

THE NEED TO OVERHAUL THE NATIONAL AND BASIC EDUCATION GOALS BEYOND RHETORIC IN NIGERIA

Grace Oluremi AKANBI, Ph.D

Department of Educational Foundations,
Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo State, Nigeria
E-mail: ayo4remi@gmail.com

Abstract

This study focuses on the need to overhaul national and basic education goals beyond rhetoric in the national policy on education. Goals give direction to any enterprise, including education. Nigeria has necessary national and basic education goals, and all the educational processes are supposed to target achieving these goals. In the conceptual framework of leaving no child behind and the importance of Basic Education as the foundation for all other levels of education, this paper noted some things that need sincere adjustment. First, education goals should be dynamic, making it conform to global development. Having the same goals from the 20th Century up to the 21st Century may not augur well for any nation that intends to utilise education as a development tool. Therefore, it needs overhauling. Second, overhauling the policies and the goal of education requires adequate funding, proper monitoring of policy implementation and evaluation of the outcome, pointing to the direction of overhauling. The researcher, therefore, recommended that allocated funds for basic education should be judiciously spent for the purpose. At the same time, the stakeholders should be committed to achieving the goals highlighted for basic education.

Keywords: National policy on education, education goals, implementation and budgetary allocation and rhetoric.

Introduction

Nigeria got her independence from the colonial government on October 1, 1960. Therefore, it becomes imperative for Nigerians to initiate the processes of taking charge of the nation's affairs, including education, to make it more relevant to the needs and aspirations of the citizens. Therefore, the issues of goals and relevance were part of why the 1969 Curriculum Conference was organised.

Before the conference, there were "expressions of general disaffection with the existing educational system which had become irrelevant to national needs, aspirations and goals (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2011: 14). It then became necessary "to review old and identify new national goals for education in Nigeria at all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary) and provide

guidelines on what the system should be accomplishing with respect to the needs of youths and adults individuals in our society" (Adaralegbe, 1972). The conference's outcome led to the evolution of the first indigenous policy on education, the National Policy on Education (NPE), which was first published in 1977, and subsequently reviewed in 1985, 1988, 2004, 2008 and 2013. All the editions of the NPE stated in clear terms what the National and basic education goals are, and following these goals were the various delivery systems that would lead to the achievement of the goals.

Nevertheless, it seems all are rhetoric because achieving the stated goals requires genuine and total commitment to building human capacity, infrastructure, and proper implementation and evaluation, which will involve adequate funding. Beyond carefully worded policy, and in the light of global developments in the education sector, this paper focuses its discussion on the need to overhaul the goals to make them practicable and achievable to build a solid foundation for our education system. This study is historical; therefore, it employs the historical method to collect information and facts needed through primary and secondary sources. All the editions of the NPE, together with relevant textbooks and journals, were consulted as the source for information.

National Policy on Education (NPE)

The NPE, a formal document produced by the Federal Republic of Nigeria, guides all levels of education in the country. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013), the NPE "enunciates the objectives, standards, structures, strategies and management guidelines for achieving the national education goals in Nigeria" (p. 13). The document, first published in 1977, was a direct result of the National Curriculum Conference and has undergone review five times. The NPE, according to FRN (2013), is geared toward addressing the problems of educational relevance to the needs and aspirations of Nigerians and promoting Nigeria's unity and laying the foundation for national integration. It gives a comprehensive structure of the nation's education from pre-primary to post-secondary education. It has a broad curriculum that aims at creating enough learning opportunities for all children, irrespective of gender, age, ability, class, interest and religion. Other

relevant aspects of the nation's education are specified and their functions well stated. These include adult education, non-formal education, and special education. However, critically examining the editions seems to portray that we are not changing with the world of education in terms of content and goals. NPE needs critical review.

What are Educational Goals?

