

NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: IN THE PURSUIT OF RIGHT PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING

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Abstract

The right physical environment of learning is a sine qua non for the realization of positive outcomes in any country's educational programme. Right environment in this work will include the combination of physical structures, right timing of teaching and learning, seating arrangement, level of sanitation and pollution of the environment, climate conditions within the environment and closeness of the learning environment to varied noise effects. According to Nigeria's National policy on education, one of the five sets of beliefs of the policy is that education in the country should be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society. The thrust of this paper is to assess the present status of the physical environment of institutions of learning, government policy directions and the philosophical orientation of the educational system. The method employed is a combination of descriptive and philosophical analysis of the physical environment and government policies and issues. The pathway to standard quality education for nation building, the paper suggests, is found in the right combination of effective resource management, adequate educational infrastructural development and appropriate governance structure that will drive all the other factors in the quest for attaining Nigeria educational goal. The paper concludes that there exists a wide infrastructure deficit in spite of government intervention mainly due to lack of political will and mismanagement of scarce resources while a marked improvement is manifested with the intervention of the private sector. The paper recommends among others, a purposeful synergy between parents and government for an improved physical learning environment.

Keywords: National policy on education, Physical environment, learning environment, infrastructure, Air pollution, Climate change, private sector.

1 INTRODUCTION

The essence of governance all over the world is to provide a sense of direction through good policy formulation and implementation for the people to find their way in life. In line with this, Nigeria policy on education provides for qualitative education, which is comprehensive, functional and relevant to all her citizens, the difference however, with other advanced systems is in how to achieve this goal. It is also agreed that quality of education as a goal is not a destination in itself, but the pursuit of the goal will determine how soon the attainment of the goal will be successful. According to [1] the significance of education to the growth and development of a country makes different nations of the world to adopt different systems from each other. The system of education a nation adopts determines the level of its development and the rate of such development depends strongly on the policies developed, adopted and practiced to achieve a balance in both physical growth of the nation and the general well-being of the citizens [2].

Management has been defined by [3] to be the process of mobilization and organisation of human and material resources in a system for the attainment of organisational goals. To achieve right environment of learning in Nigeria as in other countries of the world will require the right human and material resources availability to organise the other factors such as right physical environment, right time for teaching and learning, beneficial seating arrangement, good sanitation, reduce the level of pollution in the school environment, protect both the teachers and the students from the vagaries of weather/climate and ensure that school environment is generally serene for teaching and learning to take place. According to [4] the physical classroom environment that will affect students' performance will also include the nature of lighting, temperature, ventilation system, size of the room, floor, walls, desks, chairs, rugs, white boards, computer etc. Academic achievement as measured by the grade an individual scores in test/examination according to [5] defines the degree of accomplishment in tests. A very critical element important to the environment of learning is the teacher and student. It is therefore important to observe that a poor environment such as those with poor light, poor weather condition,

noisy environment and polluted air will not be conducive to both the student and teacher and hence produce poor results as output.

The main objective of this paper is to assess the present physical environment of our educational system, government policy direction and the philosophical orientation of the system to assure that it is directed towards the attainment of the nation's educational goals. The Nigerian philosophy of education according to the [6] is based on the development of the individual in the society into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the basic, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system. Shortly after independence, the major thrust of government policy was on how to increase the number of both the teachers and students in the system. This gave rise to the phenomenon of free education especially in southwest Nigeria. This was successful in increasing the number of educated citizens but created its own challenge of the infrastructural gap to cope with the large number of citizens desiring to have education. The intervening military era did not consider this policy of free education as very important; hence, even with the increasing number of citizens pursuing education, the physical infrastructure was nowhere matching with number of students in the system. This created the environment of using any available space, tree shades, sheds and the likes to serve as classrooms for pupils.

Solving the problem of sudden increase in number without the corresponding improvement in physical development of the system is still with the nation even till date. Therefore, while the national policy on education is desirous of providing for citizens the right quality, that is, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the society, the follow-up action is missing in most states and federal government levels to ensure that the right physical structures are put in place to achieve the stated goals. This inaction of government at all levels is made worst today by the economic difficulties facing the mono oil revenue economy that has its issues of corruption to contend with also. One of the gains of the failure of government in providing the right physical environment of learning is the entrance of the private sector into the management and running of part of the educational system. Thus, government though the major driver, provides mainly the policy while private sector participants are building the enabling physical structures required for education to thrive. With less than two (2) universities at independence, for example, Nigeria now has over 160 universities, with 86 of the number being privately owned institutions.

