

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AS A PRIMARY TOOL FOR NATION BUILDING

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Abstract

This paper focused on the various contributions of education to nation building. The challenges facing the development and quality of education in Nigeria were also raised and discussed succinctly. These include among other things the politicization of education, the use of education as instrument of social control, and gender issues. Solutions to the aforementioned challenges were proffered as to expedite actions aimed at nation building in Nigeria. Thus, government and all those charged with the responsibility of education should stop politicizing it. The funding of education should be improved upon so as to enhance the availability of facilities. Education stakeholders should frequently enlighten parents on the dangers of relegating the education of the girl-child and so on.

Keywords: Education, Roles, Nation Building.

Introduction

In the words of Shakespeare, "A little learning is a dangerous thing". For the late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, "We seek education to enable us discover facts, and to be objective in analyzing social situations, balancing possible factors, collating these into acceptable theses, and formulating logical premises before arriving at conclusions which could be regarded as fair and reasonable". For the late Kenule Saro-Wiwa, "Education is what creates the man and places him in a particular cultural milieu". He went further, for a child is born without culture, it is education which enables him to acquire the learning, values and skills of his society. To Gbamana (1991), it is a process of changing the behavior patterns of people. Behavior in this sense means the way we will change the learner in his thinking, his feelings and his overt actions. In effecting these changes in the individual, education has the primary task of:

1. Preserving and transmitting the cultural heritage of the young: This means that the good things in the culture must be inherited. Being inherited, they must be maintained and passed on to the younger generation.
2. Transforming the cultural heritage: Education must assist the learner to participate in the cultural heritage that has been preserved. But as new needs arise, giving cause for change in the culture, the learner should be able to transform the culture or effect meaningful changes in the culture that will form a framework for the new life.

3. **Developing the individual:** As the individual plays his part in preserving, transmitting, and transforming the culture, his potentials as an individual should be evident in himself and the society. He should be able to acquire knowledge and skills to enable him contribute meaningfully to the solution of problems, and providing for the needs of the society.

It is the appreciation of all these that nations of the world hold many expectations for their educational systems including that of helping her build her nation. They expect that, schools will produce the labour force for their man power requirements, the leadership for their bureaucracies, and the citizenry for an enlightened social order.

Nation building has to do with the implementation of processes that are geared towards recomposing the nation's institutions so that they can reflect the wishes, needs and aspirations of the wider society. The concept of nation building emerged as a response to a growing concern about human society's impact on the natural environment. It was defined in 1987 by the Brundtland Commission (formerly World Commission on Environment) as the implantation of processes that are geared towards recomposing the nation's institutions so that they can reflect the wishes, needs and aspirations of the wider society without recomposing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This definition acknowledges that, while nation building may be necessary to meet human needs and improve the quality of life, it must happen without depleting the capacity of the natural environment to meet their present and future needs. The nation building movement has grown and campaigned on the basis that building a nation protects both the interest of future generations and the earth's capacity to regenerate.

At first, it emphasized the environment in development policies but since 2002, it has evolved to encompass social justice and the fight against poverty as key principles of nation building.

The theme of this year's conference, "Education and National Integration in Nigeria" is apt and timely as the nation is on the verge of disintegration – resulting from the incessant insecurity challenges perpetuated by the Boko Haram sect and the overheating of the polity by politicians against 2015 General Election. This paper therefore, is an attempt to see how we can use education to build this great nation of ours, hence, the role of education in nation building.

Education and Nation Building

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004:8), emphasized that education is the most important instrument of change. Any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any nation has to be preceded by an educational revolution. From the sociological perspective, school (education) being the engine room of the society is seen as a miniature society; it is a place where formal socialization takes place. Emile Durkheim, a prominent French sociologist also maintains that education is crucial to the sustenance of a complex society e.g. Nigeria. He posits that, education helps individuals to sublimate mechanical solidarity, hence interdependence and peaceful coexistence.

