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Education and National Development in Nigeria: A Philosophical Perspective

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Abstract

The paper examines the key words: culture and development, and in the process attempts to bring out their relationship to education in a developing country like Nigeria. It further states that investment in education is sine-qua-non with national development. Hence this paper sees education as an important tool for national development. The paper finally asserts that democratization process in Nigeria is saddled with limited access to education and struggle with the task of making it available to all citizens.

What is education?

The UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education (1975) defines education as comprising organized and sustained communication designed to bring about learning. According to this definition, we can interpret communication to mean relationship between two or more people involving transfer of information. "Organized" in the sense that it is used here means planned in a sequence with established aims and curricula and "sustained" means that learning experience has duration and continuity. "Learning" here defines any change in behaviour, knowledge, understanding, skills or capabilities which the learner retains and which cannot be ascribed

simply to physical growth or to the development of inherited behaviour patterns (Thompson 1983).

Over the years, societies have endeavoured to develop appropriate behaviour patterns. They have attempted to magnify the possession of knowledge, understanding and skills among their members in their various and peculiar ways. Such practices are referred to by anthropologists as socialization and enculturation. Others refer to them as lifelong processes by which an individual is incorporated into a group and made to behave in certain expected ways by the society. Schools are only tools used to pass on to the future generations the attitudes, values, skills, social understanding and practice of the societies to which they belong. Thompson (1983) states that these are to socialize and enable them fit usefully and harmoniously into those societies. We shall now proceed to define briefly the recurring word schooling in the definition.

Malinowski (1943) defined schooling “as that somewhat restricted part of education which is given by professional educators to those who come under their tutelage in organized institutions of learning, distinguishing formal from informal education in terms of its outward characteristics rather than basic function.”

This definition, in our view has shortfalls as most societies in Africa have through a rather “informal” education established formalistic training periods to identify the youths who are able and allocate to them various responsibilities and statuses.

We must not also lose sight of the fact that there are various pre-school body of knowledge which lullabies, riddles and proverbs which he transfers to his school environment. The point we are making here is that the difference between modern schooling and traditional ethos and socialization is so narrow. But it is pertinent to note that the educational processes of a society acts as a tonic to its nature and its needs and as these change so do the educational processes change.

Education as a worthwhile activity

It has long been argued that education enables a person to perform worthwhile activities. We may invariably be referring to education as bringing about a cultured man. This is a person we may describe as a gentleman since what characterizes a cultured man may be embedded in what

also describes an educated man. Over the years, we have tended to traditionally accept this vague way of connecting education, cultured man and the idea of a gentleman.

How be it, we should not lose sight of the fact that society determines to a large extent what its culture is. This explains the link between culture and worthwhile activities as stated by Peters (1967) that “education implies the transmission of what is worthwhile”. Succinctly put, Peters thinks of education in the light of some people handing over values to other people. Put in our own parlance, we can easily see the weave between education and culture, as trademarks of values which are transmitted through well streamlined processes from one generation to another.

Definition of culture

Arnold (1869) had defined culture as the “the best that has been thought and spoken in the past”. According to Davies (1948) “Culture includes all behaviour which the human being exhibits in conformity with his family, his play group, his social clan, his church and all other human groups”.

It can be seen that the two definitions above point to behaviour. While Davies talks of all behaviour, and uses the term ‘values’, Arnold stresses on “the best of what has been taught”. Both definitions point to behaving in a gentlemanly way, which must be cultured, handed from the past to the present. In essence they both see education as part of life.

Looked at from a different perspective, we can deduce that both definitions point to standards of behaviours to which a group must measure up to. Thus we see culture, strongly linked with “a form of behaviour and with a way of life” Schofield (1972).

A close examination of the term ‘Standard’ reveals that a society adopts for itself acceptable and non acceptable standards. For example, when we behave in certain acceptable standard, our behaviours are adjudged as stable and if we regularly follow this set pattern, we produce a habitual way of behaviour. It is this acceptable norm in our behaviour pattern, which culture attempts to transmit. This consistent good pattern of behaviour is a feature of the cultured man which we have earlier on identified as the traits of a gentleman.

These character traits are sourced from our family backgrounds, peer groups, the church, social clubs and schools. Hence it can be reasoned that the

standards which a child brings to school helps him to adapt to the culture of the school, which further enables him to learn.

Conversely, a badly behaved child brings with him to school behavioural traits which are obstacles to his attainment of the good way of life, which education, inculcates in its recipients.

In most developing countries, there has been a strong desire to establish national cultural identity despite mounting pressures and cultural invasions from the outside world. Of particular concern is the rejection, by the young members of our society, of traditional sanctions and the urge amongst them to enthrone aggressive and intolerant patterns of behaviour. This has led to widespread indiscipline in schools and formation of militant cult groups which fight for supremacy on daily basis.

