

**FALLING STANDARD OF EDUCATION  
IN NIGERIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR  
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Introduction**

The importance of education to the development of any nation needs not be overemphasized; consequently, the falling standard and decline in quality of Education have become a public outcry.

Education is a fundamental right which every child must acquire in any decent society. It is important to the development of individuals and societies. According to Maduabum (2006), education which is of greater value in our society can be seen as the art or science of transmitting culture, norms, traditions, values and ethics of a society from one generation to its succeeding generation. It is seen as a catalyst to modern successes and productive future; it kills the disease of ignorance and superstition (Maduabum, 2006). Babs Fafunwa in 1974 defines Education, as the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour of positive value to the society in which he lives (Onuoha, 2010).

Highlighting the Nigeria's falling standard of education; Teachers without Borders (2006) reported that the standard of education is how the products of schools can be measured in terms of outcome. That is, a measure of how school leavers contribute to the society in terms of

cognitive, affective and psychomotor. This is in terms of skills, knowledge and right attitude acquired by graduates the country produces. When the standard is low, half-baked graduates are produced. These graduates go into the market with less knowledge, less skills and often with dubious attitudes.

The system of education in use today in Nigeria is the Universal Basic Education (UBE) also known as the 9-3-4 system which was introduced to replace the 6-3-3-4 system of education (Yahaya, 2019). The newly adopted system in use today took off in 2006 and it is expected to be reshaped to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The problem of education seems to emerge...from the neglect which the sector suffered from the 1980s leading to the gradual erosion of the system.

This paper attempts to provide some explanations for the level of deterioration in Nigerian educational institutions with its consequent negative implications on Nigeria's National development. There seems to exist an extensive government neglect of its education policy and objectives in Nigeria. The paper concludes with a range of recommendations on how Nigeria could improve its standard of education to avoid its reprisal effects on the national development.

### **Nigerian Tertiary Institutions as Compared to other Developing African Nations**

The quality of education in any country is one of the major keys to national development. Nigeria runs a federation system, so the Nigerian education system is overseen by Ministry of Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). The federal government controls public schools

while state schools are controlled at the regional levels. The education system at the federal level is managed by the Ministry of Education. This includes management of federal universities and schools. State public schools and tertiary institutions are controlled regionally by the Ministry at state level (Arong & Ogbadu, 2010).

The Nigerian High Education Institutions (NHEIs) comprise at present 129 universities (40 Federal, 39 State, 50 Privates), 116 polytechnics, 47 mono-technics and 82 colleges of education with geographical distribution (Wikipedia, 2019). However, in the 1970s, 1980s and even up to early 1990s, Nigerian universities attained handsome global ranking; but so far in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, no Nigerian university has a placement even among the best 1<sup>0</sup> Universities in Africa despite being the economic giant of (African Technology News Leader, 2018). Suffice to note that countries like Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, to mention but a few, have a placement before Nigerian universities. These are countries whose Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are smaller than that of Nigeria. For example, in 2017 the GDP of different countries released by World Bank on 2 July 2018, Nigeria stood at US\$376.28bn, over 80 percent of it from petroleum. Compare that to South Africa US\$349.299bn, Egypt US\$237.037bn, Algeria US\$178.287bn, Angola US\$124.209bn, Morocco US\$109.824bn, Ethiopia US\$80.874bn, Kenya, US\$79.511bn, Sudan US\$58.239bn and Tanzania US\$51.725bn (African Technology News Leader, 2018). This is to show the extent of decay and neglect coupled with low economic development which has had devastating consequences on Nigeria's educational system. Beyond the falling standard of education on Nigeria's universities, Nigeria also belongs to the E-9 countries with very high number of illiterates who cannot read, write or communicate in any way set up at the

instance of United Nations Education, Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

*Suffice to note that "E" stands for education and the "9" represents the following nine countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan, representing over half of the world's population and 70% of the world's illiterate adults (Wikipedia, 2017).*

While most of the above-mentioned countries have struggled through reforms to strengthen their respective educational sectors, Nigeria remains the only E-9 country in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) facing serious challenge of turning around the illiteracy rate among its youths and adults by the 2020 timeline set to achieve education for all (EFA). Now the question is, has Nigerian government neglected the proper implementation of educational policy and objectives on tertiary institutions to warrant this conspicuous falling standard of education with its negative implications on Nigeria's national development?

