
REPOSITIONING WESTERN EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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Abstract. *The paper examines the significance of western education in Nigeria in the 21st century with a view of demonstrating that its potentials are yet to be maximally tapped to facilitate industrialization and national development. This has been exacerbated by challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, under funding, corruption, epistemological colonialism and others. The paper advocates the transformation of the educational sector to align with the contemporary needs of the nation.*

Keywords: Western Education, National Development, Universal Basic Education (UBE), Transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

Western education is a veritable tool for national development, sustainability of democracy, crime reduction, pursuit of social justice, income redistribution, industrialization and others. A phenomenon that commenced in the colonial era is currently most sought after because of its relevance. Indeed, from the establishment of the first primary school in Badagry in 1842 to the various primary, secondary and tertiary institutions noticeable nationwide in the 21st century is a pointer to the fact that people are increasingly aware of the role of education in life transformation.

The introduction of the UBE in Nigeria boosted enrolment in primary education. It was influenced by the outcome of the United Nations (UN) organized World Conference on Education that took place in Thailand between 5th and 9th March, 1990. It produced a document titled “World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs” In Nigeria pupils of primary and students of JSS schools were considered eligible for this. The programme was launched in September 1999 superseding the Universal Primary Education that was hitherto pursued with little success. The states and local government areas also graciously embraced this new position on education. Again, in 2004, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was empowered legally through the

enactment of the compulsory free Universal Basic Education Act by the Federal Government of Nigeria. This was meant to promote sustainable national development, reduce the tides of poverty and consolidate democratic institutions in the country. (Chidi, 2006:405 – 406).

With the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) there was relative increment in school enrolment as demonstrated by the statistical representations in the table below for Primary Education:

Table 1: Primary School Enrolment Trends 1999 – 2001 Geo-Political Zones

Zone	1999	2000	2001	Total
North West	3,744,959	4,023,809	4,049,894	11,818,662
North Central	2,756,275	2,957,578	2,905,642	8,619,495
North East	3,327,840	3,613,879	4,020,095	10,961,814
South West	3,033,852	3,136,805	2,876,297	9,046,954
South South	2,915,114	3,187,338	3,267,509	9,369,961
South East	2,128,970	2,239,030	2,265,377	6,633,377
Total	17,907,010	19,158,439	19,384,814	56,450,263

Source: Adapted from Emmanuel Ndan Danladi, p.186

Secondary education is equally thriving which explains the present population explosion in our tertiary institutions because the former turns out candidates for the latter where professionalism is pursued. Little wonder, the proliferation of private schools across the 3 tiers of our educational system.

Suffice it to cite example of this trend from the Babcock University experience.

Table 2: Growth Pattern of Student Enrolment in Babcock University 1999 – 2005

Year	Total	Male	%	Female	%
1999 – 2000	753	370	49.1	383	50.90%
2000 – 2001	1680	829	49.5	851	50.50%
2001 – 2002	2542	1215	44.8	1372	55.2
2002 – 2003	3245	1566	49.9	1679	50.1
2003 – 2004	3609	1840	51	1769	49
2004 – 2005	3577	1709	49.8	1868	52.2

Source: NUC, Annual Review of the Nigerian University System: Vice Chancellors' Report, 2004, p.44

Despite this however, not all Nigerians have access to Western education especially university education due to poverty and lack of sponsorship. Yet, tertiary education is the

hallmark of human capacity development because of the tremendous opportunities it can offer the recipient.

THE RELEVANCE OF WESTERN EDUCATION

Education is the greatest instrument for social mobility and facilitates a reduction in income inequality, wealth and opportunity inherited from the past.

It is a fundamental instrument for the consolidation of the democratization process in Nigeria. Education exposes students to the basic political norms and values of the society. This ranges from the principle of free and fair elections to the avoidance of political apathy. The merit of this is the inculcation of patriotism and political consciousness in the students including their obligation to the nation, the virtues of discipline, tolerance, justice and so on. (Abeshi and Ezonbi, Jan- December, 2011:155). It therefore consolidates the forces of national unity and a purposeful national awareness for the sustainability of democratic governments.

