

EDUCATION AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR ACCESS AND QUALITY EDUCATION AT ALL LEVELS OF NIGERIA EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

Nigeria is a country that is blessed with human and natural resources but still wallowing in the seam of development. Sociological theories are they which expressly explain the scenario surrounding education and the applicability of theories to substantiate teaching and learning of education across the nation's divides. Essentially, sociological theories are probable assumptions about phenomena that had been tested, proofed and applied to the various circumstances as its impact on the educational sector. This paper adopted critical theory in sociology propounded by Herbert Markus which focuses on social philosophy of the society, culture and educational development. Nigeria educational system is at the threshold of critical condition where insecurity, insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, thurgery, sexual harassment and examination malpractice are common. Despite all this unpalatable situations, education to is still recognised as a veritable instruments of liberation from squalor, ignorance, diseases and shackles of oppressions. Hence, each society strives to see that citizens, have access to quality education at all levels capable of triggering development in all strata of the society. Primary sources of data was used to collect information from ministry of education, historical achieves, journals, news papers and relevant text books. The paper recommended that proper funding of education, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, and sound ethical principles and discipline will go a long way to nip in the bud corruption and embezzlement of peoples commonwealth

invested in education. The paper concludes that all stakeholders in education should invest in education, provide access and quality education that will make the products employable in the labour markets.

Key words: Sociology, Theory, Education, Access, Quality and Development.

Introduction

Universal access to education is the ability of all people to have equal opportunity in education regardless of their social class, race, gender, ethnic background or physical and mental disability. In education, the term access typically refers to the ways in which educational institution and students have equal and equitable opportunities to take full advantage of their education because it is established that education helps to eradicate poverty, ignorance, disease and banish hunger and giving people chance at better living. This is one of the biggest reasons why parents strive to make their kids attend school as long as possible. It is also while Nations work towards promoting easier access to education for both children and adults. It is against this background that this paper discusses and adopts critical theory in sociology to address the national question on education as a veritable tool to trigger national development in all its ramifications. There is also need for politically, economically, educationally, legally, health, and socio-cultural development so that, the people access to education yield positive dividends.

The method adopted for this study is critical theory in Sociology. A critical theory is any approach to social philosophy that focuses on society and culture, proponents of this theory is a school of thought practice by Frankfurt school of theoretician, Herbert Markus, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin among others. It attempt to reveal, critique and challenge power structure's that enslaved and kept people in perpetual bondage. It argues that social problems stems more from social structures and cultural assumption than form individual. It further argues that ideology is the principal obstacle to human liberation.

Critical theory find application in various field of study including sociology of education.

Psycho-analysis, History, communication theory, philosophy and feminist theory.

Critical theory can be conveniently applied to Nigeria education system where the intellectuals find themselves in critical condition that makes survival a mirage in the midst of plenty resources. ASUU struggle is a good reference point where

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academicians are denied their legitimate rights to salary, academic freedom or autonomy in the struggle to improve the Educational standard of the nation. Subsidy removal, insecurity, banditry, kidnapping, and harsh economic realities are signal to critical theory and its relevance.

It is more worrisome and critical when people of young age have no access to education, which is a social responsibility of the government to provide for her citizens. The Levels of Educational system in Nigeria are: The primary, JSS, and Senior secondary school and Tertiary levels of education. National policy on education 2004 edition clearly stated that Basic education shall be 9 years duration comprising 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education, it shall be made free and compulsory. It shall also include adult and non-formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary education levels for the adults and out- of school youths.

While junior secondary consist of JSS1, JSS2 and JSS3 which are equivalent to the 7th 8th and 9th Grade while SS1, SS2, and SS3 which is equivalent to 10th, 11th, and 12 Grade. The senior secondary school examination (SSCE) is taken at the end of SS3. It is important to note that secondary education in Nigeria is a six years programme. Comprising of junior secondary and senior secondary school. Each level is of three years duration. The curriculum of the senior secondary schools is comprehensive and diversified in nature (NPE, 2004)

Furthermore, tertiary education in Nigeria, the government has majority control of university education. Tertiary education in Nigeria consists of universities (public and private) polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education. Tertiary education refers to all formal post- secondary education, including public and private universities, colleges, technical training institutes and vocational schools. Tertiary education is instrumental in fostering growth. Reducing poverty and boosting shared prosperity {NPE, 2014}.