The leadership of these societies, though, have put in a concerted effort to reconcile and synthesize the modernization process of their communities with the conservation of their cultural ethos, as a means of maintaining social discipline as well as channelling the energies of the people in constructive directions, thus enthroning their unique cultural identity.

In attempt to proffer solution to this cultural dichotomy or confusion amongst the youth, Kenneth Kaunda asks “how do we preserve what is good in our traditions and at the same time allow ourselves to benefit from the science and technology of our friends?”. There may be no clear cut answers to this question. If we join the age long ‘chorus’ of never denying our children what obtains in all societies, then we may be ready to accept the trappings of modernization process which education is exposing them to. Perhaps we may benefit from the opinion of Thompson (1983) which states that a properly balanced education for the citizen of tomorrow must immerse the child in his society but at the same time set a distance between the child and his society. This, he further states would help the child arrive at a truer understanding of the society’s needs and potentiality.

It is our belief that the kind of education necessary for our children is that which takes them outside their own society and at the same time provides them with a broader frame of reference to cope with what is happening around them.

Investment in education

In earlier times, education was regarded more as a spending service than as an investment in human resources. That was the time education was tailored towards providing the local staff to oil the engines of government. This thinking changed through series of informational conferences organized by UNESCO. One of these conferences held in 1961 proclaimed that “the right of young people to acquire education and understanding must never be completely sacrificed to economic needs”. It also asserted that education is an investment in productivity. That conference held the view that “there is no disputing that expenditure on some forms of education is an investment which more than pays for itself even in the narrowest economic terms”. The conference went further to assert that educational provision should be “henceforth planned continuously in relation to manpower needs at all levels”.

This informed the opinion of Harbinson (1964) that

The country which rapidly increases its national income through productive investment in development of skilled manpower may reach its goal of universal primary education more rapidly than if it were to neglect the early investment in secondary and higher education.

The works of Walsh (1935) Freedman and Kusnetz (1946) echoed the ideas of Harbinson and attempted quantifying the role of education in economic development in economic growth of a nation. The implication of these studies is that education plays an important role in the economic development of a country. Zymelman (1971) summarized this as follows:

- a) Wherever relative earnings reflect the free interplay of market forces... we may expect that a higher education, with its corresponding higher earnings, reflects higher productivity.
- b) Rates of return from investment in education, however measured, compare favourably with rates of return from other types of investment.

A study by Lewis (1964) also found relationships between secondary education and development while Kaser (1965) tried to relate levels and growth rates of national product per capita to quantity and quality of education.

These studies have been tools used by educationists and politicians as supporting evidence for policies designed to increase expenditures in formal education. But the problem has been that too much attention has continued to be paid to education of professional and technical occupations where long a number of years are required for their proficiency at the expense of the training of educators and economists despite their large numbers and their vital role in production.

The unfortunate and general attitude today has been that of considering formal education as a ladder that enables students to further their education in higher institutions of learning and that this helps them adapt socially to their elitist role in the society. This has tended to relegate formal vocational training to the background. Employees of labour have not helped matters as they choose those already selected by the educational system in preference to those that may have relevant training, but lack the formal credentials. The result is that vocational training plays a second fiddle role and is less prestigious (Zymelman 1968).

Education and development in Nigeria

Development is not an easy term to define. It is, however, easy to list some of the obvious characteristics of a developed society and compare such a society with an underdeveloped one in terms of some determined characteristics. This has made it extremely difficult to define what a society should look like before we declare it developed or not.

One of the most acceptable definitions of development is that given by Curle (1973) as the creation of a form of society in which certain conditions prevail for human beings. He went on to explain the characteristics of his ideal society thus: safety, in that the society is generally non-violent, and individuals are protected from victimization by the state or police or each other; sufficiency in that they may have enough food, clothing and other material things so that they are not prevented from making the full use of their potential; satisfaction, in that their lives are generally pleasant and that sufficiency is not achieved at the cost of psychological and cultural disruption and disturbance; stimulus, in that the people are kept aware of their intellectual, emotional, social or spiritual potentiality, and encouraged to fulfil it.

Curle's perception of development is an all round approach which touch on security of the members of a society, sufficiency of the material things of life such as food, clothing etc; derivable satisfaction which is an aftermath of peaceful existence of citizens and indices that citizens are direct recipients of democratic dividends of their material and natural endowments. What this means is that if we are to talk of the development of a society we should take a holistic approach of its political, economic and social settings. This implies that discussions bordering of societal development simply centres on its political, economic and social developments which also embrace its material culture, its social institutions and culture.

