THE ROLE OF NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION IN ENHANCING ACADEMIC GROWTH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This paper examined the role of the National Policy on Education in enhancing academic growth in Nigeria. Accordingly it x-rayed the history and philosophy without which the overall goals of education cannot be achieved. It further examined the policy at the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions including supervision. To evaluate how the policy enhances academic growth, the theory of learning of Jerome Brunner (1966) was applied. The researchers finally recommended among others that the strict monitoring and supervision of teachers at the primary, secondary and tertiary institution should be ensured so that every bit of the policy would be properly implemented. This work will benefit teachers, policy makers and the public.

Key Words: National policy, enhance and academic growth.

Education is one of man's most potent and enduring resources for development. Whether formal, non-formal or informal education is capable of catalyzing far reaching changes in the society. It's immense worth and contributions to the development of persons, institutions of public agencies, nations etc. have become fully accepted.

Nations of the world are therefore laying emphasis on education as a tool for the transformation of their societies. This explains why huge sustainable investments in education are a routine in developed countries. UNESCO encourages countries to spend about 26 percent of their budgets on education. Investments are made in all spheres of education such as teaching, research, learning, manpower development provision of physical materials and infrastructure, all these require adequate funding.

The National Policy on Education enunciated by the Federal
Government of Nigeria (FGN, 2004) recognizes education as an instrument par excellence for effecting National development. Accordingly, the policy document adds that education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change. Any change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution.

Each society requires that her citizens acquire knowledge, skills and develop appropriate attributes that will make them useful to themselves as well as their society. In this era of great emphasis on Science and Technology and the establishment in Nigeria of many Technical Colleges and Universities, in this age of considerable emphasis on how to earn a living and get a well paid job in industries and factories, one wonders whether subjects in the humanities like religious education still deserve to be given a place in the curriculum, this has been the argument of those in power. This argument breeds controversies and incessant changes in government policies on education. Mistrust between the church and the state gets heightened when promises are no longer kept by the State in its obligations to the society.

Private schools exist at all levels of education in Nigeria. These schools are owned by either private individuals, voluntary agencies, communities, corporate organizations or professional organizations and associations. In recognition of the need to maintain standard and also cope with the huge demand in financing education, government has provided in the National Policy document that the schools systems and consequently their management and day-to-day administration, shall grow out of the life and social ethos of the community in which they serve (FRN, 2004).

The monitoring and maintenance of minimum standards is thus achieved through the inspectorate services of the federal, State and local governments while regulatory bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC) National Commission for Colleges Education (NCCE), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) etc. and, the education services of the churches are in-charge of administration of schools established and managed by these churches.

History of Education in Nigeria

The first colonial policy on education was in 1925. The colonial masters made this policy for Africa and it focuses on primary, secondary and adult education. Further policies in 1933, 1935 1940 and 1945 were built upon the 1925 policy, modifying it with little addition here and there, emphasis being on adult education. "The colonial educational policy centered on the products of literate nationals who were required to man positions, which would
strengthen the colonial administration. Thus, our educational institutions as few as they were, remained factors for producing clerks, interpreters, forest guards, and sanitary inspectors as no special professional nor entrepreneurial skill was envisaged in the educational system. (Akinyemi, 1987) The policy covered nation’s form of education, including informal, secondary education of different types, Teacher and Vocational Schools and Institutions... (NTI, 1978) in Komo (2004)

At of era of independence in 1959, government appointed a commission headed by Eric Ashby to conduct an investigation into Nigerians need in the field of higher education over the next twenty years. This was the first time that Nigerians represented by a Minister of Education decided to examine the higher educational structure in terms of the need of the country. At that time the country wanted to produce manpower for independence and that led to the 1960 Ashby report titled investigation into education. There was a great concern to produce manpower to take over the government jobs being vacated by the colonialist, Ada, (2007).

In 1969, there was a National Curriculum Conference held in Lagos and was a major landmark in the history of Nigerian Education. The curriculum conference was not concerned with preparing a national curriculum, nor was it expected to reconvened specific contents and methodology. It was to review the old and identify new national goal for Nigerian education.

