

An Analytical Study on the Reformation of the Nigerian Education System

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Abstract. The apparent deterioration in the standard of the educational system in Nigeria has become a significant source of concern to government officials at the local and state level and private citizens despite different reforms over the years that have been put in place to proffer possible solutions to this challenges and ensure that the products of our educational system are more self-reliant, sustainable and also able to make a necessary contribution to the advancement of the country. Some of the most notable reforms are the UPE and UBE schemes centred on enhancing the literacy level among citizens, yet the same challenges that hampered the success of UPE persist in the UBE scheme. Challenges across our educational sector include a lack of accurate statistical data, funding, infrastructure, inconsistent policies, and curriculum implementation. Considering the significance of education in developing a thriving nation, we should urgently prioritize a complete overhaul of the education system.

Keywords: Reform; Education; Policies; Curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Education is central to the development and sustenance of any nation, which is one of the reasons that propels Governments of Nations to reform existing policies to meet the changes in human knowledge, technology, globalization, and the need to adapt to a changing world. Education reform implies the changes made to improve the educational system by teaching new ideas, methods, and strategies [1].

The reform aims to identify the challenges with old policies and seek ways to enhance efficiency by proffering solutions to the identified issues.

Many developed countries have put in measures to ensure the thriving of their educational system; however, developing nations have struggled with developing and implementing a robust policy that provides quality education. Several challenges have plagued Nigeria's educational system, as it is one of the developing nations. As such, reforming and restructuring the educational system is vital for the country to meet the standards of other developed nations.

The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2022 released statistics reflecting the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. The statistics show that 1 in 5 out of school children in the world is a Nigerian,

and an estimated 20 million children have been out of school in the country to authors [2]. The alarming nature of these statistics has ensured that the country's educational policies have encouraged children's enrolment in school, commencing with the NPE scheme in the western and eastern regions before independence and continuing down to the Universal Essential Act in 2004. However, the government's focus on education, which is the right of every child's access to school, has widened the gap in the quality of education in public schools.

Poor funding of Nigerian educational institutions has led to a heavy impact on the quality of public schools. Other shortcomings include dilapidated infrastructure, poorly trained teachers, the need to update curricula to adapt to global changes, and a shortage of teaching materials. The challenges of financing and mismanaging of funds have been a massive problem that has inhibited the growth of the country's educational sector. UNESCO recommends allocating 26% of a nation's budget to the academic sector. Yet, it is pretty surprising that Nigeria, a country that wishes to improve its educational system through policies, has yet to allocate more than 13% of its budget towards educational improvement since its inception to authors [3].

Therefore, this paper makes an analytical study of the reformation of the Nigerian education system since the country's inception to evaluate the flaws that have hampered the success of each of these reforms, which would serve as a way forward toward the actualization of a quality educational system that could be comparable with other developing and developed countries of the world.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nigerian Education Reforms

Reforms in the educational system are vital to ensure the thriving of any nation in the current technological revolution, economy, and continuous changes across the globe through the development of graduates who are well adapted to contribute their quota towards their country's development. Nigeria had diverse education reforms before and after independence from the British colonial system. This paper studies some of the most prominent reforms between 1952 and 2004.

Universal Primary Education (UPE) of the Old Western Region and Eastern Nigeria. Chief S.O. Awokoye, the then Western Minister of Education, proposed the comprehensive free Universal Primary Education Programme in July 1952, centred on enhancing literacy among citizens of the old Western region [4]. The author [5] noted that the proposal had included massive training of teachers, construction of new classroom blocks, and further expansion of teachers' training facilities. Authorities fully implemented the reform in January 1955, enrolling 811,000 primary school children. Implementing the program directly impacted the budget, doubling the education budget from 2.2 million pounds to 5.4 million pounds, as authorities procured teaching aids such as books and chalk and erected several new school buildings. [6].

Similarly, the Universal Primary Education Programme was also proposed in the Eastern region in 1953, a year after a similar feat in the Western region. Authorities initiated the proposal in February 1957, leading to an exponential increase in primary school enrollment from 775,000 to 1,209,167 to authors [4,7,8]. The challenge that followed the initiation of the policy was the challenge of poorly trained teachers due to insufficient time for training and inadequate classrooms, which led to the leasing of unfit buildings

and temporary shelters to accommodate the increased student population.

