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ALIU BABTUNDE FAFUNWA

(1923–)¹

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Aliu Babatunde Fafunwa, fondly called Babs by his former students, associates, friends and colleagues, was born in September 1923 in Isale-Eko Lagos, Nigeria. Fafunwa, an educationist, a talented teacher, a brilliant scholar, a visionary, a pioneer teacher educator, a frontline pan-African educationist, a thinker, an innovator and an achiever, a distinguished university administrator, a successful author, a concerned patriot and social critic is known both at home and abroad more than any other Nigerian educationist. He is endowed with a pioneering spirit that pushes him to accept the challenges of experimenting, to blaze new trails, to spearhead bold and imaginative departures from the norm, to lead by examples rather than by precepts, and to provide challenges for others in matters of self-survival, self-sufficiency and self-assurance.

The Nigerian child constitutes the central focus of his educational philosophy. He thus never tires of reminding us that every child is gifted in at least one thing. The role of education, he argues, is to discover what that one thing is and to help him or her develop it.

Formative years

When he was 2 years old his family left for Jebba on business. The family stayed at Jebba from 1925 to 1928. While at Jebba, Fafunwa assisted his father in his fishing work and his mother in petty trading by hawking with his sister. Beginning in elementary school, he was exposed to both Western and Arabic systems of education. He completed his primary education in 1936.

He entered the Church Missionary Society (CMS) Grammar School, Lagos, in 1937. While in this school, he exhibited traits of good leadership. He was elected the class captain in his final year in 1943. Fafunwa's unique democratic leadership qualities were exhibited when he sought the consent of his classmates on all vital matters before making any decision. He was impressed by the dedication and commitment exhibited by most of his teachers. Indeed, like his CMS teachers, he was later to embrace teaching as a career.

Fafunwa developed a straightforward and forthright manner early in life. His activities as a teenager, no doubt, prepared him for a promising adult life. When he completed his secondary school education in 1943, it was evident that a courageous and brilliant leader of thought was in the making. He had his first working experience immediately after his secondary school education.

Fafunwa was appointed as a railway clerk by the Nigerian railways in 1944. He was conscientious and hardworking but would not accept foolish behaviour from anyone, even from his European bosses. Thus, when he finally resigned his appointment at the Nigerian railways in 1947, he concluded his letter of resignation as follows:

I leave the service without regret but with considerable relief because I am gaining my personal independence right now. I will be back to join others in fighting for Nigeria's self-determination.³

On leaving the Nigerian railways, Fafunwa proceeded to the United States. This phase of Fafunwa's life was full of struggle, frustration, successes and challenges. He arrived in the winter of 1947 and was welcomed by a terrible wind. He recalled that the shock gave him tremors all over and tears ran involuntarily down his cheeks.

Fafunwa enrolled at Bethune College, Daytona, Florida, for his first-degree programme in 1948. While at this college, he had to take a number of odd jobs in order to raise enough money to pay his tuition and other basic necessities. In 1951, despite the burden of limited financial means, he completed his first degree. He later attended New York University for his graduate studies where he received financial support from a woman whom he had met previously at Bethune Cookman College. He also worked in a Jewish restaurant while studying for his master's degree. After completing his master's degree programme in 1952, he enrolled for his doctoral studies at the same university. As well, he was given a part-time job as an assistant lecturer and named 'Chancellor's Scholar'. While he was working on his doctoral degree, he married a white American, Doris Elaine Jones, in 1953. He completed his Ph.D. programme in 1955 and returned to Nigeria that same year.

On returning to Nigeria in 1955, Fafunwa took up a teaching appointment at the Ahmadiyya College, Agege, as a senior tutor and acting vice-principal. He spearheaded the formulation of a code of conduct for teachers, along with school rules and regulations for the pupils. He never yielded whenever the issue of discipline came up.

While teaching at the Ahmadiyya College, he came to the conclusion that the Nigerian educational system was too examination oriented. This realization was to have a lasting impression on his approach to education policy formulations in later years. Thus, while developing the Nigerian National Policy on Education, of which he was one of the leading architects, an attempt was made to de-emphasize the importance placed on examinations. Nigeria now has a true educational system and not an examination system, as was the situation when he was at Ahmadiyya College.

