

EDUCATION FOR UNITY AND DEVELOPMENT

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Preamble

I most sincerely appreciate the Evangelical Church of West Africa mission (ECWA) for spirit-driven initiative, foresight and determination to establish this University. I also appreciate the Vice Chancellor for taking the bull by the horn in developing the infrastructure. I thank God for the pioneer and current staff members for joining hands with management to make this dream come true. I cannot fail to thank the host community for the cooperation with the proprietor and management of this University thus ensuring peace which is necessary for rapid development.

I appreciate the organizers of this unique programme for inviting me to share my thoughts with you. I see great potentials in Samuel Maina's led executive members of the Nigerian Economics Students' Association (NESA).

The contribution of investment in human capital to development has become very essential evident in the world today. It has been observed by development experts that improvement in human qualities play a very significant role in all facets of the development of societies. Another aspect of improvement in human qualities occurs in the form of quality education. It is in the realization of this important role of education in development that the United Nations in 2000 placed emphasis on education as important human capital development objective (Wikipedia, 2014) in the Millennium Development Goals.

Concept of Education

Education concerns the process of enlightening, maintenance and transformation of societies. It is a major agent of change, an ultimate value one can utilize to effect changes in behavior of one or more persons by providing certain learning opportunities deliberately or otherwise. One can talk about formal or informal education depending on the level of human involvement and structure of society or community.

Formal education involves the deliberate attempt to effect change in behavior in school settings while informal education occurs as daily experiences gained without being deliberately organized for those purposes. Education entails the acquisition and exhibition of knowledge, skills and values by members of the society. It takes a properly educated workforce to utilize resources effectively for development. Education is a tool for all round development, both individual and societal. It empowers, refines, enlightens and enriches man. Joseph Addison, as early as 1711, presented the importance of education aptly thus:

Education is a companion, which no misfortune can depress; no crime can destroy, no enemy can alienate, no despotism can enslave. At home, a friend; abroad, an introduction; in solitude, a solace, and in society, an ornament. It chastens vice, it guides virtue... without it, what is man? A splendid slave, a reasoning savage, (Ojo and Vincent, 2000: 13).

These assertions portray the pervasive role of education in improving the quality of human lives and developing the society. Let us consider the concept of development.

What is Development?

Development is defined in a number of ways based on the view points of the authors. However, the definition given by Michael P. Todaro in Ranaweera (1990) a developmental economist is relevant in this paper. In the mind of Todaro, development is the process of improving the quality of all human lives in three equally important aspects, as follows:

1. Raising people's living standard; that is, income and consumption, level of food, medical services and education through relevant growth processes;
2. Creating conditions conducive to the growth of peoples' self esteem through the establishment of social, political and economical system and institutions that promote human dignity and respect; and
3. Increasing people's freedom to make choices by enlarging the range of their choice variables, e.g varieties of goods and services.

Given these dimensions of development, it is very glaring that development is not purely an economic phenomenon but rather a multi-dimensional process which involves reorganization and reorientation of economic and socio-political systems. It is important to note that there can be development as a process or as a course of change (dynamic dimension), and development as a state or condition (static dimension). Both dimensions are relevant in this paper.

This pervasive conceptualization of development conveys enormous responsibility on education. It is obvious that education, whether formal or informal, should produce in the individual a disposition of personal autonomy and responsibilities that make him or her a useful member of the society (Orobosa, 2010). Education should release the individual from the cocoon of self-centeredness into social responsibilities. In addition to the acquisition of knowledge, education broadens the mind and engenders better human relationship which can foster unity in the society.

Concept of Unity in a Multi-Ethnic Society

The drive for unity in any society presupposes the existence of diversities. The importance of unity in the multi-ethnic society such as ours cannot therefore be overstressed.

The nation's historical antecedents remind us of attempts by our colonial masters to bring together territories divided by tongues and cultures. The amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914 is very fresh in the minds of Nigerians as the country celebrates her centenary this 2014. It is also in the realization of the need for unity in a country such as Nigeria with diverse nationalities such as ours that the country's motto of "Unity, Faith, Peace and Progress" was framed by our founding fathers.

The concept of unity in diversity is aptly applicable in Nigeria where over 350 ethnic groups exist with a few being very outstanding with marked linguistics differences. Unity in diversity means unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation (Wikipedia, 2014). There is therefore a shift of focus from unity based on mere

tolerance of culture, linguistic, social, religious, political, and related differences, towards a more complex unity based on the understanding that differences enrich human interactions. As earlier pointed out, in Nigeria, the complexity of the religious, linguistic and cultural differences must be admitted and used as basis for the determined effort at unifying the country. Cross-cultural interaction is inevitable in such a multi-ethnic situation and should be used as strength, arising from mutual understanding.