The scheme's failure in both the Western and Eastern regions of Nigeria was a factor in the poor planning and financing of the scheme. The author [8] recorded that financing the NPE scheme in the western region was due to the increased taxation of the people, which led to much resistance. Aside from the challenge of finance, the program was hurriedly executed without accurate budgeting, resulting in the lack of classrooms to accommodate the increased student population. More so, the poor and hasty implementation in the Eastern region also led to the laying off of teachers and the subsequent closing of some of these schools [4]. The author [6] highlighted the challenge of opposition from Mission schools, which was a challenge to the scheme's success, bearing in mind that free primary education had impacted mission school student enrolment [6].

Education policies between 1960 and 1976 Universal Primary Education (UPE). After independence, Nigerian educational policies centred on using education to develop human resources for economic development. However, critics levelled several criticisms against the academic policies. The criticisms include obsolete teaching methods, irrelevant curricula, high drop-out rates, and graduates being poor on initiative and over-dependent [9]. Several complaints on the educational policies led to the 1969 National Curriculum Conference, which reviewed the educational system and identified goals for Nigeria's future. The conference was Nigeria's first attempt to abandon its colonial orientation in favour of a more self-reliant one [9]. More notably, this period was characterized by the government's takeover of Mission schools, and due to the oil boom of 1976, the government took on the ambitious move of initiating Universal Primary Education schemes across the nation to improve literacy.

Universal Primary Education schemes were already in operation in some regions (Western and Eastern regions); however, under the military head of state, Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo, the Federal Government launched a centralized Universal Primary Education scheme on September 6, 1976. The scheme commenced with an enrolment record of 8.2 million primary school children across the country, with an annual grant of N 40 paid by the Federal Government for each pupil in the scheme [4]. The author [4] noted that

the Federal Government projected 60,000 teachers across the country for training for the scheme, but they trained a total number of 48,780 teachers; the figure was short by 11,200 to meet the gap in teachers, so they employed retired but healthy teachers on a contract basis. Moreover, authorities allocated special grants for textbooks and other teaching aids.

Even though the scheme was already in operation in some regions, Nigeria had not learned from the previous implementation process of UPE schemes in both the old Western and Eastern regions. The same issues of 1955 UPE in western Nigeria also hampered the success of UPE in 1976, bearing in mind the immense benefits of the program in lifting the country's literacy level. The program failed to achieve its goals due to improper preparation, insufficient data, and inadequate funding for the scheme. Significant challenges such as inadequate classrooms, teaching materials, and hiring unqualified teachers hindered the scheme's success. Authorities employed some of these teachers after a crash program in teacher training colleges hurriedly set up by the government. [9]. The author [10] noted that Nigeria had budgeted 500 million naira to initiate the UPE project. Still, within a year of its execution, the government had already spent over 1 billion nairas on Primary Education. Such funding indicates an underestimation of the cost of project implementation and inaccurate statistics.

The takeover of the mission schools, which placed the provision of education as the sole duty of government, also resulted in a unified educational system of 7-5-2-3 educational policy, which implies "7 years of primary education, five years of secondary school, two years Higher School Certificate Levels, and three years of university education. This change replaces the 8-5-2-3 education policy: eight years of primary education, five years of secondary school, two years of tertiary certificate level education, and three years of university education." [9, p.189].

The National Policy on Education since 1977. The National Policy on Education of 1977 documented the country's aim for self-sufficiency and reliance through education. Then, the government centralized the education funding, deviating from the colonial education funding model, which relied on cost-sharing between parents, local communities, and the government. Consequently, the government assumed sole responsibility for con-

trolling education in the country [9]. The move by the government was an ambitious step, considering the financial burden required to shoulder the education of her citizens. The author [11] noted that this policy introduced the 6-3-3-4 education, modelled from the American education system. The system comprises six years of primary school, three years of junior secondary school, three years of senior secondary school, and four years of tertiary education. The government introduced the education system to achieve its goal of self-reliance in a technologically advanced world. Before this period, primary education was free, yet not compulsory; therefore, the policy proposed to make UPE mandatory for all children. [9].

