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BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

AGABI, CHINYERE ONYEMAECHI

Department of Educational Management

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education

Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper is directed at identifying causes of gaps in learning which is believed to be a strong reason for the persistence of examination fraud and the weakness of tertiary education institutions in producing the desired quality of human resources for national development. Bridging these gaps from the primary education level through to the secondary education level will improve on the quality of candidates that are enrolled at the tertiary level. Bridging education gaps would require addressing the causes of the gaps from the root. Bearing in mind that each level of education has a foundation on a lower level, it is considered that the gap in learning between secondary education and tertiary education should be bridged from primary education. Failure at one level affects learning achievement at subsequent levels. The paper concludes that policy of 'all promoted' is harmful to the achievement of national development through school system education. It therefore suggests that students who do not meet the basic requirement for promotion should not be allowed to transit to higher classes; and tertiary education institutions should adopt a combination of written and oral examinations to ensure that only persons who are qualified for tertiary education are selected and enrolled. Candidates on concession list should also meet the basic minimum requirement for tertiary education admission.

Introduction

The quality of 21st century tertiary education graduates has been frequently questioned by employers of labour. This situation is not peculiar to the Nigerian economic sector. This is a major factor in the rising level of unemployment in most developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. The situation in Nigeria is made worse by the inability of tertiary education graduates to express themselves properly in the national language in both the written form and the oral form. Nigeria being a country with many indigenous languages spoken in a variety of dialects adopted the English language as the language of education (FRN, 2014) and the language of general communication and socio-economic interaction since her independence from colonial rule in 1960. It is therefore not news that a Nigerian child is exposed to the English language either as a first language or a second language depending on the child's location and socio-cultural background. This being the case, a high level of proficiency in the use of the English language is expected of the graduate of any tertiary education institution in Nigeria.

AGABI, CHINYERE ONYEMAECHI
BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

The national desire to produce a labour force that can function effectively within national and international socio-economic milieu in the 21st century has resulted in the expansion of educational curricular for various programmes at the three levels of education. This is directed at the achievement of education content relevance in the progression of school system graduates from pre-school and especially from primary education through secondary education to tertiary education. However, the continuous complaints by employers of labour against the poor quality of graduates turned into the labour market annually by tertiary education institutions question the quality of education provided by tertiary education institutions in Nigeria. The general assumption is that every student admitted to a tertiary education programme has successfully completed the curriculum for secondary education and also obtained qualifying grades at both the West African senior secondary school examination (or its equivalent) and the University Matriculation Examination (or its equivalent). This assumption is also questioned by rising cases of examination fraud associated with these two standardized examinations. This paper therefore seeks to identify and explain the missing link between secondary and tertiary education and to proffer suggestions to establish a meeting point between the two levels of education. The ultimate goal is to facilitate successful and sustainable transition of secondary school graduates to tertiary education institutions and to enhance the production of the right quality of human capital for the 21st century economy.

Conceptual Framework

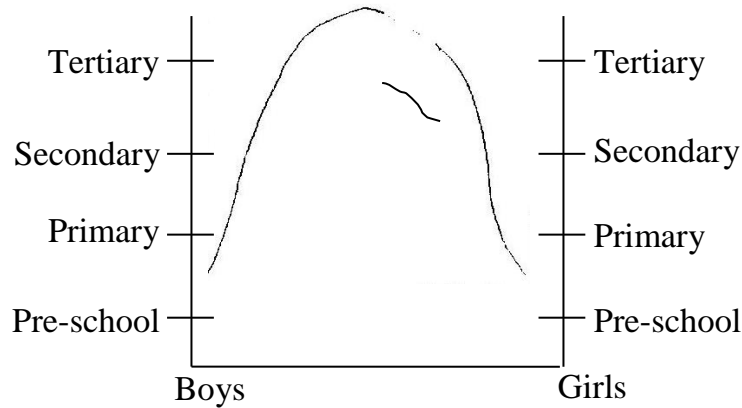
Education Gaps

A gap occurs when there is some measure of discontinuation in a series of consciously designed and deliberately scheduled line of events, activities or programmes. The gap may be a conscious part of the plan, deliberately created in the schedule of events, or programmes. In this case the gap may occur intermittently to suit the purpose of the events or programmes. When an unexpected and unplanned gap occurs, it is usually because something is missing in the schedule, such unexpected gap is referred to by economists as inequality or disparity. The rational explanation is that when a gap occurs in a programme or schedule that is linked in such a manner that gaps are not expected, the tendency is that inequality will occur at one point of the programme or another especially with regards to goal achievement. Technically, Black (2004) simply defines inequality as “the state of not being equal” (p. 234). He goes further to illustrate what has been described here as unexpected gap with the following explanation, if two numbers (x and y) are known to be unequal but the direction of the inequality is unknown, the level of inequality between them is expressed as $x \neq y$ because the two numbers may or may not be equal; and the extent to which they are or are not equal is unknown.