Actually, there has been the National policy on education since 1977 (revised in 1981; 1998 and 2004).

Also there have been the 6-5-2-3 6-3-3-4 and 9-3-4 educational structures; Continuous Assessment Pedagogy; Universal Primary Education (UPE); and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Schemes. These reform initiatives have individually and collectively at one point in time or the other led to modifications in both the structure, inputs, processes and contexts of education, but the fact remains that government neglect of its educational policy and its objectives on tertiary institutions is undisputable (Anidi & Egboka, 2009). Lawai (2003) agreed with the above statement, and even went further to assert that after two decades of operating the National Policy on Education, the

educational system in Nigeria can only be said to be in crisis.

### Factors Responsible for Falling Standard of Education in Nigeria

The following can be considered as being responsible for the lapses in the standard of education in Nigeria:

(i) Pupils/students, Parent, Teachers, Government, and the society as a whole. In particular, judging the cognitive performance, our educational standard has fallen and still seems to be falling because of the attitude of pupils to school. Some will go to school but fail to attend classes because of peer group influence; hence, majority of students neglect their studies. They prefer to play games watch cartoons on television and films at the expense of reading their books. In the higher education institutions some students engage themselves in cultism.

(ii) Another reason for the falling standard of education in the tertiary institution is the problem of wrong choice of academic specialization by students. In this respect, some students do not marry their competence with their choice of discipline as they do not possess the natural endowment demanded by such course of study and fail to contact a counsellor who will guide them in their choice of course. Coupled with this is the corruption that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the society which makes students feel that it could be easy for them to lay hands on examination papers beforehand. Students are at the centre of examination malpractice; they have various techniques of examination malpractice. At the secondary school level, most private schools have become miracle centres where schools make students pay to be helped in examinations.

(iii) The craving of Nigerian youth to acquire paper qualification at all costs is another reason for the falling standard of education in Nigeria. Some desperate youths would go as far as paying various sums of money to be awarded degrees by unaccredited educational institutions.

(iv) On the part of parents, most parents do not care about their children's education as some parents feel their means of livelihood is more important to them than the education of their children. Most parents refuse to buy necessary school materials for their children. Often poverty seems to drag some parent or guardians to involving their children or wards into hawking during school days. Apart from the above the greatest censure on the falling standard of education is directed to teachers who cannot successfully exonerate themselves because of the fact that some of them have failed to discharge their duties diligently. Divided loyalty affects input, whereby they engage in other businesses when they are supposed to be in their classes teaching. The situation is worse where some teachers are deeply involved in politics at the expense of their primary assignment.

(v) The government can be held responsible for the falling standard of education in Nigeria. A situation where a merit is jettisoned at the recruitment of teachers into schools is quite appalling and does not help. education sub sector. The government professes free education but practically denies schools the basic necessities that can make teaching and learning effective. Also the government does not equip classrooms, laboratories and workshops adequately to enable effective learning. Corrupt officers who misuse institutions' funds go unpunished. Frequent strikes and the present universities' school fees increase are also some of the causes.

### Nigeria's Educational Deterioration and other countries

It is puzzling that while other countries of the world, especially most of the countries on the same level of development~ith Nigeria are consistently attaining higher standard of education, Nigeria is still lagging behind. A lot of reasons have been adduced for the high standard of education in some known countries of the world; chief among these are:

(i) *Good funding of formal education:* Countries like the Asian tigers (Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand etc) which started together with Nigeria, commit a huge amount of funds to their respective educational system. This helps to boost their socio-economic development, reduction in crime rate, with its consequent positive implications on their national development. Nigeria commits little of its Gross National Product (GNP) to education which has left its tertiary institutions in a pitiable situation, thereby reducing the rate of economic development in Nigeria. Even small developing countries whose Gross Domestic Product (GDP) cannot be compared to Nigeria, commit more funds to their respective education system than Nigeria. For example, recent figures from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics showed countries such as Tanzania, Mozambique and Lesotho achieving 27%, 21 % and 24% respectively. Sadly, there was no data on Nigeria (Bamiro, 2012). This is grossly at variance with the recommendation of the United Nations education, scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO) which stipulates that 26 percent of the yearly total budget should go to the educational sector in developing countries (Anyaeibunam, 2007). Also, some prominent Nigerian scholars such as Maduabum (2006), Diraso, (2000), Anyakoha (2007), Ikediugwu (2007) and Okebukola



