

# CO-OPERATIVE INQUIRY: A RESEARCH POLICY METHOD FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

SHINA OLAYIWOLA *Obafemi Awolowo University*

**ABSTRACT.** This article examines the level of research involvement among educational stakeholders in the process of educational policy-making and implementation in Nigeria. It attributes the transformational challenges confronting the secondary school system in Nigeria to the epistemological question: “What is the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?” This is premised on the idea that the research process that led to the 6-3-3-4, or the “new” 9-3-4 system of education from the 6-5-2-3 system of education, did not involve the participants as co-researchers and co-subjects in their relationship. This article argues for co-operative inquiry as an alternative participatory, action research method for ameliorating these transformational challenges in the Nigerian secondary school system.

**ENQUÊTE CO-OPÉRATIVE : UNE MÉTHODE DE POLITIQUE DE RECHERCHE POUR L'ÉDUCATION SECONDAIRE AU NIGÉRIA**

**RÉSUMÉ.** Cet article examine le niveau d'implication de la recherche parmi les parties prenantes éducationnelles dans le processus d'élaboration et de mise en œuvre des politiques éducatives au Nigéria. L'article attribue les défis transformationnels auxquels les secondaires nigériens sont confrontés à la question épistémologique : « Quelle est la relation entre le connaisseur ou le soi-disant connaisseur et ce qui peut être connu ? » Ceci repose sur l'idée que le processus de recherche qui a conduit au système d'éducation 6-3-3-4, ou au « nouveau » système d'éducation 9-3-4, n'a pas impliqué les participants en tant que co-chercheurs et co-sujets. Cet article plaide en faveur de l'enquête co-opérative en tant que méthode alternative de recherche afin d'améliorer ces défis transformationnels dans les secondaires nigériens.

**E**ducation is perceived as a tool for social development and improving society. As a result of this, there should be a mutual relationship among the educational stakeholders, especially when it involves the research process for constructing and re-constructing knowledge in order to develop society. This research process usually involves the researchers and the subjects in terms of knowledge creation

and re-creation. Therefore, there is a form of power relationship between the researchers and subjects in the research process because knowledge itself is power.

The position of this article is that there should be a balance of power between the researchers and subjects as regards construction and re-construction of knowledge in the Nigerian society. The balance in this form of research refers to a process whereby researchers and subjects see themselves as co-researchers and co-subjects. This is a full participatory, action research process and often referred to as research with people at every stage of the research process. This article begins with an overview of Nigerian secondary school reforms of September 8 to 12, 1969 and October 4 to 5, 2010; examines the transformational challenges associated with implementation of policy outcomes in terms of gap between policy-intent and implementation; and concludes that co-operative inquiry is a form of participatory, action research and its application is an alternative research method.

#### **NIGERIAN SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM REFORMS**

A society is a system of social arrangements to meet needs and solve tasks which, today, are changing rapidly. Hence, the secondary educational process must take such changing dimensions into account in shaping the balance of experience and imagination that are suitable for individual responsiveness and effectiveness in such a society. Secondary education in Nigeria is also analogous with the high school system in countries such as the United States of America (USA) and Canada. In this regard, Dewey's (2002) observation on problems of US high schools "having to do with preparation for college on one side, and for life on the other" (p. 111) appears relevant to the context of secondary education goals in Nigerian society. Secondary education occupies a central position in Nigerian government policy documents. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004, pp. 13-14), the specific objectives of secondary education in Nigeria include:

- a. provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background;
- b. offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles;
- c. provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;
- d. develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage;
- e. inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence;
- f. foster National unity with an emphasis on the common ties that

unite us in our diversity;

- g. raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens;
- h. promote technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.

