

# The Challenges and Prospects in the Implementation of the National Education System: The Case of 9-3-4

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## ABSTRACT

The history of education in Nigeria has been marked by constant changes in the systems in an apparent search for quality at all the education enterprise. Thus, there have been various innovations in the Nigerian school systems. New programs have also been adopted, for instance, the educational structure has changed from 8-4-2-3 (eight years in primary school, four years in junior secondary school, two years in senior secondary school, and three years in a tertiary institution) to 8-5-2-5 to 6-5-2-3 to 6-3-3-4 and currently, we are operating on the 9-3-4 system (9 years basic education, 3 years senior secondary school education, and 4 years tertiary education).

This paper is on the implementation of the policy of 9-3-4 system of education in Nigeria. It traces its historical development and with a look at the challenges and prospects. This study was carried out through historical analysis. The study explained the operation of the 9-3-4 system of education. It finds out its challenges as inadequate funding, political instability, shortage of qualified teachers and poor access to schools. The study also examined the prospects of the system and posited in its suggestion that a definite pattern of educational system that is all embracing should be fashioned out. The scholarship proffered various options towards solving the identified problems in the 9-3-4 system of education. Data used for the study was adopted from Universal Basic Education Commission.

(Keywords: national school system, balance of primary, junior secondary, secondary, and tertiary education, educational resources, educational policy)

## INTRODUCTION

A critical examination of the type of formal education in Nigeria before and after independence shows that this education was inadequate and unsatisfactory to the nation's yearnings and aspirations. In the opinion of scholars like Udofot (2010); Obayan (2009); Fafunwa (1982), the education was parochial, elitist, regurgitate and irresponsible to the needs and aspirations of the Nigerian society. In a bid to check this abnormality, the then Federal Government of Nigeria adopted education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development. Thus, it is stated: education goals in terms of its relevance to the need of the individual as well as in terms of the kind of society desired in relation to the environment and realities of the modern world and rapid social changes should be clearly set out (National Policy on Education, 2014).

The Federal Government therefore made efforts to find the type of education best suited to Nigeria's development, hence the identification of "6-3-3-4 system of education." According to Omolewa (2014) and Udofot (2010) the history of 6-3-3-4 system of education dates back to 8<sup>th</sup> September 1969 during the (International Literacy Day) when the Federal Commissioner for Education, Mr. Wenike Briggs inaugurated a conference which formulated the ideas leading to the 6-3-3-4 program. Omolewa, and Udofot states that the program was conceived as an instrument of national unity, it was designed to inject functionality into the Nigerian school system.

The 6-3-3-4 was fashioned to produce graduates who would be able to make use of their hands,

the head, and the heart (the 3Hs of education). When it was finally introduced in 1982, there had been inputs by various sectors of Nigerian professional community.

The 6-3-3-4 system of education was seen as a laudable program capable of ushering in an educational revolution in Nigeria; hence step in the right direction towards the technological development of the nation. The policy was changed about 24 years later when the then Minister for Education, Dr. Oby Ezekwesiri heralded the 9-3-4 system coupled with the privatization of Unity Schools. The effect of this change, apart from the havoc wrecked on the already unstable Unity Schools was in name only. It was the 6-3-3-4 system in short forms and the earlier synonym soon replaced the former.

A system that even President Goodluck Jonathan in October 2010, while speaking at a National Stakeholder's Meeting on the Education Sector, said had failed and called on its proponents to apologize to Nigerians. This work thus examines the operations of the 9-3-4 system of education in Nigeria. Particularly examined in this work are: challenges and prospects of 9-3-4 system of education.

## **THE OPERATION OF 9-3-4 SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

Education in Nigeria is based on a 9-3-4 system which involves three levels of institutional learning processes: at the primary school level, at the secondary school level, and at the tertiary level. The first two stages are known as Universal Basic Education in Nigeria. Actually, nursery education forms the first stage of the learning process in Nigeria. Unfortunately, a lot of families still cannot afford to send their toddlers to nursery schools. The 9-3-4 system of education does not embrace education at this stage.

### **Primary School Education**

The 9-3-4 system of education was designed in conformity with MDGs and Education for All, EFA (Kayode, 2006). The UBE involves 6 years of primary school education and 3 years of junior secondary school education, culminating in 9 years of uninterrupted schooling. Transition from one class to another is automatic but determined through continuous assessment. This scheme is

monitored by the Universal Basic Education Commission, UBEC, and has made it "free", "compulsory" and a right of every child.

