

EDUCATION AS A PANACEA FOR THE SURVIVAL OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined the invaluable role of education, especially higher/tertiary education in the development of Nigerian democracy. The paper has sketched a road map for the robust resuscitation and strategic repositioning of education in a crowded and competitive market place in Nigeria. The article introduces the place of higher education in society, and clarifies the main concepts that have been used in the paper, which include 'education', 'democracy' and 'survival'. The interdisciplinary methodological strategy used for the writing of this paper is described in the next section. This is followed by the theoretical framework adopted for the research analysis of the paper. Some of the challenges of higher education in Nigeria today are discussed in the next section. The last section enumerates critically needed strategies that should be implemented for the survival or even the revamping of education in Nigeria as the educational system has been to a large extent a failure and rebuilding

Keywords: Education, Democracy, Development

Introduction

The role of education as an instrument for promoting the socio-economic, political and cultural development of any nation can never be over-emphasized. Education plays a paramount role in the development of any country in the world and, it is through education that knowledge and skills are passed from generation to generation (Balema, 2005). The development and growth of a nation is determined by the quality and quantum of its human resources that is provided by education

(Abdulkareem, 2001 cited in Ajayi and Ekundayo, 2012). This is so because education the world over is a veritable and cogent tool for sustainable development. It is vividly recognizable that teaching and research functions of educational institutions play crucial roles in national development, particularly in the development of high level workforce and technology. Thus, if education, especially at the tertiary level is regarded as the vehicle for social, economic and political mobilization, transformation and sustainable development, then its provision, administration, and financing should be given utmost priority, since the success of any system of education is founded on proper planning and efficient administration.

Furthermore, access to higher education is essentially a social process deeply involved with the society's cultural patterns and value system. The conditions governing admission into federal institutions of higher learning must therefore be determined by the existing social, economic, and political realities within the society. In Nigeria, with a population of over 140 million scattered over 36 States and Federal Capital Territory situated at Abuja, finding an equitable formula for admitting all eligible applicants into its tertiary institutions is a great challenge indeed (Adeogun, Subair and Osifila, 2009,)

Education plays a crucial role in supporting national development and meeting the needs and aspirations of any society. While the relationship between education and sustainable development is complex, education is the key to a nation's ability to develop and achieve sustainable development, especially when it is directed to improving agricultural productivity, providing skills for work in new industries, enhancing the status of women, promoting environmental protection, developing capacities for informed and ethical decision-making, and improving the quality of life for all, as well as inculcating good moral values for sustainable national development.

The Chairperson, UNESCO Commission on Education in the 21st Century, identified many ways in which education is contributing to the goals of national development. However, he also noted that economic and social progress has been uneven and often brought with it a widespread sense of disillusionment over the prospects for future generations. While addressing the challenge of finding alternative pathways to social and economic development, Delors (2011) described it as "one of the major intellectual and political challenges" of the new century and asked, "How could these great challenges not be a cause for concern in educational policy-making?" He continued:

It is essential that all people with a sense of responsibility turn their attention to both the aims and the means of education... [to develop] ways in which educational policies can help to create a better world, by contributing to sustainable human development, mutual understanding among peoples and a renewal of practical democracy (Delors, 2011, cited in Arisi, 2013,)

Clarification of Terms

Education

Education is regarded, globally, as a potent instrument for introducing and sustaining social change in human societies, as well as shaping its destiny (Ifenkwe, 2013). Apart from serving as a vehicle for enhancing upward social and economic mobility, education is regarded as a key to social reconstruction (Ukeje, 1978:9), and an instrument for conserving, transmitting and renewing culture (Erder, 1966).

