THE ROLE OF COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: AN APPRAISAL OF THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

National development is a comprehensive endeavour that involves all spheres of development. In particular, it is the development of education as the basis for enhancing this national development. Thus, countries all over the world have seen the establishment of educational institutions as the foundation for national growth. In Nigeria, one level of educational institutions established for this purpose is the College of Education. These colleges were established in the immediate post-colonial period to combat the dearth of qualified teachers in the primary schools. Since then, many of them have been established in most parts of the country—both by the state and Federal Governments. This paper therefore, examines the role being played by the colleges of education in enhancing national development.

Introduction

The development of education is a major aspect of national development. For without a concretely laid down foundation, it would be impossible to effect a purposeful development orientation. It is on the recognition of this important aspect of national development that since the end of colonialism in Nigeria, the various regimes in the country have devised various educational programmes, established primary and secondary schools and indeed tertiary institutions with the aim of laying the foundations for other field of national development.

One way the government has taken a bold step is in the area of teacher education. Thus, from the early 1960s, apart from the establishment of teachers training colleges, the government went a step further to establish a higher level of teacher training institution, hitherto known as Advanced Teachers’ Colleges. These institutions were aimed as mid-point institutions, which would train teachers for the primary schools. Indeed, those of them established in 1960s made their modest contributions to the development of teacher education in the country. Today, with the demise of the Grade Two Teachers’ Colleges, these institutions, now known as Colleges of Education have taken on the challenge of training teachers for the primary schools and the lower secondary school level. It is thus, in recognition of this role that this paper intends to focus on. In doing this therefore, the paper aims at clarifying the concepts of ‘National Development’ and ‘Education, examines the role of education and national development, the place of teachers in the educational and national development process, and discuss the role of Colleges of Education in national development.

Conceptual Clarifications-National Development and Education

To begin with, it may be necessary to attempt a definition of the terms “National Development” and “Education”. National development is capable of several interpretations like those given by the six blind men of Hindustan who had physical contact with an elephant. To the one that feels against its broad and sturdy side, the elephant was a “wall”, while it was a “spear” to the one at the tusk. Similarly, it was a “snake” to the one grabbing its squirming trunk; a “tree” to the one at the knee; a “fan” to the one hanging on the ear, and a “rope” to the sixth, seizing the swinging tail (Grieve, 1983).

Like these blind men we are free and bound to differ in our perception and definition of national development, because it is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Economists, for instance, ascribe national development to a country’s economic growth, a rise in its real output per head and the attendant shifts in technological, economic and demographic characteristics (Rich, 1974). Sociologists and social anthropologists on the other hand, see national development primarily in terms of the process of differentiation that characterizes modern societies; whereas, political scientists focus attention on political stability, national consciousness and political participation as the main indicators of national development (Adams, 1970).

The different approaches to the definition of national development were summed up by UNESCO
(1963), when it used the term broadly to refer to “growth plus change, which involves”

materialism, menial, psychological, physical, instructional and organizational innovations”. Thus, national development may be seen as a process of change at level of economic, political and social-cultural sphere, etc, that encompasses material advancement, industrialization, scientific and technological progress and socio-cultural transformation that results in general improvement in the welfare of the people of a given nation.

Education, similarly, is defined differently by various scholars. Some philosophers view Education from the Latin word, ‘educare’, that is, to lead out’.

Peter (1973) used the term ‘Education’ to imply the transmission of what is worth-while to those who have become committed to it.

To Okafor (1984:19), Education is “a process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of his potentialities and their maximum activation when necessary, according to right reason and to achieve thereby his perfect self-fulfilments”.

Chauhan (1987:7) defines Education as the “shaping of behaviour of modification of behaviour of the individual for adjustment in the society.

Adams (1912) quoted in Ada (1997) summed-up his analysis upon Education in the following words:

i. It is a bi-polar process in which one’s personality acts upon another in order to modify the development of that other;

ii. The process is not only a conscious one, but a deliberate one.

This is because the educator has a clearly realized intention of modifying the development of the educand.

Dewey (1963) describes education as the scientific process by means of which man studies the world, and accumulates knowledge which leads to useful and intellectual living.

In this paper, education shall be used to refer to all formalized and institutionalized instruction given to the learner to enable him acquire relevant skills that will enable him not only to be useful to himself but to contribute to the development of his society.

Education and National Development

Commenting on the relationship between education and national development generally, philosophers like Aristotle, Socrates and John Dewey acknowledge formal education as a prerequisite for peace and national development.

Plato, in his book, The “Republic”, argued that the ‘good life’ or felicity is obviously the end at which all men aim. The purpose of the educational system is to facilitate the attainment of this end. Curie (1970:8) stated among other things that:

...In order to develop a country must have a very consideration promotion of trained educated citizens as doctors, teachers, engineers, etc.