In Nigeria, children start attending primary schools when they are 6 years old and spend the next six years there, graduating at the age of 12. However, most children who attended nursery schools prior to primary schools have an edge over those children who did not have the privilege to do so. Therefore, they usually finish earlier. At graduation, primary school pupils are awarded the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC), which, in combination with the common entrance examination, fulfills the formal requirements for secondary school education.

Primary education in Nigeria is compulsory, but free under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program introduced by President Olusegun Obasanjo on September 30, 1999. However, it may be an exaggeration to speak of free primary education here because in reality parents still have to pay school levies imposed on pupils, buy school uniforms and so on (Alabekee 2009). Admit that education at this level is mainly financed by the government. But after the primary school education, parents and guardians are made to bear the full costs of sending their children/wards to secondary schools or tertiary institutions.

At primary school level, pupils have to put on school uniforms throughout the country. Subjects taught at the primary level include mathematics, English language, Christian religious studies, Islamic studies, science, physical and health education, one of the three main indigenous languages Hausa, Yoruba, and Irgbo, computer science, French, fine arts, social studies, citizenship education, and cultural and creative arts (drawing, handicraft, music and cultural activities). The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be "the language of the environment", for the first three years. From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment and French shall be taught as subjects.

Starting from 1998, those wishing to teach at primary school level are required to possess a National Certificate in Education (NCE), which is awarded by colleges of education. Due to inadequate number of teachers, however, holders of the Teacher's Grade 2 Certificate

(TC2) are still allowed to teach in some remote primary schools, (Alabekee 2009).

### **Secondary School Education**

Successful pupils at the primary school level—those in possession of FSLC and who have passed the entrance examination to secondary schools, the Common Entrance Examination, can then proceed with the secondary school education, usually at the age of twelve. Students spend six years in secondary school that is 3 years of Junior Secondary School (JSS) and 3 years of Senior Secondary School (SSS). The language of instructions at the level is English. Secondary school students also wear uniforms. At the nursery and primary school levels pupils, irrespective of their sex, attend mixed school; boys and girls at the secondary school level are often sent to separate school (boys' schools or girls' schools). However, mixed secondary schools are no longer a rare sight in Nigeria today.

The first phase of the secondary education, which lasts for three years, is provided at the Junior Secondary Schools which is the completion of basic 9. Subjects taught at this level are English, French, mathematics, language of environment or one major Nigerian language other than that of the environment to be taught as second language, integrated science, social studies and citizenship education, and introductory technology. These subjects are compulsory for every student at this level. There are pre-vocational electives: agriculture business studies, home economics, local craft, computer education, fine art and music. Non-pre-vocational electives include: Christian religious studies, physical and health education, and Arabic. Students have right to select at least one subject each from the prevocational and non-pre-vocational subjects. A successful completion of the JSS is a prerequisite for the second phase—the Senior Secondary School (SSS), which also lasts for three years.

Second phase which is Senior Secondary School (SSS) which lasts for 3 years is the 3 in the 9-3-4 system of education. Subjects taught at this level are divided into three groups: Group A core subjects: English Studies, mathematics, a major Nigerian language, one of biology, chemistry, physics or health science, one of literature-in-English, history, geography or religious studies

and a vocational subject. These core subjects are compulsory for all the students.

The Group B, vocational electives include agriculture, applied electricity, auto-mechanics, book-keeping and accounting, building construction, commerce, computer education, electronics, clothing and textiles, food and nutrition, home management, metal work, technical drawing, woodwork, shorthand, fine art, typewriting, and music.

Group C non-vocational electives include biology chemistry, physics, further mathematics, French, health education, physical education, history, geography, Christian religious studies, Islamic studies, Arabic, government, economics, any Nigerian language that has orthography and literature.

Students are expected to select a minimum of one and maximum of two subjects from the list of elective subjects in group B and C respectively. A student is expected to offer a minimum of eight and a maximum of nine subjects at this level. The Senior Secondary Certificate Examination is taken in the last year of secondary school (SS3). Private organizations, the state government or the Federal Government manage secondary schools in Nigeria respectively for private, State and Federal schools.

### **The '4' in the System**

Institution of higher education or the tertiary institutions provide the last stage of formal education, which takes a minimum of 4 years, completing the 9-3-4 educational system mentioned earlier in this paper. Professional courses like Medicine and Dentistry last for six years. Institutions offering higher education include universities, polytechnics, universities of agriculture and numerous colleges of education owned by both Federal and State respectively. Any candidate who has fulfilled the formal entrance requirements mentioned above is qualified for university education. Direct entry candidates for degree courses in Arts, social sciences and pure sciences spend three years instead of four years. There are three stages of education at the university level: First Degree Program, Master's Degree Program, and Doctorate Degree Program.