The objective of the 1969 curriculum conference culminated in articulation of the current national policy on education which spell out the objectives and the direction that education should follow. Of particular mention was the overhauling of the 6-5-4 system of education to the much popularized 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria. The system reduced the number of schooling years from seventeen to sixteen and expected the scope of studies of each level of education in the country. Not only was the scope expanded, the relevance of the system to the overall development of the country was also envisaged in the new document (Nwamara, 2000).

With the coming of the Obasanjo regime, 1999, specifically in his second term 2003 the policy experienced a major restructuring by the then Minister of Education Mrs. Ezekwesili. The restructuring was from the popular 6-3-3-4 system to the 9-3-4 system. That to say, 9 years duration of basic education comprising 6 years of primary education and 3 years of Junior secondary education, 3 years of senior secondary education and 4 years of tertiary education. The structure that which this policy will operate also changes from the universal primary education (UPE) that has been existing with 6-3-3-4 system of education, to the Universal Basic Education (UBE).
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Attainment of these objectives can only be achieved through the use of an effective system of education. Consequently, the Federal government through its national Policy on Education adopted in 1981 and revised in 1995, 1998 and 2004 recognize education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development (Komo 2004).

National Policy on Education

The policy was first published in 1977 and then revised in 1981. It was the Government's stand that "Education in Nigeria is no more a private enterprise, but a huge Government venture that has witnessed a progressive evolution of Government's complete and dynamic intervention and active participation.


(a) The lifting of the suspension order on Open and Distance learning programme by Government;

(b) revitalization and expansion of the National Mathematical Council (NMC);

(c) establishment of Teachers Registration Council (TRC);

(d) introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into school system;

(e) proscription of French language in the primary and secondary school curriculum as a second official language;

(f) prescription of minimum number of subjects to be taken by SSCE candidates;

(g) integration of basic education in the programme of quadratic schools, to ensure equal opportunity and effective; and implement of UBE;

(h) repositioning science, technical and vocational education in the scheme of national education for optimum performance; and

(i) general contextual change to reflect the state of professional practice in education, among others.

The government, having adopted education as a vehicle for national development sought, through the policy, to clarify its national objectives on which Nigeria's philosophy of Education is hinged. The national objectives endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education, are 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 economy;
(e) A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

Consequently upon the above, Nigeria philosophy of education is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system (Farrant, 1980).

The following values are expected to be inculcated at all levels via the instructional programmes:
(a) Respect for the worth and dignity of the individuals;
(b) Faith in man’s ability to make rational decisions;
(c) Moral and spiritual values in interpersonal and human relations;
(d) Shared responsibility for the common good of society;
(e) Respect for the dignity of labour;
(f) Promotion of the emotional, physical and psychological health of all children. On the thrust of the education policy, it has to be geared towards self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unit, as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress.

Pre-Primary Education
This is the education given in an educational institution to children aged 3-5 years prior to their entering the primary school.

Purpose
(a) Effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school
(b) Preparing the child for the primary level of education
(c) Providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work
(d) Inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the explosion of nation, and the local environment, playing with toys, artistic and numerical activities, etc.
(e) Teaching cooperation and team spirit
(f) Teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc through play, and
(g) Teaching good habits, especially good health habits. (FRN, 2004:1)

For the actualization of those objectives, government will encourage private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education, provide training through teacher education, encourage...
The age bracket here is 6 to 11 +

(a) The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, and the ability to communicate effectively;

(b) The laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;

(c) Citizenship as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;

(d) Character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes

(e) Developing in the child the ability to adjust to his changing environment;

(f) Giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity

(g) Providing basic tools for further educational advancement including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.(FRN,2004)

To ensure that the curricular content of primary education is attained, government, through the policy, would provide teachers, materials and necessary infrastructures. The schools will be well equipped and ensure that the teacher-pupil ratio of 1:30 is maintained even though 1:40 would be acceptable for the start. Government would establish school libraries, providing counseling services, audio-visual aids, national basic health scheme, and specialist teachers. Government welcomes the participating of voluntary agencies and private individuals in the establishment of primary schools that conform to the laid down standards (Mazi 1982).