The construction and re-construction of knowledge in the education system in Nigeria using participatory approach was done on September 8 to 12, 1969, during the national curriculum conference and subsequently on October 4 to 5, 2010, in the educational summit by examining the goals and contents of education in Nigeria. To justify this participatory approach, Fafunwa (1974) stated:

The 1969 conference was not a conference of experts and professionals but of the people, in that it comprised the representatives of trade unions, farmers' unions, women's organisations, religious bodies, teachers' associations, other professional organisations (medical, legal, engineering, etc.), university teachers and administrators, as well as Ministry officials, youth-club organisers, businessmen and representatives from the governments of most of the twelve states of Nigeria. (p. 210)

Also, the participants for the 2010 summit, according to the communiqué of National Universities Commission (NUC), aptly stated:

The meeting which was presided over by Mr. President, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR, was attended by all major stakeholders in the Education sector. This included Honourable Minister of Education, Traditional Rulers, Commissioners for Education, Nigerians in Diaspora, Development Partners, Non-Governmental Organizations, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, and other Parastatals of the Federal Ministry of Education, Education Corps of the Armed Forces of Nigeria and the Private Sector. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010, p. 5)

A cursory look at the participants of the 1969 conference and the 2010 summit reveals similarities in terms of participants. This explains the relevance of the participatory approach when it comes to construction and re-construction of meaning in the education system in Nigeria as one of the most effective research methods.

In the Nigerian education system, the year 1969 was very important because it was the first time Nigerians were to deliberate on what kind of education could be needed or relevant for an independent nation. Also, it gave the opportunity to critically examine the colonial influence on the Nigerian educational system. Fafunwa (1974) rightly captured this purpose thus:

The conference was not concerned with preparing a national curriculum, nor was it expected to recommend specific content and methodology. Rather, in this first phase it was to review old and identify new national goals for Nigerian education, bearing in mind the needs of youths and adults in the

task of nation-building and national reconstruction for social and economic well-being of the individual and the society. (p. 210)

The research outcomes of the 1969 national curriculum conference led to a seminar in June of 1973. The outcomes of the seminar led to the publication of the Nigerian National Policy on Education, which was first published in 1977 and revised in 1981, 1998, and 2004.

The 2010 summit deliberated on issues as regards the implementation and practices of the Nigerian National Policy on Education. However, observations and conclusions that emanated from the 2010 education summit, most especially regarding secondary education system, have been highly contested and debated among stakeholders in the education system.

Secondary education occupies a central position in the National Policy. For international understanding, it is crucial at this stage to briefly describe the system of education before and after 1969 to illustrate the relevance of the secondary education system in Nigeria. Prior to the 1969 conference, the system of education was 6-5-2-3. This means 6 years of primary school, 5 years of secondary school, 2 years of higher school certificate, and 3 years of university education. The 1969 conference recommended the 6-3-3-4 system of education: 6 years of primary school, 3 years of junior secondary school, 3 years of senior secondary school, and 4 years of university education. This implies that secondary education is to be given in two stages. In 2004, the Universal Basic Education Act was enacted in Nigeria. This led to a slight modification of the 6-3-3-4 system to the 9-3-4 system of education in 2005. This means 9 years of basic education (i.e., combination of primary school and junior secondary school), 3 years of secondary school, and 4 years of university education. Based on this information, secondary school education witnessed a radical departure and structural changes from the old system in 1989, when the 6-3-3-4 system was implemented and slightly adjusted in 2005.

Secondary education represents a critical stage in the life of every learner. This is the education given at the adolescence stage of the learner. The adolescence stage plays an important role especially in providing a training ground for adulthood. Hence, the nature and quality of education given to any adolescent should be accorded ultimate importance. In a nutshell, it is the education every learner receives after elementary level and before the tertiary stage.

Nigeria as a country places a premium on the secondary education level. This is aptly captured in the two broad goals of secondary education stated in the National Policy on Education: “to prepare the individual for: useful living within the society; and higher education” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004, p. 13). In reality, what is the situation of secondary education in Nigeria? Or, how far has the country come towards attaining these broad goals?