Polytechnics and some other institutions of higher education provide education in two phases of two years each. After the first two-year full-time program, successful candidates are awarded the Ordinary National Diplomas (OND). At this point, students are also required to do a one-year industrial attachment before being admitted to the HND-program.

Colleges of Education award the Nigerian Certificate of Education (NCE) at the end of a three-year program. Most NCE-holders seek admission into universities with a view to obtaining bachelor's degree in education, which could increase their chances of teaching at the senior secondary schools or becoming headmistress or headmasters at the primary schools. The higher institutions of education also run sandwich courses to enable the working population further their education or obtain the qualifications necessary for their present jobs.

### **Some Challenges in The Nigerian Education System Include the Following**

**Poor Preparation and Malpractices:** Educationists have been able to identify examination malpractices with poor preparation of students for an examination, and lack of self-confidence. In view of the rising costs of education (school fees, enrolment fees, cost of books and other materials) students and even their parents will not ordinarily want to be held by any form of deficit or failure in any of the required subjects hence will go to any length to ensure success.

In some cases, some teachers at the primary and secondary school levels are involved by way of encouraging students to contribute money (cooperation fees) in order to secure the needed assistance during such examination. This is because they, the teachers are left with no other alternative considering the fact that they are aware of the inadequate preparation of their students as well as the lack of facilities to get them properly prepared before examination.

Omofonmwan and Ocha (2007) said, interview with 50 school heads in Benin City, reveals that more than 50% of our secondary students on annual basis choose to enroll and write their final year external examination in schools in the interior and some private schools where they are very sure of success at the end of the day.

**Inadequacy of Teachers and Materials:** There is no doubt there are shortage of qualified teachers and materials even at the federal level to implement the 9-3-4 system of education. Kasamotu (1986) revealed that in the implementation of 9-3-4 system of education the areas of emphasis are the technical and vocational, which require materials in science and technical discipline. The qualified technical teachers are very hard to come by, where available in short supply. These science and technical materials are either not adequately supplied or where supplied left to rot in college store due to lack of manpower to operate the machines.

The part played by some state governors to contribute in the acute shortage of teachers to implement the quality educational system in Nigeria are seen in the character of these governors in the country. In 1996, the military government in Edo State sent home secondary school teachers that have served 28 years and above as well as those that were recruited in 1991 and after. This happened few weeks before final year examination. Some schools were left with one teacher and a security man. This is how the government indirectly legitimized irregularities in schools that is today unabated, (Omofonwan, 2001).

Between 1999 and the year 2000, the Bauchi State Government terminated the services of teachers who were non-indigene from its teaching services. (Odia and Omofonmwan, (2007). In October 2011, the Abia State government replicated the action of Bauchi State Government. A situation which resulted in acute shortage of teachers in virtually all schools in the state without a prior provision for replacement. Of particular interest is the case of Kaduna state government who in 2017 sacked over one thousand teachers from the public primary schools for non-performance of qualifying test in the state, (Ukpong, Yusuf & Aliyu,2012).

**Hindrances to Schooling:** All Nigerian children who should be in schools are not in school. In the eastern parts, one prevalent problem is the boy-child drop out syndrome. The boys for economic reasons drop out prematurely. In the northern parts of the country, the problem is that of girl-child drop out from school, for reasons ranging from early marriage to cultural values opposed to female education as well as ignorance.

**Facilities in Schools:** The infrastructure inadequacies in the schools are another area that poses hindrance to learning and research work. A good number of Nigerian universities are offering technological education programs. The question is how many of these universities have the basic infrastructure to run the program? For example, in most universities offering computer course, students graduate without touching a computer. Onyekakeyah (2005) said, the death of infrastructure in the public universities is sickening and runs short of an ideal academic environment". Odetunde (2004) said, "Unfortunately, today students are learning in dilapidated buildings environmentally depressing and learning disabling situations and yet some of these students are still excelling". (P.2). For students, it is simply a means to acquire certificates, and not the development of their cognitive and social powers.