After working for a year in Ahmadiyya College, Fafunwa resigned his appointment and joined ESSO West Africa Limited, an oil company, as employee—public relations manager. He served in this position for five years. While at ESSO, he assisted the company in increasing the number of indigenous staff members by recruiting Nigerians, both at junior and managerial levels. At ESSO, Fafunwa was convinced beyond any reasonable doubt that paper qualifications have their limits. There, he found out that most of the expatriate members of staff had little or no paper qualifications as such. This notwithstanding, he was impressed by their background and work experience, as those among them with the lowest qualifications often had fifteen years experience and training on the job. They could truly be regarded as experts in their various fields. All this led Fafunwa to recognize that paper qualifications need not be worshipped. 'I learnt early in my career that paper qualifications have limits and that ability to perform effectively and efficiently comes with experience,' he remarked. This understanding also influenced his educational and administrative policies in later years. It was not strange, then, that he experimented with the employment of unsuccessful school-leavers while still at ESSO. The experiment worked. He thus demonstrated that the final school certificate examination result was not an infallible test of a person's intellectual ability.

All along, while Fafunwa was working either at the Ahmadiyya College or at ESSO, he felt that he did not belong in either place. It was at this point that he started to publish articles on education in newspapers. As a result, he started to draw attention to himself through these publications. It seemed strange that the first Nigerian with a doctorate degree in education should be teaching in a secondary school or working as a public relations manager for an oil company. He was all the while looking for an opportunity to work in a truly academic environment.

The opportunity to join the teaching service of a university came with the establishment of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1960. Thus, when he was appointed a senior lecturer at the newly founded university in 1961, he decided to accept the appointment. This appointment enabled him to reach the top of the educational policy-making level in Nigeria.

An entirely new university was perhaps the best setting for someone like Fafunwa to start a university teaching career. He needed an academic environment full of challenges and hopes, coupled with the freedom to explore new ideas. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka, provided that ideal environment. In its pioneering years, the department of education at the university had a strong team of educators led by John Hanson, an expatriate. When Hanson left the university in March 1962, Fafunwa was appointed the substantive Head of Department and acting Dean of the Faculty of Education. Three years later, in 1965, he was promoted to professor and appointed substantive Dean of Education. Thus, Fafunwa became the first Nigerian ever to be appointed Professor of Education. Next, he transferred to the University of Ife, Ile-Ife, where he built a new Faculty of Education from scratch.

He became the first Dean of the Faculty of Education and Director of the Institute of Education, between 1967 and 1976. He left the University of Ife for Lagos in 1976 to become the first Chairman of the Teaching Service Commission for Lagos State. In 1981 he was appointed the first Chairman of the Governing Council of Lagos State College of Education. Both positions he accepted with humility and performed the duties of his office with characteristic dedication to his beliefs. By this time he had started to enjoy a national and international reputation.

Mother tongue education

In order to appreciate Fafunwa's contribution to mother-tongue education in Nigeria in general, and in the Yoruba-speaking states of the southwest in particular, it is necessary to trace the historical background of mother-tongue education in Nigeria. Between 1842 and 1881, the mission schools encouraged instructions in the mother tongue, especially in the western part of Nigeria. This trend was, however, handicapped by government intervention in and control of education.

With the beginning of government participation in education, indigenous languages began to suffer some setbacks. There was a clause in the Education Ordinance of 1882 (Clause 10, section 5) which stipulated that grants would only be paid for the teaching and learning of the English language and not for the teaching and learning of vernaculars. However, the indigenous languages received a boost in 1916 when Lord Lugard suggested that European officials should make efforts to acquire these vernaculars. The situation was further improved with the promulgation of the 1926 Education Ordinance. Between 1926 and 1952 therefore, efforts were made to standardize the Yoruba orthography.⁴

