

The Benefits of Distance Education To National Development

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Abstract: *The aim of this study was to investigate the benefits of distance education to national development. Education is a crucial sector in any nation. Being a major investment in human capital development, it plays a critical role in long-term productivity and growth at both micro and macro levels. This explains why the state of education in Nigeria continues to be our national discourse at all levels. The study has identified specific ways in which education contributes to national development. This paper emphasizes that the contributions of education to national development has been limited by poor funding, politicization of the system, unsteady political environment and corruption in Nigeria. For education to impact positively on national development, some recommendations have been made and if duly followed, will address the crisis rocking the Nigerian educational system.*

Keywords: Distance education, National Development, Education

1. Introduction

According to Uwadia (2010), Education in a broad sense is a process by which an individual acquires the many physical and social capabilities demanded by the society in which he/she is born into to function. It is to a nation what the mind is to the body, just as a diseased mind is handicapped in the coordination and direction of the bodily activities. Therefore, the single most significant complex of social – control tools for national development is found in the educational system be it formal or informal.

Ugbogbo, Akwemoh and Omoregie (2013) asserts that, education is the process of acquisition of knowledge, that is, it involves the teaching and learning process. Formal education in Nigeria date back to the British colonialism. In the pre-colonial and colonial era, the colonial master introduced reading, writing, arithmetic which was the beginning of formal education system in Nigeria. Before then, education was informal, that is apprenticeship system of acquiring knowledge. With the advent of the British colonialism there was a shift from the informal to the formal system of education. Soon after the Nigeria independence tertiary institutions for man power training and development were established by the Nigerian states. Consequently this led to the growth of the Nigerian professionalism.

The Nigerian education have had a tremendous impact on the Nigeria nation over the years this is evident in the growth and development of the Nigeria Civil service, Political system, Technological growth, Communication, Industrial growth, increase in Agricultural production, Medicine, engineering as well as the harnessing of her national endowment. All the aforementioned development witnessed in Nigeria were brought about by the growth and expansion of tertiary institutions where professional handling these different sectors in the Nigerian economy were trained. Soon after independence, there was the need for competent manpower in the Nigerian quest for development; consequently upon this the federal government embark on the establishment of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.

Education is a crucial sector in any nation. Being a major investment in human capital development, it plays a critical role in long-term productivity and growth at both micro and macro levels. This explains why the state of education in Nigeria continues to be our national discourse at all levels. Consequently, the implication of the declining quality of education at all levels has far reaching negative impact on a nation's moral, civic, cultural and economic sustainability. At this point, it is important to realize that discussions on education and its reforms to make it contribute meaningfully to national development should gradually and systematically move away from a politicized to a more analytical approach that appreciates the complexities inherent in providing genuine and workable solutions for revamping our educational system.

Distance Education (DE) is a system of education characterized by physical separation between the teacher and the learner in which instruction is deliver through a variety of media including print and other ICTs to learner who may either have missed the opportunity earlier in life or have been denied the face-to-face formal education due to socio-economic, career, family and other circumstances. Jegede, (2003) defined distance education as education provided by a mode other than the conventional face-to-face method whose goals are similar to and just as noble and practical as those of on-campus full time face-to-face education.

Jegede, (2003) found out that experiences both nationally and internationally have shown that conventional education is extremely hard to meet the demands of today's socio-educational milieu especially for developing countries like Nigeria. Distance Education mode from all indications seem to offer the way out of the present problem of giving access to the world's burgeoning population. The system is even the more attractive because of its varied and flexible media of instructional delivery made possible by advancement in technology. The objective of this paper was to discuss the benefits of distance education to National Development. This paper is divided into five sections namely the introduction, Related Literature, the benefits of distance education to

national development, identify the challenges of distance education to National Development and recommendations.

2. Related Literature Studies

Ordinarily, education is exclusively used for the development of human beings in the cognitive, affective, psychomotor and psychoproductive domains. It also involves a desirable approach in human behaviour through the process of teaching and learning. Fafunwa (1974) defines education as what each generation gives to its younger ones which makes them develop attitudes, abilities, skills and other behaviours which are the positive values to the society in which they live.