Education is concerned with the comprehensive and dynamic development of the individual and society. It is the act of systematic developed and training of the mind, capabilities and/or character through instruction/study. Education varies as widely in its forms, philosophy, contents, and methods as there are different societies in the world. Education is a life-long process that has interpretation in purpose, type and level. It is a means of socializing people into the community, for upholding customs and traditions as well as for modification of same in conformity with existing ideologies, ideological expansion and/or reformation. Education is an instrument for effecting national development through instructional pedagogy. Education can be defined as production and reproduction of knowledge of a peoples' way of life (i.e. their culture) with the aim of preserving and maintaining the social structure that will be able to guarantee social order and changes in the society. According to Ifenkwe:

Education imparts knowledge, teaches skills, and instills attitudes to the recipients. Imparting knowledge means putting across facts, current thinking, theories, principles or laws; teaching skills is imparting practical skills, comprehension and ability to see implications or solve problems; instilling attitudes include inculcating tolerance, open-mindedness, scientific detachment and healthy skepticism. These are requisites for social integration, performance of productive tasks, and for effecting national development (2013:07; cf. Langer, 1977: 62 and FRN, 2004).

He continued by asserting that to educate the mind is to liberate it from the shackles of fear, prejudice, ignorance, and superstition and to develop a free,

independent and responsible citizenry. Knowledge, attitude, skills and aspiring change through education constitute construction blocks for human capacity building.

Education is a life-long socialization/interaction process (Igbo 2003; Schaefer, 2007) through which social norms, values and cultures are learned, shared and transmitted from generation to generation. As explained by Haralambos and Heald (2006), social norms are guidelines that define acceptable and appropriate conduct or behavior (such as learning etiquette, safety regulations, hygiene, and dress code) in particular situations, while values define what is good and desirable, as well as what is important, worthwhile and worth striving for (such as achievement, honesty, and morality). Culture is a way of life of a society that includes ideas, habits and the ways of life of a people that are learned formally, informally and non-formally.

Education is one of the basic means of human and cultural self-realization as well as a means of realizing the productive power of a nation. The very concept of development according to him implies the constant improvement in the quality of life in a nation through the improvement of the productive capabilities of individuals. Education is one of the decisive tools for achieving this. Since culture differs from one society to another, every society ultimately has its own system for training and educating its youth. Accordingly, the goal of education and the method of approach may differ from place to place, nation to nation and people to people. For example, the Greek idea of an educated man was one who was mentally and physically well balanced. The Romans on the other hand placed emphasis on training-pedagogy, which refers to receiving instruction. During the Middle-Ages in England, the Knight, the Lord and the Priest were considered classical examples of well educated elite. In France, the scholar was the hallmark of excellence. In Germany, it was the Patriot. In old Africa, the warrior, the hunter, the noble man, the man of character or anyone who combined the latter feature with a specific skill. Such persons were adjudged to be well-educated and well-integrated citizen of the community.

Education takes place throughout life in many forms, none of which ought to be exclusive. We therefore must start to think about education in a more all-encompassing fashion (Arisi, 2013, 247). Higher education is set up in Nigeria in particular for the purpose of: (a) Acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and society; (b) The development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appropriate their environment; (c) The acquisition of both physical and intellectual

skills, which will enable the individual to develop into useful members of the society; and (d) the acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environments. Thus, the goal of higher education has long been identified as the process that helps develop the whole person physically, mentally, morally and technologically, to enable them function effectively in any environment in which they find themselves so that they may become more productive, self-fulfilling and attain self-actualization (Tawari, 1986; Aluede, Aluede & Ufah, 2004).

Hence the importance of higher education is to provide quality education for higher productivity so that the products of institutions can assume leadership positions in their immediate and external communities (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004; Idogho, 2011, 269). Informal, non-formal, and formal methods of education are germane for socializing and educating the citizens of any nation.

Survival

The term refers to the fact that something is still alive or still exists. It indicates a continues fight, struggle and/or striving for existence in a life situation where matters pertaining to human life are not only under threat, but they are continually lending, exposing and subscribing themselves to the principle of diminishing returns and/or producing inferior cultural values. It refers to the whole scale erosion of the value embedded within the body of a culture belonging to a holistic, cosmological paradigm or worldview. With reference to education, the term connotes the continual downward spiral of the fortunes of education in Nigeria since the institution of education in all its ramifications and taxonomy is the product of culture. In this era of the onslaught of the process of globalization, every cultural item in the whole world is struggling against other similar cultural items in other parts of the world for survival. Thus every aspect of the education industry in Nigeria is facing steep challenges for survival in a world suffering from competitive winds of the processes of globalization blowing across the globe when we continue to grow smaller in the eyes of the outside world as a global village and in our own eyes as a globalized entity. It is against this backdrop that scholars, students and critical stakeholders of the education industry very often talk of falling standards of education.

