

Attaining a Lifelong and Equitable Literate Society: The Challenges of National Policies on Education for All

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Abstract

Evidence abounds on the fact that literacy and education are important for a developed State. Also, there are global records on the movement to a knowledge based economy rather than a resource based. Thus, globally efforts are being put in place to achieve a considerable percentage of literacy among citizens if not for all because a nation that refuses to place high premium on the education of her citizenry may be toying with her level of development. Nigeria is endowed with a rich culture and indigenous education but colonization disrupted the system she would have built upon to sustain her own philosophy. She is a signatory to policy documents on the attainment of Education for All (EFA). However, despite the institution of several policies on the promotion of literacy education from pre-independence till- date, Nigeria is still battling with a large population of illiterates especially, among its females; gender inequality and less development is evident in the society. This is a reflection of inadequate attention to lifelong learning opportunities for the citizenry. Policy formulation without adequate commitment towards development from all stakeholders also pervades the Nigerian society. This, question arise, will Universal Basic Education (UBE) thrive, especially within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) taking into cognizance, the past history and the present situation on the approach to enhancing lifelong and inclusive EFA in Nigeria? Can the Universal Basic Education enhance an equitable society which will create an enabling environment for an all-round oriented sustainable development with equal opportunities for all? More so, education is essential for societal development. This paper thus examine past education initiatives of the Nigerian government within the context of enhancing a lifelong well informed egalitarian society.

Keywords: Education for All, egalitarian society, lifelong learning, Nigerian culture, Sustainable Development Goals.

1. Introduction

Evidence abounds on the fact that literacy and education are important for a developed State. Also, there are global records on movement to a knowledge based economy rather than a resource based economy. Thus, globally efforts are being put in place to achieve a considerable percentage of literacy among citizens if not for all because a nation that refuses to place high premium on the education of her citizenry may be toying with her level of development.

Literacy has been identified as fluid, the reasons for viewing lifelong learning with a continuing lens. The world is no longer looking at literacy as an act of being able to read, write and compute but rather as various types which could be used to bridge identified lacuna in societies through an informed action. In fact this realisation brought about education for sustainability.

Although, Nigeria had her indigenous education, she is endowed with rich culture. Her pre-colonial education exhibits skill acquisition, oral numeracy, reading of signs especially weather signs, the inculcation of culture and moral values through the transmission of skills and knowledge from one generation to another throughout life and in an informal way. This can be likened to the present lifelong learning because it was a continuum which provided for the needs of people then. However, as a British colony, the sustainability of indigenous education in the nation was tempered with thereby disrupting sustainable living of the people as an independent, healthy and happy people whereas, it has been established by global educators that education must be orientated to reflect a vision of sustainability linking economic wellbeing with cultural traditions and respect for earth and its resources {UNESCO, 2002}

Global movements and policy strategies towards achieving equality among all citizens were also enshrined in 'Education for All' (EFA) in which nations are to domesticate. Nigeria had hers domesticated as a signatory towards achieving EFA especially because patriarchal and inequality tendencies were reinforced by the British in Nigeria during colonization. Males were exposed to formal education earlier than females, where females received formal education, they were educated to become good wives; 'Victorian Style'.

Again, the formal education of the colonialists were less impactful as they do not provide for the philosophy, needs and aspiration of the Nigerian people nor tend to protect the indigenous culture of the people. At independence, she had to continue with the education legacy provided by the British which equally does not conform to a growing agricultural State for self-reliance and sustenance. However, Nigeria was exposed to formal education for the first time; it is believed that writing and literacy play increasingly important role in the mental and socio-economic lives of the people.

Nigeria had her first National Curriculum Conference on Education in 1969 in order to input philosophical relevance, the needs and aspiration of the people in the national curriculum, several editions of the National Policy on Education emerged. These include 1977, 1981 and the acclaimed 2004 model that changed from the British style to the American Structure called 6-3-3-4 system of Education (Okudo, 2013). It is a government tool of achieving the five national objectives of:

- A free and democratic society.
- A just and egalitarian society.
- A united strong and self-reliant nation.
- A great and dynamic economy.
- A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

These specifics are quite good and would have nailed the colonial sentiments and acculturation but the cog in the wheel of the manifestation was built in section 18 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and was stated as educational objectives of the government that:

- Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.
 - Government shall promote science and technology.
 - Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy and to this end shall, as and when practicable, provide.
 - Free compulsory and universal education;
 - Free secondary education;
 - Free universal education
 - Free adult literacy programme.
 - Government shall promote the learning of indigenous languages.
- (FGN, 1999)

Also, there are constraints towards achieving success in the 6-3-3-4 policy of education funding and the population of Nigerians particular constraints, there is cultural imbalance and diversity, multiplicity of languages and traditions, religious beliefs, inequality in educational provision, insecurity non ownership of the policy as a responsibility for all, family planning, death of qualified teachers to teach the new skills among others.