The importance of education in national development has also been recognized, stressed and eulogized in many official policy statements in Nigeria. In the National Policy on Education (NPE) for instance, it is stated that:

...The Federal Government of Nigeria has adopted education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1981:5).

Accordingly, it is stated on page 8 of the political document that: Education will continue to be highly rated in the national development plans, because education is the most important instrument of change as any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revaluation.

Thus, according to Agbocha and Okobia (1988) as societies and national development plans change, so should the education system if it is to remain relevant, useful and functional.

From the above analysis, there seem to be a symbiotic relationship between education and national development. We cannot have one without the other. If we consider this as a self-evident
truth, then the place of high quality teachers is logically central in the educational and national development processes.

**The Place of Teachers in the Educational and National Development Process**

The report of the National Curriculum Conference of 1969, (NERC, 1972:119) states clearly that:

...If our education is to achieve the national objectives, well-trained, well-qualified, efficient, satisfied and dedicated teachers are absolutely essential.

The Third National Development Plan indicated that “The quality of the teaching staff is probably the most important determinant of education standards at levels”.

Castetter (1971:4) opined that:

...While the provision of school facilities are vital and organizational purposes and leadership essential, availability of money and the provision of a well designed instrumental programmes are vital and a sine qua non, the most crucial single element in the educative process is the teacher.

This explains why Nwagwu (1988:25) states that the general purpose of teacher education in Nigeria is “the production, in sufficient quantity, of high quality professionals who have good academic knowledge of their subject disciplines as well as other personal qualities that are worthy of emulation by their students”.

Stressing the importance of high quality teachers in the educative process further, the National Policy on Education on Page 38 stated that:

Teacher education will continue to be given a major emphasis in all our educational planning because no education system can rise about the quality of its teachers.

The above statement cannot be over-emphasized because the teacher is the spark that fixes the whole development processes the key man in the drive to progress. It is a sad commentary to note here that until recently the recognition of teachers as a social force in National Development process was only at the documentary level. The recognition was not backed up by the necessary economic and social benefits. Their conditions of service were unattractive. Their salaries were meagre and not paid regularly. They were often scorned and disregarded in the society to the extent that they looked like bad photo-copies of their true self in their profession. They were only listened to occasionally by the government, when their unions issue their periodic last resort trump card in the form of ultimatum and threats of strike or industrial action. The incessant brain drain of top-class scholars from the nation’s educational institutions is because of the teachers’ financial trauma. Those still in the profession often feel trapped and are restless to seek “greener pasture” elsewhere.

At the moment, however, there seem to be a sign off relief for products of colleges of education who are primary school teachers but who were more neglected in the past. With the establishment of primary schools education boards they now enjoy regular payments of salaries. There is, however, an urgent need for an enhanced salary structure for teachers at all level of our education system to make teaching profession more attractive.

It is in the light of the central position of teachers in the national development process that we shall now consider the role of Colleges of Education (institutions specifically established to produce high-level non-graduate professional teachers) in national development. Before we do that, however, it may be necessary to take a cursory look at the origin and growth of Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

**Origin and Growth of Colleges of Education in Nigeria**

The origin of Colleges of Education in Nigeria is traceable to the Ashby Report (1960:16) called, ‘Investment in Education’. The Commission recommended the establishment of Teachers’ Grade One Colleges, which would offer a two-year teacher programme based on a school certificate.

As a result of the modification of the Report five Advanced Teachers’ Training Colleges were established in 1962 by the Federal and Regional governments with the aid of UNESCO. The programme is a three-year course open to candidates who had completed a Grade II Teachers’ course or secondary education with required credit passes.

The five Advanced Teachers’ Training Colleges were established at Lagos, Ibadan and Zaria in 1962. That of Ibadan was latter transferred to Ondo in 1964. The College is now known as Adeyemi College of Education. Other Advanced Teachers Training Colleges were established at Owerri in 1963,
Kano in 1964 and Abraka in 1968. All the Advanced Teachers’ Training Colleges were co-educational with sponsorship from either the Federal or Regional governments. Some of the Advanced Teachers’ Training Colleges were elevated to the status of Colleges of Education because of their high standards and the reputation of their products. In 1973, the number of the Advanced Teachers’ Training Colleges and Colleges of Education in Nigeria rose to 13.

Until the establishment of the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in Nigeria in 1989, all the Advanced Teachers’ Training Colleges and Colleges of Education in Nigeria numbering about 43, were affiliates of institutes/faculties of education in Nigerian Universities.

