Research Article

State of Nigerian Secondary Education and the Need for Quality Sustenance

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Abstract

The paper x-rayed the state of Nigerian educational system with interest on secondary education. While pointing out that both human and material resources were inadequate and those available dilapidated, the paper emphasized on the need to adopt basic, general, technical and vocational education with quality maintained and sustained as experience has shown in developed countries like Britain, New Zealand, Germany, among others. To maintain and sustain quality, the paper suggested indices such as students' capacity and motivation to learn in relation to curriculum and subjects to be leant, qualified teachers as recommended, availability of requisite tools for teaching and learning, expected net effects of all the inputs on the students (academic, moral, spiritual, cultural values, etc), manageable teacher-students ratios, among others. To maintain quality in Nigerian schools has often been faced with challenges such as lack of trained supervisors, inadequate facilities for teachers, poor remuneration, teachers' poor attitude to work, lack of adequate statistical compilation in the school system among others. The paper then suggested prompt addressing of these issues to guarantee good quality education system in line with the nation's and students' aspirations.

Key words: human resources; non-human resources and quality

Introduction

Education has been the bedrock of developments all the world over. Nations and individuals all the world over now agree that the way out of series of bondages plaguing them is through education. Thus, the educational standards set up for the school must be challenging to meet the needs of the students and the society (Olaniyonu, Adekoya and Gbenu, (2008). In many developed countries of the world, science, technical and vocational education is the major form of education that has transformed their economies with modern facilities provided to effect the required change. It has been found that the major cause of differences between the economies of developed and developing countries lies in the quality and quantity of education offered. The quality of education offered in developed countries is such that makes recipients creators of jobs rather than job-seekers largely in addition to the fact that basic education is mandatory which is responsible for high literacy level.

Education enables individuals to fix themselves up in the society into which they have found themselves. It equips individuals with the ability that will enable them explore the world, manipulate it for their survival and establish themselves. Potentials deposited in individuals are exposed through education so that individuals can acquire training and knowledge in a profession and earn a living (which is a continuous exercise) and education enables individuals cultivate good habits and develop the right attitude to work and life as good citizens.

According to UNESCO (2008), referring to situations in Africa, curriculum has to be revised "if they are to prepare youngsters to live in a society marked by explosion of new knowledge in science and technology, by information and communication". UNESCO (2008) referring to the Education for All (EFA) declaration adopted in Jomtien declares that:

> every person shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions and to continue learning. The scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures and inevitably, changes with the passage of time

The implication of this is what should form the basis of every nation's educational standards or system should be the challenges confronting such nation locally and internationally as these affect the students and the society and the schools must be equipped to address these issues. Developing countries in particular must develop educational system and standards that must address issues on health (HIV-AIDS, infant and maternal mortality rates, sickness, polio, etc), long-term economic competitiveness, information technology, politics and culture. Indeed, this is an arduous task for education industry. Can Nigeria as a nation meet up with the challenges posed to her by global and local expectations considering the present quality of facilities in schools generally? The focus of the paper therefore is to examine situations in Nigerian secondary schools with reference to quality education at that level, after all, good quality inputs into a system should produce good quality output.

The Concept of Quality and Quality Education

Quality according to Babalola (2007) is most often defined as "fitness to purpose in relation to the user and customer needs. It can also be taken to mean that the product conforms to standards, specifications or requirements". In Bamisaiye's (1983) words, quality may be defined as "the sum of composite of the properties inherent in a material or product". Quality education on its own can be seen as relative term because what constitute quality education vary between country to country based on their economic resources, value system, educational goals and philosophies among others. Quality education improves the quality of the work force by raising the levels of its skills and efficiency. Quality education gives a nation access to the world's body of knowledge, hence the adoption and adaptation of the reigning technology to specific environment is facilitated. By and large the general outcome of quality education is a progressive increase in productivity and efficiency. Quality education enables people to express more fully their potential capacities. Longe (1999) puts learning environment (process) and students' outcomes (graduands) under the umbrella of quality of education. The graduands in this case should be able to prove their worth by their level of performance in the competitive labour market among other challenges that will confront them in the society. Therefore it can be affirmed that comparability and international competitiveness of qualifications are a central feature of quality education.