From the above, education, according to Okonkwo (2012) is seen as the total development of the individual child through acceptable methods and techniques according to his abilities and interests to meet up the needs of the society and for the individual to take his rightful place and contribute equally to the enhancement of the society. This paper supports this definition of education.

Another concept to be explained here is national development. Oke (2004) stressed that a developed society is the one that has succeeded in providing a source of living for the majority of its inhabitants and that in such society, premium is attached to elimination of poverty, provision of food, shelter and clothing to its members. This argument agrees with the definition of development by Todaro and Smith (2006:20-21) from the modernization paradigm which sees development as a multidimensional process which involves the sustained elevation of the entire society and social system towards a better or humane life. They identify three basic components for understanding development. These components are sustenance, self-esteem and freedom. These represent common goals sought by all individuals and societies. According to them, sustenance is concerned with ability to meet basic needs, self-esteem is concerned with a sense of worth and self-respect, of not being used by others as tools for their own needs and freedom is concerned with freedom from servitude- servitude to nature, ignorance, other people, misery, institutions and dogmatic beliefs especially, that poverty is a predestination. Therefore, the definition by this paradigm which emphasizes the basic needs of life in transforming the individual in the society to self-actualization is a true definition of development. Any development model that does not reflect these tenets needs a paradigm shift.

Omoyibo and Agbonzeke (2010) also stated that the former Secretary of United Nations Organisation, Boutros, B. Ghali, in May, 1994, issued a document which categorizes development into five dimensions which are peace, economy, environment, social studies and democracy. In the Nigerian context, these components are missing as democratic processes are absent and the government in power abuses the rule of law. In Nigeria, the process does not create opportunities for opposition to strive and majority

of those in power are there on the basis of what to get but not what they could offer their various communities.

Apart from the above, Oke (2004:31) stressed that sustainable national development starts with the ability of a nation to satisfactorily provide the food and fibre that are needed by its people and industry. Himmelstrend (1984) stated that food security must be given adequate attention to solve problem of mass hunger in Africa. Even if these scholars have given importance to agriculture, national development should be able to transform individuals in virtually all sectors of the economy.

Benefits of Distance Education to National Development

1. It promotes manpower supply for national development:

The focus of this paper is to look at the benefits of education to national development. Prominent among the points to be considered here is that distance education supplies the needed manpower for national development. Afolabi and Loto (2012:330) supported this argument by stating that a developed or educated polity is the one that has enough manpower and each person occupies his or her rightful position to enhance the growth of the society. To support this, Ajayi and Afolabi (2009:34-36) have also remarked that education is largely perceived in Nigeria as an indispensable tool which will not only assist in meeting the nation's social, political, moral, cultural and economic aspirations but will also inculcate in the individual knowledge, skills, dexterity, character and desirable values that will foster national development and self-actualization. From the definition of education given above, it is clear that education trains an individual to be useful in the society and to meet up the need of the society for national development. Therefore, it should be clear that without education, a nation cannot get the needed manpower for material advancement and enlightenment of the citizenry. The trained engineers, teachers, medical doctors, inter alia are all the products of education. This explains why it is argued also that the quality of a nation's education determines the level of its national development.

2. It promotes social and group relationships

In addition, distance education promotes social and group relationships (Armstrong, D.G. et al 2011:142). In this regard, Obasanjo (2010:3) states that distance education trains individuals to relate to and interact meaningfully with others in the society and to appreciate the importance of effective organization for human progress. Here, the school system within the educational system fosters this development. The school brings people of different cultural backgrounds together for a common purpose. This promotes mutual co-existence among the different students. Learners who strongly identify with their school are thought to have a more positive attitude towards teachers, other learners and the entire educational enterprise (Armstrong, D.G. et al 2011:143).

