



## Formal Education as a Panacea for Sustainable National Development: A Theoretical Discussion

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### Abstract

This newly minded article conceptualized a broad issue on education as the panacea for national development. Attempts were made to elucidate the concepts of education and development. The fundamental idea of education and national development was examined to ascertain the extent to which educational objectives can affect positively on global developmental challenges. An appraisal of education and development issues were considered. This paper observed that the present system of education in sub-Saharan Africa and its implementation cannot bring about the much talked about national development against the backdrop of political, economic, social and religious lives which differs considerably. The paper concludes that, educational objectives must articulate the important aspect of diversity in national development since no nation can achieve a true secular state without addressing the secularities in her educational development.

**Keywords:** Education, formal education, national development, Nigeria.

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### INTRODUCTION

Education is regarded by many (e.g. Aminigo, 2003; Nwagwu, 2004; Nwosu, 2010; Ololube & Egbezor, 2012) as the foundation for national social, economic, political and human development. It is an effective instrument of positive change in the society and a fundamental social institution for transmitting basic knowledge including values, norms, skills and culture to the younger ones in the society (Macious & Gerber, 2005). Ololube and Egbezor (2012) describes education as the process by which children, youths and adult learn abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive values to the society in which they live. For Nwosu, (2010) "education is a mobile treasure that travels with an individual throughout life." It enables one to grow and develop, so that he or she is empowered to achieve his or her aspirations. Education is therefore a valuable investment in the production of human capital resources of any nation.

Education is concerned with the process of building, training and developing the inborn potentials and capabilities of the individual learner so as to make him or her a useful member of society. It is a systematic process that influences people's knowledge, skills and attitudes and transmits and develops the cherished cultures, values,

skills and attitudes of the community. This development enables learners to become functional adults who will take care of themselves and their families and contribute to sustainable national development.

There are four basic types of education: indigenous, formal, informal and non-formal (Egbezor & Akanezi, 2008). The focus of this paper is on formal education with an emphasis on western or modern education. Formal education involves the training and development of a population's knowledge, skills, and character in a structured and certified programme that is delivered in a school setting. This type of education is a deliberate process by which the cultural heritage of a society is transmitted from generation to generation and through which that heritage is improved upon through scientific discovery. It is classroom-based and administered by qualified teachers and includes structured instruction, specialized personnel, physical structures, special instruments, curriculum and objectives. Generally, it refers to the structured system of schooling designed by the state for children and youth. In most countries, the formal education system is fully state-financed and operated. In some countries, the state allows and certifies private school systems to provide a comparable education alongside public institutions. Formal education includes elementary schools, secondary schools, and post-secondary schools (colleges, trades or technical schools, and universities) (Ololube, 2011; Ololube & Egbezor, 2012).

Throughout the twentieth century, many nation-states attempted to better provide for their citizens' needs through a set of programmatic provisions, including education. The extent to which nation-states were able to transform themselves into service states by providing programmes for well-balanced living became a hallmark of their modernity and the adequacy with which they sustained these provisions became a predictor of their political credibility and stability. This taking on of increased educational responsibilities brought with it a number of organisational shifts. Governments centralised the administration of schooling and introduced regulations and legislation for the management of schools, funding of schools, teacher training, provision of materials, and procedures for accounting for an institution's performance (Ololube, 2011).

The purpose of schooling (in whatever form) is often closely tied to personal, community and national economic development. Schooling as a public practice has invested heavily in producing increasingly knowledgeable and refined students. As such, the policies governing schooling have come to place considerable emphasis on acceptable descriptions of the nature of students, their needs, how they learn, what materials they learn from and how that might be assessed (Austin, Dwyer & Freebody, 2003). Schools have simultaneously assumed increased responsibility for providing students with technical skills, a sense of civic responsibility, new paths to personal development, mental and physical health, and cultural awareness (Ololube, 2011).

Here it is important to note that while education and schooling are related to each other, they are not reducible to each other. Education refers to the search for meaning in life whereas schooling refers to the political and historic realities that accompany the institutionalisation of learning so as to meet the changing demands of society. Schooling has a history and is about helping to create and maintain a workforce. Schooling is often about power relations and the ways in which schools filter, sort, and select students through testing and evaluation. Schooling is also about certification and credentialing students for various professions in society (Hudah, 2001).