Fafunwa's interest in the mother tongue started when he was a Class One student at the CMS Grammar School, Lagos, in 1938. At that time he was able to persuade the editor of the school magazine, called *The Grammarian*, to enable him make his own contribution in Yoruba. Fafunwa then wrote his article entitled 'Writing in Yoruba Language'. His interest in the mother tongue was further enhanced when he was an undergraduate in the United States, where some American students asked him whether Africans had their own language outside English. This occasion further spurred him to action and he decided to show that the Africans had their own culture, language and a way of life before the arrival of the British, German, Spanish, French and Portuguese colonialists. Fafunwa also recalled the period when his father and his relations worked with the Nigerian railways. Many of those who worked as illiterate technicians developed the habit of 'Yorubanizing' technical terms. Thus, there were such 'Yorubanized' words as *kopulu* for 'couple', *boila* for 'boiler', *wosa* for 'washer', *wagunu* for 'wagon' and *braketi* for 'bracket'.⁵

The final experience that convinced Fafunwa of the urgent need to promote mother-tongue education happened in Iboland in the eastern part of Nigeria in 1963, while he was observing the teaching of nature study in Primary IV—a class of 10-year-olds. According to him, the teacher had a colourful picture on the wall showing different animals and vegetation. He wanted the children to describe what was in the picture. Several hands were up. However, when the teacher indicated that

he wanted the answers in English, all hands went down. This was a painful situation to Fafunwa and he vowed to promote mother-tongue education whenever the opportunity arose.

It was not until 1970 that the stage was appropriately set for Fafunwa, not only to emphasize the teaching of Yoruba language or any mother tongue in schools, but also to use the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in teaching the primary school curriculum. Fafunwa's contention was that if a primary school child was taught in the native language, that child would understand and assimilate instructions in the classroom better and thus be in a position later in life to employ his education more meaningfully and effectively than if he was taught in a foreign language.

Fafunwa strongly reasserted his view that the colonial pattern of education had robbed the African child of inventiveness, originality and creativity, since he was forced to think in English instead of in Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo or any other Nigerian language. He therefore argued that:

If a Nigerian child is to be encouraged from the start to develop curiosity, manipulative ability, spontaneous flexibility, initiative, industry, manual dexterity, mechanical comprehension and the co-ordination of hand and eye, he should acquire those skills and attitudes through the mother tongue as the medium of education, which after all is the most natural way of learning.⁶

Left to the missionaries, education would have been conducted in the mother tongue without much controversy. The colonial government, however, believed that the mother tongue or the vernaculars were not civilized languages and should therefore not be introduced into schools at all, let alone used for instruction in education. Fafunwa therefore fought a spirited battle to promote the mother tongue in Nigerian education. His struggles resulted in a successful outcome when the National Policy on Education in Nigeria, published in 1977, recommended that each secondary school child should learn at least one major Nigerian language other than his own. In order to provide empirical information to support his ideas on mother-tongue education, Fafunwa embarked upon the Ife Six-Year Primary Project (SYPP) at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Institute of Education, between January 1970 and 1989.

The main objective of the Ife Six-Year Primary Project was to develop a coherent primary education that would use the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. The project employed the Yoruba language as the medium of instruction on the assumption that the child would benefit cognitively, socially, culturally and linguistically through the use of his/her mother tongue as the language of instruction throughout primary school. The gap between the home and the school would also be bridged. English was taught as a second language using specially trained teachers throughout the six years. The project was continually evaluated with a view to determining its effectiveness.

Five major subject areas were chosen for instructional purposes. These were: social and cultural studies; science, including health and sanitation; mathematics; Yoruba language and literature; and English as a second language. The design of the experiment provided for regular intake of Primary I classes each year from 1970 to 1975. For the purposes of the study, control groups and experimental groups were established. The experimental group was taught all subjects in Yoruba except English. English was taught from the first year to the sixth as a second language. In the control classes, Yoruba was used as a medium of instruction for the first three years and English for the last three years, when Yoruba was taught as a subject. All the test materials in Yoruba, English, social and cultural studies, mathematics and science were written and printed by the project team over a period of five years. A total of 183 textbooks were produced covering teachers' books, pupils' books and work books in Yoruba and English, including several supplementary readers both in Yoruba and English.