Measuring Quality Education: Useful Indices

Bamisaiye (1983) divides the indices for measuring quality education into namely indices of the productivity of the educational system and the factors-inputs indices. An education system uses inputs in terms of human and non-human to produce desired output after going through a process. If the inputs into education are conceivably measured and related to outputs by using various procedures, the result of such comparison is regarded as the productivity of the educational system. Thus, productivity is a ratio of inputs to outputs both in terms of quality and quantity.

Some of the variables under factors-inputs indices are quantifiable while some are not. Those that are unquantifiable include school climate and the general tone of the school, discipline, moral and spiritual training, etc. quantifiable ones include the following: the quantity and quality of inputs to education, relevant curriculum, appropriate teaching methods and the quality of teaching aids, adequate and suitable infrastructural facilities, students-teacher ratios, students-classroom ratios, well-organized mid-day meals, planning, administration and efficiency of inspection and supervision, nursery and kindergarten schools, special education for the handicapped, conditions of school attendance which include distance which children walk to school and the distribution of hours among the different subjects in the syllabus, availability of suitable textbooks, well equipped library and resource centres for teachers and students, the proportion of the trained men and women in the teaching force, good system of record keeping, continuous assessment of learning activities and experiences, reliability of examinations in use, the quality of learning that is achieved, parents' positive or negative attitudes to education, cultural and religious views in the local community, and the living levels of children's families, their health and nutrition (Bamisaiye, 1983: 11).

To Longe (1999), measuring quality involves measuring outputs from the education system and secondly examining the educational processes which produce these outputs. These two approaches can be used separately or together.

From the input side according to Babalola (2007), quality of education can be gauged through students' capacity and motivation to learn and the curriculum or the subjects to be learned". Other ways of inferring quality from the input side are teachers who know how to teach and can actually teach, time for learning and the requisite tools for teaching and learning. The output indicators for measuring quality of education would be qualifications and the levels of competence in performance of the outputs (students) using the body of knowledge and skills acquired. In addition, the effective performance of the outputs in the job competitive market, their impact on moral conduct

and serviceability in the society are also indicators for measuring the quality of education. The feedback from the job market and society generally is important to the education system for evaluation of both the educational processes and outputs.

Situation in Nigerian Schools

The state of education in Nigeria largely explains the high level of underdevelopment or low rate of development in the country. Schools/structures are dilapidated, infrastructure have collapsed, population is increasing, teacher supply and quality are declining, poor method of ensuring quality within the education industry, (except until recently when National Universities Commission, NUC took a bold step towards quality assurance in the nation's universities) and more terrible is the issue of old curricula which are still in use in Nigeria today. These have failed to address the modern day challenges. Many pupils are not in schools and there is a high rate of illiteracy especially in villages in country. This should be a great source of concern for Nigerian leaders. Allele – Williams (2004) lamented gloomily that "what is of greatest concern is that most curricula offerings are not current... Most learning is paper and pencil work. There is very little practical hands on learning in our schools". As pointed out by Onifade (2006), the greatest challenge to our country in this century is making our large rural illiterate community literate, especially in science education.

Table 1: Average West African School Certificate Examination result (5 credits + English and Mathematics) for a period of ten years in selected secondary schools in Ado-Odo/Ota local government area of Ogun state

Schools	Mean academic performance
Iganmode grammar school	43.49
Alamuwa grammar school	31.65
AUD comprehensive college	29.34
Sango-Ota high school	20.44
Igbesa high school	16.53
Iju-Ebiye high school	15.65

Source: Individual school

This result is not encouraging and is an indication of the quality of inputs into the educational system at that level. No school could produce an average of 50% of its candidates at WAEC level having 5 credits including English and mathematics.