As the country's motto depicts, unity is an antecedent to progress or development, and a tool for power and authority. It is a value which may not just be taught and learnt as a school topic or subject. It has to be inculcated as a value through processes of internalization of value system. This leaves the education sector with enormous responsibility of ensuring the achievement of its affective goals, particularly the inculcation of the right type of values.

Education for Unity and Development: Issues and Challenges

The theme "Education for Unity and Development" brings to focus the concept of relevance and balance in education. In examining these concepts, some questions beg for some consideration as follows:

- How relevant are the educational offerings in Nigeria to real life situations?
- How balanced are the learning opportunities and experiences?
- How do relevance and balance in education foster unity and engender development?

Relevance refers to the extent to which education meets the needs, interest, intellectual and physical abilities of learners, and the values

and objectives of a given society. Ranaweera (1990) identified five categories of relevance thus:

1. Personal relevance to learners – age, ability, needs, interest, aspirations, etc.
2. Parental occupation, mother tongue, traditional practices and values etc.
3. Temporal relevance – preparatory education, occupational skills, learning skills and motivation needed in future at different stages.
4. National relevance – Political, economic, social, cultural, moral and religious context.
5. Global or universal relevance – human values, peace, global issues etc.

From the foregoing, it is pertinent to note that education should be relevant in all the five perspectives if such education would serve as a potent tool for national and universal development. It behoves our policy makers, curriculum planners and all other stakeholders in the education industry to re-examine our educational system, paying great attention to its relevance to learners and the immediate community including the family. The review should also focus on the preparatory capacity for the world of work and social responsibilities, its national relevance given the economic, social political and technological challenges of the nation and its global relevance in a competitive international market. It is generally viewed that if education is to contribute significantly to individual and national development, it should be relevant to national developmental goals, and the socio-economic conditions and natural endowments of the people.

By the recent innovations in the school curriculum, what could have been consolidated decades ago is being given a trial again, with functional/vocational subject areas added to the general school curriculum to make learners better equipped for the challenges in the environment. Of recent, entrepreneurial education has been given attention at all levels of education in the country. Adequate preparations might not have been made in terms of its proper integration into school curriculum but emphasis is currently being put on entrepreneurial studies. For instance, school-industry linkage which is a major ingredient for the success of entrepreneurial education is only tried briefly at the tertiary education level and almost absent at the lower levels of education. Even at that, there is still a big gap in operation. It is a vital key to development which has produced tremendous developmental benefits in a number of countries such as Britain, Malaysia and China, to mention a few.

Concerning relevance education in fostering unity, there are fundamental and structural educational measures already put in place by successive national governments to engender unity in Nigeria. They include:

- the introduction of values education either as distinct subject or part of subject in the school curriculum from primary to tertiary level;
- establishment of unity schools across the nation (Federal Government Colleges) and Federal Universities and Colleges of Education/Technology;
- application of Federal Character principles in school admissions and staffing at these secondary and tertiary institutions; and

- a wide range of national educational programmes and projects that cut across ethnic and state boundaries.

All these are aimed at instilling a sense of unity and collaboration in the citizenry. The problem of effectiveness is another issue.

However lofty the national policy on education is, if the political class who are the decision makers cannot divorce educational development matters from political gains and personal interest, the issue of ensuring relevance in education may continue to be an exercise in futility. So, one major challenge in ensuring relevance in education is the personal and political interest of the political leaders and civil service collaborators. Will they allow the system to run smoothly, employing the right caliber of teachers and not their unqualified kinsmen? Will they allow teachers salaries and other entitlement to be paid timely and adequately devoid of political gimmicks and supply the necessary resources adequately and timely? These and related issues beg for attention and appropriate action for purposes of national development. Beyond education, if human beings who are the basic building blocks of a world society are at odds with themselves and others, there can be no unity and lasting peace. It is the development of the full potentialities of every individual (i.e. spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical) that will usher in peace, unity and development.

The private sector initiatives in providing relevant education are commendable, but there are nags some where. The pecuniary motives often tend to supersede the goal of providing relevant education? If these hurdles are removed the products of the private education system should contribute substantially to national

development. If they are equipped with employable skills to enable them be relevant in the global village which the world is fast becoming, then development will spread fast. This is because the private sector initiatives are usually very focused and goal oriented.