The author [12] noted that Prof. Babatunde Fafunwa introduced the 6-3-3-4 system to ensure the country's graduates are self-assured. Additionally, the system aimed to separate technically gifted children from academically talented ones, enabling them to thrive and have equal opportunities upon leaving school. Authorities designed the junior secondary school curriculum to be more technical and vocational-oriented. Conversely, administrators expect to admit students who excel in junior secondary school into a senior secondary school more oriented toward academics than vocational education. However, the same challenge that had affected the previous implementation process in Nigeria's educational system had caught up with the education policies in 1977 and even its revision in 1981. In an interview with Sunday Triumph in 1984, the then Commissioner of Education explained the reality of the hasty implementation of the 6-3-3-4 system, which commenced in 1982. He noted that:

"The civilian regime implemented the Junior Secondary Schools in 1982, but due to numerous constraints, they hastily implemented the program for the Junior schools. Authorities converted some primary schools to junior secondary schools because the new systems' facilities were inadequate. In such a situation, many things go missing: no science laboratories, workshops, etc. Junior secondary schools are supposed to deal mainly with technical education, but this isn't easy. We expect about 37,000 children to graduate from junior secondary schools in September (1984). So, knowing fully well that the majority of these are ill-equipped, academically and in technical fields, we are making the necessary preparations to have at least one vocational centre, a reasonably comprehensive one, in each lo-

cal government area so that we can enrol a large percentage of the products of the junior secondary schools in some of the centres. We hope this will equip them better for the labour market and other higher institutions. Nevertheless, we will take a large percentage of the 37,000 into the Senior Secondary Schools" [13, p.4].

The UPE program ended in 1981 with the revision of the Education policy, which occurred because the Federal government could not shoulder the responsibility of providing free education for both primary and junior secondary school levels. Consequently, the state and local governments were responsible for funding primary education. This change greatly impacted primary school enrolment as the number of pupils dropped [14]. The author [15] noted that the federal government's reversal of UPE resulted from the dip in oil revenue in the 1980s, which affected the country's revenue-generating capacity [15]. Insufficient funding from the government led to the degradation of education facilities, constant non-payment of salaries to teachers, and a declining literacy level in the country due to the reintroduction of school fees. [16].

Universal Basic Education (UBE). The government launched the Universal basic education program in 1999 following the revision of the National Education Policy in 1998. The launching of UBE was under the administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. The program advocates for free and

compulsory primary education for every child, which represents the first nine years of a child's education, i.e., six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary education, with the aim of programs similar to that of UPE which is to reduce the level of illiteracy and to provide equal education opportunity for all. The UBE Act 2004 established the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), which aimed to Implement the UBE program. At the same time, the Act also led to the establishment of the State UBE Board (SUBEB) for state implementation of the UBE program and Local government Agencies (LGEA) at the local government level [17].

The initiation of the UBE program gave birth to the 9-3-4 education, which slightly modified the 6-3-3-4 education system. The UBE program also became a casualty of policy executed hastily without putting in place the human and material resources needed to guarantee the scheme's success. During the administration of Goodluck Jonathan, the government reverted the country's education system to a 6-3-3-4 system with just a minor alteration to include one year of Early Childhood Education (ECE); thus, the education system became a 1-6-3-3-4 system. Such changes indicate the sporadic nature of changes and modifications to the education system in the country. The table below summarizes the breakdown of Nigeria's education system

Table 1 – Nigerian Education System [20]

Year	System of Education	Early childhood/Pre-primary education (years)	Primary education (years)	Junior secondary education (years)	Senior secondary education (years)	Higher School Certificate (years)	Tertiary Education (years)
Before independence - 1982	7-5-2-3	Nil	7	5		2	3
1982	6-3-3-4	Nil	6	3	3	Nil	4
1999	9-3-4	Nil	9		3	Nil	4
2012	1-6-3-3-4	1	6	3	3	Nil	4

Challenges of Nigerian Education Reform

Nigeria has navigated through four major education system reforms since her independence 62 years ago, which reflects the inconsistency in the implementation of the country's education policies while bearing in mind that the differences in

each of the policies and systems have sometimes been relatively minor. The former president of Nigeria, in October 2010, in a stakeholders meeting in the education sector, noted that "the 6-3-3-4 system of education has failed and that its proponents should apologize to Nigerians" [18, p.31]. Such a regime reflects the inconsistent im-

plementation of reforms that stakeholders expect to lead to positive education system development. However, when the authorities do not properly implement these changes, the problems these reforms should address remain. Thus, we summarize the challenges associated with the implementation of reforms in Nigeria below:

Lack of accurate data or statistics in planning education reforms: One of the significant challenges across Nigerian education reform planning is the issue of inaccurate or incomplete data, which has significantly led to the failure of Nigeria's past educational reforms. The author [19] also shared similar reservations when he noted that the unproductivity of educational planning or reforms is due to unreliable national census or data. The country's lack of credible statistical data could have led to the hasty planning and implementation of reforms. The author [20] noted that "Educational policies are usually not conceived in a rush; it is often a long-term process which involves planning, talks, debates, deliberations, and sensitization" (p.164). Before implementing reforms, stakeholders should ensure the availability of accurate data, such as an updated school-age children database, available school buildings, and qualified teachers. These processes would not be credible without such data.

