

A Philosophical Exploration of Education and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study focused on a philosophical exploration of education and poverty reduction in Nigeria. In the discourse, the concept of philosophy, education and poverty were explicated in order to have a clear understanding of their relationship. Related issues in the discourse include: the theoretical basis of education as well as the theoretical framework of society. With this insight, the paper discussed how education can contribute to poverty reduction and by so doing; the paper established the standard for measuring poverty reduction. The study noted that influencing factors on human behaviour and development which can influence poverty reduction include rationality, self-reliance, attitudes, and societal values to mention but a few. It was on these bases that the challenges to poverty reduction were highlighted. These challenges include: wrong value system, poor attitude to work and poor funding of education. The paper concluded that education policy makers should try to resolve the differences between individual and societal values and should explore the value basis of educational philosophy that direct and guide meaningful human actions. This can help to reduce poverty drastically. The paper recommended among others that our educational system should aim at making citizens economically more relevant and that the background of students should be broadened as a means of providing the tools to work them out of poverty.

Keywords: Educational values, Philosophy, Trained Manpower, Self-Reliant and Poverty Reduction

Introduction

Poverty is a multi-dimensional concept covering both income and non-income variables such as education, health, access to social services, vulnerability, social exclusion and access to social capital. According to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2020) Report, more than 8.8% of the world population is living below the international poverty rate of less than \$1.90 a day. Majority of these people are living in sub-Sahara Africa, South-Asia and Latin America. Consequent on the long shadows of poverty on the world population and society, the United Nations adopted the Global poverty

plan in 2015. This action plan has been described as the most comprehensive and audacious poverty reduction plan the world has embarked upon. This plan covered a wide range of issues such as gender inequality, unclean water, child malnutrition, improper sanitation, poor health and well-being, inequalities in education, economies, energy, justice and sustainability. The global poverty reduction plan was targeted at ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity; meet the needs of the present without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It also aimed at eliminating extreme poverty by the year, 2030. This approach is not bound by cultures, conditions or continents.

Although, efforts to eliminate inequality and extreme poverty in the world have gradually lowered poverty rates in many low- and middle-income countries in South Asia and Latin America and in some parts of Sub-Sahara Africa, the poverty reduction plan is not on track to hit the target of ending extreme poverty by 2030. The covid-19 pandemic has drastically slowed the reduction of poverty across the world. As observed by Dewey in Okere (2018), who said that:

I believe that all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consequences of the race". This process begins unconsciously atleast at birth, and is continually shaping the individual's powers, saturating his consciousness, forming his habits, training his ideas and arousing his feelings and emotions. Through this unconscious education, the individual gradually comes to share in the intellectual and moral resources which humanity has succeeded in getting together.

Given the above scenario, the role of education in socio-economic development and political emancipation of the citizenry cannot be over emphasized. This paper therefore, examines how education can be used as an instrument of political mobilization and socio-economic liberation in the global campaign against poverty reduction in general and Nigeria in particular.

Explication of the concept of Education

Etymologically, the word education is coined from two Latin words: educare- which means 'to bring up' "to rear", 'to guide' 'to direct". It means that education becomes the process of bringing up children by the adults of the society; and educere which means to "draw out" "to lead out" "to rise up", "to bring up" (Kanu, 2018). Agu (2011) collaborated the above when she noted that education is the influence by the adult generation on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its objective is to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded by the political society as a whole and the social milieu for which he is specifically destined. The implication is that, education is for socialization and the focus is on the transmission of values, norms, skills and ideals of society which takes place from the adult to the young. Amaele and Okere (2016) said that

education activities and processes anchor on the production of acceptable, self-reliant, dependable, effective and efficient citizens. A quality education is one that addresses the basic needs of man within his given environment.

Concept of Poverty

Poverty has various meanings and dimensions. Poverty simply put refers to the low level of per capita income of a country. In economic literature, this low level of per capita income is the main cause of underdevelopment. Stanley (2005) defines an underdeveloped country as one “characterized by mass poverty which is chronic and not the result of some temporary misfortune and by obsolete methods of production and social organization; which means that the poverty is not entirely due to poor natural resources and hence could presumably be lessened by methods already proved in other countries.