(2006), in their respective research works, have identified poor funding of educational system as one of the major causes of falling standard of education in Nigeria. In 2018 budget, 7% was allocated to education (Premium Times 2019). This shows that Nigeria's educational sector is grossly under-funded far less than other countries in the same level of development. Despite the poor underfunding of Nigerian institutions, the number of the institutions keeps increasing, a situation that worsens the financial crisis that characterizes the institutions.

Poor funding is the principal challenge that most Nigerian Universities currently face which negatively affects their position in the global ranking of universities. While government funding is an important source of funding, there will continue to be funding gaps from this source due to the increasing number of government funded universities in the country (Arong & Ogbadu, 2010).

(ii) *Governance and Management*: Most of the countries of the world, especially in Africa, can boast of good governance and management of their tertiary institutions by their respective Vice-Chancellors, but most of the universities in Nigeria cannot boast of that. Undoubtedly, Nigerian university's standards have crumbled, particularly in the areas of organization, technological development and application. In fact, the crises faced by the Nigerian higher education in many instances have been attributed to ineffective governance (Okebukola, 2006). Here in Nigeria, leadership in respect of international academic standard in majority of universities has been weak and the little improvement ushered in by National University Commission (NUC) falls short of expectations. The NUC does this through institutionalizing strategic planning, holding regular workshops for top university managers; giving annual awards to Vice Chancellors and Councils who implement jointly agreed parameters, yet

most of the Vice Chancellors are simply unable to provide the academic thrust that can produce the needed global standards, even when the funds are provided by government (Okebukola, 2006). In some universities, most especially private, the proprietors usurp the role of the Vice-Chancellor, reducing the latter close to a "house boy" of the master (the proprietor). Under this situation, what do you expect of the performance of students and standard of education? Of course, poor in all its ramifications, implications, and qualifications. Also, the products of these ill-governed environments undermine rather than aid the society.

(iii) *Inadequate Equipment and Lack of Maintenance of Existing Ones*: Deterioration in the educational sector undermines self-reliance and reinforces external technological dependence which adversely affects the national development of a country (cf. Agbo, 2005). Good focused government make standard of education its top priority. But here in Nigeria, there seem to be little or no encouragement to education. This is exemplified in a national survey conducted by Nigerian Federal Ministry of Science and Technology (FMST) in conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the nature of tertiary institutions equipment and machinery. The survey covered 209 institutions, 31 federal and state universities, 27 federal and state polytechnics, 30 research institutions and technology development centres etc. Among other things, they identified a staggering list of non-functional, ill-maintained essential equipment and machinery items in many institutions, an extremely limited national capacity for development and production of spare parts and components of existing equipment, poor engineering infrastructure and glaring deficiency in human resources skills development and training for equipment design, fabrication and manufacture locally, and a near'

total dependence on foreign inputs, including scientific foreign exchange for any meaningful equipment, maintenance rehabilitation, manufacture and technological services in Nigeria (Momah, 1999).

Following closely the above reason, is the inability of government to fully implement the vocational and technical aspects of its policy by making graduates of these specialized subjects to be self-reliant. This failure of government makes these subjects that are supposed to be practically oriented to be theoretical. This has not only reflected today on the socio-economic development of Nigeria, but has also left most of the graduates half-baked and unable to be employed. Even the much-advertised Nigerian programme to boost science and technology (PTDF) has ended up assisting Nigerians to acquire knowledge instead of assisting them to apply knowledge (Adiele, 2009). The 6-3-3-4 system of education is not working here in Nigeria. Nigeria simply borrowed that system of education from the western country without properly taking Nigerian cultural peculiarities into consideration. This has only contributed greatly to the falling standard of education in Nigeria. It has necessitated the calls by some scholars for a total overhauling of Nigeria's educational system. Confirming the above pieces of information, Uwarneiye (2014) posited that the Nigerian government has been talking about scrapping 6-3-3-4 system for some time now may be to give room for another one.

