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## **Educational Reform: A Bedrock for National Development in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examined the fundamental of educational reform to national development with relevance to Nigerian educational system. The rationale for educational reform to national development was well highlighted and the needs for educational reform such as to improve on the standard, future expectations, exogenous factors, achievement inclined and creativity were properly expatiated. Planning for reform in educational structure, curriculum and methods as well as management of educational reforms which are the backbone to effective and efficient educational reform were well elucidated. The Federal Government of Nigeria had envisaged and prepared for reform in education through the provision of goal oriented national policy on education. Basis for evaluation of educational reform which is a necessity as well as procedure and levels of evaluation are fully highlighted and discussed. Factors militating against effective educational reform in Nigeria were identified and explained. The paper itemized some recommendations toward sustainable educational reform in Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Educational Reform, National Development, Nigerian Educational System

### **Introduction**

Educational reform is the injection of new ideas, methods and techniques or strategies into educational system so as to improve both internal and external efficiency and arrangements of the system and more

of development- social, cultural, political, economic and technological (Adepoju & Olaniyi,1999). It also implies bringing about a change in the status quo. It is being described as a new dispensation to meet the challenges posed by new technological development and to improve the quality of educational system.

It is extremely difficult nowadays to discuss education at any level in isolation with change, reform and innovations most especially in this period of globalization, and Information and Communication Technology development, when teaching and learning activities are more of learners-centred rather than instructors-centred. To ensure that educational system is structured and made much more relevant to the needs and aspirations of the society, new and relevant ideas and approaches must be injected into the system.

As highlighted by Miles (1964) the adoption of new ideas or reforms in education is hinged upon the following:

- i. Consideration of cost;
- ii. Consideration of technological factors;
- iii. Availability of associated support materials;
- iv. Simplicity of implementation; and
- v. Innovation system congruence.

### **Need for Educational Reform in Nigeria**

In any developing country like Nigeria, the significance of education and manpower development to the growth of the country is an issue that has engaged the attention of the government over the years. This has equally been very well articulated in government policies and pronouncements in the past decades. The belief in the efficacy of education as a powerful instrument of development has led many countries to devote their wealth to the development of educational institutions at various levels. In Nigeria, governments, organizations, communities and individuals have been involved in this effort. The adoption of the social demand approach in the provision of education to the citizenry in post-independent Nigeria has led to a significant expansion of the education system. Government believes that education would promote economic growth and provide the skilled manpower needed for development (Famide, 2000).

The importance of education as a significant tool for sustainable national development is fully acknowledged in Nigeria ever since the pre- colonial era. This appreciation has come a long way. Indeed, founding fathers of Nigeria such as Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief Herbert Macaulay, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe and a host of others, played very significant roles in ensuring the establishment and nurturing of a variety of educational institutions and reforms catering for a variety of national needs, particularly before and after independence in 1960. These distinguished visionaries and legends loved and respected education and saw it as a tool for building national alliance through language and cultural development.

Obanya (2004) regards educational reforms as a rethinking of the role of education in nation building. This is essentially a re-examination of the national goals and provision of answers to the following questions:

- i. What type of society is envisaged and what would be the building blocks for such a society?

- ii. What society form(s) of education will be needed to serve the specific development need of the envisaged society?
- iii. What necessary input (finance, infrastructure, physical resources, human resources, curriculum, etc) should be envisaged for seeing the envisaged reforms through?
- iv. What specific educative act or processes should be actively and systematically promoted to ensure that the goals of the educational reforms are achieved?
- v. To what extent are the input and the processes helping to achieve the intended outcome?

The Nigerian educational system has in recent times, experienced series of scientific, technological, economic, political and social upheavals such as the introduction of computer education, literacy education, family life education, the use of ICT in education and modern economic theories, ideas, techniques and methods into the school curriculum.

The rationale behind the involvement of Nigerian educational system in reform programmes is an indication of a major force in shaping the objectives and methods of the programme. The most common reasons or needs for introducing reform or a change programme into the Nigerian educational structure, curriculum and methods, according to Adepoju (1998) are precipitated by the following:

***Need to improve on the standard:*** This is perhaps, one of the most discussed issues in the Nigerian educational system today. The standard of educational system has been generally criticized by many people, both experts and non- experts. Since educational change is found useful where the standard of the system is declining or where its existing state is generating public outcry or conflict, its introduction is found to be relevant.