Answers to these questions, especially as regarding the second goal “to prepare

the individual for higher education,” look specific, definite, and measurable. Although this second goal is an offshoot of the first goal, Nigeria has not performed well for the past 20 years. This is shown by the abysmally poor performance of students in school and public examinations. For instance, Bello-Osagie and Olugbamila (2009) reported that the Federal Government of Nigeria set up a panel to probe the mass failure rate in external examinations for her 104 Unity Colleges in 2009. This decadence in not only the secondary school system, but also the entire education system in Nigeria, has become a national issue.

The holistic reaction to this education problem was a two-day Presidential Stakeholders’ Summit on education with the theme: “Reclamation, Restoration and Sustenance of Quality and Ethics in Education in Nigeria,” which took place on October 4 and 5, 2010. The summit assessed the current state of education in Nigeria. Assessing the secondary school system, the Minister of Education asserted that the recurrent poor performance of students in public examinations was an indication of systemic failure in the country (Ndeokwelu, 2010). The President of Nigeria pointed out that “the 6-3-3-4 system of education [has] failed to address the challenges besetting the sector [secondary school] and had not equipped Nigerians with the necessary skills” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010, p. 1). He therefore concluded:

The Minister of Education who advocated 6-3-3-4 needs to apologize to Nigerians. It is one of those theoretical concepts that did not work. The secondary school education has been dislocated but it is not working. In fact, there is nowhere it is working because it’s all theory. (Abanobi, 2010, para. 10)

In response to the President’s conclusive statement, the previous Minister of Education posited:

It is true that I proposed the 6-3-3-4 system of education in 1989. I don’t have any apology about it. Our problem is not the system but failure to implement what was recommended before the cancellation. I believe in that system of education and I have written a book on it. Currently, it is being run in the US, Japan and other countries in the world. So what is wrong with our own? (Nigeria Resource Center, 2010, para. 11)

The President’s statement disagrees with the previous Minister’s words, but the two are pointing towards transformational challenges associated with the implementation of policy. These two opposing statements suggest a research methodological problem in proffering solutions to educational problems in Nigeria. This methodological research problem refers to the gap between policy-intent and implementation.

It is against this background that this paper assesses the value of the participatory approach as a research framework concerning the reconstruction of the education system in Nigeria and most especially as it affects the secondary school system. The basis of the argument is on the two conflicting statements on challenges confronting the secondary school system in Nigeria. It therefore considers co-

operative inquiry as a form of participatory, action research and its application as an alternative research method to ameliorate the transformational challenges confronting the Nigerian secondary school system.

#### CO-OPERATIVE INQUIRY

Co-operative inquiry is a sub-set of action research. The term action research can be literally interpreted as “action” and “research,” which means the relationship between theory and practice. The pioneers of action research are Lewin (1946) and Corey (1953). The philosophical base of action research can be attributed to Habermas’s (1962/1989) work on critical theory, where subjects participate as equals in rational discussion in the pursuit of truth and the common good. Carr and Kemmis (1986) saw action research as a form of self-reflective enquiry by participants undertaken to improve understanding of their practices with a view to maximizing social justice. In a more detailed and comprehensive definition, Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) posited:

Action research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations.... The approach is not only action research when it is collaborative, though it is important to realize that the action research of the group is achieved through the critically examined action of individual group members. (p. 5)

Although this approach involves collaboration with people for emancipation, Stenhouse (1975) and Whitehead (1985) have argued that action research can be done on an individual basis, for instance, the teacher as researcher.

The background of individual or group activity and other classifications of action research, such as reflective practice and a critical action research model, lead to co-operative inquiry. Co-operative inquiry is a participatory form of action research methodologies. It was conceptualized in 1996 by John Heron from Heron’s (1971) experiential approach to research. Heron (1996) developed co-operative inquiry as a research methodology. It is a type of research with people, and not on or about people (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2001). The researcher and people who participate in the research collaborate to determine issues to be discussed, the analysis and interpretation of findings, and conclusions emanating from the study. This minimizes the problem of power structure or control in the research process because the position that is finally arrived at is jointly decided by the researcher and the subjects in a participatory process. Oates (2002) opined that “the researcher-subject distinction disappears and all participants are both co-researchers and co-subjects” (p. 27).

