Reflections On The Philosophical Base Of The Nigerian Education And The Attainment Of Equality Of Access To Primary Education

E. E Adiele
Rivers State College Of Education
Department Of Educational Foundation/Management, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Abstract

The Adoption of a National policy on education in 1977 in Nigeria was seen as a great innovation in the school system. The policy was applauded especially because of the promises of equal educational opportunity it held for Nigerians. 29 years of policy implementation, Nigerians are ever worried on the level of achievement recorded. This paper reflects on the philosophical base of the Nigerian education and the attainment of equality of access to primary education. Concluding that the land is bright but not full of opportunities, the paper recommends the development of an ideological framework for Nigeria education that is based on the peculiar nature of the country.

Introduction

Prior to independence in 1960, Nigerians had seriously criticized the British colonial regime on issues of relevance, comprehensiveness and focus of the system of education provided to Nigerians. Among several other agitations, Nigerian leaders and educators were particularly worried that the British system of education laid emphasis on academic subjects; educational opportunity was restricted to few people and that the British grammar school system of education was trans-imposed on Nigeria without due consideration to the culture, environment and the aspirations of Nigeria as a country (Nwangwu, 2003).

The above agitations culminated in the 1969 National Conference on Curriculum Development. The conference was to fashion out a philosophy for Nigerian education. The outcome of the conference was the inauguration of a National Policy on Education in 1977 for the entire country. After 29 years (1977: 2006) of policy implementation, it is pertinent to review the achievement recorded so far, especially as it applies to the criticisms raised against the colonial regime. This paper reflects on the philosophy of Nigerian education and critically examines its success in attaining equality of access to primary education since its inception in 1977.

The Philosophy of Nigerian Education

The philosophy of Nigerian education is embedded in the National Policy on Education. According to the policy document, the five national goals which Nigeria’s philosophy of education draws its strength are:

1. A free and democratic society;
2. A just and egalitarian society;
3. A united, strong and self-reliant nation;
4. A great and dynamic economy;

Based on the above national aspirations, the philosophy of the Nigerian education seeks to achieve the following:

a) The development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen.
b) The full integration of the individual into the community; and
c) The provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.

In order to make the philosophy of education work harmoniously for Nigeria’s goals, education in Nigeria has to be tailored towards self-realization, right human relations, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress (NPE, 2004). To this end, the Nigerian education system is value-laden and aims at the betterment of the citizens in order that they may live a better life and contribute to the advancement of society. The role of education in the attainment of the broadcast philosophy of education. It might be necessary at this point to examine each aspect of the national goals for which education is set to achieve in Nigeria.

Free and Democratic Society

The question that readily comes to mind here is what does a free and democratic society entails? And how can this be achieved through education? A free society is a society where the citizens do not suffer restrains or undue interference. They are at liberty to achieve whatever they want to achieve that the least capable person can attain. Just like freedom, democracy implies:

1. That all men possess certain inalienable rights;
2. That all humans are to be regarded equal in certain respects;
3. Faith in human intelligence;
4. Enhancement of individual freedom;
5. Right to peaceful dissent (Omoteso and Aladejana, 2003)

The needed level of awareness of the citizens of the Nigerian society on the benefits of a free and democratic society as outlined above can be achieved through a virile education system that is guided by rational policy, which the society itself has evolved for its own benefit (Omatsaye, 1992).

Just and Egalitarian Society

The attributes of a just and egalitarian society entails that all persons should be considered of equal importance and their opinions treated equally and seriously (Ocho, 1988). Underneath a just and egalitarian society is the principle of justice and fairness; and the principle of fairness to all is also the principle of equity. The goals of a just and egalitarian society can indeed be pursued through education. Here, education can be used to deliberately inculcate in the learner the spirit of fairness and help to recognize individual differences and needs.
A great and dynamic economy

A dynamic economy is an economy that is capable of enhancing equitable income distribution by:

i) Eliminating absolute poverty;

ii) Participation of broadly based group in public matter affecting the citizens;

iii) A reduction in the level of literacy;

iv) A greater control and manipulation of the resource endowment of the nation by the internal forces.

The role of education in achieving a great and dynamic economy for Nigeria cannot be underestimated. Skilled manpower of various categories and in their diverse qualities is needed in the various economic sectors to pursue the goals of economic growth and development. It is through the process of education that these skills are developed and used to implement any meaningful economic development plan.

A united strong and self-reliant National and a Land full of bright opportunities for all Citizens.

To build a united country entails that education should be able to inculcate in every Nigerian the ability to contribute to the development or up-liftmen of the country; every Nigerian should be his brother’s keeper irrespective of religion, ethnicity or social background; a country that will be strong in defending its territory; a country that defends the rights of her people and upholds the integrity and dignity of its citizens and provide social securities (NTI 2006).

The Nigerian Philosophy of Education and the Attainment of Equality of Access to Educational Opportunities in Nigeria.