Goel (2021) opined that educational goals are aspirations that consist of the skills, competencies, and qualities that should be acquired after completing a course or a programme. Algrim (2021) believed that it is pertinent that "when defining educational goals, the areas of attitude, skills, and knowledge can be presented separately or in combination" (p.1). In line with the above submissions, Nigeria evolved educational goals for each level of education in the NPE; pre-primary, basic, basic and career development, mass literacy and nomadic, tertiary, open and distance education and special needs education. However, the focus of this research is the national goals and goals of basic education in Nigeria which the researcher opines should conform to the four pillars of education as identified by UNESCO; "Learning to know, learning to do, learning to live and learning to be" (Sobe, 2021, p. 2). These four pillars are the way to go worldwide by targeting educational goals towards them. Nigeria should join the train of developing a total man as reflected in the four pillars. Nevertheless, goals cannot be achieved without

adequate monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the policy with insufficient funding and commitment of all the stakeholders towards achieving them.

National Goals of Education

Education is referred to in the National Policy on Education (NPE) as an "instrument par excellence for effecting national development" (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 1977:3; 1985: 5; 1998: 5; 2004: iii). Also, in the NPE, national goals of education were stated clearly as a focus of the educational system in Nigeria, as shown in Table 1. In her contribution to UNESCO's (2015) Inche on declaration and framework for action to implement Sustainable Development Goal 4, Helen Clark (2015) opined that education is an indispensable part of the development equation in our world because knowledge is power, and education empowers. Its intrinsic value extends far beyond the economy; it empowers people to determine their destiny, and that is why the opportunity to be educated is central to advancing human development. This education has to begin from the basic level if, indeed, it is the foundation upon which other levels of education are built. How then do we manage such education beyond mere wishes reflected in our collection of educational goals that have not changed for years? These goals must be reviewed, and the policy overhauled to reflect practicability and conformity to education trends: education for self-reliance.

Table 1

National Goals of Education as stated in all Editions of NPE

S/N	NPE EDITION	NATIONAL GOALS OF EDUCATION
1	1977	The: 1. inculcation of national consciousness and national unity; 2. inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society; 3. training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and 4. acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies, both mental and physical, as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society (p. 4).
2	1981	The same as 1977 (p.8)
3	1998	The same as 1977 and 1981 (p.6)
4	2004	The same as 1977, 1981 and 1998 (pp. 2-3)
5	2008	The: 1. development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen; 2. total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world; 3. provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system; 4. inculcation of national consciousness, values and national unity; and 5. development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society (p. 2).
6	2013	The same as in 2008 (pp. 14)

Source: FRN, 1977, 1981, 1998, 2004, 2008 and 2013

It is worthy to note that the national goals did not change from 1977 to 2008, a period of 31 years! Finding ways to do things innovatively and differently in the education sector should be the focus of all stakeholders, as it will significantly impact the industry positively. If the national goals of education in the 20th Century remain the same in the 21st Century for a nation, it is doubtful if its education will be global compliant. Although there were minor changes in the national goals in the 2008 edition, which is some 14 years ago as of the time this paper is being written, the nation has not had new goals that are active and achievable in practical terms. What the researcher is talking about, for instance, is reflected in number two (2) of Kenya's national goals of education, which states that; "education should promote social, economic, technological and industrial needs for national development". It now went further to elaborate on each of the needs as follows:

- ♦ **Social needs:** Prepare children for the changes in attitudes and relationships which are necessary for the smooth process of a rapidly developing modern economy
- ♦ **Economic needs:** Produce citizens with skills, knowledge, expertise and personal qualities that are required to support a growing economy
- ♦ **Technological and industrial needs:** Provide the learners with the necessary skills and attitudes for industrial development (Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa, n. d, para. 1).

Apart from just stating the goals, Nigeria's National Policy on Education should expatiate the goals like Kenya did; it will help in targeting specific areas in its policy.

Table 2:

Basic Education as Defined in all the Editions of NPE

S/N	NPE EDITION	NATIONAL GOALS OF EDUCATION
1	1977	Primary education is education given in an institution for children aged 6 to 12 years (p. 12)
2	1981	Primary education is education given in an institution for children normally aged 6 to 11+ (p. 12)
3	1998	Primary education is the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus... The duration shall be six years. (p. 9)
4	2004	Basic education shall be of 9-year duration comprising 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education ... It shall also include adult and non-formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary education levels for the adults and out-of-school youths. (p. 9)
5	2008	Basic education is the education given to children aged 0-15 years. It encompasses the Early Childhood (0-5), and 9 years of formal schooling. Early Childhood Education, however, is segmented into ages 0-3 years, situated in daycare centres fully in the hands of the private sector and social development services, whilst ages 3-5 are within the formal education sector as nursery schools. (p. 5)

The questions that come to mind are these, namely;

1. Should national goals remain static if the world is changing in focus and orientation? Are these goals realistic, or are they mere rhetoric?
2. Are there concerted efforts by all stakeholders in Nigeria towards achieving these goals?
3. Is our educational system operated in a way capable of achieving national goals?
4. Can these goals be achieved without adequate funding and total commitment by the government?

