



Research Article

Tertiary Education Reforms: the Case of Nigeria

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Abstract

The need for effective quality education reform in any Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized; this is because educational reform when properly carried out will lead to economic, social and political development. Despite the effort in carrying out the reforming of Nigerian educational system with the perceived advantages, there are still myriad of influencing factors hindering its realization. This article focuses on the tertiary education reforms with special reference to the country Nigeria. The paper opted for a general review approach, covering literature which provides an overview of the concepts of reforms, educational reforms, problems of tertiary education, goals and challenges of educational reforms. Recommendations are then made towards effective educational reform in Nigeria.

Keywords: Challenges, Tertiary Education, Reforms, Nigeria

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Introduction

The Place of education in any nation's development cannot be over emphasized, as it has been described as an important tool in human development which translates into society development. Education is also considered as the bedrock of all human sectors – political,

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medical, agricultural, security, hence it is said that no nation can rise above the quality of education its citizens receive. (Aluede, Idogho, and Imonikhe 2012).

Furthermore Okeshola (2013) noted that Education constitutes the core of human development. It is a vital tool for transformation and key to the sustainable development of a nation. Education is the most crucial instrument for empowering young people with knowledge and skills, which in turn provide them access to productive employment. Similarly Education is also seen as a significant means of achieving economic and technological improvement when fully implemented in school and out of school situations. Its usefulness in assessing opportunities and self-enhancement in terms of career and development cannot be over-emphasized. Students and non-students alike benefit from its dividends. Education laid the foundation in which many nations of the world attained reasonable heights of technology advancement required for the rare innovations, creativity and economic rehabilitation (Maduwesi and Ezeoba, 2010). Accordingly, Omoregie (2010), reports that the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), which is the Nigerian government's strategy for poverty reduction, recognizes education as a potent tool and formidable instrument to drive home the goal of NEEDS; which is transformation of the entire Nigerian polity. Thus, NEEDS' goals of wealth creation, employment generation, poverty reduction and value reorientation can only be effectively pursued; attained and sustained through an educational system that is efficient and functional (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2008).

According to Yusuf and Yusuf (2009), Gusau (2014) they noted that Nigeria on the attainment of her independence on the 1st of October, 1960, retained the educational policy bequeathed by the colonial masters (the British Government). Although Nigeria is a federation (36 federating states), successive governments (democratic and military) operate a unitary or centralised educational system, thus, a single educational system operates in a nation of over 130 million, with over 250 distinct ethnic groups. The educational sector was thus considered to need change and various government have tried to make some policy shift. Tambawal (2011) opined that changes in education often come when the current practices are challenged and questions being asked about the way things are done. The search for a more efficient way of achieving educational objectives may lead to proposals for either a new way of doing the same

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thing, or restoring the current provisions to enable achievement of the same set of goals. Changes however do not normally come about just because someone decides they want a change. There must be an event which informs those in charge of education that the present system is either not achieving or incapable of enabling the achievement of development goals. This is evident as Nigeria educational system was based on the British colonialist.

Thus the first serious attempt at reforming the educational programme of the country took place in 1969, through a curriculum conference held in Lagos, in 1969. The conference brought about radical changes in the country's education system (Fafunwa, 1974). The recommendation of the conference led to the first post independent educational policy, tailored to meet the local needs of the nation. The national policy on education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, (FRN, 1977), revised 1981, 1998, and 2004) made radical departure from the educational policy bequeathed by the British colonialist.

Various reform policies has taken place in Nigeria right from the military to the civilian government .One of such reforms was carried out by the civilian administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo (29th of May, 1999 to 28th of May, 2007) which embarked on significant educational reforms that are primed to bring about significant changes in the running of the Nigerian education system. The reforms cover every aspects of the Nigerian education system (grade levels, educational agencies, administration, curriculum, etc.). Over the years educational reforms have been brought about by the need to tailor education towards changing the economic, social, and political situations (Adamu, nd.) in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Education Reform Act (Federal Ministry of Education, [FME], 2007) contains four major parts: Part 1 deals with the preliminary issues, Part 2 which contains the main provision has 13 major chapters dealing with: Basic and Secondary Education Commission, Tertiary Education Regulatory Commission, National Education Resource Commission, National Examination Certification Council, National Business and Technical Examination Board, National Examination Council, West African examination Council, Joint Admission and Matriculation Board, National Library and Information Centre, Special Education Commission, National Mathematical Centre, Teachers Regulatory Council of Nigeria, and Education Trust Fund. Part 3 contains administrative provisions, and Part 4 deals with the final provision (Yusuf and Yusuf, 2009).