Democracy

The term democracy literally refers to rule or governance by the people as opposed to other typologies of government. It is derived from the Greek word *dēmokratiā*, which was in turn coined from the word *dēmos* meaning ‘people’ and *kratos* denoting ‘rule’. This occurred in the middle of the 5th century BC to

describe the representative nature of the political systems existing in some Greek *polis* City States, notably Athens (*Encyclopedia Britannica* 2009). Mendus (1996:409) was correct when he observed that though democracy is an imperfect form of governance, it is far better than all others. This led him to conclude rightly again that we ought to recognize the benefits of democracy and harness it with our local cultural values, instead of drawing undue attention to its shortcomings.

Democracy refers to majority rule a rule of the majority through representation. It is a system that distributes power fairly and equally (Nelson 1996: 359). During the classical period, democracy was paralleled to and different from other forms of government where power in each case lay with a certain section of the population: In aristocracy, it was the *aristoi* or the best; in oligarchy, it was the *oligoi* or the few; in plutocracy, it was the *plutoi* or the rich; in ochlocracy, it was the *ochlos* or the mob; in theocracy it was the *theos* God/or the gods; in gerontocracy it was the first born of the free borns, in democracy it was the *demos*, the populace, the people or the poor, which translates to ‘the majority’. In modern concept, however, democracy is a form of government in which no restriction is placed upon the governing body, implying that the governing body is identical with the citizenry. Though democracy is the rule of the people [for the people and by the people], in classical theory the people are identified with a section or part of the population, whereas in modern theory, the people are identified with population as a whole (Wollheim, 1996: 383f). Mill (1996: 336) asserts that since democracy is synonymous with representative government, which strives to distribute power through representation, it implies that it is the best form of governance in the world.

How does this apply to the education industry in Nigeria? There should be equity to all Nigerian children irrespective of the status, class and position of their parents in society. Nigerian children must compete within the global village with other children from say Germany or Sweden where mothers are entitled to kinder geld, child allowances, one year maternity leave, education scholarship for as long as students earn up to a particular number of units per semester and other welfare packages.

Sustainable development is a term brought into common use by the World Commission Environment and Development (WCED) in its 1987 seminar report entitled *Our Common Future*. The Commission built efforts on the human person whom it was believed to be the end product of development effort. Sustainable development can, therefore, be seen as participatory development, human development and environmental development (Arisi, 2013, 249).

Methodological Considerations

This paper has combined a multi-dimensional (Shorter, 1975) or a poly-methodical (Turner, 1981) approach of research. Thus the methodology used in this research paper is a combination of approaches used in qualitative or ethnographic research survey, which involves participant observation and historical methods. The observational technique provides the researcher with the ability to perceive events as they occur in an experiential (*erlebnis*) manner. It also provides researchers with the opportunity for picking up fine details that may otherwise be lost. Furthermore, since these approaches are inter-disciplinary and descriptive in nature, they provide researchers with the chance to accurately summarize; systematize and simplify the discourse at hand.

The historical approach permits the researcher to engage in critical investigation of events and developments in the higher education industry across time and space. It evaluates past and current historical developments in higher education and allows the researcher to chart a better course forward for the industry in the 21st century. It is in this context that the participant observation and the historical approaches are considered as aspects of qualitative research approaches, and as appropriate tools and instruments for appraising education for survival in a democratic Nigerian setting (Lenshie 2013: 23, Seltiz, 1979; Kerlinger, 1973 & Berger, 2000).

