

Accreditation and certification issues in Nigerian schools

Omaze Anthony Afemikhe¹, Jennifer Omo-Egbekuse² and Sylvanus Yakubu Imobekhai³

Abstract

Education is a big industry in Nigeria. At the Primary and Secondary (High school) levels schools are being established on a regular basis. It is however not an all comers 'market' as certain guidelines must be followed as part of schools' accreditation; and certification at the completion of school programmes. Education is on the concurrent legislative list, making these issues to vary from state to state. With public examining at the end of senior secondary school (SSS), issues having a bearing on accreditation and certification may show some uniformity. This paper attempts to explore the accreditation and certification issues as they relate to the nine-year basic education programme to bring out the similarities and differences across states. The same issues as they operate within the SSS programme would also be examined. In addition, commonalities and differences between the two levels are outlined and import for educational development particularly for developing countries are carefully examined.

Introduction

Education is an instrument for political, economic, socio-economic and national development. In Nigeria, education is a big industry. Every year government spends huge amounts of money on education. Formal education in Nigeria can be traced to 1942 and since its inception it has undergone a radical change. In the early years of formal education, schools were mainly established and owned by missionary bodies and later by private individuals who managed them at own discretion. With the evolution of a National Policy on Education (NPE) (1977) from deliberations of the 1969 National Curriculum Conference, governments focus for education became:

The development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen, the full integration of individuals into the community and the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country and at all levels of education.

Equally spelt out are educational objectives for each level of education as well as the educational structure needed for implementation of these policies.

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999:18) prescribes that government shall;

- Direct its policy toward ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels,

¹ Institute of Education, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. E-mail: tonyafemikhe@yahoo.co.uk

² Uselu Senior Secondary School, Benin City, Nigeria. E-mail: Jennifer_omoegbekuse@yahoo.com

³ Institute of Education, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. E-mail: syimobekhai@yahoo.com

- Promote science and technology,
- Strive to eradicate illiteracy by providing, when practicable; free, compulsory and universal primary education, free university education and free adult literacy programme.

Nigeria operates the 6-3-3-4 structure of education. Six years of primary education, six years of secondary education this is split into three years each of junior secondary and senior secondary schools respectively. The 4 implies 4 years of tertiary education. Since the last decade, attempts have been made at merging the six years of primary education and the first three years of secondary education to form a continuous nine years of basic education. One is therefore tempted to describe the educational system as the 9-3-4 system. This however is not the case as it is required of a child to successfully complete primary school education before being placed in the junior secondary school.

Basic education is defined as “the whole range of educational activities taking place in various settings (formal, non-formal and informal), that aim to meet basic learning needs” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basic>). It focuses on the foundational skills that students need to become productive citizens capable of civic engagement and sustaining competitive employment. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme was launched in Nigeria in 1999. Its vision is that “at the end of the nine years of continuous education, every child should acquire appropriate and relevant skills and values and be employable in order to contribute his/her quota to national development”. To achieve this goal the Nigerian government declares that education shall be free and compulsory during the nine-year basic education. Towards this end, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) developed a high quality 9-year Basic education curriculum which was approved by the National Council on Education. This new curriculum came into effect in September 2007. In it, core subjects were redefined and new subjects introduced to replace obsolete subjects. Value re-orientation, poverty eradication and job creation, which are the target of the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), were taken into account in drawing the curriculum.

The problem

Despite the multiplicity of public schools in Nigeria, there has been an upsurge of private schools at all levels of education. Olabusuyi (2008) attributed this to neglect and gross underfunding of public schools by successive governments, disdain treatment of teachers without regular payment of salaries as well as low salaries for teachers. The consequence of these is incessant teachers’ strike leading to intermittent disruptions of academic activities in public schools. Consequently, the era of private schools seemed to have erupted. Presently in some states the number of private primary and secondary schools greatly outnumber the public or government schools. Despite the free and compulsory basic education given in public schools, some parents still prefer to send their children to private schools where high fees and levies are charged. Perhaps one major reason for this decision is the fact that private schools do not experience disruptions in their academic calendar.

