

**REFORMS AND INNOVATION: A SURE STEP TOWARDS**  
**QUALITATIVE EDUCATION**

**By**

**Dr. Oluranti Idiat Adebule**

**Secretary to Lagos State Government**

**21<sup>st</sup> January, 2014**

**Introduction**

The words “reform” and “innovation” are used in many respects in our daily discussions and interactions to the extent that they are familiar to many. However, by definition, the word “reforms” means, to improve by alteration; correction of errors; removal of defects or put something into a better form or condition. Reforms could also be described as, to abolish abuse or manipulations; improvement or amendment of what is wrong, corrupt or unsatisfactory; whilst the word “innovation” could be described as the introduction of something new relating to ideas, methods or devices.

Meanwhile, according to Professor Michael Omolewa, educational reforms emanate from the basic conviction that

considerable progress can be made in a nation by its people through careful engineering of the educational process. To successfully engineer any education process, effective and efficient innovations must be involved.

Innovation is the engine for the growth of prosperity and national competitiveness, especially in this 21<sup>st</sup> century while education is the crucible in which innovations are forged. To intensify and broaden the impact of innovation in our society the nation must consider critically its relevance in the teaching and learning process.

Qualitative education on the other hand as described by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in year 2000 encompasses:

- Learners who are healthy, well nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities;
- Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provided adequate resources and facilities;

- Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace.
- Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities.
- Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation.

This definition allows for an understanding of education as a complex system embedded in a political, cultural and economic context. It is important to keep in mind education's systemic nature, however; these dimensions are interdependent, influencing each other in ways that are sometimes unforeseeable.

The important operative expressions that listener may ponder in the definitions above are:

- removal of defects or changing something into a better form or condition
- Introduction of something new relating to ideas, methods or devices.
- Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation.
- Educational reforms emanate from the basic conviction that considerable progress can be made in a nation by its people through careful engineering of the educational process.

### **National Education Policy**

Professor Michael Omolewa in a 2007 presentation gave an idea of how education reforms started in Nigeria. According to him, the Nigerian nation has witnessed several educational reforms which started before independence. It was to the credit of Nigerians, notably, agitators for self-rule, that the British colonial rulers changed the education system in operation in 1954 from 8-6-2-3 system, that is, 8-year primary, 6-year secondary, 2-year higher school certificate and 3-year University to a 6-5-2-3 system, that is, 6-year primary, 5-year secondary, 2-year higher school

certificate and 3-year University. The change resulted in reducing the number of years at the Primary and Secondary School levels. Nigerians then were more concerned about education content and particularly about what specific educational structures will be needed to produce the ideal persons to develop our dream society.

The hope placed on educational reforms continued to be rekindled after independence, and Nigerians soon realized that post-independence freedom of self rule that was being enjoyed had to be matched with educational progress. Thus, in September 1969, there was a curriculum conference held in Lagos and participants at the conference were eager to see Nigeria chart a new course in its educational system that will help Nigeria develop in the direction of technology and science. The process of educating Nigerians was censured and participants criticized the colonial education system as lacking in vitality and relevance which led to the call for a change in the system from 6-5-2-3 system to 6-3-3-4 which clearly then was the adoption of the American education that Japan copied after 1945 and succeeded.

The result of the 1969 conference was relevant and appropriate for a country that was hungry for growth, development and a brighter future. Unfortunately, the implementation of the carefully developed education framework for the country then was improperly done, without proper procedures and planned action and it, unexpectedly, backfired. The intended result of the proposed educational agenda was muddled up and was never achieved.

To buttress the allusion to poor implementation of education reforms agenda especially by the Military governments, Dr. Bello Umar Gusau in his 2008 presentation entitled "Educational Reforms in Nigeria: Successive Years of Inconsistencies and Confusion" gave an insight into the crisis that greeted the post-independence educational reforms. He alluded to the fact that the crisis in education started manifesting itself when government went all out to implement the 6-3-3-4 system without adequate planning put in place. He specifically opined that the free universal primary education (UPE) was launched in 1976 but the policy on education itself appeared in 1977, one year after implementation of the programme. In that kind of situation where

implementation was ahead of policy, confusion would certainly ensue. In that particular case, there was a mismatch between the plan and the outcome because needs assessment was not properly done. In support of this statement, G. O. Akpa in his 1988 publication on "Crisis Management in Education" stated that on the launching of UPE, three (3) million children showed up as against 2.3 million prepared for, an over 20 percent underestimation. This had implications for classroom space, teachers and equipment. Akpa has given credence to the assertion that education reforms would only guarantee qualitative education if implementation was properly done.