According to Heron (1996), there are several features of co-operative inquiry. All subjects are as fully involved as possible as co-researchers in decisions about content and method. There is interplay between reflection and action. There is

explicit attention to the validity of the inquiry and its findings. There is a range of special skills suited to such all-purpose experiential inquiry. Finally, the full range of human sensibilities is available as an instrument of inquiry.

Participation is a key word in co-operative inquiry. According to Oates (2002), participation “involves two complementary processes between political participation (concerning the relation between people in the inquiry and the decisions that affect them) and epistemic participation (concerning the relation between the knower and the known)” (p. 28). According to Heron (1996), there are several reasons for political participation. First, people have a right to participate in decisions about the method and conclusions in research that seeks to formulate knowledge about them. Second, it gives them the opportunity to express their own preferences and values in the research design. Third, it empowers them to flourish fully as humans in the study, and be represented as such in its conclusions, rather than being passive subjects of the researchers. Fourth, it avoids their being disempowered, oppressed, and misrepresented by the researchers’ values that are implicit in any unilateral research design.

Heron (1996) also offers several arguments for epistemic participation. He claimed that propositions about human experience are of questionable validity if they are not grounded in the researchers’ experience. Also, the most rigorous way to do so is for researchers to ground their statements directly in their own experience as co-subjects. Moreover, researchers cannot get outside, or try to get outside, the human condition in order to study it. They can only study it through their own embodiment in joint participation and dialogue with others who are similarly engaged. Finally, Heron (1996) observes that this enables researchers to come to know both the external forms of worlds and peoples, as well as the inner feelings and modes of awareness of these forms.

Co-operative inquiry appears to negate the epistemological and ontological assumptions of quantitative methods of research on people. According to Oates (2002), the quantitative method of research:

ignores the human right of people to participate in decisions about gaining knowledge of them [i.e., an insufficient form of political participation]. It produces knowledge that is not experientially grounded: the researchers are not involved in the experience examined by the research, and the subjects are not involved in the selection of the constructs which are used to make sense of their experience [i.e., an insufficient form of epistemic participation]. (p. 28)

Qualitative research focuses on interpretation of human constructs. There may be problems over whose voice is to be represented or excluded in the analysis of findings. This is the point where the power of the researcher becomes important. Oates (2002) opined that “interpretative researchers can also be partially participant[s] (in the epistemic sense) if they do fieldwork involving participant observation” (p. 28). Therefore, qualitative research is a mid-way approach when it comes to exclusive, controlling research on people and fully

participatory research with people (Heron, 1996).

Both quantitative and qualitative research can be called research on people or about people. One of the problems associated with research on people is that there is little connection between researchers' experience and the subjects' experience. The researchers are the active agents who determine the methodological process and analysis, while the subjects are the less active agents who contribute the action to be studied. As a result of this relationship, the research outcomes may be too theoretical and impracticable because the researchers dominate the process. In co-operative inquiry, these problems are usually minimized to a certain extent because the researchers and the subjects collaborate in a participatory manner to determine the research process and outcomes. Reason (1999) asserted that co-operative inquiry is a radically participative form of inquiry in which all those involved are both co-researchers and co-subjects.

Co-operative inquiry has been described as a research cycling process involving four phases of reflection and action. According to Heron (1996), Oates (2002), and Reason and Heron (1999), there are four phases. Phase one refers to the coming together of a group of co-researchers to explore an agreed area of human activity. This is the phase where the research settings, such as objectives, questions, and methods, are formulated. It is usually called a reflection stage. In Phase two, co-researchers now become co-subjects. They engage in agreed-upon actions, observe, and record the process and outcomes of their own and each other's experiences. It is also the action phase. In Phase three, the co-subjects become fully immersed in and engaged with their experience. This is also an action phase. Phase four represents coming together to reframe or reject the co-subjects questions and ideas. It can even lead to new propositions of questions. This is the point where co-researchers and co-subjects share their experiential data from phases two and three and re-consider their original position. This is also the reflection stage.

