

VOLUME 2 / NUMBER 2 / NOVEMBER 2006

ISSN 0794-2192

5

# African Journal of Historical Sciences in Education

*A journal of the History of Education Society of Nigeria  
An Affiliate of the International Standing Conference for  
the History of Education (ISCHE).*

**Secretariat:**

Department of Teacher Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria

ISSN 0794-2192

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# AFRICAN JOURNAL OF HISTORICAL SCIENCES IN EDUCATION

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## **THE ROLE OF MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

**F.S. Akinwumi and J. Isuku**

### **Abstract**

*The contemporary International Scene is full with numerous co-operations, understandings, undertakings and agreements of various forms of integration which are regional, continental and global both in nature and dimension. All these integrations are essentially geared towards the elimination of ignorance and poverty. Such undertakings therefore revolves round almost all facets of human activities, military scientific, educational, cultural, health and a lot of others related activities. This interdependent complexity has unavoidably made the numerous "development roles" of these fortified multilateral agencies inevitable especially to the developing countries. Nigeria as developing country faces both the new challenges of supporting knowledge-driven development and the old challenge of promoting quality, efficiency, and equity at all levels of her educational system. Giving these massive challenges and the obvious limitation facing the government in the revitalization of the system, with the consequence of eroding educational quality, it will therefore not be out of place for these multilateral organization such as the World Bank to lend their supporting hands to salvage the nation's failing educational system. The issue of multilateral assistance to educational development must go beyond lip service and international politics to a real and pragmatic support that will bring about sustained quality improvement in the Nigerian educational system. The International donors must pay serious attention to the provision of both financial and other forms of support to the Nigerian Educational System in order for the sector to compete with the ever dynamic global challenges. The educational sector as an important pivotal of economic growth and development, need a wholesale support from all and sundry. Since the ability and role of Government is constrained in most developing countries, multilateral agencies must relax stringent conditions to aid the educational development programmes of these countries.*

### Introduction

Multilateral organization comprises such institutions like the International Monetary Funds (IMF), International Development Co-operation such as United States Aids for International development (USAID), Sweden International Development Association (SIDA), International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), otherwise known as the World Bank, McArthur Foundation, UNESCO, UNICEF and etc. These various corporations engage in the provision of loans as well as other forms of aids for the development programmes of most developing countries. Their involvement in these development activities revolves around almost all aspects of human activities. It ranges from economic and political issues to military, scientific, educational, cultural, health and a host of other related issues.

Historically, earlier attempts at international economic integration dates back to the past four hundred years (See Meier 1974). However, despite this long history of unbroken relationship attendant negative consequences particularly as it affect the poor countries actually started attracting serious attention in the second half of the twentieth century, precisely after second World War (Ashara 1989). Over the last three decades, there has been considerable investment by both the government and the international donor agencies. These intervention has resulted in an increased number of children enrolled in schools. Of these international institutions, the World Bank serves as the most important source of financial support to most African countries.

Babalola, Sikwibele and Suleiman (2001) observed that the role of the World Bank for instance as in donor agency to educational development in Nigeria, dates back to 1953 when the Mcpherson Constitution (1951) and the colonial Education Act Number 17 of 1952 were in operation. However, in many instances, the rapid enrolment growth has stretched available resources beyond the limit of minimal effectiveness. In addition, the unfavourable economic conditions facing most developing countries, has further jeopardized the ability of these developing countries to provide quality education.' Coombs and Hallak (1987) echoed that the adverse financial posture and other critical educational issue currently plaguing many developing countries has resulted to among other problems, the erosion of educational quality and relevance, and the often dubious contribution of education to individual and national development, the deterioration of international educational cooperation and most worrisome, the waning public confidence in education. Although, the high income industrialized nations

may be having to face these critical problems, Coombs and Hallak (1987) submit that by far the most serious victims are African countries (See Coombs and Hallak, 1987:1). Consequent upon the foregoing, there is a growing danger that progress in educational development realized previously will be eroded by this decline in the quality of education except there is a pragmatic effort by such international bodies to salvage the situation. There is need to put a new life into or restore the loss glory of the educational system in Nigeria. Every Possible support that may result in the revitalization of the decaying educational system by these donor agencies will be of immense benefit to the Nigeria educational system. The underdeveloped word will find it difficult if not impossible to fit into the present globalization dynamics except its education system is modeled towards the proper attainment of national development.