**Brain Drain:** Over the past decades, as a result of a gradual exodus of many of the most talented faculty, Nigeria universities have ceased to be a place for exciting search for innovation. Some faculty abandoned academia for other sectors of the economy, where professionals and scientist receive higher salaries and greater social recognition. Some emigrate for economic reasons, while some fled because of political reasons. Ali (1999) said, "that many experienced and young lecturers are fleeing from the frustration of university life into more rewarding and more challenging sectors of the economy and even to overseas countries (P.3). The result of the faculty exodus is seen in the quality of graduates that our universities produce.

**Certification:** Too much emphasis on certification is a very big challenge to the educational system of the country. The issue now is that the school certificate should be the basic educational level in any civilized society. As a result, people bribed their way out to get this paper qualification with high grades. Anosike in Okoli (2008) pointed out that in Nigeria, schooling has trained people for wrong kinds of jobs and created a skilled workforce inappropriate to the demands of the labour market". He also raised the issue of 'credentialism' sometimes called, diploma disease'. This was an unusual situation found in Nigeria where there were large numbers of unemployed university graduates with unapproved skills while appropriate trained force was imported from abroad for certain sectors of the economy.

In Germany you cannot earn certificate until you are attached to an industrial organization for technological practical training. One must have that experience whatever the background (Adio and Mohammed, 2010). But in Nigeria, one obtains certificates and does not know what to do with them. This is the challenge of 9-3-4 education system.

**Political Instability:** Political instability has led to inconsistent policies due to a rapid turnover of education ministers with different interests, from supporting Universal Basic Education (UBE) to developing the National Open University. However, for any program, policy or system to succeed in any nation, its political system and operations must be effective enough to create a conducive environment for education and industrial advancement. If politics in a country is good, it will give rise to good policy, programs, process and good products which is the output. Nigeria has not had any policy but document. It is sad to note that Nigeria had spent billions of dollars on education, but little on investment. For instance, Nigeria is preparing to spend billions of Naira to establish more universities, while the existing ones are crying for facility upgrading and personnel capacity building. Money spent on education that will not enhance learning will amount to a waste. So, Nigerian politicians should learn how to invest in education that will yield better results.

**Inadequate Funding of Education:** The managers of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria are in consensus that these institutions are grossly under-funded. Evidence exists on the degree of dilapidation that characterizes the primary and secondary school buildings in parts of the country; the non-payment of teachers' salaries and allowances as a result of which strikes are the order of the day; the lack of necessary teaching and learning materials at all levels of the educational system; poor working conditions of all teachers in the country, among other indices. It has also been argued that financial mismanagement and lack of accountability by officials lead to diverting substantial resources from the educational institutions to other ends.

Two issues are relevant: need for enough funds and the need for responsible and proper management of the funds: How to achieve these two is a major challenge in the Nigerian educational system and achieving them holds the

key to educational development in the country (Oluwatobi, 2006).

**Socio/Political Issues:** There are also fiscally induced tensions that generate negative impact e.g., cultic cases, economic and political pressures. Olujuwon (2004) commented “the tertiary institutions that are established to promote intellectual excellence, good virtues etc; have deviated. We are faced daily with reports of students caught in armed robbery, rape, assassination. The majority of the institutions have misplaced their goals and allowed social, political factors of their environment to create crises in their academic community. It is a known fact that tertiary institutions do not get their entire approved annual budget” (P.6). All these and more threaten the academic autonomy and stable academic calendar.

## PROSPECTS OF EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

The 9-3-4 system of education was designed in conformity with MDGs and Education for All EFA, with the purpose to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as to stimulate and accelerate development, political consciousness and national integration.

Primary school education is the bedrock of any society development. It is the first step to liberate

a people from the clutches of ignorance. Therefore, faulty foundation has always cast doom for the people. Whole good foundation is an eye opener and crystal mirror for a progressive society since the primary level is the molder level of the youth, who are leaders of tomorrow. This could be the reason why the prospect of 9-3-4 system of education is more glaring in the Basic 9 than in the 3 and 4 levels. They include:

### UBE Community Initiated Self Help Project

The Self-Help Project of the UBE program is designed as a strategy to involve the community and private sector participation in basic education delivery through the initiation, execution, administration and ownership of designated school projects. The Self-Help Strategy also proved to be very rewarding in providing requisite infrastructure and services within the school environment as well as galvanizing popular community support and involvement in UBE delivery. Importantly, the strategy has instituted transparency and accountability in resource management, paved way for community ownership of UBE program and increased the opportunities for increasing access, quality and equity in UBE delivery. Additionally, the strategy has several deliverables in key infrastructural components and other facilities that are essential to quality UBE delivery.

