

**REAPPRAISAL AND REPOSITIONING OF NIGERIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR
EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS CURRICULUM TO ENHANCE
EMPLOYABILITY OF ITS YOUTHS**

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Abstract

This paper discusses the youth unemployment predicament in contemporary Nigeria which is highest among those in the 18-25-year age bracket; a large number of them university graduates. Rural poverty continues to drive youths from their natal villages in large numbers to the cities, in search of non-existing jobs. Many resign themselves to the meanest odd jobs; others take to various crimes. Nigeria's food dependency deepens despite the fact that numerous universities yearly churn out graduates and professors in various fields of agriculture. Thus, the education system is producing mostly job seekers, not job creators. This contradiction is happening against the backdrop of the current 6-3-3-4 education system which was designed to produce the requisite human capacity for achieving sustainable agricultural, industrial and general growth resulting principally from youth self-employment. This paper stresses the need for faithful implementation of the 6-3-3-4 through learning by doing, based on a Siamese correlation of theory and practice. This will make for vocational skills training, for increasing employment outcomes for target groups. The study is conceptual and relies on current literature in the discourse. Findings show that poor implementation of the 6-3-3-4 education system, not the system itself, is producing job-seeking rather than self-reliant employed youths. The study thus concludes that with effective implementation, including adequate funding, the 6-3-3-4 system of education, will produce youths with the required vocational skills and consequently reduce both unemployment and under-employment among them.

Key words: Education systems, repositioning, effective implementation, self reliant youths.

Introduction

Unemployment is perhaps the most damning problem confronting contemporary Nigeria, especially the youths. Every year various institutions of learning churn out thousands of young people, mostly in the 18-25- year bracket. The labor market is unable to absorb the vast majority of them partly because of its limited labor absorptive capacity (Njoku, 2001) and partly because

some of these youths are technically unemployable. This is because oftentimes, notwithstanding their brilliant certificates, they lack the apt knowledge and skill required by employers (Comyn, 2014). Knowledge combined with skill is a top priority employers of labor look for. Education at all levels should not only impart knowledge but also skills for living. But a more worrying source of concern is the type and the quality of the country's education system, especially at the university level. The universities inherited a system that tended to alienate their products from their roots; a false start which has continued to haunt the system.

The colonial 6-5-4 education system was fundamentally flawed, being largely mimetic and theoretic. It was not designed to grapple with the existential problems of the country, including critical areas such as agriculture, health, industry, and human capacity building in general. The imported Western system trains its recipients away from their primary environment rather than into it. Thus, as Heinecke (1986) laments, the schools have become foreign enclaves isolated from the working community. This explains the uncontrolled drift of youth to the urban centres. The system also creates an unnatural dichotomy between the head and the hand and thus, stunts creative initiative (Njoku, 2001). Consequently, the system denies youths their basic human right to work, to stand on their own feet, to be self-reliant; not to talk adding value to their community.

As literate youths desert their natal villages to the cities, they abandon the non-literate members to the intimidating challenges of fast diminishing soil erosion and fertility, coupled with multiple health challenges and the consequent rapid decline in food production. Nigeria's food dependency deepens just as our numerous universities chum out graduates and professors in

various fields of agriculture. Thus as hinted earlier, very sadly the system continues to produce mostly job seekers, not job creators. This scenario plays out in other branches of the education system.

Against the backdrop of the foregoing antithesis/incongruity, many scholars strongly argued for a review of the colonial system of education, the 6-5-4 system, which, they argue is at odds with the nation's aspiration towards sustainable modern technological and industrial development. They argue also that the 6-5-4 system is parochial, a recipe for external dependency oriented and defective in objectives and course content (Faunwa, 1982). Fafunwa and Aisiku, (2022) add that the system was not only riddled with inadequacies and gaps in course content and objectives but also under-utilized available resources; thus a recipe for external or neo-colonial dependency.

The flood of criticisms led to the review of the education policy, which birthed the 6-3-3-4 system, operational since 1982/83 the academic year to date. This system is based on, six-year primary schooling, three years of junior secondary schooling, and another three years in senior secondary school. Thereafter, the student/graduate may proceed to university (4-6years, according to discipline), or end at this stage with a good skill to fend for him or herself.

The 6-3-3-4 system lasted for two and a half decade and was slightly modified in the current universal 9-3-4 basic education system, (Uwaifor & Uddin, 2009). This 9-3-4 system seems to exist in theory because operationally, it is the same with the 6-3-3-4 system. The only difference is that, the six-year primary schooling and the first three years in the Junior secondary school are

termed as basic education, and are under the control of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). The other is the three-year period in senior secondary school followed by four years (or more) in university education. These education systems were aimed to meet the educational needs of Nigerian youths by equipping them with the needed skills for self reliance (Uwaifo & Uddin, 2017) and employability in the labour market.