Pursuant to the attainment of the broad national goals examined in the earlier, the National policy provides that the philosophy of the Nigerian education shall among others be based on “The provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system”. (NPE, 2004; 7). In order to realize equality of access to educational opportunities, the policy framework provides that government shall undertake the following measures:

a. Education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans;

b. Lifelong education shall be the basis of the nation’s educational policy;

c. Education and training facilities shall continue to be expanded in response to societal needs and progressively accessible to afford the individual a far more diversified and flexible choice;

d. Education activities shall be centered on the learner for maximum self-development and self-fulfillment;

e. Universal Basic education in a variety of forms depending on the needs and possibilities, shall be provided for all citizens;

f. Efforts shall be made to relate education to overall community needs;

g. Educational assessment and evaluation shall be liberalized by their being based on whole or in part on the continuous assessment of the progress of the individual;
h. Modern educational techniques shall be increasingly used and improved upon at all levels of the education system;

i. Education shall be structured to develop the practice of self-learning, and government shall in this regard continue to encourage the establishment of young learners clubs in schools;

j. At any stage of the educational process after junior secondary education, and individual shall be able to choose between continuing full-time studies, combing work with study, or embarking on full-time employment without excluding the prospect of resuming studies later on;

k. Opportunity shall be provided for religious instruction; no child will be forced to accept any religious instruction which is contrary to wishes of his or her parents; and

l. Physical and health education shall be emphasized at all levels of education system (NPE 2004, 9-10).

A critical examination of the extent to which the stated philosophy of education in Nigeria has achieved the desired goals reveals that the policy was more utopian than practical. There are clear indications that educational programme implementation has been generally defective and largely ineffective, and have shown disappointing outcomes. Forty-six years after independence, the gap between the rich and the poor has continued to widen in an unprecedented manner. There is no practical evidence to show that all Nigerian children have equal access to education. In the words of Omatseye (1992: 171), “the fact that only those who can afford the cost of schooling send their children to school is anything but a just and egalitarian system”.

It has been impossible for government to eliminate situations in which the children of the poor are attracted to ill-equipped public schools and those of the wealthy to well-staffed and better-equipped schools. Until that day when the children of governors, ministers, commissioners and the highly-placed in society will be sent to public schools which they (the highly-placed) have built, shall the populace take government educational polices serious. The national goal of “a united strong and self-reliant nation” will remain a mere dream if every Nigerian child does not have the right to education, not just by mere policy proclamation and directives but by matching words with appropriate actions. The Nigerian education system as presently constituted is in serious crisis. The different levels of public schools suffer from poor conditions of learning, high students-teacher ratio, overcrowded classrooms, etc. These conditions have eroded the quality of education provided in public schools. It is not surprising, then, that majority of the primary school graduates and indeed the secondary schools cannot read and write, talk less of acquiring manipulative and lifelong skills as well as moral values as outlined in the National policy on Education.

Presently many Nigerians do not have faith in the country anymore, talk less of faith in the leaders who stash away Nigerian wealth illegally in foreign countries. Nigerians have lost faith in themselves and have more than ever before become mutually suspicious of each other. No respect for culture, industry ad honesty. Our values have been eroded. The land is bright but not full of opportunities (NTI, 2006). Very high levels of unemployment have come to stay with us. Crimes of all sorts have taken over our streets. Many Nigerians cannot attend a university because of inability to finance its education.

That the Nigerian education system has not been able to achieve the desired goals as enumerated in the policy document leaves much to be desired. Forty-six years of nationhood, we are still counting our losses. In the words of Okoh (2005: 4), “our nation is at risk because we have been committing acts of unthinking, unilateral educational
disarmament. We have ended up producing graduates who are completely irrelevant to their society; graduates who have been miss-educated”.

**Policy Implications for Primary Education**

The inauguration of the Universal Basic Education programme in Nigeria promises free education to children of primary school age. Before now, it has been difficult for the Government to adequately fund all levels of the education system. With the introduction of the UBE and the antecedent of lack of willpower among the political class to implement educational policies, the present policy regime has serious financial implications for the primary school system. An estimated 24 million primary school children are expected to benefit from the UBE scheme (Obanya, 2001: 53). It is equally estimated that for the UBE to take off, about 4668.66bn will be required (Obanya, 2001: 55).

A cursory look at budgetary allocations to education over the years reveals how serious the Government has taken issues concerning education generally. The education sector is generally characterized by poor funding as budgetary allocations have declined over the years. The United Nation’s recommendation that 26 percent of the national budget of countries be allocated to education is far from being met. And since the UBE will require a huge capital outlay for its successful implementation, an important question to address is: What optimal budgetary provision should be made for the UBE?

Presently public primary schools are in crisis situation; they are characterized by dilapidated buildings, poor infrastructure, absence of instructional materials etc. Given the Nigerian antecedents, three main issues need to be considered in discussing resource allocation to primary education. The first should consider the total financial allocation available to schools from both the Government and other sources and the means by which government ensures that all children of primary school age have equal chances of receiving quality education.  The second issue bothers on decisions about how the total financial allocation is to be distributed to schools in such a way that every child, no matter the geographical location, has equal opportunity of benefiting from the funds.

The third issue should consider the way the resources are allocated to programmes that will promote the best outcomes for pupils in the primary schools. Each of these considerations is critical to the development of a functional primary education in the new dispensation because evidence has shown that the way resources have been allocated to primary education in the past has not been as effective as desired. Two major concerns should govern the allocation of resources to primary education, namely efficiency and equity. Within regard to efficiency, it is important that we have efficient use of resources so that we get the best value for the money being allocated to primary education. For equity, it is important that the money allocated to primary education be used in such a way as to give every pupil in the school system equal chance of succeeding.

**Conclusion**

A major conclusion drawn from this paper is that the policy framework for a broad national philosophy of education in Nigeria appears to be more utopian than utilitarian several years after adopting the national philosophy of education. The promise of equal educational opportunity to all citizens at all levels of education has not been adequately achieved. The dream of a just and egalitarian society and a great and dynamic economy envisaged by the policy makers is yet to be achieved 46 years after attainment of political independence. The education system has not been able to produce graduates who are self-
reliant and who can meaningfully contribute to economic development. These issues need to be seriously addressed by the present regime.

References


