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## CRITICAL CHALLENGES AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: SYNTHESIS AND PROGNOSIS

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### ABSTRACT

*Education is very vital for the survival of society. It is through education that future generations learn the art of living in their peculiar environment and acquire the necessary skills needed to transform that environment for an enhanced living. In Nigeria, the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education were put in place by the federal government in order to harness the human capital needed for individual survival and the economic development of the country. Unfortunately, it is claimed that the standard of education in Nigeria has fallen since the late 1970s and graduates from Nigeria universities lack in quality, low in perception, unfit in skills and lamentably unemployable. The education sector is worsening with the dearth of fund and the misapplication of the little provided to run education; lack of adequate infrastructure or the decay of the little available; insecurity of lives and property occasioned by frequent kidnapping and killing of innocent citizens by religious fanatics 'Boko Haram' who claim that education is anathema; and incessant strikes that frequently led to closure of schools. These challenges prompted the federal government of Nigeria to set up Transformation Agenda aimed at reforming the education industry together with other sectors with a view to growing the economy. The Transformation Agenda drew its philosophy from the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals on Education and the Nigeria's Vision 20.2020 aimed at making Nigeria one of the world's 20 economies by the year 2020. A synthesis and prognosis of critical challenges threatening education were revealed and suggestions proffered for overall transformation of education in Nigeria.*

### KEYWORDS

critical, challenges, transformations, synthesis, prognosis.

### INTRODUCTION

There is no society that can survive without a sound system of education. This is so because it is through education that future generations learn the art of living in their peculiar environment and acquire the necessary skills needed to transform that environment for an enhanced living. In the heart of every democracy, the provision of sound education is central as education is a tool for combating ignorance, poverty and under-development. Education is the method by which a society transmits from one generation to the next, its knowledge, culture and values. For the individuals, it is the process by which a person learns fact, acquires skills, and develops abilities and attitudes necessary in the workplace. Investment in education, therefore, contributes to the accumulation of human capital which is essential for economic and social development and by encouraging responsible citizenship, helps to prepare the way, gradually, for a robust democracy (Ramson, 1994).

According to Ajibade (2001), education is the key to greater heights; education has made it easy to lead and govern but difficult to drive and enslave. It is the greatest companion that cannot be stolen, destroyed, or enslaved; education can bring people out of obscurity into limelight and education is the key to national development.

It is perhaps for these reasons and more that successive governments in Nigeria have taken very seriously the burden of organizing education. In particular, the federal government recognizing that education is globally regarded as a veritable instrument for social and economic reconstruction of societies, embarked on a revolutionary reform in the education sector which would be compliant with emerging global initiatives on education. The remaining part of this work will be focusing on critical challenges and transformations of education in Nigeria.

### SYNTHESIS AND PROGNOSIS OF CRITICAL CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA'S EDUCATION SECTOR

The Federal Ministry of Education (2012) stated very clearly what it perceived as challenges to a sound education sector and which must be resolved for successful transformations in education to happen:

1. Institutional challenges like declining academic standards, low admission capacity (turned effect), legacy examination system, examination malpractices, cultism inadequate facilities and unsustainable cost structure.
2. Policy and communication challenges such as non-implementation of policies, poor relations between federal and state agencies and communication gap between operators within the sector and society.
3. Capacity challenges, e.g., skill gap between Nigeria and other nations, unemployment and brain drain
4. Socio-cultural challenges, youth deviancy, dying reading culture, and moral degradation.
5. Generational challenges e.g., generational gap between parents and children and between teachers and students.

These are not the only challenges bedeviling the system. Other critical challenges need to be mentioned and addressed in order to explain the urgency in transforming education in Nigeria as per following:

#### INSECURITY

The unprecedented rise of insecurity due to the devastating attacks by the Boko Haram sect in Nigeria particularly in the north east, the frequent kidnapping in the south-east and south-south of Nigeria which is gradually spreading across the nation have proven to be the greatest headache of federal government of Nigeria since the end of Nigeria's civil war in 1970. First because peace which is a precursor to development has been taken away and secondly because these challenges are the reasons schools are shut down, factories abandoned and the future of education in Nigeria is uncertain. Universities in the northern part of the country are now undersubscribed as prospective students prefer safer universities in the central and southern parts of the country thereby putting pressures on the already overstretched and over-subscribed universities. Parents prefer to keep their wards at home to prevent their being abducted or conscripted into the ranks of the deadly Boko Haram insurgents. Inadvertently, the same youth who have been kept at home for fear of being abducted or those who have been displaced became ready sources of recruit by Boko Haram insurgents. Furthermore, the unprecedented high rate of unemployment in the country worsened the situation as the unemployed youth succumb to these vices and became ready stooges in the hands of Boko Haram, kidnappers and armed robbery surrogates.

