



Transforming Secondary Education in Nigeria: Problems, Prospects and the Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

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Secondary education is the education after primary education, but before tertiary education. It improves on primary education and serves as a basis upon which tertiary education is built. Because of the sensitivity of this phase of education being given within the formative years of the child, it is deserving of special attention by all stakeholders in the sector. With the adoption of analysis of reports and articles on secondary education in Nigeria, the paper submits that secondary education in Nigeria is in dire need of transformation if it would continue to maintain its importance in both the educational and national development of the country. Findings showed that the secondary phase of education is faced with several problems which have negatively impacted on its purpose. These include poor funding, low staff motivation, poor remuneration of staff, poor quality assurance, lack of basic and requisite personnel and poor quality control. Prospects for transformation of the sub-sector include increasing funding by both state and federal governments, regular and proffer supervision of schools, ensuring capacity building of staff and adequate staff motivation.

Keywords:

Secondary education, transformation, problems, prospects and Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Secondary education is critical to the education of a child, being the bridge between primary and tertiary education. It is even more critical to the development of the child as it is given to the child at his or her formative period that is between ages 12 to 18. An education at this critical period shapes the adulthood of every child. It provides the child with an opportunity to acquire additional knowledge, skills and traits beyond the primary level. Ige (2013) opines that a major factor that necessitates the acquisition of secondary education in Nigeria is that the education being provided at the primary level is proving to be insufficient for a child to acquire permanent literacy, communicative and numeracy skills expected from him/her at the end of the training. According to Adesina (1997) cited in Ige (2013) secondary education is aged in Nigeria, having developed alongside western education which was introduced by the Christian missionaries in 1842.

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At the onset, only primary education received a boost from the Christian missionaries because it was used as avenue to woo the children into Christianity. Government's attention to secondary education started some decades after the development of primary education, particularly when the need for outputs of primary schools to further their education secondary schools became paramount. Adesina (1997) as cited by Ige (2013) reports that the first secondary school (CMS Grammar School, Bariga, Lagos) was established in 1857, but it was not until 1909 when the colonial government decided to complement the effort of the missionaries by establishing Kings College, Lagos. Throughout the period of the colonial governments in Nigeria, there were few secondary schools to provide secondary education. However, upon independence in 1960, the number of secondary schools began to grow. From 1,227 in 1960, secondary schools particularly Senior Secondary Schools has grown to 27,042 in 2018, while enrolment that stood at 168,309 of Senior Secondary Students in 1960 has grown to 5.2 million in the 2018/2019 session. (Sasu, 2022).

The major objective of secondary education is to develop a child beyond the primary level because it is obvious that primary education is insufficient for a child to acquire literacy, numeracy and communication skills which would enable him operate maximally at higher level (Ige, 2011,

Yusuf, 2009). Hence, the paper sought to ascertain the problems and problems of secondary education with a view to proffering solutions in transforming the level in Nigeria.

CLASSIFICATIONS OF CONCEPTS

Education

There are several definitions and meanings of education and because it has growing qualities of a living organism, it is difficult to offer a definite or precise definition of the term. The Oxford English Dictionary defines education as “a process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools or colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills.” The concept continues to change with time, place and individual.

Education can also be seen or defined from different perspectives or professions or even societal needs. For example in politics, education is seen as an instrument for political enlightenment and emancipation. To the sociologist, education is seen as the most potent process of socialization of the people. Hence, Ugwu (1996) defined education as the process of helping an individual to live the fullest life he is capable of living. In the view of Swift (1969), education is the way the individual acquires the many moral and social capabilities demanded of him by the group into which he is born and within which he must function. This definition implies that education is all that goes on in the society, which involves teaching and learning. In the same vein, Fafunwa (1974) defines education as the aggregate of all the processes by which the child or young adult develops his abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour, which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. For him education implies a process of transmitting culture. Prior to Fafunwa, Nduka (1964) had defined education as the united concern of a people for the right upbringing of its children and improvement of its national life. From the above definitions, one summarize education as a process of developing a person mentally, physically, socially and spiritually so that the person can be useful to himself and others in the community which he lives. Education therefore involves acquisition of knowledge, skills attitudes, aptitudes, competences, ideals and culture.

Secondary Education

Secondary education as mentioned above is the education provided to the child after primary education and before tertiary education. It forms the bedrock or the foundation upon which tertiary education is built. In Nigeria, secondary education is divided into two phases which are the junior secondary phase and the senior secondary phase. The former is the first three years which form part of the basic education, while the later is the next three years which has wider scope than the junior secondary school phase (Ige, 2013).

