

Education Transformation for Sustainable National Development Needed in Nigeria

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Abstract

Education has always been the very root of human development and progress. Even when things go awry in a society and the people become dejected, education is the means of bringing hope and smiles back to them. Hence, all nations pay attention to education, allocating to it significant time and resources. If Education becomes a static business, it would never be able to meet the society's desires. The curriculum, which is the educator's major device of meeting the people's expectations, is particularly prone to change, but the change must not be haphazard; it has to be transformation oriented and cost-effective. If the gains of an education are not transformational, especially in an increasingly competitive world, all investments in the education are wasted, as the investors would soon be overtaken by poverty and neglect. It requires the commitment of all stakeholders to make education work. Academic opinions and practices count so much in the matter – their unending but reasoned discourse should provide the firework needed in socio-economically, politically and technologically transforming the society. Thus, this paper attempts to link sound education with national development and integration. It argues that an education with faulty primary and tertiary components leads nowhere, and it identifies and explains the problems confronting primary and tertiary education in Nigeria before suggesting the steps that can be taken to solve such problems.

Keywords: Education, Transformation, Development

Introduction

Education is on the current lists of most countries. By this, education perpetually receives budgetary attention in the countries. Thus, year in year out, huge resources are committed to it. Relegating it is courting retrogression, poverty and general hopelessness among the peoples. In spite of the universal commitment to education, it is not total yet in most countries. Education not tied to development is never good education. If so much resources are given to education, as much progress, good living and democratic values are expected from it, because the more literate a society is, the greater the socio-cultural, economic, technological and scientific attainments of the people. The acquisition and use of the skills employers of labour desire today would be possible only if education system is consistently relevant.

Many factors would not make education functional. While some of the factors have to do with the society (Ogundele & Ahmed, 2011), others have to do with the practitioners themselves. Most of these factors obtain in Nigeria but educators do not seem to have identified and appreciated them properly. The result has been an education not tied with employability – so many graduates are not gainfully employed.

Meaning, Nature and Dimensions of Education

It is impossible to attempt a watertight definition of education, which is why different scholars have given it varied definitions. Education may be formal or informal, and it is of different levels, each level having its mandate which can only be successfully carried out by focused stakeholders. Thus, needs are involved in it, and the curriculum helps to identify and describe such needs which it anchors on appropriate content, learning experiences and extra-curricular activities. The creative output by the recipient of an education would seem to be the hallmark of that education. This means that what goes on in the process of educating someone does not constitute education. Rather, the amount of empowerment that the one enjoys after the process should be viewed as education. In this connection, no individual can function more effectively than the amount and quality of education they have received.

The critical role that education plays in the life of any society makes it an unending concern of a nation. As affirmed in the Nigeria National Policy of Education (2007), no nation can rise above the quality of her education. In order to explore and adequately use the nation's scarce resources to meet the ever – increasing needs, the citizenry must be properly educated. Democratic values, effective bilateral relations, and cultural awareness flow from productive education.

By nature, education (especially formal education - a type that is curriculum-driven) has very fluid boundaries by which it can benefit from different aspects of knowledge. The open-ended frontiers of formal education probably account for why educators believe that the discipline is the mother of all disciplines. However, in flowing into, and drawing from other disciplines, formal education maintains its principal mandate of producing learners who would not only be all-round developed, but also fully predisposed for further development.

The goal of formal education is not quite different from that of informal education, although the procedures in one are largely different from those in the other (Fafunwa, 1974).

Traditional education has involved and produced great thoughts and helped to trigger powerful instincts that civilizations have been able to benefit from. It has no curriculum, syllabus and documented instructional steps, gimmicks, classroom activities, and so on, yet its main aim is the successful imparting of knowledge and ideas.

Education, in the formal context, can also be described in term of its levels, such as pre-nursery, nursery, primary, secondary, tertiary and university (this paper intends to treat the college of education, polytechnic, monotechnic and the university as different shades of tertiary education). Every level draws from and flows into the next higher one, and through effective curriculum evaluation, the highest level can loop into the lowest. Ariei (1991), Lawal (1993) and Mkpa (2005) are agreed that curriculum evaluation is one of the most useful ways of innovating in education.

The Significance of Primary and Tertiary Education

That tertiary education is linked with primary education in the theme of this conference is quite instructive. While the primary level is the entry point, the tertiary is the exit. Examining both levels critically is an urgent task, particularly in a country like Nigeria where there have been so many rapid challenges that it would seem education is in a confused state. If the foundation (primary level) – input – is not solid, there cannot be a steady process of throughput (secondary level) that would lead to balanced output (the tertiary level).