The school therefore, transmits and perpetuates the culture (knowledge, skills, norms and values) of society. It inculcates a common culture by emphasizing the teaching of a national language, ethnic, tribal, and religious tolerance, and respect for national symbols. Besides, it prepares the pre-human infants for effective membership of his society. In fact, school education is the bedrock of every civilized society. A civilized society is a peaceful

society. An uncivilized society is a chaotic society, vulnerable to poverty, violence, corruption, and ethno-religious tolerance. As such, any leader that abandons the development of the educational sector is ultimately leading his people as well as himself into perpetual darkness.

A synthesis of the above therefore, reveals that education is the pathway to any nation building enterprise. Good quality education is an essential tool for achieving nation-building in a nation. This was emphasized at the UN World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002 where the reorientation of current education systems was outlined as key to nation building. Education for nation building promotes the development of the knowledge, skills, understanding, values and action required for creating a sustainable world which ensures environmental protection and conservation, promotes social equity and encourages economic stability. The concept of nation building developed largely from environmental education which has sought to develop the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behavior in people to care for their environment. The aim of education and nation building is to enable people make decisions and carry out actions to improve the quality of life without compromising the planet. It also aims to integrate the values inherent in nation building into all aspects and levels of nation building. Education and nation building also address poverty alleviation, citizenship, peace, ethics, democracy and governance, justice, human rights, gender equality, corporate responsibility in local and global contexts, management and biological diversity. It is generally accepted that certain characteristics are important for the implementation of education and nation building (END), reflecting the importance of both the learning process and outcomes of education process (adopted from 'UN Decade of nation building' UNESCO Nairobi Cluster 2006), ENB should:

1. Be embedded in the curriculum in an interdisciplinary and holistic manner, allowing for a whole institution approach to policy making.
2. Share the values and principles that underpin nation building.
3. Promote critical thinking, problem solving and action, all of which develop confidence in addressing the challenges of nation building.
4. Employ a variety of educational methods, such as literature, art, drama, and debate to illustrate the processes.
5. Allow learners to participate in decision making on the design and content of educational programmes.
6. Address local as well as global issues and avoid jargon-ridden language and terms.
7. Look to the future, ensuring that the content has a long-term perspective and uses medium and long-term planning.

Factors that Engender Nation Building

The process of nation-building takes a long period of time. Ikoku, in Nzewunwa and Okoh (2001) maintains that nation building calls for repeated sacrifices over a long period of time. A long period of patience is required by everyone involved, leaders as well as followers for nation building. These points are succinct and are therefore listed here in abridged form viz:

1. The presence of common values, beliefs and attitudes among the people.
2. A capable group of rulers who are able to overcome all issues that may cause division.

3. Individuals and groups accepting decisions with which they may otherwise disagree. This means the will to live together by the people constituting the populace.
4. Economic well-being, which enables individuals and groups to have a satisfying standard of life and health.
5. Centripetal nationalism – where a group of people believe strongly in their ability to live together for a common reason, they can build a single political community of enormous significance.

What role does education play in nation building?

The saying is true that, no country can rise above the level of its educational system, and no system of education can rise above the level of the quality of its teachers. We get out of a system as much as we put into it, and what we put into it is simply what we have (Fafunwa in Dienye, 1998).

The above statement affirms the important role education plays in the life of a nation. No wonder nations of the world spend so much to build – up its educational sector, realizing that no amount of development can be achieved without this all-important sector since it inculcates the knowledge, attitude and skills that will help build the nation. On the whole, education plays the following roles:

1. Education recreates an enlightened society. This is a crucial prerequisite to nation building because the more a people become enlightened, the more they would refrain from engaging in activities that will endanger nation-building efforts. For example, educated elites will always tend to be responsive and responsible citizens. By this, I mean they obey state laws and properties. Without this, no nation-building efforts will be set in earnest.
2. Nation building requires a meritocratic bureaucracy in order to make the state's institutions effective. Therefore, with education the country will have the best human resources that are competent enough to carry out the day-to-day affairs of the state. Most states collapse as a result of a low-level of education because of the human institutions. No nation rises above its quality of education.
3. Nation-building requires a democratic society that allows the contribution of all – rich or poor. With education, there will always be an increase in democratic participation. This participation will in turn enhance nation-building initiative because the participation of all the citizens is counted in nation building.
4. Education is very crucial in the information of cross-cutting cleavages that embraces diversity. Accepting differences therefore, it is very important to nation building because until we accept our differences and come together to build the nation, progress will never be made, but with quality education, this fear can be allayed.
5. Education creates a large middle-class (professionals, teachers, doctors, technicians etc). This class is very important to nation building because they provide the necessary expertise that is needed to build a nation. This is the major reason why emphasis has been laid on education because an educated society is always a strong society and a society that is set for development.

Obstacles to the Development of Education in Nigeria

Even at present, there are challenges to the development of education in Nigeria, which equally inhibit efforts aimed at nation building. Amongst them are: the use of education

as an instrument of social control by the state, the politicization of education by the government, gender issues, to mention but a few.

1. Education as an instrument of social control by the state:

Ake, in Dienye (1998:6) opines that states have educational systems not just for the benefits of the citizens but to facilitate social control. A situation where the government tightly controls the setting up of educational institutions, decides who heads them, what their curriculum should be, how many people should be admitted and for what purpose, what subjects/courses are relevant and what not, constitute a problem to genuine educational development hence, affects nation building.

2. The Politicization of Education by the Government:

The increase in the number of institutions of learning is not necessarily based on the realities of need and expedience. We have simply as a nation increased and multiplied our educational institutions basically and simply to suit our political whims and caprices (Emenyonu, in Dienye 1998:93). The politicization of education by government has also manifested in the incessant strike actions witnessed everywhere by ASUU, NASU, ASSUP, among others. This invariably, does not augur well with a genuine nation-building effort which education is a potent tool.

3. Gender Issues:

Gender is a socially constructed role expectation and behaviours attributed to members of a society because of being masculine or feminine. Numerous reports have shown that irrespective of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights on education, politics, and law and so on, there is still a great imbalance between male and female children in terms of access to quality education, which is a requisite for peaceful coexistence. In most cases, the girl-child is the disadvantaged due to economic hardship, religious and socio-cultural practices. This is earnestly a great form of social injustice to the girl-child and a threat to peaceful coexistence. If both boys and girls are given equal access to quality education, it helps to foster collaboration among the entire citizenry. Besides, girls are future mothers. Their presence in the family and the quality of education they receive, help to enhance better family upbringing and forestalls the grooming of socially maladjusted children. This is because a maladjusted individual is a maladjusted nation.

Recommendations:

If education is to help us build the nation called Nigeria, the following should be adhered to:

1. Government and all those charged with the responsibility of education should stop politicizing it.
2. The funding of education should be improved so as to improve infrastructural facilities.
3. Education stakeholders should frequently enlighten parents on the dangers of relegating the education of the girl-child.
4. Teachers who are the interpreters of the curriculum should not only be tolerated but should be respected so as to help build the nation.
5. Issues of training and retraining of teachers should be given prominence at all levels of the education system.
6. Curriculum which is the main instrument of teaching and learning should be made flexible to accommodate emergent issues in the society.

Conclusion:

Building a nation requires the efforts of all and sundry. It is a journey worth undertaking, and this journey cannot be fruitful without the education, which inculcates the right type of knowledge, attitude and skills. With education, professionals are nurtured in a way that will enhance nation building. In the same vein, education leads to efficient utilization of a nation's resources. This indeed is evident in the developed nations. To continue to build their nation, they educate their citizens because education shapes the attitudes, behaviors and values of citizens. These are qualities that are needed for nation-building and it is only education that can bring these mechanics into fruition.

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