

QUALITATIVE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN 21ST CENTURY AFRICA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract:

In the course of time, various civilizations have considered the value of education in promoting excellence in professionalism and driving societal development. In fact, it suffices to say any meaningful attempt at attaining excellence and national development begins with qualitative and value-oriented education. Education can only fulfill its aim if it is qualitative enough to meet the needs of the time and society. This paper analyses the need for qualitative education in Africa in order to promote excellence and development in the 21st century and beyond. This study adopted the qualitative research design. Data was derived from library materials. The study reveals that qualitative education involves not only the affective domain, which is value-oriented, but also the cognitive and psychomotor domains. The study found out that most African societies have lost touch with quality education owing to several factors including corruption, lack of personnel and political manipulations. This has led to moral laxity in all sectors of national life. The study recommends that African education should be channeled towards value reorientation in such areas as good character development, respect for elders, vocational skill acquisition, and promotion of cultural heritage of Africa, among others, so as to produce a well-ordered and proactive society that would excel and develop with the rest of the world. Africa's quest to become a progressive society can only be attained when there is adequate value reorientation through qualitative education, a type of education that adequately meets the needs of the time.

Key Words: Quality, Education, Africa, Development, Excellence

Introduction

The place of education in the advancement and development of societies has always been highlighted. This explains why education has always occupied a central position in almost all known civilizations of the world over the different epochs. Whatever conception a society has of education, there is always need for the quality of education to be enhanced in order to provide men and women who would excel in their different professions in life and create a meaningful society. This is because any significant effort towards attainment of excellence and national development begins with qualitative and value-oriented education. Such an education ought to be adapted to the mentality, traditions, occupations, aptitudes and general worldviews of those being educated. However, Enoh observes that “critics of the African system of education have tended to see it as a colonial inheritance, perpetuated by agents of imperialism, lacking quality and substance” (17). This entails that as a continent, Africa has copied systems of ideas and models from other countries, without realizing that

just as our problems differ from theirs, so must our solutions differ. In line with the above, it has become pertinent in the 21st century to reevaluate the system of education in Nigeria and other parts of Africa so as to raise the quality of education to a status that it can enhance excellence in the learners and trickle to societal development. This paper surmises that if education would become functional in Africa and foster excellence and development, then such an education must be made qualitative so as to become relevant to the developmental needs of the African society.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

Education as a concept, has been variously defined by different scholars. Because of the many definitions, owing to multiplicity of schools of thought in education, some scholars have rather resorted to defining education based on its etymology. But even its etymology has been contested today. For instance, Akpan and Ogabo aver that the word education is derived from the Latin word *educere* which means “to lead out of” or “to bring out” (3). This would mean to lead out or bring out of ignorance. Schofield on the other hand traces the etymology of education to *educare* which connotes to “form” or “train” (24). While one cannot uphold either of these etymological suppositions, it is apparent that both are windows through which a concise definition of education can be fashioned. It is from here, perhaps, that Farrant views education as “the process of learning to live as a useful and acceptable member of the community to which one belongs” (12). The implication of this definition is that there are certain things that must be learnt if one would become useful and excel in the community. From this functional definition, we can decipher that education is an instrument for personal change, but at the same time a developmental process which enables the individual to contribute to the wellbeing of the generality of the society through his/her social responsibility.

For the purpose of this paper, however, we shall adopt Fafunwa's definition of education. Fafunwa defined education in a way that has become classic for the contemporary African. For him, education is “the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he/she lives...it is a process of transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth, for disseminating knowledge either to ensure control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both” (17). Fafunwa's broad view of education includes both formal and informal education. In fact, for him, what we call formal education represents an insignificant fraction of all that we learn in life since a greater proportion of what we learn takes place outside the classroom. Fafunwa's definition best typifies education for excellence.

Education for excellence in the 21st century entails a good blend of both the formal and informal ideals of the society. If an increase in the number of formal educational institutions tantamount to the churning out of more educated people in Africa, why would the continent remain developmentally stagnant for so long a time rather than develop commensurately with the educated people produced? It is apt to reiterate here that any education that is worthwhile ought to equip one for life and living and create in the individual the ability to roaster and survive his/her environment. As Okolo beautifully states, “that education is dead which does not equip one with the necessary knowledge and skills to dominate one's environment” (49). Thus, true education which would produce the desired excellence and development in 21st century Africa is that model which is characteristically aimed at self-reliance – the

ability of the human being to think, decide, fend and act for himself/herself; one which is free from the dominion, whims and caprices of the Western model. Unfortunately, such an education has been a mirage in Africa due to the many challenges that bedevil the educational space. Some of these challenges are identified below.