Poverty Profile in Nigeria

Poverty poses challenges to the nation’s quest for development. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2019) Report, Nigeria has been witnessing low per capita income which until recently hovered around the US\$300 bracket. Recent indication of a new trend in the nation’s per capita income of US\$1000 was rather based on a simple calculation derived from a population figure of 140million to a net foreign reserve of US\$14 billion. The report also shows that forty percentage of the population live below poverty line of \$381.75 per year, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of 2.3%, Gross Domestic Product GDP per capita of \$5,280 while GDP by sector shows: agricultural-21.96%, industry-23.65% and services-54.39%; consumer price index-16.0, country population-206.140 million. The report equally shows high share of informal employment in the rural agricultural sector with widespread income reduction in rural and urban household.

Despite the observed nominal increase in the nation’s per capita income, the nation is still characterized as one of the leading nations of the world with the highest level of poverty in terms of both income and non-income derivatives. Non income poverty indicators, such as life expectancy at birth, maternal mortality rate, as well as child mortality rate are still all high in Nigeria relative to other West African countries. Accessibility to health and education services remains very low, and in most cases, non-available. The Nigerian government has been unable to utilize the funds so obtained from the sale of crude oil and from foreign loans to satisfactorily improve the lives of its citizens and to develop the economy properly.

Relationship between Education and Poverty in Nigeria

Nigerian education has failed to solve the basic issues of unemployment, illiteracy, poverty and diseases in Nigeria. The dysfunctional nature of education system in Nigeria can be noticed in terms of decayed infrastructure and ill-prepared graduates that roam the streets without any means of livelihood. The education system is irrelevant to the needs and aspirations of individuals and the nation at large. Describing the dysfunctional nature of Nigerian education,

Mezieobi and Mezieobi (2016:141) stated among others as follows:

- No philosophy of education very relevant to the diverse Nigerian citizens;
- Preponderating examination malpractice system;
- Poor quality graduates;
- Deterioration of the physical environment of schools in Nigeria.

These factors are responsible for the seemingly lethargic nature and poor quality education in Nigeria. In support of Mezieobi, Emenogu in Okere (2018) contends that education in Nigeria since 1960, has been experiencing a lot of turbulence and seems not to have achieved the desired goal. He added that the prevalence of examination malpractice, immorality and general indiscipline in the Nigerian society are part of the moral decay of Nigerian education. Also, Amaele (2010) collaborates with the above view when he opined that there is collapse of discipline not only in the educational institutions, but also in parental authority and domestic values. The resultant effect of the poor nature of Nigerian education is widespread poverty, unemployment, low income and poor spending patterns amongst most Nigerians.

The Nigerian government has adopted several measures to contend with the poor quality education and widespread poverty besetting Nigerians through her educational system. The escalating nature of these problems necessitated the adoption of economic reform measures by the Federal government of Nigeria. These measures were the micro and macroeconomic reform policies. Adimmadu (2006) captured the policies as follows: laying a solid foundation for a self-reliant economy, attainment of higher levels of self-sufficiency in the production of food and other raw materials, and enhancing the level of socio-political awareness of the people. These policies translated into completion of on-going projects in the health sector, urban and rural water scheme and education and environmental protection. Also, there were improvements in basic infrastructure including roads, mass transportation, power generation and the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Economic growth measures were focused on the macro and microeconomic policies to ensure rapid growth of the economy and create income generating opportunities for the

poor. However, these measures were unable to satisfactorily ensure the amelioration of poverty and poverty-related issues without strong philosophical and ideological bases in education. This urgent need for a sound philosophy of education becomes imperative.

Philosophy and Goals of Nigerian Education

Goals of education are determined by the educational philosophy prevailing at a particular point in time. It can therefore, be said that philosophy of education aims at putting in place, policies that are geared towards making education for a given society worthwhile. Education is not just a process by which an individual acquires literacy and numeracy or proficiency in a profession but the totality of experiences that enable the individual to live a full and meaningful life within the human society:

Nigeria's philosophy of education is hinged on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system. (FRN, 2014)

At the upper basic education level that is, (JSS 1-3), the educational objectives are to:

- a. Provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship and educational advancement;
- b. Develop patriotic young people equipped to contribute to social development and the performance of their civic-responsibilities;
- c. Inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of independent thinking and who appreciate dignity of labour and;
- d. Inspire national consciousness and harmonious co-existence irrespective of differences in endowments, religion, colour, ethnic and socio-economic background;
- e. Equip students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology.

The policy guidelines for the implementation of the nine-year basic education curriculum states inter-alia that:

The curriculum of the junior secondary school should be revised so as to give suitable educational opportunities both to those for whom junior secondary education will become terminal and for those who will proceed to senior secondary education.