### **Present Posture of Nigerian Educational System**

The observed symptoms of educational crises as stated by Umo (1995) in Onwioduokit and Tule (2003), include the dilemma of schooling without learning, rising graduate unemployment, fast deterioration in human capital base and increase distributional inequality. Also included in the crises is the problem of financial allocation and management crises, crises in the teaching profession, low participations, declining quality and a dearth in human capital base. These problem are noticed at all levels of the educational system in Nigeria. Babalola (2001:1) for instance, lamented the crises situation of Nigerian Universities when he exrayed the reaction and counter reactions among Universities Institutions, government and donor agencies in terms of fund provision, management and utilization of available resources as unsatisfactory.

The problem of physical facilities, workshops and laboratory equipment is acute in technical colleges and Secondary schools, as shown in the Nigerian National Rolling Plan (1993/95). At the tertiary level, there has been growth in enrolment without commensurate expansion in the available facilities. There is also the absence/shortage of laboratory equipment, funds, academic staff and relevant books, frequent closure of Universities and other higher institutions of learning due to strike actions, as well as an adversely affected quality of training. Thus, the quality of education has been severely impeded not just by financial circumstances alone but by other environmental/socio-economic and political factors. The



consequence of the aforementioned is the gradual depreciation of the country's human capital stock.

The literacy level in Nigeria as analysed by UNICEF 2001 for instance, fell from 57% in 1990 to 49% during the year under review, while that of women declined from 44% to 41% during the same period (See Obayan 2004:72). Similarly, the human development index report for the year 2001, showed that Nigeria falls into the low human development class out of the 162 countries that were rated in high, medium and low human development scale "measuring a country achievement" in terms of life expectancy, educational attainment and adjusted real income (UNDP 2002). The aforementioned, point a dismal posture of the Nigerian educational system. This is highly unacceptable especially in this era of globalization and millennium goal achievement. The educational system in Nigeria at the beginning of the twenty-first century can therefore not play a role of prime mover of the country's socio-economic and ever political development. To this extent, something drastic need to be done and urgently too, to remedy this ugly scenerio so as to reposition the education industry to its prime place as a positive tool for human development (See Obayan, 2002).

### **External Obstacles To Educational Development In Nigerian**

The external influences on any country's educational development would either have positive or negative impact to the nation's national system. However, the beneficial or non-beneficial impact of external influences would depend on the relative political and economic strength of the influencer (Obanyan 2002:21). This would also determine whether the influence is one-way (that is vertical and hierarchical) or whether it is two-way (i.e. horizontal and mutual). However, Nigeria external influences on education seems to have its origin to very powerful "partner" (in term of political and economic powers). Thus, the influence have been the one-way influence of hierarchical flow from the top to the bottom, Nigeria being of course at the receiving end". Babalola (2000) for instance, observed that the World Bank provision for educational development in Nigeria has always been associated i.e. "tied" to a form of financial assistance that had forced the recipient to use the resource in such a way that usually do not maximize local objectives. The Bretton Woods institution for instance, in particular did not favour the strengthening of the Western Nigeria Region's capacity to design its own UPE scheme during the period of its introduction in the early 1950s.

Obanya (2002) summarized among other external impediments to educational development to include the problem of:

*The manpower approach to educational planning: powerfully orchestrated in the 1960 – 1970 decades, which made ... education plan only for the absorptive capacity of the post-colonial civil service and not for empowering the people*

Among the problems he also posited as an external drawback to educational development include “the rapidly shifting goal post phenomenon, which pumps in new ideas, new jargons, new fads at every stage, often diverting attention from the educational needs and issues of those concerned.” The impact of these influences on education revitalization in Nigeria in particular has not been encouraging. This is because they have mystified approaches to educational reform which are not people oriented. Thus, they have alienated Education from the polity and the economy thereby making the country to be starting afresh. The list in endless, the problem of external impediment to educational development in the country also include that of the emphasis on the rate of return approach and that of the cost-benefit analysis emphasized by the donor agencies. This has placed educational development of the incapacitated countries at a disadvantage. The emphasis on these ideas as a sine-quo-non for international education support is usually to the neglect of the nation’s personality development dimension of education.

