

RE-ENGINEERING EDUCATION THROUGH THE INDIGENOUS NIGERIAN LANGUAGES AND CULTURE FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SELF- PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education generally in Nigeria today is beset with a plethora of problems. These problems have hindered the successful implementation of laid down educational plans in the educational sector in Nigeria which in turn has led to a fall in the standard and quality of education. This is applicable to both the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. This paper examines such concepts as education, re-engineering, re-engineering education as well as language and culture, employment and self-productivity. This paper discusses the need for such concepts as language and culture in education and how they can be harnessed to re-engineer education in Nigeria. The concluding remarks of this paper emphasize the need for a total rehauling of the present curriculum to fit into Nigeria's present day educational needs.

Education is a process of transmitting what is worthwhile to those who are committed to it. Education is a fundamental aspect of any nation. It is a fundamental aspect of the dynamic life of citizens in a nation. According to Borishade (2001:5), "Education is all that builds human consciousness for action" Going further, he opined that we are what our education makes us. In his definition of education, Maimunatu (2004:24) remarked that "Education is the process of bringing about behavioural changes that are worthwhile in individuals." In a related opinion, Osioma (2009:8) defined education as "a social process which deals with the harmonious development of all the abilities and faculties of man- physically, mentally, morally, emotionally spiritually and socially."

It can be deduced from the above definitions of education that education is a potent tool for development, individually and nationally. As Maimunatu (2004:24) puts it, "education equips individuals with knowledge, skills and attitudes" that gear them towards self-productivity and employment. It also develops the abilities of individuals to cope economically and socially with the trends of present day situations. Osioma (2009:8) observed that education imbues man with those skills, abilities and competencies that will enhance his own welfare and the welfare of the society in general. Borishade (2001:5) perceived education to be a sure tool for employment and

makes possible the transfer of skills, knowledge, techniques and competencies needed to perform in the society and nation at large. Maimunatu (2004:24) noted that for a person to be self-reliant or self-productive, he/she has to have undergone functional education which according to him is any education which has value in terms of assisting people to secure jobs, improve their skills and competencies or earn their living. In a nut-shell, education is the acquisition of basic knowledge, skills, attitudes and values essential for the general upliftment of man in his complex society (NTI, 1995).

Given the importance of education to the individual and a nation, it is surprising to note that in Nigeria today, the quality and standard of education is degenerating at a fast rate despite educational policies put in place to boost the standard of education. In the words of Guobadia (2006:1), “ Education in Nigeria is now in a state of stress.” It is indeed in a sorry state. It is fast deteriorating. The deteriorating state of education can even be noticed from the output of students from our educational institutions in Nigeria. These students who claim to have gone to school and are educated seem more illiterate than literate. They can not account for the number of years they have spent in school, either by way of putting to use what they have learnt or in the way and manner they speak and carry themselves. They are unfit to perform the task for which they have been trained for in school. According to Ajayi (1992) in Maimunatu (2004:24), “Our school curriculum is not designed deliberately to make pupils effective members of society in terms of self-reliance” or self-productivity. This deteriorating state of the educational sector in Nigeria which can have devastating effects on the economy of the nation, calls for a total rehauling of educational goals or plans. It is on this premise that this paper proposes a re-engineering of education in Nigeria through the Nigerian indigenous Languages and culture for employment and self-productivity. Relevant concepts will be defined or explained.

Conceptual Analysis of Re-Engineering and Re-Engineering Education

Re-Engineering according to Ayandele and Ibok (2009:35) can be viewed as “a system that prescribes ways and approaches to reverse the tide of incompetence, inefficiency, redundancy and rigidity. It represents innovative propositions as well as permutations of past concepts made to adapt to present day realities.” In other words, re-engineering has to do with re-structuring or re-designing. It has to do with putting up ways of re-structuring something, in this case education, in other to manage it better.