Implicit in the policy is the concept of curriculum development derived from the local environment which can produce analytic minded individuals who will use their experience to bring about national unity and integration. Nwana in Mezieobi (2016) remarks that “the

curriculum of junior secondary school is designed to produce people... who can do things for themselves and employ themselves all in an effort to defeat the idea that government should continue to be the major employer of labour. From the foregoing, education combined with socio-economic and vocational training within the framework of development will satisfy the basic needs of the masses of Nigerians. By such educational integration, the Nigerian society will seek to achieve two major objectives that is;

- (a) It will seek to enhance economic development and cater for the cultural and social needs of the Nigerian communities;
- (b) It will make possible for learners to participate actively in the life of society to change society from within and towards better living.

Strategies for Youth Empowerment in Relation to Poverty Reduction

Education strategies aimed at empowering the youths and the Nigerian populace for poverty reduction include a wide range of facilities, incentives, abilities, knowledge, skills and competencies at the disposal of youths and the general public that will enable them to make informed decisions, take actions on prevailing issues aimed at bringing changes capable of improving present and future welfare of their lives and the lives of others. Education is a powerful instrument for socio-economic and political transformation of any society. The Nigerian government uses education as an instrument “par excellence” for achieving a number of socio-economic, political and cultural developments of the nation. Education empowers a person to utilize his/her potentials for personal, collective and national benefits. It is seen as a powerful instrument for the enhancement of growth and development. It boosts and builds the capacity of members of society for sustainable growth and development. The National Policy on Education (NPE) professes a functional literacy dimension to educational attainments in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Federal government has also taken steps to realize this objective by embarking on the revision and restriction of school curriculum at the appropriate level. Gardner in Alabekee (2010) in emphasizing the role of the school in acquisition of relevant skills noted that:

We cannot speak of our values apart from the down to earth programmes that are necessary to put them into effect. For example, if we believe in individual dignity and responsibility, then we must do the necessary sometimes expensive, often complicated things that will make it possible for each person to have a decent job... We must provide the kind of education that will enable him to hold a job, the kind of work training necessary to prepare him for specific lines of work.

To this effect, the Nigerian government adopted the 6-3-3-4 system of education in (1982) with its emphasis on skill acquisition, growth of the economy and national development. It means that science and technological subjects have to be taught in the secondary school for

technological development to take place. Technological development refers to a nation's capacity to utilize the products of science and technology to meet her needs. It means that the country will not rely heavily on foreign goods and services but will have the capacity to produce most of her needs internally. Technology is a critical factor in human development. The objectives of technology education include:

1. To provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce particularly at the sub-professional grades;
2. To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for the agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development;
3. To give training and impart the necessary skills leading to the production of Craftsmen, technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant.

Despite the above measures, Nigerian education system is still facing a lot of challenges as discussed below.

Problems of Nigerian Education in Relation to Poverty Reduction

Poverty reduction is saddled with a lot of challenges which include:

- *Colonial Education Heritage:* Colonial education offered literary studies at the expense of technical education. The aim was not the production of technically-oriented manpower. The educational system at the secondary and tertiary levels sought to produce administrators who could assist the colonial government in governing Nigeria. At the tertiary level, the 4Rs, reading, writing, arithmetic and religion preponderated; while at the secondary level, the arts subjects took the upper hand and very little was done to advance the cause of technical education (Mkpa in Okere, 2018)
- *Wrong value system:* Value systems dictate and influence a person's way of behaviour. Mezieobi (2016) points out that values dictate and influence a person's ideas, beliefs, actions, convictions and behavioural dispositions.
- *Poor attitude to work:* Poor attitude to work affects people especially in public services. The poor attitude is noticed in lateness to work, disobedience to rules and regulations, non-challant and carefree attitude over jobs.
- *Scarcity of competent technical instructors.* Technical instructors required to provide training for the skilled technicians in post-secondary institutions are lacking. Sessay in Okere (2018) avers that efforts at implementing the technical education of our National Policy on Education continue to be thwarted by the scarcity of

competent teachers in this area that is, teachers who can effectively combine theory and practice in their subject area.

- *Population explosion.* High population growth rate is responsible for per capita agricultural and food output decline. This poses a heavy burden on the country's foreign exchange resources. Thus, the poor performance of the agricultural sector is a major constraint on the sluggish economic growth of many less developed countries (LDCS).
- *Poor funding of science and technological Institutions.* The Universities, the polytechnics and research institutes are places for research and development. Unfortunately, these institutions are poorly funded; a factor militating against the productivity of these centers. And so far as this problem of poor funding persists, so long shall expectations of development through the centers remain elusive.
- *Policy inconsistencies and changes:* Lack of continuity in projects and programmes of government between the outgoing and incoming government had been responsible for failures on the part of poverty reduction.
- *Inadequate planning statistics:* Divergence between data and information gathering and available statistics makes planning difficult. Efficient decision-making relies on available, accurate and timely statistics in both public and private life. Nigeria's economic planning has often been linked to projected data rather than accurate data.

