

Towards Actualising Sustainable Education Standards in Nigeria

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Abstract. The standard of education in Nigeria has now become an issue for national debate as some are of the opinions that the standards of education are falling in Nigeria today. This paper therefore examines the concept of sustainable education standard with allusion to quality education as suggested by UNICEF 2000. It examines the strategies towards ensuring sustainable education standards in Nigeria. These include reviewing the existing national educational policies, increase in budgetary allocation to education, provision of adequate learning resources, promoting capacity building for teachers, modernising instructional supervision, promoting quality assurance in schools, encouraging public/private partnership in education. It concludes that there is urgent need to re-design the school curriculum at all educational levels, train and re-train teachers and adequately fund the school system for the sustainability of education standards in Nigeria as the future development of our nation hinges on the product of our educational system. It therefore recommends that the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria should re-design the schools curricula and syllabi in order to provide functional education for rapid national growth and development.

Keywords: Development, Education, Policies, Standards, Sustainable, Quality.

Introduction

The vital role of education in the development of nation cannot be overemphasised. In Nigeria, education has been a huge government venture as the Federal Government is placing adequate attention on education because of

its role in national growth and development (FGN, 2004). Education has been conceived as a veritable and vital tool towards ensuring a strong and virile society rather than a means of civilisation and social reform. Now that education has been recognized as a sensitive issue and an important factor for the development of any nation, Nigeria puts a high premium on the education of her citizenry. The economic growth of Nigeria hinges on the available personnel who are highly equipped with sound education and not only the high quantity of natural resources which are available (Oyewole, 2008).

The standard of education in the contemporary Nigeria has now become a paramount issue for national debate as some are of the opinion that the standards of education in Nigeria today are falling (Sam, 2014). Hence, the issue is whether the falling standard of education in our country today is a myth or reality. Eguavo (2013) noted that a nation without sound education lacks adequately equipped future leaders who will help to propel development for the future generation. Oladunni (2012) observed that the falling education standard in Nigeria could be linked with inadequate dedication and commitment by the teachers who are saddled with the responsibility to facilitate effective instructional delivery and inadequate funding of education by the government in accordance with the United Nations standard. He further observed that the teachers at all tiers of our educational system as well as the government have not performed up to the expectation in the process of providing and maintaining good education standard in all our schools. Ochuba (2008) noted that the contents that students learn in secondary school, retain in their memory and put into action after graduation has a great role to play in national development.

In another perspective, Chinelo (2011) opined that the declining education standard could be attributed to ineffective traditional education which helps to inculcate important values of hardwork, diligence, integrity and high productivity. It is pertinent to note that the quality of education in Nigeria has dropped to an alarming rate which could portend great danger for the future of our country (Atanda, 2014). Adebajo (2013) was also of this view when he asserted that the standard of education is falling. He observed that the problem came as a result of neglect which education has to experience in the 1980's is gradually resulting to the decay of the nation's educational system. He noted that a study was carried out to examine whether the standard of education in Nigeria is actually declining or not. The results of the study revealed that 76% of the total respondents were of the opinion that the standard of education is declining while 24% disagreed. Based on the view of the respondents, it was revealed that the major aspects of falling standards of education are controllable. These include adequate finance, inadequate teaching aids and unconducive classrooms, corruption, persistent strike, low remuneration for teachers and dearth of qualified teachers in some states in Nigeria.