While the material culture of a society describes its available human resources, the population size, its productive workforce and its skilled man power; the social institutions may include the family, the trade unions, the church or other religious organizations, the health services and the judicial institutions. Of course, amongst the many institutions in a society is the educational system.

The place of education in the process of development is one which we have always paid lip service. Bell 1978 states:

What is development is a process of enabling people to accomplish things that they would not do before- that is, to learn and apply information, attitudes, values and skills previously unavailable to them. Learning is not usually enough by itself. Most aspects of development require capital investment and technical processes. But capital and technology are inert without human knowledge and effort. In this sense, human learning is centered to development.

Bell here emphasizes that what education does is not exactly determined by the educators but by others, made up of individuals and groups with different orientations and perceptions. What is described here is the many societal stakeholders such as politicians, economists, parents, pupils who work to moderate educational activities. This explains why Anderson (1976) states that the more useful education system becomes to its ambient society, the more manifold become its linkages to other aspects of social change.

In Nigeria, we have come to recognize the fact that education cannot be divorced from politics. The growing scale of demand for education in Nigeria

makes it imperative for a centralized planning and co-ordination. This explains the rising demand that cost of education be met from public purse. This also explains why political expediency must be used to draft in governments at both federal and state levels to ensure that citizens right to provision are upheld.

It is common knowledge that investment in education is sine-qua-non with national development. This is why education has been seen as a major instrument for achieving the goals of unity, political stability and equality of opportunity and for circumventing situations which may give rise to conflict (Thompson, 1983).

While agreeing to the fact that schools have offered some unifying roles in our multifaceted country- like the provision of unity schools to the 36 states of Nigeria; it can also be argued that schools have played divisive role.

The uneven distribution of opportunities for acquiring education by different ethnic, religious, state, and sex groups has led to wider inequalities in Nigeria more so when education is seen as the principal means of access to the goodies offered by the national development.

One sure way in which the schools have played a divisive role in Nigeria has been through serving as a means for selecting who become members of the elite groups. The new elite groups we see in our country today have tended to create a stratified society. The implication is that elite members always seek for their children the best education available which they are sure will ensure their eventual access to elite positions. When one also considers the literate home environment, and encouragement which rich homes afford to their children, we can understand the advantage children of elite parents have in achieving greater success in schooling as compared to the children of the uneducated.

There is cheering news however; democratization process in Nigeria is bringing about widening access to education and of making it available to all citizens. Government at different levels in Nigeria accept that the fairest way of allocating occupation structure and other privileges is on the basis of merit and one sure way of assessing merit is through education. Hence the various attempt of extending educational opportunity to all strata of the society to ensure a fair competition for the limited number of positions available in the land. The success of this strategy depends upon what amount of equal educational opportunity that is available to all.

The deliberate effort of the federal government of Nigeria to establish nine new federal universities in 2011 in states which hitherto had no federal universities is a reinforcement of a resolve to bring higher education to the door steps of the citizens. Though there have been calls to fund the existing federal institutions of higher learning rather than establish new ones, states where these nine institutions are sited have welcomed them with great enthusiasm. Their reasons have been simple.

The schools in Nigeria have done a moderately successful job in facilitating mobility. Frequently, opportunities at the top and middle levels of our organizational structure expand but slowly, and educational structure rather than being an institutional device for promoting mobility from the masses, only transmits status to the offspring of existing elites.

However, Nwogu (2001) sees government moves to spread universities to every state of the country, as a means of ensuring equitable distribution of education facilities as well as access to schooling. This according to Lasky (1957) is to ensure that “no man shall be so placed in the society to the extent which constitutes a denial of the latter’s citizenship”.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that education is an important tool for national development, ensuring the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity which makes every Nigerian to see himself first as a Nigerian (Nwogu, 2001). Education also enables every Nigerian to see the inseparable bond that binds all who live within the confines of the geographical entity known as Nigeria.

The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes will also encourage Nigerians to develop habits and attitudes which will enable individuals go for what they deem right and to get at the root of a problem with a view to solving it.

Development of human civilization is replete without equality of access to schooling; hence, the expediency for government all over the world, to respond to greater equality of access to schooling. There is no doubt however, that complete equality of access to schooling is impracticable. Perhaps, the introduction of new technologies being developed for education which include education radio and television, programmed instruction

textbooks, reading machines and videotaped lectures would do the magic of bringing back the Nigerian child to his study table.

In addition, there may be need to reconstruct our syllabuses to include environmental and social studies and to reduce the study of ancient history of other parts of the world. By so doing the Nigerian child would not be ignorant of what goes on in his own society but also be encouraged to have a deep knowledge of his culture as well as appreciate, with good education, the nature of the changes taking place in the world.

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Education & National Development in Nigeria: A Philosophical Perspective

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