Education gaps in the level of enrolment, participation, and completion and transition rates and in the level of learning achievement are often compared between rural and urban regions, male and female genders, and geopolitical regions such as north and south or southwest and south-south geopolitical regions. When the levels of participation and completion rates favour one group over another, the graphical presentation will show a skewed curve (as shown in figure 1 b and c). A normal curve indicates a state of parity or balance in the variables that are being compared between identified groups (as shown in figure 1a) statistically; a skewed curve is achieved when there is disparity. Figures 1a-c present graphical examples of levels of parity in transition rates in gender participation at levels of education; and when gaps exist in educational participation

between various groups. Figure 2 is a graphical reflection of distribution of teachers and learning resources at basic school levels. Resource distribution is a factor in the existence of education gaps.

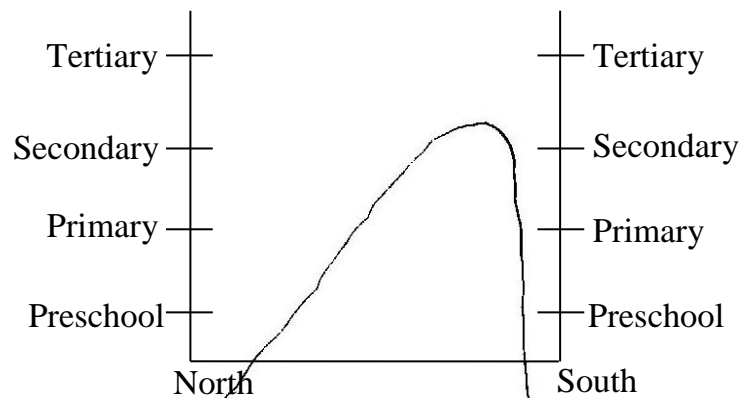
Figure 1a: Graphical Features of Gaps in Educational Participation



A state of gender parity

Gender parity in education is yet to be achieved in developing countries of Africa and Asia where religious and cultural considerations remain one of the major challenges to the participation of girls in some regions and boys in some other regions. Figure 1(a) is therefore more of an expression of hope than reality. In Nigeria, the gap between Northern and Southern regions in the level of educational participation and completion rates has been entrenched by religious beliefs. Today, this state of disparity that is skewed in favour of the South has been consolidated by the high spate of insecurity caused by frequent armed conflict between herdsmen and farmers; the frequent kidnapping of girls and suicide bomb explosions on human gatherings by Boko Harm insurgents. In view of this, it seems like Northern Nigeria is going to be educationally disadvantaged for as long as it takes the Nigerian government and the governors of the Northern States to establish an environment in which human life is safe and secure. Until this is done, achieving a state of education parity between Northern and Southern Nigeria will remain a mirage. The disparity between Northern and Southern Nigeria in the level of participation in informal education is mirrored in figure 1b.

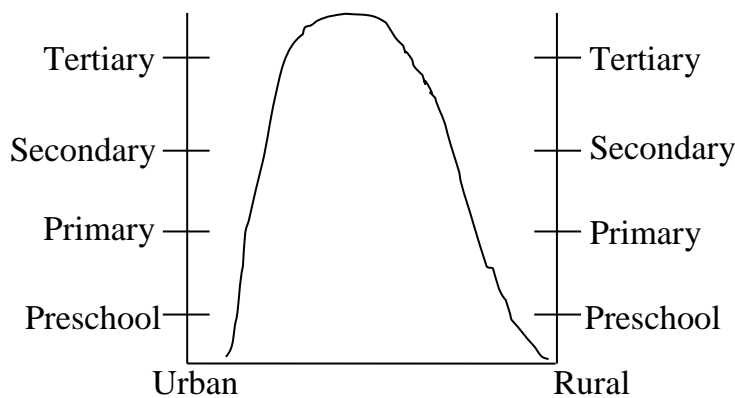
Figure 1b: State of regional disparity in Nigeria



A state of regional disparity in favour of the southern region

The full benefits of free and compulsory universal basic education in terms of improving on literacy level and eradicating poverty among women will also continue to elude the North if children, irrespective of gender are constantly hindered from school attendance because of the fear of either being killed or kidnapped enrooted school. It is then very obvious that Northern Nigeria’s chance of achieving parity in tertiary education participation and completion is greatly reduced by the persistence of general insecurity and discrimination against women in the region.