Ensuring that both the state and privately owned educational institutions provide the right quality of education requires good governance structure to be put in place. This governance structure through proper supervision will ensure the aggregation of such factors that will increase students' academic performance in schools to meet up with the overall aim of right quality of education as the philosophy emphasised. Such factors according to the research by ([7], [8], [9]) has been identified to include social, psychological, economic, environmental and personal factors for the students to attain the highest level of education. The effect of these factors on students' performance is known to vary from student to student and also from one country to another. If the question is asked as to how far has our educational system since independence achieved the goal of developing the individual into a sound and effective citizen who is functional and relevant to the society, then table 1 below developed from the [10] index report will give the answer. Indices of measurement of good governance according to the report include: overall governance of nations, safety and rule of law, participation citizens and human rights, sustainable economic opportunities and human development. Note that infrastructural sub-category is further subdivided into: transport, infrastructure, electricity, digital and IT, access to water, and water and sanitation services. The public management sub-category is said to be the most deteriorated even though Nigeria was ranked 19th and has above average value for African countries at 46.1%. Since education is the sub-category under human development, it is noted that the sector includes: Education provision, education quality, education system, primary school completion, secondary school enrolment, tertiary education enrolment and literacy level. In this sub-category, Nigeria was ranked 36th out of 54 countries with a score of 42.1%, African countries average of 47.9% and a trend over 2015 report of -2.8. This report has shown beyond words that the country's educational system need to be improved upon if both the goals and philosophy of the National policy on Education is to be achieved. In this regard, the physical environment of learning and other aspects of human, material, equipment, funding, governance, policy and governance structure need to be improved drastically from what it is today for the attainment of the nations educational goals. This is in consonance with [11] observation that educationist in Nigeria are in agreement on the need for improvement in resources (funds, manpower, etc.) available for education especially science education.

Table 1. Authors design of the performance index for Nigeria based on MO Ibrahim (2016) index report for 54 African Countries.

S/N	Scoring indices	Overall governance	Safety and rule of law	Participation and human right	Suitable economic opportunity	Human development
1	Nigeria rank out of 54 countries in Africa	36	44	26	34	38
2	Nigeria scores/100 measured in 2015	46.5%	42.8%	53.1%	39.5%	50.5%
3	African countries average score	50%	52.1%	50.0%	42.9%	55.0%
4	Trend of 2016 report over 2015 report	+2.5	-6.0	+6.1	+5.1	+5.0
					Infrastructure Sub-Category	Education Sub-Category
5	Nigeria Rank				41	36
6	Score/100				26.3%	42.1%
7	Africa average score				39.1%	47.9%
8	Trend over 2015 report				+8.0	-2.8%
					Public Management Sub-Categories	
9	Nigeria Rank				19	
10	Score/100				46.1%	
11	Africa average score				42.2%	
12	Trend over 2015 report				+1.2	

*All these are ranks of Nigeria on the indices of good governance based on 54 countries that make up the African continent

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Physical Environment of Learning

Physical environment comprises of both the physical structures and the serenity of the environment that allows for unhindered flow of information between the teacher and the students. The physical structure, especially for buildings, is essentially how the buildings and other structures are designed, located and built. The serene environment depicts the appeal and quietness that the environment generally gives to those within the system to enable information flow in encoding, retention and recall of materials given from the teacher to the students. Arising from poor funding of education is the abandonment of old building projects and not starting required new ones. As a result, existing structures are distressed without maintenance, which according to [4] contribute to students' poor academic performance, Figure 1 and 2.



Fig. 1 (Left) and Fig.2 (Right) show a classroom and school environments for teaching and Learning

This situation of things pervades the Nigerian educational system which resulted in government, post military era in 1999, setting up the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), for primary and secondary schools and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND), for Tertiary schools with minimal success in changing. Funding and governance issues have also not allowed for proper infrastructural development of schools with respect to putting the right manpower in place, adopting good seating arrangement (some schools do not have enough seats), development of right timing for teaching bearing in mind the tropical nature of the country and the excessive heat stress, maintenance of good sanitation in schools with planting of flowers and trees to check air pollution and climate change issues, and checking noise pollution through maintenance of safe distances between school sites and various noise sources. Since political leadership need schools and schools also need political leadership to grow and produce good leaders for the society, the importance of synergy between the two cannot be overemphasised.

2.2 An Analysis of Government Pursuit of Better School Environment

One of the reasons for the compulsory takeover of schools in Nigeria by the Federal Military Government of General Obasanjo was to improve the state of education in Nigeria. However, since then there has been a noticeable decline in public education most especially in the general state of the environment and dilapidating infrastructure which on the reverse has led to the increase and improvement of private participation in education. The inherited structures and school plants have been overstretched and ill maintained. Many of the schools are not child-friendly according to the UNESCO benchmark; they are no longer inclusive as they are being attended by children of the poor, classrooms are without doors, windows, ceiling, lightings, visible chalk boards, acute shortages of desks and chairs, Figure 1 and 2 above. These have led to overcrowded classes where teachers find it difficult to move within the learners for supervision of class work and other learning activities. This type of environment is more reflected in the rural areas and inner cities. Teachers, who are one of the major components of the environment are ill motivated and affected

2.3 Philosophical Orientation

In an attempt to mitigate this state of school environment, the revised [6] states that the Nigeria philosophy of education is based among other beliefs that education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society (NPE,2013, sec, 1.3e). Furthermore, it states that one of the goals of education is the enlargement of access to qualitative education for all citizens at all levels at all levels of education. One could conclude that the government appreciates the importance of good school environment in the attainment of these objectives.