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Abdulkareem and Fasasi (2013) reported that the Federal Government's reforms in higher education include resuscitation of National Open University of Nigeria, introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for teaching, learning and research; Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), Post UTME screening and Teachers Registration Council. The Federal Government also stipulated that Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) would be the minimum teaching qualification and encouraged all teachers to be professionally qualified. Granting of license to some colleges of education and polytechnics for award of degree was also a reform on higher education in Nigeria (FRN, 2004; Babalola, 2007; and Lawal, 2008). According to them the reform continued to be initiated and implemented as people and government see the need for it.

Nzeshi (2007) noted that previous educational reforms and implementation in Nigeria promises great reforms, However he was quickly to know that spite of the promises of the education reforms, the salient question is, "can the reform be implemented successfully?" Previous educational reforms had been implemented half-heartedly or abandoned at its inception. A few examples will suffice. In fact, the current reforms started by the last administration are already being questioned by the present administration in Nigeria. The present government late Yar Adua/ Goodluck Jonathan has also come up with its own transformational agenda in the educational sector. In 2006, the government launched a major education reform programme, with a revised vision statement, which led to a comprehensive education sector analysis, and a 10-Year Education Sector Plan. There is also the over-celebrated Vision 2020 document with its ambitious projection of making Nigeria "to become an emerging economy model, delivering sound education policy and management for public good." (Punch, 2013).

Concept of Tertiary Education

Tertiary Education encompasses all organized learning activities at the tertiary level. The National Policy on Education (1998) defines Tertiary Education to include the universities, polytechnic, monotechnics and colleges of education in Nigeria Higher Education. Similarly Tertiary education, also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a [secondary education](#). The [World Bank](#), for example, defines tertiary education as including universities as well as institutions that teach specific capacities of

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higher learning such as colleges, technical training institutes, community colleges, nursing schools, research laboratories, centers of excellence, and distance learning centers

The Goals of Tertiary Education,

Okemakinde (2012) citing the National Policy of Education (2004 edition) stated that the goals of tertiary education in Nigeria are as follows -
are:

- to contribute to national development through high-level relevant manpower training;
- to develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of society.
- to develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments,
- to acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- to promote and encourage scholarship and community services;
- to forge and cement national unity; and,
- to promote national and international understanding and institutions.

Concept of Reforms

Yusuf and Yusuf (2009) citing Yahoo Education (2007) noted that the term reform is etymologically derived from the Latin root *reformate* which means “to shape”. It is a verb that refers to improvement by alteration, a correction of error or removal of defects. Similarly, Young and Levin (1999) defined educational reforms as program of educational change that are government directed and initiated based on an overtly political analysis (that is, one driven by the political apparatus of government rather than by educators or bureaucrats), and justified on the basis of the need for a very substantial break from current practice .

Concept of Educational Reforms

Educational reform is a re-thinking of the role of education in nation building. It is essentially a reexamination of the goals and objectives of education and efforts towards their attainment, as the worth of any educational system as an investment lies in its capability to continuously serve its stakeholders better and remain relevant to national development (Alabi and Okemakinde, 2010). Educational reform and innovation are synonymous with the injection of new ideas, methods and techniques or strategies into educational system so as to improve both internal and external efficiency and

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arrangements of the system and more of development- social, cultural, political, economic and technological (Adepoju and Olaniyi,1999). Similarly Alabi and Okemakinde (2010) see Educational reform and innovation also imply bringing about a change in the status quo. It is being described as a new dispensation to meet the challenges posed by new technological development and to improve the quality of educational system.

Based on the miscegenation of the aforementioned definitions, in this context, educational reforms means federal government induced and directed substantial alteration of the Nigerian education system (programme curriculum agencies, educational levels, etc.).

Finally, according to a season educationist Professor Micheal Omolewa (2007) 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.

Problems of Tertiary Education in Nigeria

Okemakinde (2010) asserts that among the greatest challenges facing higher education in Nigeria is inadequate funding. There is also the problem of access which has attracted a lot of attention in recent years, and the problem of poor infrastructures and lack of teaching and learning materials. Corroborating this view the recent findings on the state of higher education in Nigeria as conducted by the World-Bank and UNESCO had confirmed the degradation of the Nigerian education system. Nigeria was a country that produced world- class higher education graduates that compete with their counterparts around the world and hard work was their watchword. Today, we only produce the worst set of uneducated higher institution graduates that cannot structure a simple sentence. Nigerian higher education is based on a centuries old system of knowledge organization, largely influenced by 19th century academic traditions.

