

# COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND PROBLEMS OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

**Ogoke, Chinedu**

Department of English and Communication Studies

Federal University Otuoke

+2348081308100 ezudike@hotmail.com

## **Abstract**

The Corona virus pandemic made it easy for people to understand how the educational sector in Nigeria has failed the country. It reflected intensely the defective educational system established by the colonialists. The country ought to have relied on products of its education at different levels to keep the entire system from being overwhelmed by the problems that came with the virus. Instead, the country's relationship with other countries as sympathizers and philanthropists and a beggar nation and recipient was in open glare. From the education ministry to local administrations in the states, education institutions are badly run. Various authorities can only make guesses at student strength at various levels. This results in loss of resources as funds cannot be properly channeled. For all the time, commentators have been talking about the state of the educational system, there are still inadequate classrooms, laboratories, libraries, unqualified instructors or insufficient hands to teach students and reliance on an alien language for instruction. To a great measure, it is connected to the political structure laid by the colonialists. The Corona virus affords the country the opportunity to look deeper into the fault lines in the educational system as well as the flawed governance in the country. An opportunity is not only being missed, Nigeria has suffered a huge setback as a result. This is what informs this study. The aim is to make a special case for the educational system. Materials for the essay are sourced from books, journal articles and newspaper write ups.

**Key words:** Covid-19 Pandemic, *Education, Colonialists, Language, Corruption*

## **Introduction**

The progress of every nation rests on the foundation of the educational system. Nigeria does not have an education system the country can be proud of. Nigeria faced the same dilemma faced by countries that went through British colonization. The country is getting less than she should from the system because of incompatibility issues. Hopefully, if the country can design one that suits its cultural ways like the Japanese, Chinese and Indians (that draw from their cultures) the story will be different. An educational policy has to be unique, argues Kerr. It will be unlike other policies, as it is developed for institutions.

Policies must be used to achieve set objectives, and must pass the test of rationality. That way, they can deliver solid results. Policy formulation may be detached from its implementation. Certain realities may frustrate the implementation of an educational policy. A weak plan definitely leads to faulty implementation.

A good plan has to take into cognizance how suitable the plan is with the geographical area. Religious and ethnic norms of the place are factored in as well, just as political culture which is borrowed from Britain, then later the U.S., cannot be ignored. The plea is for the country to adjust the political arrangement in place to

provide a good atmosphere for educational as well as socio economical progress of the country (Okeke 1-5).

### **Colonial Educational Foundation**

Nigeria's educational foundation had been laid by Britain. The system failed. Its fault lines were highlighted at a National Curriculum Conference held in 1969. A resolution was taken then on a new national policy with a different focus. To build on that, the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERC) was instituted in 1973 under S.O. Adebayo. This was the prelude to the adoption of the national Policy on Education in 1977. A policy outlines measures to take in administering a plan. A good policy points to the area where the action will be executed. Problems of implementation have been the bane of educational policies. These policies determine the course the educational system will take. It is through education that young people take their place in society. Education gives young people the right of passage into being full citizens of a society, to be considered worthy of a society. Education empowers people. It affects them positively. It makes someone productive, to exercise his social duties, and elevates him or her intellectually (Balogun 6).

Implementation may suffer setback because of some reasons. One is wrong estimate of the amount of money required. In this case, the budget submitted may be inadequate for the project. It could be discovered that there was a miscalculation in the budget as unforeseen events like inflation and the cost of execution were not properly worked out, thus leading to

complications. A promise from a foreign donor may not be fulfilled, when that was to be the only source of funding. This can hurt project execution. Sometimes, there may not be data to work with. Government, definitely, must know whom it is planning for. It is important to work with near accurate figures to prevent disastrous outcomes. Also, information passed on for the implementation of a project must be clear and should be received intact. Any loss at the point of reception may have some consequences for the system (Balogun 6-7).

Using staff that lack requisite skills may ruin a good plan. Project coordinators or workers may not adhere strictly to commitment to the project or to time. Again, Nigeria's policy on education is shaped by points. One is to provide the conditions for a lawful and fair society. The second is a society that is founded on unity, existing among other nations as an independent global player, where the human rights of citizens are conditions for nationhood.

