REFORMS ,INNOVATIONS AND NEW APPROACHES IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Saidova Mukhayyo
Student of Narpay "Foreign Languages" faculty of Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Annotation: *Education is an instrument for effecting national development but in keeping with the dynamics of social change and the demands on human capacity, certain changes are introduced as new ideas and information about man and his environment are developed. In the context of education, reforms and innovations have been evolved and more innovations will continue to be evolved since education and its curriculum are dynamic. Given Education to build a strong base for technology development in the country as articulated in the national policy for polytechnic education, the imperative for proactive reforms and innovations in the general education of polytechnic students in line with current trends, cannot be over – emphasized. In this paper, the meanings of polytechnic education, reform and innovation would attempt a critical discourse on the challenges militating against the current reforms and innovations in the polytechnic sectors as well as proffer far – reaching recommendations as way forward.*

Key words: *education, polytechnic education, reform, revitalized education, capacity building, implantation, feedback, careful engineering*

INTRODUCTION

Reforms and innovation in the educational sector has become topical issues of discussion in various academic fora in recent times. Education being the main pivot to capacity building, development and wealth creation in any society cannot but deserve such emphasis.

Indeed, it is a trite to say education is key to all human undertakings that is why in every civilized society, issues pertaining to it treated as a matter of national security. But much more than that, experience has shown that third world countries that successfully transited from the backwaters to the industrial nirvana necessarily put primacy on the development of the human capital. The transformation that has trailed the Asian countries i.e Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, India, Bangladesh, South – Korea etc for instance, are as a result of robust reforms in their educational sector culminating in the development of their human capital (Tribune: 2007). In other words, all great countries of the world have used educational reforms to introduce structural, systemic and content changes to bring irreversible progress. In the words of Omelewa (2008) Educations reforms invariably emanates from the basic conviction that considerable progress can be made by a nation and by it people through a careful engineering of the educational process Seen from the above, the issue of desirable

reforms within the education sector Nigeria has been a recurring subject of discourse. Fundamentally, debates on reforms and innovations in education. Education has centred on a review of the structure and management dispensation of the education system, evolving of new funding mechanism which will be sustainable, curriculum innovations for appropriateness and relevance to national development reinventing of teacher education, effective resources generation for a revitalized education sector among other contentious issues, However, changes in educations often come about when current practices are challenged and questions are being asked about the way things are done. In other words, the search for a more efficient a new way of achieving educational objectives may lead to proposal for either a new way of doing the same thing, or restructuring the current provisions to enable achievement of the same set of goals. But changes such as we are experiencing in the education sector do not normally come about just because some one decides they want a change. There must be event which informs those in charge of education that the present system is either not achieving or is incapable of enabling the achievement of developmental goals. Once that decision is made, what remains is the attempt to carefully identify not only why the old system can no longer be continued in its present form, but also, how to provide a more acceptable alternative. The above indices form the basics for the current reforms and innovations in polytechnic education in the world.

Polytechnic Education and Its Objectives in the world

Polytechnic education in the world is designed principally to meet the country's philosophy of man-power development. The National Policy on Education (2004) stated emphatically that technical knowledge and skills are necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development of the world. In the words of Egboro – (2007). the Polytechnic are further mandated to give training and impart the necessary skills for the production of technicians, technologists and other skilled personnel who shall be enterprising and self reliant. Commenting on the objectives

behind the establishment of tertiary institutions, Adejumobi (2006) opined that polytechnic and university education in Nigeria have their distinct objectives. He posited that while the university exacts for the inculcation of theoretical frame-work, the polytechnic is established for practical application. A critical appraisal of the objectives above reveals a fundamental focus of polytechnic education as a creation of learning environments apposite to a structure designed for instruction. The learning environment is one where subject knowledge is learnt while using and developing process skills in the context of termed Problem Based Learning (PBL). In the PBL approach, students solve problem set by the designers by working in groups under the supervision of their facilitators.

It is the above approach that the interpersonal communication , skills, capacity building and stimulate a sense of self – imitative, e.t.c. This approach is in tandem with the global objectives, establishing polytechnic which states inter alia – imparting education and training to students at the level of regular diploma in a way to develop

an integrated personality and well – adjusted individuals both in society and in their profession. It is the desire of government to make polytechnic education more relevant to the contemporary need of Nigeria that precipitated the recent reforms and innovation in the sector. Definition of Reforms

An educationist) defined reform as a long process that begins with problem identification, study and analysis, and ends with the evaluation and continuation or termination of the programme. It involves, among other things, the development of policy alternatives, experimentation, implantation and feedback. A critical examination of the definition above reveals that reform is a gradual process; it involves collective participation especially stake holders in such sector and most importantly, a good and all- embracing reform must be based on a sound theoretical frame-work.

