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Abraham B. Borishade
Federal Ministry of Education

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RESTRUCTURING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AS A LONG-TERM SOLUTION TO THE UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM IN NIGERIA

BY

PROF. ABRAHAM BABALOLA BORISHADE*

INTRODUCTION

... the educational process, formal or informal, consciously created, represents an essential investment necessary for industrialization; such education must be planned to fit the needs of a changing society so that as the urban complex grows and demands expand, there will be entrepreneurs, technicians, the professionals and skilled craftsmen available for jobs not yet even created

Rostow (1963)

EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

Pre-Colonialism

In the traditional Nigeria setting, various people and sectors of the country had their own educational systems, which were mainly non-formal in nature. The young were taught to conform to social customs and traditions of the community and to learn relevant trades or vocations that would make them good citizens. Such education was aimed at maintaining continuity in various vocations (especially in medicine, arts and crafts) and the continuity of culture by transmitting to successive generations not only accumulated knowledge but also the acquired standards of values.

Colonial Era

Formal education was introduced



Prof. Abraham Babalola Borishade

by the colonial masters. The objective was mainly to service their commercial and religious interests, hence the emphasis was on numeracy and communication. The method was role learning based on the development of the 3Rs - Reading, 'Riting and Rithmetic.

Post Colonialism.

After independence, the Federal Government had little influence on educational matters at primary and secondary school levels as that was the constitutional responsibility of the states. This resulted in a multiplicity of educational policies and practices and varying standards of education in the country.

Real educational planning started in Nigeria when the Ashby Commission was set up in 1959 to investigate the post-secondary manpower requirements of the country for

a period of twenty years from 1960 to 1980. The period was later reduced to ten years.

The Ashby Commission headed by Sir Eric Ashby had among other members, three Nigerians namely Professor K.O. Dike, Senator Shettima Kashim and Dr. S.D. Onabamiro.

The Commission recognised education as an investment and in turn favoured the expansion of the education system. Ever since then, concerted efforts have been made to plan Nigeria's education system not only to ensure its effectiveness and efficiency, thus ensuring continuity, but also to maintain a dialectical yet harmonious relationship with its environment.

Notable among such efforts, was the 1969 National Curriculum Conference that culminated in the 1977 statement of a National Policy on Education which is currently in use (though it has been reviewed over time). The Nigeria educational philosophy is based on the development of the individual into a sound and useful citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, both inside and outside the formal school systems. The content and quality of instruction at all levels is oriented

**Prof. Abraham Babalola Borishade is the Hon. Minister of Education.*

towards inculcating respect for the worth and dignity of the individual, faith in man's ability to make rational decisions; moral and spiritual values in interpersonal and human relations, shared responsibility for the common good of the society; respect for the dignity of labour and promotion of the emotional physical and psychological health of all children and the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence. With this came the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system to replace the former 6-5-2-4 system.

Education is the biggest industry in Nigeria. It affects everybody. The initial approach at providing education was the adoption of social-demand approach in educational planning. This made education available to everybody irrespective of the socio-economic and developmental needs of the country.

Education was perceived as the missing link in the process of national development. The belief, particularly among the then newly independent nations of Africa, was that, there was a high positive relationship between increased educational expansion and economic development. Consequently, they (Nigeria inclusive) over expanded their educational systems, with the resultant manifestation of this inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the system and the inability of education to catch up with the changing needs of the Nigerian society.

The Issue of Unemployment

Unemployment as a phenomenon,

is a situation whereby people who are professionally qualified, able and willing to work are unable to find employment.

This situation presents itself in different ways.

- **Seasonal unemployment** - a situation whereby people are laid off seasonally due to the nature of job they do e.g. agricultural jobs.
- **Technological unemployment** - unemployment caused by technological changes or new methods of production in an industry or business e.g. a non-computer literate Accountant may not be able to get a desired job in a bank.
- **Disguised unemployment** - a situation where by people take up jobs unrelated to their area of specialisation when the job they are qualified for is not forthcoming.
- **Under employment** - a condition where people are employed in less-skilled jobs than they are qualified to do.
- **Sectoral unemployment** - a situation that affects certain professions because of over production of graduates in such areas. This can also happen as a consequence of rural-urban migration.