To worsen the already bad situation, this was also the period that Government took over all voluntary and mission schools, and assumed full financial responsibility over them throughout the country without visible plan for sustainability. The fulcrum on which the success of the implementation rested was largely the cash prosperity of the Government from oil boom, which was faulty.

The period was characterized by overwhelming greed, corruption and mismanagement of resources and a few years down the line, Government began to fail in the discharge of its responsibilities. Eventually, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) was gradually lowered into its grave due to lack of proper planning, inadequate statistical data and large scale corruption that culminated in sharp decline from “boom to doom”. Thus successive Governments from General Yakubu Gowon down the line to General Olusegun Obasanjo’s second coming defectively implemented educational reforms which ordinarily should improve education in Nigeria.

By the end of the 1990s, it was increasingly getting clearer that the reform processes were either misconceived, poorly executed or were too ambitious in relation to the then changing economic, political and social climates around the country. Currently, the education template in Nigeria is piloted on the 9-3-4 system of education and it was designed in conformity with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA). The part of the system named Universal Basic Education (UBE) in replacement of the UPE involves 6 years of primary school education and 3 years of junior secondary school education,



culminating in 9 years of uninterrupted schooling with automatic transition from one class to another but determined through continuous assessment. The programme was launched on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1999 by President Olusegun Obasanjo under his new educational reform agenda and as usual the rush to privatize every aspect of our lives including privatizing campuses of Federal Universities and other tertiary institution for greater efficiency of resources according to them and the sale of the 102 unity schools across the country through the Bureau of Public Enterprise (BPE) typified the reform. This is not to say private sector involvement in education is bad, after all, many private institutions are presently delivering qualitative education to Nigerians and, proudly, Caleb University is one of them. However, it took the efforts of Nigerians particularly the lecturers and students for the Federal Government then to realize that education is much more than manufacturing or merchandising concerns which deal in commodities but a process that brings about a desirable change in a person and ultimately shape the development of the people.

Above were the scenarios that profile educational reforms in Nigeria. From the takeover of voluntary and mission schools in the

1970s under the UPE system and eventual return of the schools to their owners in less than a decade, the unrealistic course of action in the privatization of Government owned unity schools clearly shows that the nation is far away from the reality of instituting an enduring structure aimed at providing qualitative education to its citizenry.

In essence, minor liberal educational reforms that focus on correcting in-school problems but avoid confronting the broader, deeply rooted causes of our educational failure can best be described as flimsy efforts. Quality education is the cornerstone for Nigeria's future successes in political, socio-cultural, economic and global influence. Without proper and quality education, the population made up of electorates, children, the aged and the workforce, will lack a secured and civilized living environment that can nurture and sustain good living standards that give meaning to life itself.

### **Agenda for Educational Reforms**

If educational reforms must play the role they are intended to, major issues that must shape such reform agenda in Nigeria education system can be discussed under the following heads:

1. Curriculum development and relevance to emerging Issues;
2. E- Learning and Educational Technology;
3. Economic Disparities and Funding

### **1. Curriculum Development and Relevance to Emerging Issues**

Okebukola (2004:1) viewed curriculum as the traditional platform for translating expectations of the society into knowledge, attitudes and skills that are expected to be developed or acquired by learners within the school system in formal or non-formal settings. Odunusi (1999:3) wrote that curriculum should be seen as the totality of the environment in which education takes place, that is, the child, the teacher, the subjects, the content, the method, the examination, the physical and the psychological environment. Adeyemi (1995:2) held that curriculum should be viewed as that plan which guides all the learning experiences of the child while undergoing schooling or passing through the educational process, in an attempt to acquire cognitive, affective or psychomotor capabilities.

In the same context, Obanya (2003:32) proposed that we should be concerned with curriculum in its widely accepted sense of a

body of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes consciously and systematically promoted under the guidance of educational institutions, with a view to achieving the educational goals decided by the society. However, Nwaboku (2005:20) cautioned that the content of the school curriculum is ever changing and with the rate at which new information is currently generated, it is expected that the content in any school subject or discipline would have a very short life span. This view was corroborated by Babalola (2006:167) that no curriculum is good enough except one that captures the global mood, else the people will be singing a different song from the rest of the world, with such global change, interest of learners is bound to change as well as that of the entire society. To this end, for curriculum to serve its meaningful and qualitative purpose there must be a policy with a clear vision for developmental goals, coherent curriculum and instrument to validate when the mastery of the curriculum occurred and the goals attained. In other words curriculum is one very important part of an educational reform agenda and, for continuous effectiveness, it must have a life of its own which causes it to respond to immediate environment and global

changes so that Nigeria and indeed Nigerians would keep pace with the rest of the world.