### **Introduction of Universal Primary Education**

In 1976, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) was introduced. It was replaced in 1999 by the Universal Basic Education (UBE). It is argued that actual replacement did not take place as the faults of the UPE were all visible in the UBE. One year after the UPE became operational, it was discovered that the figures put out as estimated number of primary school children was wrong. 33 million children, 700,000 more than the projected 2.3, million were listed for enrolment. To meet its goal, the government had the difficult

task of doubling its expenditure on the scheme. The program was dogged by such discrepancies throughout its five-year life span. For the UPE to succeed, Onabamiro and Nwankwo make some suggestions. The suggestions include having a satisfactory data on the numbers of school age children. There should be a commensurate number of buildings for learning. There should also be proper funding. The program must be well advertized This is however not possible due to ethnicity (Okereoma 4-5).

The federal government neglected these points, making the scheme to not produce the desired results. This was how a similar scheme with a different name emerged. Even the UBE suffered from lack of personnel with minimum qualification as teachers. It missed its target due to poor funding. The possibility in learning in comfortable spaces was not realized. Instructional materials were not available. The teachers were unenthusiastic about their jobs due to poor remuneration. Criticisms of the 3-3 system have been unceasing. Opinions are divided about it. It did not give people much hope, a development that has not changed. After 22 years in practice, a lot of observers say it belongs to the same ineffective scheme of school programs. Not only did it come with a lot of unrealizable goals, this postcolonial state has to live with a failed secondary education system (Nagziger 505-510).

### **Disappointing Non-Availability of Teachers**

In Rivers state of Nigeria, for instance, the idea is hampered by disappointing non availability of teachers, especially in

vocational areas. Workshops are almost non-existent in a lot of instances. It is the same story with laboratories and libraries. Without funding, such a program is meaningless, which is the experience in the state. Many people who have money feel that Nigerian universities cannot give their children the type of education the children need. They therefore spend money to send their children to Europe, USA and even Benin Republic. There are many reasons why Nigeria lags behind these countries in providing good education for its citizens. A country with a history of unstable political climate spanning several decades cannot develop a sound educational system. Also, not much can be accomplished with the European colonizers' language in an African setting. A country needs a good economy to support a desired education standard. Nigeria is plagued by corruption and ethnic problems. Many Nigerian citizens continue to live on less than a dollar a day. The number of years Nigeria has spent under military leaders against the 21 under non-military rulers really harmed the country (Karsten 111, Dorsinville 62). The military leaders were engaged in civil rule that was outside their calling. They had to be assertive, even as they attended to their private affairs. A good example is that of Olusegun Obasanjo, who in 1998 had just answered to treason charges under SanI Abacha, and was offered the civilian presidency by Abdulsalami Abubakar, following Sani Abacha's death and Abubakar's brief tenure. Obasanjo left the education system in a worse state than he met it (Osayande 143-146).

In Nigeria, politically, how things should be done did not really mean

anything to the leaders. There is hardly anything that holds the country together. The different ethnic groups have different ideas how the country should be run. They compete on how to outsmart one another and draw from the country's oil resources. Political power plays a big role here, as it connects them with the resources and the military might to weaken others. Little room is left for imaginative ideas. The government has its finger on the trigger, breaking the law at will. Governing is viewed through ethnic eyes. It threatens the foundation of the country and the educational system. The government has chosen the path of chaos. The president makes comments that are at variance with a democratic system. The uncertainty in the country is deep. People are less hopeful than they were in the past, even when there has never been ease. Therefore, education is becoming less and less important in the country (Ejimofofor 21).

### **Corruption**

The scale of the problems in Nigeria during the Covid-19 pandemic made the weaknesses in the educational system all too glaring. The situation will only get worse from hence. The education plans in the past were exercises in futility. The people placed at various points depart from their briefs. They see public responsibility as personal business. What is left after they must have helped themselves to the public funds are not sufficient to execute projects or to run the schools. Only problems are harvested as a result. Remedying the situation requires the commitment of a concerned government (Bracking 13, Rock 58).