At the end of their Primary VI year, the children in the experimental classes were subjected to the same external examinations taken by all Primary VI children in the state. It was found that the children in the experimental classes performed significantly better than those in the control groups in

all school subjects, including English. The Ife Six-Year Primary Project proved conclusively that a child learned best in his or her mother tongue. Today, the 'products' of these experiments are occupying important positions in the various sectors of the economy, politics and religion in Nigeria.

It is significant to note that only 10% of the experimental group dropped out of school, while the drop-out rate for the control group was 30% during the six-year period. The national drop out rate in 1980 ranged between 40 and 60%.

The project did not end with the examination of the experimental and control groups at the end of their primary education. Monitoring of project children at secondary and post-secondary school was embarked upon. It is interesting to note that the entire first group (1975) passed the First School-Leaving Certificate Examination, while a sizeable number of the control group failed. While in secondary grammar schools, the project children were found to be at an advantage academically over their counterparts in most of the subjects offered at school especially in Yoruba, English language and mathematics.

Due to lack of funds, the monitoring exercise could not be extended to the post-secondary school level. It is however worthy of note that out of the 820 pupils who enrolled in Primary I in 1973, more than 300 of them had graduated from Nigerian universities by 1987.

As a result of the success of the project, in 1985, the Oyo State Government, one of the Yoruba-speaking states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, decided to introduce the Ife Six-Year Project in its primary schools on a trial basis. More than 60,000 pupils and 2,100 teachers participated in the project. By 1988, ten of the twenty-one states in Nigeria were using some of the project's published books. At least 2 million children are using some of the project materials in the Yoruba language today. Some of the non-Yoruba-speaking states have translated the Ife materials, particularly science and mathematics, into their own mother tongues.

Between 1990 and 1992, with the encouragement and active support of the federal government, spearheaded by the federal Ministry of Education, various scholars, groups and institutions produced orthographies for over twenty-five Nigerian languages. Today, at least fifty Nigerian languages now have orthographies. In addition, in 1993, on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the birth of Jan Amos Comenius, an international award was instituted jointly by the Czech Ministry of Education and the Director-General of UNESCO. The objective was to reward achievements in the field of educational research and innovation. Fafunwa was one of the ten laureates, coming from all geographical regions of the world, who received the award. Fafunwa was overwhelmed with joy upon receiving the award. As he said:

For UNESCO to have singled me out as one of the five persons along with five institutions for this prestigious award for the promotion of primary science education in the mother tongue and the promotion of mother tongue education generally shows that my humble efforts have not gone unnoticed.⁸

Fafunwa continues to insist on the use of mother tongue in the primary school years to enable the child to interact effectively with his environment. One of the strongest points regarding the issue of mother tongue as a medium of instruction is that, though it may not be a necessary and sufficient condition for intellectual development, it is surely a necessary and sufficient condition for conceptual development. This is the foundation on which Fafunwa's project rests.

Curriculum reforms

Fafunwa showed practical interest in curriculum reforms at all tiers of the educational system. In 1967, Fafunwa proposed a detailed curriculum for nursery school education in developing societies. He believed that the curriculum of the nursery school should follow the child's natural inclination.

He felt that the African child, more than European children, needed nursery education because of the several disadvantages that his early home environment presented. The home, instead of assisting the child, was mostly a hindrance due to the non-literate circumstances of many African parents. Children had neither educational toys nor home libraries at their disposal. Parents were, in most cases, unable to help their children with school problems—which is not normally the case in advanced countries. He thus recommended a curriculum that followed a child's natural inclination and provided opportunities for self-expression and creative imagination. At this level of education, Fafunwa believed the child should be taught to develop creative thinking with lessons in African music, dancing, story-telling, role-playing and painting. The child should be engaged in motor and manipulative skills. Children should be made to handle things. Wooden educational toys could be constructed and such toys as wooden motor cars, diggers, trucks, aeroplanes, counting beads, rattles, balances and other educational objects should be made. The child should also be taught health and moral education. The importance of health education was further stressed for the simple fact that in rural areas children suffered from dietary ailments due largely to an unbalanced diet. Protruding stomachs, poor eyesight, bad posture, yaws, rashes and sores were common problems and nursery education could play a significant role in helping to eliminate these problems. Fafunwa also placed a premium on the inclusion of science exploration in the nursery curriculum. He noted that children had a natural inclination towards natural science. They liked birds, bees, butterflies, fish, dogs, cats and so on, and they liked to possess a number of these as pets, if parents allowed them. Providing a science corner in nursery, kindergarten and elementary schools would naturally foster the children's interest. In short, Fafunwa saw the introduction of nursery education, not for the purpose of direct instruction geared towards achieving high intellectual development, but essentially for facilitating a smooth transition between the home and the school. In his view, the nursery system of education was intended to remedy early environmental deficiencies.

