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Examining the place of public administration in Nigerian educational advancement from historical lenses

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Abstract

Despite studies, concerns and active agitations from people on the promotion of qualitative education in Nigeria, these studies and agitations have not yielded any concrete results. This article discusses how public administration can advance qualitative education in Nigeria from historical lenses. At the end, the study calls for the establishment of a special office on education reforms at the Presidency, working with other levels of government and stakeholders, to fashion out a 25-year 'Marshall plan' to reposition education and follow up the plan with a measurable implementation strategy. It study equally recommends for government at all level to establish policies and a regulatory

framework to increase literacy rates and encourage gender equality in education. While the Federal Government should strengthen regulatory regimes for standards nationwide, state and local governments should establish their competitiveness standards to be measured by academic performance in public examinations and evidence of high levels of numeracy and literacy skills among children. And finally, there is urgent need for a complete reset of education in Nigeria. This means a holistic reform programme that will position our education sector as the engine for social and economic growth.

Keywords: Education, Government, History, Public Administration, Reforms

Introduction

Despite education being part of the priority lists of the present and previous Nigerian governments, the education system is still far from being ready for the challenges of the new century (Teboho, 2000) ^[15]. Travelling back in history and going beyond 1960, the colonial administrators who amalgamated the two protectorates but not excluding the Lagos colony did not get the educational structure right. This they did primarily by refusing to understand the peculiarities of the African region (presently called Nigeria) when they formulated their various educational policies and so imposed upon the Southern protectorate the British form of education with little participation by the people themselves. They literally excluded the North in their educational policies by restricting the missionaries (who were the agents of Western education) from penetrating the Northern protectorate (Fabunmi, 2005) ^[6], those whose form of education was arguably based on the Qur'anic Educational Policy (Ozigi & Ocho, 1981) ^[14]. Whereas in the south, it is reported that each ethnic group had its own traditional form of education based on its own culture and tradition (Ozigi & Ocho, 1981) ^[14]. Fafunwa (1974) ^[7] states that "the curricula which is informal comprises developing the child's physical skill, character, intellectual skills and sense of belonging to the community as well as inculcating respect for elders, and giving specific vocational training and the understanding and appreciation of the community's cultural heritage." Then the result of the European imposed Educational Policy was the following school systems: primary, secondary, sixth form and higher education in the country (Fabunmi, 2005) ^[6].

Fabunmi further noted that consequent upon the attainment of independence, it was discovered that this system of education (structurally called the 6-5-4 system) did not meet the aspiration of Nigerians; probably due to its great emphasis on paper qualification" ¹¹ "which had overemphasized literary, and underplayed Vocational education.

Paradoxically, Nigeria has great brains which do great academic exploits the moment they go out of the shores of the country, but who as it were, would be considered duns and nonentities in matters of education when they studied in the country. This necessitated the present study that onerously discusses the place of public administration in educational advancement of Nigeria.

Concept of public administration

Administration is a universal process and must exist in any organisation set up for a defined purpose or objective. Whether we think of the church, the army, a university, an industrial or business concern or a purely social organisation, there has to be administration because each one consists of human beings brought together in a hierarchical set-up, making use of tools, equipment, human and material resources, all in the quest to attain the objective for which the organisation is established (Adebayo, 1981)^[2]. Thus, administration is seen as a process of management which is practiced by all kinds of organisations from the household to the most complex system of government. This is the reason why administration is a generic term.

Public administration according to Waldo (1995), is the art and science of management as applied to the affairs of state. For Woodrow Wilson, public administration is the detailed systematic execution of public law, every particular application of general law is an act of administration. Public administration is the fulfillment or enforcement of public policy as declared by the competent authorities. It deals with the problem and powers, the organisation and techniques of management involved in carrying out the laws and policies formulated by the policy-making agencies of government. Public administration is law in action. It is the executive side of government (Dimock, 1937). Public administration is that part of the science of administration which has to do with Government and thus concerns itself primarily with the executive branch where the work of the government is done (Gullick, 1937). Public administration has come to signify primarily the organisation, personnel, practices and procedures essential for effective performance of the civilian functions entrusted to the executive branch of government (Morstein Marx, 1964). Nigro provides a more comprehensive meaning and definition of public administration. According to him, Public Administration:

- a. Is cooperative group effort in a public setting;
- b. Covers all three branches – executive, legislative and judicial – and their-relationships;
- c. Has an important role in the formulation of public policy and is thus a part of the political process;
- d. Is more important than, and also different in significant ways from private administration;
- e. As a field of study and practice has been much influenced in recent years by the human relations approach; and
- f. Is closely associated with numerous private groups and individuals in providing services to the community.

Public administration is decision-making, planning the work to be done, formulating objectives and goals, working with the legislative and citizens organisations to gain public support and funds for government programmes, establishing and revising organisations, directing and supervising employees, providing leadership, communicating and receiving communications, determining the work methods and procedures, appraising performance, exercising

controls, and other functions performed by government, the means by which the purposes and goals of government are realised (Basu, 1994)^[5].