Funding of Reforms: Funding remains a crucial factor in the success and failure of reforms. Nigeria's education budget indicates the value given to this sector. The author [21] noted that Nigeria's highest spending on education was 13 % in 2008, far below other countries, and the benchmark for UNESCO is 26 % of the budget. The end product of the limited budgetary spending on education leads to resource constraints and limited investment in Educational infrastructure and programs.

Lack of Infrastructure: Poor infrastructural development has been a significant limitation to the success of educational reforms in Nigeria. The author [22] "noted that to ensure that curriculum must be effectively implemented, infrastructural facilities, equipment, tools, and materials must be provided sufficiently" [4, p.124]; hence, prior educational reforms have been massively affected by inadequate and poor infrastructure, most notably is the challenge of lack of classrooms that ensured the Implementation of NPE and UBE program were not a smooth ride. Implementing the 6-3-3-4 education system was massively affected due to unavailable workshops, laborato-

ries, and libraries. The government should invest in constructing and renovating school buildings, classrooms, libraries, and laboratories and having internet and electricity connections in schools.

Inconsistent Policies and Curriculum Implementation: Teachers are central to the successful implementation of reforms as they shoulder the responsibility of curriculum implementation, representing the practical execution of policies. An essential prerequisite in reforms should not be limited to the clarity, need, quality, and complexity of material used but the ability to develop personnel that understands the necessity for a change in strategy, thus ensuring meeting the objective of such reforms [13]. However, the inconsistent generation of reforms in Nigeria has placed teachers in a situation where they do not fully grasp the curriculum implications or features of those reforms. The author [20] noted "More often than not, these teachers are not part of the planning and development of these policies; they only implement anything given them, their incompetence notwithstanding". Therefore, a well-designed implementation strategy should bear in mind the contribution and role of teachers in its success.

Poor Monitoring and Evaluation: Evaluation is critical in obtaining information on the standards of reform implementation, identifying its weaknesses and challenges, and determining the program's effectiveness in meeting its objective. Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), State UBE Board (SUBEB), and Local government Agencies (LGEA) are saddled with the responsibility of monitoring the Implementation of the UBE Act [17]. Therefore, more effort is required to monitor and evaluate these programs to ensure their success.

Outdated Curriculum: One of the fundamental issues with the Nigerian education system is the obsolete curriculum, which fails to align with the demands of a globalized, knowledge-based economy. Incorporating modern subjects like artificial intelligence, robotics, coding, and entrepreneurship into the curriculum is imperative to foster innovation and critical thinking skills. Reforming the curriculum to include these subjects will equip students with the skills needed to adapt to the ever-evolving workplace.

Infrastructural Deficiencies: Insufficient infrastructure is a significant challenge many Nigerian schools face. Lack of proper classrooms, up-to-

date learning resources, and inadequate access to technology hinder the delivery of quality education. A thorough reform should prioritize equitable distribution of resources, investing in school infrastructure upgrades, and ensuring reliable access to technology and internet connectivity for urban and rural areas.

Reforming Nigeria Education

Enhancing Curriculum Relevance: The current Nigerian curriculum often fails to prepare students for the modern world's demands adequately. A reformative approach should emphasize integrating practical skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. Updating the curriculum to include technological literacy, financial literacy, and vocational training will equip students with the skills needed to thrive in a globally competitive job market.

Quality and Capacity of Teachers: The quality and capacity of teachers significantly impact the education system's effectiveness. There is a pressing need to enhance teacher training and professional development programs, promoting continuous learning and upskilling of educators. Providing teachers access to advanced teaching methodologies, instructional technologies, and mentorship programs will empower them to create dynamic and engaging student learning experiences.