Figure 1c: Rural-urban Disparity in Education



A state of disparity in favour of urban communities

In the formal education system, inequality in education can be measured in terms of quality of education received by contemporaries at the same level of education in the same school. It can also be measured in terms of level of subject mastery achieved by learners at the same level of education in different schools. Inequality in education can also be measured in terms of rate of successful transition from one level of education to the next higher level. In other words, the rate at which learners successfully graduate from primary to secondary schools and from secondary to tertiary education institutions may or may not be equal between schools; between boys and girls; between states; between geopolitical regions; or between rural and urban communities. In fact, various studies have shown that inequalities exist in the levels of educational participation, learning achievement, completion rates and rate of progression to tertiary education between boys and girls (Agabi, 2013; Okafor & Okwarachukwu, 2017). Evidence of regional gaps in educational participation abounds in UNESCO publications. As much as it is not possible to bridge all the gaps at the same time, it is important that the bridging of gaps begins with the quality of learning achieved from the onset of formal education.

Gap Entrenchment

Education gaps can either be entrenched or bridged, depending on the pattern of vital inputs made to educational development from the planning and policy development stages to the stage of policy implementation and evaluation. However, most observers of education are

of the opinion that the political will of leaders (especially in developing countries) is also a vital tool in ensuring the absence of gaps in the pattern of educational development and in the achievement of smooth transition of learners from one level to the other (Enaohwo, 2017; Nwosu, Odo & Ogechi, 2017; Akpeghughu & Orji, 2017). In the words of Agabi (2018 p. 158), “the problem is in the reluctance of national and state governments to develop the right frame of mind and will to make sacrifices” in favour of educational development. African leaders (Nigeria inclusive) tend to place political ambitions above national economic development considerations. For this reason, education is relegated to the background to the neglect of vital human capital development necessary for a developing economy. In this situation, gaps in education are entrenched.

Entrenching Education Gaps

Education gaps are entrenched in the existence of circumstances that promote disparity in quality of teaching and learning as well as in the measure of educational resources available in schools at any particular level of education. Some of the most prominent factors that entrench gaps in educational attainment include but are not limited to the following:

- (a) Insufficiency in educational resource availability
- (b) Imbalance in teacher distribution
- (c) Weak transition policies
- (d) Weak policy implementation framework
- (e) Environmental factors

Insufficiency in Resource Availability

The level of resource availability in an education system is described as insufficient when such resources exist in measures and qualities that do not impact significantly and positively on education goal attainment. In this situation available resources are not enough and goal attainment tends to depend heavily on the use of improvisation which itself depends more or less on the level creativity and skill development attained by teachers. However the use of improvised resources is encouraged (FRN, 2014) and has been found very useful in classroom instructional delivery (Agabi, 2016; Anero, 2015; Esu, 2004). There still exist many other resources that are very vital to educational development and the provision of which are mandatory for effective achievement of curricular goals for all subjects that are taught in a formal school system. Such resources include the right calibre of teachers, adequately equipped laboratories for the teaching of experiments and practical skills, well stocked and appropriately furnished libraries, spacious classrooms with good lighting, adequate furnishing and adequate ventilation; regular and adequate funding to ensure the maintenance of infrastructure and the sustenance of a steady supply of other instructional materials that facilitate classroom teaching and learning. Sufficiency in resource availability is attained when statutory teacher pupil ratio is achieved not just in the content of class attendance register but also in the number of learners per class. The presence of the right quality and quantity of all other educational facilities in a school is also an indicator of resource sufficiency

Factors of Insufficiency

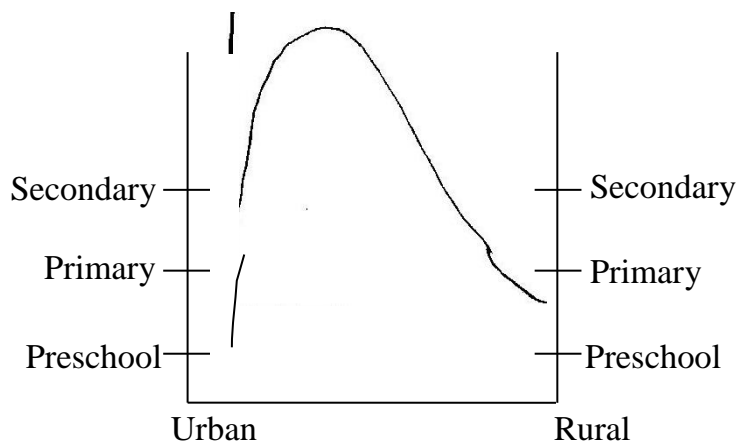
There is no gain saying that education planners, curriculum developers; and school administrators responsible for making education policies functional at institutional level are aware of the importance of equipping schools and education programmes with a good supply

