

Educational reforms in Nigeria: For who and why?

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Abstract. Great changes are occurring in the global world, and the educational system must respond to these changes or become obsolete and irrelevant. There is evidence in Nigeria which over the year has shown that government investment in education has not achieved the desired results, goals and objectives. The failure of the educational sector has increased the incidence of poverty and deprivation of the vulnerable groups. Education in Nigeria is said to be an instrument “par excellence” for effecting national development. The country’s educational goals should be clearly set out in terms of their relevance to the needs of the individual and those of the society, in consonance with the realities of our environment and the modern world. For the educational system in Nigeria therefore to be relevant to the needs of individual and the society, there must be radical changes in our educational system in terms of curricular content, methodology and instructional materials. It is only through educational reform strategy that Nigeria as a nation can keep pace with the accelerated technological changes in the modern world. This paper therefore looks at the individual (Learner) and the society as beneficiaries of educational reforms. The paper seeks to know why they need reforms, which are the target groups and policy options for effectiveness of educational system reforms at any levels. The paper equally sees ICT as a veritable strategy for such radical reforms at the classroom and society levels; it discusses the role of the teacher as the implementer of the reforms at the classroom level. It equally looks at the problems confronting the implementation of IT reform strategy. It also highlights on the prospects of ICT at these levels. Therefore, the research paper will fill the gaps that have been yet addressed by the researchers in a study related to Educational reforms in Nigeria and this will also help in improving the methodology and selection of instructional materials for Educational system in Nigeria. The paper concludes with recommendations on how this giant stride technology can meet the needs of learner and society.

Keywords: Educational reforms, target groups, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The colonial system of education inherited from the British pattern of education was structured along with their values and beliefs. It was oblivious of the educational yearning and aspirations of Nigeria. Education is a service provided in all countries of the world with many objectives in mind. These objectives include the skills required for a more rapid growth of the economy and the provision of basic knowledge to the citizens. Knowledge has become the most important factor for economic development in the 21st century. Through its capacity to augment productivity, it increasingly constitutes the foundation of a country’s competitive advantage (Olayiwola, 2012). Fafunwa

(2004) explained that the educational system was only functional to the colonialists. The grammar school curricular could only train students in literary subjects and produced only white collar job seekers. The grooming of the learners in science and technology that are much needed for technical take off and development were either not done or done perfunctorily. Employment orientation had been completely absent from the grammar schools and the economy suffered in consequence. Nigerians therefore saw the urgent need to restructure and reform the educational system in order to make education relevant and equip the school leavers with necessary skills needed in industry. So after

independence in 1960, the urge became stronger to fashion out an educational system that would satisfy the nation's desire for united, strong and self-reliant members of the society. This desire and agitations led to several curriculum conferences that culminated in radical reforms in the history of Nigeria at the classrooms and society levels.

Individual (learner), society as beneficiaries of reforms: Target groups for educational system reforms in Nigeria

In the last decades of the 20th century, as Indira (2007) asserted, society has witnessed unprecedented technological advancements and these economic, political and socio-cultural changes must be reflected in the school. Education is a process of human enlightenment and empowerment for the achievement of a better and a higher quality of life; a sound and effective system of education results in the continuous development of learner's potentialities, the strengthening of their skills and the fostering of positive interests, attitudes and values. All progressive societies have recognized the enormous potential of education and have committed themselves to the universalisation of education with its explicit aim of providing quality education for all. Education as opined by Mkpa (1987), is supposed to be a problem-solving instrument for the learner and the society. Since society's problems change so must educational system. National Policy on Education - NPE (2004) asserts that education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society. There is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria, to this end, school programs need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive, while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education. Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on:

1. The development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen;
2. The full integration of the individual into the community and;
3. The provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.

For the philosophy to be in harmony with Nigeria's national goals, education has to be geared towards self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity, as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress. Therefore, the quality of instruction at all levels has to be oriented towards inculcating respect for the worth and dignity of the individual, faith in man's ability to

make rational decisions; shared responsibility for the common good of society; acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance (NPE, 2004). In order to achieve or realize the above statements for the learner and society through education, radical reform is the way out.