These envisaged problems call for urgent attention.

Education and Poverty Reduction

Pragmatic educators opine that the aims of education are the cultivation of a dynamic and adaptable minds which are resourceful and enterprising in all situations; one which is powerful enough to create values in an unknown future. Growth or development of the child is the aim of education and that all the aims of education must be concerned with the present and the future subject to modifications. The Nigerian government uses education to deal with the problems of under-development and poverty. Education involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies and their utilization for the development of the individual and for his contribution to the society in which he lives. Educational activities deal with teaching as a vital tool to achieve its purpose. Teaching can simply be referred to as a deliberate and conscious effort on the part of the teacher to bring about learning in the students. Teaching as an activity aims at transmitting knowledge, ideas, skills, information into the learners for their own development and for contribution to the society in which they belong. Iroegbu in Irabor (2020) opines that knowledge given in teaching has three basic functions namely; information, formation and reformation. Information in the area of ideas

and facts are used to achieve some goals. It is formation because the ideas and facts constitute the mental and personality structure of the recipient while the reformatory function helps to change the already formed manner and behaviour of the individual.

Education is a value laden enterprise. It deals with three significant aspects of philosophy namely: metaphysics, epistemology and axiology. Metaphysics is concerned with questions and issues relating to the ultimate nature of reality. It can be classified into four: ontology aspect of metaphysics deals with the study of being and existence. Cosmology deals with the study of the nature of the universe while theology deals with the study of the supreme being (God) and anthropology deals with the study of human beings (Knight, 2006).

According to Iroegbu in Irabor (2020):

Metaphysics is thinking, reflection, critique, into the inner depths of things. You need a mind to do that and only individuals have minds to think. Only individuals can do metaphysics. A community cannot. It may appropriate the thoughts of given individuals as a common heritage. But the thinking is individually originated. So is metaphysics only individually done.

Metaphysics is therefore, central to education. The educational programme of the school should be based upon facts and reality rather than fancy or imagination. Educational activities should concentrate on the nature and potentials of students. Dewey in Okere, (2018) opines that human beings are social and biological. This idea was collaborated by Rousseau and Pestalozzi in Okere (2018) who believed and thought that the function of philosophy should be to guide people by coordinating the concepts and findings of science in the exploration of nature. In their view, man should be seen as a highly developed biological organism, innately imbued with survival potentials which need to be developed through a process of adjustment with the environment. This metaphysical belief about the individual lends credence to Rousseau's philosophy of human goodness which needs to be sharpened through the educational process.

Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge. Epistemology helps educators to understand how knowledge is constructed, validated and acquired enabling them to create more effective and meaningful learning experiences. This allows educators to be more intentional in their teaching and the students themselves can become aware of their own learning process and personal development. Moreso, curriculum developers, teachers and instructors can teach and impart valuable and useful knowledge to the learner. This can help to foster critical thinking and a deeper understanding of educational issues and problems.

Axiology is the theory of values and ethics. Values determine the choices and decision we make as human beings. Education is a value enterprise and educational values are major subsets of human existence because they guide our actions and decisions. If we base our

choices and preferences on good and societal value systems, there would be progress and development in human society. Okere, (2018), believes that if individuals learn appropriate behaviour, attitudes, societal values, skills and competences, they would be useful to them, parents, government, and can contribute to the development of society. He asserts that value education helps students to grasp certain underlying principles and the ability to apply these rules intelligently, and to have the settled disposition to do so. It means that values education is to be able to think morally, to feel the right kind of emotion, and to act accordingly. The Nigerian education system recognizes the following values; respect for the worth and dignity of the individual; faith in man's ability to make rational decisions; shared responsibility for the common good of society; promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children; and acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance. (FRN, 2014:8).

The Nigerian education system is well positioned in policy formulations and programmes to ensure that poverty and the related concepts such as low income, weakened linkages to opportunities and decline in social services delivery are tackled. The educational system inculcates into the learners the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes, habits and understanding in order to be self-reliant and contribute to the development of the Nigerian economy. From the Universal Basic Education (UBE) to the secondary education and up to the tertiary level of education, efforts are being made to provide the learners with skills and the necessary competence for creating jobs and encouraging income generation.