AGABI, CHINYERE ONYEMAECHI
BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

of relevant resources that assure education quality at any level. The poor funding of education is the major challenge, especially in an import-dependent economy like that of Nigeria, made worse by the very low international market value of the local currency and the double digit inflation rate in the country. The poor and irregular wages earned by teachers in Nigeria, especially at the primary and secondary school levels, create ample room for teachers and head teachers, whose professional and moral integrity has been reduced to the lowest ebb by poverty, to divert school fund and materials to personal use. Corruption thus becomes the associating challenge that compounds the problem of inadequate funding. These two factors are the inseparable Siamese that entrench resource inadequacy in formal education.

Variations have been identified in the levels of resource inadequacy between rural and urban schools by various researchers (Okafor & Okwarachukwu, 2017; Moses-Promise & Ahiakwo, 2017). However, there is a consensus that schools in rural communities are associated with much higher level of educational resource insufficiency than their urban counterparts, and this is therefore the reason for the rural-urban migration of students in search of better education; opportunities and the reason for the overcrowding of classrooms in urban public schools (Agabi, 2018; Akpotu, 2008). This situation is captured in figure 2 as presented in the resource distribution curve that is skewed towards the urban region.

Figure 2: Distribution of qualified teachers and learning resources in primary and secondary schools



A state of disparity in teacher distribution in favour of schools in urban communities

Imbalance in Teacher Distribution

Teacher distribution in a school system can be described as balanced when the statutory teacher requirement is at par with the existing supply of teachers in schools at any point in time in terms of teacher-pupil ratio. There also exists in the school system disparity between the statutory requirement for teachers and the existing supply of teachers in schools, especially in public schools in Nigeria (Agabi, 2018; Ololube, 2018; Akpeghughu & Orji, 2017). Public schools tend to have fewer teachers than private schools, in terms of teacher-pupil ratio.

Emphasizing the importance of appropriate teacher-pupil ratio to teaching-learning effectiveness, Okafor and Okwarachukwu (2017) insist on the maintenance of the statutory

teacher-pupil ratio of 1:35 for primary schools and 1:40 for secondary schools. However, the result of an investigation by Agabi (2018) showed that some public secondary schools in urban and suburban areas in Rivers State have a teacher pupil ratio that ranges between 1:100 and 1:150 in an arrangement of three registers to one classroom. By this arrangement, the total number of students enrolled in each class is 50 as contained in the class attendance register. Three register to one classroom therefore implies that the teacher pupil ratio per class is one teacher to 3x 50 pupils.

This situation entrenches a survival-of-the-fittest situation in terms of the level and quality of learning that can be achieved by students in a difficult and unhealthy learning environment. This situation negates the policy of enhancing infrastructural facilities in schools and the maintenance of teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40 in secondary schools (FRN, 2014). In this situation, the education gap between fast learners and slow learners is entrenched and examination malpractice among learners and between teachers and learners is consolidated and passed on to the tertiary level of education.

The rational reason is that when students lose faith in the quality of education that is provided and in the teachers' capability of achieving effectiveness in teaching, they also lose faith in their own intellectual abilities as individuals and as students. When this is the case, they see cheating at examinations as the only gateway to graduating from one level of education to the next higher level. As aptly observed by Okafor & Okwarachukwu (2017), when teaching is ineffective and insufficient, students have higher chance of performing poorly in external examinations; hence the equally high tendency to cheat at internal examinations and at all other qualifying examinations.

Similarly Inko-Taria (2015) investigated academic self-concept as correlate of test anxiety among secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. The study which was guided by one research question and four hypotheses used a sample of 200 students randomly selected from five secondary schools using the stratified random sampling technique. The result of Inko-Tariah's (2015) study showed that when students have high concepts of their intellectual capability, they tend to exhibit little or no anxiety towards examinations; while students with low self-concept tend to exhibit great anxiety towards examinations and also tend to perform lower than those who exhibit little or no anxiety towards examinations. It therefore follows, by logical reasoning, that students with low self-concept are more prone to examination malpractice than students with high self-concept. Technically, the confidence level of students on their academic cum intellectual capabilities is either boosted or diminished by the level of confidence they have in their teachers and in the quality of education they receive. This is affirmed by a study of relationship between Nigerian secondary school students' test anxiety and their tendency to indulge in examination malpractice; a study carried out by Nwosu, Odo and Ogechi (2017). This trio showed in the result of their analysis that students strongly believed that high grades at any examination can only be achieved through some form of cheating. This is an indication that students have low faith in the quality of education they receive in schools in terms of level of learning expected of them at any point in their education.