Schooling refers to the totality of efforts put in place to help teachers to impart knowledge to learners, which transforms into skills, ability and professional development. The process of getting people schooled requires that they first attend schools. School is an intentional place established to assemble people for the purpose of education and training. Schools are located in all geographical areas and occupy a particular milieu backed by the laws of the society. Schools are about helping students grow and this growth may be obtained through a variety of approaches (Dillon, 2001). To describe this as having been accomplished means that the teachers and students are not simply acting out a predetermined script, but rather that they are attending to the immediate context of what has just been said, heard and understood in light of a taken-for-granted background understanding about society, how to interact, knowledge and learning. The hierarchical relationship between the categories of students and teachers is an aspect of schooling that neither teachers nor learners can ignore (Ololube, 2009).

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this paper is to survey how formal education has impacted national development, or its potential for driving national development. A secondary aim of this study is to evaluate education policies, implementation strategies and support services geared towards advancing national development. It can be assumed that formal education service delivery experiences are complex, and while research has been conducted in this regard, there remain some important gaps in the discussions of formal education service delivery aimed at national development. This study is significant as it attempts to fill a small part of this gap in the academic literature. Hypothetically, to give direction to this study, we looked at the extent to which formal schooling can be used in sustainable national development.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative research design. This type of design was used because it enabled the researchers to obtain and interpret information, and its meaning and the experiences contained therein, from a relatively broad perspective. In particular, materials that evaluated the role of formal education service delivery and its impact on national development were used. Such document materials are valuable sources of data about society. The documents used in a study included both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources generally take the form of government publications, and UNESCO and World Bank reports and publications that offer first-hand information on the theme of this article. Secondary sources include textbooks, journals, and reports of research carried out by other investigators and relevant to this topic. One of the reasons for choosing this approach stems from the fact that such textual sources are less likely to suffer from memory decay or memory distortion as compared to data obtained from an interview (Bowen, 2009).

In seeking out an array of materials, it was important to assess their validity and value to this research. To some extent such assessments are contingent on our agenda and approach (Pole & Lampard, 2002; Ololube, 2009; Bowen, 2005, 2009; Curry, Nembhard & Bradley, 2009). We did, however, validate all the materials used for this study with Scott's (in Ololube, 2009) overlapping validity criteria of authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning.

## **EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT**

The questions around education put forward by UNESCO in 2012 have led many to ponder the true importance of education and how we might better educate for a more sustainable future. These questions include:

- What if every person benefited from an education promoting development that is environmentally sound, socially equitable, culturally sensitive and economically just?
- What if learning was about knowledge and also about doing, being, interacting with others and changing the world?
- What if formal learning was enjoyable, hands-on and relevant to life outside school while addressing the problems of our world?
- What if every person benefited from genuine learning opportunities throughout life, in the workplace, and within the community?
- What if education systems prepared learners to enter the workforce as well as handle a crisis, be resilient, become responsible citizens, adapt to change, recognize and solve local problems with global roots, meet other cultures with respect, and create a peaceful and sustainable society?

Given these questions it seems evident that national and regional governments in sub-Saharan Africa must join hands in the great endeavour that is education for sustainable development. There is no doubt that the best way to enhance effective education in schools is through defined educational programmes, which are key to understanding the knowledge and skills required in teaching and learning (Ololube, 2005a, 2005b). Education helps citizens grow and develop, provides them with desired skills and professional abilities, assists them in acquiring the understandings, concepts, values and attitudes needed to manage future tasks, and shows them how to be productive members of the society. It is thus believed that with high-quality education programmes, it is possible to ensure the effective first-class teaching needed to raise students' academic achievements and foster further national development (Amedeker, 2005).

## **NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

In explaining the meaning of development, English language dictionaries often include phrases such as 'to cause to grow or expand' and "a new stage, event or situation". Development then is a noticeable movement out of a perceived stagnation. This could be backward movement (negative development) or forward movement (positive development). It is also a concept used to measure human comfort and satisfaction.