Although the current policy (FRN, 2007) subsumes the primary level within the nine-year Universal Basic Education (UBE) paradigm, it is clear that the primary is foundational, forming the Lower Basic and the Middle Basic Levels. In many states of the country, the Primary School system has remained distinct.

Pupils coming into the primary school are impressionistic. They have just been forming their own world views and are often inquisitive, eager to learn. The pupils believe so much in their teachers and would hold fast to whatever view such teachers express. Olajide (1995) explained the role the primary school teacher plays in predisposing learners at that level for tasks at higher levels of learning. The curriculum of primary schools should bring forth the capabilities of the pupils and permit the teacher to harness such capabilities. The learners, through diligent handling, could mature into tertiary students who would be primed for the focused leadership that Nigeria expects them to offer in the future. They would have developed a globalized view of their cultural heritage (Oyibo, 2005).

The tertiary level is unique for harnessing the potentialities that learners have developed from the primary and secondary schools. It is where specialization becomes an issue, and the conditions attached to each specialization are usually stringent. In order to graduate, for example, the student is required to do some form of practicum and research. Tertiary education that is not development oriented is detestable. The different specializations are expected to reflect societal needs. As such, the curricula involved should be need centred and integrative. Lawal, (1993) advocated integrative curriculum planning and development for the language arts at the tertiary level. The integrative curriculum links educational content and objectives effectively.

Without successful teacher education, there cannot be dynamic education at whatever level. Incidentally, for quite some time in Nigeria, there have been worries over the quality of teachers produced in the Colleges of Education and the Faculties. Different arguments have been advanced by stakeholders on what should be done to improve teacher performance, and new policies are being fashioned to guide teacher preparation and practices. There cannot be genuine and sustainable national development where teachers are poorly orientated and ill-equipped.

The Challenges in Linking Education with Development in Nigeria

The challenges involved in making primary and tertiary education truly development-oriented are many, ranging from the professional through the societal to those related to policy formulation and implementation. Some of such factors are examined below..

Socio-economic

The vicious cycle of poverty, un-employment and insecurity affects education, especially teacher, education badly. Majority of the teachers produced roam the streets for job while those employed are poorly paid. The situation, as noted by Jimoh (2004), makes the teacher a mocked individual. Consequently, there is no enthusiasm among teacher educators, teachers in paid practice and trainee teachers. Those who deliberately seek admission into courses related to education at the tertiary level are so few, and many of the few actually do not want to teach on graduation. They merely want to acquire the certificates as stepping stones (Lawal, 2011). Even in tertiary institutions, those in Education are erroneously viewed to be academically weak. Attitude to teacher education among the populace does not show that they can link education to genuine, sustainable national development.

Distractions from Technological Innovations

Much of the comfort that man has been able to enjoy derives from progress in science and technology – two mutual beneficiaries of functional education. Technological inventions have helped the world become a global village, particularly the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which is an offshoot of the wireless communication invented by Guglielmo Marconi in 1895 (Olajide 2012). As noted by Olajide, most of the inventions have had adverse effects on (rather than promote) education in Nigeria. The Global System of Communication (GSM) in particular has badly affected language use among learners (Lienjdlien, 2010S), just as devices like computer and calculator have threatened the development of numeracy skills in schools. Whereas, if wisely used, all the inventions are tools for attaining sustainable development through education, they pose dangers because the Third man can be unwitting in his applications of the inventions.

Intriguing Political Forces that Perpetrate Incompetent Leadership

Education cannot thrive in a country where visionless citizens are led, because such leaders would only promote irrelevant policies and projects. Ogundele and Ahmed (2011) attributed the poor quality of education, especially teacher education programme in Nigeria, to bad leadership. Administrative styles at the university and primary levels have negative and/or

positive effects on education. The orientation of those statutory bodies charged with monitoring teaching and teacher education also counts. If the officials slant their reports for pecuniary reasons, government may not be able to appreciate and meet primary and teacher education needs. Infrastructural decay in schools arising from overstretched facilities due to admission explosion and the unmet interests of the learners and society may continue.