Why do learners and society need reforms?

Educational reform is the key to participation in the global economy of the 21st century, based on technological revolution in communication and transfer of information as well as major changes in production, distribution and the economic value of knowledge. Education as Achuonye and Ajoku (2003) in Achuonye (2007) put it functions as an agent for the maintenance of social status quo in the society through the transmission of modern ideas, modern strategies of doing things. In an effort to better meet the diverse needs of learners and ultimately of the society, there have been numerous curricular reforms and the introduction of a range of new approaches and strategies in the class room environment. Every child, youth and adult should be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning and personal needs. Achuonye (2007).

Obanya (2004) said such needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, numeracy, oral expression and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development to improve the quality of their lives and to make informed decisions. He expressed that the basic learning needs of youths and adults are diverse and should be met through a variety of educational reform programs.

Husain (2004) went further to say that the learner and society need educational reform because it helps to build human potentials, builds upon responsibility, active participation, reflection and flexibility which creates competences that develop active citizens and further democratic behaviour. It gives quality learning that enables the learners to function in various roles as individuals as well as part of the work force which takes place in the school and outside. It is a driving force that helps individuals and society to move from the practice of educational mono culture to a system which recognizes that human beings have a wide range of variety of socially useful talents, all of which should be developed through educational reforms. Dike (1999) and Husain (2004) agreed that we are presently going through phase of transition where one tradition of teaching is giving way to another. They totally condemn the traditional method where the teacher is looked upon as a dispenser of information, a repository of knowledge and data bank, where the learner is only a passive receiver. They opined

that the 21st century learners no longer require such traditional mode of learning. Achuonye (2007) declared that different theories abound about the way individuals learn and about how to motivate and manage a class for effective instruction. With the invention of sophisticated equipment and new discoveries that are made everyday especially in the field of science, this calls for educational system to make available to learners up-to-date information in any field through scientific instructional materials. And since teaching is an attempt to help the learner acquire a change of attitude, knowledge, idea, a process of helping someone to acquire the problem-solving skill, ability to think for themselves, helping the individual learn how to learn so that he not only knows how and where to obtain needed information, but to develop the habit of enquiry and be a lifelong learner. Since the concept of teaching has changed, the aim of teaching has equally changed. There is obvious need to refocus our instructional objectives particularly in this era of unprecedented development in Science and Technology; a period of sporadic information explosion.

ICT as a veritable strategy for radical reform

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become a global phenomenon of great importance and concern in all spheres of human endeavor including education, governance, banking, business, agriculture, commerce, insurance and many others. Globalization in essence has changed the old or traditional ways of doing business especially in the worlds of work and learning. For instance, the introduction of computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) in Nigeria educational system some years back has been rendering tremendous assistance to learners. This is because the learners do not necessarily need the services of a human teacher. The program is designed in such a way as to arouse and maintain the attention and interest of the learner who, to a large extent, works on his/her own. Such learner's interest and attention are aroused and sustained throughout the lesson through appropriate programming and the stimulus-response chain of activities that characterized the system. CAI packages are such ICT programs that motivate students to learn better and faster.

For education to be effective, it is essential that there be more opportunities for student participation in the learning process, more team work, more self-study, self-evaluation as well as more peer-evaluation and less examination-oriented teaching and learning. At the classroom, the computer affects how we view teaching and learning. It is reflected in students' use of a variety of technological and information resources (e.g. data base, computer networks, videos etc) to gather and synthesize information and to create communication knowledge. Strudler (1991) in Owhotu (2006) has shown that ICT is an essential innovation that should be clearly visible in

