

AN ANALYSIS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A NEED FOR RETHINKING IN A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Education is the fulcrum on which posterity depends on for a smooth transmission of cultural, social and moral heritage from its ancestors. Secondary education in Nigeria occupies a central role in the attainment of this as it is the bridge between primary and tertiary institutions in the country. It therefore significantly plays a crucial role in the development of the nation. However, with the trending events and challenges this said tier of education is facing, there is the need to go back to the drawing board. Thus the topic: Rethinking of Secondary Education in Nigeria: A Philosophical perspective. The concept of rethinking is an invitation for reappraisal of the status quo. The writer sought to identify the purpose for which secondary education was established and to assess whether the said objectives were being achieved as well as offer possible steps for a new approach to the system

Key Words: Rethinking, educational system, secondary education, national policy on education

Introduction

Secondary education is a crucial tier in the hierarchy of education in Nigeria. It is the midway between primary and tertiary schools. It is the form of education that students receive after their primary education and or before their tertiary education. It is intended for pupils between the ages of 11-17. Secondary Education is the budding ground for future professionals as well as the foundation for the discovering and classification of the specific fields of professions. Prior to the independence of Nigeria through to 1982, Secondary Education lasted only five years. After the duration of five years, those who obtained the required qualifications were allowed for the two years of Higher School Certificate which qualifies them for university education. Thus the system allowed for three years junior and two years senior. However, discovering the need to enhance this tier of education with science and technical subjects, the curriculum was broadened to have its duration extended to six years. The importance of this stage of education cannot be over-emphasized.

The certificate for the junior secondary school was based on a continuous assessment while the senior secondary certificate was issued after writing a national examination (The West African Council Examination-WAEC). Today, there is another body that conducts similar examination at the end of the six year duration independent of WAEC; The National Examination Council Examination (NECO).

Aims and Objectives of Secondary Education in Nigeria

In order to assess the present state of secondary education in Nigeria, it is good to begin by identifying some of the cardinal objectives for which secondary education was established in Nigeria. Among the salient objectives of secondary education in Nigeria are:

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1. The provision of smooth opportunities for primary school leavers to further acquire higher quality education irrespective of their sex, religion, social and ethnic backgrounds.
2. To diversify its curriculum to cater for the variety of talents that are latent in the students to come to light in a productive way.
3. To equip the students with the relevant scientific and technical knowledge to effectively survive in the modern age.
4. To foster national unity with emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity.
5. To inspire students with a high desire for achievement and self-improvement both at school and in later life.
6. To raise a generation of people who should be self-reliant and can think for themselves as well as respect the worldviews of others.
7. To inspire a deep sense of appreciation of the dignity of labour among citizens as well as create a great sense of national consciousness.

The above objectives are very noble objectives and they are critical for the growth and development of any society or nation. And it is very significant that these ideals are set for attainment within the secondary system of education. Secondary education is the bridge between primary and tertiary institutions and thus holds the compass for the direction the nation intends to follow. It is therefore understandable to maintain that the failure of this tier of education poses a damaging threat to the nation at large.

Current Happenings in Secondary Education in Nigeria

The secondary education level as important as it is though serving as the link between the primary and the tertiary institutions in the country, in all honesty, has not enjoyed adequate and sufficient attention from the government at different periods right from the military era to the present democratic dispensation. The Federal Governments at different times has somehow left this tier of education chiefly in the hands of state Governments and voluntary agencies as well as private individuals. Even now, the debate to handover or take over secondary schools in some states has not attracted a definite response from the federal government, leaving only the state Governments at logger heads with most of the voluntary agencies who on the other hand, feel being short-changed as most of the prestigious schools are established by them.

The pitiable condition of the secondary education sector is further dampened by the Federal government's inability to come up with a standing policy guiding the handing over of the schools. Lack of policy statement on this burning issue has further demonstrated that the Federal Government lacks either the political will to mediate and proffer lasting solutions or that it is tacitly comfortable with the deterioration of this sector of education.

