

## EDUCATION AND SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT: THE QUALITY IMPERATIVE

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### ABSTRACT

Societal development is linked with socio-economic indices like economic growth, level of technology, industrialization, self sufficiency in food, healthcare system and good governance. This paper discusses the relationship between quality education and societal development. It looks at societal development as only possible through a sound and a qualitative education system at all levels. It opined that, quality education is the hub around which societal development revolves. The cycle of poverty, ignorance and disease can only be broken through a relevant quality education that addresses the needs of the society. The paper argue that good teaching, teacher trainings, effective supervisions, curriculum reviews, the provision of clear learning targets and entrepreneurial education is required for the stimulation of national economic and social development.

*Keywords:* Societal Development, Education, Poverty, Teaching.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The developed nations did not attain their levels of development by merely wishing it; their dreams and aspirations were actualized through a well thought out, planned and executed education system. The giant strides made by most Asian countries that are fast competing with the developed countries of Europe and North America had to work on the quality and relevance of their education system to ensure that it met their needs of science and technology. Nigeria's aspiration to become one of the developed countries of the world can only be actualized through a relevant, functional and quality education system.

Education is synonymous with the existence of human societies. It can be explained to mean the medium through which the society transmits its cultural heritage to its younger generations. The education of any society usually reflects its whole essence. This means that it encapsulates its philosophy and way of life. The education of any society involves the transmission of all knowledge that is deemed worthwhile.

Orobosa (2010) defined education as the process by which an individual acquires the many physical and social capabilities demanded by the society in which he or she has been born into. This definition also agrees with that of Schofield (1982) that defined education as a type of initiation into the culture of a society because the learner is being exposed to specific learning situations. The whole essence of education is to ensure the proper functioning and

survival of an individual in his society. Education enhances an individual's ability to impact positively on and improve his society. As pointed out by Orobosa (2010), education is to a nation what the mind is to the body. He likened a poor education system to what happens when a diseased mind is handicapped in the co-ordination and direction of bodily activities.

Education therefore performs a most significant complex social function of the control of tools for societal development. Recognizing the role of education to the individual and society at large Dienye (2004) noted that education involved the deliberate efforts on the part of the educator in developing the personality of the child and to prepare him for membership of his society.

The meaning and function of education is aptly captured by Ukeje (1986:8) when he concluded thus

Education is power. It is a process of acquiring knowledge and ideas that shape and condition man's attitudes, actions and achievements, it is a process of developing the child's contributions in social reforms; it is the process of mastering the laws of nature and for utilizing them effectively for the welfare of the individual and for social reconstruction; it is the art of utilizing knowledge for a complete living.

## 2. SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT EXPLAINED

Development can be explained to mean different things depending on the subject matter of discourse. Development as defined by Nwabueze (1995) is a progressive unfolding of the potentialities of a given reality. It has to do with the integration of the various givings, natural and physical acquired by people towards the full working out, permanently and cumulatively of the being as persons of their nations and their real productivity. Development can also be seen as a positive improvement in the overall lifestyle and circumstances of the citizens of a society. This is usually measured in socio-economic terms using indices such as economic growth, industrialization, level of technology, healthcare system, self-sufficiency in food and good governance.

Societal development can also be seen as "the process by which people recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilizations in accordance with their own choices and values" (Ake 2001:125). He maintained that development is something members of society have to do by themselves. He however pointed out that it can also be facilitated through the help of others. Members of society are the end agents and means of development.

## 3. THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY AND QUALITY EDUCATION

The complexity of the concept of quality has lent it to different interpretations, some of which are complicated. However, Akinpelu (2001) interpreted quality to mean the defining essence of anything, that characteristic which made an object what it is without which the thing in question will not be said to be what it is. He likened the absence of that essence to salt which has lost its characteristic taste. He also pointed out that quality can be interpreted as the degree of relative worth of a thing. The worth of anything is dependent on its efficiency and utility. Quality can also be viewed as defined by the American heritage dictionary (1996) cited

in the web as “an inherent distinguishing characteristic, a degree or grade of experience. Quality has to do with what is acceptable and unacceptable.

The concept of quality can also be applied to education in the areas of relevance, efficiency, and essence. Akinpelu (2001) explained the quality of education as essence to mean that the products of an education system must be the best example of those who can be regarded as educated in their cultures and who should be generally seen as the best of humanity. He is of the opinion that if the recipients of an education system are ignorant of the norms and all that their society stands for, then there is something wrong with the education system.

The quality of an education system becomes suspect when its recipients cannot perform efficiently in society. A quality education should enhance the capability of its recipients to improve and bring about positive improvement in their societies. Ability effectively efficiently and perform the duties that are required to function in society as well as add value by improving it, is the hallmark of quality education.

