

CHALLENGES OF FUTURE OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

That education faces serious challenges in Nigeria is not in doubt. As Ochu (1995) has observed, the Nigerian education system has been in a state of permanent crisis in which the attempted solution of one type of crisis inevitably led to another. The same work identifies four areas of crisis in the historical development of the Nigerian education system namely: crisis of irrelevance, crisis of un-equal expansion, crisis of unplanned expansion and crisis of financial inadequacy. Adasu (1995) in turn has remarked that the history of the Nigerian education system has been a history ridden with crisis beyond the imagination of the proponents, initiators and propagators. Going further, he observed that education in Nigeria had suffered from a deliberate faulty definition and appreciation, with its attendant wrong placement in the hierarchical setting of national priorities. Several other scholars have written about many other areas in which the Nigerian education system is in crisis. In fact in 1995 a group of academicians were so worried about the deplorable situation in which education had found itself in Nigeria but that they produced a book of readings titled. *The Nigerian Education System in Crisis*.

Suggestions as to how to bail the Nigerian education system from its crises have not been lacking either. Such recommendations include that ail should join hands in educating all (Onwuka, 1995); that education should be treated as a priority (Ocho, 1995); that there should be a faithful implementation of the National Policy on Education (Adasu, 1995); that teaching should be recognized as a profession, and that the Nigerian education system should be reformed in such a way as to accord Nigerians greater educational opportunities for self-development (Maduabum, 1995; Anowor, 1995). But in spite of how laudable these recommendations have sounded, the Nigerian education system has not so benefited from them as to surmount the challenges still facing it. Despite the visible attempt being made by providers of education in Nigeria to bail it out, it is still very much plagued by the ills observed earlier. But perhaps (here has not been sufficient attention paid to the need to regard those ills, as obstacles rather than as disasters. Perhaps the providers of Nigerian education have not been pragmatic enough to see the shortcomings of the Nigerian education system from the viewpoint of averting their consequences.

It is when the persistent lapses in the Nigerian education system are viewed as obstacles to averting their undesirable consequences that greater and more concerned efforts will be put in by the stakeholders. It is then that the need will be felt to work towards facing the resultant challenges not only in the present but also in the future. This paper therefore attempts to examine present challenges facing education in Nigeria, their implications for the future and feasible success routes.

The Challenges of Self-Development

Self-development is one of the challenges facing education in Nigeria. The imperatives of human self-development go beyond physiological maturation to psychological maturation. Maslow's hierarchy of human needs infact places satisfaction of physiological needs as only a starting point towards full self-satisfaction. In between physiological human needs and self-actualization are safety needs, need for love, affection and belongingness, and esteem need (Maslow, 1943). None of these human needs can be adequately met without education tailored to meeting it. Yet education in Nigeria has been inadequate for this purpose. Not only is poverty written boldly on the faces of a majority of Nigerians but also what is generally prevalent all over the country are insecurity of life and property and deprivation of love, affection, belongingness, self-esteem and self-fulfillment.

The restoration of the dignity of the Nigerian in terms of provisions for the human needs as articulated by Maslow is a function of education considered as a means of self-development. As Eheazu (1989) has pointed out, in Nigeria hunger and poverty appear to be more typical of the rural illiterate or semi-literate than with the more educated and affluent who has attained a certain comfortable level of regular income. Neither is anybody in Nigeria without the relevant education better equipped to satisfy Maslow's middle or higher order needs. So, appropriate education is obviously required for one to live safely in Nigeria, to live a

satisfactory social life characterised by love, affection and belongingness within and outside one's home, to enjoy esteem in the Nigerian society and generally to become the best thing one wants to be or is capable of being. The appropriate education required in this case is capacity building for the purpose of developing people's potentials fully.

The Challenges of Industrial Expectations

Changing industrial expectations pose another challenge to education in Nigeria. Self-development in terms of physiological and psychological empowerment would be inadequate for the satisfaction of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in the industrial society of today. The world of work in a sense determines personal self-actualization, which is the ultimate human need. For, to be functional and relevant, knowledge, skills and sensitiveness acquired through education must be employable that is, useful and helpful to the world of work or the industry. Thus, not only are employable education required for earning a living in an industrial society, such as Nigeria of today, hardly anyone can guarantee his safety, love, affection, belongingness, esteem prevalent all over the country are insecurity of life and property and deprivation of love, affection, belongingness, self-esteem and self-fulfillment.