The policy has been in operation for almost 19 years but actualization of some of the provisions of the policy still
remains a far cry. When the policy started, some improvements were observed but as the years rolled by, the situation began to deteriorate. For instance, many primary schools in the country are in a sorry state, services such as libraries, counseling, audio-visual and specialist teachers are rarely present. Even though the quality of teachers in the primary schools today could be said to be high, one doubts if the quality of instruction is commensurate with that teacher quality in terms of higher academic qualifications.

Secondary Education

This is the type of education children receive after primary education and before the tertiary stage. The two broad aims of secondary education are: 1) Preparation for useful living within the society; 2) Preparation for higher education

Specific Objectives

Secondary education should:

(a) Provide an increasing number of primary schools pupils with the opportunity for education of higher quality, irrespective of sex, or social religious, and ethnic background.

(b) Diversify its curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and roles posed by or open to students after their secondary school course;

(c) Equip students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology;

(d) Develop and project Nigerian culture, art and language as well as the worlds cultural

(f) Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the dignity of labour, and appreciate those values specified under our broad national aims, and live as good citizens;

(g) Foster Nigerian unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity;

(h) Inspire its students with a desire for achievement and self-improvement both at school and in later life. (FRN, 2004)

Junior Secondary School

(a) The junior secondary school shall be both pre-vocational and academic. It shall be tuition free, universal and compulsory. It shall teach basic subjects which will enable pupils to acquire further knowledge and skills. Every student shall offer:

(i) a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 13 subjects.

(ii) all subjects in Group A.

(iii) at least one subject each from Groups B & C.

Group A: Core

(i) English

(ii) French
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(iii) Mathematics
(iv) Language of environment to be taught as L1
(v) One major Nigerian Language other than that of the environment to be taught as L2
(vi) Integrated Science
(vii) Social Studies and Citizenship Education
(viii) Introductory Technology

*The language of environment shall be taught as L1 where, it has orthography and literature. Where it does not have, it shall be taught with emphasis on orally as L2.

Group B
Pre-vocational Electives
(i) Agriculture
(ii) Business Studies
(iii) Home Economics
(iv) Local Crafts
(v) Computer Education
(vi) Fine Arts
(vii) Music

Emphasis on subjects in Group B shall be on practice.

Group C
Non-prevocational Electives
(i) Religious Knowledge
(ii) Physical and Health Education
(iii) Arabic

Students who complete junior secondary school shall be streamed into:
(i) the senior secondary school;
(ii) the technical college;
(iii) an out-of-school vocational training centre;
(iv) an apprenticeship scheme.

The streaming shall be based on the result of tests to determine academic ability, aptitude and vocational interest; and as much as possible to achieve a transition ratio of 50:50 as follows:

Senior Secondary School
(a) The senior secondary school shall be comprehensive with a core-curriculum designed to broaden pupils’ knowledge and outlook.
(b) Every student shall take all the six (6) core subjects in Group A and minimum of one and a maximum of two (2) from the list of elective subjects in groups B and C to give a minimum of seven (7) and maximum of eight (8) subjects.
(c) One of the three elective subjects may be dropped in the last year of senior secondary school course.

Group A: Core
(i) English Language
(ii) Mathematics
(iii) A major Nigerian Language
(iv) One of Biology, Chemistry, Physics or Health Science
(v) One of Literature-in-English, History, Geography or Religious Studies
(vi) A vocational subject.

Group B
Vocational Electives
(i) Agriculture
(ii) Applied Electricity
(iii) Auto-Mechanics
(iv) Book-keeping & Accounting
(v) Building Construction
(vi) Commerce  
(vii) Computer Education  
(viii) Electronics  
(ix) Clothing and Textiles  
(x) Food and Nutrition  
(xi) Home Management  
(xii) Metal Work  
(xiii) Technical Drawing  
(xiv) Shorthand  
(xv) Typewriting  
(xvi) Fine Art  
(xvii) Music

Group C 
Non-vocational Electives  
(i) Biology  
(ii) Chemistry  
(iii) Physics  
(iv) Further mathematics  
(v) French  
(vi) Health Education  
(vii) Physical Education  
(viii) Literature in English  
(ix) History  
(x) Geography  
(xi) Bible Knowledge  
(xii) Islamic Studies  
(xiii) Arabic  
(xiv) Government  
(xv) Economics  
(xvi) Any Nigerian Language that has orthography and literature etc.