A critical look at these private schools reveals that while some are standard, others are substandard. Even among the old government schools some can be classified as being substandard. There are however guidelines expected to be followed in establishing schools. These guidelines are drawn and executed by the Federal and State Ministries of Education to ensure that newly established schools meet some standards. It is the process of doing this which we hereby

refer to as accreditation. Floden (1980) claims that disagreements have mainly been in the area of how accreditation should be determined, who participates in the accreditation process as well as the effects of accreditation. In Nigeria, accreditation of newly established schools is done by a team of officials of the Federal/State ministry of education depending on whether the school is directly under the jurisdiction of the federal or state government. To carry out the accreditation process, the officials undergo a feasibility study of the new school checking that the guidelines are followed. This process can take a few years until the school is finally approved or disapproved.

Completion of an educational programme requires something to show for it. Apart from the skills and knowledge, something tangible must be given to the programme participant that he/she can show. A certificate is one such expectation. Certification refers to the confirmation of certain characteristics of an object, person or organization. In the school system this confirmation is provided by assessment. At the completion of every stage of education students are assessed and consequently certificates are awarded.

This paper examines two issues of accreditation and certification and focuses on primary education and junior secondary school levels. In particular it examines the following:

1. How accreditation is carried out in primary and junior education levels?
2. How Certification processes is carried out in primary and junior education levels in Nigeria?

Methodology

The method adopted in this paper is documentation. The documents used are the minimum guidelines for approval of primary, junior secondary and senior secondary schools. The population is made up of all primary, junior secondary and senior secondary schools from some states in Nigeria. There are thirty six states and the Federal Capital territory in Nigeria. Each state draws its own guidelines using the minimum standards provided by the Federal Ministry of Education titled “guideline for the establishment of new schools (2005)”. To be eligible for recognition a school owner has to fulfill a number of conditions. The thirty-six states in Nigeria have their various operational guidelines but we have selected some four states for illustration.

Thus the documents from the states were compared and areas of similarities and differences were highlighted.

Results

This is presented in two headings:

Accreditation

The Federal Ministry of Education outlines the following stages in the accreditation process:

1. The proprietor/proprietress of the new school applies to the state government. On payment of an application fee, a form is issued alongside a copy of the minimum standards for the establishment of schools.
2. (i) the state authorities inspect the site;
 (ii) If what is on ground is consistent with the guidelines, a provisional approval is given;
 (iii) Where it is not consistent, the proprietor is advised to comply with or stop further development. Based on this, he/she can later ask for re-inspection.
3. Three years after the establishment of the school, officials of the FME carry out Recognition Inspection of the school. A letter of approval is then issued if the school meets all the guidelines. Subsequently, regular visits are to be conducted to the school.

School accreditation is a type of school self evaluation, a systematic and comprehensive evaluation to look out for areas of strengths and weaknesses of the school. In Nigeria, the aspect of school accreditation has not been fully developed. In cases where it is done, it may be once in about five years or more. In such occasions a team of officials from the inspectorate division of the ministry of education, a few selected principals and some head teachers are made to visit and inspect the schools in line with the spelt out guidelines. However the reports of these panels rarely see the light of the day. If properly done, accreditation should bring about positive changes in a school system. Through accreditation schools receive external mark of quality, teachers engage in more meaningful teaching, students' academic performance is raised and the whole school system is overhauled. With the introduction of school based management committee into the Nigerian school system, it is expected that the concept of school self evaluation will be put into frequent practice.