Notwithstanding these well meaning objectives, many Nigerian graduates are still unemployable, in spite of their brilliant certificates. In fact, “certification” is sadly becoming the vogue in contemporary Nigeria, to her detriment. Invariably, unemployed and unemployable graduates are still not trained to explore and initiate small scale ‘start up’ ventures. Ironically, the educational policy was aimed to make Nigerian youths imbibe the spirit of hard-work very early in life by exposing them to vocational training which would enable them to be self-reliant rather than aspiring for white collar jobs. Were the system successfully implemented, virtually every school leaver at any level would have been equipped to fend for themselves (Egugbo and Salami, 2021). Unfortunately, the expectation has not materialized.

Thus this paper seeks answers as to the following queries: What derailed the laudable education systems? Why have all the education policies tried failed to prime the skill potentials of Nigerian youths for employability and self reliance? The aim of this study to ascertain why the various Nigerian systems of education could not impart the required skills to Nigerian youth for employability and self-reliance and will specifically address the following issues: the effectiveness of the curriculum in the current education system; preparedness for the transition to

6-3-3-4 education system; assessment and implementation, and repositioning of the 6-3-3-4 system.

The effectiveness of the curriculum in the current education system

Attending school and acquiring education is fundamental to human development because education plays a critical role in one's life journey. For education to attain the required value, it has to be based on apt curriculum that is faithfully implemented. The kingpins here are "apt curriculum" and "faithful implementation". A curriculum is a learning guide designed to address students' educational needs. It lays out the expectations of what students are to be taught and do in a program of study by drawing objectives and listing the contents, materials, resources and the process for evaluating the set objectives in a specific order (Campbell-Phillips,2020). Campbell adds that education is very productive if it is founded and guided by an appropriate curriculum.

According to Adeyinka (1991), the curricula of the various levels of education in the current system were designed in a way that would benefit every learner within the system. The curricula were made to prepare the learners to be able to serve the nation and be self employed. Eleweke (2002) adds that the broad aim of education under the current system is to provide all Nigerian learners a wide and rich variety of educational and vocational opportunities to ensure the optimum development of their potentials. Sadly, despite the apt packaging of the programme, the system has not yielded the desired result of producing self-reliant and employable youths.

A plethora of problems that hindered the effective realization of the objectives of the current system has been highlighted by various authors. The problems include lack of manpower, inadequate personnel training programs, facilities and materials, limited vocational preparation opportunities and inadequate funding of services.

Preparedness for the current education system, 6-3-3-4

It is one thing to aspire for and draw new policies of education, quite another to effect its faithful implementation. Egugbo and Salami (2021) draw attention to certain basic pre-requisites that have to be in place for a policy to be successful. Apt preparedness is sine qua non for the success of any endeavour or project. This involves getting all the necessary components ready to embark on the project. Among these are good planning and effective implementation, which are a precondition for a successful realization of the project. Campbell-Phillips (2020), has pointed out the prerequisite for attaining a valuable education, namely - a curriculum that draws up the correct objectives and lists the contents, materials, resources and the process for evaluating the set objectives in a specific order and faithful implementation.

From extant literature, it is evident that several researchers have opined that the curricular for the different levels of 6-3-3-4 education policy are adequate (Adeyinka, 1991; Aibieyi & Oghoator, 2015). However, other machineries for its implementation have suffered inadequacies. These include adequate number of trained teachers, a deficiency which as Fafunwa (1982) emphasized, should be paramount in the list. Several other scholars, such as Aibieyi and Oghoator (2015), Eleweke (2002) and Babafemi (2007) have also identified one factor or the

other, that is lacking in the planning or preparation towards embarking on the 6-3-3-4 education policy. However, Egugbo and Salami (2021) aptly summarized the factors that are lacking in the planning and which have been major factors militating the successful achievement of the 6-3-3-4 education system in Nigeria. These include (a) inadequate skilled manpower to train the students in various vocations envisaged by the policy-makers (b) lack of necessary instructional and infrastructural facilities such as well-equipped laboratories and workshops, and vocational equipment. (c) epileptic power supply, which impedes efficient and effective use of the available equipment and (d) inadequate funding. (e) lack of proper planning. Egugbo and Salami conclude that lack of proper planning fore-doomed the formulating of the policy. Ihejieta (2006) also observes that Mathematics teachers are not adequately prepared for the required thorough grounding of students at the senior secondary level to enable them transit successfully to university. All these inadequacies in resources, personnel training, funding, etc. are glaring factors that imperil the 6-3-3-4 system of education.