It is quite unfortunate that education standard in Nigeria is losing its credibility in the global market as most graduates from universities do not possess saleable skills as required by many employers of labour (Omoregie, 2008). It is pertinent to note that most students cram their notes and textbooks during the examination and therefore answer question words for words. After the examination, such students forget what they have read (Oladunni, 2013). In higher institutions, this trend is referred to by the students

as *la cram, la pour, la forget*. It is highly instructive that this unwholesome trend has been a major setback to our educational system. Examination has been construed by learners as a matter of do or die in which students engage in different forms of examination malpractices just to pass at all cost where as examination is supposed to be testing the students' knowledge of what they have been taught in their own understanding (Ibukun & Oyewole, 2011). No wonder, the observation that the quality of Nigerian university graduates in recent time had declined considerably. Ijeoma (1997) observed that many of our university graduates cannot rub shoulders with graduates from other universities in the world. This implies that something must be wrong with the Nigerian educational system right away from the foundational level (primary and secondary education). The educational pyramid in Nigeria needs urgent attention by the government and all other stakeholders in the education industry in order to salvage and restore the lost glory of education in our country. To this end, this paper attempts to examine some strategies to actualize sustainable education standards in Nigeria.

Concept of Sustainable Education Standard

The concept of sustainable development came into the limelight in 1987 through the report of the Brundtland Commission where sustainable development was perceived as indices for determining present economic and social growth without losing focus on the ability of future generations towards achieving their own needs (United Nations Department of Social Affairs and Economics, 1987). Brundtland Commission posited that sustainability refers to ensuring adequate balance in the areas of environmental, societal and economic considerations towards the development and enhanced quality of life. It is quite evidence that the role of education in achieving this balance cannot be overemphasized. Atanda (2014) noted the significance of planning for sustaining national growth and development should aimed at the future, that is, it should 'foresee' and planned in a way that will meet the needs of the future generation.

Sustainable education standard should entrench quality as the hall mark that is ready to stand the test of time. The standards that are set as regards quality education should be geared towards all round development in the process of producing sound education that could impact positively towards the development of individual and the nation in general. It is pertinent to note from the above submission that sustainable education standard is joint responsibility of every stakeholder in the education industry as everyone has a critical role to play in the development of education sector. Igwe (2001) noted that quality at any level of education is strictly based on measurement and degree of meeting the laid down standards, policy formulation to implementing the educational policies, coverage of the contents in the curriculum, the process of teaching and learning, teachers' performance evaluation as well as research and academic environment. In essence, sustaining education standards in Nigeria requires active participation of the parents, students, educational administrators and education policy makers at both state and federal levels.

Strategies Towards Ensuring Sustainable Education Standards in Nigeria

The following strategies as highlighted and discussed could go a long way towards actualizing sustainable education standards in Nigeria.

a. *Reviewing the national educational policies:* The national educational policies need to be reviewed in line with the current national needs and global standard. Educational policy could be regarded as a principle or rule to guide educational decisions in order to achieve rational outcomes. The present educational policy of 6-3-3-4 educational system developed by the Federal Government of Nigeria has witnessed different reforms in structure and implementation in recent time, some of the changes that have political undertone rather than national interest. Though the idea behind the present national policy on education could be lofty but the implementation has not yielded the desired results (Kayoom, 2015). There is no focus on what education should be in addressing national problems. Hence, there is no stabled structure as this system of education was once changed to 9-3-4 and now modified as 1-6-3-3-4. This assertion was also remarked by Adebajo (2013) when he noted that the government change educational policies frequently leaving the teachers and students confused. Amannah and Ahiakwo (2013) observed that there have been 44 Ministers of Education working to actualize the policies of 14 civilian Presidents and military Heads of States since independence. Faulty implementation of educational policies had undermined the fulfillment of educational goals. Progress made in some areas of the education sector were not necessarily consolidated as some education policies appear to be politicized thereby resulting to neglect, misappropriation of fund and poor implementation. There is need for a critical analysis of the existing situation in the education sector putting into consideration the socio-political and economic issues which could have significant influence on the education sector as well as decision making and of course the process of implementation should completely be devoid of politics. There is need to reform educational policies in Nigeria to pave way for access to educational opportunities, equity in the distribution of educational services, maintaining a consistent structure of the educational system with focus on internal and external efficiency. Hence, the need to make primary and secondary education compulsory for all school age children, train and re-train the teachers and ensure stability in the structure of the educational system.