The curriculum of the junior secondary is pre-vocational and academic in scope, core pre-vocational and

non-prevocational subjects are included in the curriculum. The core subjects here include: English Language, Mathematics, French and major Nigeria Language other than that of environment, Basic Science, Social Studies, Citizenship Education and Basic Technology. The prevocational subjects include; Agriculture Science, Business Studies, Home Economics, Local Crafts, Fine Arts, Computer Education and Music while the non-prevocational subjects are, Religious Knowledge, Physical and Health Education as well as Arabic.

Certification at the end of this phase depends on the performance of a student in Continuous Assessment (CA) and the result of Junior School Certificate Examination (JSCE) being coordinated by State Ministries of Education or Federal Ministry of Education (if owned by the Federal Government. A child with minimum number passes in the subjects in the curriculum including English and Mathematics qualifies to proceed to the Senior Secondary level.

The Senior Secondary level has wider scope than the junior secondary phase and aims at broadening the knowledge and skills of a student beyond the JS level and thus prepares him/ her for further education. It is both academic and vocational in scope. Certification at the end of this phase depends on the performance of a student in either or both secondary School Certificate of Education (SSCE) coordinated by West African Examination Council (WAEC) or National Examinations Councils (NECO) to qualify for admission into a tertiary institution, a student is required to obtain a minimum of five credit at two sittings including English Language and Mathematics.

The objectives of secondary education in Nigeria are derived from the recommendations of the 1997 seminar that culminated into what is today known as the National Policy on Education (usually referred to as NPE). These aims are as contained in section 4 subsection 18 of the Policy (FRN, 2004). They include:

- a. Provide an increasing number of primary school pupils with opportunity for education of a higher quality irrespective of sex, or social, religious and ethnic background.
- b. Diversify its curriculum to cater for difference in talents, opportunities and roles possessed by or open to students after their secondary school course.
- c. Equip students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology.
- d. Develop and project Nigerian culture, art and language as well as the world's heritage.
- e. Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, and appreciate those values specified under our broad national aims and lives as good citizens.
- f. Foster Nigerian unity with an emphasis on the common lines that unite us in our diversity.

- g. Inspire its students with a desire for achievement and self-improvement both at school and later in life.

Performance of Secondary Education in Nigeria

As noted above education at secondary school level is supposed to be the bedrock and the foundation towards wider knowledge in tertiary institutions. From the performance of the students in their external examinations, the state of the phase of education can be appraised, that is, whether one of its cardinal aims is being achieved. Poor academic performance has been observed in school subjects especially in English and Mathematics among secondary school students (Adesenowo, 2005). The two

subjects are the critical subjects as without them admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria becomes difficult inspite of passes in other subjects. So performance in them could be used to adjudge performance in the secondary level of education in Nigeria. Before 2016, performance in the two critical subjects had been abysmal and below average. Some people however have expressed doubt over the recent improvement in the rate of passes in the two subjects, believing that the students were marked up due to some sentiments like the COVID-19 lockdown and strikes (Ileyemi, 2021). See table below.

Performance of Secondary School Students WAEC examinations in English and Mathematics from 2007 – 2022

Year	No. Sat in (m)	No. Credits (m)	%with credits
2007	1.26	0.33	25.54
2008	1.37	0.19	13.76
2009	1.37	0.36	25.99
2010	1.35	0.34	24.98
2011	1.46	0.44	30.70
2012	1.67	0.64	38.81
2013	1.54	0.56	36.57
2014	1.69	0.53	31.28
2015	1.59	0.62	38.68
2016	1.55	0.88	52.97
2017	1.47	0.92	59.22
2018	1.57	0.78	49.98
2019	1.59	1.02	64.18
2020	1.54	1.02	65.24
2021	1.56	1.27	81.70
2022	1.60	1.22	76.37

Author’s compilation from various WAEC May/June results publications

Aremu (2002) stresses that academic failure is not only frustrating to the students and parents, its effects are equally grave on the society in terms of dearth of manpower in all aspects of the economy and politics. Garba (2012) acknowledges that secondary education has become a shadow of itself with far-reaching negative effects as manifested in low enrolment, shortage of quality staff, dearth of quality teachers and dilapidated infrastructures.

Garba (2012) goes further to report that quality of teaching staff in secondary schools has deteriorated over the years. According to him holders of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) are still the bulk of the teaching staff in secondary schools even though the recommendation is graduate holders. Some of the graduate teachers are not qualified (teaching without education and some are HND graduates). The proportion of the teaching force that is trained especially in science and technology is inadequate. This lack of qualified teachers has been reported as partly responsible for the dismal performance of candidates in public

examinations especially in English language and Mathematics.