Assessment and Implementation

Several scholars have studied the operation of the current 6-3-3-4 and 9-3-4 education systems in different parts of the country. Their studies reveal various problems militating against effective realization of the systems. For instance, Uwaifo and Uddin, (2017) examined the student-teacher ratio, laboratory-/workshop-student ratio and availability of instructional materials for teaching of the technology subjects particularly at the Junior Secondary School (JSS) classes in Ekpoma, Delta State. They submit that the 6-3-3-4 system has achieved very little because of lack of

human and material resources and poor implementation. Aibieyi & Ogboator (2015) agree that the policy itself is appropriate, but that the problem lies in its implementation. Odukoya, Bowale and Okunlola (2018) compared the education policies of Nigeria and that of United States of America (USA), with regard to their relevance and sustainability and observe that USA's system, which dates to 1949, remains appropriate for the need of the country. On the other hand, Nigeria's policies are discarded not long after their introduction. Like Odukoya and Bowale and Okunlola, they observe that nothing is wrong with the 6-3-3-4 system. The problem lies in proper implementation.

Repositioning of the 6-3-3-4 system.

Various studies have shown that the current 6-3-3-4 education system is a laudable project, but lacks faithful/adequate implementation. As suggested by Ejemezu (2015), government should take responsibility and provide adequate facilities and resources for achieving the ultimate purpose of providing Nigerian youths a variety of educational and vocational opportunities for optimum development of their potentials. There is need for expert assessments of selected countries whose educational policies have yielded successful results with focus on Africa. Nigeria is not listed among ten African countries with the best educational system in 2022; namely, Seycheles, Tunisia, Mauritius, South Africa, Algeria, Bostwana, Kenya, Cape Verde, Egypt and Namibia (Nduka, 2022). Needless to stress the fact that information gained from such exercise would have to be modified in order to mesh it with Nigeria's domestic cultural and social peculiarities and variables.

Conclusion

Nigeria's education system needs to be repositioned in a way that it can produce the requisite calibre of human capacity for achieving sustainable industrial and economic growth. This should include, in particular, the capability of the recipients for self-employment via startup businesses. The curriculum to achieve this objective should emphasize learning by doing, which promotes a correlation between theory and practice. This would, in turn, engender a reciprocal balance between institution-based and informal type of education and skills acquisition and reduce the staggering level of unemployment and under-employment of youths. Given adequate funding and faithful implementation, the current 6-3-3-4 system of education will produce youths with vocational skills and consequently reduce unemployment and under-employment of youths. This may sound like a tall order but not an impossible one; given the political will.

A recurrent problem overlooked by experts is the government itself. A distinguishing characteristic of governance in Nigeria is policy inconsistency riddled with parochial over nation interest. Every new government almost has invariably introduced new policies and programs with little or no regard to existing ones. Significantly, this is done most often for parochial rather than patriotic/national reasons. New programs have usually provided conduits through which public funds are wriggled into private individuals' accounts. The key sector of agriculture is a typical example. From the 1970s to the end of the 1990s, Nigeria went through the Agricultural Development Programme, Operation Feed the Nation, the Green Revolution, River Basin Development Programme, Better Life For Rural Women and Family Support Programme

(Njoku, 2014). In spite of and as a result of the programs, Nigeria went into agrarian decline, resulting in unprecedented importation of food. Thus, between what official preaches and what it practices there is a conspicuous disparity. As Elizabeth Isichei has argued , as long as those who praise the dignity of labour do not practically exemplify the virtues in their lives, their exhortation would fall on deaf ears.

Recommendations

To reposition the education system of Nigeria in the right direction, this paper recommends as follows. First, the Nigerian government should set up appropriate machinery to ensure that the current 6-3-3-4 education system is faithfully executed through appropriate funding, provision of the required up-to-date facilities and regular training and re-training of the teaching and non-teaching staff. Second, it should introduce and execute faithfully a program of rural infrastructural empowerment that can attract learners back to their rural environment, as has been successfully achieved by Tanzania, for example.

The programme will address Heinecke's concern (1986) that the schools have become foreign enclaves isolated from the working community and denying young people the opportunity to be self reliant. Third, the authorities should set up a policy and programme performance monitoring and evaluation committee, staffed by dedicated and competent hands. The committee would regularly monitor the working of the system for compliance evaluation or otherwise. Fourth, school graduates would only be given certificates in technology-based disciplines with practical evidence of passing through self-reliant activities before graduating

(Ikponmwosa, 2006). Finally and most important of all, government must lead by example, as has happened in Ghana, for example. A situation in which government is seen in some learned quarters as a critical part of the education policy problem augurs badly for the country. This advocacy is the thrust of Chinua Achebe's *The Trouble With Nigeria* which essays that Nigeria's main problems arise from the political leadership, not the governed.

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