The Universal Basic Education act (UBE) was to complement the 6-3-3-4. It has early child care development and education. (ECCDE) arising from the fact that children should start school early and be fed in school to provide for good growth, development and education.

The vision is that after nine years of continuous education of the child, he or she should have acquired relevant skills and values to contribute his or her quota to national development (Etuk, Ering & Ajake 2012). It is however curious that 10.5m children in Nigeria are out of school while 40% of her adults are illiterates of which women and girls are prominent.

It is against this background that this study sought to do a review of Nigeria's basic education in implementing her EFA strategies towards achieving a lifelong literate and egalitarian society.

2. Literature review

2.1 The indigenous Nigerian education system

Obanya (2007) had a good coinage for indigenous Nigerian education when he exclaimed "The education that Africa lost"! Nigeria belongs to Africa, her indigenous education is very rich, it provided for the requirements of social cohesiveness and regeneration of the society, traditional Africa had a lot in common with education everywhere else but it lost this through colonization (Obanya,2007) corroborated by Sarumi (2011), he asserted that the Nigerian traditional system of education encompasses all aspects of social, cultural, political, economic, oral, intellectual, physical and spiritual orientations, entailing various forms of traditional judicial systems, community and co-operative affairs .

Indigenous education in Nigeria starts from childhood and continues to adulthood (Sarumi, 2011). According to Obanya (2007) indigenous education is mapped out to fall in line with the development stages of life. He further said that children receive primary socialisation; adolescents consolidate this and add life skills while adults consolidate the two. Organisation and social skills are added through communalism as such, special needs are taken care off without exclusion. It is erroneous to say that Africans do not have their own system of education. Omolewa (1981) submits that western education is predated by traditional education in Nigeria. Indigenous education is holistic and had personality development notion, emphasising learning rather than curriculum and examination based school.

2.2 Literacy and sustainable development for a lifelong educated Society

Educational reforms and government mandates have had significant effect on literacy thus contributing to its fluidity. Literacy has gone beyond skills in reading, writing and numeracy and as such we can talk of literacy from the perspective of attaining a lifelong learning society. When people are literate in climate concerns for application to their environment, or in performing their civic responsibilities, to operate a mobile phone or a computer, they can read prescriptions from health care professionals and apply literacy skills to their day to day activities throughout life; such a society is building its people for a lifelong task. According to Constance (2011) the Scottish Minister for skills and lifelong learning, she averred that “Strong literacies skills help people fulfill their potential, achieve their goals, and take advantage of opportunities. She reiterated that when individuals do well, so do their families, communities and employers. Similarly sustainability literacy believes that;

Education, including formal, public awareness and training should be recognized as a process by which human beings and societies can reach their fullest potential. Education is critical for achieving environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behaviour consistent with sustainable development and for effective participation in decision making. Both formal and non-formal Education are indispensable to changing people's attitudes so that they have the capacity to access and address their sustainable development concerns. P4

... Lifelong learning is essential to sustaining a civilized and cohesive society, in which people can develop as active citizens, where creativity is fostered and communities can be given practical support to overcome generations of disadvantage. (UNESCO, 2002 p.35)

Nigeria would have had it better if her indigenous education had been harnessed with those she diffused for breeding a sustainable egalitarian society. This clearly reflects that sustainable development is a means to an end because it is a continuum, a sustainability literate person must:

- Understand the need for change to a sustainable way of doing things individually and collectively;
- Have sufficient knowledge and skills to decide and act in a way that favours sustainable development; and
- Be able to recognize and reward other people's decisions and actions that favour sustainable development (Obe et al 2015 in Ayimoro, 2017 p26)

2.3 Literacy for an egalitarian Society

One wonders at the intricacies of inequality in societies especially, developing and low income economics and begin to sense that if parity and equality were allowed to thrive, these societies would have had it better. Literacy as a right based approach specifies that no one should be left out; the females, males and special need children and persons. An educated society is a developed and civilised society.