With regard to emerging issues, the explosion of knowledge calls for a nurturing system because it makes greater demands on both the teacher and the student. In the words of Erinoshio (2005:189), engaging students on these issues of contemporary concerns will sharpen their insight about the world around them, enable them to be critical about issues and be able to articulate their opinion on them. In effect, educational process must serve as an engine of change and must be dynamic as well as sensitive to societal expectations, aspirations, and goals. In particular, it must be sensitive to emerging global issues and conscious effort must be made to determine the goals and objectives that education intends to achieve in a changing society. This in effect means certain parts of the curriculum must involve practical demonstration that exposes students and teachers to examining globally impactful issues.

## **2. E-Learning and Educational Technology**

A most recent powerful and effective instructional facility is Information and Communication Technology (ICT). According to Riel and Becker (2000:9) the rapid spread of technological development brings new computer mediated tools to the classroom door each year. New educational models and innovative platforms for knowledge creation, dissemination and application in the classroom today range from the magnetic board, bulleting, electronic (white) boards, charts, globes, photographs, satellite communication and computer to the most popular choice, the internet. These are material objects that can be used for human sustenance, knowledge enhancement and effective teaching. According to Awotua-Efebo (2006) in Chinyere (2007:159), ICT has the following characteristics:

- Information capture (gathering and collecting data)
- Information storage (Ability to retain data)
- Information manipulation (processing for better understanding)
- Information distribution (transmitting and sharing information electronically)

Milligan and Robinson (2000) posited that effective technology use includes such activities as linking curriculum outcomes with

various technologies, establishing a learning context of discovery and process in the use of technology, collaborating with others both face to face and virtual to achieve learning outcomes, stimulating real world environment and assessing outcomes.

The stage should therefore be set by asking educational reformers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to consider the critical contemporary situation in Nigeria of loaded and overburdened curriculum, congested classrooms, inadequate infrastructure facilities, epileptic electricity, poor technological equipment, pitiable telecommunication services and poverty stricken parents in enriching whatever reforms they envisage for the education system in Nigeria with modern ways of presentation of the curriculum contents so that the system would benefit from the large volume of knowledge and information available in the emerging global education village. Any reform devoid of consideration for technology is at best a waste of time and resource and, consequently, a waste of the life of Nigerians.

### **3. Economic Disparities and Funding**

Presently in Nigeria, one of the pressing issues we face is the acute socio-economic disparity amongst Nigerians and the effect

that this disparity has on the delivery and reception of qualitative education. Meanwhile, Nigeria's rapidly expanding education system could be improved by linking education quality and goals to both strategic and tactical funding. What I call strategic funding is the relative size of education budget at all levels of Government while tactical funding is what exactly is being funded in the education system. This is important because the national budget for education could be huge but what makes it effective and enhance meaningful reform agenda is when the right projects are the ones attracting funding. For example, a simple library structure that is conducive and has relevant books (physical and virtual) would serve as better reform implementation relative to a gargantuan library edifice with poor content, both of which would have cost huge sums from the budget.

That aside; in Nigeria there are obviously two categories of economic class, the poor and the rich. The third category had virtually disappeared, which is the middle class. Thus children from middle class and rich families grow up in an environment that is most conducive to academic success and can afford the best education money can buy anywhere in the world. This set of



people may not be bothered about the state of education in Nigeria; reform or no reform. For some amongst them who bother, they depend on private schools for their children's education. Some have access to home library and private teaching. Members of such families do not lack role models and successful people in education, industry and other spheres of life. But they are in the minority and the destiny and vision of greatness of a nation cannot be placed on this people.

In contrast, the children from poor families find it difficult to attain desired educational achievement due to financial incapacitation. Even in the communities where they live there is abject poverty all around and they are often surrounded by people who cannot be role models by any standard. Therefore, they form the larger percentage of the population of public schools as they strive to take advantage of the free or subsidized education available there. The consequence of all these is that they either do not go to school or they drop out midway. For those who are able to struggle through school to attain some educational achievement, it is less than premium which affects their ability to compete favourably at higher levels of education.

This position is confirmed by the statistics of admission into Nigerian universities between 2004 and 2009 which was put at between 8.5 percent and 19 percent of candidates seeking admission by the Directorate of Tertiary Education, Federal Ministry of Education at a UNESCO Institute of Statistics workshop in 2010.

Considering the above, therefore, any educational reform that will have wider impact on the socio-economic system and national security should address the issue of economic disparity and effective funding of education to accommodate different economic strata of the society. This should include providing for skill acquisition in structured academic environments to accommodate people with less capacity to advance in normal education but can learn trade or technical skill while acquiring modest literacy at affordable cost or no cost at all.