Another situation that entrenches education gap is the situation that encourages the influx of teachers from schools in rural areas to schools in urban areas as observed by Subair & Talabi (2015). This situation leaves public schools in rural communities in dire need of qualified teachers while schools in urban centres are relatively better supplied with all categories of

qualified teachers. As much as students in urban schools and those in rural schools are being educated in the same system of education, guided by the same education policy and the same education curriculum, inequity in education opportunities and achievement of learning is established with imbalance in teacher distribution that favours schools in urban location. As a result of this imbalance, students in rural community schools are more likely to be denied education in subjects that are very vital to the effective pursuit of a student's career of choice. This is because in a typical situation, subjects in which teachers are lacking are either not taught at all or are taught by unqualified personnel. Imbalance in teacher distribution is therefore a strong factor in the entrenchment of gaps in educational achievement, level of participation and school completion rate between individuals, between schools, between levels of education and between regions.

Weak Transition Policies

A transition policy in education is a policy that specifies the conditions for graduating from one level of education to another higher level either within educational institutions (graduating from primary one to primary two for instance) or between education programmes by levels such as moving from primary education to secondary education and to tertiary education as the case may be. The general assumption is that learning is not achieved at the same pace by learners within the same age cohort, class and level of education. A healthy transition policy therefore makes provision for slow learners to have a second and probably a third opportunity to successfully progress from one class level to the next higher one. This is also considering that education curriculum and schemes of teaching are designed to provide knowledge from the simplest basic concepts to the most technical complex concepts, as learner's progress from one level of education to the next higher level. This pattern of teaching and learning continues till learners meet the conditions for certification that qualifies them to graduate from one level of education to the next higher level.

The national policy on education in Nigeria acknowledges that learners are not all equally capable in the development of knowledge in the three domains of human development. While some are faster than others in the development of cognitive abilities others are quicker in the development of motor sensory abilities. There are yet some others who exhibit greater abilities in the affective domain of knowledge development. This does not rule out the existence of learners who are gifted in the ability to acquire knowledge in all three domains at a pace that is relatively faster than that of other categories of learners at the same education level. In recognition of these individual differences among learners, the Nigerian government makes provision for education programmes that suit the education needs of all categories of learners, by various education laws and policies.

For instance, the Universal Basic Education makes provision for an enrolment pattern that progresses gradually from 55% with 10% annual increase, with the hope of achieving 100% transition from primary education to junior secondary school education over a period of six years by the first year UBE primary education cohort (i.e. the primary one of the 2000/2001 academic session). This, according to the UBE implementation guidelines is one of the strategies directed at ensuring a sequential implementation of the programme "focusing on the primary one cohort of 2000/2001 and progressively ensuring qualitative education for them over a nine year basic education cycle" Federal Republic of Nigeria (2000 p. 16). The essence

was to make room for infrastructural expansion, improve the quality of teachers and enhance instructional resource availability to ensure progressive improvement of education quality in basic schools.

Other Conditions for Transition

Other conditions that are necessary for effective transition in the formal education system include the achievement of success at continuous assessment and school examinations which are rated on a 40:60 ratio and used as basis for progressing from one class to the next higher class in public and private schools (FRN, 2014). The national policy on education goes further to specify that primary school graduates, by the UBE policy, are no longer required to write the common entrance examination that qualifies them to transit from primary school to junior secondary school. To this end, state governments and the FCT are mandated by the same policy, to make arrangements for smooth transition. In other words, transition from primary school to junior secondary school is more or less automatic depending on the benchmark prescribed by the respective state governments for schools in their respective states.

The Problem with the Transition Policy

The problem with the transition policy is that it seems to lack a reliable framework for ensuring compliance by school administrators and students, to the extent that every child is promoted from primary one to primary two and progresses to junior secondary school irrespective of whether the child achieves the required level of learning or not. The absence of common entrance examinations used for evaluating a child's level of learning before enrolling him/her into a secondary school has resulted in the neglect of the importance of achieving at least 75% curriculum content coverage before transiting from primary school to secondary school. The result is that most children in contemporary Nigerian school system do not complete primary education before applying and being admitted to secondary schools. Some pupils are moved from primary four to junior secondary class one some others move to JS 1 after primary three (3). The majority manage to complete primary five before proceeding to secondary schools. This makes the completion rate for primary education very low, especially in urban and sub urban towns and communities where parents are anxious to cut short the duration of a child's education for mundane social and economic reasons. This situation is further compounded by the failure of most secondary school administrators to request for the examination results of the child's previous class and a testimonial from the previous school.