Modern world is now dominated by vocational, science and technical/technological education to the extent that, in the words of Njoku (2001), "there is hardly any economic activity that is not propelled by science and technology". In Britain for instance as reported by the Department of Education and Science in 1981, the country attaches special importance to craft, design and technology as part of the preparation for living and working in a technological society. Equally too, a report from Her Majesty Inspectorate (2001) recommends that "technology merits a place in the curriculum of all pupils up to the age of 16. It also emphasizes equal relevance of craft for both boys and girls". Ellis (1990) also reports a rapid science and technological development in the Caribbean societies.

Primary and secondary education in New Zealand are meant to develop scientifically and technologically literate society that is able to utilize knowledge, skills and opportunities for social, environmental and economic betterment of the country. To achieve this according to Edem (2005), teachers in science and, mathematics, social science and technology are released from school (through the NZ Science, Mathematics and Technology Teacher Fellowship) to work for the project of their choice, hosted by industry or institutions such as tertiary institutions, local or territorial authorities, communities, groups or research institutes. This enables a better understanding and appreciation of the importance of science and technology education in schools by the teachers as well as exposing them to the world of work.

In Germany, the school system trains two-thirds of the young people in technical skills: electronics, new technologies, mechanics, etc. In Australia, the curriculum combines both traditional secondary and vocational subjects. On completion of secondary education, students are given a diploma which is recognized by both industry and universities. Mathematics, science, engineering and technology are central to American education for economic competitiveness and quality of life of the citizens (Edem, 2005).

The situation is bad in Nigeria. For instance, the planned curriculum for the Basic 9 system of education has not been effected or brought to limelight not to speak of giving out books freely as planned. This is glaring from the statement credited to Ismail (2006) that:

> the curricula for primary and junior secondary school levels are still being used in the new system. No doubt, one would expect to find frictions and frustrations associated with the re–organization of physical structures, as well as staffing…There is still some skepticism over the plausibility of full implementation. (Ismail, 2006: 24)

The curriculum being run presently in must be readjusted or re-designed to reflect the interests of Nigerians. Ogbechie (1999) admits this when he advocates for urgent review of Nigeria's school curriculum admitting that this would enable the nation to experience growth in its socio-economic milieu. In his words

> the current curriculum in the nation's school system is not capable of producing knowledgeable, skilled, creative and globally-competitive pupils that will feed the nation's university system. We should redesign education to align with the challenges of the 21st century. Therefore, the focus of all levels of government for both the public and private schools should be review of the curriculum with a view to incorporating entrepreneurship, vocational, problem-solving, life and ethical skills in pupils. The creative arts such as music, dance and ICT and computer education should be integrated into the curriculum.

By this argument, if pupils are introduced to such a curriculum at the primary and secondary school level, it will be easier for them to discover their talents. When this happens they will become useful citizens and the challenges being faced in education in Nigeria will be a thing of the past.

It is necessary to establish challenging academic standards in schools for students so that they face the myriads of problems in the area of economic, social, political, and cultural issues. According to UNESCO (2008), curriculum has to be revised "if they are to prepare youngsters to live in a society marked by explosion of new knowledge in science and technology, by information and communication". A new trend now is to specify curricula in terms of outcomes and levels of achievement rather than content.

The analysis above shows that the type and relevance of education that is given to a child is an important aspect of quality education. Much of the education that is offered to a Nigerian child is unrewarding to himself and the community, hence the increasing rate of unemployment. The quest for quantitative education without due regard for quality can make education irrelevant to the needs of the students and society which is the focus of educational planning. Low quality teaching can therefore lead to increase in dropout rate due to boredom and frustration. This often results in a constant lowering of standards and efficiency of the process of instruction. Evidence of dropouts especially at the primary and secondary levels in Nigeria, irrelevant curriculum content and lack of appropriate teaching aids suggest that the quality of education offered at these levels is far less than what obtains in developed countries. For instance classrooms are overcrowded, one teacher having to cope with up to eighty or one hundred students, and sometimes classrooms are without teachers at all (Adesina, 1980: 46).

In terms of quality of the teaching force in secondary schools, NCE holders are still found even though it the recommendation is graduate holders. Some of the graduate teachers are not qualified (teaching without education and some are HND graduates). The proportion of the teaching force that is trained especially in science and technology is inadequate.