***Future expectations:*** Change may be desired if there is an indication about the future trend or expectation of the system. In Nigeria, education is said to be performing different roles which may be expressed in terms of nation building and national development. Therefore, in order to cope with such future demands, educational reformation may be desirable.

***Exogenous factors:*** The presence of some exogenous factors that may influence the system, and which may also be the sources of educational change may justify educational change. For instance, the public may advocate for a course that they believe will benefit their children and the society at large such as moral education and entrepreneurial skills. If they, therefore, demand a change, such change will be incorporated into the system.

***Achievement-inclined:*** This would always allow a positive change to take place wherever there is need for it. In other words, an educational administrator would always like new programmes that will improve teaching- learning situation to be introduced in the school.

***Creativity:*** An educational change may be precipitated by desire of the members of staff to be more creative by introducing new ideas which may lead to the realization of the school objectives and their own individual goal.

### **Planning for Reform in Educational Structure, Curriculum and Methods**

Reform and innovation are probably two major concepts that must be built into an organization or system that is aiming at standing the test of modern period when dynamism is vastly replacing conservatism. Change is, therefore inevitable and major challenge which modern organizations face is creating an atmosphere where rapid and meaningful improvement is possible (Adepoju, 1998). There is no doubt that for growth and development to be recorded, reform and innovation are pre-requisites. As a result of the increasing complexities in modern organizations and the need to optimize efficiency in the face of stiff competition from others, there is increasing advocacy that reform and innovation be

injected into major facets of Nigerian educational system and more specifically in the areas of structure, curriculum content and context as well as the methods of imparting knowledge by the teachers in our schools and colleges. The need to bring about a revisit of the educational structure, curriculum and methods became necessary in view of the fact that it is extremely difficult to discuss educational development in isolation without mentioning reform and innovation. There is no doubt that the social context of education is ever-changing and at an increasing rate.

Educational change is a prerequisite for educational improvement and the planned change is likely to be more effective than unplanned change. Griffiths (1975) asserts that when organizations are viewed over a long period of time, their outstanding characteristic appears to be stability rather than change. However, when one considers the rate at which reform and innovation take place in our educational system today, one tends to conclude that the rate is not commensurate with that of the society as a whole. For education to be more relevant and to ensure compliance with the societal needs, it must be planned for reform and innovation, especially in the areas of structure, curriculum and methods.

### **Management of Educational Reform**

This is perhaps the most critical and pervasive task facing the world today. Society is undergoing a structural revolution characterized by multiple and basic changes in economic, social and political institutions. The new forms that emerge will be shaped, in considerable part, by management skills in managing reforms or change and its ability to master the process of innovation through which science and technology are transformed into goods and services.

For education to achieve its required purpose, it must be tailored towards the needs and aspirations of the community or environment. This is in agreement with the *National Policy on Education* (2004), which states inter- alia in section 1, sub-section 9[f]; 'efforts shall be made to relate education to overall community needs'. By implication, therefore, embarking on education reform requires that such reform must be precipitated by the need to yield to the demand of the community or environment where such reform is taking place. This is to say in essence that the culture of the community will determine whatever form the reform should take. In other words, a community that is inherently conservative would make reform a difficult task to achieve compared to a dynamic community.

Educational reforms should also be well managed to ensure self- reliance. Many people would agree about the importance of self-reliance in education. Self-reliance has a very profound meaning. It is not merely that the child should be taught some handicraft or some manual skills by which he may be supported. There must, of course, be manual labour which assists everyone to learn how to use his hands and be self-sufficient. It implies that education must be of such a quality that it will train students in intellectual self-reliance and make them independent thinkers. If this is to become the chief aim of learning, the whole process of learning would be transformed. A student should be so taught that he is capable of acquiring knowledge for himself. There is an infinite sum of knowledge in the world, and each one needs some finite portion of it for the conduct of his affairs. But it will be a mistake to think that this life-knowledge can be acquired in any school. Life-knowledge can only be acquired from life. The task of the school, however, is to awaken in its students the power to learn from life (Alabi & Okemakinde, 2010).