Conceptual view of education

The word 'education' is exclusively used for the development of human beings in the cognitive, affective, psychomotor and psycho-productive domains. There is a general agreement among educationists and educators that education involves a desirable change in human behaviour through the process of teaching and learning. This means that a human being who exhibits undesirable behaviours from the point of view of the acceptable societal norms cannot be adjudged an educated person, despite the fact that he had passed through the four walls of an educational institution. The society, generally, expects a kind of change from an educated person. Education, as a process of initiating the child into cherished norms and skills, is designed and implemented by the more matured or the adult members of the society to effect the desirable changes in the younger ones, from one generation to the other.

Fafunwa (1974)^[7] defined education as what each generation gives to its younger ones, which makes them to develop attitudes, abilities, skills and other behaviours which are of positive value to the society in which they live. This position reflects the sociological perspective.

Education, is a social service, provided world-wide with multiple objectives in mind. The objectives vary from the acquisition of basic skills required for a more rapid growth of the economy and the basic knowledge for the individual to function effectively in the society.

Etymologically, education derived its meaning from two Latin words 'educare' and 'educere' respectively. The word 'educare' is interpreted to mean; to train or to form or to mould. Education here seems to be sociologically biased. In other words, educare implies that the society trains, forms or moulds the individual to achieve the societal needs and aspirations. This perspective of education has little to consider on the natural potentialities of the individual child.

On the contrary, the word 'educere' is interpreted to mean: to build, to lead or to develop. This perspective of the concept is mostly favoured by the humanists, who insist that the function of education is to develop the natural potentialities in the child to enable him function in the society according to his abilities, interest and needs. This perspective of the concept education is child-centred, whereas the former is society-centred or subject matter-centred.

History of education in Nigeria

The Nigerian education system has undergone several changes over the years. From indigenous education, all the way to the western education system that is in effect today, the history of education in Nigeria is an incredibly eye-opening topic that is sure to spark the interest of any person interested in the way in which the education system in Nigeria has evolved over time, and talk a little about the ways in which these systems of education differed from each other.

Pre-Colonial Education

Before western education breached Nigerian borders, children were taught two different kinds of education across the country:

1) Religious Education

Northern Nigeria was prominently taught purely Islamic religious education before the British occupation in the 1840s. Each Muslim community in Nigeria had a mallam who taught children as early as 5 years old the teachings of the Qur'an and the Arabic alphabet. In larger cities, communities set up schools that also taught science and math. By 1913, almost all Islamic schools were built in the north, save for a few exceptions, and were approximately 19,073 in total, with over 143,000 students enrolled.

In the 1970s, the government seized control of all the Islamic schools, but in 1990, the schools were given the ability to operate independently, without government intervention once more.

2) Indigenous Education

The indigenous form of education was the second form of education that existed in Nigeria before the 1840s.

In this system, children were taught practical skills that were necessary depending on the needs of the local community and general society within a certain area. Children as young as two to three years old belonged to an age group, and each age group was assigned specific duties around their village, such as clearing brush or sweeping lanes.

As the children grew older, they were given specific tasks depending on their sex; boys were taught farming or more specialised tasks, such as drumming and wood carving, whereas girls were also taught domestic skills. The boys would also enter into apprentice-style relationships with master craftsmen, and this style of education is also still practised in Nigeria today.

Post-Colonial Education System

In 1840, British missionaries introduced the first form of western education to Nigerian land, when they started the first primary school. 9 Years later, in 1954, the first Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) grammar school was opened by Christian Missionaries in Lagos, becoming the first secondary school to open in Nigeria.

When the northern and southern territories of Nigeria were brought together by Lord Lugard in 1914, the demand for schools had increased dramatically. Due to this demand, the growth of western education was incredibly rapid and led to the establishment of the University of Ibadan in 1948, which was the very first Nigerian university.

At the same time as the public schools and universities were being formed, many private schools were founded and built as well, creating a multitude of choices for the different social classes in Nigeria.

Education Structure in Nigeria

Initially, the education structure in Nigeria followed a 6-3-3-4 scheme, which consisted of 6 years of primary school, 3 years of junior secondary, 3 years of senior secondary and 4 years of tertiary education.

In 2008, however, the scheme was altered to fit the 9-year basic education scheme that fit the needs of the universal education programme. Therefore, the educational structure became the 9-3-4 formula, which consists of 9 years of basic education, 3 years of secondary school education and 4 years of tertiary education.

The 9-year basic curriculum consists of:

- Lower Basic Education Curriculum – Junior Primary School, Primary 1-3.

- Middle Basic Education Curriculum – Senior Primary School, Primary 4-6.
- Upper Basic Education Curriculum – Junior Secondary School, Secondary 1-3.