In the present world dispensation, a country needs not to remain parochial in her outlook; instead, concerted efforts must be made to overhaul national goals objectively so they do not look like wishful thinking. Conforming to what is stated as goals is a characteristic of a good policy. If the goals stated promise the development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society, it must do just that. Otherwise, it must change. Goals are not stated for the statement's sake; they are meant to be achieved through all the mechanisms and resources involved; otherwise, it will amount to not having a goal at all.

Basic Education in Nigeria

From 1977 to the 1998 edition of the NPE, primary education was the basic education in Nigeria. In September 1999, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was launched, and from then, basic education included the junior secondary school, as shown in Table 2. Therefore, there is a need for clear direction since NPE is "the foundation for lifelong learning and human development on which countries may build, systematically, further levels and types of education and training" (UNESCO, 2011, para. 1).

S/N	NPE EDITION	NATIONAL GOALS OF EDUCATION
6	2013	Basic education is the education given to children aged 0-15 years. It encompasses Early Child Care and Development Education (0-4) and 10 years of formal schooling. Early Child Care and Development Education, however, is segmented into ages 3-4 years, situated in daycare or crèches, fully in the hands of the private sector and social development services, whilst ages 5-6 (Pre-Primary) are within the formal education sector. (p. 17)

Source: FRN, 1977, 1981, 1998, 2004, 2008 and 2013

There was an Act, *the Compulsory, Free, Universal Basic Education Act, 2004 and other Related Matters* which spelt out what basic education entails. It states that "every government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age" (UBE Act 2004: 2). It marked the era of a new definition of basic education in Nigeria. According to FRN (2013), the Federal Government instituted a Universal Basic Education (UBE), for purposes of policy coordination and monitoring, with the following objectives;

- Development in the entire citizenry, a strong consciousness for education and a solid commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- The provision of compulsory free and universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age;
- Reducing the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system through improved relevance, quality and efficiency;
- Catering through an appropriate form of complementary approaches to the promotion of basic education for the learning needs of young persons who had to interrupt their schooling for one reason or another: and
- Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, communicative and life skills and the ethical, moral, security and civil values needed for the laying of the solid foundation for life-long learning. (pp. 17)

However, without adequate funding and the government's political will, none of the objectives could be achieved, making the objectives mere rhetoric. Basic education may be free, but the compulsory aspect of the Act has not been enforced, which renders it mere rhetoric. The complementary approaches to the promotion of basic education for the learning needs of young persons who, for one reason or the other, had to interrupt their schooling are not working. Some of the Almajiri schools have been

closed down, and out-of-school children are increasing day by day, with Nigeria having the highest number, 10,193,918 in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ojetunde, 2018). The third objective of "reducing the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system, through improved relevance, quality and efficiency" also seems not to be working. Nwajiuba (2021) laments that "while the FG is making concerted efforts to reduce the numbers, more and more children are joining the queue. Therefore, unless and until our efforts at enrolling these children outweigh the birth rate, the challenge will continue to stare us in our face" (para.3).

Goals of Basic Education in Nigeria

In the first four editions of NPE, 1977, 1985, 1998 and 2004, the goals of primary education did not change, even if they were to be few words. Therefore, in the face of global changes in education, it becomes imperative that the government overhauls basic education goals, and this demands financial commitment, proper implementation and regular evaluation. Focusing on all the editions of NPE, necessary suggestions will be made for the overhaul. However, there is a need for overhauling in line with global changes in education.