For the primary school curriculum, Fafunwa proposed a six-dimensional structure in the areas of: reading and writing in the child's mother-tongue, English or French; arithmetical and mathematical processes; basic science; civics and social studies; vocational education; and physical education. When taken as a whole package, a detailed examination of his proposals for the primary school curriculum revealed that he had carefully provided for all the vital components of a child's development. It is to be observed that the overriding philosophy of his primary education was the building of self-reliance, creativity, imagination and resourcefulness into the personality of the child.

Fafunwa's most penetrating criticism of the colonial curriculum at the secondary school level led him to call for greater reconstruction to meet local conditions. His proposals for curriculum reforms at the secondary school level were geared towards making the Nigerian youth think effectively; communicate thought clearly; make relevant judgements; play one's part as a useful member of one's home and family; understand basic facts about health and sanitation; understand and appreciate one's role as a citizen of a sovereign country; understand and appreciate one's cultural heritage; develop economic efficiency both as a consumer and as a producer of goods; acquire some vocational skills; recognize the dignity of labour; develop ethical character; appreciate the use of leisure; understand the world outside one's environment; develop a scientific attitude towards problems; and live and act as a well integrated individual. Fafunwa recommended a two-tier secondary school structure of three years each to obtain these goals.

Fafunwa was equally dissatisfied with the content of university education. According to him, the university in Africa should have its roots firmly entrenched in its native soil, without neglecting the common heritage of all universities the world over. It should be alive to the social, political, economic and cultural backgrounds and needs of Africa. He concluded that the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Russia, Germany, Japan, China, etc. had themselves attempted to base their educational systems on these relevant criteria, while still performing conventional tasks common to all universities around the world.

On the whole, Fafunwa's contributions to curricular reforms in Nigeria affected practically all phases of Nigerian education. It is interesting to note that most of his ideas for curricular reforms eventually found their way into the national policy on education.

Significantly, Fafunwa challenged the then gurus in Nigerian education to a debate and action on fundamental issues in the country's educational system. Its philosophy, relevance, objective, management, funding, value, etc. were hotly debated and examined not only in various publications but also at various forums. His bold advocacy for reforms led to the creation of the Nigerian Educational Research Council to increase interest in research, and the historic National Curriculum Conference of 1969, attended by Fafunwa and a powerful team of young Nigeria academics. That conference was the precursor to a series of events that led to the adoption of the '6-3-3-4 National Policy of Education' in Nigeria. This itself gave birth to a myriad of reforms in the curriculum content of primary, secondary, post-secondary and higher education.

The conference made a total of sixty-five recommendations on the direction in which education should be pursued if Nigerian education was to produce more effective students. The 1969 National Curriculum Conference was the first national attempt to change the colonial orientation of the Nigerian educational system and promote national consciousness and self-reliance through educational processes.

Teacher education reforms

Fafunwa's teacher education reforms in Nigeria are radical and innovative. His pioneering zeal was made manifest when he led the academic members of the Faculty of Education at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, to train the first set of degree holders in education. The academic programmes provided in the faculty led to the production of highly qualified secondary schoolteachers equipped with a sound knowledge of educational theories and practice, and the mastery of academic content in two cognate subjects, including either arts, science or social sciences.