b. *Increase in budgetary allocation to education:* Sustaining the education standards at all levels depends largely on adequate funding. There is no doubt that education is the most capital intensive out of all other sectors as education is the bedrock of any national development. However, in recent time, the budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria has dwindled considerably when compared to other sectors of the economy. The 26% of national budget that UNESCO recommended for education has become a myriad in Nigeria as the total budget for education is less than half of the recommended percentage in some years back. Atanda (2014) observed that the percentage allocated to education did not go beyond 10% as against 26% of annual budgetary allocation

recommended by UNESCO. Adebakin and Ajadi (2014) opined that underfunding education in recent past and budgetary restriction of Nigerian education sector had posed a number of challenges in achieving quality in Nigerian education. It is evident that political interference could influence the level of funding the education system while corruption has constituted a major impediment to sustaining education standards in Nigeria. The depressed funding has resulted to inadequate supply of instructional materials and other resources that could facilitate effective teaching and learning process in our schools. To address this problem, Chinelo (2011) advocated for adequate funding of education through the adoption of UNESCO's 26% recommended from annual budget. The money to adequately finance education could be derived from the Education Tax Fund (ETF) and Petroleum Trust and Development Fund (PTDF). The bogus budgetary allocation to pay the public office holders could be reduced in order to have enough money for the development of the nation's educational system at all levels. This will help to address the decay in the state of school infrastructural facilities. In similar vein, Adebajo (2013) observed that most of the problems that led to the falling standards of education are controllable and these problems can be solved easily when there is a remarkable increase in budgetary allocation for education in order to sustain educational standards in Nigeria as most of the problems facing education today are emanated from inadequate funding of the educational system.

c. *Provision of adequate learning resources:* For any educational goals to be effectively achieved, urgent attention must be given to provision of adequately trained personnel and teaching materials. The infrastructural facilities in schools must be put in place based on standards. Atanda(2014) opined that the minimum standards documents for every level of education stipulate required standard in construction of classrooms, toilet facilities, library, laboratories, etc. Education is capital intensive and putting into consideration the demands of other sectors of the economy, it becomes highly imperative to develop public/private partnership in the process of funding education and instilling moral discipline at all levels of education in Nigeria. Education finance and provision of adequate facilities in schools should be the joint responsibility of all the stakeholders in the education industry. Evidence exists on the degree of dilapidation that characterizes school buildings especially in primary and secondary schools in many parts of Nigeria. Many of the schools are ill-equipped with basic learning resources while the taps of many laboratories in the schools are dried up. Experiments can no longer be performed in science laboratories as chemicals are not available. Many of the practical classes have turned into tutorials. This situation must be urgently addressed. The rapid increase in the demand for education relative to population increase in the country is a significant factor to consider in the decline in standard. Any expansion in the provision of such essential service must generate resources to match attendant costs of having additional teaching staff, procurement of textbooks, construction of classrooms, hostels, etc in the sustenance of standard (Sani, 2014). Worse still, there are inadequate textbooks in school libraries as many of the available textbooks are obsolete. Many of the students do not

cultivate the reading culture as they are busy engaged in the social media (Oyewole, 2015). Perhaps, this unwholesome attitude developed by the students towards reading habit has not encouraged many of the school administrators to place high premium on the acquisition of modern textbooks into the school libraries as this could result into share waste of meager financial resources that are available in the school.