Re-engineering Education on the other hand can be viewed from several perspectives. However, for the purpose of this paper, re-engineering education is conceptualized as re-focusing, re-shaping, re-positioning, rehauling, reforming or re-adjusting education in Nigeria for employment and self productivity. It is a technique designed to introduce relevant changes in Education. In other words, re-engineering education is involved with the ways or means of improving education in Nigeria with the aim of boosting the standard and quality of its education as well as equipping the individual with skills or abilities that can enable them secure jobs or become self-reliant or self productive. Oriafio (2001:10) noted that re-engineering education cannot be done in isolation. Hence

it involves reviewing educational antecedents, contemporary situations and future consideration have to be taken together, analyzed, evaluated and possibly resynthesized to produce the quality and quantity of education that should equip the individuals-child, youth and adult- with requisite knowledge, attitudes and skills that will enable him make the most of his life. In a nut-shell, re-engineering education in Nigeria for employment and self-productivity refers to mapped out strategies that will effectively improve the present falling standard and quality of education in Nigeria given to an individual which will equip such an individual with the skill needed to survive, first in Nigeria and then elsewhere, either through being gainfully employed or by being self-reliant.

It is pertinent to note that the educational sector in Nigeria is in dire need of re-engineering. The over-all concept of re-engineering education has to do with making reforms that would help the education sector in Nigeria generally and benefit and prepare the individual for real life events. According to Eke (2001:10), part of the relevance of re-engineering education is “to produce school graduates who can survive in a condition of poverty and unemployment”

Employment and Self-Productivity

Employment and self-productivity are terms that cannot be separated from education. They are the gains of education. *Employment* refers to work. It is a situation in which one works to earn money. It is believed that education prepares one to be gainfully employed – through working for organizations or people or by being self-employed. There is no gain saying that Nigeria needs skilled hands in different areas of human endeavours. This need requires that people or individuals are given proper education to fit into and perform these needs to boost the country’s economy.

Self-Productivity on the other hand refers to one’s ability to be useful to himself/herself and the society at large without having to rely on the society or any body. It refers to the ability of a person to be self-reliant, self-dependent and capable of taking care of himself/herself as well as contributing his/her quota to the development of the economy. It has to do with having confidence in one’s abilities.

Education, employment and self-productivity are all inter-related. Education is the foundation on which employment and self-productivity rest and can be expressed or realized. Education is necessary if one is to be gainfully employed and self-productive. It trains one to be self-reliant and emphasizes the development of a person’s potentialities..

Language, Culture and Education.

Language and culture are concepts that are intertwined and inter-related. One cannot be discussed without talking about the other. Both concepts have a lot of bearing on education. **Culture** refers basically to the knowledge system that includes ideas, values, beliefs and standard of conduct, that is, norms that regulate the life of a group or society. As krech (1962) in Nwaru (2009:37) puts it, “It consists of their distinctive modal patterns of behavior and the underlying regulatory beliefs, values and premises.”

Okome (2007) in Okoro (2009:115) remarked that “Culture is the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours.”

Language on the other hand is the tool by which various activities (including education) are carried out. Through language, man expresses his thoughts, feelings, culture, etc. It is a vital part of human existence. Apart from the fact that it is primarily used for communication, it also functions as a means of transmitting shared knowledge, customs and traditions. It serves as a symbol for national and cultural identity. There is a popular adage that reads ‘no language, no culture; No culture, no identity.’ This happens to be a vital reason given for the argument that English language should be replaced with the indigenous languages as a means of instruction in education in Nigeria, since the English language can not adequately express the Nigerian indigenous culture, as culture is expressed through language. According to Ogunsiji (2007:69), “Most human knowledge and culture are stored and also transmitted in language.” Language and culture are interwoven. Language is an embodiment of culture. In his submission, Oderinde (2005) in Olufowobi and Makinde (2009:63) described language as one of the indices or markers of culture. Various scholars believe that using the indigenous languages in education in Nigeria is the best way of transmitting knowledge which reflects the Nigerian indigenous culture. In other words, if education on one hand is geared toward transmitting what is worthwhile to individuals and equipping them with knowledge while Culture on the other hand refers to the system that regulates the life of an individual in a group or society, language (in this case, the Nigerian indigenous languages) which is a carrier of culture is then the best tool to be used in transmitting this knowledge which reflects the Nigerian indigenous culture. In other words, knowledge is transmitted through language, language on the other hand is a part of culture and education can not take place without language. As Anozie (2007:12) succinctly puts it, “All languages meet the social, economic, religious, political and psychological, etc, needs of their speakers and equally deserving of scientific study and can provide the referred speech community with valuable information about human nature and society.” It is therefore not out of place to suggest that education in Nigeria can be re-engineered laying emphasis on language and culture as tools for better results while noting that English–language has been used long enough but has failed to produce the desired or expected results, rather, there is a decline in the standard of education.