Historically, the common practice before Fafunwa's pioneering efforts was for teachers to receive a degree in a discipline other than education and later to be trained for nine months to qualify for a diploma in education. Fafunwa considered this to be grossly inadequate for the proper training of graduate teachers. Fafunwa's innovation has become the general pattern today in all Nigerian universities offering degree programmes in education. It was, indeed, a landmark in the history of teacher education in Nigeria.

It was also at Nsukka that he initiated the long vacation education programmes for primary schoolteachers. Although the programmes have assumed different dimensions in recent years in the country, the original aim as indicated by Fafunwa—the improvement of the Nigerian teachers' teaching competencies—remains the same.

Fafunwa also fought hard at Nsukka to ensure that the status of the Grade II Teachers Certificate was raised by allowing the holders to be admitted to the degree programme at Nsukka. Hitherto, the Grade II Teachers qualification was considered too low for admission for degree courses under the British colonial system. The experiment worked. Today, virtually all the universities in the country have adopted this progressive and forward looking innovation.

Fafunwa also pioneered the introduction and development of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) teacher preparation programme. This started as a two-year course for holders of Teachers' Grade I Certificates and three-year course for holders of Teachers' Grade II Certificates. Its original objective was to produce teachers for the intermediate level in the secondary schools. Many colleges of education were established to produce NCE teachers and it was subsequently projected that the NCE would become the minimum qualification for teaching in Nigerian schools.

In his contribution to the book: *A philosophy for Nigeria education* published in 1972,⁸ Fafunwa had this to say:

In conclusion, may I reiterate that teacher education is intimately related to the ever-recurring problem of the need for trained manpower in Nigeria and therefore affects the social, political and economic spheres of our lives. Teaching more than any other profession touches the life of practically every citizen either as students, parents, guardians or administrators and planners. To treat the teaching profession with levity and careless abandon is to damn our own future. A poorly trained and unsure teacher will likely produce a poor doctor, engineer, architect, fellow teacher and the like. The services of the teacher are indispensable to a nation, for they, more than any other professional group, influence the lives of the Nigerian youth and therefore the nation's future. (p. 96-97).

A paramount desire for Fafunwa was to achieve the recognition of teaching as a profession. For decades, Nigerian teachers have been agitating for professional status. Fafunwa was part of this crusade.

It was in pursuit of his struggle for the recognition of teaching as a profession that in March 1992 he presented the establishment of the Teachers' Registration Council to the cabinet of ministers under the chairmanship of the president. This was when he had his greatest opportunity in his position as the Minister of Education for the country.

The main functions of the Teachers' Registration Council included the production of quality teachers and the maintenance of minimum standards in all institutions handling teacher education at all levels. The council would initiate the formulation of common policies on teacher education. The council would also determine who would be considered professional teachers, set standards of knowledge and skills to be attained by persons seeking to become members of the teaching profession, as well as review these standards as and when considered appropriate. A register of persons entitled to practise the teaching profession would also be established and maintained.

Not only did the Council of Ministers approve the establishment of the Teachers' Registration Council, it also promulgated a decree to this effect. Indeed, the decree was published in 1993. However, six years after the promulgation of the decree, the Teachers' Registration Council has yet to be implemented.

Establishment of new educational units

Fafunwa originated the idea of setting up of the 'think tank' in Nigeria in 1975 to enable Nigerians to deliberate and contribute to decision-making on such important matters as inflation, employment generation, education, particularly Universal Primary Education (UPE), airways, traffic congestion and road safety, foreign affairs, health services, agricultural production, wage administration, public information and civics education youth corps, etc., all of which were very topical at the time. By 1976, the federal government established a National Policy Development Centre (NPDC) or 'think tank' to assist government with the reappraisal of existing policies and the evolution of new policy decisions. Fafunwa was immediately made the chairman of the ten-man advisory board. The board organized a conference on Discipline in Schools in July 1977 in conjunction with the federal Ministry of Education for 300 principals of secondary schools drawn from all the then nineteen states of the federation. The conference focused on the social, environmental and psychological factors underlying lack of discipline and lawlessness in schools. The report of the conference has become a blue-print for principals of schools in managing discipline problems.