The consequence of this unfettered transition pattern is that the child begins a long process of education marred by frustrated efforts at learning concepts from a more advanced curriculum with higher level of instructional techniques that are completely new. Repeated failed efforts at learning and understanding the new concepts results in a waning of interest at learning (Nwankwo, 2007); self-esteem drops to the lowest ebb and the learner develops heightened anxiety or fear of tests and examinations (Inko-Taria, 2015; and Nwosu et al, 2017). To avert the shame of failure the learner devices alternate illegal strategies for passing examinations.

The government of Nigeria did not envisage that making basic education free and removing the common entrance examination would trigger an uncontrolled transition pattern from primary schools to secondary schools thereby watering down the quality of students and heightening the problem of examination fraud that has become a canker worm in our

secondary school system. The problem of examination fraud in our school system has become a rapidly spreading malady that has its roots in the primary education transition pattern; its nucleus in a poorly managed secondary school system; and all of its tentacles spread across the tertiary education system. This is because of the existence of a great gap between what learners are required to learn and what they are able to learn before progressing to the next education level.

Weak Policy Implementation Framework

Education policies are statutory documents that are implemented at institutional level by school heads and their members of staff (teaching and non-teaching inclusive). This does not rule out the important inspectorial roles played by Federal Ministry of Education (FME) and other education management agencies like the schools boards, Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), National Universities Commission (NUC) and many others. When these bodies fail in their duties as education monitoring agents established to assure the maintenance of a satisfactory level of education quality, the school system fails with them.

The failure of the school system to mandate parents and all interest groups in education to allow their children and wards to have complete primary education is a major factor in questioning the quality of basic school products and that of secondary education. The education structure in Nigeria as in most countries has a curricular format that begins at the primary education level and terminates at the tertiary level of education. In this continuum of knowledge development, a sudden termination of learning before a statutory terminal point creates a gap in knowledge that adversely affects learner's ability to connect with education curriculum at the content and teaching methods at the next higher level of education. Low completion rate in education in Nigeria is not peculiar with the primary level of education. It has also become part of the senior secondary school system. The current trend is a situation in which senior secondary school students that fails in the promotion examinations from either SS1 to SS2 move to new schools and enrolls for the West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations. In such schools, teachers are paid to write the examinations for such candidates. They then fraudulently obtain credit passes in probably all the eight or nine subjects with which they proceed to seek university admission through the same fraudulent means.

The consequence is that students who can neither read nor write have become common features of our tertiary education institutions in Nigeria. Some of them are able to maintain the same fraudulent method that brought them into tertiary education to the point of graduation. Majority of them are flushed out because they can neither cope with the modus operandi of tertiary education nor are they willing to withdraw voluntarily. The law on examination malpractice seems to have become moribund judging by the alarming frequency of malpractice by students and teachers alike. If the law is still functional, it then means that the impact of the law is not strong enough to deter persons who plan and execute examination malpractice at all levels of education. It is therefore pertinent that the law is reviewed for greater impact so that the school system is not completely destroyed.

Factors of Implementation Policy Weakness

The condition for enrolling students for senior secondary school certificate examinations is that they have had complete secondary education and have successfully passed through the various stages of secondary education and achieved credit pass grades at the required internal examinations. It is then surprising that principals and teachers would aid students to move from one class which they have not passed to the next higher one. Even if the student is transferring from another school, there should be evidence of success from the previous class shown in the examination report and attached to the transfer certificate. The criss-crossing of students between classes and between education levels without recourse to policies and laws is the ultimate outcome of a weak transition policy.

The policy of 100% transition from primary one through to primary six or to any point from where the child jumps to secondary school is a very weak transition policy that is counter-productive to effective primary education (Agabi, 2014). The rational explanation for this policy that promotes quantity rather than quality of primary school leavers is that 100% transition makes adequate room for fresh enrolment's; so that more persons are enrolled into primary schools, every session. In a vicious cycle, it also waters down the quality of candidates enrolled for junior secondary education in terms of level of learning achievement.