Unemployability of Graduates

One of the greatest problems of Nigeria education today is graduate unemployability (Abdulkareem & Oduawaiye, 2011; Ogundele, 2011). Apart from that, the contents of most of the courses at the tertiary level do not incorporate skills development and application. As such, employers, who require highly skill labour, have no spaces for the graduates. Educational planning is also not based on a proper understanding of market (labour) situation. Institutions merely keep graduating students across disciplines. There is an urgent need to link admission and graduation with employability in Nigeria. The disinterestedness in education which the private sector currently displays (Ogunlade & Ahmed, 2011) does not help the development of worthwhile education.

Lack of Fund

Poor political disposition to education has led to the underfunding of the sector. Apart from the general dilapidation of structures at all levels of education, teacher-education facilities have gone obsolete. The funds that educators need to do development oriented research, attend seminars, workshops and conferences, and supervise practical teaching embarked upon by student teachers are not available.

Un-innovative Teacher Education Curricula

A serious challenge is the focus of current teacher education curricula in Nigeria. The content of the curricula hardly reflect needs at micro- and-macro-levels. For example, as noted by Olajide (2011^a), Adeyemi (2011) and Fakomogbon (2011), education programmes now should have incorporated critical thinking, skills acquisition, environment matters and reading culture. Also, it would seem that the existing teacher education curricula do not emphasize the effective integration of experiences which Lawal (1993) considers as crucial aspect of curriculum development. Then it is not clear how much educators carry out the evaluation of the curricula they operate, whereas, as observed by Suarez (1991) and Olajide (2011b), a poorly evaluated curriculum cannot lead to an education that can fast-track development and progress.

The Problem of Rights and Responsibilities

Moreover, teachers and teacher educators have not fully appreciated the rights attached to their responsibilities. Issues of work condition, health, minimum wage, retirement and pension have not been properly resolved in favour of the education sector in Nigeria. While many teachers and teacher educators are insensitive to issues of conduct (Oladosu & Abdullahi, 2004), there is generally low protection for the teaching profession (Jimoh, 2004).

Lack of Harmonization of Primary and Tertiary

Education Curricula of Teacher Education in Africa differ from country to country (Olajide, 2011^b). This implies that the focus of teacher preparation is not the same in the continent. The world is moving towards integration, and the more countries have in common, the better for mankind. If teacher education in Nigeria borrows from other parts of the world, Nigerian educators could become professionally more mobile. Primary and tertiary education in particular may be able to re-invent more meaningfully by drawing from the experiences of practitioners from other lands.

Surmounting the Problems

The problems so far identified can be solved through commitment on the part of the stakeholders in Nigeria. Each of the problems needs to be carefully studied and approached pragmatically. Curricula of teacher education should be reviewed holistically (Nwosu 2011). Education relevant to the primary and tertiary levels has been shown to be strategically important. Consequently, the programmes for preparing the teachers at the levels should be made stronger through curricular transformation or overhaul. As no nation can rise above the quality of its teachers, issues of teacher education must be addressed well. In so doing, certain factors may be taken into consideration:

- (i) Primary and tertiary education should reflect what the society wants education to do for them in this era of insistent globalization. Otherwise, the products of the education would lack relevance, and society would continue to be relegated.
- (ii) The intellectual, emotional and skills requirements in teacher education must be met by primary and tertiary education curricula.
- (iii) The objectives of primary and tertiary education must also be stated so clearly in the curricula that they would be achievable.
- (iv) In re-engineering the curricula, experts in planning and development should be properly involved.
- (v) Also, the eventual curricula should be endeared to stakeholders through well-funded enlightenment programmes.
- (vi) The evaluation of primary and tertiary education curricula should entail feedback processes. The vice chancellors, provosts, rectors, principals, head teachers, professional bodies and employers of labour should be involved in re-inventing and evaluating the curricula.
- (vii) There should be efforts at harmonizing primary and teacher education curricula in Nigeria with those in the rest of Africa as advocated by Olajide (2011^b)

Concluding Remarks

Education is the bedrock of human development and progress. The primary and tertiary levels of education stand out in general discourse on education not only because they are the largest in preparation and practice, but also because they are quite critical in laying the foundation for the technological and industrial advancement a nation desires. It is however worrisome

that primary and tertiary education is beset with many problems in Nigeria. While some of the problems come from the society, some others have establishmentarian roots. There are also those connected with education as a profession, the fads of science and technology and the learners themselves. In order to solve the problems, all stakeholders must play their roles properly. Only transformed education, particularly primary and tertiary education, can produce visionary leaders who can initiate and effect sustainable national development and integration.

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