The level of corruption in Nigeria compounds the situation. Corruption is so much in Nigeria that the story makes news all over the world. Transparency International (TI) lists Nigeria third in the world's 2003 world's corruption index. Due to corruption, good drinking water, electricity supply, housing, good roads, education and food that citizens around the world enjoy, are denied majority of the Nigerian people. The country's wealth is used to maintain people who hold state power. Corruption is a burden to the education system. It is customary to take care of the interest of concerned law makers before a bill on education or a budget can be passed. The law makers can delay or stop a bill or a budget from getting to the floor of the house if their interest or demand is not met or made. The executive may not be disposed to releasing money for relevant education needs after the budget had sailed through the national assembly. The money released to schools and agencies are at the risk of falling into the hands of people who will likely not properly account for it, as some officials keep part of the money to themselves (A.J. Brown and Finn Heinrich 285).

Experts generally agree that the atmosphere in the democratic setting has to be hostile to the education system. For a country to show willingness to progress, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) recommends that 26% of the country's budget should be spent on education. In Nigeria, the allocation has dropped to 6% from the 13% education got under the military regimes. The decline started in 1999 under the Obasanjo government. Obasanjo himself spoke of the excesses of

parliamentarians when, in 2005, he informed the nation how the minister of education delivered the sum of N55 million to some members of the National Assembly to bribe them to approve an education budget. If the minister had defied the Senate committee on education, that aspect of the bill would have been removed or not included in that year's budget. This was how a step was taken to provide education for the children of the country. It is termed a routine practice. The minister, Mr. Osuji, defended it as goodwill present so that a certain arrangement would also apply to education as requested. Many parents had stopped sending their children to school, with less than 20% of children getting enrolled in schools. It is much lower for entrance into tertiary institutions (Okereoma 7).

### **Education and Government Commitment**

Leaders of industry, technology and administration are produced by schools. Schools prepare them for their various roles. A good educational system requires government's commitment. A people cannot continue to be dishonest when it comes to the education of the young ones and expect any form of growth. The teachers must be fit to carry out their responsibilities. All the obstacles in their way must be removed. Government must desist from acting as a body who wants to defeat and annihilate an army. Safe for natural occurrences like the Covid-19 pandemic, doors of tertiary institutions must be open at the appropriate time. The teaching environment must be conducive. The state must develop a system that rises to global challenges. The situation

whereby one foreign donor after another comes to Nigeria to hand over checks to Nigerian leaders must stop. It is important that the time spent in unionism in various fields be channeled fruitfully.

Government must be credible during labor negotiations. The government should not go into meetings with the intention of deceiving the other party. It must not ignore the protestations of lecturers. The central government cannot continue doing the work of regional governments, which is running schools at some levels. It should slowly disengage itself from numerous responsibilities. It is cheating its citizens by using federalist facilities like a Senate and House of Representatives, while the facilities do not count in its calculations. The system being practised is a unitary system disguised as a federal system. If the states or regions can get back all that they have lost to the center, various hurdles that impede growth will be removed. A restructuring of the political system would lead to restructuring of the education system (Adavbiele 134-136).

The country's constitution states that no child shall be less favored than another child in the country. This is not true. Where there is minimal education, ignorance thrives. What is found to be missing in the pandemic is the presence of science and technology. If a country finds itself where it has to rely mostly on foreign ventilators, PPE, and test kits in a crisis situation like the present one, the country is doomed. Nigeria has almost been helpless. When many economies had started running, the Nigerian crude oil was on the high seas waiting for buyers. The country had difficulty producing what it

needs to fight the pandemic, not to talk of meeting some of its demands from local sources or even exporting technical know-how to generate income. Goods flowed in while none flowed out of the country. Germany was pleased by its recovery from the pandemic while Nigeria was being touted as a failed nation. It has failed as much as how it has neglected its education. This reinforces the argument that lecturers in Nigeria and products of Nigerian universities, even without the ASUU strike, could not have changed the situation or recorded remarkable progress (Anugwom 145).