According to the Word Bank (2004), development can mean the actualization of an implicit potentiality, the simplest example being the patterned growth and maturation of a seed or an initial germ cell, or human person. It is a progressive unfolding of the potentialities of a given reality. As it applies to human, it is the integration of the various giving's, natural, physical, acquired and human of a people towards the full working out, permanently and cumulatively of their being, as persons of their nation and their real productivity (Uwadia, 2010).

For Amaele and Dumani (2011), development is synonymous with change. This change can be positive or negative. Militancy in the Niger Delta and Boko Haran, for example, are all developments in Nigeria's ongoing evolution as a nation. However, they posit development as the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values. This latter definition is particularly appropriate because it highlights the positive side of development which is the fundamental desire of any person or nation to strive to do better.

Development does not necessarily end with economic prosperity, but transcends this one indicator to include psychological, social, political and environmental change for the betterment and well-being of society (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2005). Development in this context is thought to be of the people, by the people and for the people. It is a multi-dimensional process that can involve the reorganization and orientation of the entire economic and social system. In addition to improvement in incomes and output, it can thus involve radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes.

In terms of national development, this is often development that can be realized through the transformation or transfer of technological ideas, institutions, attitudes, values and cultures to the underdeveloped nations. Supporting the above view, Okodudu (2007) opines that development occurs when technological change, either through the transformation or transfer among sectors, positively and spontaneously impacts national development. Aminigo (2003) argues that it is common knowledge that economic growth and development come through industrialization as industrial development itself means wealth, employment and lessening economic strife. For Obanya (2002) national development as seen from the human point of view simply means a state of well-being. And this state is not considered from the point of view of increase in quantity alone, but in a qualitative transformation of people's living conditions (Efemini, 2002). It is worth noting here that those countries that have attained a certain level of successes in their social, political and economic development are deemed to be developed nations while those who are still struggling are referred to as developing nations (World Bank, 2004).

Development as we understand it today often revolves around humans. Development thus pertains to any form of improvement in the living conditions of humans, be they social, economic, political, cultural or educational. Through the process of education, humans continue to mold and remold their own lives and the lives of others in their society. The Nigeria National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) captures this by stating that education shall continue to be highly prioritized in national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change; any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society must be preceded by an education revolution.

## **EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

No society can effectively transmit its values and aspiration without institutions of education. Amaele (2008) observes that "education, if adequately handled is the greatest legacy society leaves for the quality of mankind". Education as an instrument for sustainable national development is no longer a contestable fact. What should rather capture attention now is the type, methods, dynamics of education as well as making the goals of education instrumental to the changing context of national development (Ololube et al., 2012a).

The major aim of education is human capital development which, when systematically applied, translates into functional resources in the national development equations of a country. Education is an investment that equips the individual for proper understanding of important phenomena and fuller exploitation of human past experiences. It is in recognition of this fact that individuals who are properly educated are expected to function to address the challenges of society.

As a process of learning, UNESCO (2005) suggests that, "education helps in the provision of skills preparatory for youth economic, social and political empowerment". In this regard, education ensures the development of social stability and the production of new knowledge, and serves the complex interests of society. Accordingly, nations can progress in a sustainable direction if they embrace these values of education overtime. Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that defences of peace must be constructed. To my mind, education targets the minds of men. It is therefore an instrument for peace building, equity, progress and growth. Education opens up the minds of men towards the knowledge and appreciation of societal values and aspirations.

Education is central to solving the problem of poverty. It is an axiom that the provision of education and training in any nation is a tool for escaping from poverty to prosperity. Poverty in this paradigm includes the lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihood. Education and lifelong learning are prescriptions for solving the problem of poverty across the world.

According to estimates provided by the World Bank, in every region of the developing world the percentage of people living on less than \$1.25 a day declined from 2005 to 2008. This across-the-board reduction over a three-year monitoring cycle marks a first since the World Bank began monitoring extreme poverty (World Bank, 2012). Yet, in 2008 an estimated 1.29 billion people (or 22% of the population of the developing world) still lived on less

than \$1.25 a day. It is estimated that more than half of those living in extreme poverty reside sub-Saharan Africa. However, as Oloolube et al. (2012b) argues, educational development can go a long way towards reducing poverty and sustaining national and regional progress. Oloolube et al. (2012a) have described education as a catalyst for national unity; human capital development; cultural diversity and human rights; and empowering individuals to participate in global knowledge chains by expanding and improving access, capacity building and information sharing.