Quality can be looked at from the perspective of Boon in Briggs (2010) as a high degree of excellence. Quality education should be reflected in students’ progress as well as teachers’ performance in terms of meeting or exceeding appropriate standards. Appropriate standards here have to do with objectives that will reflect in acquisition of skills, values and attitudes agreed upon by policy makers and educationists.

Quality education fulfills the needs and expectations of members of a society. Inability to fulfill the expectations of a society leads to a suspicion of the quality of that education system. This could result looking outside that system for quality education.

#### Quality of Education and Societal Development

There is an upsurge of fundamental and rapid change in contemporary society. This requires that a nation like Nigeria must strive to fit into the present and project itself into the future. Ability to cope with this climate of change depends on the education system which is the driving force of society. The definition of education as the bedrock through which development acquires its meaning Ibekwe (2000) lends credence to the fact that education is a vital force in societal development. If education is what refines humankind by developing their lives meaningfully, productively, responsibly in society, then every society needs the best quality education that can guarantee a complete emancipation of humankind. It confers members of society with the ability to make positive changes in society.

Quality education for societal development as noted by (Briggs 2010:7) “encompasses teaching and learning of knowledge, proper product and technical competency. It also focuses on the cultivation of skills, trades or professions as well as mental, moral and aesthetic development”.

There can be no development without quality education. It is a pre-requisite for sustainable development. The Nigerian society can develop to the extent her citizens aspire if the education system is powerful enough. This power comes with the quality of education offered by the government. If the education system is powerful enough for its recipients to be functional members of the society then societal development is assured.

Society has vested the educational institution with the responsibility of moulding the ideas, habits and attitudes of learners so as to produce well balanced personalities that are physically strong, mentally alert, emotionally stable, culturally sound and socially efficient.

Ezewu in Dienye (2004) noted that it is in realization of the importance of education in the development of the society that Nigeria prescribed several goals it wanted education to fulfill at different levels. Education was expected to perform the following roles at the primary school level:-

- Make every Nigerian child literate
  - Develop in every Nigerian child a scientific attitude so as to be able to play his role in a technologically developing society
  - Prepare him to adapt easily to changing Nigerian society
  - That education should develop the Nigerian physically, emotionally and intellectually.
- Dienye (2004).

These expectations of the society from the Nigerian education system only mean that only a well planned education system that is both relevant and functional can result in the development of the Nigerian society. The role of quality education in societal development cannot be downplayed. It is in recognition of its importance that Oyedepo (2011) described quality education as the foundation of the great transformation of every nation. He noted that it is quality education that ensures the right type of leaders and the promotion of the right type of values which ensures the right kind of graduates. He was positive that the right types of graduates are what Nigeria needs to bring about the right type of changes she desperately needs today.

Quality education is fundamental to societal development. A society that is intellectually bankrupt will automatically become socially, economically and politically bankrupt which means no development. To ensure societal development, Nigeria has to make a long term investment in education to ensure quality for a guaranteed future.

Alabi (2003) in his research for enhancing quality education pointed out that quality education is an essential ingredient for societal development and the greatest legacy any nation can bequeath to her citizens. He advocated the need for collaborative efforts among the different groups of personnel within the education system to achieve quality education.

Education can only result in societal development if it is the type that can translate theoretical findings into usable forms which will impact on the development of the communities in which they live. This refers to a pragmatic type of education which is used for the development of the Nigerian society. It is only quality education that can guarantee this usefulness to society.

Explaining the relationship between quality education and societal development Nwangwu (2007) drew attention to the fact that what children learn, retain and practice after leaving school has a direct impact on the competencies and skills of the society. This means that what learners learn formally and informally determine their ability to contribute to societal development.

Aghenta (2006) noted that trained personnel bring about national development. This means that the quality of education received by the citizens of a nation determines the level of development of that nation.

#### 4. ACHIEVING QUALITY EDUCATION FOR SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT

Quality education is indispensable in a society that needs to break the cycle of poverty, ignorance and disease. It is an integral part of the social, political, economical and prosperity of all societies. Societal development can only be realised if policy makers match their words with positive actions. A society whose education system is in shambles cannot expect any reasonable level of development when policy makers pay lip service to issues that border on improving the education system, development will continue to be a mirage.

Briggs (2010) noted with dismay the massive rot at all levels of the nation's education. He asserted that a situation where students learn under trees without seats leaves much to be desired. He pointed out that the little successes recorded are found among the few well equipped expensive with qualified and dedicated teachers. In his words "in all educational levels there are no commensurate resources to provide for a quality education system to work.