Furthermore, Nigeria's educational system is yet to recover from its 1986 greatest shock on public expenditure leading to the withdrawal of subsidies following the activities of IMF, World Bank and U.S treasury department (Woodward, 2004). Following the above reasons, available data indicate decline in funding of formal education from 1986 when the Nigerian

government adopted the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) leading to the withdrawal of subsidies from social services such as education, health and public welfare (Abiola, 2006; Phillips, 1989). Most of the universities annually witness overcrowding of classrooms, laboratories, workshops and hostels owing to increasing demand. In some tertiary institutions, students listen to lectures standing; sometimes, on corridors and peeping through the windows of over crowded lecture halls (Okolo, 2004).

Although the establishment of private universities in Nigerian has positively helped to decongest universities, it has nevertheless contributed to compounding the problems in tertiary institutions. How? The government simply concentrated on granting licenses to private universities without paying attention to the reformative prognostic dimension of the sub-system. Evidently, the new private universities have failed, in the short term, to meet policy objectives due partly to profit-making through excessive school fees, lack of quality staff and poor academic leadership. Therefore, the commercialization of universities without proper policy objectives that can be enforced by Nigerian government has immensely contributed to the falling standard of education.

#### Solutions to Reviving Education in Nigeria

The first step towards reviving the educational system lies in the hands of the government. Necessary steps need to be taken in order to restructure and save the sector. The government at all levels needs to commit itself to the delivering of a competitive standard of education across the country with other countries. Also, the right investment needs to be done in order to get the desired

result. Adequate funding with good management will provide high-quality education in Nigeria. Funds for renovation of academic institution, acquiring quality training facilities, research grants, appropriate teachers' salaries and welfare, etc. need to be properly budgeted for and made available to the institutions. The level of corruption in education ministries and regulatory bodies needs to be taken seriously and tackled. The level of examination malpractices needs to be curbed by joint efforts of the government and examination regulatory bodies. The teaching curriculum needs to be reviewed and updated. It needs to be more practical and research based. There should be regular payment of teachers' salaries. This will attract dedicated teachers to public schools and will change the attitude of young people towards the teaching profession, that is, making the teaching profession attractive for the youths.

Proper training of teachers with current and up to date materials and technology also will improve the condition of education in Nigeria. Necessary vetting measures should be taken to make sure that only qualified teachers are employed. Admission into tertiary institutions should be based solely on merit. To gauge the seriousness of a society, especially its seriousness about attaining national development goals, we need to appraise the nation's educational system.

To revive the educational sector in order to help in building the individuals to be able to assist the process of developing the society, government should make sure our schools are equipped with functional libraries and laboratories, with classrooms having modern instructional technologies; computers connected to the internet, projectors, audio-visual and video conferencing equipment etc. Teachers cannot perform miracles without the necessary teaching aids. Primary and secondary schools,

which are the foundation of education should be properly built, funded and adequately staffed. That is why the United Nations benchmark is that countries must put 26% of their budgets into education.

### **Summary of Problems in the Education Sector**

Problems of education in Nigeria are so many but we will try to highlight the major ones.

*Poor governance and management:* One major factor that has crippled Nigeria today is poor governance. The educational sector is not an exception. The government's attitude towards 'crucial problems of education, especially its quality, is lackadaisical. The situation can be noticed on every level of government. Basic universal education suffers most because primary education is neither fully controlled by the government, nor by the state or the local government.

*Poor funding and neglect of the educational sector:* Education in Nigeria is poorly funded. According to Premium Times (2019), in 2018 Budget, 7% was allocated to education in Nigeria. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommends that 26% of the nation's budget should be allocated to the educational sector; this way, the educational sector will have a good impact on the national development. But in Nigeria there is huge gap in the funding of 'education at the different levels of the government.

*Corruption in Nigeria:* This affects every sector of the government including the educational sector. Corruption occurs in the educational system at a high rate at every level. Taking bribes is 'practiced not only by politicians but also by people in the educational system

including school authorities. Funds meant for education infrastructure, salary payments, maintenance, running of schools and institutions are often diverted into private pockets and mismanaged. The collection of bribes by most lecturers and teachers is not a secret anymore. According to the report by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), corruption is endemic in Nigerian Universities today and there is a lack of political will to deal with it.