The followings are perceived problems in Tertiary Education:

Deteriorated Infrastructure and facilities

In most tertiary educational institutions the infrastructure and facilities are fast decaying. All the required resources for education production process are in short supply. Lecture halls, laboratories, students' hostels, library space, books and journals, official spaces are

all seriously inadequate. The situation is true for both federal and state government institution.

Increase in Graduate Unemployment

The problem of graduate unemployment is a reality in Nigeria and also is on the increase and has led to various kind of vices and also a situation where those who manage to get jobs are paid peanuts. It is common in recent times for higher education graduates to be subjected to series of competitive examination for appointments. It is becoming a Herculean task for fresh inexperienced graduates to pick a first employment in the formal sector.

Political Interference

The tertiary education system in this present dispensation are not totally free from the hands of politics. Government of the day, most especially in the state-owned higher institution interfere a lot in terms of selection and choice of the chief executive, Deans, Department heads, Directors of Programmes and above all the selection of Vice-Chancellors and Provosts. Some even interfere with the functions of the these officers and some even go to the extent of some of them now decide to stay permanent in their offices on campuses seeing to the day -to-day running of the institutions.

Disciplinary problems

Disciplinary problems have since the mid-1970 s become a common feature of our schools. In a study of the use of Indian hemp and drugs among secondary students in Lagos in 1975 by Adesina (1975), 25 percent of the self-confessed drug users in the study sample said that they used drugs for action. This is not different in the higher institution where it has led to various criminal cases in these institution and the society at large.

Lack of access to admission

Some of the other problems affecting the tertiary institution is also the lack of entering due to high population rate and lack of facilities that will make institutions increase the numbers of intake. This is very evident in the case of Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), post UME and also matching education to job demands. Some candidates has resulted to all form of vices including cheating ,sorting with huge sums of money and in some case into the wrong hands who have no business with the

admission process and some cases taking an unpopular career course in order to gain admission.

Education for World-Class Citizens

As noted by Amadi of the National Open University of Nigeria There is need to make research the centre of institutional activity, taking into account the social; cultural; and political problems that Nigeria now faces. Financial and administrative limitations and lack of resources; intellectual stimulation; and incentives demand that we find new strategies to advance this ambition. There is a diminishing scope of mentoring junior researchers by seasoned and senior researchers due to brain drain. Despite the increasing value of research in the world economy based on the supremacy of knowledge; and constant technological change; budgetary constraint; and the belief that research is costly have resulted in the virtual disappearance of research centers' in Nigerian higher education.

Faculty Exodus Over the past decades

The truth is that there has been a gradual exodus of many of our most talented faculty/lecturers from the academic environment to other sectors and some outside the country in search of greener pasture. Thus the tertiary institutions have ceased to be a place for exciting search for innovation/research. Corroborating this view Odetunde (2004) stated, "There was mass exodus of many brilliant lecturers that could not compete on political campus arenas from the university campus. Some left to join the rat race in the business world and others left Nigeria for better services" (p.3). He further said, "That experienced and seasoned professors were sidelined. The political professors often silenced the lone voices of active and academic professors.(p-4) Similarly Ali (1999) also stated, "That many experienced and young lecturers are fleeing from the frustration of university life into more rewarding and more challenging sectors of the economy and even to overseas countries" (p-3).

Money and Management

The tertiary institution as noted by Prof J.C Onyenkwelu is supposed to be established as an endowment and not a profit making venture. Thus it can be seen that the funding of higher education is very challenging. In Nigeria the main source of funding is the Federal and state government and they cannot meet the growing demand of these institutions. This imbalance between demand and available resources is aggravated by

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the ' increasing cost of higher education, driven as they are by the number of students seeking admissions into higher institutions. As noted by Amadi of the NOUN this financial restrictions also create problems that obstruct academic work; causing friction between the higher education and the government, thus threatening the stability of institutions. He further stressed that the problems are more visible in the areas of faculty salaries; libraries; equipment; research; and quality of students entering our higher institutions today. There was an increase in the proportion of total expenditure devoted to education but this has been considered to be rather grossly inadequate considering the phenomena increase in student enrolment and increasing cost, which has been aggravated by inflation. Besides, the Nigerian government over the years has not been meeting the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommendation of 26% of the total budget allocation to education sector.

The apparent shortage of fund has been responsible for the declining library; laboratory facilities; in higher educational system and in no small way makes the governance of the system a Herculean task (NOUN).

Management Style and the Structure of Higher Education

Another problem that has threatening the tertiary institution in Nigeria is that of the management style and the structure of our higher education. There are allegations of politically motivated decision-making; mutual back scratching; patronage; and partisanship that have permeated our higher institutions.