Education equips different kinds of learners with diverse forms of knowledge, skills and understanding to produce various goods and services for human consumption and for employment generation and income creation. Increase in a nation's stock of manpower resources and natural resources endowments are pre-requisites for reducing poverty and boosting the country's export earnings. As captured in the national objectives, education in Nigeria is geared towards achieving a united, strong and self-reliant nation. According to Nwosu (2013), education is the vehicle for economic self-sufficiency, political stability and social well-being. Nwosu stated that, to be self-reliant is to be able to harness and use her own resources effectively for the betterment of the lives of the people. Justice and egalitarianism are also advocated as a national objective. A just society guarantees the equality of all persons before the law and egalitarianism refers to equal opportunities of citizens for personal development and fair method of distribution and acquisition of available resources. Justice and egalitarianism are overlapping values. They are procedural values for sharing national resources, for the reconciliation of divergent interests and for securing harmony and peace among conflicting interests and interest groups (Akinpelu, 2005). This philosophy has implication for quality education. Quality education is one that can easily provide dependable and self-reliant citizens for societal growth and development.

Amaele (2016) summarily puts qualitative education. As good, relevant education achieved through diligent learning and research which produces sound and useful knowledge and creative skills for production and development...for it is characterized by the admixture of the elements of culture, morality, manners, arts, science, technology, application of knowledge, creativity, valuable skills, and positive personal values. For Nwosu, (2013), education should aim at the following:

- Providing men and women with minimum of skills necessary for taking up their place in the society and to seek further knowledge;
- Providing the citizenry with vocational training necessary for self-support;
- Inculcating in people the desire for reasoning coherently and providing the skill of critical thinking;
- Training of people to appreciate the cultural and moral achievements of mankind.

These aims are consistent with the aims of Nigerian education and are geared towards poverty reduction as contained in the National policy on education. It is in these capacities that education can really serve as an instrument for poverty reduction. The injection of the right caliber of manpower resources into the nation's economy is a sine qua-non for poverty reduction. Manpower resources such as technologists, scientists, agriculturists, engineers, economic planners among others are responsible for producing goods and services, and for creating jobs and boosting income generation. Education functions as an instrument of innovations and inventions, creativity, resourcefulness and imaginative abilities of learners are enhanced as they go through the various educational programmes. The objective of education is to give the learner knowledge of himself, his fellows and his environment. And since he cannot live except as a member of a social group, the aim of education is simultaneously to help him become a better member of the community. Education enables Nigerians to work themselves out of poverty and thus be able to place themselves on the right path in the search for national identity. This calls for an educational provision geared towards development.

Conclusion

When values are imbibed by the learners in the educational system, it leads to social harmony and societal stability. The school is an institution of society that undertakes the job of educating the children, transmission of values, skills, competencies, attitudes, ideas and philosophies of society. Education imparts to the pupils, the basic skills which will enable them perform the specific role which the society has assigned to them-intellectually, morally, socially, emotionally, to mention but a few. Knowledge acquired in education must fulfill the aspirations of society in such areas as economic, social, political, and cultural

aspects of life. Education is a value laden enterprise. Educational aims must be flexible to meet the dynamism of education and socio-economic development of Nigerian populace. This requires development of creativity in the individual; the promotion of vocational skills and efficiency for individual productivity and self-reliance and the development of critical and reflective thinking. Educational policy formulation should try to resolve the differences between private or individual and public or social values in education before formulating its educational philosophy. Also, educational administrators and policy-makers must be exploring the value basis of their activities because it is values that direct and guide meaningful human actions of which education is perhaps the best example.

Recommendations

If education in Nigeria must continue to cope with the problem of poverty and its related challenges, its objectives must be constantly kept in mind. These objectives include:

- * There is need for sound and quality education that can cater for the intellectual and manual skills for the work force. The critical skills are needed in information and communication technologies (ICTS), computer and applied equipment.
- * Attitudinal changes. Transparency and integrity, strong, positive ethical behaviour/principle of life such as sense of responsibility, respect for laws and regulations, dignity of labour, love for work, and the desire to be productive should be cultivated among Nigerians.
- * Education should aim at making citizens economically more efficient;
- * Education must endeavour to develop in the citizens a sense of responsibility and a knowledge of how to make personal adjustments to home life, family relationship and community relations;
- * Education should aim at supplementing and broadening the educational background of citizens as a means of providing the tools to work themselves out of poverty;
- * Education must set its clientele on a sound footing for the attainment of personal and community fulfillment in a bid to reduce poverty;

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