Re-engineering Education through Nigerian Language and Culture.

Education generally can be re-engineered using the Nigerian languages and culture to meet the present need of Nigeria. The importance of language in relation to a person’s culture, identity and educational development can not be over emphasized. Language as well as culture performs a lot of function in education. Also, when talking about development, employment or self–productivity, language cannot be excluded because they are inseparable. There is no education without a society and a society

cannot be separated from its culture of which language is a part of. For education to be successful, Nigerian languages and culture are the right channels through which knowledge can be effectively transmitted. According to Ibrahim (2007:303), “No educational system stands apart from the society which establishes it. It has purposes that must be achieved if that society is to continue in the right direction.” He further remarked that education is meant to be embedded in its social context.

It has been argued by a lot of scholars like (Fafunwa (1974), Barnghose, etc) that English-language may not be the best tool to be used in the dissemination of information in education. Scholars advocate the use of the Nigerian indigenous languages, which carry the culture of the Nigerian people, in education, not only to be taught as subjects, but also to be used as a means of instruction at all levels. Womboh (2009:159) stressing the importance of our indigenous languages noted that “language is recognized as an engine-room of human social behavior and cognitive development.” In a related opinion, Maimunatu (2004:25) noted that “the colonial education succeeded only in producing Europeanized Nigerians whose behaviour were at variance with the social and economic realities of our culture.” Junaid (2001) in Nwajiuba (2007:17) observed that “no meaningful and relevant education can be carried out unless it is formally rooted in the cultural milieu of the recipients.” The argument posited in this paper is not to eradicate the system of education as it is presently nor is it to do away with the English language totally. It is not entirely possible to do either of the above especially in this era of globalization. We have learnt a lot and there is still much to be gained from the western Education. The point however, is that, there should be a merging of the old system of education (as it was in the African Traditional Education) with the western education of today to bring about qualitative education. In other words, every society has its own way of training its youth to become relevant and responsible to the society. This system of training, African Traditional Education (ATE), was very effective in the past. It succeeded in training youths to be loyal, hardworking, honest, functional, upright, etc. It produced better products than we have now. In short, the educational aims of African traditional education as identified by Fafunwa (1974) had a wide curriculum for the realization of its objectives. It touched every aspect of human life, even though it did not include reading and writing. It provided the kind of training and discipline that prepared the African child effectively for a life in Africa. The training was carried out in the indigenous languages which is a part of culture and the results were positive, at least much better than what we have today. The argument then is that the curriculum or education generally as it is now should be made to incorporate aspects of the African traditional education while emphasizing the role and importance of the Nigerian indigenous languages as carriers of the Nigerian culture as a means of achieving qualitative and standard education in Nigeria. This should be the main focus in education in Nigeria today. It is obvious that education as it is presently has failed.