Basic Education in Nigeria

Primary Education

Even though English is the legally approved language of instruction, some basic level institutions in Nigeria may teach in their native languages, depending on the location of the school.

When a student completes primary education, they receive a primary school leaving certificate, and students that pass the entrance exam to gain entry to secondary school are awarded a basic education certificate.

Secondary Education

Secondary School students are able to choose from formal and vocational education options. Formal education options include core subjects, like mathematics, English, civic studies and entrepreneurship across many different areas of study, such as science, the arts, technology and business.

Vocational education options, on the other hand, offer the students an option to gain skills in areas other than those of the formal education curriculum, such as hair styling, crafting and fashion designing.

In order for secondary school students to be allowed to attend tertiary education institutions in Nigeria, they must first pass the senior school examination, which is prepared by the West African examination council (WAEC), and the National examination council (NECO).

In order for these students to gain admission into Nigerian tertiary education institutions, they must pass either the WAEC or NECO exam, as well as the unified tertiary matriculation exam (UTME). However, after some irregularities in the conduct of the way the UTME exams were being graded, some institutions prefer to hold their own internal exams to screen their students even further before admission.

Tertiary Education

Tertiary education in Nigeria is an umbrella term that encapsulates universities, as well as polytechnics and colleges of education. All the activities of accredited universities in Nigeria are regulated and overseen by the governing body known as the National University Commission (NUC).

The university curricula are structured to ensure that the students are prepared to contribute towards national development and to encourage entrepreneurs to create more job opportunities in their local communities.

Colleges of education are more suited towards students who want to become teachers. These institutions prepare their students by teaching them how to become competent teachers in their societies and be able to educate the youth who would be learning under them before going on their own educational journey.

Polytechnics have a much more hands-on approach to education, teaching students who want to follow engineering, industrialisation or economics. This way, the students can develop to gain specialised technical training and appropriate skill acquisition to contribute to their community.

Factors Militating against Adult Education in Nigeria

1. Poor attitude of both teachers and students to the teaching and learning process. Teaching and learning ought to be a complementary process but sometimes, due to moral laxity the teacher may not be able to teach inspiringly to motivate the students to learn which is capable of crippling the education sectors.
2. Irregular payment of teachers' salary: Often times, teachers in some states do not receive salary on time or as at when due. They are not regularly promoted on regular bases. This could affect the morale of teachers (Onyenemezu, 2008).
3. Lack of dependable infrastructural facilities and amenities: Quite a good number of Nigerian schools in Nigeria lack facilities or equipment. This range from students' learning in dilapidated building hostel, recreational centers, workshop etc to lack of instructional materials for teaching and learning.
4. Poor Funding: The gross underfunding of the educational sector in the country in general and the neglect of the maintenance of the physical facilities; Instructional and living conditions have deteriorated in many o schools; classrooms blocks, libraries and laboratories are nothing to write home about, all leading to declining academic standards.
5. Inadequate budgetary allocation/ under funding: Nigeria is one of the country that is yet to allocate 26 percent of her budgetary allocation to education as recommended by the United Nations (UNESCO). This goes a long way to affect education in the country. One of the major problems facing Nigeria education is under funding.
6. Teachers are not well supervised and monitored in some states: Where regular inspectors by inspectorate is lacking, some teachers may branch off into quick money generating activities such as farming, butchering, petty-trading, etc. even during school hours (Ojo, 2011)^[12].
7. Politicization of education: Most attempts at educational reforms fail to succeed partly due to disparate political ideologies by leaders. Lack of continuity also exist from one administration to the other. In the area of accreditations, some schools that did not meet up the standard are allowed to operate too.
8. Value place on paper qualification: Many Nigerians have misplaced value on qualifications of candidates in the society. By so doing, some of the student resort to getting the certificate through various means and at all cost. Some do take to examination malpractice or certificate forgery.

How to address Nigerian education system

1. There is need to establish a "Special Office on Education Reforms" at the Presidency, working with other levels of government and stakeholders, to fashion out a 25-year 'Marshall plan' to reposition education and follow up the plan with a measurable implementation strategy.
2. The government at all level must establish policies and a regulatory framework to increase literacy rates and encourage gender equality in education. While the Federal Government should strengthen regulatory regimes for standards nationwide, state and local governments should establish their competitiveness standards to be measured by academic performance in

- public examinations and evidence of high levels of numeracy and literacy skills among children.
3. There is urgent need for a complete reset of education in Nigeria. This means a holistic reform programme that will position our education sector as the engine for social and economic growth.
4. Government should rqually devise a means of sustainably funding education and allocate a significant portion of the national budget to the sector. And the training and professional development of teachers should be ensured to enable them have the skills and knowledge necessary to teach in 21st-century classrooms.
5. Finally, the expansion of access to education should be prioritised, especially in rural areas.

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