In this vicious cycle of insufficient learning and unbridled transition from class to class and from one level of education to another, quality of secondary education is further challenged by infrastructural decay and insufficiencies in the supply of qualified teachers, teaching-learning resources and grossly high student-teacher ratio in public schools (Agabi, 2018). It is therefore not surprising that secondary school students in Nigeria as shown by the works of Inko-Tariah (2015); Nwosu et al (2017); and Moses-Promise and Ahiakwo, (2017) have low assessment of their intellectual capabilities and tend to exhibit high anxiety over internal and external examinations. This lack of trust in the quality of education they receive is reflected in the growing incidence of examination malpractice. It also widens the gap between what is learnt at secondary education level and what is to be learnt at the tertiary level thereby entrenching the use of examination malpractice as the most reliable medium for transiting from secondary education to tertiary education.

Bridging the Gap

A gap is bridged when a connection is established between vital ends of the gap. The great gap between secondary and tertiary education in Nigeria has its opening at primary one and spreads through secondary education to culminate at the points of Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination and tertiary education enrolment. It is therefore very important that the bridging of this gap should begin from its beginning and not from the middle of it.

Bridging Primary Education Gaps

The gap between learners' learning achievement at the primary level of education and the offset of secondary education was created by the policy of "promote all". This is an anti-development policy responsible for the presence of secondary school students who can neither clearly write the letters of the alphabet nor spell their own names correctly. It is also an indication that such students did not acquire the basic education that is provided at the primary school level which was supposed to be the preparation for secondary education. Bridging the gap in learning between primary and secondary education requires the abolition of the no-good "all promoted" policy because it has done great harm to the primary school system. Primary

education is pivotal to other levels of education. Getting it right has great positive implication for the development of the desired quality of human resources necessary for national development.

Repeating a class by a child who has not shown sufficient learning ensures that the child acquires sufficient knowledge of concepts that are taught at primary school level before progressing to the next level. In bridging the gaps in learning between classes at primary school, the gap between primary and secondary education is also being invariably bridged. The child who is adequately educated at the primary school level, is ready for secondary education by the completion of primary six. It is arguable that in contemporary Nigeria, most children acquire two to three years of nursery education at which primary school curriculum is introduced and as such can transit to secondary education after the successful completion of primary five in the case of private schools. However, the extent to which such children are ready for secondary education depends on the quality of teaching and learning they receive in such schools.

It has been established that most private schools minimize cost of running their schools by employing non-trained teachers who lack relevant professional teaching skills and competences in classroom management (Ololube, 2018; Esu, 2004). Such teachers often lack capabilities in the effective use of time, resource improvisation and relevant techniques for effective teaching (Anero, 2015). This is not ignoring the existence of private schools that are quality oriented and whose products are positively outstanding in the test of time and in the quality of learning in any given educational environment but such schools are few and charge very high fees. These high fees make such schools exclusive to the wealthy class because majority of those who are enrolled in public schools are from poor families that cannot afford the cost of education in private schools. They also constitute a great majority of the school-age population.

Bridging Secondary Education Gaps

Secondary education gaps refer to the gaps in learning that are created either by teaching methods or by continuous assessment and terminal examinations methods. The first error begins by the assumption that all junior secondary class one (JS1) students have basic knowledge that forms the background for the introduction of secondary school curriculum. The acid test would be to make them write short essays on subjects that adopt short essays as a method of assessment such as English, French, social studies, etc. By the result of this essay, the teacher would choose whether to begin with JS1 scheme of work or to revisit some aspects of what they ought to have learnt at primary school, for the purpose of addressing areas of insufficient knowledge. It is important that knowledge of basic concepts is strengthened in JS1. Brief exercises on mathematics and other practice based subjects drawn from primary six curriculums for instance, will also guide the teacher on the appropriate starting point.

Cheating at any internal examination should earn the student a fail irrespective of whether it is a continuous assessment test or a terminal examination. The argument that head teachers present when this author frowns at the level of academic irresponsibility exhibited by their students and usually observed in the course of teaching practice supervision; is that 'they will move to other schools if we are too rigid on examination rules' or 'we don't want to lose our enrolment to other schools that have more liberal rules on academic success'. The general misconception that academic success refers to the achievement of a high number of credits at

any examination is one of the factors promoting examination malpractice and the reluctance of head teachers in taking decisions that discourage malpractice of any sort.

Many other arguments have been put up to justify weak learning, insufficient education and examination malpractice especially at the secondary level. Such arguments hinge on the conspicuous absence of libraries in primary schools; the existence of near-empty libraries in secondary schools and the absence of functional computers with internet services at virtually all levels of education; with the worse cases in public primary and secondary schools. It must be stated here that nothing justifies the level of moral decadence in schools, propagated by teachers, accommodated by head teachers and entrenched by government through the insufficient funding of education and further compounded by weak inspectorial and supervisory machineries. If teachers who are found culpable in aiding examination malpractice among students are dismissed from work, others will be deterred.