The Challenges of Social Expectations

Education in Nigeria equally faces challenges posed by social expectations. Maslow's middle and higher order needs can only be satisfied if some social expectations are met. No one can guarantee his own safety if he fails in his duty to others. The same condition applies to the satisfaction of the needs for love, affection, belongingness and esteem. For as the saying goes, respect is reciprocal.

Now, what constitutes one's duty to others is largely determined in Nigeria by social expectations whether the reference point is the family, neighbourhood, workplace, associations or the larger society. In Nigeria, one's life is inevitably tied up with social obligations arising from the social environment in which one finds oneself.

Havighurst (1961) calls such social obligations development tasks. He defined a developmental task as a task which arises at or about a certain period in the life of an individual successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society, and difficulty with later tasks. Such tasks are therefore not only a way of achieving personal satisfaction but also a means of meeting social expectations. As Havighurst (op cit) has pointed out, these tasks span throughout the adult life of every person starting from early adulthood (ages 18-30) with such social tasks as starting a home, selecting a mate, coping with family life, finding an occupation, taking on civic responsibility, and finding a congenial social group. Next comes middle age (ages 30-55) with such attendant tasks as: attaining and maintaining an economic standard of living, developing leisure time activities and looking after ageing parents. Lastly, there is later maturity (ages 55 and above) with such tasks as:

adjusting to retirement and reduced social interaction, adjusting to death of spouse, meeting larger social and civic obligations and maintaining a satisfactory living standard.

To accomplish all these adult developmental tasks clearly requires appropriate lifelong education. Educational programmes appropriate for this purpose would include: family life education, vocational education, social education, continuing education, recreational education, retirement education and gerontology. But these kinds of education are hard to come by in today's Nigeria. In their place, there is a predominance of schooling, which Illich (1970) has described as the age-specific, teacher-related process requiring full attendance at an obligatory curriculum. Unfortunately, educational programmes appropriate for equipping people to accomplish their developmental tasks in a Nigerian setting have not been, and cannot be accommodated in the regular school or university syllabuses. Neither has any serious attention been paid by the providers of education in Nigeria to the implementation of the provisions made in the National Policy on Education for adult and non-formal education to which lifelong education properly belongs.

Implications for the Future

The failure of the Nigerian education system to meet the challenges of self-development,

industrial expectations and social expectations is, as has been pointed out, a result of the shortcomings in the present and past Nigerian education system. It follows that these challenges will not be met unless the shortcomings are redressed. As has already been observed in the introduction of this paper, it would appear that sufficient attention has not been paid by providers of education in Nigeria to such consequences of a defective education system as the failure to meet the imperatives of self-development, industrial expectations and social expectations.

Yet the failure of the Nigerian education system to meet these challenges has serious implications for the future as well as the present generations of Nigerians. But while the present neglect of appropriate education may be bearable because of the availability of some other means of cushioning the effect such as oil money and foreign loan, the future of Nigerians will remain bleak till the situation is redressed. An examination of (he consequences of continued failure to meet the challenges pointed out will highlight the seriousness of the implication for the future.

The alternative to embarking now in Nigeria, on education tailored to self-fulfillment is nurturing the seed of frustration. This kind of education requires more than what the present Nigerian education system has to offer. Self-fulfillment implies the full development of people's potentials. This will not happen in the existing Nigerian education system which is so structurally defective that, as Anowor (1995) has pointed out: a majority of children between 2+ and 2 years of age are excluded from pre-primary school education; a large number of products of the present universal basic education scheme will be denied the opportunity of senior secondary education and an equally large number of graduates of the senior secondary school level of education will be thrown into an unstructured out-of-school sector where neither well-organized alternative education nor gainful employment is readily available. As the same author correctly observed, these anomalies in the 6-3-3-4 system of the present National Policy on Education have resulted in a structural imbalance whereby the second and third levels of education have neither provided adequate education for the products of primary schools, nor sufficiently equipped its own products with knowledge and skills appropriate for the manpower needs of the nation, while the fourth level has provided hope for the further capacity-building only to a few privileged people. Under such a system frustration is bound to be the lot awaiting not only those who will have no opportunity for schooling but also those who will remain half-baked after graduation.

Similarly, continued failure on the part of the Nigerian education system to meet the requirements and expectations of the job-market or industry will bring greater distress to Nigerians in the future. If as has been pointed out earlier on this paper, the present system of education in Nigeria is known to be producing unemployable graduates in their thousands, the situation is bound to worsen when the population of such graduates increases in the future. This situation will pose problems not only for healthy and decent living but also for security of life and property in Nigeria. Consequently, there will be a more serious impairment of not only personal-fulfillment but also national growth and development.

