

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This paper emphasizes the contributions of education to national development. It stresses the fact that a nation develops in relation to its achievement in education. This explains why contemporary world attention has focused on education as an instrument of launching nations into the world of science and technology and with consequential hope of human advancement in terms of living conditions and development of the environment. This is because, education, in the life of a nation, is the live wire of its industries and also the foundation of moral regeneration and revival of its people. It is also the force and bulwark of any nation's defence and it has been observed that no nation rises above the level of its education. Seeing education in this perspective calls for proper funding from federal, state and local governments to make the sector produce the desired results which will stimulate national development. In Nigeria, much is not being derived from the sector due to neglect on the part of government, corruption, policy discontinuity, inter alia. To make the nation derive maximum dividends from the sector, useful recommendations are made.

Keywords: Education, national development

Introduction

Education is a crucial sector in any nation. Being a major investment in human capital development, it plays a critical role in long-term productivity and growth at both micro and macro levels. This explains why the state of education in Nigeria continues to be our national discourse at all levels. Consequently, the implication of the declining quality of education at all levels has far reaching negative impact on a nation's moral, civic, cultural and economic sustainability. At this point, it is important to realize that discussions on education and its reforms to make it contribute meaningfully to national development should gradually and systematically move away

from a politicized to a more analytical approach that appreciates the complexities inherent in proffering genuine and workable solutions for revamping our educational system.

In the Nigerian context, for the sector (i.e, education) to contribute meaningfully to national development; there should be proper funding of the three tiers of government. If this is done in the proper way, the Academic Staff Union of Universities will not have any need to embark on industrial actions as there will be improved infrastructure in the primary, secondary and post-secondary schools; there will be no more brain-drain as research activities will be effectively carried out and examination misconduct will be eradicated or reduced and the sector will contribute meaningfully to national development. Samalia and Murtala (2010:254) state that something urgent has to be done in the educational sector since ‘illiterates’ are leading Nigerians. But the problem with Nigeria is that there is no difference between an educated president and not so enlightened ones in terms of their leadership. Irrespective of the above observation, the main focus of this paper remains the contributions of education to national development.

Conceptual Clarifications

In this paper, there are certain concepts like education and national development which need clarification. This is done for proper understanding and good grasp..

Etymologically, the word education is derived from two Latin words “educare” and “educere” (Amaele et al 2011:6). Accordingly, “educare”, means to train, to form or to mould. In other words, it means that the society trains, forms or moulds the individual to achieve the social needs and aspirations. “Educere”, on the other hand means to build, to lead, or to develop. This is mostly favoured by the humanists who argue that the function of education is to develop the natural potentialities in the child to enable him function in the society according to his abilities, interests and needs. This is child-centeredorientation.

Ordinarily, education is exclusively used for the development of human beings in the cognitive, affective, psychomotor and psychoproductive domains. It also involves a desirable approach in human behaviour through the process of teaching and learning. Fafunwa (1974) defines education as what each generation gives to its younger ones which makes them develop attitudes, abilities, skills and other behaviours which are the positive values to the society in which they live.

From the above, education, according to Amaele et al (2011:7) is seen as the total development of the individual child through acceptable methods and techniques according to his abilities and interests to meet up the needs of the society and for the individual to take his rightful place and

contribute equally to the enhancement of the society. This paper supports this definition of education.

Another concept to be explained here is national development. Lichman (1972:57) and Markovitz (1977) stress that a developed society is the one that has succeeded in providing a source of living for the majority of its inhabitants and that in such society, premium is attached to elimination of poverty, provision of food, shelter and clothing to its members. This argument agrees with the definition of development by Todaro and Smith (2006:20-21) from the modernization paradigm which sees development as a multidimensional process which involves the sustained elevation of the entire society and social system towards a better or humane life. They identify three basic components for understanding development. These components are sustenance, self-esteem and freedom. These represent common goals sought by all individuals and societies. According to them, sustenance is concerned with ability to meet basic needs, self-esteem is concerned with a sense of worth and self-respect, of not being used by others as tools for their own needs and freedom is concerned with freedom from servitude- servitude to nature, ignorance, other people, misery, institutions and dogmatic beliefs especially, that poverty is a predestination. Therefore, the definition by this paradigm which emphasizes the basic needs of life in transforming the individual in the society to self-actualization is a true definition of development. Any development model that does not reflect these tenets needs a paradigm shift.