Major Challenges of Education in Africa

Education in most parts of Africa has been riddled with challenges and crises of various dimensions. Some of these challenges are discussed below:

- Lack/Shortage of Skilled Personnel

There can be no meaningful education without the requisite personnel. The personnel factor is one of the most important factors in offering qualitative education in Nigeria and the rest of Africa. Unfortunately, probably due to red-tapism and other negative variables, some individuals who become teachers and educational administrators in Nigeria do not possess requisite training and qualification for the task. Due to the absence of proper scrutiny before the employment of teachers, our schools have now been littered with teachers who are incapable of teaching. People who have simply been employed because they lack jobs or who have the papers but not the brains; these in turn teach our young ones and those who are supposed to be the teachers of tomorrow, and because they have not been taught well, they themselves end up being unqualified teachers. And so the stream goes on. In the view of Akpagwu, many individuals who become educational administrators are frequently not sufficiently aware of the problems and methods of education (65). In Africa today, many teachers and educational administrators who did not receive formal training in Education or cognate fields, find themselves suddenly entrusted with the task of teaching and managing the educational system. Thus, such personnel can best be described as round pegs in square holes and this hampers the progress of educational attainment.

- Political Factor

Politics and governance have been core challenges in Africa since political independence of the various countries. Since political independence, education in Africa has been caught between the webs of different partisan political manipulations. Nwankwo asserts that “in Nigeria whether it is civilian or military regime, there is always a marked difference between the federal, state and local government policies and practices in education” (51). This has affected educational planning and implementation in no small measure. The dynamics of planning education only operates within the political ideological framework of the government in power without any due regard for the socio – economic realities of the day. To worsen the matter, there is lack of continuity of purposeful educational programmes. As soon as a different government ascends into power, it deviates totally from educational policies of previous administrations no matter how laudable and functional, and this has continued to hamper the growth of quality education.

- Lack of/Inadequate/Deteriorated Educational Resources

Inadequate human and material resources have become a major constraint to educational institutions at all levels in Nigeria. We find that most Governments and proprietors today pay very little or no attention to what is required to make our schools suitable places of learning. There is poor infrastructure and absence of the basic needs of a school such as laboratories, desks, books, classrooms, etc. Currently, many educational planning divisions of various educational levels are staffed with non-

educational planners. This impedes proper education planning and leads to ineffectiveness. In the few schools where educational plans are finally implemented there is dearth of professional teachers. The existing stocks of education personnel at all levels are poorly motivated and this leads to a high wave of brain drain. In most cases, class rooms, equipment, furniture and other instructional materials are either totally absent or very inadequate to promote affective teaching and learning. And even though there is over utilization of the few and grossly inadequate available physical facilities, yet they are poorly maintained. This has limited how far education in Nigeria can go in achieving its aspirations (52).

- **Population Surge**

The population of African countries has been witnessing very rapid rates of growth. Structurally, Nigeria's population is more in favour of young people. Due to the large number of school aged population, more education burden is placed on society in terms of providing teaching and learning inputs (human, material and time). Inability to cope with the explosion of learners in our school system has affected effective planning of education in Nigeria. The few infrastructures that are provided quickly bow to wear and tear due to over dependence and pressure on them. Thus, in most of our educational institutions today, one notices dilapidated structures and materials, which are yet highly insufficient for the exploding population.

- **Economic Crises**

Over the years, Africa has witnessed serious economic crises due to corruption and mismanagement. Today, one could surmise that the African economy is in serious distress. The economy that once was booming is now a shadow of its former self. The mono-oil based resource has been 'enthroned' in Nigeria leading to the neglect of other sectors of the economy like agriculture (Obanyan 22). This is worsened by the galloping inflation trend in Nigeria which eats up the little funds for education. With the resultant rise in the cost of education, mobilization strategies for more funds have not proved very impressive and successful hence the growing mismatch between education and economy; thus making effective planning of education inhibited. Even when very lofty plans are made, the resources to execute them are lacking. Thus, inspite of the many education edicts and policies (including the laudable National Policy on Education), little or no impact is often made.