It is also an investment that yields dividends which transcends mere economic returns. This is because education, especially tertiary education elevates the quality of life of the recipient, bequeaths individual dignity and self respect which is the hallmark of individual freedom. Indeed, the merit of education in this regard is beyond estimation. (Patel, 2003:137)

Education is also paramount to the improvement of the people's health condition. Education generally, especially women education is connected with child health, nutritional quality, decline in infant/maternal mortality. It also assists tremendously in the aspect of reproductive health. It further elongates life expectancy due to the consciousness of personal hygiene and dietary values acquired through education. Indeed, the World Health Organization reported that "a difference of one percent point in the national literacy rate is associated with two-year gain in life expectancy" (Dada and Bazza, 2007 :277).

Apart from the foregoing, it also assists in curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS and the proliferation of HIV orphans in the society. Research has indicated that the incidence of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria rose from 1.8% in 1988 to 5.8% in 2001. It further showed that approximately 3,300,000 adults are infected with the virus in 2003 out of which 1,900,000 (57%) are women. With increased literacy rate amongst the populace this trend could be reversed. (Cited in Kwaghe, 2007:241) Indeed, some educational institutions are already incorporating such programmes that relate to population and family life education, ICT/STD/HIV/AIDS, Drug Abuse and Women Education, Environmental / Conservative Education. (Mbakwe, 2006:351) Education therefore, facilitates the development of the human personality, empowers women, averts child labour, sexual exploitation, engenders awareness on human rights, facilitates population control and environmental protection.

Education contributes to the development of new technologies following researches by university dons and other research institutes. Technological development itself equally enriches education. Education and technology are critical factors for economic development. Currently, advances in information technology has aided the accessibility of knowledge, declined the importance of geographical boundaries due to globalization, the intellectual capital has become an instrument of competitive advantage amongst nations and the thinking skills is viewed as a pre-requisite for employment. (Kabiru Isyaku, Sept. 2009:76) The government recognized the relevance of technological development and the need to keep pace with developments around the globe even in the area of ICT. This was succinctly expressed in the National Policy on Education (2004) thus " In recognition of the prominent role of information and communication technology in advancing knowledge and skills necessary for effective functioning in the modern world, there is urgent need to integrate Information and Communication Technology (ICT)" The demonstration of government's commitment to this could be seen in how institutions of higher learning, secondary and primary schools have been equipped with ICT facilities in line with the global trend. Indeed, private educational institutions are not left behind in this transformative process. Most institutions execute on-line registration of students. Indeed, there is the increasing digitalization of the whole process. Students embark on educational researches via the internet. This has enabled students to be progressively exposed to the internet and the processing and accessibility of data from reputable scholars around the world from Africa, the Middle Eastern Region to Europe, from the Americas, Asia to Australia.

Education transforms human population and provides human resources for technological and economic development. However, this is not to suggest that there are no challenges in the quest for placing Nigeria on the pedal of technological development hence industrialization through education. Technical education is crucial in ensuring the scientific and technological development of a nation to confront global challenges. Graduates of technical education programmes could bridge the gap between the professional engineers and craftsmen in a given nation.

SOME PROBLEMS MILITATING AGAINST THE SECTOR AND THEIR IMPLICATION FOR INDUSTRIALIZATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Beginning first with the state of technical education in Nigeria, it is disturbing to note that it has not been given the desired attention as is the case in other nations of the world such as Japan, Britain, the United States, China, Germany and so on. (Ukuma, 2009:108 & 109) Indeed, the gross enrolment in technical institutions in Nigeria is low. The ratio has been shown to be 1:120 in favour of the conventional secondary schools. Despite the UBE laudable programme, it still faces challenges in the question of revitalising technical education in the country as it has been noted to be performing below policy expectancy; some of the reasons being that technical education is unattractive to some students because it is not adequately rewarded. Again, it is regarded as a less prestigious line of career to pursue.

The consequences of the preceding is the retardation of our technological breakthrough and indeed, industrialization, informing the persistent importation of nails, safety pins, from China, Korea, Taiwan; cars, electronics, footwear, clothes, household items from Japan, the U.S.A, Germany. (Ibid, pp.109 &111) The current status quo with regards to technical education in Nigeria needs to be addressed because we cannot afford to neglect the merits and prospects it holds for the nation. Some of these include the turning out of the required craftsmen, artisans, technician, technologists, and engineers that are critical to scientific and technological revolution in Nigeria, the facilitation of job creation not only in the domestic economy but also opening up opportunities for the citizenry in the global capital market, poverty reduction and so on. Technical education therefore is crucial to the realization of political stability, socio-economic and technological transformation of Nigeria for self reliance. (Ibid p.114 &118).