These phases of reflection and action can involve several repetitive research cycles in order to enhance the validity and robustness of the findings. To ensure this validity, Heron (1996) suggested being present and open, bracketing and reframing, radical practice and congruence, non-attachment and meta-intentionality, and emotional competence as basic inquiry skills in cooperative inquiry research process.

The epistemological assumption of co-operative inquiry is based on critical subjectivity. According to Heron (1999), critical subjectivity "means that we do not have to throw away our living knowledge in search of objectivity, but are able to build on it and develop it" (p. 212). Based on this notion of reality, Heron (1996), Heron and Reason (1997), and Reason (1999) have grouped the four ways of knowing that can be generated in co-operative inquiry into extended epistemology. Reason (1999), for instance, referred to "epistemology meaning a theory of how you know, and extended because it reaches beyond the primarily

theoretical knowledge of academia” (p. 211). This extended epistemology goes beyond theoretical knowledge recognized by research on people; it is research with people, by the people, and for the people. The research outcomes are well-grounded with the people. Reason (1999) described the four ways of knowing in this extended epistemology:

Experiential knowing is through direct face-to-face encounter with a person, place or thing; it is knowing through empathy and resonance, that type of in depth knowing which is almost impossible to put into words. Presentational knowing grows out of experiential knowing, and provides the first form of expression through story, drawing, sculpture, movement, dance and so on. Propositional knowing “about” something, is knowing through ideas and theories, expressed in informative statements. Practical knowing is knowing-“how to” do something and is expressed in a skill, knack or competence. (p. 211)

It appears that these four ways of knowing are developmental as each builds up on another. It starts from experiential knowing, which is being perceived by all in our immediate environment. This perception accounts for individual differences of experience in how we look at the problem in the environment. It also leads to propositional knowing and finally practical knowing.

According to Heron and Reason (1997), critical subjectivity can lead to critical intersubjectivity because our ways of knowing are always within the linguistic-cultural and experiential-shared meaning having a critical consciousness with each other, which leads to the co-operative inquiry method. This implies a collaborative form of inquiry as co-researchers and co-subjects form a common ground based on the four ways of knowing. Co-researchers and co-subjects, therefore, engage in several research cycles before reaching a common ground in a research process.

The procedures to develop this form of agreement in co-operative inquiry include a series of actions. Such actions are managing divergence and convergence within and between cycles, balancing reflection and action, challenging uncritical subjectivity and intersubjectivity, managing unaware projections and displaced anxiety, attending to the dynamic interplay of chaos and order, and securing authentic collaboration (Heron & Reason, 1997). Careful identification and implementation of these procedures will ensure the validity of knowledge being generated in co-operative inquiry.

Heron and Reason (1997) concluded that qualitative research, like other traditional research methodologies in the social sciences, is about other people in their own setting. Co-operative inquiry is therefore a wide-ranging approach to social science study about any aspect of human conditions that a group of co-researchers and co-subjects chooses to explore through the instrumentality of their own experience (Heron & Reason, 1997). This inquiry places both the co-researchers and co-subjects in the same research conditions to develop the practical way of knowing.

## APPLICATION OF CO-OPERATIVE INQUIRY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

The application of co-operative inquiry in the Nigerian secondary school system demands a re-examination of the epistemological assumptions that guided the 1969 conference and the 2010 summit that led to the two conflicting statements from key educational stakeholders. This is needed because participatory approach as a research framework was used for both the 1969 conference and 2010 summit. This re-examination implies “the epistemological question, ‘What is the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?’” (Reason, 1998, p. 9).