**Table 1:** Analysis of Information that Guides UBE Resources in School.

S/No	Project Type	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
		4,407 Schools	7, 532 Schools	6,434 Schools	4,225 Schools	22,598 Schools
1	Construction of new classroom	3,111	8,673	3,618	3,380	18, 782
2	Renovation of classrooms	3,993	6,840	34,784	4,572	50, 189
3	Teachers/pupils furniture (sets)	60,098	126,150	127,200	94,800	408, 248
4	Boreholes	79	120	87	55	341
5	Electricity	164	578	40	13	795
6	VIP Toilets	-	714	543	179	1,436

Source: UBEC 2019

### **Federal Teachers' Scheme (FTS)**

The Federal Government of Nigeria introduced the Federal Teachers' Scheme (FTS) in 2006 with aim of addressing shortage of qualified teachers in the basic education sector. The scheme which is being financed through the Debt Relief Gain (DRG) is a two-year program designed to cater for unemployed NCE graduates. Under the scheme, NCE graduates are employed by the Federal Government and posted to States for a two-year period before formal absorption by states and LGEAs: The first batch of 40,000 participants completed the service in October 2008. UBEC enlisted 34,000 fresh participants in January 2009 while states have absorbed 27,000 products of the first batch into their workforce.

### **Inter-Agency Cooperation**

In recognition of the multi-sectoral and cross-cutting nature of UBE program implementation, UBE pursues and implements critical sub-sector related programs in collaboration with other agencies with distinct responsibilities within the Federal Ministry of Education. In this regard, the following are some of the achievements recorded.

- Production and distribution of the new 9-year Basic Education Curriculum to all public primary and junior secondary schools across the country;
- Development, production and distribution of training manuals to provide the knowledge the skills required to plan, design, organize and evaluate training programs for all those that are concerned with the implementation of the 9-year basic education curriculum ([ubeconline.com/index.3.html](http://ubeconline.com/index.3.html)).

### **Universal Basic Education 2009 Curriculum Improvement.**

The following have been achieved in the area of curriculum improvement:

- Setting up National Early Child Care minimum standards for ECCE centers
- Approval of Integrated Early childhood curriculum for 3-5 years by the National Council on Education (NCE) for pre-school child growth and early stimulation.

- Production and distribution of 9-years Basic Education Curriculum materials to all public primary and junior secondary schools in the 36 states and FCT.
- Introduction of the 9-year basic education curricula into schools for step-wise implementation beginning from 2008/2009 academic year in primary 1 and JSS 1
- Training 40 master-Trainers in each of the 36 states and FCT on the philosophy and content of the basic education curricula in August 2008. The state level training by master-trainers has also been conducted (UBEC, 2009). Some state governors are not left out in the achievement of the 9-3-4 system of education.

### **Way Forward**

There is a common aphorism that knowledge is power, and in contemporary times knowledge is mostly acquired through education. Therefore, the educational system of any society is a powerful instrument for national development. The desire for better quality of education is a generally shared feeling in Nigeria as in many other countries. Though quality production is the responsibility of all stakeholders, the schools in particular, play key role in the quality process for the 9-3-4 system. To be fully implemented government must be ready to provide all the necessary materials both human and material resources needed for all the citizens to acquire literacy.

For an educational system to be classified as functional and effective, it must be all encompassing and all embracing. Thus, a well-focused and definite pattern of educational system that is all embracing should be fashioned out while vocational and technical education will be well developed and every child given the proper and kind of education he or she desires, based on the psychomotor, cognitive and affective domain.

Finally, since education is seen as a sine-qua-non to national development and since no nation can develop above its educational system, it becomes not only important but also imperative to find some solutions to the problems of dwindling resource allocation to the educational sector.

## CONCLUSION

The policy of the 9-3-4 system of education in Nigeria is in tandem with the world-wide acclamation for universal education. This was the target of international conferences like those at Karachi, Addis-Ababa in early 1960s, Bombay (1952), Cairo (1954), Lima (1956), Abidjan (1964), Nairobi (1968), Lagos (1976), Harare (1981), Winsor, UK (1984), Dakar (1991) Jomtien and Thailand 1990 etc. There is need to organize this 'elementary level,' the Basic education (the '9') as well as it is the foundation for the other '3 and 4: columns in the system. Though the challenges in adoption and implementation are many yet there is light in the dark tunnel as Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council is carefully mapping out the curriculum content to meet the emerging issues in social and the aspiration of learners in term of capacity development.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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