In contemporary developing countries, there is an incongruous relationship between education and their economies. This is reflected in the rising pool of the phenomenon of educated unemployed more than ever

before. In Nigeria, the rate of unemployment, which reached a very dangerous level, is already weakening the country's politico-economic systems.

According to Coombs (1985: 178):

the typical picture in most developing countries showed a highly distorted pattern of graduates in relation to urgent national development needs: a heavy preponderance for example, of graduates in humanistic studies and law (over 90 percent in some cases), less than 10 percent in natural sciences and engineering, and often fewer than 3 percent in agriculture.

The quantitative expansion of the educational system without due regard to the rate of expansion of the economy has led to the production of large number of school leavers the economy cannot absorb.

This paper intends to highlight and stimulate discussions on the emerging issues and problems of educational planning and implementation with a view to proffer solutions.

The Current Situation

Education is a system, with the different levels (pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary) as its sub-system. At the same time, education at the macro level is a subsystem. While the sub-systems of education are inter-related, education is equally related to other sub-systems of the wider society like the economic, socio-cultural and

political components in many ways, with the result that what affects any sub-system affects others. For this reason, the adoption of sectorial approach in the management of education in Nigeria has created more problems in the past than solving the existing ones. For example, the implementation of the National Policy on Education started in 1982, yet the higher education sub-sector that produces the manpower for the lower levels of education pyramids had no such policy for very many years. This created a system gap, bringing about a very serious dis-alignment in the educational system.

Up to the early eighties, university graduates had jobs waiting for them on graduation, at times more than one offer. What obtains now is a situation whereby graduates of ten years or more are still seeking for employment. What then went wrong and where?

Some of the factors militating against adequate planning and policy implementation in Nigeria

- weak data base
- inadequate resources
- depressing economy
- political instability
- long planning period
- lack of self will to contribute to economic development
- unconducive economic atmosphere.

Resultant Effects of Inadequate Planning

- ♦ decreasing industrial capacity utilisation

- ♦ rising level of unemployment
- ♦ increasing intensity of poverty attack on the populace
- ♦ dilapidating infrastructure
- ♦ threats of social insecurity by ebullient jobless youths
- ♦ structural imbalance and system configuration
- ♦ inadequate resource input and consequent low output.
- ♦ poor societal attitude towards and acceptance of technical and vocational education as an alternative form of education.
- ♦ over dependence on government as employer of labour.

The way forward

Nigeria is at its lowest ebb in human capital development and utilisation because of its inadequate educational system, which tends to produce more of those who lack job skills for employment than those the economy requires to remain vibrant. The country has been more concerned with quantitative planning, which has led to linear expansion in the size of the educational system without any broad and dynamic conception of the qualitative dimensions of the system. Qualitative aspect of education according to Coombs (1969) should be viewed as a living, moving thing whose goodness resides not only in its excellence relative to certain 'standards' but in its relevance and fitness to the changing needs of the particular students and the society it is intended to serve.

To move the country forward, there will be need to focus on:

1. Training and manpower needs:

The current situation whereby people make career choices without recourse to the manpower needs of the Nation has to be monitored in order to check the unemployment situation. There should be a strong link between the Manpower Board and the admitting bodies. Any new policy focus of the government should be translated into manpower requirements and relevant information passed on to relevant bodies like JAMB, NUC, NBTE, NCCE etc. Professional bodies will be required in this regard to work hand in hand with tertiary institutions in determining yearly intake of students.

2. Tertiary institutions should be guided strictly by a sound admission policy on course basis. This is with a view to checking the imbalance in the system and reflecting National developmental needs. This directive should be backed by adequate funding to ensure compliance.

3. Guidance Counselors in schools should tailor career counseling towards areas of National needs. This however should not preclude those who may want to pursue purely academic courses.