Theoretical Approaches

Three theories have been chosen by the author as suitable for use as theoretical framework for this paper. These are the *human capital* theory, *functionalist* theory and neoliberal theory. All of these theories view education in this holistic nature and typology (formal, informal and non-formal) as an institution existing in a competitive global market. They also regard education as performing a crucial and invaluable role in society. Furthermore, they see education as the most portent tool for galvanizing and mobilizing positive and equitable transformation and development in a culturally, religiously, ethnically, economically and socially diversified and pluralized Nigerian society, where merit is placed far ahead of mediocrity.

Human Capital Theory, Education and Development

The human capital theory is responsible for whole-scale adoption of education and development policies (Schultz, 1971: 8ff, 1994; Sakamota and Powers, 1995: 10ff and Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1997, 12ff). human capital theory rests on the assumption that formal education is highly instrumental and

even necessary to improve the production capacity of any demographic entity anywhere in the world. In a nutshell human capital theorists argue that an educated population is a productive population.

Human capital theory emerged in the 1960s, primarily through the work of American economist Theodore Schultz (1902 – 1998). During his time, economists began to make tangible analysis between education and its impact on the ability of humans to earn higher wages. Thus Schultz, a Nobel prize-winning economist is credited with the establishment of the term *Human Capital* (Becker, 2006: 16). Furthermore, in his 1958 paper, “The Emerging Economic Scenes and its relation to High School Education”, Schultz was the first to write about the connection between education and productivity. He identified people as the source of economic growth when other economists were attributing national growth to improvement in technology (Fitz-enz 2000: 30).

Furthermore, human capital theory emphasizes how education increases in productivity and efficiency of workers by increasing the level of cognitive stock of economically productive human capability, which is a product of innate abilities and investment in human beings (Okemakinde, 2001: 16). Hence the provision of formal education is seen as a productive investment in human capital, which proponents of the theory have considered as equally or even more equally worthwhile than that of physical capital (Schultz, 1971: 7). It is worthy of note to mention that the development of skills and techniques is an important factor in production. This is because education creates improved citizens and also helps to upgrade the general standard of living in the society. Therefore positive social change is likely associated with the production of quality citizenry.

Education is also regarded as both consumer and capital goods because it offers utility to a consumer and also serves as an input into the production of other goods and services. As a capital, good education can be used to develop human resources (that is HRD) necessary for economic and social transformation. Moreover education is an engine of growth and key development of every society in view of its quality and quantity. Thus in order to make significant contribution to economic growth, high quality education is required. This is because the twenty-first century paradigm is shifting towards the enhancement of knowledge as a priority. This is what has happened in Japan, South Korea, Singapore, China, Brazil, India, Malaysia and must be caused to happen in Nigeria-regarding human demography as capital and then investing deliberately in enhancing its quality and development for national growth.

Functionalist Theory

Functionalism as initiated early fathers and proponents, (Emile Durkheim (1957, 1963) and Auguste Comte, investigates institutions to consider the function they perform in society. Anele (1999: 25) opined that the functionalist premise states that if an institution exists, then there must be some reasons for its existence. This means that every phenomena found in the society performs useful functions towards the survival of the entire system or society. As regards education, functionalists assume that educational institutions are examined for the positive contributions they make towards maintaining society. Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917) is the acclaimed father of functionalism. He was interested in education and he trained teachers as part of his career. He believed that education had a number of purposes-functions for the society.

Generally, education helps in the socialization of the whole population into dominant culture, values and beliefs of a society. Education helps in transmitting norms and values and also in promoting social solidarity. Again, functionalists identify schools as transmitters of knowledge, norms and values as a selection mechanism. This means that schooling develops talents. Furthermore, industrial society requires specialists, of which education is seen as a means of providing the appropriate outputs.

Ekpenyong (1993: 51, cited in Anele, 1993: 33) remarked that education changes the values attitudes and beliefs of the educated. It makes people become flexible in respect of primordial phenomenon and at the same time it gives them the ability to adopt new ideas. To this end, education has been adjudged an important mechanism for social change and social mobility in contemporary society. This is because education imbues the beneficiaries with the questioning spirit, which is the root of positivism, scientism and empiricism.