*Poor infrastructure and training facilities:* Most schools and institutions in Nigeria are in very bad conditions. In most states, the teaching environment is not conducive. The buildings are in bad shape and most of them lack teaching materials. Schools lack practical or technical facilities. Lack of standard and up to date practical facilities make education theoretical and rather quantitative than qualitative.

*Poor teacher's welfare:* This is another major problem affecting the level of education in Nigeria. It is one of the consequences of both poor funding and corruption. Poor salary scale and bonuses, as well as irregular payment of salaries, are the problems that teachers face in Nigeria. It is a sad practice that teachers have to take industrial actions before they get their salaries and other remunerations accruing from their services.

*Lack of dedication of teachers:* This is a direct consequence' of the lack in the welfare of teachers. Teaching is not seen as a lucrative job. So, not many people want to become teachers or to stay in the profession. The ones that are teachers now, in most cases, are not dedicated; some even hate their job. Most of the teachers in Nigeria have other businesses to support them and their families. This way, they spend more time attending to their other businesses than they do in class.

and the level of education in school like selling cloths

*Poor Qualification of Teachers:* It is not a secret that there are teachers in Nigerian schools, especially at the primary education level, who are either unqualified or underqualified. There have been cases where teachers could not speak English properly. Also, most teachers lack updated and proper training in educational methodology. *High level of examination irregularity:* There is a high level of examination irregularity in Nigeria. They are practiced by both students and teachers. The inability of the government to curb this has caused a serious decline in the quality of the Nigerian education system.

To revive the educational sector in order to help in building the individuals to be able to assist the process of developing the society, government should make sure our schools are equipped with functional libraries and laboratories, with classrooms having modern instructional

technology; computers connected to the internet, projectors, audio-visual and video conferencing equipment among others.

Teachers cannot perform miracles without the necessary teaching aids (tools). Primary and secondary schools, which are the foundation of education should be properly built, funded and adequately staffed. That is why the United Nations benchmark is that countries must put 26% of their budgets into education.



## Recommendations

The following are some recommendations to deal with the problem:

(i) Primary and secondary schools, which are the foundation of education should be properly built, funded and adequately staffed. That is why the United Nations benchmark is that countries must put 26% of their budgets into education

(U) Nigerian government should increase funding of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. They should understand that it is practically impossible to operate universities without fund.

(iii) There should be a granting of greater autonomy to the state and federal universities by Nigerian government. This administrative and financial autonomy will make them to be more accountable to their students and the community at large.

(iv) A better condition of service is required to boost the morale of teachers in tertiary institutions. This would reduce drastically their unprecedented emigration to other countries of the world in search of greener pastures.

(v) NUC should be reformed under a new paradigm, focusing on objectivity and high international academic standard to boost the quality of education in Nigeria.

The lofty well-articulated goals and objectives of Nigerian educational policy, if followed judiciously, will spur Nigerian educational system to an international standard with its consequent effects on high technological application and less threat to Nigeria's national development.

## conclusion

The Nigeria National Policy on Education published in 1976 and revised in 2002, adopted education as an instrument par excellence for affecting national development. But the conspicuous inability of Nigerian State to discharge its basic functions of statehood, with particular reference to the educational sector, has left the educational dimension of Nigeria in chaos.

In those days, possession of certificate was an asset to the holder. Employment abounds, hence pupils and students alike were studious and faced their studies meticulously whereas the learners of the present day seem to feel like losing nothing if they fail to face their studies squarely since those regarded as genius and gurus find it difficult to secure jobs after graduation in spite of their excellent performance.

If the government provides or educates its citizens through functional education, the people will take their right places in the social, political, economic and even religious life endeavours and so we can reach great heights and be among the first twenty countries by 2020.

The strength of any economy is traceable to a well-structured educational system. This is why developed nations like US, Britain, China and Japan do not compromise with the standard of education. Apart from national development, good educational system promotes personal development and job creation.

In conclusion, we will be able to see real changes in the level of education in Nigeria, when power will belong to visionary and selfless leaders who understand the importance of quality education.

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