any educational system. Its use and knowledge should be taught in order to enhance students self-directed learning on individually and socially constructed meaning. It encourages children to apply skills to evaluate and make judgments, and finally to draw together, disparate information into a whole in order to solve problems. It has been stated that for students to foster and supply critical thinking and reasoning, they should be given opportunities in the classroom to use technology. Technology fosters and supports constructivist approach to learning when used as a tool in the process of making meaning and supporting inquiring. As classroom access to information and communication technologies increases and as various amounts of information become available in digital format, students will need to be literate across a variety of communication technologies. Information technology has a critical role in enhancing the learning process at all levels and across a broad range of activities. Sharma and Sharma (2008) believed that the computer can have a revolutionary effect on all of education, from increasing the occurrence of self-directed learning through computer in the home for changing the relationship of student to teacher in the classroom. Computer exercises according to them, can be developed that bring the learner "into a relationship with his own initiative knowledge structures" multimedia as explained by Indira (2007) is becoming the principal way of presenting information, allowing information to be presented in different forms and take up less space. In the classroom for instance, two main tasks may be identified in the use of these technologies. The use of ICTs in education can permit both pupils and teachers to acquire skill in the uses of these technologies, particularly in exploiting the computer, because they have become essential everyday tools in contemporary societies. Pupils need to remain in close touch with the reality around them, they need to touch, manipulate, build and experiment with the natural world. Indira (2007) explained that the new technology have enough potential to revolutionize education because it dramatically transforms schools. As he puts it; "for the first time in the history of education, students are proving more adept at mastering delivery systems than their teacher", it is obvious that the monopolies enjoyed by schools as formal education provides will diminish with a lot of educational exposure and experience being provided by ICT. The scope of the new technologies for transforming existing educational provision is enormous and includes the globalization of education, the adaptation of curricular, new teaching materials and the networking of schools". The development of the internet has already had a very significant impact on the structure of higher education provision:

(i) Technological developments are leading to accelerating convergence between education and industry and between formal and non-formal education.

- (ii) Business organizations are becoming learning organizations,
- (iii) Life-education and training will become increasing the norm,
- (iv) Through technology, education is becoming more closely linked to entertainment.

On the part of the teachers, ICTs offer many new possibilities for teacher education. Teachers may learn new forms of communication through regular use of these technologies. Owhotu (2006) said that IC T can further:

- (i) Improve motivation: promote perseverance and develop self-esteem;
- (ii) Improve the presentation of work: enable pupils to take a greater responsibility for their own learning - enable pupils to explore abstract ideas - encourage the development of problem-solving approaches to learning - facilitate individualized and collaborative approaches;
- (iii) Encourage more emphasis on higher level skills.

With these technologies, the traditional way of organizing teaching/learning activities may change, with many forms being used in different combinations: Individual or whole class work, small group research, out-of-class room activities, such as research in libraries. This leads to change in the organization of the class, the duration of lesson even in the architecture of the school. Indira (2007) believed that this evolution of the teaching/learning process will eventually lead to a transformation of the teaching profession, with new teacher profiles emerging. On the part of the society, there is evidence that the global market is shifting its dependence from a manufacturing economy to an information economy that relies heavily upon quick and efficient communication. Lue (2000) in Owhotu (2006), has highlighted that for any employer to compete for any higher skilled jobs which tend to demand higher pay than blue-collar occupation, employees need to know how to use technologies including the internet to work efficiently in the work environment. In the present day world of work, more emphasis is put on collaborative work team to gather information and make decisions that directly affect job responsibilities and the internet has become the vehicle that most fosters the collaborative atmosphere necessary by making communication among workers more accessible.

Bruce (1997) in Owhotu (2006) explained that today's workers need the skill to gather information from diverse resources, including both traditional and electronic means, and to merge that information to make common connections. To work effectively, Lue and Kinser (2000) explain that employees must be able to communicate. Corporations are thus increasingly using alternative means of communication such as electronic mail and video conferencing, to conduct business with clients around the world. A great majority of job vacancies

advertised specify computer/ICT competency as a basic requirement for prospective employees. Employees have therefore made good opportunities provided by ICT to prepare them and make them more competent in the global market. Proper automation and networking in a business environment brings about effective communication among staff and reduces cost in terms of stationery which, in turn, encourages practice of paperless office which most Nigerian business establishments and organizations are striving hard to achieve. Other gains include societal productivity and improved government revenue. ICT has made the world of work more meaningful, much easier, much efficient, and much faster. For instance, in the Banking sector, the splendor and grace of ICT use being displayed has really taken many by surprise. The overwhelming wonders of the internet and e-mail services, as well as the practical networking system has made it possible for ICT complaint banks to offer unprecedented smooth, sophisticated and highly efficient banking services. Bank clientele are now beginning to have more faith in a hitherto unreliable, manually operated banking service. One can now send and receive money from any part of the world in minutes. Technology has made it possible for one to carry all his wealth in a simple smart card (value card).