Theoretical Framework for Educational Reforms

Scholars are of the view that changing economic, social and political situations in both developed and developing countries have combined to create needs for constant innovations and reform in education. Durkheim argued that educational transformations are always the result and symptom of social transformations in terms of which they are to be explained in order for people to feel at any particular moment in time, the need to change its educational system. It is necessary that new ideas and needs have emerged in which the former system is no longer adequate. Although, it is difficult to pinpoint when strong links between education, social and economic development began, nevertheless, (Fagerlind and Saha (1982,395) posits thus …..it is certain that by late 1950s and early 1960s there was general agreement among politicians, educational and social planners, and schools that education was a key - change agent for moving societies along development continuum. Seen within the above postulation, expanded and improved education provision became a focus of development efforts especially in developing countries as a means of acquiring new skills and increasing productivity. The rationale this argument is reflected, for instance, in a review in several documents issued in several African, Asian and Latin American countries. These documents in the form of national plans, expressed a desire to use educational provision for economic development (Lewin: 1984). A common theme has been that education is not seen to be pursuing relevant goals, and its various outcomes are subsequently unsatisfactory. Reforms in education are often introduced to make education more utilitarian, and this has generated a whole theoretical field with a focus on how the reforms were initiated and how they achieve their effects.

For the purpose of clarity, this paper wishes to make a distinction between the forces responsible for initiation of educational innovations and educational reforms. The former (educational innovation), is aimed at improving the maximization of educational resources(Finance, Personnel, Instructional Facilities) while the latter (educational reforms) has the added dimension of direct social antecedent and reflects

a revolutionary, rather than evolutionary trend in the society .In the postulations of Karabel and Halsey (1977:551),

The process of education-al reform during periods of revolutionary upheaval raises with particular sharpen the general problem of relationship between educational and social change Revolutions do not merely make educational change possible, they require it. They must transform the educational system and bring it to harmony with a new institutional and ideological frame work.

Karabel and Halsey (1977:551) cite Russia, Cuba and China as typical examples of the interplay between educational reform and social change. This distinction between educational innovations and educational reform is necessary because the focus of this paper is on both subjects but within the context of localized conditions giving rise to the application of the twin changes rather than the social pressure that precipitated the changes. Besides, these distinctions make it easier for instance to separate Paulson's (1976, 1977) classification of theories of educational change with social antecedents from the innovatory theories characteristics of isolated programmatic alterations. Paulson (1977) posited that the unique characteristics of any educational reform effect can be partly explained by the theory of education and development in a given society.

When this broad categorization, Zaltman, Florio and Sikorski (1977) further generated sub-categories of theories which they described in terms of specific models analyzing educational and organizational changes. These subcategories are environmental (external), organizational (internal) authoritative/ participative (both internal and external), and individually. Oriental (internal) for the purpose of this paper, the authoritative / participative theoretical from work will be examined.

The Authoritative/ participative theory posits that changes in educational system occur terms of the extent to which decisions are made by authority figures. In this frame word, decisions about the nature of process of change are made entirely by individuals holding positions of may be, within the organization (e.g. teachers), or outside (e.g. the Ministry of Education). An important implication of this theory is that organizational characteristics which facilitate introduction of reforms may make implementation difficult, while characteristics enabling easy implementation may make initiation difficult. Besides, its liner structure is blind to realities of reform. Many changes are initiated but not implemented fully or at all. For instance, lack of teacher commitment may produce any passive compliance with change, and thus, the potential not fully realized.

In other words, those who implement a particular reform or policy seen from the above theory must of a necessity, have an input, no matter how negligible, in some stages of the decisionmaking regarding the reforms. The magnitude of this input often puts this category of change into a participative mode. But when the input of stake holders, in a given reform is disregarded,implementation as well as the attainment of set goals becomes a mirage.

Meaning of Innovation

Scholars have often argued that innovations are useful in any educational system and in human experience in general. According to Unruh and Alexander (1974), they viewed innovation as the introduction of a novel factor, perceived as new by a given school or community supported by a driving force, and implemented as a practical advance that deviates from established or traditional forms. Similarly, Miles, (1964) defined innovation as a deliberate novel specific change which is thought to be more efficacious in accomplishing the goals of a system. The implication of Miles definition is that innovation is often willed and planned for, it does not occur spontaneously and haphazardly. In other words, when there is a deliberate effort to improve any practice in respect of some desired objective one can conclude that innovation is being conceived.