Most parents are anxious for boys to complete the school course so that they can get a salaried job and live an easy life. This may, however, not be the best way of perceiving education. Learning has value in its own right. The purpose of learning is freedom, and freedom is another word for what we refer to as self-reliance. Self-reliance means freedom from dependence on others or any external support. A man who has true learning is truly free and independent. The first and least part of this self-sufficiency

is that the person must be educated and made skilled in a craft. A second and very important part of this is ability to acquire new knowledge for oneself. There is a third essential element in freedom, and this also is a part of education. Freedom implies not only being independent of other people but also independent of one's own moods and impulses. The man who is a slave to his senses and cannot keep his impulses under control is neither free nor self-sufficient. Temperament and service therefore, have their place in education, for it is by these means that this third aspect of freedom can be learned (Fadipe & Adepoju 2006).

Self-sufficiency then has three meanings. The first is that one should not depend upon others for one's daily bread. The second is that one should have developed the power to acquire knowledge for oneself. The third is that a man should be able to rule himself, to control his senses and his thoughts. Slavery of the body is wrong. The body falls into slavery for the sake of the stomach, therefore, a free man must know how to earn his living through handcraft. Slavery of the mind is wrong. If a man cannot think and reach an independent judgment, his mind is enslaved; a free man must have acquired the power of independent thought. Slavery of the emotions and the sense is also wrong, and it is an essential part of education to overcome their tyranny.

Nigerian government, towards realizing the goal of self-reliance, decided that the quality of instruction at all levels has to be oriented among other things, towards inculcating the values of:

- a. respect for the worth and dignity of the individual; and
- b. faith in man's ability to make rational decisions and acquisition of competences necessary for self-reliance (FGN, 2004)

Government also intended to vigorously implement the policy by emphasizing:

- a. life-long education as the basis of the nation's educational policy;
- b. educational activities to be centred on the learners for maximum self-development and self-fulfilment; and
- c. the education system to be structured to develop the practice of self-learning.

This is entrenched in the national goals of Nigeria as contained in the *National Policy on Education* (2004) as the building of;

- a. a free and democratic society;
- b. a just and egalitarian society;
- c. a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- d. a great and dynamic economic; and
- e. a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

### **Evaluation of Educational Reform**

Evaluation is a systematic process for determining the extent to which instructional objectives are achieved by students. It is also the process of determining the extent to which actual experiences conform with objectives. Akinwumiju (1996) pointed out that evaluation is the process of delineating, obtaining and providing useful information for judging among decision alternatives. Some forms of evaluation are inevitable in teaching and learning process. Indeed, a major reform to be done in

education sector must not underscore the issue of evaluation before, during and after such reform. This is inevitable because of what is being demanded by all stakeholders in education industry.

In education, the term evaluation often implies different things. Traditionally to a classroom teacher, it means testing, conducted at the end of the lesson or a programme. Evaluation here is often aimed at the outcome. However, as it is widely known, testing is only an aspect of evaluation and does not represent the wide range of activities and roles played by evaluation (Isiogu-Abanihe, 1996). The concept is often used interchangeably with assessment because of a considerable overlap in their meaning. Hills (1992) posited that educational evaluation is used more in a general way and often when the subject is the success of a teaching or method of teaching or other than a person (or a group of persons).

Evaluation, simply put, appraises the quality of something. In the words of Popham (1988), systematic educational evaluation consists of a formal appraisal of the quality of education phenomena. The main purpose of evaluation is to assist decision makers at various stages, taking appropriate action to ensure programme efficiency. It is very important to evaluate the extent to which an educational activity (such as educational reform) achieves the purpose for which it was designed or the extent of the performance of an educational activity. The matter of performance evaluation concerns the measurement of progress towards objectives, which have been established through perfect knowledge of the total performance required to maximize results. The important place of evaluation in educational reform and innovation cannot be underscored. Indeed, it plays a major role on the scaling up process of reform and innovation.