Other problems militating against technological development in Nigeria have been succinctly captured by Hamman Diram (2007:2005) when he remarked that there is the proliferation of research institutes and universities of technology without sufficient funding for research and there is the lack of connectivity between them and the industrial sector. Independent innovations and invention by private individuals often lacked government encouragement and funding. Expatriate technicians are often invited by government to inspect such inventions but end up discrediting it as unsuitable for operation due to the high rate of corruption on the part of some people who connived with the expatriate officials to frustrate local engineering consultancy firms. He further indicated that the Industrial Training Fund saddled with the task of training man power through industrial attachment has been incapacitated in the execution of its functions due to underfunding. He averred that poor leadership that transcends the private and public sectors has also constituted a stumbling block to the attainment of technological development. Again, there is often the formulation of policy on technology without implementation by the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTD) and the Ministry of Science and Technology.

Despite the instrumental role of education in national development, it is confronted with series of other challenges one of which include epistemological colonialism. Many developments within Africa have been explained from the perspective of the West. On this note, Ali Mazrui has pointed to the cultural westernization of Africa via the instrumentality of colonization, imperialism and capitalism affecting adversely the education curricula in Africa a number of which are alien construction and incompatible with the African context. (See Francis, 2009:31).

Indeed, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Don McKinnon also expatiated on this when he remarked that, the education system of the Commonwealth nations were formulated in England during the colonial era, and this was inherited by contemporary societies. And that it "is largely western and predominantly English in terms of systems and content, characterised by a high level of elite exchange among European sectors, and

a patron-client relationship centralized in Britain, in the African and to a lesser extent, Caribbean sectors” This is because colonial antecedents including differences in economic prowess or resources had entrenched the scenario of inequality between the erstwhile imperial powers and the colonies. And, despite the fact that most member states of the Commonwealth in Africa, Caribbean and Asia had diversified their educational system in consonance with the patron-client outlook of the colonial era, there are still traces of overwhelming educational under development and/or imbalance especially for the African members. (Quoted in Agwu, 2004:60) This is compounded by the use of western perspectives to explain developments in Africa with little regard for socio-cultural differences and specificities. For instance, Africa has been misrepresented as a continent characterised by anarchy capable of threatening global peace and security.

It is undoubtedly true that a number of African countries and regions have experienced conflicts in varying degrees, i.e. in Angola, Burundi, Congo, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, Central African Republic, Cote d’Ivoire and others. In some of these however, relative peace have be obtained.(Adetula, 2009:390 – 391) Nigeria also witnessed a civil war between 1967 – 1970 and currently security challenges that involves the use of sophisticated weapons in some sections of the northern part of the country. It is equally valid to note that all over the world and throughout history, no society can assert absolute freedom from incidences of crisis and armed conflicts.

Be that as it may, the question of peace and conflict management could be effectively addressed if African indigenous knowledge system is maximally tapped and applied for that purpose. For, studies have indicated that pre-colonial Africa had developed political, social and economic institutions with effective strategy of conflict resolution and peace creation. (See Francis, 2009:31) Nevertheless, given the nature of conflicts in Africa which in some cases are violent, the role of peace education is critical in enlightening the citizenry of the various nationalities on the dynamics of conflicts and / or its devastating consequences thus, the imbibing of peace making skills that will assist to reduce albeit effectively the tides of violent conflicts on the continent. Societal ills such as injustice, oppression, discrimination based on gender categorization, race differentiation, ethnicity, religion bigotry, marginalization resulting in the pauperization of a section of the masses, prejudices, political domination by a particular ethnic extraction and so on contribute to the eruption of crisis in the society.

No doubt currently, peace studies have assumed a multi-disciplinary dimension drawing contributions from political science, law, international relations, developmental studies, sociology, history, economics, social psychology and so on, but this can only be meaningful and result oriented when analysis and perspectives are situated within the African context. However, the curricula developed by Africans should not only reflect the African reality but also global issues and debates that challenge Africa. (Ibid, p.30) When this is established, peace education will inculcate the right culture of peace in the people through scientific and ethical values. It will focus peoples’ attention on the need to

respect human life, dignity and rights, pursue social justice, ensure equity in the distribution of national wealth and power, the eradication of gender inequalities (Gumut, 2009:165 & 166) for the promotion of regional, continental and global peace.