Principals of secondary schools who collect money from students to facilitate cheating at any external examinations do not show good leadership qualities and are not likely to exert disciplinary control over students and teachers. Such principals should not remain in the school system. Their presence in the school system amounts to economic sabotage because it hinders the country from producing a labour force that is equipped adequately with the required level of education and training. The feat of removing bad eggs from the school system will not be achieved overnight but rather than have a huge labour force, majority of whom are not employable because they can neither read nor write in spite of their level of education; it is better to have a small supply of quality labour that grows consistently in number and in quality of economically viable skills. To achieve this, it is important that more impetus is given to the quality provision of primary and secondary education because they ultimately feed into the quality of tertiary education enrolment.

Bridging the Tertiary Education Gap

The tertiary education gap is the gap in educational attainment between graduates of secondary education and the requirements for tertiary education. Nigeria has gotten to a stage in her educational development at which tertiary education certificates no longer reflect level of learning and specialization. It is for this reason that more impetus has been placed on the teaching of practice-based vocational skills and entrepreneurship as reflected in the content of the 6th edition of the national policy on education (FRN, 2014). The fact however remains that even in the field of trade and entrepreneurship, participants should be able to read and interpreted documents and project plans; and also express themselves clearly in both written and oral forms of the language of trade (English language in the case of Nigeria). A graduate of tertiary education who can neither read nor write; and cannot express him/herself meaningfully in spoken English clearly indicates that he/she did not achieve the requisite knowledge level for tertiary education and therefore achieved little or nothing in the course of tertiary education. Nothing can be done for this graduate except to encourage him/her to register in an adult education programme and begin again at the primary education level at which level basic skills in reading, writing and speaking are taught.

In bridging the gap between secondary and tertiary education, it is very important that the factors that entrench education gaps are carefully addressed. It is also very important to review the current selection method for admission into tertiary education institutions. Written examinations, whether computer-based or manual are no longer adequate in ensuring that only

AGABI, CHINYERE ONYEMAECHI
BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

qualified candidates are admitted. The poor quality of candidates admitted into first degree programmes indicates that standardized examinations like the West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations; the University Matriculation Examination, UME, and the Post UME are not fraud proof.

Conclusion

A significant gap exists in the level of learning achieved by primary school pupils who transit to secondary school before the completion of primary education. This gap is sustained and made greater by the all-promoted policy that enables a child to transit to higher classes irrespective of level of learning. The existence of examination fraud in secondary schools and teachers' haste to complete a given scheme of work faster than the given time frame sustains the gap at the secondary school level which then hinders effective learning at tertiary education institutions. These gaps are entrenched by the failure of governments at different levels to adequately fund and equip schools; maintain a balanced distribution of teachers between schools in urban and rural areas; and develop a policy implementation framework that ensures that only qualified candidates graduate and transit from one level of education to another. Bridging the regional gap in educational participation and completion rates generally requires a reorientation of the populace on the economic and social value of providing equal education opportunities for boys and girls. This will be strongly complemented by government's ability and willingness to combat with insurgent groups to restore and sustain peace in conflict prone regions and communities.

Suggestions

In bridging the education gap between secondary and tertiary education levels, the following suggestions are necessary.

1. The all – promoted transition policy practiced in primary schools should be de-emphasized and discouraged. Slow learners should have a second opportunity at learning. After the completion of the scheme of work for a particular class, students who fail to achieve a minimum cumulative average of 40% should not be promoted to the next class.
2. Students who are transferring from one school to another should have the results of their last examination from the previous school attached to the transfer certificate. This will aid the head teacher of the new school in taking decisions that would ensure appropriate class placement for the transferring student. In this case, some form of pre-admission interview is necessary, to provide additional information on the candidates level of learning.
3. Examination malpractice should not be tolerated at any stage of secondary education. At the secondary level, any student who cheats at an examination should repeat the class. This should be built into the national policy on education so that lazy students will no longer hide under school transfer to move to higher classes. Tertiary education students found cheating at an examination should be expelled from school, irrespective of whether or not the examination is internal, as is the case in most universities. This is very important in instilling the culture of academic discipline in students. Teachers found to have aided examination malpractice should also suffer the similar extreme punishment.
4. Oral interviews should be adopted as part of tertiary education admission procedure. This will ensure that candidates who have cheated their way through secondary education,

WASSCE, UME and Post UME are winnowed out and kept out of tertiary education institutions till they have achieved the required level of learning.

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AGABI, CHINYERE ONYEMAECHI
BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

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