Tertiary Education
Tertiary education is the education given after secondary education in university, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics including those institutions offering corresponding courses. The goals of the tertiary education shall be to:

(a) contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
(b) develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
(c) develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local external environments;
(d) acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
(e) promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
(f) forge and cement national unity; and
(g) promote national and international understanding and interaction.

In order to achieve the above objectives, secondary education should be of six-year duration, made up of three years respectively. Core subjects for each level of education were delineated. The policy made provisions for the implementation, supervision and control of the programme to ensure that the objectives were attained.

Jerome Brunners’ Theory (1966) and the Policy Goals
From the foregoing it can be observed that the National Policy provides enough theoretical frame work for the acquisition of appropriate skills and competence for both physical and mental health, the inculcation of national consciousness, national unity, and
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academic excellence if the tenets are followed to the later, this will enable the individuals passing through the system to self-actualize.

However for the national policy to be implemented to achieve academic excellence, there must be a structural theory with contextual procedure to pass through to achieve the set objectives. Jerome Brunner’s theory (1966) whose research work has fundamental influence on how best to ensure effective teaching and learning is therefore postulated side by side with the with the policy goals.

Brunner’s Cognitive Development Theory points out the fact that schools should strive to teach the general nature or structure of a subject rather than all the details and facts of a subject. Secondly, any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectual honest form to any child at any state of development. Finally, Brunner stressed the importance of intuition in learning. This according to him is a problem solving technique where a child relies on insight or immediate apprehension. This can be achieved through four major principles-

(a) Motivation
(b) Structure
(c) Sequence
(d) Reinforcement

Motivation is the key to sustaining academic growth, one of the objectives of primary education is to inculcate in a child the spirit of enquiry and creativity. If we look at Brunner’s first principle it is about motivating a child for productivity. Motivation according to him leads to curiosity, a drive to achieve competence. Competence leads to reciprocity and reciprocity leads to knowledge that is self-sustaining.

The second principle is on structure, structure according to him is any body of knowledge that can be presented in three ways

(a) mode of presentation
(b) Economy
(c) Power

The mode of presentation of any subject refers to the technique or method where by information is consciously communicated. one reason why children fail to attain success is because of the way information is passed to them. Brunner proposed Enactive, Iconic and Symbolic representation.

Putting this side by side with the goals of primary education one will again notice that the policy has clearly spelt out that pupils should be taught the rudiments of numbers, letters, colors, shapes, forms etc.

In the third principle which is Sequence Brunner believes that intellectual development entails moving from enactive to iconic and to symbolic representation. It is also logical to move from wordless messages through the use
of pictures and diagrams and finally symbolic communication. Sequencing is important during exploration and significant in motivation. The last principle of Brunner’s theory emphasizes reinforcement. Students at all levels of education must receive reinforcement as clearly spelt out in the national policy. Results of their assessments should be made known to them for maximum effectiveness.

National Policy on Education and Academic Growth

For those policies to actualize it set goals all regulatory agencies must ensured proper monitoring and supervision of institutes concerned. The policy is aimed at promoting academic growth but the problem is the lack of maintenance of structures, monitoring and supervision.

According to NPE (2004) in Obayan (1979) the policy was to bring about innovation and creativity in the educational sector. Education generally is the bedrock of any nation’s economy and for any academic excellences, there must be a dramatic change or evolution in the sector for which the National Policy on Education was design for.

Conclusion

Although the national policy on education is being criticized for not meeting the needs of the Nigerian society the writers are of the opinion that if there is training and retraining of teachers, they will translate the policy into meaningful actions that will shape the direction of the educational system into capacity building.

Recommendations

The researchers recommended the training and retraining of teachers so that they will be equipped with skills to implement the national policy on education.

There should be monitoring and supervision of teachers at the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions so that every bit of the policy is implemented.

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