The issue of government reluctance to adequately fund the education sector shows lack of commitment on the part of the government to ensure quality education. Recent World Bank report on the funding of the sector by the federal government revealed gross irregularities as (World Bank's, 2008) shows that even though funding increased N30.6 billion in 1999 to N205.2 billion in 2007 expenditures on education was rather on the decline. Increase in funding never translated into a commensurate improvement in the provision of needed infrastructure, facilities and equipment needed to improve the sector.

Effective teaching and adequate teacher training at all levels of the education system is very crucial in the achievement of quality education and development. The school is an important agency of education needed to bring about a positive and desirable modification in behavior of learners in a more systematic way, the quality of teaching must be very good to yield desired results. A high quality education is required to adequately prepare pupils for adult life roles. What this translates to is a type of education that is functional. Effective teaching in this case means what Zeilberger (1961) referred to as teachers striving to develop the intellectual abilities of the child rather than force feeding with facts that are easily forgotten. He described these facts forced on learners as foreign substances without any connection to the child's life. He rather advocated the use of functional instruction which will enable the learner gain thinking habits and develop the technical means needed for them. He pointed out that this would enhance their ability in solving practical problems.

Obanya (2003) explained Zelberger's idea of functional education to mean that education should inculcate specific skills. These functional skills acquired from education are to enable learners to understand life situations, adapting to it and contributing to its development.

He further explained that functional education in basic literacy programmes has to do with the application of reading and writing skills to solve day to day problems, which includes the improvement of one's living conditions. For persons with disabilities, a functional education should equip the learner with the skills that will enable him overcome the disabilities while in vocational education it should inculcate appropriate skills to fill the labour market.

A functional education should imbue the learner with skills that will lead to the consolidation of scientific behaviour. In teacher training, a quality education should be functional to the extent that it equips the teachers with the appropriate aptitudes and abilities needed to promote learning and bring out the best in learners. Functional education as an integral part of quality education is focused on helping learners acquire the skills with which to function meaningfully in society thereby contributing to societal development.

For education to contribute to societal development, the type of education offered the citizenry must be relevant to the needs of that society. The system should be such that a level of autonomy is allowed. Autonomy here means a situation whereby individuals have the ability to judge, act and think accurately as well as rationally.

The development of the society depends on the extent to which education can be an instrument for identifying personal, social goals and objectives. Its relevance is usually determined by its level of efficiency and effectiveness in accomplishing set goals. The relevance of an education system to the needs of society determines the extent of development of that society for as Akinpelu (2001) asserted, education without quality is more dangerous than no education at all.

Policy makers must be made by educationists and all stakeholders to realize that quality in education cannot be compromised if Nigeria will meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The mass exodus of Nigeria to look for quality education outside Nigeria is a sad development which puts a question sign of the quality of higher education system.

One of the national goals of Nigerian education apply the importance of education for the development of a sustainable economy when it stated that “acquisition of appropriate skills and development of the mental, physical, social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society” (FRN 2004:8). Ochuba (2008) pointed out that the goals of education can only be achieved through a well articulated and effectively coordinated school system. He posited that the development of quality human capital depends greatly on effective checks and balances in the education industry through regular supervision and inspection of schools.

The issue of qualification, integrity and attitude to work and research has to be adequately addressed. Ivowi (2005) advocated sufficient exposure of academic staff in tertiary institutions to internal seminars, conferences, courses and exchange programmes to enable them get acquainted with new techniques, practices and knowledge. This he said would ensure the sustainability of the system and quality output. There is also the need to ensure a higher ratio of professors and senior non academic staff who support the engineering workshop and laboratories. All these will ensure quality education at the tertiary level.

Achieving societal development through quality education is also dependent on how ready the government is in addressing the issue of facilities at all levels of the education system. At the secondary school level there is the need for more classrooms to reduce the number of students per classroom for effective teaching and learning. Libraries, laboratories and workshops should be provided and expanded to enhance learning.

Equipments and tools need to be updated and maintained at the tertiary level to ensure quality learning and skills acquisition. Teaching and learning facilities like textbooks, PowerPoint presentation facilities and a public address system need to be adequately provided to enhance learning.

The issue of discipline among academic staff has to be adequately addressed. Cases of poor attitude to work affect the quality of output. A system where lecturers still dictate notes to students without discussion and explanation leaves much to be desired. A complete commitment on the part of the academic staff will reduce cases of forcing students to buy handouts without making contact with them for proper intellectual interactions. Learners need to consolidate what they have read and broaden their knowledge through discussions and practical sessions. Both staff and learners need to always update their techniques in ICT. Academic staff should be so computer driven that they know the best search engines and websites to direct students for further knowledge. Quality assurance at all levels of education is necessary ingredient for the development of the society. Policy makers must as a matter of urgency ensure that all agencies responsible for ensuring standards and benchmarks for maintaining quality in education live up to expectations. The Nigerian University Commission NUC, National Board of Technical Education and the National Commission for Colleges of Education must ensure proper implementation of programmes to maintain quality of delivery and output.