#### INCESSANT STRIKES AND CLOSURE OF INSTITUTIONS

Incessant strikes by staff of tertiary institutions in Nigeria as a result of unsatisfactory conditions of the education process contribute very adversely to the growth of the sector. Students stay at home more than they actually study and because of this, parents have resorted to sending their wards to private institutions while well-to-do parents send their children abroad. This confirms the decay in the process and explains the reason for the devalued quality of our products.

#### POLITICS IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INSTITUTIONS

Institutions are established by the Federal Government along political and geographical lines. The siting of educational institutions has always been at the whims of people in power meant to please particular ethnic or religious groups, and expand political patronage. However, the effort of this administration in ensuring the involvement of the private sector in establishment and management of institutions has opened-up desirable vista in university administration in Nigeria. This



was long overdue since the existing federal and state universities could not cope with the teeming young Nigerians that crave for university education. With the coming of the National Open University of Nigeria it is hoped that many Nigerians that seek tertiary education will find opportunities.

#### POOR FUNDING OF EDUCATION

Funding is the most intractable task facing managers of educational institutions in Nigeria. Fund is very important. It is needed for provision of facilities/equipments, payment of salaries as well as allowances. Several other activities such as accreditation, maintenance, etc., depend on fund. There is hardly anything that can be achieved in schools without fund. In emphasizing the important role of funding in goal realization of educational institutions, Suleiman (2011) reiterated that the most serious of all constraints is funding which he considers to be undoubtedly, extremely and dangerously low. According to him, the declining quality of education, characteristic perennial shortage of institutional materials, decaying physical facilities and low morale among teachers and students are often attributed largely to problem of funding.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) provides for shared responsibility for education at all levels. In practice however, local governments have shown greater prominence in primary education while the state governments are involved in secondary and tertiary education. The federal government operated predominantly at the tertiary level with some inputs to assist the primary and secondary levels. Even though the Nigerian educational system is very large and still expanding, a commensurate funding system is not put in place for meaningful improvement in quality of materials and processes. Unfortunately, with the dwindling resources accruing to the federal government occasioned by fallen oil prices, the realization of allocation of 26% of national annual budgets to education, in line with the United Nation standard, will be distant indeed. For avoidance of doubt, the best budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria's history was 10% of her annual budget witnessed in 2014.

#### ACCREDITATION

Closely related to the problem of funding is accreditation. The supervisory bodies of Nigeria's institutions insist on minimum standard in the area of student quality, programmes, physical facilities, teacher quality, etc. At the receiving end of these inadequacies are the managers of these institutions who struggle to keep the various institutions on course in ensuring that minimum standard is achieved. Accreditation is necessary in the sense that products and processes used in achieving it are not at variance in the same school and between schools.

#### AUTONOMY

The need for autonomy of tertiary institutions and especially in the appointment of chief executives and funding has been made incessantly. True autonomy lies in the various institutions being able to select their leaders themselves through election. The chief executive so elected would be likely to serve the institution better than a leader imposed on the institution and staff by the political leadership. A vice-chancellor appointed single-handedly by the President may only owe allegiance to the man who appointed him. This explains the reason some heads of tertiary institutions treat their colleagues with disdain, not caring about managing the institution responsibly; undue interference by the supervisory ministries in the area of student admission, appointments and fund management thwarts the efforts of the institutions managers to manage universities governing councils the responsibility for institutional governance, the appointment of key officers restricting the powers of the National Universities Commission and also, allowing universities to set admission criteria, select students, develop curricula and restore grant funding to universities. Governing Councils should be given the responsibility for institutional governance, the appointment of key officers restricting the powers of the National Universities Commission and also allowing universities to set admission criteria, select students, develop curricula and let the government restore grant funding to universities.

#### CULTISM

Cultism is a cankerworm bedeviling Nigeria's institutions. The youths involved in cultism have distorted view about life. They believe that joining cults is a way of achieving their aim of passing examination and getting their way on every issue that affects them in school. Unfortunately, cultism cannot thrive if parents and society do not encourage it wittingly. Some cultists have the support of the authorities in our tertiary institutions who believe that they could be used to protect them from their bad management. Academic activities are usually disrupted where cultism exists and loss of life and properties becomes the order of the day. Managers of such institutions have their hands full.

#### EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE

Examination malpractice is a social malaise threatening the foundation of our institutions in Nigeria today. The society and parents have share of the blame. A society that encourages wealth acquired by every means is a fertile ground for examination malpractice. The societal values of love, care, respect, honesty, dedication, pride, fairness, humbleness, truthfulness, hard work, etc., are now virtues of the past. Today, our institutions are no longer sure of the type of graduates they produce. The students are products of examination malpractice of miracle centers from various secondary schools across the land. According to Akingbola (2012), it is now commonly accepted that the system has failed because graduates have worthless degrees and it is nearly impossible to find qualified staff to run the universities and teach.