What about the teachers? How committed and honest are they in their work? Some teachers are abetting examination malpractice. This attitude encourages laziness and dishonesty among learners instead of helping them inculcate the right type of values? Some teachers create special examination centres to aid examination malpractice. These and related issues need to be addressed if education is to contribute to national development substantially.

Another issue raised in this discourse for consideration is that of balance. Balance in education refers to the extent of existence of appropriate distribution of attention to the various elements within the programme content and instructional and learning systems. In Nigeria, the drive for scientific and technological development has led to the adoption of 60:40 ratio for decisions about Science and Technology versus the Art and Humanities. Such decisions include admissions into Institutions of learning, funding, supply of physical resources, recruitments, and other related matters. It should be noted that this ratio applies more to public institutions and may be difficult to apply in private institutions. However the decision is aimed at ensuring relevance and development and should be properly implemented.

Achievement of balance might have informed the introduction of comprehensive education system at the secondary school level

about five decades ago, which have not been fully implemented owing to a number of factors some of which have been mentioned before. Recent innovations in the school curriculum discussed in this paper earlier are also aimed at ensuring balance in education and individual development. Therefore, all the stakeholders in the system owe posterity a duty to carry out their share of responsibility in implementing the innovations effectively and efficiently.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

It is indisputable that education fosters unity and engenders development in all its facets. It is also indisputable that for these lofty goals to be realized, all the stakeholders, from the policy makers to service providers and beneficiaries, must be committed to their share of duties.

The following suggestions are therefore made in an attempt to chart the way forward.

1. Accountability in Education:

To ensure adequate social, economic and political development of the country, all stakeholders in education industry at all levels must be made accountable for any amount of money and other resources spent on their activities. Policy makers must account for resources spent on their policies; teachers and administrators must account for salaries received for their duties; students must justify for the money spent on their education. Every stakeholder must sign a performance contract at whatever the level of operation. This will promote commitment and consequently development. Accountability in the education industry is one level of evaluation that is scarcely done. This is why we have universal schooling, over-

schooling, no educational gain, high percentage of job seekers and no development.

2. **Fair Educational Policies in States:**

The current measures by the federal government to foster unity are commendable but need to be strengthened. States should be more open-minded in their educational policies. Differential admission and fee paying policies should be re-examined to promote unity in the country. Also, there should be equitable distribution of resources and states should be allowed to draw up their policies according to local needs. It is obvious that catchment areas would enjoy some benefits but that should not be to the detriment of others.

3. **Values and Citizenship Education:**

The role of education in the inculcation of values is not in doubt but the modus operandi for this to be realized must be re-examined. Citizenship education should start early in the life of all pupils. Study of Nigerian nation should be sustained with relevant. Field trips visual clippings and exchange programmes for the learners to be acquainted with their country. **The love of one's country should be instilled in all pupils before they are influenced by the love of money.** Instructional methods should be modified to be more learner-centred. Teaching of values or mounting citizenship education courses or subjects as is currently handled in schools is not enough. The methods teachers use may not enable the lessons to reach the learners' heart. Once it stops in the head, its affective purpose is defeated. Various resources and strategies should be used to make the lessons appeal to the learners' feelings and character.

4. **Entrepreneurial and Experiential Education:**

Efforts at enhancing entrepreneurial and experiential education should be made more realistic with sufficient school-industry linkage at all levels of education particularly at the Primary and Secondary education levels where established linkage is almost non-existent. This should be integrated into school policies by Education Ministries and their parastatals. The 6-3-3-4 system of Education tried and kept aside in Nigeria is the same model of the Technical Vocation Education Initiative (TVEI) model of the British Education System (Ekpo, 1995). What went wrong with ours?

I am conscious of the fact that I am today addressing a generation of dynamic youths who can take a firm decision on moral like the biblical Daniel not to defile themselves with the "King's delicacies" but to stand out from the crowd and be different in taking their education seriously as a major tool of development of themselves and the society at large. I am equally conscious of the fact that the youths of this Nation without relenting to violence can cause the political leaders to have a rethink on their various policies. As a young student in Queens College many years ago, I had friends from all over this country and each time we see ourselves we feel and love ourselves. As an undergraduate at Ahmedu Bello University, Zaria my roommate Amina was my close friend. We shared meals and talk about our cultural variations. Where are these values today? Who bewitched us?

The young ones surely will determine the state of this nation in future!

It is hoped that if these few but major suggestions are tried at all levels of education, substantial stride would be made in the attainment of an appreciable level of unity and development in the country.

Thank you.

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