

EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper acknowledges the fact that there can be no meaningful development of any country without education as an instrument. It pointed out that although the government has been making effort towards manpower development through education, certain problems exist in our education system, which hinders education from achieving its proper objectives. Recommendations for solving such problems were made.

Introduction

The link between education and development in human society cannot be easily described. Starting from the time of the early man, education has formed the bedrock of development. A shift from the use of crude implements to the use of mechanised equipment in agriculture was made possible through the processes of education. A look at the industrial revolution in Europe and the technological advancement in Japan and other industrialised nations will show that all were the outcome of functional education systems. This was why Mackinnon (1985) observed the link between education and development and asserted, "Education is development".

•Education develops an individual and raises his capacity to produce and make meaningful contribution to the development of the society. This was why Enoh (1996) observed that education is the greatest stimulus for development because it trains the required manpower in which other developments depend.

Manpower Development

Manpower is the labour force or work force of a country. In its broad concept, it includes all who are potentially employable, ranging from unskilled to the most highly skilled workers (Encyclopedia of Education, Vol. 6). Development involves change, change for better. The Fourth National Development Plan (1981). described development thus, "true development must be the development of man, the unfolding and realisation of his creative potential, enabling him to improve his material conditions of living through the use of resources available to him". Thus, in this paper, manpower development is described as all the processes involved in making individuals acquire knowledge, skills and capabilities which dispose them to be engaged in or for readiness for productive activities. '

Manpower development involves quantitative and qualitative training of persons to carry out jobs in the society. It is an important factor in the economy of every nation and no serious nation can afford to ignore it. In Nigeria, it has been a major concern of the government since independence. It was clear to the government that political independence without economic self-reliance would bring about no meaningful development. In this regard the government has emphasized and encouraged in many ways manpower development in various educational and socio-economic programmes. For instance, the government has established many educational institutions including schools of science and technology all over the country for the development of middle - level and high - level manpower for our economy. Also, the Federal Government of Nigeria, through Decree No. 47 established Industrial Training Fund (ITF) for the purpose of training students, on - the - job - training, and retraining of both students and staff of various training institutions. The government still assists students of vocational and technical education in higher institutions of learning through the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES).'

All these efforts notwithstanding, one is still in doubt as to whether Nigeria is fully achieving her objectives of manpower development. Are there not factors/issues in our education system that militate against high quality manpower development in our country? The major aim of this paper is to discuss current education issues and their challenges to manpower development in Nigeria.

Issues in Nigeria Education

Finance (Inadequate Funding)

It is true that the government has been making visible efforts in ensuring that adequate and qualified manpower is developed for the economy of this nation. As already stated, many manpower training institutions are established. Some candidates are sent abroad for technical training. Students of vocational and technical courses in the country are assisted. However, it is also very true that Nigerian education is beset with financial problems. The government is finding it extremely difficult to implement the National Policy on Education. Some projects are partially executed while others are entirely abandoned. Hardly can any school boast of adequate teaching and learning materials. Teachers do not have job satisfaction and that is why we experience brain drain at all levels of education. This lack of job satisfaction also encourages teachers' misconduct of extorting learners to enhance teachers' means of living.

If there are inadequate teaching and learning materials in schools, how can learners be adequately trained? It will result in producing half-baked manpower for our economy. If highly intelligent and talented teachers should continue to abandon their jobs for greener pastures then our education system will be left with mediocre and since no nation can rise above the quality of its educated citizens (Ajayi, 1998), we will continue to have low and middle level manpower while high-level manpower will be scarce. So, no matter how good our education plans and policies are, the stated objectives can hardly be achieved without adequate funds to execute them.

The Issue of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice could be regarded as any irregular behaviour premeditated and exhibited by candidates or people charged with the conduct of examination (Aliyu, 1996). It includes any activities or actions of people planned or carried out to make candidates gain undue advantage in an examination. In the 1970s examination malpractice was something that could be hardly imagined. Today, in Nigeria it has become a culture such that greater percentage of candidates can hardly write their examinations without one form of malpractice or the other. This evil has spread to all levels of education in the country. Apart from other effects examination malpractice has contributed much in lowering the standard of education and according to Shonekan (1996) it makes examination results unreliable. That is why now many secondary school leavers would possess nice certificates with Alpha and Credit grades yet majority can hardly write informal letters or essays with correct spellings and good sentences.

Many parents now believe that not much academic work is done in public schools. So they withdraw their children from government schools to the private ones hoping that private schools would do better in terms of character moulding and instruction (Onwuka, 1997). But it should be understood that both private and public schools are in the same society. If the government cannot provide adequate teaching and learning materials and equipment and cannot pay teachers adequately, could the private proprietors of schools do better especially as many private schools were established based on the motive to make money? This is why some private schools do not clearly discourage frauds especially in external examinations lest they would be discouraging admission into their schools.