#### CORRUPTION

On top of the list of social ills in our institutions is corruption. While we bemoan the fact that education is under-funded, the little available is misappropriated by the managers of these institutions. Corruption in tertiary institutions has reached all time high in Nigeria. Again, it is the reflection of the larger society. The politicians who appropriate this money, the executive that releases the money and institutions that actually spend the money are all neck deep in this rat-race to cut a share for themselves. It is a vicious circle that must be broken. With economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) in place, the managers of our institutions should understand that the game must be over so that our educational institutions could grow.

#### QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING

Education, properly conceived and applied requires all kinds of resources; human, financial and physical resources. In Nigeria's institutions, the inadequacies of all three are obviously the case. The need to continuously train the teachers so that they would be relevant in view of the changing world is very pressing. Indeed, the need for adequate and appropriate learning resources remains central to the success of education. According to Suleiman (2011), scarcity of these resources is partly responsible for the situation that prevails today where learners are programmed right from the start without the capacity to visualize in concrete terms the concepts learnt and as such are unable to do things practically, describe relationships between various objects accurately or apply themselves to challenging situations to arrest the decay of resources and facilities. The quality of staff and discipline suggests that the system is in a state of crises. While many schools are shut most of the time due to strikes, those who are working are not paid salaries as and when due, or when paid at all are not paid commensurately.

### OVERVIEW OF TRANSFORMATION EFFORTS AND PROGNOSIS OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

In order to address challenges mentioned above, some of which are generational, the federal government of Nigeria took several steps, one time or the other, to reform education so that education can effectively play its role as a tool for moral, emotional, physical and intellectual capital for the development of the individual and the society. According to Okafor (2007) educational reforms in Nigeria dates back to 1882 Education Ordinance Act borne out of the British Education Act of 1844.

- The 1887 Education Act laid down rules for annual examination of pupils, methods of granting teacher's certificates and the system of grants-in-aid.
- The 1903 Education Code for the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria laid down rules for the provision of primary and secondary schools and payment of grants-in-aid.
- The 1908 Education Ordinance strengthened the staff and provided for a Director of Education and superintendent of schools.
- The 1916 Education Ordinance and Code proposed by Lugard in 1914 were finally adopted;
- The Phelps Stokes Report of 1923 on Education in Africa gave rise to the 1925 Memorandum on Education in British Colonial Territories.
- The 1926 Education Code was made to curb the mushroom establishment of schools by missions, private individuals and groups in Nigeria.
- Hussey Education Reforms of 1930 gave rise to three levels of education, namely; Eight-year primary education, the intermediate stage of six years, at which pupils would leave to seek employment and a third stage of vocational higher education.

- The Elliot Commission of 1945 strengthened the development of Higher Education in Nigeria including the establishment of College of Arts and Science at Enugu, Ibadan, Zaria and eventually the University College Ibadan.
- The military regime reforms of Gowon-Obasanjo (1976-1979) led to the 6-3-3-4 system of education, UPE, transfer of first generation universities to the Federal Government, and introduction of JAMB.
- The Obasanjo regime introduced Open and Distance Education, UBE, 9-3-4 system, Post UME Exams, Operation Reach all Schools (ORASS), Tracking Assets for Progress (TAP), Public Private Partnerships, and others.

The government of ex-president Obasanjo in 2007 introduced a Reform which, according to Okwuanaso (2007) reported by Umoru (2012) can be summarized as follows:

1. Establishment of Basic and Secondary Education Commission at Federal, State and Local Government Levels. In establishing this Commission and the Federal Inspectorate Service of the Federal Ministry of Education were consolidated. The purpose of the commission was among others, to ensure that Government at all levels in Nigeria provides free compulsory and universal basic education for every child of school age.
2. Establishment of the Tertiary Education Regulatory Commission. The Commission was expected to be a merger of the National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). The Commission was expected to be charged with responsibility of regulating all Federal Government owned tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It was also expected that the 21 Federal Polytechnics (except the Yaba College of Technology and Kaduna Polytechnic which would become "City Universities") and 21 Federal Colleges of Education would be converted into campuses of neighbouring universities as may be directed by order issued by the minister and published in the gazette.
3. Establishment of National Education Resource Commission. The National Teachers Institute (NTI) Kaduna, the Nigerian Educational Development Council (NERDC) Sheda, Abuja and the National Institute for educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) Ondo were to be consolidated into this body to take over the functions previously performed by the three agencies.
4. Preservation of four examination bodies National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB), National Examination Council (NECO), West African Examination Council (WAEC) and Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB). These bodies shall conduct examinations as specified in the Acts establishing them. The National Library and Information Service Board, National Mathematical Centre, Teachers Council of Nigeria and Education Trust Fund were also preserved.
5. The Special Education Commission was established. The Commission is a consolidation of bodies known as the Nigerian French Language Village (NFLV), the Nigeria Arabic Language Village (NALV). National Commission for Nomadic Education and the National Commission for Adult Education, Mass Literacy and Non-formal Education. The commission was to take over the function previously performed by the above listed bodies and pursue the objective of the Federal Government Goals (MDGs) by addressing perceived gaps in groups that mainstream education system which were ignored.
6. Schools Management Organization (SMO) was established to manage each unity school in Nigeria. The function of the Schools Management Organization included among others, managing the academic and administrative affairs of unity schools. Public Private Partnership (PPP) in the management of the 102 Federal Government Colleges was introduced.