Table 1: Physical facilities minimum guidelines for establishing schools in Nigeria

| Description | School type | Federal | Kaduna State | Edo State | Enugu State | Cross River State |
|------------------------------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Land with certificate of occupancy | Primary | 1-5 hectares | 4 hectares | 2 hectares | 2-5 | 1-2 |
| | Junior secondary | 4-8 hectares | 5 hectares | 5 hectares | 4-8 | 2 |
| | Senior secondary | | 5 hectares | | 4-8 | 3 |

| | | 4-8 hectares | | 5 hectares | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| No. of classrooms at inception | Primary | At least 3 | NA | 6 | 3 | 4 |
| | Junior secondary | 4 | NA | 6 | 3 | 4 |
| | Senior secondary | 4 | NA | 6 | 5 | 5 |
| Dimensions of classrooms | Primary | 9m x 12m | 9m x 6.6m | 7.3m x 9.2m | 9m x 12m | 8m x 10m |
| | Junior secondary | 9m x 12m | 12m x 9m | 7.3m x 9.2m | 9m x 12m | 9m x 12m |
| | Senior secondary | 9m x 12m | 7.2m x 8.4m | 7.3m x 9.2m | 9m x 12m | 9m x 12m |
| Class size at inception | Primary | 10 pupils | Maximum of 40 | Not indicated | 18 pupils | 10-15 pupils |
| | Junior secondary | 15 students | Same | | 25 students | 35 students |
| | Senior secondary | 15 students | Same | | Not stated | 35 students |
| Administrative block | Primary | 1 big room & a store 7mx4m | 1 block | 1 room with store | 1 room with store | 1 big room with store |
| | Junior secondary | 3m | same | 1 | 3 rooms with store | 2 big rooms with store |
| | Senior secondary | same | same | 1 | 7 rooms with store | same |

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| | | same | | | | |
| Library | Primary | Functional library | Functional library | 1 | Functional library | Functional library |
| | Junior secondary | Same | Same | 1 | Same | Same |
| | Senior secondary | same | Same | 1 | same | Same |
| Basic health scheme | Primary | First aid room with 1 trained nurse | First aid room | First aid room | First aid room | First aid room |
| | Junior secondary | Sick bay with 2 trained nurses | Sick bay | Same | Sick bay same | Sick bay |
| | Senior secondary | same | Same | same | | Sick bay |
| Toilet facilities | Primary | 3 VIP toilet | 1 with toilet bowl/urinary | 1:40 pupils | 4WC | 4WC |
| | Junior secondary | 4 VIP toilets/ 4 water cistern | same | same | 4WC | 4WC |
| | Senior secondary | same | same | same | 4WC | 4Wc |
| Laboratory/workshop | Primary | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil |
| | Junior secondary | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 laboratory/1 workshop | 1 laboratory/2 workshops |
| | Senior secondary | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 labs/2workshops | 3 laboratories |
| Games field | Primary | 1 football field | 1 football field | 1 football field | 1 football field | 1 football field |
| | Junior | 1 football | same | | Same | |

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------------|
| | secondary | field and 1 other game | | Same | | Same |
| | Senior secondary | same | same | same | same | Same and 1 other game |
| Farm/fish land | Primary | 1 40m ² | | 40m ² x3,000m ² | Required | 40m ² x 3000m ² |
| | Junior secondary | | 1 hectare | Same | Same | Same |
| | Senior secondary | | same | same | same | same |
| Guidance and counseling room | Primary | nil | Nil | nil | nil | Nil |
| | Junior secondary | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | Senior secondary | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

From Table 1 it is observed that the requirements for land as specified by the federal guidelines are complied with by the four states. With respect to the number of classrooms at inception, the federal guidelines specified 3 for primary, 4 for junior secondary and 4 for senior secondary school. Edo state requires 6 classrooms for each of the levels while Enugu and Cross river states specified 3 classrooms and 4 classrooms respectively for their primary and junior secondary schools. The number of classrooms required for senior secondary was higher than the number specified by the other states. The dimensions of the classrooms as specified by the federal documents were not directly followed by the states. Administrative blocks are as specified by the federal and state guidelines. In addition, a functional library is expected to be available in the primary, junior secondary and senior secondary schools. With respect to basic health scheme, all documents examined showed that a primary school should have a first aid room. While the federal government indicated that there should be a trained nurse, the state documents were silent. Among the states, a requirement for the provision of a sick bay was specified except in the case of Edo state where the existence of a first room was specified. There was however no provision for laboratory/workshop for primary schools but at least one laboratory is expected to be available in the junior and senior secondary schools. Provision was also made for 1 football field, a farm and a guidance and counseling room for senior secondary schools.