The NPDC metamorphosed into the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) in 1979 and was located in Kuru near Jos. As a former Director-General of NIPSS, retired Major-General Charles Ndiomu said: 'The National Policy Development Centre (think tank) is the father of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies.'¹⁰

In 1984, the Fafunwa Study Group on funding education was set up by the federal government. The report of the group formed the bedrock on which subsequent decisions on funding, especially primary education, was based. Other benefits that accrued to the Nigerian education system from the report of the group included the improvement in the payment of

teachers' salaries and allowances at the primary school level, the establishment of the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) in 1988 under the chairmanship of Fafunwa and the establishment of two important government parastatals—the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and the federal Ministry of Science and Technology.

On 29 December 1989 Fafunwa was appointed the federal Minister of Education. He used his position to set up the Longe Commission on Review of Higher Education in Nigeria in 1990. It would be recalled that the last nation-wide commission on education was The Commission on Post-School Certificate and Higher Education in Nigeria, popularly called the Ashby Commission. The report of this commission was submitted in 1960 and had since guided thinking, planning and overall development in the general areas of educational provisions in the country. The Ashby Report had been overtaken by events. In essence, the report was no longer relevant to the needs of Nigerians. There was therefore a need for another commission on higher education. The Longe Commission was to serve that purpose. The Longe Commission considered the issues of consolidation of the existing institutions and their future expansion, including the risk of institutional proliferation in higher education, over the next decade and immediately beyond. It also examined future available resources and efforts to readjust the structure and growth patterns of the nation's economy. Today, the recommendations of the commission, as accepted by the government, are greatly influencing various aspects of Nigerian higher education.

Fafunwa, as Minister of Education, also established six units under his ministry between 1991 and 1992. The Nigerian French Language Village was established in 1991 in Badagry, Lagos State, by the federal government to cater primarily to undergraduate students of French from all over Nigerian universities and colleges of education. It has since become a center of excellence committed to the promotion of the learning of French in Nigeria in particular, and in Anglophone West Africa in general.

The National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), located at Ondo, was established by Fafunwa on 17 December 1992. The Institute is multipurpose in outlook and functions. It serves as a training, research, data storage and dissemination as well as consultation centre.

The National Institute for Languages was established in Aba in 1992. Today, the Institute serves as an active teaching, learning and research center for the study of Nigerian languages. The Institute encourages the development and publication of materials including books, journals and teaching aids for proficiency programmes in tertiary institutions and for primary and secondary schools.

The National Arabic Language Village was established in 1992 and located in Gamboru in Bornu State. It is an active center for teaching, learning and conducting research in the Arabic language.

The National Board for Educational Measurement (NBEM) was also established in 1992 and is currently located in Minna in Niger State. The board is charged with the responsibility of conducting junior secondary examinations for the federal government colleges and selection examinations for admission into the federal government colleges through the National Common Entrance Examination. The Board will also conduct the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) as of May/June 2000. This function was originally performed by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), but is now being transferred to NBEM by the federal government in order to reduce the burden on WAEC.

The National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) was established in 1992 and located in Benin, Edo State. The board is charged with the responsibility of examining candidates at the end of their business and technical programmes in post-primary schools. The board handles the final examinations for the Royal Society of Arts and the City and Guilds. These were some of the responsibilities taken from WAEC.

Fafunwa also introduced the Education Bank to replace the Students Loan Board which had difficulties recovering the loans given out to students. Fafunwa's argument was that the banks best know how to recover debts and as such should be given such a responsibility. He however directed that the interest should be kept very low and the repayment terms liberalized. The bank is located at Abuja, the federal capital.