Omoyibo and Agbonzeke (2010:284) also state that the former Secretary of United Nations Organisation, Boutrous, B. Ghali, in May, 1994, issued a document which categorizes development into five dimensions which are peace, economy, environment, social studies and democracy. In the Nigerian context, these components are missing as democratic processes are absent and the government in power abuses the rule of law. In Nigeria, the process does not create opportunities for opposition to strive and majority of those in power are there on the basis of what to get and the development of their various communities is not their priority

Apart from the above, Oke (2004:31) stresses that sustainable national development starts with the ability of a nation to satisfactorily provide the food and fibre that are needed by its people and industry and Himmelstrend (1984:18-21) has supported this argument by stating that food security must be given adequate attention to the solve problem of mass hunger in Africa. Even if these scholars have given importance to agriculture, national development should be able to transform individuals in virtually all sectors of the economy.

Contributions of Education to National Development

The focus of this paper is to look at the contributions of education to national development. Prominent among the points to be considered here is that education supplies the needed manpower for national development. Afolabi and Loto (2012:330) support this argument by stating that a developed or educated polity is the one that has enough manpower and each person occupies his or her rightful position to enhance the growth of the society. To support this, Ajayi and Afolabi (2009:34-36) have also remarked that education is largely perceived in Nigeria as an indispensable tool which will not only assist in meeting the nation's social, political, moral, cultural and economic aspirations but will also inculcate in the individual knowledge, skills, dexterity, character and desirable values that will foster national development and self-actualization. From the definition of education given above, it is clear that education trains an individual to be useful in the society and to meet up the need of the society for national development. Therefore, it should be clear that without education, a nation cannot get the needed manpower for material advancement and enlightenment of the citizenry. The trained engineers, teachers, medical doctors, inter alia are all the products of education. This explains why it is argued also that the quality of a nation's education determines the level of its national development.

In addition, education promotes social and group relationships (Armstrong, D.G. et al 1981:142). In this regard, Obasanjo (2012:3) states that education trains individuals to relate to and interact meaningfully with others in the society and to appreciate the importance of effective organization for human progress. Here, the school system within the educational system fosters this development. The school brings people of different cultural backgrounds together for a common purpose. This promotes mutual co-existence among the different students. Learners who strongly identify with their school are thought to have a more positive attitude towards teachers, other learners and the entire educational enterprise (Armstrong, D.G. et al 1981:143).

Again, in the school system, there are official clubs and organizations in existence. Learners who participate in these organizations and clubs gain experience in working with others outside the individual organizations and to some extent in working and competing with outside groups with minimum friction and this goes a long way to promote national unity and peaceful co-existence which will lead to national development. Sometimes, organizations not formally sponsored by the school in some cases make arrangements to use school facilities when classes are not in session. Learners derive benefits from their association with these groups in the same way they profit from participation in school sponsored organizations. By doing this, education provides a setting within which different learners'

organizations flourish and a context for helping young people learn appropriate patterns of interpersonal relations. Through this, it provides a forum for the development of many kinds of acceptable person-to-person behaviour patterns as the school classes include a variety of individuals. In these classes, learners meet people from different social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds from their own. Here, male-female relationships begin to develop as young people mature. It is obvious education through the system inculcates much to learners beyond the prescribed academic curriculum and also encourages the development of social behaviours that will be useful to them as adulthood.

Education also promotes the culture of productivity by enabling individuals to discover the creative potentials in them and apply same the improvement of the existing skill and technique of performing specific tasks, thereby increasing the efficiency of their personal societal efforts (Obasanjo 2012:3). Education teaches or trains people to be useful to themselves and the society they live. By this, they have to be productive and discover their creative abilities and use this to perform specific tasks to attain self-actualisation.

Education also develops in individuals those values which make for good citizenship, such as honesty, selflessness, tolerance, dedication, hard-work and personal integrity, all of which provide the rich soil from which good leadership potential is groomed. As already noted, education trains an individual to be responsible in the society. From this, it is clear that education gives moral training. Consequently, if the Boko Haram Islamic sect had received quality and sound education, they would have abstained from violence and it follows that if our elected representatives in the Rivers State House of Assembly had been well trained educationally, there wouldn't have been ugly incident as that of July, 9, 2013 in Rivers State. This, therefore, shows that Nigerian leaders are morally bankrupt and have nothing to offer in terms of national development from their leadership style. This therefore demonstrates that education has not fully impacted positively on Nigerian leaders.

From the above, it is clear that education has a critical function in national development. But in the Nigerian, context, education has not fully played its roles in the regard. This is as a result of certain inherent problems in the Nigerian education system.

First among these problems is inadequate funding. Education is no doubt, directly linked with the processes of nation building and development. Education in Nigeria has not been properly funded and this leads to poor infrastructure developed in the universities, secondary and primary schools. This poor infrastructure makes the environment very hostile. This explains why highly placed Nigerians like senators and state legislators are cruel to

each other to the point of fighting in their legislative houses. The table below shows Federal Government percentage budgetary allocation to education in 1999, 2000, 2001, 2006, 2008 and 2009.