2.4 Funding

In order to accomplish this, the NPE noted that education is a capital intensive social service which requires constant and adequate financial in flow from all tiers of government, so, the policy canvasses a joint responsibility of the Federal, states, local governments and the private sector (NPE, sec 10,154). The policy further states that “at least 26 per cent of Federal, states and local government budget should be dedicated to funding of education at all levels” (NPE, 2013, 10, 155a). To strengthen financial in flow into education, the government sought intervention funds from TETFund (Tertiary education Trust Fund), Industrial Training Fund, PTDF (Petroleum Technology Development Fund), international and local development partners such as World Bank, UNIDO, UNICEF, UNDP, USAID and a surcharge of a minimum of 1.5 per cent of contract sum/fees to a Special Education Corporate social Responsibility Fund (SECOSOF) (NPE, 2013, Sec. 155c). Government also encourages the formal participation of Old Students Associations, Parents Associations and Alumni bodies in the funding of education.

2.5 Management and Administration

In order to aggregate and prudently manage these funds, the government advocated for the promotion of a culture of accountability, effectiveness and efficiency in the management of public investment in education. To encourage transparency, all tiers of government shall publish allocations, releases and expenditures on education by level and type yearly to provide an overview of trends in financing education. Also, government shall comply with the Community Accountability Transparency Initiatives (CATI) in conjunction with relevant stakeholders to effectively track expenditures, monitor and evaluate service delivery in education (NPE, 2013, sec.156, 157). Through the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), the government seeks to strengthen and improve leadership capacities and skills of school managers and administrators in effective resource mobilization and management of human, material, finance and time. Government has established quality assurance agencies at the various tiers of government to facilitate and bring supervision close to educational institutions. These agencies are to operate autonomously but supervised by the Minister / Commissioner of Education. The goal among others is to set, maintain and improve standards in all aspects of the school system which includes the state of classrooms, sitting arrangements, learners’ physical appearance, teaching aids, ancillary equipment and structures, security threats, recreational facilities and the general ambience of the school. These are the major thrust of government pursuit of better school environment and delivery in education. The impact of these needs an assessment.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 An Assessment of Implementation

These various policies have little effect on the provision of better physical environment on the Nigerian educational system across all levels. In terms of funding, the various levels of government tend not believe in the importance of education as the major driver of all round societal development in that the federal and state governments have never budgeted up to the 26 per cent benchmark recommended in the national policy on education. As such, many physical developments in schools are delayed, half way executed, abandoned and ill maintained due to shortages in funding. Local intervention funds such as TETFund are difficult to access due to bureaucratic bottlenecks and political patronage which make such projects difficult to track, monitored and supervised by the relevant agencies. This has led to official corruption and financial leakages in an already inadequate budget. In multi-level financing such as in Basic Education, many states do find it difficult to pay their counterpart funding for the improvement of physical environment of their educational institutions.

The management of education at all levels of governance is weak and inadequate. Heads of tertiary institutions are hardly trained for the job which is generally seen as “tour of duty”. Many of them do not appreciate the economics of their institutions in terms of attracting partnerships and marketing their specialization to attract financial and other developmental in flow, so, they rely only on government subventions. Again many lack the requisite management skills in blocking administrative and financial leakages.

The interconnection between education and politics has not been properly explored for the development of education. The general trend seems to be over subjection of education to politics. In

states where free education is practiced, the government tends to prevent parents from active participation in school development preferring that such contributions and interventions passed through the government. This has alienated parents, voluntary agencies, parents associations and Old Students' Associations and communities from infrastructural development. This runs against the provision of the national policy on education. [12] asserts that the decentralization of the provision of school facilities enhances availability, adequacy and functionality of facilities and reduces official corruption.

The Local Government, the third tier in educational management, administration and finance, has been politically and financially emasculated by many state governments which have resulted in centralization of education management and control. Supervision and quality assurances have become inefficient. Generally, quality assurance seems to be limited to teachers attendance, examination and tests administration and general school neatness.

The philosophical orientation of the National Policy on Education tend not be in consonance with the political orientation and arrangement of the nation for the political commitment to the development of education is inadequate. The educational imbalance between the North and South is a subtle hindrance to genuine national development of education in terms of creation, management and finance of proper framework that is not easily subjected to political manipulations.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The challenges in the provision of adequate physical environment in education are a reflection of the state of development of the nation as shown in the survey Table 1 above. The greatest challenge seem to be the lack of political will to properly implement education programmes and policies, centralization of education administration to the exclusion of parents and concerned stakeholders and the general community. If this were remedied, the nation would have made appreciable advancement instead of the little unsteady improvement in the provision of good physical environment in our schools. Nigeria that is in democratic rule since 1999 cannot afford to avoid the education of the citizens that will ensure that the future of the country is assured. The National Policy on Education has given the direction to follow; it remains the governance structure that will utilize the available human and material resources to create the enabling physical environment for qualitative, comprehensive, and functional education that is relevant to the Nigerian Society.

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