The Neoliberal Theory

A third theoretical framework used in this work is the neoliberal theory of educational neoliberalism. This is based on the principles of equality and meritocracy because the theory reflects the multicultural diversity and pluralism of the Nigerian society in terms of ethnicity, religion, and primordial affiliations. This theory seeks to promote the ideals of acceptability of diversities and pluralism as endangered in Nigerian societies towards fostering a more democratic educational system and citizenship, where everybody possesses equal rights and opportunities as against the use the nepotism, God-fatherism, high level connections, ‘bottom-power’, bribery and mediocrity that is perpetuated within most of the system today

(Lenshie, 2013: 23f). Educational liberalism is built on the construction of a society in which all are equally eligible to compete for society's position irrespective of social status, ethnicity, class or religious identities of competitors. This theory avers that primordial and oligarchic identities or status are not decisive in determining the height an individual should attain in society. If meritocracy is allowed to set the stage, the height to be attained in excellence by individuals will be limited only by the sky (James and Seville, 1989: 10 cited in Olssen et al, 2004).

Young (1961) concurred when he stressed that meritocracy, that is, intelligences and effort demonstrated in the competitive environment should be the bases of everything to be carried out within the educational environment because it produces and promotes merit. He argues further that meritocracy is based on the belief that intelligence quotient (IQ) plus effort, equals merit. The ideal environment for the production of neoliberal educational system requires a multicultural educational set up to flourish. It needs a setting that deliberately nurtures, encourages and embraces diversities that are not only limited to ethnicity, culture and religion, as is the case with Nigeria., but also societies that are economically, socially, politically, and technologically pluriform in nature. This framework never sacrifices the ideals of meritocracy as a standard measurement for reward, promotion, or appointment, even when "federal character system" or "quota system" is being used. This applies to all recruitment mechanisms and admission of students into educational institutions and other cognate arrangements (Lenshie, 2013)

Education and Democratic Sustainability in Nigeria

The aspirations of many Nigerians at the time of independence were that, independence will usher in: "A free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society, a united, strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy, and a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (FRN)". However, when Nigerians took over political power following the independence, these hopes were dashed by the politician and other political actors. The political crises that bedeviled the First Republic led to military intervention and subsequently towards the attempt at political succession, with attendant mindless killings of the citizens in a civil war that engulfed the country for thirty months (1967-70). These monumental problems could be attributed to low level of educational attainment by majority of Nigerians.

Democratic habits must be learned, which means they must be taught. Also, democracy can only be sustained in an enlightened and well-educated

society. The survival and advancement of democracy depends greatly on the quality and quantity of education attained by the overwhelming population of the country. In order to be able to vote effectively, the voter must be able to understand and appreciate the issues involved and cast their lot with one of the alternatives. The citizen of any democratic society must know that the constitution is supreme; having binding force on all authorities and persons, and the country shall not be governed except in accordance with the provisions of the constitution. This means that, education is central in the enthronement and sustenance of democracy. However, the basic question that arises is which level of education can best address the contemporary Nigeria democratic practice. This paper attempts to critically appraise the role of higher education in strengthening democracy. It argues strongly for increased attention to colleges and universities, since they constitute a touchstone in any country's effort in human capacity building, with implications for building and sustaining a democratic society. Structurally, the paper first tries to clarify the concepts; education and democracy. The second section deals with the history of Nigerian democratic practice, while section three discusses the role of higher education in sustaining democracy.

The problematic and Challenges of Education in Nigeria

1. Poor Funding

The first and possibly one of the greatest challenges facing education in Nigeria is inadequate funding by the Federal, State and Local governments. In the year 2017, Nigeria's education sector was allocated much lower than the 26 percent of national budget recommended by the United Nations. The global organization recommended the budgetary benchmark to enable nations adequately cater for rising education demands.

2. Poor Governance

Poor governance and mismanagement have crippled most sectors in the country not leaving behind the education sector. Government's attitude towards crucial problems of education, especially its quality, is lackadaisical. Governments at all levels are more concerned about issues that are not as important as education and this is crippling the sector.