Year	Allocation (%)
1999	11.12
2000	8.36
2001	7.00
2006	8.77
2008	10.02
2009	8.08

Source: Abubakar S., and Murtala, A.R. (2010), p. 257

The table above shows how insufficient Nigeria's allocation to education has been. Corollary of the above is the question of quality in our educational programmes. This shows that products of this underfunded educational sector will be very poor and teachers will not be adequately remunerated for them to perform their duties effectively. This calls for incessant strike actions embarked upon by Academic Staff Union of Universities. This also explains why pupils and students in the school system sit on bare floor and under mango trees to receive lessons and lectures. As the sector is not properly funded, it cannot efficiently contribute to national development. This explains why Jega (1997:5) calls Nigerian funding of her educational sector "Much ado about nothing". The above situation emanates from our disregard for quality education which is informed by poor funding resulting in the crisis of credibility which appears to have bedeviled the academic qualifications obtained in Nigerian universities today.

Another point to be considered here is unsteady political environment. From independence till date, there have been several administrations in Nigeria. The successive political leaders either military or civilian often suspend the existing educational policies and replace them with the newly fashioned ones which typify their own political agenda. By this, the educational policy planners are compelled to jettison a plan still on the drawing board and take up new policies which must be geared towards meeting the current political demands. This has become a serious bottleneck to education in term of achieving national development. There explains lack of continuity in educational policy formulation.

Still in the same vein, education in Nigeria is politicized (Afolabi, F.G. and Loto, A.B. 2012:330). Educational policy decisions in Nigeria are highly political orders, directives, and assertions bereft of synergy. This happens when the envisaged educational plans and objectives are being politically manipulated to suit the whims and caprices of policy formulators. This explains why some political appointees are given portfolios as

commissioners and ministers which they are least qualified for. This explains why Adesina (2005) states that Nigerian politicians would rather advocate unrealistic populist educational programmes than risk their constituency through technically derived and obviously realistic and productive educational programmes. It is sad to note that political appointments in most universities evade due process to the detriment of stakeholders.

Nevertheless, incessant change of educational policies also impacts negatively on national development. A policy requires sufficient time to mature from planning phase to implementation phase and finally to review phase. For instance, a policy that affects the secondary level of Nigerian educational system would definitely require twelve years to have just two complete cycles that is Junior Secondary School (JSS) and Senior Secondary School (SSS). This is the reverse in the Nigerian context as the usual practice is to jettison such policy, drastically modify or completely abandon it for reasons obvious to the policy makers who are political leaders in power (Afolabi and Loto 2012: 339). Particular examples here include the phasing out of Teachers Grade II programme in the late 1980s and the establishment of National Teachers' Institute (NTI), replacement of Modern Mathematics in schools with General Mathematics and incessant changes in school calendar for flimsy excuses.

Also important to be mentioned is corruption. In most cases, budgetary allocation to the sector is always embezzled. At the same time, politicians use their offices to accumulate more money. For example, Nigeria has spent over ₦1.1 trillion on national assembly for the past eight years. With this, much will not be spent on education and it cannot contribute more to national development. These problems so identified explain why the crises in the sector have lingered for a long period.

Recommendations

The discussion above illustrates the strategic position of education in charting the course of national development. The crisis which has engulfed the Nigerian education sector centres on government neglect of funding education, politicization of education, changing political environment, incessant change of educational policies and corruption. Below is a recipe or lasting solutions to the perennial crisis that has bedeviled the Nigerian educational system.

Prominent among the solutions is that government should be determined to make provision for effective funding of education. The Federal Government should endeavour to earmark 26% of the total budget for educational development as recommended in the United Nations Organisation.

Again, education should be a tripartite affair and responsibility of federal, state and local governments. At the same time, the private sector should also be made to participate in the funding. This will be successful if government on its part shows its seriousness and commitment to the system in terms of funding. The private sector can participate by providing research grants, awarding of scholarships and endowment of Professorial Chairs in universities. An enabling law should also be enacted making it mandatory for multinational companies operating in Nigeria to set aside a minimum of 5% of their profits to finance education and allied projects.

There should also be the need for strong political will among political leaders to ensure continuity of educational policies and doggedness in the fight against corruption in the country. Severe punishment should be meted to financial crimes and other corrupt practices in the educational sector.

Education should not be politicized as identified above and there should be a steady political environment to ensure continuity and maturity of educational policies.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper is the contributions of education to national development and the researchers have identified specific ways in which education contributes to national development. This paper also emphasizes that the contributions of education to national development has been limited by poor funding, politicization of the system, unsteady political environment and corruption in Nigeria. For education to impact positively on national development, some recommendations have been made and if duly followed, will address the crisis rocking the Nigerian educational system.

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