Improving Teaching Standards and Capacities: Teacher quality is paramount to any education system's success. Nigeria must prioritize comprehensive training and professional development programs for teachers to enhance their teaching methodologies and subject knowledge. Promoting ongoing learning opportunities and performance evaluations will help raise the country's overall standard of teaching. Additionally, attracting and retaining talented and motivated individuals to the teaching profession through competitive salaries and improved working conditions is crucial.

Standardized Assessment and Evaluation: A robust and objective assessment and evaluation system is crucial for monitoring progress and identifying areas for improvement in the education system. Implementing standardized assessment methods, such as national examinations, can better understand student performance and enable comparisons across schools and regions. Additionally, incorporating practical and project-based evaluations would encourage critical

thinking and problem-solving skills over rote memorization.

Addressing the Gender Gap: Achieving gender equality in education is essential for the nation's development. Reformation efforts should eliminate gender disparities in access to education, literacy rates, and academic achievements. Authorities should implement policies and initiatives to ensure girls receive equal educational opportunities and are encouraged to pursue fields traditionally dominated by men, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Enhancing Digital Literacy: The Nigerian education system must prioritize digital literacy skills in an increasingly digital world. Access to technology and internet connectivity must be improved nationwide, enabling students to develop essential digital skills. Integrating technology into classroom activities, providing teacher training in digital tools, and incorporating online resources into the curriculum will equip students with the skills necessary to participate in the digital economy.

Collaboration with the Private Sector and NGOs: The Government should foster partnerships with private sector organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to supplement the efforts to reform the Nigerian education system. These partnerships can bring expertise, funding, and innovative ideas to support educational initiatives, infrastructure development, teacher training, and digital literacy programs.

CONCLUSIONS

Before independence, Nigeria's education reforms focused on reducing illiteracy by encouraging schooling. Authorities implemented the NPE and UBE to provide free and compulsory education for Nigerians. Yet, Nigeria still ranks among the highest in the number of out-of-school children, implying that the challenge confronting the educational sector does not lie in the development of reforms but in the successful implementation of policies.

The country still battles the same challenge in its education sector as before obtaining independence, which is baffling considering the several reforms/policies put in place to address these issues. It is a clear indication that authorities did not implement certain factors to ensure the suc-

cess of these reforms. The author [23] noted that authorities should urgently consider the complete overhaul of the education system and not restrict it to the educational sector but extend it to the nation. Considering the significance of education towards the development of a thriving country, authorities should consider the following recommendation as a way forward in the educational sector:

Before implementing policies, authorities should conduct adequate planning, considering they often implement most education reforms quickly. Consequently, under-budgeting, lack of updated statistical records, and poor infrastructural development persist through the significant educational reforms in Nigeria. Teachers should be part of decision-making in educational reforms and curricula planning, considering that the onus of practical implementation of policies/systems also rests on their shoulders.

Authorities should conduct more sensitization programs to enable teachers and parents to understand educational policy changes and the significance of such changes. The government should increase its educational budget to at least match the 26% benchmark recommended by UNESCO. Government authorities should create platforms to enable partnerships between the government and private sectors to fund public schools.

The government should ensure investment in education facilities such as ICT, internet connection, modern laboratories, workshops, instructional materials, and other infrastructures to keep up with the continuous trend in education and further close the gap between the Educational system in Nigeria and other developed nations of the world.

Authorities should increase teachers' salaries and other remunerations to ensure the teaching profession attracts the best brains. In addition, the government should invest in teacher training institutions to ensure the development of quality teachers.

Authorities should continuously audit UBEC, SUBEB, and LGEA educational expenditures to ensure transparency, accountability, and effective resource management,

The Nigerian education system needs comprehensive reform to meet its students' current and future challenges. By addressing issues relating to the curriculum, teacher quality, infrastructure, assessment methods, and partnerships with the private sector and NGOs, a reformed education system can better equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Implementing these strategic reforms will be crucial to building a solid educational foundation for Nigeria's socioeconomic development.

Thus, comprehensive reforms are imperative to overcome the Nigerian education system's challenges. By addressing issues of access, curriculum relevance, teaching standards, gender disparities, and digital literacy, Nigeria can develop an education system that nurtures well-rounded individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a globalized world. A reformed education system enhances individual opportunities and contributes to the nation's socioeconomic development. Therefore, policymakers, stakeholders, and the entire society must come together and work towards realizing this vision of educational Reform in Nigeria.

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