Problems of Secondary Education in Nigeria.

In spite of the role of secondary education in national development as encapsulated in the National Policy in Education, Ajayi (2002) and Omoregie (2005) reported that it is riddled with crisis of various dimensions and magnitude, all of which combine to suggest that it is at a crossroads. Ige (2013) enumerated the challenges plaguing secondary education to be:

- i. **Inadequate fund.**

What affects other levels of education, that is, the primary and tertiary also affect the secondary level. Adequate funding is germane to effective implementation of the objectives of secondary education. According to Obe (2009), without adequate teaching, standard of education at any level shall be tantamount to a mirage or building castles in the air. Money is important in a school because it is used to construct buildings, purchase needed equipment, pay staff salaries and

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allowances, maintain the plants and keep the service going. In Nigeria, secondary education derives its major fund from the annual allocation of the budget to the education sector. Unfortunately, allocation to the education sector on which secondary education depends has been consistently low in spite of the strategic role of the country. budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria over the years have never met the UNESCO target of 26% or even the 20% for developing

counties. From 2010-2022 it was 4.83%, 6.16%, 8.20%, 8.55%, 9.94%, 7.74%, 6.10%, 7.38%, 7.03%, 7.03%, 6.5%, 15.6%, and 5.4% respectively (Taiwo, 2022). This is a far cry when compared to Ghana another West African country. Ghana education spending as a percentage of GDP for the period 2010-2018 was 20.7% in 2010, then 30.63%, 37.52%, 21.22%, 20.99%, 23.81%, 22.09%, 20.10% and 18.60% respectively.

Budgetary allocation to education in percentage of GDP for Nigeria and Ghana from 2010

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Nigeria	4.83	6.16	8.20	8.55	9.94	7.74	6.10	7.38	7.03	7.03	6.5	5.6	5.4
Ghana	20.70	30.63	37.52	21.22	20.99	23.81	22.09	20.10	18.60				

Author’s compilation

It is obvious from the above table that Ghana is doing better in education funding than Nigeria.

ii. **Inadequate and delay infrastructural facilities.**

School facilities are the material resources that facilitate effective teaching and learning in schools .Ige (2013) posited, they are things that enable a skillful teacher to achieve a level of instructional effectiveness that exceeds what is possible than more they are not provided. They include such items as building chairs, tables, libraries, laboratories, workshops and textbooks. Unfortunately, according to CBN (2010), there are inadequate infrastructure and facilities in many secondary schools in Nigeria.

iii. **Inadequate number of qualified teachers.**

Ige (2013) also observed that one of the most important requirements of delivering a quality secondary education in Nigeria is lacking and that is inadequacy of qualified teachers in senior secondary schools. Collaborating this assertion was the report of the roadmap for Nigeria Education sector by Federal Ministry of Education (Egwu, 2009) which revealed that there was shortage of 39,023 teachers in senior secondary schools in Nigeria as at then. The inadequacy of teachers is noticeable mostly in core subjects such as English Language, Mathematics, French and science subjects (Okorodudu, 2011) and in the rural areas (Ediho, 2009).

Added to this disadvantage, teachers and students have to work long distances to get to school due to non-availability of staff and students buses. The corollary of these is low quality of outputs. Also noted by Garba (2012) is dearth of infrastructure, inadequate classrooms and offices and inadequate laboratories for practicals. Many schools are said to lack access to water, proper sanitation and electricity, with many buildings dilapidated and in dire need of repairs. These of course impact negatively on school outcomes. Garba also noted that in despite the general state of total disrepair in which most of the country’s schools are in, teachers are still the lowest ranked profession that enjoy good salary structure,

meaning teachers are among the lowest paid professionals in Nigeria.

Worthy of note too is that despite the much touted compulsory education, school enrollment is not what is ought to be as there is escalation of drop-outs and growing number of out-of-school children. The recent report by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) put the figure for Nigeria at about 20million children between the ages of 6 to 18 (Alabi, 2022). UNICEF put the figure to be 18.5 million children (Agence France Press, 2022)

The worst proof of the state of secondary education is the poor performance at external examinations especially in WAEC and NECO English language and Mathematics. For example, the 2011 Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE) results released by WAEC had over 600,000 who failed English language out of 1,460,003. The 2012 result had similar percentage of 36% out 1,540,250 candidates who wrote the examination who obtained credit in mathematics while over 800,000 representing 54% obtained credit in English Language. This still showed a poor performance despite an improvement over the previous years.