Girls and women lag behind boys and men in literacy skills. Two out of every three 110 million children in the world who do not attend school are girls (UNESCO, 2013/2014). Record has it that 10.5m Nigerian children are out of school while forty percent of Nigerian adults are illiterates where women are a larger percentage (Ayimoro and UNICEF, 2017). Insecurity and flood in the northern part of the country has aggravated the incidence of accessibility to basic education in Nigeria recently. Boko Haram insurgents, religious intolerance and conflicts generally are factors to be dealt with to enhance accessibility.

The foot print of colonialism is still evident in Nigeria. Females in the northern and rural part of the country are highly affected while males in the east prefer to trade than go to school, courses of study at the higher level in Nigeria is a big issue as few females venture into courses like engineering, architecture and sciences generally. This has placed women in disapproportionate positions in decision-making spheres. Policies that affect women and families are largely made by men in Senate and House of Representatives. Only few women are involved in politics in Nigeria where women aspirants vie for positions, finance and female representation in politics relegate their coming up as party candidates.

2.4 The Nigerian literacy history and education laws

The relevance of the past cannot be underestimated in development discourse. Nigeria went through literacy historical reminiscence since the 19th century although, records had it that the art of reading and writing was brought by Muslim traders and teachers to the northern parts of Nigeria in the 11th century and by the Portuguese traders to the southern parts in the 15th century (Sarumi, 2011).

Between 1842 and 1882, there was intense missionary activities and the expansion of formal education in the south to enhance conversion of Christian adherents. Also, with the second world war of 1945, colonial administration had to embark on an aggressive mass literacy campaign to enable African troops understand the logistics of war which is disseminated through English Language (Sarumi, 2011). These soldiers returned to African as literates.

Also, there is Education Ordinance of 1882-1884 known as West African Ordinance already in use by other British West Africa territories (Ayeerun, 2018). The Ordinance took roots from the British Act of 1884, providing a general board of education for settling Lagos, Nigeria with the setting up of general board of education on the establishment of government schools, conditions for granting certificates to teachers and eligibility of government school to grant – in- aid, the inspectorate for schools and the establishment of two types of schools namely ‘‘Government Primary Schools’’ and ‘‘Assisted Primary Schools’’ to be established and maintained solely by government the assisted school is to be established by mission and communities but shall be financially assisted by the government. (Ayeerun, 2018p.33-34)

The 1887 Education Ordinance was the first Nigerian Education ordinance including a board of education to be established for Lagos colony consisting of Governor as Chairman, members of House of Legislature and four people nominated by the Governor. The board shall assist schools with grants and award scholarship to pupils. Also, the board shall fix conditions for the distribution of grants to schools for excellence.

The 1908 Education Ordinance was as a result of merging of the colonies of Lagos and southern Nigeria in 1906 (Abari & Shonubi, 2003). The provisions of the ordinance include that there should be a department of Education in the colony, a Director of Education in the colony reporting directly to the Governor of Education matters only and the Superintendent of schools.

The 1926 Ordinance spelt out the order and direction to the development of Nigerian Education. It gave recognition to the standardisation and professionalisations of teaching as a job (Ayeerun, 2018). It emphasized registration of teachers, only registered teachers should be allowed to teach in schools, the regulation of minimum pay for teachers in assisted schools among others.

The 1948 Ordinance gave recognition to regionalisation and decentralisation of education in Nigerian while the 1952 Acts reflected the socio-political aspirations of the nation. This also allowed each region to develop education according to its values and needs. This is one of the reasons for the lacuna between the literacy gap in the North and the South.

In 1969, Nigeria had her first National Curriculum Conference on Education to make the Curriculum relevant which led to several editions of the National Policy on Education (NPE). The versions include 1977, 1981, 2004 and 2013.

In order to correct the imbalance of the education of the colonialists, Nigeria took a bold step by correcting the education policy to meet the needs and aspirations of her people and promote the philosophy of the society. The NPE is thus a government tool to achieving national objectives of:

- A free and democratic society.
- A just and egalitarian society.
- A united, strong and self-reliant nation.
- As great and dynamic economy and
- A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.
- Consequently, instructions at levels of education were set towards inculcating these values. They are
- Respect for the worth and dignity of individuals.
- Faith in man’s ability to make rational decisions.
- Moral and spiritual values in interpersonal and human relations.
- Shared responsibility for the common good of society.
- Respect for the dignity of labour, and
- Promotion of the emotional and psychological health of all children.
- This paper wishes to base its argument on the nine years of basic education to achieving literacy for all.