d. Promoting capacity building for teachers: Developing various programmes for teachers' capacity building at all levels of the educational system is vital towards actualizing sustainable education standards in Nigeria. According to the national policy on education (FGN, 2004), it was clearly stated that no education could develop above the qualities of its teaching personnel. This implies that, the standard of knowledge acquisition of any teacher at a particular level will determine the standard of education at that level. The teachers play prominent role in determining education that is needed for human and national development. This great responsibility bestowed on the teachers cannot be handled carelessly or with levity. This calls for training and re-training of teachers at all levels in order to face the challenges of education in schools' curricular which at times change from time to time in line with global standard and national development. According to Aghenta (2006) as cited in Ochuba (2008), the highly trained personnel help to bring about national development that could facilitate the tremendous growth and development of any nation. It is no doubt that teachers' capacity building has a role to play in their job performance in schools and consequently enhancing students' academic performance. Ajayi (1999) examined the relationship between teachers' job performance and academic achievement of secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The study revealed that levels of teachers' job performance and students' academic achievement were low. Moreover, the relationship between teachers' job performance and academic performance of students was significant. In essence, for the teachers to perform optimally on their job, there is need to expose them to new strategies of teaching especially in the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in classroom instructional delivery. For educational standard in Nigeria to meet the global requirement, there is need to adequately train and re-train teachers at all levels through seminars, workshops and conferences on emerging issues that could facilitate effective teaching and learning process in our schools. The teachers must be exposed to modern techniques and application of ICT in instructional delivery in classrooms. It is pertinent to note that the use of ICT facilities in training teachers in Nigeria has been a great challenge as most of the teachers do not have adequate knowledge of ICT. Ayodele and Oyewole (2012) remarked that the teachers as builders of the nation should be adequately equipped in the revolutionary approach to modern day knowledge. The contemporary approach in teaching techniques need to be increasingly used and developed at all levels of the nation's educational system and this can only be achieved through effective capacity building for the teachers.

e. ***Modernising instructional supervision:***Instructional supervision is very vital in the actualisation of sustainable education standards in Nigeria. Ochuba (2008) observed that for education to effectively develop human capital, it becomes highly imperative to embark on regular and effective supervision. It is quite unfortunate that both the federal state inspectors have not performed up to the expectations due to various challenges such as inadequate fund for inspection, lack of transportation and other problems. In the past, teachers of schools were 'snoopervised' in the process of ensuring quality education in schools as this type of supervision was characterised with bossiness, threat, and lack of human relations. Ayodele and Oyewole (2014) noted that the modern day approach to instructional supervision is more clinical in nature as teachers need to be helped to improve on their job performance through corrections and personal guidance where necessary. The idea of clinical instructional supervision places much emphasis on the behaviours of the supervisors in the process of interacting with the teachers. It is a clear departure from the punitive measure that are embedded in the 'old traditional' supervision while the modern approach (clinical instructional supervision) focuses on corrective/rehabilitative measures in a cordial relationship that will totally erase symptom of suspicion for any kind of witch-hunting on the part of the teachers. Rather, this is a diagnostic approach that involves the teachers' abilities, preparation and creating enabling environment that will keep the teachers to improve on the quality of instruction. This modern approach will ensure quality control through mutual interactive behavior between the supervisor and the supervisee in sustaining the standard of education in our schools.

f. ***Developing mechanism for accountability and evaluation in schools:*** There is urgent need to develop accountability and evaluation of schools' programmes and activities in sustaining standards of education. What distinguishes schools of the past from the present is discipline, hard work, virtues and values. Adebakin and Ajadi (2014) asserted that quality assurance is a concept that has been designed purposely to improve the quality of input, process and output in schools. Ajayi and Adegbesan (2007) opined that quality assurance could be linked with accountability which is aimed at maximizing effectiveness and efficiency of educational systems according to stated goals and objectives. Ajayi (2014) noted that the better the quality of education, the more effective the education system and vice-versa. He therefore suggested that it is necessary to ensure quality education so as to make the education system to be relevant in solving societal problems.