Teachers and students have to walk long distances to get to school due to non-availability of staff and students buses, poor road network and series of potholes on the roads causing hold-ups. A journey of half an hour takes about three hours so that the time to be spent in schools by teachers and students reduces drastically. All these have negative effects on the teachers to teach and students to learn and consequently on quality of outputs.

Maintaining/Sustaining Qualities in Schools: Problems at Hand

Even with the desire to maintain and sustain quality in schools, some challenges are apparent which are making this bold step difficult especially at the primary and secondary levels. Olagboye (2004) listed some of these challenges to include the following.

1. Supervisors lack training in supervisory competencies because some supervisors were promoted on the basis of seniority and length of service but not appropriate training and qualification.
2. Inadequate provision of infrastructural facilities, teaching aids and instructional materials in schools.
3. Poor remuneration of teachers and poor conditions of service which reduces their commitment to teaching.
4. Poor status accorded to teachers which dampen their morale and job satisfaction.
5. Presence of a large number of untrained and unqualified teachers in the school system.
6. Teachers' poor attitude to work and lack of interest in teaching.

Babalola (2007) on his own listed the following as some of the challenges especially as it relates to inspection which is a tool for sustaining quality education.

1. Using of unqualified and untrained personnel in the inspectorate services which result in poor quality control.
2. Shortage of manpower in the inspectorate.
3. Lack of adequate statistical compilation in the school system.
4. Inadequate funds and resources for inspection.
5. Lack of training for would-be school inspectors.
6. Inadequate facilities in the inspectorate.
7. Non-implementation/inadequate implementation of recommendation in inspection reports which results in discouragement in producing high quality inspection reports.
8. Lack of cooperative attitude by some principals.
9. Political instability and frequent policy change.
10. Overload of administrative duties in addition to inspection tours, travels, etc.
11. Occupational hazards associated with road or river travels on inspection tours.

Indeed, these are great challenges for those to maintain quality in Nigerian schools.

What to Do

It is imperative to improve the quality of education in Nigeria because the nation is still far from where it should be after forty-eight years of independence. Quality basic education should be well planned and introduced. Basic education, general and technical and vocational education are needed in Nigeria to bail her out of shackles of poverty and other related problems. Basic education as defined by EFA (2000) refers to "a whole range of educational activities that takes place in different settings and that aims to meet basic learning needs". It thus comprises both formal schooling (primary and sometimes lower secondary) as well as a wide variety of non-formal and informal public and private educational activities offered to meet the defined basic learning needs of groups of people of all ages. General education is mainly designed to lead participants to a deeper understanding of a subject or group of subjects, especially, but not necessarily with a view to preparing participants for further (additional) education at the same or a higher level. Vocational education is designed to lead participants to acquire the practical skills, know-how and understanding necessary for employment in a particular occupation or trade or class of occupations or trades. Technical education designed at upper secondary and lower tertiary levels to prepare middle level persons (technicians, middle management, etc.) and at university level to prepare engineers and technologists for higher management positions. Technical education includes general education, theoretical, scientific and technical studies and related skill training. The component of technical education may vary considerably depending on the types of personnel to be prepared and the education level. It is not enough to introduce this educational system but must be fully funded with all the necessary apparatuses needed supplied in terms of human and non-human human while not forgetting to establish standards or criteria that would should serve as the basis for maintaining and sustaining quality within the industry.

Conclusion

It is important for Nigeria to improve on her state of education which is far from what operates in the developed countries and sustain the quality established for improvements in the quality of human lives and the society generally. An education system that will move the nation to the next advanced level should be adopted fully – basic and general education, technical and vocational education – is acceptable going by the successes recorded in developed countries. There is therefore the need to increase public spending to the sector, encourage students' capacity to learn through adequate motivation, employment of qualified teachers to be in the right proportion with the number of students, provide necessary tools which will improve the quality of teaching, make education relevant to the needs of the students and the society by providing the right curriculum and

assessment methods and employment of right managers to ensure quality. In all, a holistic method of ensuring quality education in which case every stakeholder in the industry should be participants is suggested.

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