The introduction of global system of mobile communication (GSM) a few years back had tremendous psychological and economic relief to Nigerians. This is because Nigerians, especially individual workers and parastatals, pass through various stresses due to poor communication system; people travel the length and breadth of cities to keep business appointments, a situation which simple telephone calls would have solved. The impact of ICT will be felt in all facets of a nation's economy; better education, a competent and creative work force, better products, lower costs, more job opportunities, smarter and low energy consumption, better security equipment among others. Sharma and Sharma (2008) agreed that technology influences all of society in ways greater than most people know. For example "in the coming century, the emergence of a new social frame-work based on telecommunications may be decisive for the way in which economic and social exchanges are conducted, the way knowledge is created and retrieved and the character of the occupation and work in which (people) engage".

Role of the teacher as the Implementer of Educational Reform

Teachers are said to be the pivot of teaching and learning process. The whole idea of principles and practice of education as opined by Iwuagwu (2006) are firmly anchored on the role of the teacher. Therefore the contemporary teachers must be adequately equipped

with more didactic competences so as to assume their new role as experts in the learning process. In essence the teachers' abilities to exhibit competence that should aim at the development of learners' competencies and qualities at school are anchored on their expertise knowledge and use of technologies. The full benefits of ITC in education will be fully realized at the classroom only when teachers at all levels and in every subject wish to exploit it to help them meet their curriculum objectives and are in a position to do so. This will require all teachers to have a clear understanding of what IT can offer them; the capability to make effective use of it; suitable curriculum support materials and advice, and sufficient access to appropriate equipment and technical support.

Problems of implementing ICT reforms strategy

Availability/accessibility

Many schools at the primary and secondary levels in Nigeria do not have computer education in their curriculum because the computers are not available to the schools. Even some schools that have it in their curriculum, the students merely undergo a theoretical course without actually having any opportunity to undertake practical training on the ICT equipment. Quality of Teacher Education Program: The quality of teacher education remains the cornerstone of any educational system. Yet, teacher education institutions in Nigeria have not yet effectively responded to the need to integrate information technology throughout the teacher preparation program. Most teacher training institutions in Nigeria lack computer hardware for training purposes: Teachers are only exposed to introductory courses in instructional technology and basic computer knowledge but not on courses that integrate ICT into the teaching of their various subjects.

Environment

Micro-electric products like computers thrive best in cool and dust free environment. Many schools do not have enough buildings and classrooms, let alone libraries and laboratories where these computers can be kept and utilized.

Infrastructural facilities

For the computer to be fully operational, it would need regular supply of power. This is lacking in so many schools, with the result that installed computers may be idle for most of the time because of power cuts, while frequent fluctuations in power voltage can lead to

mechanical breakdown and cause damage to gadgets. People may resort to power generation or plants but they have to frequently buy diesel or petrol as well as to maintain them. This is an expensive alternative; as a result, many schools may not indulge in ICT.

Cost of computer hardware

ICT components like computers, photocopiers, fax machines, telephone, etc, are quite expensive to procure. At this stage of the nation's IT development, Nigerians generally do not care which computer they use or what configuration it is made of.

Inertia

Some teachers are afraid of the ICT innovation. They fear that computers may sooner or later take over their jobs. So, they shy away from them, hence the technophobia syndrome.

