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Education for Economic Efficiency and National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Education exists to provide as part of its functions, a conscious and continuous number of people with the requisite knowledge, skills dexterity and competence that are crucial for the economic and political development of a country. The general neglect of education sector over the years had led to a work force with poor generic skills; unable to turn the economy around which invariably, makes Nigeria to rely heavily on expatriate staff for its national development. Against this backdrop, the paper highlights the importance of educated citizenry to national development. The need to reconstruct the education sector away from its current plan-less state has been suggested which include among others, increased funding for the sector, improved supervision of activities in this sector and the need to convene a national education summit which will chart the way forward if education is to provide the necessary service that will engender Nigeria's national development.

Fifty one years after its independence, Nigeria is still grappling not just with establishing a united entity, but building/maintaining individual and institutional structure for its sustainable development. This arises because the country's investment in the education of the human resource by budgetary expenditure is far less than investment in physical goods (Arowolo 1983). This abysmal neglect of the educational sector had variously led to a workforce with poor generic skills; which invariably made the country rely heavily on expatriate staff for its developmental purposes. Oyo (1997)

Journal of Resourcefulness and Distinction, Volume 5 No. 1, April, 2013

posited that for Nigeria to attain sustainable National development, government needs to increase its investment in human capital using Education as a tool. Accordingly he further stated that attainment of sustainable national development is predicated upon the blending of an appreciable number of talented and skilled people to search for, discover and tap the nation's natural resources, mobilize capital and develop requisite and relevant technology for industrial production.

The Federal Government of Nigeria has over the years attached importance to Education Planning. After Nigeria's independent, many policy makers saw Education as an end in itself. The various levels of government, communities, religious organizations pursued primary, secondary and tertiary Education with vigour and awarded generous scholarships to deserving students (CBN, 2000). Such public concerns for education have reduced over the years. Education has increasingly become a private good in the purview of public policy. At virtually all levels, the private cost of Education is growing very fast. And the social relevance of education is depreciating quite fast. Nigeria's education sector has regrettably become the "Certificate factory" where the highest bidder gets the best.

Education implies helping people become aware of the dignity of life and developing potentials into abilities which may be used for self-improvement and for the benefit of others (Essia, 2004). For the individual, education builds and nurtures intelligence and awareness through learning. Stoddard (1943) as cited in Essia (2004) defined intelligence and awareness as the ability to undertake activities that are characterized by difficulty, complexity; abstractness; economy; adaptiveness to goal; social values; emergence of original; and to maintain such activities under conditions that demand a concentration of energy and resistance to emotional forces. Learning may be described as the ability to establish bench marks at any given time on the basis of accepted concepts and knowledge, and still hold oneself ready to revise, re-evaluate and re-formulate one's understanding as new findings emerge. Thus, for the individual, learning implies knowing present day thinking in certain areas of human activities as thorough as one can, and having the ability to apply the knowledge to appraise the suitability of existing beliefs and practices. Learning is therefore necessary for National Development.

Development as a concept is rather contentious in definition, while some may be tempted to equate it with Economic growth, others differ and believe that development embraces economic growth and the institutional changes. In its report on redistribution of wealth with growth cited in Nyong (2003), the world sees development both as a physical reality and a state of mind in which society through the combination of social, economic and institutional process secured the means of

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obtaining a better life. Goulet in Nyong (2003) identifies the three core values of development to include:

1. Self – esteem or sense of worth;
2. Self – respect, of not being used as a tool by others for their own ends; and
3. Freedom from servitude or to be able to choose. This involves emancipation from alienating material conditions of life and freedom from ignorance, misery, poverty and diseases.

The world conference of major (WCM)/administrative staff college of Nigeria (ASCON), (2011) reasoned that to some people, development means good condition of life, having plenty of money, making people to do their best or effort made to stop poverty. It also involves a high level of life expectancy, low infant mortality; high school enrolment, gender equality, democratic freedom, increased employment and concern for environmental degradation. Thus, national development could be seen as a pervasive trend, which involves the generality of people within a nation-state to create and re-create themselves and their life circumstances through careful planning to realize higher levels of civilization in line with their own choices and values (Agi in Duru, 2001). In specific terms national development implies growth in the nations in terms of unity, education, economic well being, mass participation in government, equality etc. (Ihjikira in Iheriohanma, 2003). By it liberation alignment, Education should promote brotherhood, release individual capacities and harness them into productive channels capable of enhancing social change, hence National Development

Amucheazi (1980) stated that at a time development was based on uni-dimensional approaches, which focused on one aspect of life at a time. At another time, emphasis was placed exclusively on the Economy, as they want a country to compete with the western industrialized nations in levels of economic attainment.