In a nutshell, the relationship between researchers and participants based on the participatory approaches for the 1969 conference and the 2010 summit appears to be at the first level of empowerment in participatory research. Heron (1996) observed:

The first is when informants [subjects] are liberated by a research design to voice their own views and values and to act in ways they judge to be productive. The second and higher-order level is when informants [subjects] are empowered by being initiated in and by collaborating in, the research design itself and the values embodied in it. The first without the second is something of a contradiction. (p. 28)

To justify this placement, it is stated thus:

After the National Curriculum Conference [1969 conference,] a seminar of experts drawn from a wide range of interest groups within Nigeria was convened in the year 1973. The seminar, which included voluntary agencies and external bodies, deliberated on what a national policy on education for an independent and sovereign Nigeria should be. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004, p. iii)

It can be inferred that some of the 1969 participants were invited to offer informed consent on goals of education in Nigeria. This refers to the first level of empowerment in participatory research. The 1973 seminar was a forum for experts alone and used to fashion the policy document. This represents the second level of empowerment, but not all the 1969 participants attended the 1973 seminar. This is the genesis of contradiction in Heron’s (1996) words on policy-making. Co-operative inquiry operates at the second and higher-order level of empowerment.

Obviously, the policy document stated that not everybody who attended the conference was invited to the 1973 seminar. It should be noted that the outcomes of the 1973 seminar led to the Policy document on education. It is possible that the experience of every participant in the 1969 conference may not be adequately represented. Or in principle, not all the participants were at the seminar to agree to the final outcome or output. It is against this background that this paper argues for another research method that will ensure that every

decision taken through participatory approach is a co-operative affair. As Reason (1999) described:

Co-operative inquiry is an inquiry strategy in which all those involved in the research endeavour are both co-researchers, whose thinking and decision-making contributes to generating ideas, designing and managing the project, and drawing conclusions from the experience; and also co-subjects, participating in the activity which is being researched. (p. 207)

If this co-operative inquiry is done, then the statements “there is nowhere it is working because it’s all theory” or “what is wrong with our own” would not have sufficed at all. Instead, the research would have incorporated the users (subjects and researchers) at planning and implementation stages. All stakeholders’ views are considered in the process and outcomes on how the system of education should be operated.

The previous participatory approach engaged mostly the researchers at the planning stage and the subjects at the preliminary stage of the planning process. The subjects who are mostly “the managers on spot” or people to implement the policy may not be well-acquainted with it. To support this idea, Heron (1996) argued:

If reality is nothing but an internal mental construct, no warrant can be given for supposing that other people being studied actually exist, let alone for supposing that the researcher’s view of them adequately represents their own view of their situation. (p. 10)

This suggests that perceptions on implementing the system of education from both the researchers and subjects will be different from each other. This lack of congruence in the research process would have been resolved if co-operative inquiry had been utilized.

The earlier participatory research reflects traditional research processes. According to Reason (1999), one of the problems of traditional research “is that the kind of thinking done by researchers is often theoretical rather than practical. It does not help people to find out how to act to change things in their lives” (p. 208). This argument of Reason (1999) corresponded with the statement “there is nowhere it is working because it’s all theory.” Reason (1999) therefore pointed out that co-operative inquiry is “concerned with revisioning our understanding of our world, as well as transforming practice within it” (p. 208). This suggests that transformational challenges confronting the secondary school system in Nigeria can still be revisited and ameliorated with co-operative inquiry.

Participants in co-operative inquiry follow social guidelines that define their approach to sensitive issues. In principle, the activities are participatory and the process is democratic in terms of equal distribution of power with assurance that all participants have a voice. Stringer (2004) noted that in action research, “people develop high degrees of motivation and are often empowered to act in

ways they never thought possible” (p. 31) and, as described earlier, co-operative inquiry is a form of action research. From Stringer’s point of view, the two opposing statements ought to have been simplified in terms of gap between policy intent and implementation.

Co-operative inquiry adheres to the concept of participant-oriented development and promotes an active involvement of participants. Also, it allows the participant to be more conscious and creative in order to achieve real transformational schooling in the form of dialogue. In co-operative inquiry, the facilitator guides other participants on the broad goals of secondary education through independence, inquiry, and cooperation, and communicates deeply through group inquiry to enhance attainment of the goals of secondary schooling.