Citizenship and entrepreneurial education should if properly monitored and implemented to ensure development of the individual as well as manpower. Adapting innovations in programmes and teacher education for developing countries to suit the peculiarities of Nigeria would ensure quality education which will impact positively on society.

## 5. CONCLUSION

For society to develop, a lot of overhauling is needed within the educational system to achieve quality education. There is the need for an examination of how social forces combine with philosophies of education to shape a society's education purpose. An examination of how and why Nigeria's education goals and objectives were formulated. Issues like the major themes of recent policy reports on education need to be examined. The goals of education must be re-examined to see how they translate into curriculum and teaching.

As suggested by Ornstein and Levine (2006), current changes in the society, knowledge, beliefs about the nature of learners should determine the goals of teachers.

Modifications in prevailing philosophies and theories should be determined by changes in social forces which include society in general, development in science and technology, new methods of processing and storing information. It also includes organizing and defining fields of study like new theories of the learning process.

Society will develop if education policy makers embrace a positive and proactive attitude towards planning. Arbitrary, unplanned and uncoordinated expansions in the education sector especially recently in the tertiary sector should be avoided if quality education is to be achieved. The alarm raised by the executive secretary of the National Universities Commission (NUC) Professor Julius Okojie that most of the private universities are manned by half baked lecturers lends credence to the fact that quality education and development cannot result from arbitrary establishment of universities without proper planning. Private universities are to be monitored for proper accreditation.

A quality education should start by laying a good foundation at the primary level for what Obanya (2003:29) referred to as “lifelong functional education” this he explained, involves ensuring the functionality of literacy and numeracy inculcating the life skills of manipulative reasoning, social and knowledge application and instilling a love for learning and continuous self improvement. It also includes ensuring an intensive adult literacy programme and a highly diversified secondary school system that satisfies the diverse needs of students.

A common core programme at the junior secondary level with a senior secondary system that takes care of the needs of different groups of students through streaming will ensure quality secondary education. Quality involves a higher education that is development oriented. This requires eliminating what Obanya (2003) refers to as narrow and premature specialization. Development will evolve from a higher education system that is committed to the “inculcation of such core skills as verbal and quantitative reasoning, information technology fluency, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills and broadening the scope of general knowledge (reach out to the world of work including the world of self-employment) to breath fresh air into the curriculum” Obanya (2003:30).

Teacher training must be given a better boost to ensure quality output. Teachers must be trained for effective teaching which involves more guiding than telling. A system with a high level of unqualified teachers cannot guarantee development. Nigerians cannot leave the education sector to the government alone. Quality education is a collective effort of all stakeholders.

Briggs (2010:14) advocates have begun to think in terms of producing “enthusiastic highly motivated and more importantly, highly competent teachers and school administrators.”

To correct the poor literacy level of our students at all levels of education and achieve the level of success the past mission schools and some good private schools in the public schools requires what (Premji 2005) refers to as “learning guarantee”. This concept goes beyond what government is doing about education or the quantity and quality of teachers. He explained learning guarantee as involving the pedagogical processes in the classroom teachers' understanding of what competencies that are to be developed among students. It also involves the classroom practices that bring the best out of children in a manner that is less threatening and most exciting. It has to do with the school creating competitive spirit in children's learning. He also added that learning guarantee an active intervention between teachers and parents which exerts enough pressure that results to better learning in school. Learning guarantee is a social and a high quality management process. It ensures the accountability of every stakeholder that has the capability to influence learning and education. A healthy and elaborate interaction between parents and teachers ensures learning guarantee.

Making schools accountable to parents, communities and neighbourhoods instead of bureaucrats can ensure quality education for development. This means breaking the barriers between schools and society. Getting parents and local communities actively involved in the generation and development of educational programmes.

A strong and active Parents Teachers Association PTA ensures teacher effectiveness. The business of maintaining set standard is better handled by parents who work with teachers than a faceless administrative body like the school board.



The role of the formal and non-formal sectors of the economy in the development and running of education programmes cannot be downplayed. Inadequate funding has been the bane of the Nigerian education system. Ensuring both sectors of the economy in the business of education will ensure adequate funding and viability of the sector. The content and orientation of academic programmes should reflect changes and innovations in society especially in the areas of societal needs.

Periodic education review summits involving all levels of education as well as all personnel in the education industry are important in achieving quality education for development. Tertiary education is the bedrock of research and development. A periodic review of the curriculum at this level is very crucial for quality education and development. The issues of teachers' professional moral must be looked into. A situation where the government pays lip service to every agreement reached with teachers is unfortunate. A demoralized teacher cannot give his best.

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