Another problem militating against the educational sector is the issue of funding. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)- an international organization established since 1946 with its headquarters situated at France, involved in the sponsoring of various projects around the globe such as international science programmes, literacy, technical and teacher training programmes, projects dealing with regional and cultural history, and also enters international co-operation agreements not only on the preservation of human rights but also the securing and preservation of world cultural and national heritage, given its experience in educational matters, fixed the bench mark for the funding of a nation's educational sector to not less than 26% of the annual national budget. (Agwu, 2004:62) Yet, most countries including Nigeria have not fully implemented this causing educational underdevelopment in the different levels of the educational system. Indeed, available evidence indicated that between 1997 and 2000, Federal Government gross expenditure on education was below 10%. (Igbuzor, 2009:75).

The history of low educational funding in Nigeria could be traceable to the early 1980s with the decline in crude oil prices at the international market resulting in dwindling revenue to the national treasury. This coupled with the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) further led to government cut on expenditure including that of the educational sector. All these culminated in the non payment of teachers' salaries, deterioration of educational facilities and infrastructure, industrial actions by teachers/lecturers, e.t.c adversely affecting the educational sector and literacy level. (Ibid, p. 73). Indeed, in the 21st century, underfunding is equally partly responsible for the series of industrial actions/ strikes embarked upon by teachers/lecturers over time. Indeed, currently, University lecturers nationwide are on strike as a result of the funding question and inadequate infrastructures in the universities amongst others.

Corruption is yet another factor that hampers the implementation and attainment of educational goals in Nigeria. In some cases funds that were supposed to have been spent on the educational sector by stakeholders in the ministry are siphoned. Also, internally generated revenue is being misappropriated by school administrators. Further manifestation of corruption could be seen in the lack of provision of adequate data that would facilitate objective educational planning and decision making. Sometimes funds meant for educational development are sunk into political campaigns for the pursuit of personal ambition. (Danladi, 2006:189) A situation where funds for the provision of basic educational infrastructure and facilities are diverted to some personal ventures, libraries are rarely stocked with the modern relevant literature/books/research works. The implication of this is the recent decline in the standard of education noticed in the educational system.

No doubt the sustainability of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) is a pre-requisite for ensuring educational revolution in Nigeria. But despite its emphasis on free and compulsory education for all Nigerian children in the Primary and Junior Secondary levels, the programme is confronted with some challenges which tended to limit its success. These constraints as succinctly highlighted by Chidi (2006:405 – 406) include inadequate funding, irregular payment of teachers' remuneration, limited allocation of time for the planning of the programme, inaccurate statistics, ignorance of the value of education by some parents, employment of non-professionals into the educational system, lack of school facilities and basic infrastructures, failure to up-grade school curriculum in line with modern developments and changes to make it consistent to societal needs, high rate of school drop outs, policy discontinuities due to political changes and so on.

CONCLUSION

This paper pre-occupied itself with discourse on education bringing out its significance to the individual and the nation at large. It identified the challenges confronting the sector. It therefore concludes by recommending the revamping of the sector through more funding by the three tiers of government, expansion of accessibility through scholarships even from wealthy individuals in the society, epistemological de-colonization. Indeed, African academics in Diaspora can work in collaboration with intellectuals domiciled on the continent to incorporate African indigenous knowledge system having modified the overtly western interpretation of developments in Africa entrenched in western literature, media and even the curricula determining what and how one learns, knows and thinks! The thrust of this idea is that western technology could be tapped through Western education as most countries in the Asian continent had done resulting in tremendous rate of industrialization there. But all intellectual discourse that misrepresented Africa should be systematically denounced.

Also, corruption in the sector should be addressed. Again, the current abolition of pass degree(s) by the National University Commission (NUC) in the Nigerian University System is a welcomed development because this level of education is where the production of high level man power is made for industrialization and national development which is only achieved through a meaningful demonstration of zeal and competence by the graduates in the field and/or labour market.

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