The cogent question now is, how does examination malpractice affect manpower development in the country? A simple answer would be that it affects it negatively. The greater the rate of examination fraud the lower the quality of manpower produced. For instance, a candidate who buys scores to read any of the professional courses like Medicine, Pharmacy, Engineering etc. can never do as much well as the one who did not know fraud. Examination malpractice discourages hard work on the part of teachers and learners. A child who has known fraud will always look for "a short cut" an easy way of getting things. This mentality of striving to achieve objectives through fraud leads to the production of mediocres in the society. This, we know, is detrimental to national development.

Quota System of Admission into Schools

For a long time the admission of students into federal higher institutions of learning has followed quota system formula. This is a formula based on Federal character which offers candidates chances of admission because they come from certain states whether they are qualified or not. Meanwhile, admission of candidates into Federal Colleges of Education is by 45% merit, 35% locality, and 20% educationally disadvantaged states. In other words, all candidates in schools were not admitted by merit. Somebody who might have scored very low marks could be offered admission into a school because he comes from certain disadvantaged states. While others who might have obtained higher scores are rejected.

The application of quota system, according to Onwuka (1997), destroys the primary purpose of

instituting our educational institutions as a means of forging national unity and fostering quality in educational opportunity. Again, the issue of using education as an instrument par excellence for building adjust and egalitarian society (FRN, 1998) becomes a dream that cannot be realised. This quota system of admission does not encourage realistic manpower development. It is necessary that people should be given the opportunity to develop their capabilities and potentialities to the maximum. But in doing that, quality should not be sacrificed on the altar of quantity. America is known for recruiting and developing for themselves best brains from different parts of the world. We can encourage our own people by offering everybody the opportunity to develop irrespective of state, tribe or belief.

Gender Disparity in Education

One cannot say that the Nigerian constitution or the National Policy on Education discriminates against either sex in terms of educational opportunities. However, it appears that women education has not received equal attention as that of their male counterparts especially in higher education. For instance, Blakemore and Cooksey (1991) pointed out that females, throughout the world, are victims of educational disparity in higher education and Graham - Browne (1991) regretted that this disparity is greater in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

In Nigeria, records from NUC (1997) indicate that disparity exists between male and female students enrolment. According to the report students enrolment from Anambra during the 1990/91 academic session was 7,145 for males and 5,821 for females while in 1991/92 academic session it was 9,462 for males and 7264 for females. Although, the situation is gradually changing and there is increase in female enrolment in schools even in sciences (Nzewi, 1993), there is still wide gap between male and female enrolment in some parts of the country. For example, the NUC (1997) reported that male enrolment in higher education in Sokoto State for the 1991/92 academic session was 854 while female enrolment was only 134, Okolo (2001) also reported that data from University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1998) showed a discrepancy between male and female students' enrolment for 1996/97 and 1997/98 academic sessions. In 1996/97 academic session male enrolment was 6,226 and 3,629 for Nsukka and Enugu campuses respectively while female enrolment was 4,928 and 2,554 for both campuses. During 1997/98 academic session male enrolment were 6,499 and 4,635 for Nsukka and Enugu Campuses respectively while female enrolment were 6,069 and 2649 for both Campuses. Gender inequality in higher education poses a great challenge to educational advancement and manpower development. When economic positions and science based careers are occupied mainly by males, who are by no means greater in national population, it would retard even and smooth socio-economic development. If women who occupy the major part of our population do not have the opportunity of competing favourably with their male counterparts they may lose the chance of providing required good service to the nation. Thus serious effort should be made towards reducing gender inequality in our education system.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Major challenges in our education system should be solved to enable education play its expected roles especially manpower development. Therefore the following recommendations are deemed necessary.

The government should increase her annual budgetary allocations for education.

All private individuals and corporate bodies that make contribution towards education should be encouraged to increase their financial participation in funding education.

Educational institutions should look inwards and find possible sources of income to support their institutions' revenue. This could be sale of service like agricultural projects, guesthouse, motor transport ventures etc.

4. The government, education bodies, teachers and parents should call it an important duty fight corruption including examination fraud in our nation.
5. School administrators should accord, greater priority to merit in admitting candidates in schools.
6. Employment houses should apply merit in recruitment of workers instead of asking where they come from.
7. Women education in science and technology areas in higher institutions should be made free.
8. A law should be enacted to prevent families from giving their female children out for marriage too early.
9. Curriculum materials and books should be revised to ensure that they do not downgrade either sex.

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