The five objectives of the philosophy of Nigerian education as stated in the policy document (1981) include: (i) A free and democratic society (ii) A just and egalitarian society. (iii) A united, strong and self-reliant nation (iv) A great and dynamic economy (v) A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

In the same vein laudable as these objectives are, lack of access to education will have far reaching effects in achieving the goals of education in Nigeria.

Quality Education in Nigeria, according to the world Economic Forum (2017), Nigeria ranks 124th out of 137th countries in the terms of quality of primary

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education. Similarly, fleets, Waktins, and Greubel (2012) found that 58%. of school children in Nigeria are not learning basic literacy and numeracy skills.

In Nigeria, educational performance is abysmally low in terms of quality and quantity, poor performance with regards to quality is illustrated by the fact that there were more than 1.5million out of school children in 2018, which is the globally (UNICEF, 2018). The situation is even more worrying in terms of quality. According to the World Economic Forum (2017), the significant problem, as this skill are essentials for success in school and in life.

The goals of quality education

These goals ensure that all girls and boys complete free primary and secondary schooling by 2030. It also aims to provide equal access to affordable vocational training, to eliminate gender and wealth disparities, and achieve universal access quality education.

Furthermore, since 2000 there was progress in achieving the target of universal primary education. The total enrolment ratio in different region reached 9% in 2015 and the world wide numbers of children out of school has dropped almost half. These has also been a dramatic increase in literacy rates and many more girls are in school than ever before. There are all remarkable achievements.

Progress has also been tough in some developing regions due to higher level of poverty, armed conflict and other emergencies. In western Asia and Northern Africa, ongoing armed conflict has been an increase in the number of children out of school. This is worrying trend, while Sub-Sahara Africa made to the greater progress in primary school enrolment among developing region from 52% in 1990, up to 78% in 2012. Large disparities of children from poorest household are up to four training more likely to be out of school than those of richest household disparities between the rural and urban areas also remain high. Achieving inclusive and quality education for all reaffirms the belief that education is one of most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development.

Challenges facing educational development in Nigeria

Education is essential for the growth and development of any Nation and Nigeria is no exception. However, the state of education in Nigeria has been a major concern for decades. Despite being of the most populous country in Africa and having the

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larger economy and one of the most literacy rate with only 59% of adults population are able to read and write fluently (NNVC, 2006).

Inadequate funding: one of the most sufficient challenges facing education in Nigeria is inadequate funding, despite government promise to allocate 26% of its annual budget and education, this has been achieved with the sector receiving less than 10% of the budget in recent year (UNESCO 2021). This has resulted in a lack of repurcy, inadequate facilities and low teacher salaries.

Low Teacher Quality; Nigeria also face a challenge with low teacher quality with many teachers lacking necessary qualification and training. In addition, there is inadequate development of teachers especially in the rural areas where many schools have few or no qualified teachers. According to (UNESCO, 2021) Nigeria needs an addition 227,537 teachers is the maximum requirement for teacher proper ratio (Kaur, 2012).

Poor infrastructure: the Nigerians education system suffers from inadequate infrastructure with many schools lacking basic facilities such as classroom having up to 100 students per teacher (Oyebade, 2020).

Curriculum issues: the Nigeria education system curriculum has been criticized of been outdated and irrelevant to the country's need. This has resulted in differences between the skills acquire by graduate and the skill required by the job marked leading to high level of unemployment among Nigeria graduates (Ibe, 2019).

Additionally, many schools lack basic amenities such as electricity and water supply making it difficult to deliver quality education.

Opportunities for improvement

Increased Government funding: one of the most significant opportunities for improvement in Nigeria education system is increased government funding. The government must fulfil its promise of allocating 26% of its budget to education and ensure that the funds are used effectively and efficiently.