4. Need to emulate industrial giants of the world e.g. India, a country which in spite of the problem of over population has made tremendous progress in Agriculture and Technology, thus significantly reducing the need to import non-essential goods. Also, there are Technician

programmes, craft training and some institutions of National importance set up to develop specialised manpower and expertise in the fields of Engineering, Technology and Medicine.

5. Re-orientation/Mobilisation of the populace to imbibe productive rather than consumptive culture. This should go beyond mere propaganda, with measures put in place to assist small and medium scale entrepreneurs.

6. Incentives should be given to local producers to protect them from the effect of dumping. Our markets are littered with cheaper foreign goods to the detriment of local production. Industrialisation can only be achieved through the production of local goods and not by large-scale importation of used and finished goods.

7. Production of an enabling environment for infant industries to grow through efficient power supply and other infrastructure. This is with a view to making our local products competitive at the international market.

8. Cultivating the self and political will to move things around positively in the country.

9. Development of industries in rural areas will create employment and check the rural-urban drift and at the same time help to develop the rural areas.

10. Change in focus of education will help to equip school leavers to be proficient

in the skills practised by their communities. This will equally prevent such people from migrating to the cities to look for non-available jobs. This will likewise inspire others to go to school, as formal schooling would finally become relevant to their local needs.

Recommendations

Education is the key with which to unlock the economic potential of the people. It empowers the individual to improve himself as well as equip him to participate in, contribute to, and derive benefits from the national economy.

Education is a corner stone for development policies and strategies for economic and social revival.

This administration, fully aware of the imbalance in the system, has put in place initiatives to rejuvenate the sector. The re-invigoration of the Technical and Vocational Education is a worthy step in this direction. Steps are being taken to ensure

- a demand driven approach to education
- training for employability
- continuing recurrent lifelong learning
- self-directed learning with the focus on the learner
- learner-based approach using innovative open and distance learning methodology
- education and training integrated by policy and practice
- multi-skilling
- skill recognition based on demonstration of competency

and recognition of prior learning

- flexible and multiple entry and exit
- recognition of the need to focus on formal and informal sectors
- flexible academic award structure
- training for wage and self employment
- a shift from social demand approach to human capital approach especially at tertiary level
- decentralised system requiring both strong national and decentralised institutions
- participatory governance, recognition of multiple stakeholders involved in the dialogue.
- development of an all embracing, yet flexible National Policy
- periodic review of educational policies to reflect current needs of the country
- development of a dynamic model that will accommodate changes as they come.

Conclusion

The pluralistic nature of Nigerian society makes it imperative that all sectors of the country have to be carried along in the developmental process of the country.

Depending on a monolithic economy (petroleum products) will not take us to the Promised Land. Renewed efforts will have to be made to revive other sectors of the economy especially agriculture and engineering. It is only then that education can both be effective and efficient,

<p>as efficiency in education is the capacity of an educational programme to produce result in direct proportion to investment expended on it. It is only then we can have desired returns from education. We can build on existing structures to have a turn around. We can take advantage of our fertile lands and go into production and export of both food and cash crops, thus creating more jobs. Our Agricultural institutions could be mobilized and given mandate to produce the required manpower within a particular time frame.</p>	<p>We need the will power and attitudinal change to make things work.</p> <p>We need to encourage local production by patronising local products. We need to graduate from merchandising to manufacturing. The Asian Tigers started from somewhere. Even, in the West African sub-region Ghana, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and others have since woken up from the slumber.</p> <p>We can all work together to make Nigeria great again, and inter-sectoral cooperation in this</p>	<p>regard is a <i>sine qua non</i>.</p> <p>It is therefore clear that a new approach to educational development is clearly needed to address our educational deficits and determine whether we will have a productive workforce in the 21st century. Whether this shift will be enough to ensure the desired change in our society is a problem not for education alone, but also concerns all the other aspects of our national life. We should therefore all work together to make Nigeria great again.</p>
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