#### THE DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL CHANGE IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLING

Generally, educational politics could be used to include all social interaction which influences education. In Nigeria, the history of education development depicts three phases. Adesina (1992) noted that “history of our educational development, to most of us, reveals three phases each with its peculiar lessons and experiences” (p. 1). The first phase, between 1861 and 1960, which was a reflection of the continuation of colonial conceptions and strategies, was based on a policy of teleguidance and importation of foreign curricula and materials for adoption in Nigerian schools. During this phase, the central actors were the colonial countries and their foreign experts while Nigerian educators and students were bystanders or mere onlookers. However, with increasing internal sensitivities and awareness, the strains, weaknesses, and distortions that accompanied this phase were exposed and had to give way to a new phase: the second phase.

The attainment of independence in 1960 ushered in the second phase which was also characterized by the influx of all sorts of experts and ideas based on prescriptions or specifications largely prepared by the colonial country or its agency with very little or superficial knowledge of Nigerian local conditions. At this second phase, the experts occupied the various positions of designing the curricula in the sectors where they were engaged and preparing project evaluations without appropriate consultations with the local or on-the-spot Nigerian personnel.

The third phase was from 1969 till date. It depicts local initiatives in the holding of the 1969 Curriculum Conference and the subsequent Seminar in 1973 and Summit in 2010, which were fundamental to the formulation of the Nigerian National Policy on Education documents. Since education should be a joint effort of both the Government and the people, the roles of the various levels of Government need to be reviewed with the view to determining the specific roles to be played by the people themselves.

In a general sense, the successful implementation of any policy rests squarely on all those involved not only in formulation of policies but also in its implementation.

For example, when federal, states and local governments are singing different tunes on the same educational issues or when a National Policy is agreed upon and each level of government implements what it wishes rather than what is agreed upon, the resulting situation is chaos and confusion. Education should be regarded as a collective responsibility that brings together the beneficiaries in the form of teachers, parents, students, policy makers and executors.

Another classic example is the language issue in the Nigerian educational system. The ultimate goal is that the only right medium of instruction at any level of the school systems (primary, secondary, and tertiary) is monolingualism or to some extent, bilingualism in the form of convention. The reality of Nigerian society depicts a multilingual and multi-ethnic diverse nation and therefore poses a threat to the effective implementation of the educational language policy for realization of such goal. The Nigerian National Policy on Education stated that “the medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of immediate environment for the first three years in monolingual communities. During this period, English language shall be taught as a subject” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004, p. 11). This is the case of the use of mother tongue. Specifically, it requires instruction to be conducted in the mother tongue for the first three years of the primary school. Today, most state and local governments have ignored this provision in the National Policy, most especially among private schools.

## CONCLUSION

The argument of this paper is not for change in the system of education. It is only reacting to the two conflicting statements regarding the process that led to the structurally similar 6-3-3-4 and the 9-3-4 systems of education. These systems of education restructured the education process in Nigeria, but there are transformational challenges associated with the policy making and implementation. Both statements in this writer’s view are only referring to non-workability or impracticability of the system of education.

The position of this article is that the methodology used to arrive at the system of education contributed to the transformational challenges as evidenced by the two conflicting statements noted earlier. Although it used elements of a participatory approach, not all the 1969 conference participants were carried along at every stage of the policy-making, especially at the 1973 seminar. This article, therefore, argues for co-operative inquiry as an alternative participatory, action research method to examine transformational challenges confronting the secondary school system in Nigeria. This is a full participatory approach that will include every participant at every stage of policy-making.

This argument assumes that the previous method used in arriving at the current system of education did not properly engage the researchers and subjects mutually as co-researchers and co-subjects. The policy outcomes appear to reflect

most of the views of the researchers, common to most traditional research, which justified the statement “it’s all theory” because the participants were not properly involved in the whole process of conceptualizing the 6-3-3-4 system of education. If the co-operative inquiry had been used, it would have neutralized the unforeseen circumstances that worked against the system of education, which justified the statement “So, what is wrong with our own?” Hence, there is need for co-operative inquiry as an alternative research method to examine the transformational challenges confronting the secondary school system in Nigeria. Hopefully, the co-operative inquiry will bridge the gap between policy intent and implementation.