2.5 Nigeria is a signatory to

- The Jomtien (1990) Declaration for Basic Education for All.
- The New Delhi (1991) Declaration on E-9 countries for a massive reduction of illiteracy within the shortest possible time-span.
- The Ouagadougou (1992) Pan-African Declaration on the education of girls and women.
- The Amman Re-affirmation (1995) calling for the implementation of the Jomtien recommendations of Education For All.
- The Organisation of African Unity Decade of Education for Africa (1997, 2006) on Inter-African Cooperation on Education, with a strong emphasis on the vigorous pursuit of basic education.
- The Child Rights Law, 2003.
- Action on Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, 2000.

2.6 Steps to redeeming her commitment on Literacy for All include

- The nine year compulsory primary and junior secondary education.
- Literacy and adult education
- Science and vocational training. (FGN, 2000)
- It is doing this through formal and non-formal measures, public enlightenment, community mobilization, the enactment of necessary legislation, training of teachers, implementation of school-based health (Focusing Resources on Effective School Health, 2000).
- Also, Non-Governmental Organisations like Rochas Foundation, University Village (UNIVA) of the University of Ibadan, religious organisations like the Catholic mission are not left out in promoting Literacy for All (Sarumi, 2006).

In 2004, the Nigerian Education system changed its structure from the British model to the American style. This gave birth to the acclaimed 6-3-3-4 system of education. It provides for six years of primary education, followed by an unbreaking three years of junior secondary, three years of senior secondary and four years of University. The 6-3-3-4 system had the objective of enhancing acquisition of skills, appreciation of the dignity of labour, promoting literacy, manpower development, scientific and technology advancement. Its objectives are to:

- Universalise access to basic education;
- Engender a conducive learning environment; and
- Eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria within the shortest possible time. (NPE, 2004)

The 2004 policy has an outstanding feature of nine years of compulsory basic education for the Nigerian child which is the Universal Basic Education (UBE). This study is based on assessing the basic education for achieving an egalitarian society.

2.7 The Universal Basic Education Act (UBE)

The UBE of 2004 covers Early Child Care Development Education (ECCDE) of the child, six years of primary school and three years of Junior Secondary School. It specifies that

- It is imperative that school age children must be in school and that this must be the responsibility of all (Ayimoro, 2017).
- There must be one hundred percent transition to the Junior Secondary at the completion of six years primary education.
- Completers of basic education must possess literacy, numeracy and basic life skills as well as ethical, moral and civic values.
- All teachers in basic education must possess a minimum of the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE).
- A review of basic education curriculum to conform to the reform agenda.
- Achievement of one hundred percent awareness on HIV/AIDs in schools.
- Establishment of an effective institutional framework for monitoring learning and teaching.
- Active involvement in and participation and eventual ownership of schools by local communities. (Ebuk, Ering & Ajake, 2012)

2.8 Challenges to implementing the National Policy on Education

The acclaimed NPE of 2004 would have been a huge turn around in the socio-economic and political sphere of the country because it captured the needs, aspiration and philosophy of the people but for defects in its planning and implementation, lacking in political will, monitoring and evaluation. For every programme planning is money and

commitment. The government played lip service to financing educational policies in Nigeria. Although, government invested heavily in education during the 1960 to 1970 decade of the oil boom as there was rapid expansion of education and facilities in Nigerian education institutions then. In fact, facilities and curriculum were at par with global practices at the period but the economic crisis of the 1980s, the Structural Adjustment Programmes, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank reduction in public investment in education policies all did a big dent on the Nigerian education (Eisemon, 1980; Babalola et al, 1990; Igbuzor, 2006 in Esere, 2015).

UNESCO recommended twenty-six percent of the nation's budgetary allocation to education but, evidence revealed that education in all sectors has been underfunded in Nigeria. Right now the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is on strike throughout the nation because of poor funding of education in Nigeria. Below is the resources allocated to education for the last ten years.

Nigeria's Educational Budgetary Allocation For the Past Ten (10) Years

FG Budgetary allocation to education (2009-2018)			
Year	Budget	Educ Allocation	% of budget
2009	3.049 trn	N221.19 bn	7.25
2010	5.160 trn	N249.09 bn	4.83
2011	4.972 trn	N306.3 bn	6.16
2012	4.877 trn	N400.15 bn	8.20
2013	4.987 trn	N426.53 bn	8.55
2014	4.962 trn	N493 bn	9.94
2015	5.068 trn	N392.2 bn	7.74
2016	6.061 trn	N369.6 bn	6.10
2017	7.444 trn	N550 bn	7.38
2018	8.612 trn	N605.8 bn	7.03
Total	55.19 trn	N3.90	7.07

□ Source: (Ndujihe, 2018 p.1).