Needless to emphasize that except UBE, other reform proposals were never implemented.

Of recent, the initiatives of the federal government of Nigeria towards reforming education was by adopting the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which the world leaders under the aegis of the United Nations fashioned in 2000 to fight the root causes of poverty, disease and inequality. The goals which UN (2000) aimed to achieve by the year 2015 are:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve Universal Basis Education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

In order to own these goals, the federal government of Nigeria created its MDGs version in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) document which state governments in the country adopted and christened State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (SEEDS). To fast-track progress in this direction, the federal government convened a National Summit on Higher Education in 2002 in realization of the importance of quality education at all levels as a vital transformation tool and a formidable instrument in achieving not only the education aspect but also all the other aspects of the MDGs. The Summit revealed that deep-seated social vices such as cultism, examination irregularities, sexual harassment, rape, drug abuse, corruption, indiscipline, poor work/learning habit, extortion, etc are threatening the very foundation of Nigeria's educational system. It was perceived that transformation of Nigeria's educational system is inevitable if Nigeria must break into the 20 emerging economies of the world by 2020. This was followed by Vision 20:2020 which was crafted as a perspective and economic business plan intended to make Nigeria a fully developed economy by the year 2020.

The late Head of State President Musa Yar'Adua in 2008 refined the vision in his 7-point Agenda revolving around wealth creation, security, land reform, food security, power and energy, transportation and education. This lofty Agenda was still finding its feet when the president died. In 2011 his predecessor President Goodluck Jonathan adopted a Transformation Agenda. The TA anchors on macroeconomics framework and economic direction; governance; real sector; infrastructure; human capital; enablers (private investment, finance mobilization, external economic relations and diplomacy, etc.); monitoring and evaluation. In order to actualize the Transformation Agenda, the Federal Ministry of Education (2012) drew up a 4-year strategic plan (2011 – 2015) that focused on:

- ✓ Access and equity;
- ✓ Standard and quality assurance;
- ✓ Strengthening the institutional management of education;
- ✓ Teacher education and development;
- ✓ Technical and vocational education and training; and
- ✓ Funding, partnerships, resource mobilization and utilization.

The federal government of Nigeria under the leadership of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan has implemented the Transformation Agenda for four years now and it seems that things never improved in Nigeria and it is doubtful if the country is even moving in the right direction. Were things to be moving well, the state of education in Nigeria would not have been deplorable as observed by experts. For instance, Ekpo and I'shaq (2014) lamented the consistent denigration of the Nigerian educational system of recent claiming that the status of the system now is unenviable, low in quality and standard, limited in its reach and disturbing in its future. Furthermore, they argued that poor remuneration for teachers triggers a lackadaisical attitude to work, high dropout of students from schools, quantitative rather than qualitative oriented education, campus prostitution, rape and sex abuse. Similarly, the issue of Nigerian students migrating to other countries for studies is an indictment on the Nigerian educational system. A revelation by the Network of Migration Research on Africa (NOMRA) shows that Nigerians migrating in 2009 who were granted visas into United Kingdom for studies numbered about 10,090 and paid not less than N42 billion to the host nation.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Federal government, no doubt, has been trying to improve education at all levels in Nigeria. The establishment of twelve new universities in Nigeria, the establishment of Almajiri Education Programme, Nomadic Education Programme, the provision of N36 billion Federal Government Intervention funds, the funding provided by Tertiary Education Trust Fund and other numerous interventions are all laudable steps but a lot still need to be done as suggested here:

1. The Federal Government must first of all meet the minimum education funding requirement of 26% of national budget as advised by the United Nations. Instances have proved that countries that meet this requirement are likely to do well.
2. The Government must ensure that everything necessary is done to avoid strikes in all institutions in Nigeria. If salaries are reviewed as and when due and paid in the same vein, this is possible.
3. The Federal Government should ensure security of life and property throughout Nigeria.
4. Good governance is a precursor to corrupt-free organizations and in fact including the education sector and this will ensure the effective and efficient management of human and material resources and the disappearance of the vices discussed above.

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