Today, there are 57 Colleges of Education in Nigeria with uniform minimum standards as provided by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). The setting up of the uniform minimum standards by the commission was necessitated, among other things, by the discriminatory admission policies of the universities in favour of the candidates from ATTCs/Colleges of Education that were affiliated to them. The commission argues further that:

The necessity for harmonization of the different standards becomes even more compelling with the recognition that is producing for the same market.

Since the establishment of the National Commission for Colleges of Education in Nigeria, the Academic Programmes of all the Colleges of Education in Nigeria have been accredited from time to time as stipulated in section 5 (c) and (d) of Decree 3 of 1989 that set up the Commission. The Decree states that; the Commission shall: (c) Lay down minimum standards for all programmes of teacher education and accredit their certificates and other academic awards, (d) Approve guidelines setting out criteria for accreditation of all Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

The purpose of accreditation and re-accreditation exercise is to ensure the maintenance of minimum standards in all the Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

The Role of Colleges of Education in National Development

Colleges of Education in Nigeria have played a vital role in our national development, especially in the education sector. The teaching function of colleges of education in Nigeria for instance, has contributed immensely to national development particularly in the development of middle-level manpower for the nation’s primary and junior secondary schools. Over the years, colleges of education have produced a large number of non-graduate professional (NCE) teachers that teach in our primary and junior secondary schools, thus alleviating the manpower problems of the nation at those levels.

These teachers have also laid the foundation of whatever formal education that is received later in life by that now appear in different forms as accountants, teachers, lawyers, economists, engineer, doctors, agriculturalists, architects, etc. The ideas of these people put into productive use has enhanced the nation’s development.

Colleges of Education in Nigeria have plan waded into the task area of producing professionally trained teachers for our vocational and technical secondary schools in order to meet the nation’s requirements for technological take-off as provided in the National Policy on Education (1981).

Another aspect of the role of Colleges of Education in national development according to Nwankwo (1988) is their ability to adapt quickly to the educational needs of their immediate environment. Pre-occupation with universal academic, cultures, scholarships, research and international acceptability often inhibit Nigerian universities from responding promptly and appropriately to the local needs and demands. Standing at the middle as they are, Colleges of Education are often called upon to mount flexible programmes that can be tailored to the urgent requirements of the primary and junior secondary schools.

Another contribution of Colleges of Education to national development is in the structural integration of Nigeria. Through public lectures, seminars, workshops, conference, inter-collegiate sports competition and the implementation of their curriculum, especially in General Studies Courses like Citizenship Education, they have raised the level of national unity, and national consciousness, sense of oneness, common citizenship and common purpose amongst Nigerians, thus enhancing the development of the nation. In addition, they provide in-service courses, extra-mural classes and sandwich programmes to raise the literacy level of the members of the communities around them.

Another vital area of their contribution to national development is in the area of research. Their research results enable the educational planners to formulate appropriate education policies for the nation’s development.

Finally, they have assisted in national development by providing compulsory and agricultural extension services to the communities around them. The consultancy services boost the economic
activities of the communities around them, while the agricultural extension services enhance the improvement of agriculture and thus, the national economy.

Conclusion

The future of Colleges of Education in Nigeria is quite bright if they are properly equipped, staffed and funded. If that is done, they will be granted the expanded responsibility of producing B.Ed degree teachers. At the moment, only few Colleges of Education in Nigeria have been granted the status of degree awarding institutions, due to inadequate facilities, staffing and funding.

The junior secondary school system, which emphasizes acquisition of vocational and technical knowledge within the comprehensive education programme, are expected to be staffed almost exclusively by N.C.E. teachers. Only very few Colleges of education in Nigeria offer vocational and technical courses at the moment due to lack of equipment, high cost of fittings and the maintenance of technical workshops. The Federal and State Government equipped the technical workshops of secondary schools but left out the Colleges of Education that are expected to produce the teachers that will make use of them for teaching-learning purposes. The result is that there are technical equipment and workshops in our secondary schools but no teacher to man and operate them.

Colleges of Education in Nigeria should strike a better balance in subject combination to reflect the Federal Government emphasis on scientific and technological education. There is currently an over production of N.C.E. teachers in arts, humanities and social sciences. The Nigerian Education System according to Nwangwu (1988) requires a heavy input of teachers for the natural sciences and mathematics, yet it is these vital areas that have the lowest enrolment in the Colleges of Education in Nigeria. The 60:40 ratio in students’ enrolments in favour, of the sciences must be our immediate target. The inability of the Colleges of Education to implement that policy however is not entirely theirs. Secondary schools have their share to the blame for their inability to produce successful graduates in the natural science areas.

With N.C.E. as the minimum teaching qualification as provided in National Policy on Education (1981), it is our hope and expectation that the Colleges of Education in Nigeria will be equipped, staffed and funded to successfully perform their onerous responsibility to the education system, the society and prosperity.

References