In Nigeria, the goals of Basic Education clearly stated in NPE section 2, paragraph 13 (FRN, 2013) are to:

- provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship, wealth generation and educational advancement;
- develop patriotic young people equipped to contribute to social development and performance of their civic responsibilities;
- inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of independent thinking and who appreciate the dignity of labour;
- inspire national consciousness and harmonious co-existence, irrespective of differences in endowment, religion, colour, ethnic and socio-economic background; and
- provide opportunities for the child to develop manipulative skills that will enable the child to function effectively in society within the limits

of the child's capability (p. 18).

Also, section 1, paragraph 3e states that; "education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society" (FRN, 2013, p. 13), to make the goals achievable. The basic education goals may be rhetorically excellent, comprehensive, and achievable, but looking at what is on the ground, which of the goals can we say basic education has achieved fully to make the recipients function despite all the programmes being organised in the sector? The Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA) sponsored by the World Bank, for three years, succeeded in enrolling only 1,053,222 (10.33%) out of 10,193,918 out-of-school children for three years, the remaining 9,140,696 (Akinpelu, 2021).

The Need to Overhaul the National and Basic Education Goals Beyond Rhetoric

There is no doubt that the problem of Basic Education in Nigeria is hydra-headed, and urgent attention should be paid towards ameliorating the situation. In particular, both the National and Basic Education Goals are well stated. Still, beyond stating the goals carefully, there is the need to overhaul them in practical terms to make them relevant and achievable. All these problems cannot be solved at a time and from the same angle; that is why this researcher is focusing on the goals, how to make them a global complaint and achievable with the results seen on the other levels of education and Nigeria. All these could only come to fruition if there is adequate funding in the form of budgetary allocation to education, regular monitoring and evaluation of the programme in the real sense of evaluation. The educational system must be run in line with the goals, but as soon as it is noticed that goals are not being achieved after thorough evaluation, something urgent should be done to ameliorate the situation.

Table 3:

Budgetary Allocation to UBE from Education Allocation from 2009 to 2022

Year	Total Budget in Trillion	Ministry of Education N	% of Total Budget	Allocation by Min. of Edu. to UBE N	% of UBE Budget Allocation
2009	2,670,000,000,000	224,677,000,000	8.41	5,786,000,000	2.58
2010	4,079,654,724,257	249,086,254,059	6.11	5,000,000,000	2.01
2011	4,484,736,648,992	356,495,828,145	7.95	5,389,982,954	1.51
2012	4,648,849,156,932	342,727,781,936	7.37	6,916,000,000	2.02
2013	4,924,604,000,000	427,515,707,889	8.68	4,443,811,000	1.04
2014	4,695,190,000,000	495,283,130,268	10.55	75,822,000,000	15.31
2015	4,493,363,957,158	483,183,784,654	10.75	71,636,000,000	14.83

In Nigeria, year after year it is claimed that the NPE and the education goals are revised, and this author assumes that the revision should be holistic and not change the dates and cover of the document. It is expected that consideration should be given to the changing world in evolving goals in this Century, emphasising practical, personal and societal growth in real terms. In Finland, for instance, education has been a national priority for over three decades, and education policy is built on lifelong learning principles. Developing a unique holistic approach that has earned the system a world-class education system; the key elements of Finnish education policy include quality, efficiency, equity, well-being and internationalisation. Reforms in recent times aim to further develop schools as learning communities, emphasising the joy of learning and a collaborative atmosphere and promoting student autonomy in studying and in school life. All these are powered by adequate funding and municipalities have control over strategic decisions and budgeting

Budgetary Allocation and Overhauling of Education Goals

The UNESCO's Inche on Declaration of 2015 recommends that the government should commit 15 per cent to 20 per cent of the nation's budget to education, yet the issue of budgetary allocation to education has been a recurring one in Nigeria. Stakeholder discussions with the government have never ended without adequate attention to low budgetary allocation to education. Since 2009, budgetary allocations to education are below 10%, except in 2014 and 2015 with almost 11%, as indicated in Table 3. These years did not even meet UNESCO's

Year	Total Budget in Trillion	Ministry of Education N	% of Total Budget	Allocation by Min. of Edu. to UBE N	% of UBE Budget Allocation
2016	6,060,677,358,227	480,278,214,688	7.92	79,038,271,348	16.46
2017	7,441,175,486,758	398,686,819,418	5.36	8,626,414,385	2.16
2018	9,120,334,988,225	605,795,857,907	6.64	113,732,201,395	18.77
2019	8,826,636,578,915	634,557,159,877	7.19	121,924,903,544	19.21
2020	10,509,654,033,053	479,568,158,460	4.56	51,120,202,624	10.66
2021	13,588,027,886,175	771,461,372,053	5.68	94,460,399,261	12.24
2022	17,126,873,917,692	923,787,614,465	5.39	150,391,249,701	16.28