## **Barriers to Reforms in Education**

Three major factors are discussed in this presentation as to what constitute barriers to effective reforms in the Nigerian educational system.

## **1. Politics**

More often than not, most reforms in Nigeria are usually marred by the political authority's bid to own and drive such reforms as opposed to being owned and driven by the civil populace and stakeholding professionals. The implication is that there is no continuity after a change in the political leadership. The new leadership begins its own reforms to stamp its authority and probably make political dividends from it. But it is not in all cases that reforms are politically motivated. Some are as a result of painstaking evaluation of the situation on ground or a movement towards the programmes enunciated and canvassed by the party in power. My earnest call is for politicians to allow education professionals be in the driving seat of reforms in education and it will have a reasonable chance of acceptance and success.

## **2. Funding**

Another barrier to reform is the dangerous assumption that educational entrepreneurship is akin to business of manufacturing or merchandising. This is a misconception and mix up between education as business and the business of education. The competition between Government and the private sector to run education as business could becloud the reasoning behind certain education reforms. Education is a right by law and an essential part of life that should not be left to the whims of demand and supply, and returns on investment. Every human being living must be educated for the world to work harmoniously. Meanwhile, the business of education is a social service which should be structured to meet the aspirations of the various economic strata of society. But no living human being should be left out of being formally educated in one form or the other.

### **3. Fear of Change**

Most changes, whether personal or societal, are unnerving at first because societies cling to what they know to avoid the anxieties of the unknown. Therefore, educational reforms are not an exception especially when they are as far reaching as to affect control and influence of operators at all levels including the

private sector. As long as these realities of societal reforms are obscured or subsumed by anxieties and concerns of individuals, advantages accruable to the society as a result of the reforms may be lost completely.

#### **4. Local Fixation**

Another barrier to reforms in education is that educationists in most cases focus on fixing issues within the school system whereas fundamental problems that need fixing lie outside the borders of the school. Qualitative thinking outside the box is required to have quality input into future education reforms especially as regards development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century educational organization and delivery.

#### **5. Attitude**

Attitude is an important variable for change to occur. It is a mental state held by an individual, which affects the ways that person responds to events and organizes his cognition. Thus, everybody should not only speak about change but be ready to accept change and live it by having positive disposition to change.

## **Conclusion**

Reform in education as enumerated is not an easy and straight forward task to embark upon. Therefore, significant parameters such as national needs, consultation with relevant stakeholders and sustainability of the reform project no doubt will make reform desirable and applicable to the society. Furthermore, considering the level at which technological innovation has evolved, reform agenda must consistently be matched with growth and development to ensure quality and sustainability.

## **The Way Forward:**

- Quality educational system should be the fulcrum of the way a society's system is set up and managed. Consequently, future national education reforms and policies must articulate the various parameters needed for genuine nation building.
- The trend today is integrative curriculum or inter-disciplinary teaching, which implies that learners must be provided with opportunity to explore knowledge from various areas related to their subject area within a curriculum guide.

- Educational goals and objectives should be internalized and profess the good attributes of a society. “National Values Curriculum” which has been designed and is being introduced into schools is an anti-corruption programme, aimed at inculcating positive values in the youths. Core values, such as honesty, right attitude to work, justice, discipline, citizen’s right, contentment, courage, national consciousness, regard and concern for the interest of others, should continue to be used in the selection of curriculum content.
- Technology is a dynamic entity that is constantly changing and will continue to break paradigms that will assist to reshape education and promote learning in the sense of qualitative improved change regarding technological innovation.
- Addressing socio-economic disparity problems in respect of access to education should form the focus of reforms in our education system without lowering quality and effectiveness

- Funding of education should be linked to quality. Schools should be held accountable for their performance and innovative partnership with our development partners like UNESCO and DFID should be encouraged.
- Clear achievable educational standards should be set as part of reforms, and clear means of assessing outcomes of learning should also be integrated.
- Politicians at all levels in positions to effect reforms that would be beneficial and engender quality education must de-emphasize partisan gains and allow education professionals occupy the driving seat when reforms are to be designed and implemented.
- The necessity for good public education follows logically if it is believed that the quality of democratic governance depends on the ability of citizens to make informed decisions and that education can bring this into being, and, finally,



- The process of teaching and learning must be evaluated and reviewed in order to conform to contemporary models and methodologies in developed societies and as well capture the peculiarities of the local culture and national aspirations. Innovations and methods that are effective for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills pedagogy should be adopted in reforms.

**Thank you for listening. God bless you all, God bless Caleb University and God bless Nigeria.**

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