- **Lack of Needs-Assessment in the Formulation of Policies**

Education is supposed to be configured to the peculiarities of a people. African Education as it has been practiced across time is public imposed. The plan is made by the government on behalf of the masses with the belief that "they" know the needs of the people. Needs assessment is rarely undertaken. According to policy makers, the public will always support any educational services being provided. This has proved otherwise. It is even worsened by the fact that those who plan are not the implementers. The people are not involved at the stage of planning hence there is a deficit of support when it comes to implementation. Any education that is not structured along the needs of the people is an aberration and cannot be said to be qualitative.

- **Vague Educational Objectives**

Every society whether simple or complex, believes Fafunwa, has its own system of training and educating its youth (18). In his opinion therefore, what was introduced to

Africans by the Europeans is mere schooling which despite its importance constitutes but a fraction of the total process of what is still being learnt. Thus, just as the West have their conceptions of education, so also do Africans and other groups. This means that quality education can only be evaluated in terms of how it meets the needs of any given society. The functional differentiation of educational planning and implementation has been ineffective. Normatively, the broad definition of educational objectives in Nigeria has been very vague. Apart from the fact that it is not based on systematic needs assessment, resources constraints at times are not taken into cognizance. Also there is poor integration of tiers of government in project planning, all resulting in ineffective educational systems.

- **Lack of Spirit of Hard Work among Growing Number of African Youth**

The standard of education in Africa has continued to drop due to laxity and apathy for learning by many students. The hard work that characterised education in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s has gradually dwindled, giving way to a crop of lazy and complacent students. Experts in the educational sector have identified examination malpractices with laxity and poor preparation of students for examinations and lack of self-confidence. Understandably, the rising costs of education (school fees, enrolment fees, cost of books and other materials) ordinarily prompts students and even their parents not to want to be held back by any form of deficit or failure in any of the required subjects. This forces them to go any length to ensure success. In some cases, some teachers at the secondary school level are involved by way of encouraging students to contribute money (cooperation fees) in order to secure the needed assistance during such examinations because they, the teachers are left with no other alternative considering the fact that they are aware of the inadequate preparation of their students as well as the lack of facilities to get them properly prepared before examination (Ogabo 63).

- **Lack of Moral Content in Education**

Education all over the world is usually expected to transmit what is worthwhile to both the individual and the larger society. It is, however, disappointing and disheartening to say that; the various levels of Nigeria's education system presently seem to have lost grip of a vital part of education which is the promotion of moral values. The laudable virtues of human feelings, honesty, sincerity, hard work, patriotism etc seem to have been lost. Presently in the Nigerian educational system, we continually witness all kinds of decadence from both the educational administrators, teachers, parents and pupils/students. The truth is that these constant moral decadences due to values decline affect the level of excellence and growth accruable from qualitative education. This is why Amaele rightly observed the many woes in Nigerian education by stating that:

The present system has drastically dropped in providing quality education, disciplined behaviour, hard work, creative and acquired skills, valuable and resourceful techniques, acceptance of leadership roles, mutual respect within and outside the school environment.... (120).

Suffice it to say that any educational system whose products exhibit these woes cannot be said to be qualitative in the true sense of the word, for it negates the principles of self-respect, integrity and humanness. It holds society hostage and makes everyone a slave of their own desires. In view of the foregoing facts, it has become pertinent to

reassess, redefine and restrategise the educational sector of Nigeria in order to reposition it for quality delivery and excellent attainment. The following steps are relevant for this quest.

Qualitative Education: Tool for Excellence and Development in 21st Century Africa

Obviously, qualitative education has clear characteristics and goals which make it unique and attractive to those for whom it is meant to serve. It is in line with this that Fafunwa appraises quality education as characterized by functionalism, social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, coupled with spiritual and moral values. Under this scheme, learners learn by doing. The aims of qualitative education would include:

- To develop the child's latent physical skills
- To develop character
- To inculcate respect for elders and those in positions of authority
- To develop intellectual skills
- To acquire specific vocational training and to develop healthy attitude towards honest labour
- To develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs, and
- To understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large (20).