As a scholar observed:

"It is unfortunate that these ill-nurtured plans by the different states appeared to have the approval of the Federal Government of Nigeria because there has been no policy statement against the handing over of schools. More to that, the Federal Government has no effective commission to take care of this cardinal level of education..... The establishment of a body for any level of education will always protect it from all emerging predicaments in that country for better result oriented programmes".

The Secondary Education sector lacks a firm governing council like its counterparts the Primary and the Tertiary sectors. For these other two, there are the

National Primary education Commission and the National Universities Commission who tend to regulate governance of these tiers of the education sectors by ensuring probity, effectiveness, some level of uniformity across board. These commissions ensure a great level of check and balances and offer universal guides for the administration of these tiers of educational sectors. On the other hand, the secondary education sector only has boards to run its daily affairs. Different administrations develop different policies as soon as they take over the leadership of their respective states. Thus little wonder why we have different states having different calendars. We have different salary structures, treatment of retired, dead and serving staff or secondary schools in different states. In some cases even private owners of such schools also formulate different calendars for their own

An analysis of Secondary Education in Nigeria: a Philosophical Perspective

With the prevailing pictures of how the Secondary education sector has become bedridden by so many problems and challenges, it is only appropriate that a critical analysis of this sector of education be carried out. This calls for a rethinking and reappraisal of the status quo. A look at the above discrepancies as evidenced in the state to state administration of the secondary sectors shows that, if the said objectives are to be achieved, we need to tow a different line of approach in addressing the problems. There should first of all be a stiffer organ established at the Federal level with the aim to harmonize all the activities of the sector across the country and not to leave the running of its affairs in the hands of state governments. At the moment, the federal government is only directly involved with Unity Schools, numbering only 104. And even these schools are poorly funded and managed. Thus, in like manner to its counterparts the Primary Education and the Tertiary Education, Secondary Education should also have what should be termed National Secondary Education Commission as against the mere Boards of Governance as is currently the case. At the moment, the only unifying element for the secondary education sector is the West African Examination Council and the (NECO). This is not good enough as they only test the level of co-relationship among the schools once in a year. More should be done to ensure that every quota, heads of secondary schools are brought together if not at the national level, at least at the regional level Where strategies and styles of management would be brought to the common table for a review. It is not enough that heads of secondary schools only meet at the state level. This does not allow for innovation and novelty of ideas. If there is interstate or interregional seminars and symposia, there will be room for comparative analysis of the effects of style of management which will result in the overall improvement of this sector.

The ages for enrollment into and completion of Secondary School (12-18) are very volatile stage in the life of a student and such can easily be influenced. At this stage, the students are malleable and can easily be swayed. Therefore there is the need for extra attention to be given to this sector since it is the midwife for potential professionals or otherwise half-baked intellectuals. It is at this stage that the mental curiosity of the child is being developed. The three domains of learning, the affective, cognitive and the psychomotor domains are at their most receptive stage. This is why those who are either dropouts or who barely managed to graduate from this sector often turn out to be societal disasters and miscreants, causing mayhem here and there at the expense of our national security. It is in the light of this that a strong advocacy for our national budget should be made to reflect that we are not paying lip services to this

sector. In order to minimize the threat that failure to manage this sector can cause, it is important that a reappraisal of the system be carried out such that students would be motivated across board at the national level without having to allow only the state governments to grapple with its management. A synergy of collaboration from the Local Government where the schools are sited, State Government and the Federal Government should be involved so as to have a free flow of reports that would be analyzed for better improvement of the sector. The rate at which secondary education, albeit education in general, is being paid lip service is the bane of meaningful productivity in this country. Being an indispensable stakeholder in manpower production, one would have thought that our annual budget should offer good percentage to this sector in order to tame and channel the welling energies of our youths in the sector from misappropriating such talents and energies to crime towards self-discovery and national consciousness. It should this is quite unfortunate for the secondary education in Nigeria, which is major link to the tertiary education and an indispensable stakeholder in manpower production in the country.