Nigeria got her first university, the University College Ibadan in November, 1948. It was done by affiliation to the University College London, hence the name. The medical school did not join the university in dropping the word 'college' in its name. British lecturers, who constituted majority of the teaching staff, remained as long as it was conducive. With 75% European lecturers, the Chemistry Department embodied the foreign presence the university felt. The advancement noticed was tied to good funding the university enjoyed. The quality of education could be noticed as the university was rated among the 100 best universities in the world. Decay set in when the military became in charge of the affairs of the country. Money spent on universities dwindled by the day. The military almost abandoned the old universities to make arrangements for new ones. Universities were strewn all over the country. It robbed the old ones of quality teaching and research. This was how the lean resources were shared between the old and the new universities.

Government's reluctance to fund education showed in the 7.8% allocation. It shrunk so low that lecturers, in 1978, set up ASUU, which was meant to enable the lecturers speak up about remunerations. ASUU has taken tough stances that have prevented the universities from crumbling completely (Anugwom 145-150).

ASUU first pulled lecturers from classrooms in 1988, when it pressed for wage increase and the autonomy of universities. 18 strikes have followed since then. The government had been ignoring calls to implement the 2009 agreement government signed with ASUU. With the manner the government views education, she has always appointed incompetent ministers of education and labor. Nigeria has had a miserable record in terms of technological advancement. The number of skilled workers in the country is a source of worry. A country should be able to compete favorably with other countries around the world (Ryan 14).

One Goodluck Jonathan put the universities in further danger when he opted for further propagation of universities instead of adequately funding the existing ones. He founded nine universities that were not needed. His government released N13.5 billion or 31 million pounds for their commencement, believing they could produce the same results observed elsewhere in the world. The amount was the type of money the labs at the University of Ibadan would need to make them worthy research centers, to compete with the best in the world. At a time when lecturers were on strike because of government's disinterest in financing existing universities, the Buhari government was setting up four

new federal universities. The government had no difficulty providing N18 billion for one of the universities, National Transport University in Daura. There is the Nigerian Military University, Biu, Air Force University Bauchi and Nigerian Maritime University. Obasanjo and his then deputy Abubakar Atiku and many government officials own private universities (Okereoma 7).

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

Nigeria must stop shying away from modern methods of keeping records. Planning for a group of people in this case, students, a state needs to work with accurate data. If it works with the wrong figures, problems like the present one will persist. The various governments have chosen ethnic and religious considerations over education and the welfare of the school children. The governments cannot be hesitant about making adequate provisions for the educational sector. The governments cannot pretend to be funding education when their actions force lecturers and teachers to seek other means of supporting themselves. If the authorities love the country, then the laboratories and libraries will be well equipped. If they want to secure the lives of their children and the lives of children of their citizens, then they must take all measures necessary to provide basic education for every child in the country. It must adhere to what is stated in the constitution it swore to uphold. Everywhere else Nigerian government officials turn to, education is being given the desired attention. Sending their children overseas for studies is a phase that will come and go, but the conditions in the country will persist.

#### **References**

- Adavbiele, J.A. "Implications of Incessant Strike Actions on the Implementation of Technical Education Programme in Nigeria." *Journal of Education and Practice*, vol. 6, no. 8, 2015, 134-138.
- Anugwom, Edlyne. "Cogs in the Wheel: Trade Unionism, Government, and the Crisis in Tertiary Education in Nigerias" *African Studies Review*. vol. 45. No. 2, Sep. 2002, pp. 141-155.
- Aubiya, Miguel St., Alvaro Pina, Filomena Gacia, and Joana Pais. Study on the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Public Spending on Tertiary Education: Third Report (second draft). Belgium: Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs Publications, ISEG – Technical University of Lisbon, December, 2008.
- Azoona, Ginette, Rachel Chute, Farah Dib, Loveena Dookhony, Heather Klein, Daniel Loyacano-Perl, Dominic Randazzo and Vanessa Reilly. *Harvesting the Future: The Case for Tertiary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*, June 2008, The Maxwell School of Syracuse University.
- Balogun, T. A. "The National Curriculum Conference in Nigeria, 8-12 September, 1969." *West African Journal of Education*. vol. 14, no. 1, 1970, pp. 5-8.
- Bolaji, Dele. *Intention to Action: Overcoming Barriers to Universal Basic Education Policy Implementation in Nigeria*. Thesis, Edith Cowen Iniversity, 2014.