The field survey conducted to centres of basic education in Ondo, Oyo and Kogi states revealed that a good proportion of pupils learn under un conducive environment. The buildings are dilapidated, some buildings are just being erected through the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), teachers have no spaces and rooms to sit, basic infrastructural facilities are lacking. For instance, free textbooks were given to few pupils only in subjects known as 'core' that is, English Language, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science. Pupils have to share the textbooks. The teachers said they have to adopt coping strategies of asking pupils in the same streets to read together and do assignments.

A strategy of the UBE is ECCDE where pupils less than six years are expected to be in school for easy and onward transmission to the primary school. All pupils are to be fed and given health care facilities in school. During the survey, the researcher was made to realise that not all schools covered in Ondo State have such facility. Only pupils in primary four to six are fed by the Federal Government. The state is expected to take care of children less than six years of age and primary one to three pupils. These are yet to benefit from the free feeding programme. How do you ensure quality and equality education like this? The picture below is a testimony to this



Again, the responsibility of all towards achieving literacy for all is lacking. People do not see it as their civic responsibility of making sure that all age school children are actually in school. Poverty is so evident that some children are bread winners of their household. They hawk products during school period, while the security agents and citizens go about their normal businesses rather than reporting the situation to the appropriate quarters.

Also, the policy did not take into consideration the training of man power in its planning. The teachers do not have the technological skills for some of the subjects in the policy. For instance, woodwork, teaching of the three main languages – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba and other minority languages. Nigeria is densely populated; it has multiplicity of languages and dialects. The right textbook for the languages are also not available, the planners did not cater for cultural imbalance of the nation and the difference in religious belief. Immigrants seize this as an opportunity to cause conflict especially because of the porosity of Nigeria's borders.

The level of insecurity in the northern and eastern parts of Nigeria is equally a factor causing disruption in school environment and attendance. Children whose parents are displaced or have died through insurgency and tribal conflicts are having difficulties in accessing education in internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps.

There is inequality in educational provisions in the country. There are traditional schools, private nursery and primary schools, model and mega schools. The traditional schools are government funded and equipped while the model, mega and private schools are better equipped, because the fees paid are beyond the reach of the masses.

Again, the teachers in the public basic school are in a group of three. The first group comprises of trained teachers traditionally posted to the school, the second are those who had an in-training service but were staff of Local Government Areas. They were recruited back to schools during verification of certificates in the state, while the third group is known as N Power Federal Government Volunteers also who are paid directly by the Federal Government. The Head teachers of these schools said they do not have a good grip of the latter two groups (Former Local Government workers posted to schools and N Power groups). They noted that these groups come to school when they want. This is an account of inconsistencies in policies and lack of proper monitoring.

There is no adequate provision for a good learning atmosphere or incentives for enhancing better enrolment and sustenance of the Girl Child in Schools. Pupils with special needs education in the form of gifted and handicapped are not well taken care of. The facilities to cater for them are lacking.

There is little or no provision at all for adult and non-formal education where rural communities would have benefited in lifelong learning processes. Majority of early school leavers drop-out completely thereby adding to the percentage of illiterate adults. Lifelong learning centres would have served as centres to teach civic education and other identified educational needs of the nation from time to time.

3. Conclusion

It is important to note that an educated society breeds a healthy, civil and developed state. As such, government, individuals, international donor agencies and all stakeholders need to prioritise educational issues in Nigeria as a means of enhancing global peace.

The Way Forward

- Nigerians Right to Education is procured in the 1999 Constitution but remains a fallacy.
- First, Education for All should be the responsibility of all, by ensuring that all children of school age stay in school.
- There should be improvement on budgetary allocation to education.
- There is need to improve on funding and quality of Adult literacy programmes conducted in various locations of the country.
- Finance and resources meant for basic education, should be well utilised, rather than serving as conduit pipes to corrupt officials.
- Government need to take security and religious issues seriously in Nigeria.
- Universal Primary Education should be free indeed for all citizens of Nigeria.
- Government should design its policy to ensure that educational opportunities at all levels are equal.
- The promotion of Science and Technology should start from the basic level.
- EFA cannot be achieved without improvement in quality of basic education in Nigeria, therefore policies that provide for this type of education, should be enacted.
- There should be provision of trained teachers and facilitators.
- Improved working conditions should be made available for teachers to serve as motivation.
- Learning materials used in the classrooms should be void of difficulty to read.
- Well-structured facilities should be made available for the learning process to take place.

- Health care facilities should be functional around areas where schools are located

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