Across the world, education helps in the building of universal principles based on shared values, especially in multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. Culture, science and technology are all about knowledge which are shared and communicated through education. Education also exercises modernizing influences on the values, beliefs and cultural patterns of those who are still held back by their primitive values. In order for a society to become modern (that is to develop economically and socially) it must be composed of a modern population, in values, beliefs and behaviour patterns.

Education helps to clarify the concept of literate and illiterate societies. It also helps to clarify the status and position of both individuals and nations in line in terms of social, political and economic development based on educational attainment. The economic development of a society is ultimately dependent on the productive capabilities and capacities of its citizens. This in turn depends largely on the quantity and quality of relevant education provided.

More practically, education generates the human resources required for both development and sustainability. The economy influences education's character. Education systems are thus usually adapted to the demands of the society because they are expected to produce individuals with the requisite skills, values and competencies who will then work to advance their society.

## **EDUCATION AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Education and politics cannot be separated as formal education is both determined by, and a determinant of the political system. For example, the education system, which is operated by any society, is a reflection of the political ideology of that very society.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) suggests that a nation's policy on education is its government's acknowledgment that many national goals can be best achieved when education is explicitly used as a tool. As such, no policy on education can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and goals of the nation. Oloolube (2004) concurs, noting that "as is the state, so is the school and what you want in the state, you must put into the school". In contrast, Nwagwu (2002) opines that it may be impossible to exclude politicians and political influence from the policy making process in education since the education system is a public enterprise funded by government and not by politics.

## **WHAT THEN IS POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT?**

Political development is the way in which societies have governed themselves over a given period of time. For Oloolube (2011), it is the authoritative allocation of the values of society. Values here include the accepted beliefs (such as egalitarianism) and resources (such as education) of the society. Political development has to do with the distribution of stakes within the society or group over time. This means how jobs, money, prestige, power, ideas, status, and so on have been distributed and redistributed. Political development is the acquisition by a political system of a consciously sought and qualitatively new and enhanced political capacity as manifested in the successful institutionalization of new patterns of integration, regulating and containing the tensions and conflicts produced by increased differentiation. Integration in the above context refers to the extent to which society can create unity and solidarity among its members which will in turn help national identity to take precedence over group interest (Munck, 2010).

An educational system plays a unique role in the political socialization of any society. Oloolube (2011) argues that, "an educational system can be viewed as the master determinant of all aspects of change". For many, education can be a conserver of the political system and as well as a contributor to political development. Education serves as an agent for the political socialization of the young into the national political culture. Political socialization in schools is perhaps most noticeable in developing nations where patriotism and national unity are emphasized. Education equally functions to promote national unity and sustainable development by creating a fulcrum for the selection of elites in society as good leaders can help to bring about positive change. Education help to stabilize and sustain society through these important selection processes.

At the same time, education can also be an avenue for building national political integration against the wishes or aspirations of minority groups. The disconnect between formal education and the indigenous system of education is one of the continuous efforts by the state to break down certain local or regional identities. In Nigeria ethnic differences have been exaggerated and aggravated through colonial education. The Muslim northern part of the

country was considered (by Britain) to be inhabited by advanced communities while the southern part was seen as a land of primitive tribes.

It should be observed here that, the relationship between education and politics is a reciprocal one. Olorube (2011) argues that in many ways, the differences in education between capitalist and socialist regimes, developed and less developed countries, and rural and urban societies are due to the effects of the political system. This view is corroborated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) where it states that education is an instrument for national development, and to this end the formulation of ideas, idea integration for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education. Politics and education therefore cannot be separated if development must be achieved.

## **EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT – AN APPRAISAL**

Formally, education in Nigeria is considered the instrument for the attainment of national goals as expressed in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004): “a nation’s policy on education is a government’s way of realizing those parts of the national goals which are achieved using education as a tool”. These national goals are not separate from the nation’s cultures, heritage, religions, occupations, and attitudes that shape the lives of its citizens.