One major problem that is confronting quality assurance in Nigerian educational system is the issue of examination malpractices. That there are malpractices in the process of examination in Nigeria is no longer news (Eguavo, 2013). The concern in contemporary society is the alarming rate of the frequency and dimensions of examination problems. Indeed, whether in the primary, secondary or tertiary levels in the school system, the problems of cheating and other sharp practices have been noted. Public campaigns and programmes embarked on by government and non-governmental agencies on the need to eliminate examination malpractices have not yielded the desired results, not even the introduction of jail terms for culprits (Ibukun & Oyewole, 2011). Today,

the qualities of certificates from Nigerian schools are questioned in the light of the growing challenges in the preparation and examination of the products of the school system. It very unfortunate that universities' graduates with first class results are now put to test before they could be employed. There is urgent need to wage war against examination malpractices in the nation's educational system through re-orientation and possible change in Nigerian value system, developing better and more flexible evaluation system through continuous assessment. The teachers handling pupils must be trained and experienced. Teachers should seriously observe the conduct and performance of their students. The continuous assessment on the students plus periodic tests results should form the means of evaluation in order to determine the strength and weakness of individual student. Those students who critically need assistance to catch up should be given extra lessons to enable them cope with regular lessons. There is also the need to enforce laid down laws/decrees on examination malpractices thereby promoting quality assurance in sustaining education standard.

g. Encouraging public/private partnership in education: It is important to reiterate the fact that government alone cannot singularly bear the total costs on education in Nigeria if the education standards are to be sustained. There has been much criticism on the neglect of public schools by the government for failure to take corrective measures which will arrest the rapid decline in the standards of education. There is need for effective collaboration by all the stakeholders in the education industry. These include government, parents, philanthropists, religious bodies, private establishments and even the students. All these stakeholders have key roles to play towards sustaining education standards in Nigeria. The idea of private schools/institutions in Nigeria today has helped to reawake the standards of education in our country as many of the private schools are better equipped in terms of facilities than public schools. However, the exorbitant fees charged by many of these private schools and institutions have now become unbearable for parents especially the poor. Children of the well to do including senior public servants are preferably enrolled in private schools abroad where the educational standard is high and elitist (Sani, 2014). This is not to say that the idea of setting up private school is not good, but if this present trend is sustained, the education of the common people may be hindered as there could be no equal access to education standard. Government must therefore be committed in providing quality education. The parents and other stakeholders should assist and cooperate with the relevant authorities to ensure quality control in the standard of education which must be sustained for the attainment of disciplined, just and egalitarian society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The policy on education at the national level should be revisited as a matter of urgency. Experts from the ministries of education should explore all possibilities with a view to put in place workable mechanisms that could provide remedial measures in order to enhance and sustain education standards in Nigeria. There is urgent need to re-design the school curricula to meet the local needs of Nigerian society. The teachers at all levels of the nation's

educational system should be made to undergo training and re-training programmes for improved instructional delivery in the classrooms. The public-private partnership should be encouraged to improve better funding of the nation's educational system, while the budgetary allocation by the government to the education sector should also be increased. The educational systems of other countries like Ghana, United States of America, United Kingdom and South Africa could be understudied for comparative analysis and adaptation of methods and principles that best suit Nigerian situation. The curriculum planners in the Federal Ministry of Education could be charged with this responsibility. These experts in the field of curriculum planning should closely understudy the school curricula at all levels in these various countries and study the pattern of funding their educational systems. These countries have been selected because of the urgent drive of affluent parents in Nigeria to send their children/wards to study in some of these countries, not minding the financial cost that this could place on them.

The schools curricula and syllabuses that are tested, trusted and found effective should be adopted for teaching in schools, colleges and universities in order to provide functional education for rapid national growth and development. Greater attention should be placed on primary and secondary schools curricula as these levels of education are very crucial to sustainable development in the education industry. What the children learn at their tender age must be of paramount interest to education policy makers. Students must be encouraged to develop reading habit while special attention must be devoted to communication ability and skills in the language of instruction. The promotion of students to higher classes should strictly be based on their performance while teachers should be encouraged to display better commitment in the discharge of their duties. Good virtues such as hard work, diligence, punctuality, enhanced productivity and creativity by the teachers should be adequately rewarded.

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