

Reforms in Public Education: The case of Kwara State.

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Introduction

I can not but state as part of my preamble, what I learn from Baba.

Recently, David West quoted his mother as saying “if you do not appreciate the goodness of your neighbour, you can not be good yourself”. Baba started with settling at home after serving the nation. He established a Qur’anic School at the family house, later a center where others learn, followed by the establishment of the Nana-Asma’u College. I must not fail to mention his centrality at the point of approving of Al-Hikmah University by the National Universities Commission (NUC). Today, he is impacting on public education through our able and dynamic Commissioner of Education discussing reforms in public education.

No doubt, we have learnt from Kwara model of education reform, but we will need to add value to the brilliant presentation from four angles; these are good political will, meaningful access, understanding Universal Basic Education in relation to SUBEB and finally action forward.

Worldwide, education reforms are product of political will, commitment and need to relate education to the needs of the society. I am not unaware of the efforts of the State in reforming the basic education sub-sector. The partnership with Education Sectors Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) has brought about improved quality. Infact I congratulate the State in the current reform going on in the Colleges of Education as well as in the direction of quality assurance.

Reforms in Relation to Political Will

As it has been stated by our Honourable Commissioner that political participation in Africa is mostly based on economic considerations. However, a review of literature presents politicians winning people’s votes on what they promise to offer through their manifesto and which they are convinced that they will fulfill.

Professor Akinpelu (1997), emphasizing the importance of education to development, quoting H.G. Wells declares “the price of human survival, as Darwin’s Evolutionary Theory has shown, is continuing adaptable intelligence which can only be a product of continuing learning. The history of civilization is littered with wreckage of those who cannot or refuse to change. Thus, human civilization is a race between education and catastrophe”.

Awolowo, (1955), Harold Wilson, (1969), Blair (1997), Clinton in 1990s brought educational reform on positive political will.

This Day of September 7, 2004 reported a scene in Akwa Ibom. The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was visiting and he met a woman with three children and he asked why the woman was with the children when they were supposed to be in school, the woman replied, “there was no money to send them to school. The President then picked one of the three children and said I will send him to school”.

Whereas, in the United Kingdom when Harold Wilson was faced with high population of potential University Students during his campaign in 1969, he promised a mass approach of Open University. His victory in 1969 led to the establishment of the Open University in United Kingdom in 1970.

Tony Blair in “His Journey” touched issue related to reform when he stated that “By the end of week six, we had started to put in place the literacy and numeracy strategy to raise standards of performance for primary school children in reading, writing and mathematics”.

Bill Clinton during his visit to California as President found great kids who had big dreams and a deep desire for normal lives but had a fear of being shot going and from school. Another fear was that when they turned 13, they would have to join a gang and smoke crack cocaine or face severe beatings from their contemporaries. Clinton said “my experience with these kids had profound impacts on me. They deserve better deal”. The result was, before too long Congress had enacted Head Start Reform. Put the National Education Association Goals into Law; reform the student loans programme, created National Services Programme, passed the school-to-work programme, to create apprenticeships for high school graduates who do not go to College and dramatically increased our commitment to adult education and life long learning.

Here in Nigeria, we all remember the Free Education Programme of Late Sage Chief Obafemi Awolowo (1955). Thus a good political will gave birth to good reform in education, whereas bad political will bring about bad policy. Let us adopt the good political practice as advised by Obayan (2010) in his yet to be published book.

Decisive Factors in Education	Bad Politics Context	Good Politics Context
1. Policy development methodology	Haphazard	Participatory
2. Policy thrusts	No clear directions	Responsive to national development thrusts
3. Plan for educational development	Non-existent/exists as mere piece of paper	Derived from policy thrust, with strategic focus areas
4. Management	Over-centralized Hierarchical	Decentralised, with de-concentration of authority
5. Human resources	Management: not professionalised/over-bloated bureaucracy Teaching: not professionalized/inadequate (quantitatively)	Management: professionalised/constant and systematic re-skilling and re-tooling
6. Funding	Non-sustainable Wastage and corruption-prone	Sustainable Targeted funding Functional mechanism for expenditure tracking
7. Curricula	Inappropriate Non-responsive Out-dated Imposed from above	Appropriate Responsive Relevant Internalized and readily operated at school level Dynamic, with participatory approaches to evaluation and constant review
8. Physical facilities	Inappropriate Inadequate Little or no maintenance	Appropriate Adequate Culture of maintenance firmly upheld
9. Pedagogical facilities	Scarce Inappropriate Out-dated No bearing with curricula	Adequate Appropriate Up-to-date Closely related to curricula
10. Teaching-learning Methods	Frontal teaching Teacher-centred Memorisation/regurgitation	Activity-based Flexible classroom arrangements

		Learner-centred Participatory
11. Outcomes	Children merely passing through school Absence of effective learning	Children passing through school AND the school passing through them Effective learning

I read with hope, the This Day of December 29, 2010 (p 9,11) the statement credited to His Excellency, Governor Bukola Saraki at the Headquarters of Ifelodun LGA which reads “that N2 billion has been set aside for the massive renovation and equipments for all its Secondary Schools”.

May I appeal to His Excellency, the Governor of Kwara State through the Hon. Commissioner of Education that for the sake of the children of Kwara State, he should access the about one billion Naira FGN-UBEC matching grant that is currently with UBEC. If this is accessed, infrastructure in Kwara primary schools as well as teachers capacity will be strengthened.

Again, going through the Kwara State 2011 Budget, education has N3.5 billion out of the more than 68 billion. This puts the education budget at 5%. Our Honourable Commissioner, kindly help to appeal to His Excellency to raise it to 10%.