A man of vision

Fafunwa is an author whose publications are respected and widely read both nationally and internationally. His wide-ranging publications in the form of books, monographs, conference proceedings, journal articles, technical reports and newspaper columns on equally wide-ranging subjects as science and mathematics, education, technical education, mother tongue education, teacher education, social studies education, curriculum and instruction, educational technology, educational history, educational administration and supervision to mention a few, are as inspiring as they are challenging. They have revolutionized the conceptual and practical aspects of policy and policy implementation in Nigerian education over the last four decades. Fafunwa is a recipient of many national and international honours and awards.¹¹ Since he made his debut on the educational scene in the 1950s there was hardly any level of education, be it pre-primary, primary, secondary or tertiary that has not been influenced by his innovative ideas. Fafunwa literally assumes the duty of re-orienting the course of Nigeria's education so as to attune it more closely to this scientific age while not alienating it from the deep roots of Nigeria's cultural backgrounds. He has courage, faith, knowledge and wisdom—all of which are his source of power. He would best be remembered and honoured as a man who has been very instrumental in translating theoretical formulations into sound realities, a man who has succeeded in putting principles into practice.

One of the educational landmarks for which Fafunwa will ever be remembered is the National Policy on Education. It is interesting to note that no other Nigerian has had such a profound influence on education policy-making in Nigeria. Fafunwa no doubt had a vision for Nigerian education and he struggled to create the enabling environment to actualize that vision which eventually brought light to the country's educational scene.

Notes

1. *Thomas O. Fasokun (Nigeria)*. Professor of Adult Education, Department of Continuing Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria since 1989; obtained a Ph.D. in educational administration and later granted a Commonwealth Fellowship Award which was utilized at the Department of Adult Education, University of Manchester, United Kingdom between 1979 and 1980; an active researcher who has published in national and international journals; recent publications include: *Politics in adult education*; *Mentoring activities among extra-mural teachers*; *Monitoring of learning achievements of primary school pupils in Nigeria* and *Adult education strategies for promoting indigenous knowledge and skills*.
2. Professor Aliu Babtunde Fafunwa will be seventy-six years old on 23 September 1999.
3. A.B. Fafunwa, *Up and on: a Nigerian teacher's odyssey*, Lagos. West African Publishers Ltd., 1990, p.48.
4. Babatunde Ipaye, *The Fafunwa phenomenon in Nigerian education*, Lagos. Printserve Ltd., 1996, p.21. Text of First Foundation Annual Lecture, Fafunwa Educational Foundation.
5. A.B. Fafunwa, Op. Cit., p.20.
6. A.B. Fafunwa, J.I. Macauley and J.A.F. Sokoya, eds. 1989. *Education in mother tongue: the Ife primary research project, 1970-1978* Ibadan, Nigeria, University Press, 1989, p.10.
7. A.B. Fafunwa, *Memoirs of a Nigerian minister of education*, Lagos. Macmillan, 1998, p.33.
8. A.B. Fafunwa, *New perspectives in African education*, London. Macmillan, 1967, p.51-52.
9. A. Adaralegbe, ed., *A philosophy for Nigeria education: report of the national curriculum conference*, Lagos. Heinemann Educational Books Nig. Ltd., 1972, p.96-96.
10. A.B. Fafunwa, *Memoirs of a Nigerian minister of education*, Op. Cit., p.49.
11. Fafunwa has received a great deal of recognition for his work both within Nigeria and abroad. He was Director, Comparative Africa Education Study Tour of East and Central Africa (1966), International Member, Kenya

Commission on Teacher Education (1966-1968), International Member, Sierra Leone Commission on Higher Education (1969-1970), Co-Chairman, African Primary Science Workshop of the Educational Development Centre, Newton, Massachusetts (1963-1966), Member of the UNESCO Commission on the Review of University Education in Liberia (1975), Consultant, Workshop on Teacher Training in the Use of African Languages. Monrovia, Liberia (1983), Togo (1984) and Kenya (1987), Founders' Day Special Honours Citation for Outstanding Scholarship, New York University (1956), Franklin Book Award for Outstanding Contribution to Educational Development, New York City (1976), Medal for Distinguished Service in Education, Teachers' College, Columbia University, New York City (1973), Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award, New York University School of Education (1982), Distinguished Fellow, International Council on Education for Teaching, Washington D.C. (1983), Hon. LL.D., University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1986), Hon D. Litt., Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife (1987), Nigerian National Merit Award Winner (1989), Honourable Federal Minister of Education (1989-1993), Fellow, Science Teachers Association of Nigeria (1990) and Fellow, Nigerian Academy of Education (1990).

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