According to Fafunwa, the common concerns of the curriculum of quality education in Africa would include: physical training, character development, respect for elders, intellectual training, vocational training, community participation and promotion of cultural heritage (27).

The importance of qualitative education can never be overemphasized. Onwuka (56-57) highlighted some of the value of quality education as follows:

1. It is through quality education that one develops a sound moral character for the benefit of the society. Apart from the training given to individuals on the home or family unit, educational institutions also teach or inculcate sound moral virtues. People are taught what is right or wrong, importance of obedience to parents, elders and constituted authority; love, kindness, hospitality, hard work, patience, tolerance, cooperation, etc.
2. Quality education develops national consciousness and political awareness in people. Through such education, individuals get information about the workings of the government, responsibilities and the limitations of government officials and right to vote and be voted for.
3. Quality education helps people to alter their ways of thinking and attitude to people, events and situations. For instance, through quality education people get to learn about good food habits, way of behaving and values of different ethnic groups in Nigeria. With better information, we change our attitudes and feelings towards others.

4. Quality education is the only gateway to excellence and a powerful instrument in the advancement of individual and national goals. No wonder, the Federal Republic of Nigeria in her National Policy on Education recognized it (education) “as an instrument per excellence for affecting national development”. In other words, to develop, Nigeria must imbibe quality education as a tool. Of course, we know that if education is properly planned and wisely directed, it becomes the key to success in achieving individual and national goals.

The Way Forward

In the light of the foregoing discourse, the following recommendations are necessary to reposition Nigeria's education sector for excellent performance:

- i. It has become expedient that a value based, value driven and value focused education should be the emphasis and Nigeria's greatest need in the face of moral laxity in every area of our national life. The need to put to a halt moral decadence (negative values) of individuals has become necessary and urgent. No matter how rich a man may be in other qualities and dispositions, if he lacks good character, he cannot be said to be educated. Corroborating the above position, Uduigwomen avers that “a man who has good social inter-personal relationship with other members of his community, who is economically fruitful (at least enough to cater for his immediate needs), who makes positive contributions to community decisions and policies, who discharges his social and political duties, is the truly educated person” (199).
- ii. There is need to restructure our mindsets and set our political system right. Apparently, the hope of a better Nigeria depends on the quality of education given to our future generations. This is because it is difficult to attain excellence and positive growth without human facilitator(s). We have to adopt values that could contribute to the proper functioning of our educational institutions at all levels.
- iii. Both Government and the private sectors should pull in more effort and resources towards the development of education at all levels. Schools should be properly staffed and equipped with the basic necessities for learning.
- iv. There should be moral education and re-orientation of teachers, parents and students on the need to discourage examination malpractice in schools. Students have to imbibe the spirit of hard work rather than engage in practices that jeopardise their academic attainment.
- v. Online registration being introduced for school examination enrolment, by some examination bodies and education managers should be encouraged; this will reduce the exploitative tendencies by some school heads.
- vi. More vocational and technical education centres should be established by governments and individuals to boost functional and technology-driven education. The few already existing technical schools should be properly equipped and staffed for optimum performance.
- vii. Qualitative and affordable education should be made available for all. Governments should take over payment of enrolment fees for both primary and secondary schools external examinations.

CONCLUSION

Education of one form or the other has been part of every society from earliest times. No society can rise above the quality of its education. This entails that for any society to develop integrally, the role of qualitative education cannot be neglected. The truth that education is the swiftest vehicle to societal development has remained a mirage to Africa due to the many challenges faced by the sector. There is therefore urgent need to carry out a re-orientation of the African mind towards education. Only such a re-orientation will bring the needed attitudinal/behavioural change, as well as catalyse, sustain and consolidate the desire for excellence and the developmental drive in Africa within this century. Education must be made wholistic, i.e. education of the head, the hand, the spirit and the mind. The onus therefore lies on all stakeholders in the African educational sector to re-structure their educational philosophies and curricular to depict the perceived needs and aspirations of the continent. This educational proposal represents a synthesis between formal and informal learning; continuity between the home and school; use of local resources in education; learner centredness of education; indigenization of the curriculum; and, restoration of African moral personality. Education should be life itself rather than a preparation for living; learning should be directly related to the interests of the child; the teacher's role is not only to direct but also to advice. Education which would bring about development ought to be configured to the needs and peculiar conditions of Africans.

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