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DEVELOPING EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

Education has always been the bedrock of human development and progress. Even when members of a nation disagree among themselves, education has always been a means of bringing hope and smiles back to them. Hence some nations pay attention to education, allocating to it a significant time and resources. Nigeria is highly endowed with human and material resources which require careful, effective and efficient strategies to develop into a prosperous society. Thus, education is expected to be at the forefront of the implementation process of any national strategic plan/policy framework required for the attainment of these visions and agendas. If the gains of education cannot be seen in improved social, economic, and health development of the nation, especially in an increasingly competitive world, all investments in education are wasted. Stakeholders in education should engage in discourse and come out with a framework needed in the socio-economic, political and technological transformation of the nation. This paper attempts to link sound and effective education with national development. It explores ways through which the education system of the nation should be developed and sustained to achieve national transformation. It also identified and explained the problems confronting education in Nigeria before suggesting the steps that can be taken to solve such problems which include among others adequate funding of education, curriculum reformation, value re-orientation sensitization and reduction in political influence.

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Introduction

Education is on the concurrent lists of most countries. Nigeria as a nation is a signatory to "Education for All" agenda, because of its importance to national development and transformation. Nigeria is a highly endowed nation with human and material resources which requires careful, effective and efficient strategies to develop to a prosperous society. To achieve Nigeria's Vision 20-2020 which is a perspective plan, an economic business plan intended to make Nigeria fully developed economy by year 2020; education is expected to be at the forefront of the implementation process of any national strategic plan/policy framework required for the attainment of the vision. Literacy plays a pivotal role as an agent of transformation and societal development, in a society that understands its values and needs. It is the key to socio-economic and overall growth of any nation. Many factors such as inadequate planning, lack of strong political will, corruption, poor funding, development, implementation and monitoring process would not make education functional. While some of these factors have to do with society others have to do with the practitioners themselves (Ogundele& Ahmed, 2011). The result has been an education not tied with employability – so many graduates are not gainfully employed.

Concept of Education

It is impossible to attempt a generally accepted or watertight definition of education, which is why different scholars have given it varied definition. Fafunwa (2004) defined education as an aggregate of all the process by means of which a person develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour of positive value in the society in which he lives. Oforah (2009) opined that, it is to affect behaviour, that is, behaviour in the broad sense of the word involving thinking, our reaction and to influence individuals to move from self-centeredness towards intelligent concern for others".

Education may be formal or informal, and it is of different levels, each level having a mandate which can only be successfully carried out by focused stakeholders. Education consists of all those experiences, which affect the individual from birth till death. Thus, education is that process by which an individual freely develops his self according to his nature in a free and uncontrolled environment. In this way, education is a lifelong process of growth environment. Education is not limited to the classroom; it is also not limited to a particular period of life.

According to Jimoh (2004),education is a lifelong process and goes on from birth to death. Throughout life one goes on learning to adjust oneself to the changing patterns of life. Life is a continuous process of growth and development and so education is also a continuous process. An individual learns through his experiences, which are acquired throughout his life. Peters (2006) opined that, education is not merely collection of some information; rather, it is acquisition of experiences through life in the social and natural environment. It includes all the knowledge and experiences, acquired during infancy, childhood, boyhood, adolescence, youth, manhood or old age through any agency of education- the press, the travels, the club, the nature- formally and informally. Thus, education becomes the sum-total of all experiences that the child receives either in the school or outside. In this wider sense, life is education and education is life. Whatever broadens our horizon, deepens our insight, refines our reactions and stimulates thought and feeling, educates us. Fakomogbon and Adegbija (2011) noted that,education is the process whereby a human being gradually adopts himself in various ways to his physical, social, and spiritual environments. It is the development of all those capacities in the individual, which will enable him to control his environment and fulfil his possibilities. Education, in the broader sense, is transmission of life by the living, to the living, through living and for living and a means for the development of balanced all- round harmonious development of personality (Ogunlade& Ahmed, 2011).

Educational Development and National Transformation

The nation and her citizens would not function successfully without a well-developed and sustainable strategy towards educational development (Jimoh, 2004). The critical role of an effective and functional education cannot be over-emphasized, especially in the realization of federal government transformation agenda which centres on peace and security, rule of law, power, employment, health, and infrastructural development. The main national goals of Nigeria, which have been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education, are the building of:

a) a free and democratic society;
b) a just and egalitarian society;
c) a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
d) a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

As affirmed in the Nigeria Policy on Education (2013), no nation can rise above the quality of her education. In other to explore and adequately use the nation's scarce resources to meet the ever-increasing needs, the educational system and policies should be properly developed and implemented. Democratic values, effective bilateral relations, and cultural awareness flow from productive learning. The national policy on education has constantly been reviewed to the recent 2013 edition to meet with the constant dynamic needs of the nation, yet the nation has almost failed to attain the transformation needed. The question is, how best do we develop the education system to achieve the needed transformation? And what have been the obstacles in the development of education for national transformation?

The Challenges

The challenges involved in developing education for national transformation are many ranging from the professionals, through the societal to those related to policy formulation and implementation. Some of such factors are examined below. Ozochi (2008) categorized the factors affecting educational development into four namely; historical, economic, sociological and geographical factors.

Socio-Economic Factors

The vicious cycle of poverty, unemployment and insecurity affect 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 zeal among teacher educators, teachers on teaching practice and trainee teachers. Those who deliberately seek admission into course 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 a stepping stone (Lawal, 2011). Even in tertiary institutions, those in education are erroneously viewed to be academically weak. This problem has made the intelligent ones to develop apathy towards teaching and have diverted to other fields. The result is that unintelligent ones take on the profession and produce students who are not employable and innovative, because no education can rise above its teachers.