Prospects of ICT as a Reform Strategy at the Classroom and at the Societal Level

The aforementioned problems do not in any way detract from the potentials role value of ICT in schools and the world of work. Owhotu (2006) pointed out that in the last decades, information communication and technology has become a reality that the whole world has lived with and will definitely live within the future. It has also developed into a think-tank mechanism for networking. In particular, the use of computers and the internet for promoting learning and maximum productivity in any organization will be very significant in the years ahead. Online education and distance learning are already in Nigeria, but the prospects of their use should greatly increase in the years to come. People will learn new skills and knowledge to enrich their lives with more flexibility in terms of location, time committed. Education will simply "travel" to people.

The optimal mobilization of available human resource is a vital factor if ICT is to remain sustainable in Nigeria. It is believed that nearly all sector of the economy have realized this, especially Education. In most private sector establishments, employment is given to only those who are computer literate since new technologies are closely related to productivity levels of various industries and companies. Many youths have also realized this and have gone ahead to undertake computer education courses at their own expense.

There is likely to be a move from rigid one-time, full-time, on campus education to diverse programs of lifelong learning. The content of courses will need to assume a more global dimension, with cross-cultural

variations becoming more evident. The new educational enterprise will be developed around student outcomes.

These changes are likely to lead to the development of outcomes-based education where each learning outcome will be defined, assessment criteria for each outcome will be clearly stated and guidelines for generating evidence of learning achievements will be laid down. Teaching methods and strategies as well as accreditation and certification, will have to change, significantly to meet these new demands. The professor/teacher will no longer dominate the teaching/learning process. Students will assume greater autonomy and responsibility for their learning. The teacher will become more of a coach, animator and co-explorer with his/her pupils. The process of learning will be emphasized more than specific detailed subject content, while learning will become more flexible and interactive.

CONCLUSION

The provision which has been made to introduce computer education into the curriculum of secondary and tertiary education in Nigeria as a reform strategy have been seen in the right direction, but it remains for government to do more than it had already done to be able to reap effectively from the inexhaustible prospects offered by ICT. Invariably, for Nigeria as a nation to meet the current challenges and the future expectations of building a strong develop nation through the use of ICT as a reform strategy, a lot is required to be done.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Because of need for reform in our educational sector and for a better living for Nigerians through ICT, the Federal Government has declared that:

1. A Network of Educational Services Centres in Nigeria (NESCN) Educational System Interactive network should be introduced so that it will close the educational system gaps at all levels that shall be set up to provide a forum for exchange of ideas on the development and use of innovative materials for improvements of education. All States, Teachers Resource Centres, University Institutes of Education, and other professional bodies shall belong to the network of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

2. Nigeria needs and deserves to have education that is functionally productive, politically constructive, philosophically relevant and culturally sensitive. An appropriate mix of education provision in Nigeria will be a combination of private and public actions while at the same time the government and private individuals as well as business organization bear a proportion of the cost of providing education.

Fund generating activities by the various institutions,

the Education Trust Fund (ETF) intervention programme as well as other special grants released to institutions of learning from both local and external sources have not adequately solved the problem of gross under-funding. Therefore, there is the need to consider the idea of charging certain level of fees to relieve the government of heavy financial burdens, thus shifting part of the costs to the students, their parents, and sponsors. This is particularly so when we consider the fact that demand for education will continue to increase as government financial responsibilities also will forever continue to rise.

State Ministries of Education and the NERDC shall ensure the operation of the network and encourage teachers to participate and develop innovative instructional materials.

3. Environment must be created within institutions of learning such that the needed academic staff would be encouraged of stay in the trade of developing the needed manpower for the nation's development. This can be done by way of establishing welfare schemes and adequate remuneration for staff, grants for research and other academic work, and providing soft loans and bursaries for students. Teacher education shall continue to take cognizance of changes in methodology and in the curriculum. Teachers should be regularly exposed to innovations in their profession (NPE, 2004:40-54).

4. Teachers as suggested by Achuoye (2007) should brace-up, face the challenges of the era by adopting the innovative teaching methods which emphasizes problem-solving skill and the ability to think; learning how to learn, cultivating the habit of enquiry and being a life-long learner.

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