Embracing Technology: Nigeria has a high level of mobile phone penetration with over 140 million active mobile phone lines (NCC, 2021) this presents an opportunity to leverage. Technology to improve education delivery, especially in areas where there is shortage of teachers. Technology can be use to deliver e-learning platform, distance learning and online courses to thestudents, improving access to education.

Quality Teacher Training: to address the low quality of teacher in Nigeria, there is a need for a significant infrastructure in teachers training and development. This will

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ensure the teachers to have necessary qualification and training to deliver quality education to student.

Curriculum Reforms: the Nigerian government needs to reform and update the education curriculum to ensure that is relevant to the needs of the country and job market. This will ensure that Nigeria graduates acquire skills of knowledge required to compete in the job market and contributes to the country's economic development.

However, in this context therefore development involves not only economics but also social, political, cultural, moral, and religious upliftment of the vast majority of the populace. Economic development is much more encompassing which is a multidimensional and multifaceted concept because it donates not only an increase in the GNP but also an increase general welfare and standard of living of the vast majority of the people in Nigeria. The relationship between access and quality education fostering National development is a straight forward, meaning to develop in this sense means creating an appropriate standard of education process that will serve as a catalyst of development in all levels. (Odigie and Odionye. 2013).

Benefit of access to quality education

Building inclusive free education with qualified teachers and educational context is key to achieving the right education for all. Access to quality education among other enables:

- Reduce the number of schools drop outs.
- Reduce differences in level between students, through quality education.
- Eliminate discriminatory learning gaps between individuals through inclusive education.
- To provide learners with the skills needed for everyday life for professional success and also for individual fulfillment.
- Minimize child mortality as a result of mothers' ability to read and write
- Reduce poverty by 12%
- Increase workforce income by at least 20%
- Reduce the risk of violent conflict by at least 37%
- Education is therefore the most power asset to cause significant improvement, in health stimulate economic growth and encourage the development of companies more resilient and sustainable (UNESCO 2020).

Furthermore, access to education will immensely improve the life of the Normadics Fulanis, Fishermen, Almagiris and other migrates groups that are marginalise in terms of provision of education. Access to education to some extent will curtail

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incessant insecurity challenges, banditry, kidnapping, raping and reckless hooliganism experienced in different parts of the country (Saba, 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the stakeholders in education, Government, Teachers, Parents, Students, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and International Agencies like, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank should encourage education for all by making it accessible towards eradicating illiteracy, ignorance, poverty and diseases constituting nuisance to the well-being of the citizens.

Recommendations

The paper suggested that problem of education in Nigeria can be solved if the political class has a change of attitude towards the educational sector which has been severally lampooned for failing to contribute to the development of the nation. Hence, the following recommendations are put forward to enable accessibility to quality education.

1. Proper funding of education should be given priority by all the tiers of government, Local, State and Federal. Importantly, government should stop paying lip service to issues of education, rather they should provide all it takes to make education functional and accessible to all and sundry.
2. Adequate infrastructural facilities like enough classroom with proper ventilations, table, chairs and modern teaching aids plus laboratories to facilitate teaching and learning should be provided in schools.
3. Communities and philanthropic should support government by financing quality education, Religious organization of different persuasive should aggressively evangelize and mobilize their members to pursue quality education
4. The government should be proactive by taking cognisance of the welfare of the teachers by prompt payment of their salaries and other incentives to retain them on the job.
5. Any acts of indiscipline especially embezzlement of public fund should be severely dealt with by bringing the culprits to face the wrath of the law.
6. Fund allocated to the educational sector should be judiciously managed and accounted for.
7. Over politicization of education should not be allowed rather qualified and competent people should be given position of responsibility to handle

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educational problems. Henceforth, appointment of principal officers based on son of the soil should be stopped.

8. Insecurity ravaging all nooks and crannies of the country should be checkmated as security challenges constitute a threat to accessibility to education as parents are no longer interested in sending their children especially the females to school for fear of being kidnapped, raped and payment for ransom.

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