As the saying goes, 'he who plays the drum controls the music'. This could be argued that the collapse of the secondary education sector is due to lack of academic and political will on the part of the policy makers and implementers. Thus, as a means to revive the strong will of commitment by them to this task, a new policy thrust should be developed to stop all public workers, especially those who are stake holders in the operational affairs of the sector, from enrolling their wards or children in private schools or even sending them abroad. As a point of emphasis, all children of public servants should, as a matter of policy, be made to only enroll their children in public schools. People have the tendency to protect their interest wherever. Thus if the wards and children of public servants and all stake holders are banned from enrolling into privately owned schools, it is apparent that all the stake holders would stop paying lip services but would spring into action to revive the almost decayed secondary sector. On this, government must exhibit the strong will to remain resolute towards ensuring that the implementation of this policy is carried out asymmetrically. As a country, Nigeria has always exhibited a tendency to praise the academic achievements of its founding fathers by making references to how much they achieved in the past without making effort to surpass such in our present era. The yardstick should be about breaking new frontiers rather than reveling in past glories. Today, the rate of productivity of secondary graduates of nowadays in the open market, even after having sat for different external examination (WAEC, SSCE, NECO, JAMB, BECE), is hardly to be compared with the performances of those who sat for only GCE examination. Thus, instead of making progressive steps, we are rather retrogressing. In the light of this, government and all stake holders in this sector of education should discourage making references to the achievements made in the past and explore newer levels of progress. We are to challenge teachers and students alike to be at their best in order to excel beyond their predecessors. Even as one is concerned about the declining productivity of the secondary students, it is equally important to trace part of this poor performance to either poor motivation of teachers by government and or students by teachers. In the aspect of teacher's poor motivation, this shows itself in intermittent payment of emoluments by government to the teachers. This, of course often has adverse effects on

the teachers who instead of giving out their best, have their time spent looking for how to augment their living standard by engaging in other kind of jobs. Some teachers, due to lack of government's adequate attention to them, are not able to have the barest basic necessities of life. This situation often demoralizes the teachers, thereby making some of them to have low self-esteem. A person with low self-esteem is a recipe for poor productivity.

There is also the need to revisit the operational system of the secondary system where some of the children go to attend classes from their parents' houses while others stay within the school compound all through the term to receive education. While the operation of boarding system of schooling is commendable and should be encouraged, something has to be done to scale up equal performance in the day schools. Our day secondary schools often, apart from students coming mostly late to school compound, also often have the students flagged out and are not able to concentrate especially for the afternoon classes. On the other hand, an effective boarding school is sure to offer students adequate health care, good level of discipline and inculcation of sound moral values, high sense of inter-cultural accommodation and co-existence, adequate safety to students and staff alike, room for extra curricula activities which allows for self discoveries among students is made available. On the other hand, apart from the benefit of the student being always within the view of its parents and the fact that the day students, due to being exposed to risks are often resilient, so much counts against this system of educating the child. It is therefore imperative that stake holders in secondary education revisit operations of the day school by ensuring that all day schools, before they operate, should make extra provision for easy arrival to the school by means of transportation. Also only parents whose houses are within one to two kilometers from such schools should be allowed to enroll. This must be enforced as a policy since the education of the child a national matter of concern

Conclusion

Secondary education in Nigeria, a very vital tier in the education sector, has undergone a turn for the worst in recent times partly due to lack of social and political will on the part of all stakeholders in this sector. A reappraisal is apt and timely to salvage this all important but often trivialized tier of education. The lack of adequate will power from the stakeholders in this sector has dampened the ability of the sector to meet its prescribed aims and objectives as contained in the national Policy on Education of the country. It is the awareness of the deterioration of this sector that has prompted the writer to offer a need for rethinking on the sector through a philosophical approach. The establishment of education board for secondary education, interstate harmonization of Basic Examination Certificate (BECE) examination, a robust accreditation mechanism for monitoring the approval and establishment of secondary schools for both private and public owners, as well as renewed effort aimed at motivating secondary teachers, are proffered as possible remedies to the worsening conditions of secondary education in Nigeria. It is the conviction of the writer that the implementation of the suggestion proffered above, will not only redeem the sector but galvanize sincere commitment from all stakeholders in the sector.

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