3. Corruption

Corruption is one of the major problems in the country and the educational sector is not an exception. There are stories of lecturers collecting bribes from students in exchange for good grades, university administrators demanding money from

students to have their exam results compiled and submitted to the (required) National Youth Service Corps, admission seekers paying money to get admission into universities and so on. Also, school funds meant for salaries, maintenance and so on are being diverted for personal use and mismanaged. This cuts across all the level of the sector; universities, private and public secondary schools.

4. Lack of Responsibility and Control

This is a problem not only affecting Nigeria but most countries on who actually controls the educational sector. Is it the Federal, State or Local government, for example, the control of primary education is neither fully in the hand of federal government, nor state or local government, this is a great barrier for effective educational development at the basic level. Works needed to be done are being passed around and no tier of government wants to actually take any responsibility.

5. Politicization of Education

Talking about politicization in the sector, the desire to compete with others, governments at all levels, especially at the state level, attempt to run many institutions even when they are least prepared to do such. This cause the general fall in the standard of the initially existing ones and the available budget cannot cater for all their needs. In addition, state governments give accreditation to private schools that they know are not well equipped for teaching, all in a bid to generate more revenue for themselves.

6. Lack of Infrastructure

In past years, schools and other vocational institutions have collapsed due to abject neglect by governments. Our tertiary institutions having to fall into dilapidation and products of such schools are not given adequate training to compete with other products of another country. Many schools lack basic equipment for conducive learning, most especially for science practical classes, and those that claim to have are managing the old ones. Hence, the students only learn the theoretical steps rather than carrying out the practical aspect. Also, the libraries in schools are lacking the needed books, journals and magazines.

7. Indiscipline

This is manifested in examination malpractice, secret cult menace, corruption etc. The investigation revealed that some examination centers exist in this nation where parents pay money to qualify their wards to pass SSCE –WAEC/NECO/JAMB. Indiscipline is so endemic in the sector that we hear of cult killings almost every day in the media, students are no longer concerned about academic excellence.

8. Poor Parenting and Guidance

Parents are meant to provide the basic things needed to meet the challenges of life, but many parents do not even show enough care or support. All they want is for their wards to excel irrespective of the means. This lack of proper guidance for their wards leads to encouragement on their part to engage in exam malpractices and even going as far as paying for “special centers” for their wards.

9. Lack of Teaching Aids

Teaching aids are objects or devices used by a teacher to enhance or enliven classroom instruction. There is a wide range of teaching aids which can be audio, video, books, DVDs, Projectors, computers etc. these are not provided for teachers thereby making teaching difficult.

10. Unstable Curriculum and Subject

An effective curriculum provides teachers, students, administrators with a measurable plan and structure for delivering quality education. It acts as a roadmap for teachers and students to follow the path to academic success. There is no stable curriculum in the sector, because of changing policy, most schools cannot keep up and you see most schools using the British curriculum.

Suggestions

Balema (2005: 161f) mentions various modes of education formats that would characterize the future of education in Africa, which include Partnership Mode, Virtual Universities Mode, Modular Modes, Correspondence, Distance Learning or Open University Learning Mode and Matured Students’ Program. The partnership mode consists of educational institutions agreeing to work together on the basis of established MOUs, that would guarantee partnerships, affiliations, linkages, offering of joint degrees, credibility of a degrees, sharing of research facilities, applying for joint research grant and undertaking joint research projects, lecturers and students exchange, providing materials and funding.

The virtual mode of learning or distance learning is fast becoming an option of choice for Nigerian institutions of higher learning. The students graduates in *absentia* and the degree earned is sent home to the graduate. New ICT facilities are making this possible through on-line resources such as bigger and faster bandwidth, the internet facilities (via Wi-Fi or optic fiber), video conferencing, multi-media hard and software equipment. Challenges arising here that must be overcome include provision of suitable technology, training of required professional cadre, development of a clearly defined and unified national distance

education policy and curriculum, access to internet connectivity 24/7 with computers, web browsers, easy and fast internet services and the acceptability and recognition of distance learning by public services. Learning could be semester or modular based with the optional use of the third semester, aside from Summer programs on separate campuses.

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