Process of Innovation

Innovation seen from its definitions, can be considered an on going process that can result from constant - going process that can result from constant evaluation of any existing system or structure, as long as such system fails to evaluation of any existing system or structure, as long as such system fail to achieve its set goal or objective. Every innovation in any system must necessarily follow the following step;

1. Identification of the area that needs change and the agreement on the need for change. This will involve the innovator and those concerned with the system to observers and study the structure of the system. From the study, acts that do not satisfy the needs of the system can be identified. In this situation, suggestions for change will be made and agreement as to the area that needs change will be reached.

2. Identification of direction of change: It means thinking out new objectives which invariably, implies having one or more new practices (innovations) that will most probably meet the identified needs. It is at this stage that better alternatives to replace old ideas requiring change are thought out.

3. Organization of workshops for relevant stake holders on the innovative practices or alternatives.

4. Field-testing and evaluation of new practice or alternatives: This involves what is regarded as experimental try-out or filed testing of innovative ideas with a pilot group similar to the group that will eventually use the new pack age.

5. Dissemination and adoption of theinnovation: If the new practices or alternatives tried out in the aforementioned (iv) turn out to be successful, such new practices or alternatives will then be disseminated to be adopted and put into operation.The above processes have been outlined to put in proper perspective the current reforms and innovation in the polytechnic education in Nigeria and to examine if the change so introduced went through global approved channels. Besides, with the knowledge of the theoretical frame work on reforms as well as the definitions cum the processes of innovation, it becomes clearer in understanding the challenges of the current changes in the educational sector.

Reforms and Innovation in Polytechnic Education and Objectives

As earlier stated in this paper, polytechnic education was established to provide the man power needs of the country in order to propel the nation into middle-income status by the year 2015. Giving reasons for the reforms and innovation the Education Minister said competence -based concept of education was important to government since graduates of such training are of high demand in the job market because they are capable of establishing their own businesses and would be in good positions to employ others in order to reduce unemployment. Some of the Policy innovations and changes in the Polytechnic education include:

1.Repositioning science, technical and vocational education in the scheme of national education for optimum performance.

2. Introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the teaching/learning process in polytechnic education.

3. Affiliation of Polytechnics and Colleges of Education to campuses of proximate Universities

4. Abolition of HND programmers and the introduction of Bachelor of Technology (B. Tech) e.t.c

According to Yemi (2006) one of the major objectives of the reform is to rekindle the hope of students and reduce the number of students that are annually denied the opportunity of having a place in Polytechnic and the desire to place Nigeria on the global map through the upgrading of some Polytechnics to University status and the conversion of others to campuses of proximate Universities.

Besides, the fundamental objective of the reforms and innovation in the Polytechnic sector is to lay a solid foundation for technological breakthrough as expressed in the 70/30% admission rate for science and non-science students. This reform is anchored on the recognition that science based technological education is central to development and critical to Nigeria's attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

But the question is, in spite of the above laudable objectives, how far have the reforms and innovations on the Polytechnic been?

Nigeria students in general. Education without character, Mahatma Gandhi forewarned is a social sin. Part of the defects of the new reform is the nonrecognition and the non-entrenchment of a distinctive Nigeria character in the new educational curricula. The objectives of the new reforms and innovation in the education sector cannot be realized unless there is a thorough review of the school curriculum so that students are equipped to meet the peculiar demands of the new world without necessarily losing the cultural identity of their fatherland.

Conclusion

No doubt, the primacy of education as the bed rock of national development makes it susceptible to constant reforms and innovations. Global realities, however in the recent reforms and innovations in the education system especially as it relates to

polytechnic education have been dogged by diverse criticism. For instance, the introduction of ICTS in polytechnic education and other higher educational institutions by the reform failed to take into cognizance the abysmal funding of education in Nigeria. The high cost of hardwares and softwares as well as their sustainability given the state of funding of education in Nigeria, is considerably too high for many higher educational institutions. Besides, inspite of the large-scale nature and consequences of the reforms on the various classes and interest groups in Nigeria, there was no collective participation neither was there experimentation and impact analysis on its effects before its implementation. This paper therefore align itself with the suspension of the reforms and innovations at all levels of the education sector and call on the government of the day to convene a representative summit on education which will afford all the stake holders a platform to discuss the system and find solutions to its plethora of problems.

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