Table 2: Human resources minimum guidelines for establishing schools in Nigeria

| Description | School type | FEDERAL | KADUNA STATE | EDO STATE | ENUGU STATE | CROSS RIVER STATE |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|--|--|---|--|
| Qualification of head teacher | Primary Junior secondary Senior secondary | NCE (with TRCN) 5years experience B.Ed. 1 st degree & PGDE for 5 years Same | NCE primary education University graduate with teaching qualification Same | NCE/B. Ed Same Same | NCE 5years with (TRCN) B.Ed or 1 st . degree/PGDE same | NCE 1 st .degree or PGDE for 5years Same for 7years |
| Teachers' qualification | Primary Junior secondary Senior secondary | NCE (with TRCN) NCE, B.Ed, 1 st degree & PGDE same | TC II,NCE primary education University graduate with teaching qualification same | TC II/NCE NCE/B. Ed same | NCE B.Ed same | NCE NCE/B.Ed/PGDE same |
| Minimum no. of teachers at inception | Primary Junior secondary Senior secondary | 3 teachers with 2 support staff 12 teachers with 3 support staff | Maximum of 2:40 pupils Same Same | Not stated Not stated Not stated | 3 teachers 12 teachers 12 teachers with 8 support | 4 teachers 12 teachers 12 teachers |

| | | same | | | staff | |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------|------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Bank account | Primary | 1 million naira | Not stated | Required but amount not stated | 2 million naira | 500,000 naira |
| | Junior secondary | 3 million naira | Same | | 5 million naira | 1 million naira |
| | Senior secondary | 4 million naira | Same | | 6 million naira | 5 million naira |

In Table 2 the human resources minimum guidelines are specified. For primary schools, NCE is required of all head teachers while for junior and senior secondary schools the requirement is a B.Ed degree or a university degree with a teaching qualification. All states seem to agree with these requirements. The teachers' qualification for primary schools was the NCE except in the case of Edo and Kaduna states which could also accept a teachers' certificate grade II. For junior and senior secondary schools the NCE, B.Ed, 1st degree and PGDE are the required qualifications. The minimum number of teachers at inception as specified by the federal government is 3 for primary and 12 for both junior and senior secondary schools. Enugu and cross river states requirements are in perfect agreement with the federal requirement for the junior and senior secondary schools. In the case of Kaduna state a ratio of 2:40 pupils was specified.

Certification

Nigerians place much emphasis on paper certification. The NPE decrees that the conduct of examination and award of certificate at the primary should be by the head master. At the junior secondary level of education, National Examinations Council (NECO) and state ministries of education conduct the terminal examinations for certification. At the senior secondary school level, external examination bodies like West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and NECO are responsible for the certification exercise.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education provides guidelines for certification at each level of schooling. In it, it is stated that at the end of the six-year primary education, the Primary school leaving certificate, which is based only on continuous assessment shall be issued locally by the head teacher of the school. For the three-year junior secondary school certificate (JSC), it is based on continuous assessment and examination conducted by state and NECO. However, the

senior school certificate (SSC), awarded to graduating students of the three-year senior secondary school shall be based on continuous assessment and a national examination. This examination is usually conducted by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and the National Examination Council (NECO). To this end, the various state ministries of education (exams and records division) are responsible for the Junior School Certificate while the Federal ministry of education takes charge of the federal government schools and some private schools.

Conclusion

This paper explored the issues of accreditation and certification in the Nigerian educational system. The federal and state ministries of education are fully responsible for the carrying out these processes. Guidelines are laid down for each of the states as well as the federal government. Similarities and differences were observed. To a large extent there is an agreement in requirements. What is not sure is how well these guidelines are followed. The aspect of school self evaluation in schools in Nigeria need to be re-awakened as this will bring about change and reform in the educational system. It is recommended that the initial accreditation of new schools, subsequent and regular visits be made to schools to retain standards. In addition, existing schools need also be re-accredited.

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