- Bracking, Sarah. *Corruption and Development: The Anti Corruption Crusades. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan*, 2007.
- Bridges, Davis and MacLaughlin. *Education and the Market Place. Washington D.C.: The Falmer Press*, 1994.
- Brown, A. J. and Finn Heinrich. "National Integrity Systems—An Evolving Approach to anti-Corruption Policy Evaluation." *Crime, Law and Social Change*. 68, Sep. 2017, pp. 283-292.
- Dorsinville, Max. "Senghor or the Song of Exile." R. Smith 62-73.
- Drayton, Richard and Dubow, Saul. *Nigeria's University Age: Reframing Decolonisation and Development. Oxford: Palgrave Macmillan*, 2017.
- Lumby, Jacky and Coleman Marianne. *Leadership and Theory: Challenging Theory and Practice in Education. New Delhi: Sage Publications*, 2007.
- Hanne, Michael ed. *Creativity in Exile. Amsterdam: Rodopi*, 2004.
- Hon-Chan, Chai. *Education and Nation-building in Plural Societies: The West Malaysian Experience. Development Studies Centre, Monograph nr. 6, Canberra*, 1977.
- Karsten, Peter. "American Literary Exiles: The Escape from Anguish." Hanne 107-115.
- Mattheou, Dimitris. *Changing Educational Landscapes: Educational Policies, Schooling Systems and Higher Education= a Comparative Perspective. New York: Springer*, 2010.
- Nagziger, E. Wayne. "The Political Economy of Disintegration in Nigeria." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. vol. 11, no. 4, Dec. 1973. pp. 505-536
- Odiaka, Timothy. *ASUU Strike: An Endless Phenomenon*, April 23, 2020
- Okeke, Remi Chukwudi. "Political Culture, Democracy and Development in Nigeria. Science Arena Publications Specialty Journal of Politics and Law." vol, 2, no. 4, 2017, pp. 1-9.
- Okeoroma, N.S. *Educational Policies and Problems of Implementation in Nigeria \Rivers State University of Science and Technology Nigeria*
- Oketch, Moses, Tristan McCowan and Rebecca Schendel. *The Impact of Tertiary Education on Development, 2014 Institute of Education University of London, Education Rigorous Literature Review*,
- Osayande, Emmanuel. "A Tortuous Trajectory: Nigerian Foreign Policy under Military Rule, 1985-1999." *African Research Review, an International Multidisciplinary Journal*. vol. 14, no 1, Jan 2020. pp. 143-154.
- Palmer, Parker J. & Arthur Zajonc. *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call To Renewal; Transforming the Academy Through Collegial Conversations. San Francisco: Jossey Bass*, 2010.
- Peters, Michael A., Sharon Rider, Mats Hyvonen and Tina Besley eds. *Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity & Higher Education. Singapore: Springer*, 2018.
- Philippus Marthinus Uys. *Towards The Virtual Class: Key Management Issues in Tertiary Education. Victoria University of Wellington*, 2000.

- Thesis, Rock, Michael T. "Corruption and Democracy." *The Journal of Development Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1, Dec. 2008, pp. 55-75.
- Salmi, Jamil Tertiary Education and the Sustainable Development Goals: In Search of a Viable Funding Model. Prepared for the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity. The Education Commission, 2016,
- Smith, Lawton Helen. Universities, Innovation and the Economy. New York: Routledge, 2006. Smith, Roland, ed. *Exile and Tradition: Studies in African and Caribbean Literature*. London: Longman, 1976.
- Strathdee, Craig Robert. Tertiary Education in the 21st Century: Economic Change and Social Networks. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Urhie, S. Ese. Public Education Expenditure and Economic Growth in Nigeria: 1970-2010. Covenant University, Thesis, 2013.
- Wissema, J.G.. Towards the Third Generation University Transition. Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2009.