Other problem areas in secondary education includes; negative attitude of teachers which may be occasioned by the low status accorded the teaching profession (Achimugu,2005), negative practices of some teachers such as examination malpractices, absenteeism from school and classes, lateness to school, inappropriate and non-keeping of records and other of such practices, indiscipline of students, low quality intakes and poor academic performance of students, prevalence of examination malpractices, and inappropriate curriculum.

Ike (2017) enumerated the problems of secondary education to include unstable staff which he explained to mean that many teachers in secondary schools do not see the job as a career but rather as a stepping stone or as an

alternative job because of not securing the jobs of their choice which are more lucrative than the teaching profession, inadequate classroom accommodation, poorly equipped libraries, laboratories and subject room; scarcity and prohibitive cost of books, poor preparation and malpractices, exploitation, poor parenting, ignorance, poverty and falling standard; politicization of education; procurement and servicing of equipment; problems of relating the curricula to national manpower needs; prevalence of multiple systems of education occasioned by different states having different education systems backed by their state laws; inadequate research development and lastly organizations influence on educational system.

Prospects of Secondary Education in Nigeria and the Way Forward

Nigeria is a young population with the higher percentage of her population below 60 years. This implies that it is an active population with a lot of potentialities. If this young population must be transformed into an active population, education holds the key. And to transform education into a tool of national development, secondary education which is the link between the primary education and tertiary education must equally be transformed. The following are suggestions on the way forward for secondary education in Nigeria predicated on the problems noted above.

1. Increased funding.

Funding is virtually everything in the pursuit of transforming secondary education. Funding will take care of all facilities, capacity building, supervision even remuneration of staff and all sundry needs of secondary education. Public schools appear to be more negatively affected especially as there continues to be decline in the budgetary allocation to education at both federal and state levels. The present allocation of below 10 percent of the GDP will do little or nothing to change the situation in the sector. Until the various tiers of government make drastic changes in their budgeting allocation to at least above 10 percent, the present situation will persist. Unfortunately, state governments appear to be less in funding secondary as there are only 104 unity schools under the federal government, the rest secondary schools other than those privately owned are within the management of state government.

Other than increasing budgetary allocation to education, states should shed excess burden of management of secondary school by returning schools to their original owners especially one originally owned by missions.

2. Supervision

A follow up to increased funding is proper supervision by education authorities. The obvious difference between outcome of public secondary schools who have more qualified staff personnel and the private schools is largely supervision. There is often tendency of

laxity and lackadaisical attitude to work by staff of public schools because they are not properly and adequately supervised. Transformation of secondary education especially in the public sector may remain a mirage until the authorities in conjunction with school management embark on regular supervision of both staff and work. Supervision should also be concerned with ensuring quality assurance of class size, number of teachers and instructional materials including buildings.

3. Staff Motivation

Umejiaku (2016) opines that motivation of teachers in teaching process can direct behaviour towards particular goals, lead to increased effort and energy, enhance cognitive processing, increase initiation of and persistence in activities, determine what consequences are reinforcing and also lead to improved performance. Motivation can be in form of regular payment of salaries, fringe benefits such as allowances, bonus on the job training, promotion, good work environment and other welfare packages. There is bound to be enormous prospect for secondary education if the governments of both federal and states would motivate the teachers as this is bound to make them give their all in discharging their duties because they would be satisfied being teachers.

4. Capacity Building

Another area of prospect in secondary education is in the area of capacity building. There is always need for training and retraining of teachers in secondary school as this would enhance their capacity to deal with current issues in teaching pedagogy. This would involve workshops, seminars and conferences and even sponsorship for further studies.

5. Review of School Curricula

The world is on a fast changing phase, hence there is need for periodic review of secondary school curriculum. This would enable school learners to compete favourably with people of other nations. Thus, authorities concerned should not allow for continued use of out-dated curricula in secondary schools.

CONCLUSION

Secondary education which serves as the link to tertiary education is of particular and special importance in the educational and by implication national development of any nation.

This phase of education in Nigeria is however deviled with myriad of problems which have affected adversely its outcome. Some of these problems include inadequate funding from both the federal and state governments, lack of basic facilities, paucity of qualified teachers, poor remuneration and motivation of staff and a host of other problems. This paper hence submits that there is a dire need for transformation of secondary education in Nigeria if it would

continue to be relevant in both educational and national development of the nation.

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