Yet, another serious hindrance to educational development is the problem of debt burden. Empirical evidence on the effect of external debt variables showed that it has a significant negative impact in human capital (educational achievement) and technological acquisition whose effect on growth may be more pronounced (See Adam 2003). It is an economic truth that extremal debt depresses investment and lowers economic growth below its potential level. Fusu (1999)’s work suggested that external debt burden has contributed to a reduction in economic growth in sub-Sahara Africa (SSA), thus, the debt burden adversely influences growth via its ability to reduce expenditures on education sector. Since there is a positive relationship between human capital (education) and economic growth (Greene and Villanueva 1991), external debt burden certainly constrain educational development especially among the heavily indebted poor counts as Nigeria. Despite the debt forgiveness echoes in Nigeria, its positive effect in any of the sector is yet to be noticed. These various constraint constitute serious impediment to Nigeria educational development. It therefore suffice to say that those multilateral institutions must go beyond and or endeavour to

periscope these overwhelming restrictions to the nation educational development with a view to enhancing the sector's development.

### **Need For Multilateral Organization's Intervention**

In consonance with the different policies of these different organizations for adjustment, revitalization, and expansion in Africa educational system, different projects has been introduced in Nigeria at one point or the other. For instance, the World Bank sixth and seventh project titled. Federal Universities Development sector operation was signed on July 18, 1990 and was to close December 31, 1996. The overall objective was to assist the Federal Government through the NUC, in its effort to ensure that the federal Universities improved their effectiveness and relevances of their teaching and research while at the same time becoming more cost-effective. Specifically the sixth project which gulped US \$120 million, was meant to encourage Universities to reduce the recurrent cost per students borne by government, to increase internally generated income as well as to reduce over-staffing and other area of Westage (Babalola, 2000). However, considering the existing facts, it is not reasonable to reduce the recurrent expenditure per student as suggested by the Bank owing to the already too low per student expenditure. For instance by 1991/1992 fiscal year, Nigeria was spending US \$671.62 on each University student, an amount judged to be very low when compared with those of the advanced countries. The seventh World Bank initiative in Nigeria was the Primary Education Project (US \$ 120 million) signed in August 15, 1991 and which was expected to be closed on June 30, 1997. This was meant to upgrade the quality of instruction in over 35,000 primary schools in the country, increase enrolment, improve resource allocation on non-salaried items; strengthen the capacity of national and state primary schools boards, and through an upgraded sectorial information base and augmented planning capacity, result in better development plans (Ajayi, 1988). These are good antecedents of foreign aid to educational development in Nigeria during the period. Nevertheless, the effect of this investment is quite little. According to the then Minister of Education, 'Very little has been achieved ... since the project became effective on March 12, 1992'. This Scerio denote an unsatisfactory state of affair. For instance, pupil enrolment rather than increasing, seems to decline, there were 276,854 classroom most of which were in deplorable condition serving about 15.5 million pupils, implying about 56 pupil per classroom as against the norm of 40 per class (See Ajayi 1988). This deplorable situation calls for unreserved intervention in order

to salvage the Nigeria education system from collapse. Similar studies also showed low participation rate due to the colossal problem of the Nigerian education system. In primary schools, participation rate of 96 percent attained as at 1983 was reduced owing to the introduction of school fees during the period (see Onwioduokit and Tule 2003). Thus participation rate also declined at the secondary level from 25 percent to 4 percent. The general overview of most support for educational change have not been too satisfactory as noted by Ajayi 1998, and Babalola 2000. Verspoor (1989) observed that World Bank support for educational development in most of the developing countries are only partially successful and the average outcome of these projects moderate 2.5, on a scale of 1 (No or limited achievements) to 4 (outstanding achievements). Instead of giving grants to the government directly to execute educational projects, it will more effective, if the donor agencies would directly get involved in the direct construction of classrooms blocks, provide books, equipment, scholarships to the needy students, funding research and publications, provision of functional libraries and other necessary facilities that will enhance the total quality of the entire school system in Nigeria. These multilateral should also work towards freeing resources for educational development. This could be achieved through the sponsoring of Technical Aid corp programmes to such needy nation like Nigeria.

### Summary and Conclusion

The education sector contribution to national development has been widely recognized in the Third World Countries since World War II. Government policymakers and development groups emphasized the importance of increasing and improving the quantity and quality of education. Hence, it has been accepted as a very important tool for development. However, effective education policy mainly rest on the ability of the recipient country to draw a positive education path for itself. Nevertheless, given the poor state of decay in the country's educational system, it is obvious that the government certainly do not have the capacity to cope with the mountaneous problem of revitalizing the education system alone. Although, the Government has the obligation to educational development in the country, enhancing its effectiveness would be possible through the full and sincere participation or involvement of these strong donor agencies. The quantity and quality manpower products can only have its relevance in today world of globalization with total re-engineering and revitalization of the educational system and with the unreserved support of these multilateral organisations.

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