The federal and state governments of the federation place a high premium on education. Education is recognized as a weapon against ignorance, disease, poverty and also as a means of raising an enlightened society. The reaction of citizens to education (of the western type) varies from passion and insatiable thirst to difference and antipathy. This has contributed to divisions in the country, often along religious lines, with Christians on one side of this debate and Muslims on the other.

For some, the educational system has not been able to produce enough qualified people in the relevant disciplines to meet the needs of the labour market. This is not isolated from the inability of our educational system to positively harness the various factors which shapes our national lives as mentioned above. Of recent, there has also been an upsurge of activity from a group called Boko Haram. One of their main demands is to see that western type education is expunged from the educational curriculum of the northern part of Nigeria.

One of the significant questions that remains to be addressed is: what role(s) is education playing in our national lives? The focus of education now seems to be on liberal arts and the social sciences, to the detriment of adjustments that would develop the essential skills needed in growing industries and while preparing individuals to be self-reliant. Olorube (2009) decrying the educational system of Nigeria, argue that despite the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education to cater to both vocational and academic aspects of education at the secondary school level, little has actually been achieved in vocational skill development. One reason for this, according to Okorosaye-Orubite (2005), stems from the fact that while the 6-3-3-4 system is supposed to be all inclusive in the development of all talents, it has been implemented largely as a grammar school system. The present and resulting reality of considerable joblessness among graduates should force us back to the drawing board where we can reassess the goals and dynamics of education in light of its perceived failure to meet the social, economic, political and environmental needs of the citizens. Given these failures, it is unlikely that the present system will help to establish better human relationships, effective citizenship, or national unity. Unemployment is on the rise and the nation seems to be falling apart.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has attempted to appraise modern formal education’s contributions to national development. Based on the foregoing, it is possible to conclude that national development does not occur through good policies on paper alone, but also requires the proper implementation of well-articulated educational goals. Still, it is obvious that formal education has not been able to address some of today’s most important national issues. It is important that these issues find articulation in our education system. Further, it is imperative that Nigeria and its regional states continue to commit to a secular educational system if the much talked about national unity and consciousness is to be achieved.

This research has offered insight into how people think about and integrate education into their everyday and long term concerns, and into their ideas and attitudes towards national development. In this study we learned through literature that poor education is a hindrance to national development. The data/literature presented in this study has shown the hypothetical statement to be true, as the evidence presented suggests that formal schooling can be used for sustainable national development.

The question remains, why does education have such a strong hold national development? As the literature reviewed in this study suggests, all of the component parts of education feed into the desire and ability of a nation to pursue growth and development. The connections between education and national development inform us that it is not simply enough to build more schools; the state must also provide high quality education programmes. Part of the provision of such programmes includes acknowledging the personal challenges to educational attainment faced by much of the population: poverty, hunger, disease, insecurity, socio-economic, gender parity and political inequalities.

While education can help to overcome these challenges, an awareness of the very real limitations they pose must be part of the education programme development process.

We compiled this academic piece to inform education planners, education researchers, policy makers, and curriculum developers of the relationship and the advantages of taking an interactive approach to education. This research conceptualises the challenges and obstacles currently facing education in Nigeria and offers suggestions for overcoming or addressing these challenges. In writing this piece, we have attempted to portray multiple distinct perspectives on education and national developments. We adopted a qualitative approach to education and national development that truly captures the meaning and implication of each of these.

In closing, we trust that the academic community will find this piece of work a useful addition to existing literature on education and the need for improvements in education to ensure broader societal and national development. Stakeholders in education are responsible for developing a vision and strategy for the development of education, and mobilising support and cooperation from a wide range of actors to implement that vision and strategy. Education stakeholders in this paradigm include government ministries and non-governmental providers of education services who have influence over the amount of resources available to the sector. These stakeholders also include the teachers and school administrators who do the work of delivering education services, students and their families as the immediate beneficiaries of the services provided, and employers and the public at large who look to the education system to supply skilled labour and citizens who can contribute to enrich the country's economic, political, social and cultural life (Ololube, 2011).

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