Mkpa (2002) has highlighted the neglect of functionality in the present Nigerian education practice. As he has pointed out, not only did the colonial education in Nigeria consolidate the missionary tradition of occupational dis-functionality, but the post-independence financial mismanagement and misplaced priorities further complicated matters in the sense that even though funds were available, the education sector was never a priority for successive governments, and this resulted in lack of commitment on the part of teachers. Furthermore, little attempt was made by providers of education in Nigeria to regularly revise curricula to make them respond to changes in the demand of the job-market. Consequently, the gap between industrial expectations and the knowledge, skills and attitudes resulted in large-scale unemployment on the part of school leavers and graduates which is bound to worsen and create more serious problems unless the situation is urgently reversed. Higher unemployment will lead to lower productivity and more widespread poverty across the country if the existing Nigerian education system remains insensitive to industrial expectations.

Lastly, if the failure of the Nigerian education system to meet social expectations is allowed to continue, the consequences will be grave both at individual and societal levels. It has been earlier pointed out that these social expectations relate to the developmental tasks of various stages of adulthood, the non-accomplishment of which will inevitably lead to personal and public dissatisfaction. The inability to accomplish the developmental tasks of adulthood by a generality of Nigerians is evident from the widespread

negative social and political climate prevailing all over Nigeria at present. The climate in fact appears so ominous that anyone who gets an opportunity to leave the country is regarded as extremely lucky, while those Nigerians who are residing abroad are regarded as being in an earthly paradise. That such a situation is highly deplorable is evident since no nation can be expected to attain prosperity and greatness, if its citizens cannot meet their social obligations.

The accomplishment of the developmental tasks of adulthood which involves meeting social expectations will continue to elude Nigerians if the appropriate forms of education are not put in place. This is because accomplishing the necessary developmental tasks requires prior preparation on the part of the citizenry. Without benefiting from educational programmes tailored to such fields as family - living, vocational occupation, citizenry, communal living, skill-improvement recreating, retirement and ageing, one cannot guarantee one's preparedness for the task of meeting the challenges of social expectations. It is evident that in a national where such challenges continue to be unmet, the future is indeed bleak.

Solution Routes

The multitude of existing recommendations for the promotion of education in Nigeria has tended to concentrate on issues related to quality and availability of conventional school education. Consequently, not only has out-of-classroom education been given scanty attention but also little attempt has been made to proffer solutions to the challenges posed by self-development and the expectations of the job-market and the society. But a pragmatic approach such as has been adopted in this paper needs to fill this gap. From this perspective, defects in the Nigerian education system should be seen as having far-reaching consequences on the ability of the Nigerian people and nation to meet the challenges posed by the need for full self-development, employability and social skills. Hence suggestions should be addressed to ways and means of promoting those dimensions of Nigerian education considered appropriate and imperative for meeting the identified challenges both at present and in the future.

The first recommendation of this paper is that there should be greater recognition of the imperative of functionality in Nigerian education. When this happens, it will be realized that major challenges facing individuals and the society can be met through appropriate education. Top among those challenges, which are education-related, are those posed by the need for self-development and the expectations of the industrial and civic societies. The realization on the part of the Nigerian government and other providers of education, of the potential of education in meeting such challenges will push education up in the priority lists of the stakeholders and engender greater interest in the promotion of appropriate education.

The realization of the functionality of education in meeting major developmental tasks facing individuals and the society need to be accompanied by higher investment in resources required to promote appropriate education. This in effect implies that such an education should be placed on top of the priorities of the stakeholders as used to be the case in some parts of Nigeria before and after the civil war. Naturally, this will mean that other areas of need will suffer or wait. But, that consideration need not deter the suggested prioritization since the capacity building which investment in appropriate education will accomplish will take care of the delay in funding other sectors. This is the hidden advantage of human resources development whereby human beings are developed in order that they may become agents of other areas of societal development. This is why in recent times the global parameters of human development have shifted from physical to human indices.

There is also the need for providers to continuously carry out reform in educational curricula to ensure that Nigerian education is made appropriate education. The education curriculum of the future will remain relevant only if it responds to the dynamics of those and other education - related challenges.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the challenges and future of education in Nigeria from the pragmatic perspective of the utility value of education in relation to specified challenges in Nigeria. It is the contention of this paper that it is only when the potential of education in meeting (the challenges posed by the imperatives of self-development and the expectations of industrial and civil societies is recognized and actualized in Nigeria, that the Nigerian education system can be expected to free itself from its present bondage and look forward to a brighter future.

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