ACCESS

My Honourable Commissioner’s paper read in part that “access generally does not harm any reform”. When we mean meaningful access, it affects many things in our education setting. Access means opening school gate to many, leading to increase in school enrolment which will then lead to more classrooms, more teachers, more instructional resources and eventually overstressing the school capacity. Again, the table below will help us to know the implication of improved access to education

Meaningful Access and its implications

1. Access and Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrolment at various levels/forms of Education • Attendance/drop out/repetition/completion/success/transition to next level • Opportunities for education for out-of-school • Gender parity and equity in educational opportunities (all levels/all forms) • Geographical and social coverage of educational opportunities
2. Quality and Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational INPUTS (policy, management framework, teachers, materials, infrastructure,

	<p>curriculum, funding)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational PROCESSES (school level management, teacher-pupil classroom interactions, opportunities for out-of-class learning, inspection/supervision/quality control measures) • Educational OUTCOMES (student learning, examination success rates, learner-behaviour/values/attitudes, types of skills acquired through education) • Level of appropriateness of education to children and society's current and future needs • Relationship between school curriculum and the world of work
3. Teaching and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher education level/qualifications/competence/knowledge/ experience • Learner readiness/attitudes/study habits/work ethics • School and classroom environment/including gender-friendliness levels • Guidance and Counseling services • Parental/societal support for school learning
4. Management and Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System level management • Institutional level management • Decentralization/devolution of authorities in educational management • Society involvement-PTA/Organized Private Sector (OPS) • Education data (Federal/State/Local Government (LGT)) • Structures and mechanisms for education service delivery • Level of synergy among parastatals and agencies and departments
5. Resourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sources of resources for Education • Education budgeting methodology • Overall education sector budgetary allocations • Sub-sectoral allocations within the education sector (basic/secondary/higher education/non-formal education) • Education service-related budgetary allocations (teachers, infrastructure, materials and equipment central and LGEA administration). • Fund release methodology • Non financial resources (community participation) • Resource availability and use at the school level

May I add that Kwara State is one of the states with a great number of almajirai. Thus, we need to expand our basic education programme to accommodate this group of children. Also of importance is the provision for adult and non-formal education. We should ensure that our State Agency for Mass Education is well funded to ensure an accelerated process of increasing literacy rate in the State as we are approaching the year 2015. Meaningful access means ensuring all and not few, inclusive and not exclusive.

Universal Basic Education (UBEC)

My Honourable Commissioner's comments on SUBEB need some explanations. The law establishing SUBEB made it a parallel organ to Ministry of Education. One of the reasons that could be identified as causing unhealthy rivalry between the Commissioner of Education and Chairman of SUBEB perhaps is likely to be the fact that both are appointed by the Governor.

However, ideally memo to State Executive Council from SUBEB passes through the Education Commissioner. It means where we have harmonious relation between the Chairman and the Commissioner, they can jointly propose a reformatory memo to the State Executive Council. In addition, issues of quality assurance is so central that it needs the attention of all stakeholders in education. I advocate that there should be a change of attitude between the Ministry and SUBEB as the pictorial representation as reflected in the Hon Commissioner's paper is not education friendly.

Let me highlight some objectives and scope of UBEC.

Objectives and Scope of UBE

(a) OBJECTIVES	(b) SCOPE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for Education and a commitment to its vigorous promotion ▪ The provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age ▪ Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality, and efficiency) ▪ Catering for the learning needs of young persons, who for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling, through appropriate approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education ▪ Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills, as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Programmes/initiatives for early childhood care and socialization ▪ Educational programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life-skills, especially for adults (persons aged 15 and above) ▪ <u>Out of school</u>, non-formal programmes for the up-dating of knowledge and skills for persons who left school before acquiring the basics needed for life-long learning ▪ Special programmes of encouragement to ALL marginalized groups: GIRLS AND WOMEN, nomadic populations, out-of-school youth and Almajirai. ▪ Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youth, who have not had the benefit of formal education ▪ The formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of the junior secondary school.

This is so as Nigeria UBE is the home grown Education For All (EFA), thus it includes, ECCD, formal basic and the non-formal and adult education.

Action Forward

Based on what we have been able to learn from our Honourable Commissioner and what we have identified as relevance, we need to ask some questions: How do we ensure quality after meaningful access? How do we improve the capacity of teachers? How do we sustain the current degree of transparency already established at the basic education level? How do we sustain the E-payment process and how do we ensure harmonious relationship between the Ministry and SUBEB? In fact how do we engage the Organized Private Sector (OPS) for effective implementation of education? What of the large population of the school community? We should be able to harness these resources in addition to what government can offer.

Going back to my earlier interaction, political will promotes good governance and good education system and focus administration based on Community Accountability and Transparency Initiative (CATI). Thus, where we have a government that is fully committed to the provision of social needs, more importantly education, rather than sitting down here for critical analysis, we will be thinking of the next step.

To achieve all these, our politicians should present to us clear, vivid, meaningful and implementable manifestoes in languages understood by the electorates.

Electorates too, should endeavour to consider politicians that bring to them what they intend to do in improving the people. In Nigeria today, we have National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS), Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS). How many Nigerians understand what they stand for. Huge financial resources has been invested in publishing these documents without actually delivering in line with the contents. Whereas the SEEDS and LEEDS in particular are to allow people to know and find out at different levels what are listed in these documents as developmental programmes to be executed for the benefit of the populace.

Politics of deceit must stop, and people should not vote for money if we want meaningful, relevant and functional education that will facilitate development.

In conclusion, I thank our father for providing this channel of communication and to the Honourable Commissioner I say thank you for sharing with us your experience on the job.

Thank you all.