In some tertiary institution the chief executives run it like their business empire, were decision are made to favour a group of people he considers loyal to him and this once do a lot of evil with impunity and nothing happens because they belong. Some even go as far as to proliferate of academic programmes where as the main campus needs development, all because of money and the product are half baked graduate who cannot make a simple sentence .

Challenges of Educational Reforms

Adamu, nd.; Bello, (2007); Yusuf, (1998) opined that there are several reasons adduced for the lack of success in the implementation of past reforms include in Nigeria . These includes.

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(i) Inconsistency in government policy and lack of political will to effect lasting solutions to educational problems.

As mentioned earlier various policies has been put in place in the educational sector in order to reform it yet it has not brought the required result .Even when they are established, they are not sustained by various successive government. In fact in some case within the same government they change policies and sometimes in a bid to satisfy a political block.

(ii) lack of required personnel resulting from lack of training back up when policies are designed.

For every policy to succeed there must drivers of that policy and this drivers must be trained so that they can effectively implement the direction of the policy. For example training in a new policy involved so much that it becomes so much difficult for the policy to be fully carried out.

(iii) Inadequate funding, top down approach to the development of educational reforms

Ajayi and Adeniji (2009) noted that funding is central to unhindered access to university education. As it has been found that virtually all the problems of universities in Nigeria are attributable to inadequate funding .As Okebukola (2005) rightly observed, the depressed quality of education in Nigeria has been explained in part by the inadequate funding of the system. As all stakeholders in the education sector have listed funding inadequacy as a problem. They further stressed that despite the recommendation of UNESCO of 26% of national expenditure must be devoted to education, a closer look at Nigeria's experience is that education budget is still low. This is because fund are needed to bring to pass the desired reforms such as increase in facilities and other infrastructures.

(iv) Lack of proper monitoring

The government has set up various commission to monitor the various tertiary institution in the countries .The problem of effective monitoring is an issue to the reforms in these sectors. In line with these reforms there is also a need to make these monitoring agencies properly equipped for the reforms by providing adequate training,

(v)Over emphasis on paper qualification instead of placing such on productive marketable skills.

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One of the set back to this tertiary education reform is that of over emphasis on paper qualification instead of placing such on productive marketable skills. This has led to the increase of all kinds of schools and degrees and also produced half-baked graduate with a lot of short comings in their field of endeavor. This is because the issue of making education available for all has led to this.

Conclusion

Reforming the tertiary educational sector in Nigeria appears to be a herculean task considering the relative difficulties in the exercise., it has to take care of all the relevant parameters which includes issues such as; national needs, wider consultations, commitment, reliable statistical data, practicability, sustainability and quest for development that would make the reform desirable and useful to the society. A lot of problems /challenges were also noted but it is possible to achieve greater reform in the educational sector in Nigeria, if areas of waste are curbed and resources conserved and other measures put in place for the actualization of these reforms.

Recommendations

Based on the review of literature the following recommendation were made

Curbing of Financial Waste in Nigerian tertiary System. For instance according to Okebukola, (2008); Oraihi and Ebhohimen, (2011) they reported that the funds available to the universities were not adequate. Despite the inadequate funding of universities, we still notice various areas of waste by the leadership of the universities, which if well harnessed can be effectively directed towards expansion of facilities to accommodate a larger number of students. The existence of several official vehicles, which some institutions brand as project vehicle, but used for private businesses do not augur well for the system. Even when these vehicles are most times used for private activities, they are fueled and maintained by their respective institutions. This in itself negates the principle of consolidation. (Aluede *et al.*, 2012).

Government should set up an independent committee made up of experts in the education to study various reforms in the education since independence and come up with a strategy that will enable the nation move forward.

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Government should make sure the various established tertiary education commission live to their expectation while they were established in the first place.

The relevant authority should avoid Policy haste in educational sector.

Nigeria educational reforms should not be politicized. For instances establishing tertiary institution, appointment of provost, rectors and vice chancellors should base on merit. Government should work toward finding a more permanent solution to incessant strikes at the tertiary institutions by academic staff in the various tiers of tertiary education. Presently the academic staff union of polytechnic are treating to go on strike.

The increase in the number of tertiary institution does not really make sense were these schools are cited based on political bases instead of putting the money into making the existing tertiary institution more equipped structural and otherwise.

Government through its relevant agencies and parastatals should revisit licensing of universities and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This is to ensure the quantity of these institutions match the quality of tuition. A sort of guided establishment, expansion and development.

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