Evaluation, as far as educational reform is concerned, can appropriately be carried out at three levels, viz;

- i. Before the reform i.e. Pre-reform evaluation
- ii. During the reform i.e., Diagnostic evaluation / on-going
- iii. After the reform i.e., Post-reform evaluation.

Before the process of bringing about major reform into the system, there is the need for evaluation to assess the situation on ground so as to determine what must be put in place before the reform is carried out. Similarly, evaluation can be done during the course of reform. This is to take a diagnostic view of the reform. It can also be carried out at the end of the reform which is to determine the extent to which the outcomes agree with what was originally planned for before the commencement of the reform.

According to Fadipe and Adepoju (2006), educational reforms are evaluated for the following reasons:

- i. It helps in setting, refining and clarifying realistic goals.
- ii. It helps in finding out the degree to which the objectives of reform have been realized.
- iii. It helps in determining and refining the strategies or techniques to use to bring about expected changes.
- iv. It helps to have knowledge about the need for the reform.

### **Factors Militating against Effective Educational Reform in Nigeria**

The following are some of the factors affecting effective planning for educational reform in Nigeria:

***Inconsistent Educational Policies:*** Often times, policies are changed by the Nigerian government. These are consequent of the fast-changing socio- economic and political factors but these affects the planning of education. Many plans have been jettisoned before they were ready for implementation

because of government directives and counter directives. Besides, there is always a wide gap between policy formulation and execution which might have rendered the educational reformation almost irrelevant.

**Lack of Accurate Statistical Data:** According to Ajayi (1985), lack of accurate statistical data and unreliable national census have tended to render most efforts relating to educational planning or any other forms of planning in Nigeria unproductive. Yet, the success of the various forms of planning rests on reliable data.

**Economic Constraint:** For effective and adequate planning to enhance educational reform, there is the need for adequate fiscal resources to develop it. In Nigeria, the percentage of the government budget always earmarked for education is too meagre. Hence, there is hardly enough fund for the planning unit of the educational sector to embark on serious educational reform and innovation.

**Poor Planning Technique:** According to Adeyemi and Oguntimehin (2000), there are not enough experts in Nigeria in the area of educational planning. There are small units in the ministries of education, which are responsible for educational planning. These units are often staffed with educational officers who rose from the rank. Almost all of them have no formal training in educational planning and statistics. They can rarely use the information gathered to interpret the educational situation of the country for proper planning of educational reform to improve educational quality.

## Conclusion

The paper has attempted to highlight the need to make educational reform effective and sustainable through effective planning and democratic approach to decision making. The importance of effective planning in educational reform and innovation cannot be over-emphasized. Educational reform and innovation are crucial for consideration in order to meet the millennium development goals as well as the stated vision of education. Having examined the concepts of planning and educational planning, the paper identifies some limiting factors to the successful planning of educational reform and innovation, which are social, economic political and technical in nature. Issues are also raised towards making educational reform sustainable in Nigeria.

## Recommendations towards Sustainable Educational Reform in Nigeria

To make educational reform effective and sustainable in Nigeria, the following should be considered:

- There is need to base educational reform policy on attainable objectives.
- It should conform with ethical standards.
- It should have focus based on stability and flexibility.
- It should be sufficiently comprehensive.
- There is the need to control the rate at which policy changes to give room for continuity and long-term planning.
- Those to be affected by a reform policy should always be involved at the planning stage.
- There is also the need for well-defined and clearly stated objectives of the plan and reform policy.
- There is also the need for a centralized decision-making structure to guide against distortion or unnecessary diversion in the course of achieving the stated objective(s) of the reform.
- There is the need for the provision of monitoring, co-ordination, supervision and evaluation machineries, which will serve as follow-up to a planned reform policy.

- There is the need for disciplined and effective leadership to give the reform its vision and ability to translate that vision into reality.
- There is the need to train and use educational planners for the purpose of planning reform policy in the interest of the educational system and the country in general.
- There is the need for the stabilization of the economy by reducing the fiscal drags and raising enough resources for educational reform that will be prudently managed.

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