According to Osisioma (2009:13) “the graduates of our school system today are neither suited for the world of liberal arts, nor the world of Science and Technology. He is barely literate, highly in-educable and a terrible mismatch in the labor market.” He

further noted that our schools spend scarce resources and valuable manpower producing graduates that are either not needed by the system or poorly equipped to function in the system. The reason for this is not far-fetched. The present curriculum (education) has not been properly organized to incorporate salient features of the Nigerian culture, norms and values. Even if it has incorporated some of these features in its curriculum, they are downplayed in the course of execution. In other words, these features are not emphasized or given importance. Rather, we have a Europeanized curriculum that does not address the present needs of the Nigerian child living in Nigeria. Hence in most cases, after going through school, the next thing for the youths is to travel abroad if the opportunity presents itself because they have not been trained to live in the Nigerian environment. They hardly fit into the society. In Nigeria today, it is common to find a lot of people unemployed. In other words, they are not gainfully employed or self-employed. This affects both graduates and non-graduates alike. As noted by Nnamdi-Eruchalu (2009:57), there is still a high rate of unemployment in Nigeria which affects both the educated and uneducated. She observed that the unemployment rate is attributable to the fact that the curriculum does not offer courses that make an individual to be independent, rather, the courses they study make them unproductive on their own. As Okpara in Nwosu (1985:309) succinctly summarized, “their education has not trained them to rely on their capabilities and potentialities; they have not learnt to be self-confident, to take risks and to ask questions.” In the African traditional education, emphasis was laid on vocational skills which prepared youths to be self-reliant and self-productive. The overall purpose of the ATE curriculum was functionalism. It was emphasized such that after training, one did not remain idle or unemployed. You were trained to do something and automatically fitted into the society. Eke (2001:28) buttressed the importance of vocational skills education when he remarked that “Each graduate of our school system should have a survival vocational skill.” Vocational education equips the individual with special skills which prepared them to be self-reliant, self-employed and productive in the society in the absence of a white collar job.

In summary it is impossible to divorce language and culture from education, in this case, the indigenous languages. To re-direct the course of education in Nigeria, the indigenous languages and culture are the best tools for the re-engineering process and should be incorporated into the curriculum. It should be the core of the curriculum. Everything that made education successful in the past before the coming of western education should be incorporated into the western education for better results. In other worlds, we need to go back to our ‘roots’ to look for ways of improving the educational sector in Nigeria. As Dasylya (2007:7) succinctly puts it, “Africa in general and Nigeria in particular had an indigenous system of knowledge dissemination and acquisition before the contact with the west.” There is need therefore, to re-explore that indigenous system of knowledge dissemination and acquisition in the re-engineering process. It is noteworthy to mention that the contact with the west brought us the system of education we are practicing now, that is, the western system of education, and funny enough, these Westerners or Europeans as the case may be left our shores with our own system of education, ATE which emphasized functionalism, implementing it in their own country

which is now yielding positive results for them judging from the level of developments and globalization taking place in these countries. In these countries presently, their system of education emphasizes functionalism. They have incorporated everything the ATE stood for into their own system of education and left us with something that is not workable under the present circumstances. Indeed, re-engineering is absolutely necessary.

Conclusion

The impact of language and culture in education cannot be over emphasized. Education is believed to equip one with abilities to be self-reliant and self-productive. The type of education meted out in a society must be relevant to the needs of the society. In Nigeria today, the rate of unemployment is on the increase. There are no jobs to accommodate the output of graduates from the educational institutions that are being produced in their numbers every year. Some of these graduates are not equipped to function productively on their own even without a job talkless of a 'white collar' job. They lack skills that can help them survive without a job. Hence the essence of re-engineering education. Osisioma (2009:17) remarked that "the relevant institution of the 21st century must have an excellent curriculum based on the language, culture, tradition, norms and standards of the people even while retaining its international flavour and ambience." He succinctly emphasized the need for our educational system to learn how to address the peculiar problems of its own society in order to properly engender growth, development and genuine productivity.

In essence, the present educational goals in place are not working, neither are they producing results. Therefore, the need to re-engineer education arises and the indigenous Nigerian languages and culture are the best methods to be applied to achieve this feat.

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