Okeem (1985) has also pointed out another approach to national development which focused on social transformation through Education. Proponents of this school of thought believed that mass education will eradicate illiteracy, which is regarded as the basic feature of under development and then provide not only an enlightened and well informed citizenry, but also high level skilled manpower – two features of developed nations. Oshagbeme (1985) stated that earlier conception of national development was focused primarily on the modernization of physical facilities. In his view, this approach to national development had to fail because as he argued “development is a state of mind” – This means that development involves the psychology of individual citizens who must, beside other things, be prepared to cope mentally with the use of sophisticated facilities (Edung, 2001).

Uni-dimensional conceptions of development appears out dated in modern times. What appears to be generally accepted is that national development is a multi-dimensional process involving the totality of man in his political, economic, psychological and social environment. Amucheazi (1980) and Obinaju (2006) viewed the concept of national development as a regularization of the means of living, which provides for adequate improvement on the previous ways of living, in response to contemporary exigencies of life with the full awareness of the need to act in ways and manners which would ensure continued existence and adequate comfort to succeeding generation. National development implicitly requires putting in place a system of enduring innovation to initiate a beneficiary process as well as maintenance of generation of valuable resource through consistent exploration. Olarinoye (1997) posited that, this is possible through the acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills by the citizens to enable them participate as effective citizens in exploiting and using environmental resources in a sustainable manner for themselves and generations to come.

National development is essentially a people oriented and ecology centered paradigm. It is not the presence of sky-scrapers nor mere physical rise of Gross domestic products (GDP) and per capita income. It relates to the growth in mental horizons of the population, reduction in ignorance, unemployment and underemployment. It is the ability of a nation to continually produce internally a very significant proportion of its basic needs Wey-Agbeyungi, 2003).

This description of what constitutes national development confirmed Ojo (1997)'s postulations when he asserted that national development refers to persistent quality improvement in economic and social life. It means empowering the population with skills that can be employed to exploit the resources of our environment to cater for the basic needs of the people. It includes the capacity to exercise reasonable control over nature, to make people free so that it eases labour and increases leisure or as some opinion put it, to make human beings free to develop their potentials. This therefore portends that for the attainment of national development, there must be an improvement in human resources through educative means.

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Education is essential for national development. This is particularly so because economists now realize that development in the broadest sense is to improve the quality of people's life. This realization takes modern Economy beyond the mere traditional focus on growth of Gross Domestic product (GDP). Thus, there is a broad agreement that national development should focus more on increasing the general well being of the people (Preston, 2004).

Economics do not however agree on the major factors that can promote national development. The general view is that firm-level productivity is a function of

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the fuller utilization of existing resources. Producing firms are therefore relied upon as the major source of the development impetus. Therefore, the role of human resources in national development is not debateable. Apart from the roles that labour and human capital can play, development also requires cutting-edge entrepreneurship, good managers and efficient technologists. Material resources would remain sterile or underutilized. Without these other forms of human resources. Enhancing people's capability to direct these creative potentials for national development, necessarily, requires balanced education. By balanced Education, Essia (2004) stated that it is the kind of education that provides sufficient enlightenment and exposure; to enable recipients discover and consciously develop their talents and creative abilities.

Education in this sense is for everybody; the young and old, the literate and illiterate, the able and disable, the government and governed. Said differently, equitable distribution of social wealth implies equal educational opportunities for all, just as self-sustaining national development requires a more educated population. Therefore on one hand, education is a major "dividend of development" which every Nigerian deserves, and on other, education is the most important requirement for further development.

Balanced education can eradicate poverty. The term poverty means many things to different people in different places. But suffice it to state that at the dept of poverty are ignorance, fear and lack of self confidence. Fear incapacitates the possibility of creating new things and education can greatly reduce these negative tendencies. Good governance, an aspect of national development is also easier to achieve with an educated population. Education promotes evolution of the "scientific mentality" in a society. Scientific mentality does not just accept traditions and received wisdom. It questions beliefs; asking what is the evidence? And how do we know what we believe? Once people begin to question traditional beliefs, change is inevitable, indeed a county is poor and unstable because its people lack technological knowledge and skills. Closing the gaps in knowledge is paramount (Stiglitz, 2009).