Poor Innovation in Curriculum Planning and Development

Curriculum which is the bedrock of education (formal) have been neglected or poorly planned, developed or implemented. According to Oforah (2007), man prefers the familiar and the habitual, they prefer previous habits found successful than delve into a new and yet to be tried experiences. Man dislikes ideas that conflict with established attitudes, therefore, are reluctant to change.

Poor funding

Poor political disposition to education has led to the underfunding of the sector. UNESCO advocates that each country should map out 21% of their annual budget for education, but government at all levels in Nigeria have constantly and deliberately allocated less than 10% of its annual budget to education. Apart from the general dilapidation of structure 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 are not available.

This has led to mass production of students without requisite practical knowledge to drive the technology and economy of the nation to a better state.

Politicization of Education System

Education development cannot be sustainable in a nation where visionless individuals are the leaders, because such leaders would only promote irrelevant policies and projects as long he/she will make dubious fortune out of it. Ogundele and Ahmed (2011) attributed the poor quality of education, especially teacher education programme in Nigeria, to bad leadership. Poor administrative styles at all levels of education development have negative effects on the students. Most unqualified individuals have been appointed to head critical educational institutions and committees, leading to poor results.

Poor Access to Education and Unequal Educational Opportunities

Consequently, the cost of educational training in Nigeria especially at the tertiary level have sky-rocketed. Education has now become a venture for the rich and elites in the society making the children of middle and low income earners to become drop-outs. They involve in many social vices and pose treats to the security of the nation. Also there is poor enrolment of girl-child in northern part of the country, which is mainly due to early marriage and religious beliefs. This has led to gender barrier in such areas and makes their females to lag behind educationally, thus, disadvantaged to contribute to the economic and cultural transformation of the society (Oforah, 2007).

Poor Harmonization of Primary and Tertiary Institutions

Education curricular of teacher education in Africa differ from country to country (Olajide, 2011). This implies that the focus of teacher preparation is not the same in the world and continent. It will be very difficult to transform the nation if the educational system is totally different from the syllables of other countries around us.

Inadequate Availability of Technical, Vocational and Business Schools

The government and private institutions have failed to pay adequate attention to the establishment of more technical, science, vocational and business schools.

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Employers (both government and some private institutions) of labour, have relied so much on certificate rather than skills acquired as a pre-requisite to securing job. This has lead to students engaging in many examination malpractices to obtain good grades rather than skills.

Bribery, Corruption and Impunity

Bribery and corruption has eaten into the deep fabrics of the Nigerian society and the education sector is not exempted from this evil. Students bribe their way through and obtain the best certificates, while their female counterparts are ready to sacrifice their bodies to obtain the best grades. Impunity is another barrier to educational development. A situation where somebody will be caught in examination malpractice and will go scot-free can never help in developing our education for national transformation.

The Way Out

The problems so far identified can be surmounted through commitment on the part of the stakeholders in Nigeria by taking pragmatic and careful steps to solving them. Some of the ways through which education can be properly developed for national transformation are:

Government Intervention

The government at all levels should declare state of emergency at all levels of education, especially at primary and tertiary levels. The teaching profession should be made viable like every other profession and the teachers well remunerated so as to avoid constant brain drain in the sector. This will help to make people who have the zeal and desire to teach to come into the profession and promote it. The issue of recruitment of teachers should be holistically reviewed to ensure that qualified and professional teachers are employed.

Curriculum Reformation

Any educational system which cannot translate to functionality is a total waste. That is why curriculum, its planning, development and implementation are critical to the achievement of the national goals. The contents of curricula should reflect needs at micro and macro levels. According to Fakomogbon and Adegbija (2011), educational

programmes now should have incorporated critical thinking, skills acquisition, environment matters and reading culture. It should be able to show ways of teaching the youths to be security conscious. The existing education curricular should emphasize the effective integration of experiences which is considered as a crucial aspect of curriculum development.

Adequate Funding

Government at all levels should adequately allocate funds to education and its development in their annual budgets. The funds should also be released on time so that it can be used for the purpose it is meant for. A strong monitoring mechanism should be set up to make sure that these funds are not misappropriated, diverted and/or embezzled. These funds should be directed toward educational researches, seminars, workshops, conferences and the like to come out with better ways to transform our nation.

Value Re-orientation

Ozochi (2008) opined that, except value re-orientation is declared as state of emergency, the future of our nation will be beleaguered. Nigeria and Nigerians must find a better way of inculcating moral and character development among our youths other than the ones already experimented. Curricular should be developed to train youths in areas of good virtue, religious, tribal, ethnic and social tolerance. It is only through this process can our images be redeemed both nationally and internationally.

Promotion of Entrepreneur Education

Education for living should be emphasized at all levels. The schools should be seen as an instrument for preparing the individual for living a healthy and satisfying life both for his own good and in the best interest of the community. Public private partnership (PPP) should be strengthened and properly synergized to help in the establishment and running of technical, science, vocational and business schools to train individuals who can be employable and can also be self-employed and create jobs for others.

Harmonization of Education System to meet with Other Nations

Our curricula should be streamlined in such a way that it contains what is

obtainable in other parts of the world. This is pertinent because of the nature of society we live in, which is global and almost common. The issue of disparity in educational content in West African Examinations Council (WAEC) should be discouraged and fashioned in a way to pursue likely and common objectives.

Conclusion

Our education system should rise to the challenges of the contemporary Nigerian society by evolving enriching curricular to address all the problems facing educational development in the nation to achieve the national transformation that we all clamour for.

Recommendations

1. The government should allocate more funds to the education sector.
2. Government should promote entrepreneur education at all level of our education system.
3. Government should ensure that teachers are well remunerated to avoid job mobility.

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