#### REFERENCES

- Abanobi, C. (2010, October 12). Jonathan goes back to school! ... At national stakeholders' summit in Abuja. *Online Daily Sun*.
- Adesina, S. (1992). Foreword and keynote. In Ndu Alice (Ed.), *Educational policy and implementation in Nigeria* (pp. 1-4). Awka.
- Bello-Osagie, K., & Olugbamila, A. (2009, December 31). Events that shaped education in 2009. *The Nation Newspaper*, p. B2.
- Carr, W., & Kemmis, S. (1986). *Becoming critical*. Falmer.
- Corey, S. M. (1953). *Action research to improve school practice*. Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Dewey, J. (2002). The educational situation. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 17(2), 104-119.
- Fafunwa, A. B. (1974). *History of education in Nigeria*. George Allen & Unwin.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2004). *National policy on education* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.).
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2010, October 11). Monday bulletin. *National Universities Commission*, 5(41), 1-18.
- Habermas, J. (1962/1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Polity.
- Heron, J. (1971). *Experience and method*. University of Surrey.
- Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition*. Sage.
- Heron, J. (1999). *The complete facilitator's handbook*. Kogan Page.
- Heron, J., & Reason, P. (1997). A participatory inquiry paradigm. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3), 274-294.
- Heron, J., & Reason, P. (2001). The practice of co-operative inquiry: Research “with” rather than “on” people. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research* (pp.179-188). Sage.
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1988). *The action research planner* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Deakin University Press.
- Lewin, K. (1946). Action research and minority problems. *Journal of Social Issues*, 2(4), 34-46.
- Ndeokwelu, C. (2010, October 12). Education: FG to set up task force. *Online This Day*.
- Nigeria Resource Center. (2010, October 25). 6-3-3-4: Desecrating Fafunwa's memory? *The Nigerian Voice*.

*Co-operative inquiry: A research policy method for secondary education in Nigeria*

- Oates, B. J. (2002). Co-operative inquiry: Reflections on practice. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 1(1), 27-37.
- Reason, P. (1998). Co-operative inquiry as a discipline of professional practice. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, 12(4), 419-436.
- Reason, P. (1999). Integrating action and reflection through co-operative inquiry. *Management Learning*, 30(2), 207-226.
- Reason, P., & Heron, J. (1999). *A layperson's guide to co-operative inquiry*. Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice, School of Management, University of Bath.
- Stenhouse, L. (1975). *An introduction to curriculum research and development*. Heinemann.
- Stringer, E. (2004). *Action research in education*. Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Whitehead, J. (1985). An analysis of an individual's educational development: The basis for personally oriented action research. In M. Shipman (Ed.), *Educational research: Principles, policies and practices* (pp. 97-108). Falmer.

SHINA OLAYIWOLA teaches in Department of Educational Management, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He is primarily in the area of education and conflict management in commonwealth countries, in particular, the politics, implementation and outcomes of education policies in Nigeria. He has published in reputable journals such as *Higher Education Quarterly*, *School Leadership & Management*, among others. [shinaoau@yahoo.com](mailto:shinaoau@yahoo.com)

SHINA OLAYIWOLA enseigne au Département de Gestion de l'Éducation à l'Université Obafemi Awolowo, Ile-Ife au Nigéria. Son domaine principal de recherche concerne l'éducation et la gestion des conflits dans les pays du Commonwealth, en particulier les politiques, la mise en œuvre et les résultats des politiques éducatives au Nigéria. Il est publié dans des revues réputées telles que «*Higher Education Quarterly*», «*School Leadership & Management*», entre autres. [shinaoau@yahoo.com](mailto:shinaoau@yahoo.com)