Economic efficiency means achieving the desired outcomes at the least possible cost. Economic theory stipulates a positive relationship between education, economic efficiency and the level of technological capabilities. Essia (2002) identified technological capabilities as intelligence transformed into technical skills and knowledge that can generate creativity and enhance the management of technological process. The learning process, which enhances technology accumulation, involves adaptation, commitment to goals and progression on the basis of past experiences. For Okwuosa (1976) in Essia (2004) technological capabilities increases the ability to make improvement or alterations in production patterns, processes or systems, or in designing and implementing policies and programmes. It can therefore be possessed or acquired by entrepreneurs, bankers, farmers, government functionaries and the general public. It

includes new knowledge (innovations) and the application of existing knowledge, either by introducing it from outside the economy or through its spread within the economy. The technological capabilities can therefore grow vertically, through improvement and innovation and horizontally through the expansion of its application or increased per capita knowledge distribution (Essia 2004). Man-power development through the use of balanced education describes the general process of equipping people with skills and knowledge that make them fit for employment in specific skills depending on the depth and content of their acquired knowledge and skills. At the point of engaging a worker on the job, it is the technology using skills and knowledge that the employer hires. Technology using skills, a product of functional education is no doubt necessary for economic efficiency, but is not sufficient; beyond technology using skills, functional education provides technology generating skills and knowledge which facilitate adaptation of new knowledge and promote innovative consciousness. Essia (2002) further posited that accumulation of technology-generating capabilities requires additional investment and setting of achievable educational goals. This is rooted in the realization that literacy levels and academic achievement determine individuals job attainment and earnings as well as the general economic wellbeing of the society.

Drawing from the research works of Hicks and Wheeler; Psacharopoulos (1994) reaffirmed the importance of education in promoting economic growth. He emphasized that the contribution is even stronger if the complementary relationship between education and other forms of investment are taken into account. Moreso, Psacharopolos and Woodhall (1995) taken from the works of Schultz and Denison (2000) in their method of measuring the contribution of education to economic growth found that a substantial proportion of the rate of growth of output in the united states was due to investment in education.

To achieve human capacity building for people's employment, training is essential. Local and international educational institutions, such as universities, polytechnics and management development institutions provide training and retraining for manpower resource development. Educational institutions help a nation to develop and increase its human resources capabilities through the inculcation of the relevant general and technical knowledge, skills and effectiveness to realize set goals efficiently (Obadan and Adubi 2008). The overall submission is clear; increased education of the labour force appears to explain substantial part of the growth of output. Lucas (1988); Mankiv, (1992); Grammy and Assane (1996) all stressed the role of human capital in the development process in their studies; their findings point to the fact that a highly literate labour force promotes faster growth. Ojo (1999) indicated that improved human beings will not complain about their education, health, food, housing and security, among other things. Therefore, the educated human beings are better producers who

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are, then, enabled to contribute to another round of human improvement in a kind of cumulative progress.

Modernization theory states that the greater the number of individuals exposed to modernizing institutions, the greater the level of individual modernity attained by the society. Once a critical segment of the population changes in this way, the pace of society modernization and economic development quickens. Thus, education through its effect on individual value and benefits sets into motion the necessary building blocks for a more productive work force which will engender sustained economic growth.

Conclusion

Education can play an important role in Nigeria's development if the entire sector is re-constructed away from its current planless state. Doing so would among other things, require considerations. First, the curriculum development is necessary for all levels of education-with focus on literacy, creativity and innovativeness. Education should serve primarily to awaken people to their natural endowments and equip recipients with the relevant knowledge and skills. At the early stage of education, it should not just be English Language, but also a number of other local and foreign languages. Over-specialization within the major academic discipline may make sense at the post graduate level; but certainly not all the undergraduate level. Every Nigerian should be given opportunity, and encouraged, to acquire basic knowledge of music, philosophy, Fine Arts, literature, history general sciences and at least one vocational trade (Essia, 2004).

Secondly, realistic goals would need to be set for all levels of education and all educational activities. The process of goal setting should be flexible to respond to the changing needs of the society. The mechanism of setting realistic goals for education should be wholly indigenous, when the right goals are set, and the strategies for achieving them are determined, the role of each player in the education sector would easily be determined.

Recommendations

The restructuring of Nigeria's education to enhance economic efficiency and national development requires that:

- (1) Education curriculum should be innovated to meet the reality of the demands for National Development.
- (2) Certain aspects of the existing bureaucracy in educational administration have to be dismantled completely while others may need some amendment.
- (3) Different levels of government and other stakeholders in the educational sector need to increase the funding of this sector for better results.

- (4) Educational monitoring bodies should improve on their supervisory approach and techniques for improved result in the sector.
- (5) There is need to convene a national summit on Education in Nigeria. Every Nigerian should be encouraged to debate, and contribute new ideas on how the sector could be re-organized and re-structured. Issues such as privatization of education, staff and student's ratios, scholarships, and rationalization of courses in schools would need to be addressed in a National Education summit. The summit should produce blue prints for the education sector.

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