Unfortunately, a considerable part of the allocation is spent and not invested; spent on cars and personal office gadgets instead of being invested in purchasing laboratory equipment and relevant books for the libraries. According to Okeowo et al. (2021), out of the total allocation of N94,460,399,261 to Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) for 2021, N70,051,853,172 (74.16%) was spent on recurrent expenditure, while N24,408,546,089 (25.84%) only, was for capital expenditure. The pattern of spending a huge part of allocations on recurrent expenditure is not peculiar to basic education alone; this has been the general trend since the year 2000 in Nigeria (Akanbi, 2016). Something should be done to ensure that the bulk of the allocation is not spent but invested on technical, human, infrastructural, and material resources that will enhance the realisation of UBE goals (Obanya 2011). Ensuring regular and effective monitoring of the fund will go a long way to see that educational processes have the expected outcome.

Change from Top-Bottom to Bottom-Top Goal Formulation and Implementation

Exploring the bottom-top approach in formulating and implementing the goals will lead to a successful overhaul of Educational Goals in Nigeria. The Political Pipeline (2013) observed that "top-down implementation is the carrying out of a policy decision-by statute, executive order, or court decision", whereas the "bottom-up implementation approach initiates with the target groups and service deliverers because they find that the target groups are the actual implementors of policy" (para. 1). In Akanbi's (2022) opinion, most policies fail because the formulation processes do not involve those at the core of the implementation, reflecting the top-down approach. Allowing students, teachers and the community members to participate in the formulation, implementation and overhauling of educational goals and policies (bottom-up) determines to an extent, positive educational outcomes. In the 21st Century, it would be better if Nigeria could adopt this bottom-up approach. It is necessary as the deployment of goals,

strategies, and activities must focus particular attention on the people the policy will directly impact, particularly pupils.

The bottom-up policy accounted for why formulating educational policy in Finland is transparent and participatory, involving all stakeholders, including children. Surveys on different educational processes are done, and their feedback has always been incorporated into legislation and decision-making (<https://www.futurepolicy.org/rightsofchildren/finlands-basic-education-act/>). In line with the bottom-up approach, the 'Phenomenon-based Learning (PhenoBL)' is used in Finland to help overhaul their basic education goals and monitor the achievement of the goals. This approach helps pupils apply the learned course material to all kinds of real-life problems and answer a real-life situation by researching and finding a solution by looking at the issue from different angles and perspectives (Drew, 2020). This is an effective evaluation process as pupils and teachers are also involved, which could also be tried out in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The NPE is an excellent document to guide the educational delivery process in Nigeria as the goals for each level of education and the national goals are also stated; however, a carefully worded policy and goals without commitment towards achieving the goals remains mere rhetoric. Therefore, educational goals must not be static but dynamic; having the same education goals for the 20th and 21st Centuries does not portray our commitment to making education a development tool. There is, therefore, the need for overhauling of the goals to make it relevant to the needs of learners and the society through proper policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation of educational processes, which may not be possible without adequate funding for the sector and effective use of the fund. Not achieving the stated goals may mean mere wishes that could be detrimental to the nation's growth.

Recommendations

Overhauling education goals should also involve the pupils since they know their needs and what is good for them. Those in charge of evolving educational goals should be conversant with what is going on in the world of education. In the light of the fact that educational outcomes benefit the individual and the society at large, the researcher recommends community participation in education in Nigeria through the bottom-top approach. This recommendation is also in line with Akanbi's (2017) opinion that the Parent/Teacher Association should be encouraged to monitor school programmes and provide infrastructure in schools in their communities since there is no magic for successful teaching and learning without adequate tools. Systemic corruption is another cankerworm that must be dealt with in Nigeria for education to achieve what it is supposed to achieve. Budgetary allocation to education should also increase tremendously, and stakeholders should be concerned about practical steps to achieve these goals.

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