progress demands that a public forum on education be organized to examine the many pitfalls of the current system, and determine the way forward. Such a forum is important for the development of sound strategies and the encouragement and involvement of relevant stakeholders, including teachers’ unions, parent and student associations, women’s groups, trade unions, international aid agencies, UN education agencies etc.

The challenge is to encourage government and all stakeholders to take a hard look at the system that has been operated for nearly six decades and to explore ways of making it more quality-oriented and rewarding to teachers and learners, and the society in general.

Finally, changes in social attitudes and behaviour will be necessary before any reforms can be implemented successfully, and this challenge is primarily a political one. It demands that government must show strong commitment and political will to garner the support of all interest groups to initiate and implement such a national project.

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