Again, in the school system, there are official clubs and organizations in existence. Learners who participate in these

organizations and clubs gain experience in working with others outside the individual organizations and to some extent in working and competing with outside groups with minimum friction and this goes a long way to promote national unity and peaceful co-existence which will lead to national development. Sometimes, organizations not formally sponsored by the school in some cases make arrangements to use school facilities when classes are not in session. Learners derive benefits from their association with these groups in the same way they profit from participation in school sponsored organizations. By doing this, education provides a setting within which different learners' organizations flourish and a context for helping young people learn appropriate patterns of interpersonal relations. Through this, it provides a forum for the development of many kinds of acceptable person-to-person behaviour patterns as the school classes include a variety of individuals. In these classes, learners meet people from different social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds from their own. Here, male-female relationships begin to develop as young people mature. It is obvious education through the system inculcates much to learners beyond the prescribed academic curriculum and also encourages the development of social behaviours that will be useful to them as adulthood.

3. It inculcates the culture of productivity in learners

Distance Education also promotes the culture of productivity by enabling individuals to discover the creative potentials in them and apply same to improve the existing skill and technique of performing specific tasks, thereby increasing the efficiency of their personal societal efforts (Obasanjo 2010:3). Education teaches or trains people to be useful to themselves and the society they live. By this, they have to be productive and discover their creative abilities and use this to perform specific tasks to attain self-actualization.

4. It promotes moral values in the society

Distance Education also develops in individuals those values which make for good citizenship, such as honesty, selflessness, tolerance, dedication, hard-work and personal integrity, all of which provide the rich soil from which good leadership potential is groomed. As already noted, education trains an individual to be responsible in the society. From this, it is clear that education gives moral training. Consequently, if the Boko Haram Islamic sect had received quality and sound education, they would have abstained from violence..

5. It enhances human capital development

Distance Education is exclusively used for the development of human beings in the cognitive, affective, psychomotor and psych productive domains. It also involves a desirable approach in human behaviour through the process of teaching and learning. Fafunwa (1974) defines education as what each generation gives to its younger ones which makes them develop attitudes, abilities, skills and other behaviours which are the positive values to the society in which they live.

4. The challenges of Distance Education to National Development

Olekedede, (2004) assert that the educational sector of the Nigeria economy has been bedevilled by series of challenges that has hitherto poses the great limitations to the actualizations of the cardinal goals and objectives for educational programmes. Obasanjo (2012) opined that at present, our education environment and the outlook for education in Nigeria are bedevilled with many problems, some of which appear intractable and are like recurring decimals. Below are some of the challenges facing Distance Education with regard to National Development:

4.1 Inadequate Funding of Tertiary Institutions by the Federal Government:

With the continuous increase in the population of students in tertiary institutions, it is obvious that the facilities needed for educational programmes in schools have increased over the years bringing about a drastic increase in the course of providing a befitting education for the Nigerian child. The funding of education is the responsibility of the government and the Nigerian government have embarked on strategic initiative to actualize the accomplishment of their societal need but the effort of the government have indeed yielded little or no result in bringing the Nigerian educational system to lime light. There is a gross inadequacy of educational funds required in the provision of educational infrastructures and facilities. Enormous fund is required in the refurbishment of dilapidated institutional infrastructure. With the advent of global and modern educational challenge the task of funding education in Nigeria is fast becoming unrealistic with insurmountable complexities. There has been shortage of funds for the implementation of educational policies and programmes thus making the Nigerian educational system incapable of meeting the challenges and demand of the 21st century. With the down of the millennia dispensation and the natural resource with which Nigeria is greatly endowed it is hoped that in the near future the aforementioned problem would be a thing of the past (Olekedede, 2004).

4.2 Shortage of manpower requirement:

One of the greatest challenges facing Nigeria today is the lack of sufficient manpower to meet her human resources requirements in all sectors of the economy. Little wonder, artisanal workers from neighbouring countries like Togo and Benin Republic troop into the country to do the jobs Nigerians should undertake.

4.3 Poor Quality and Standard:

The overall responsibility of the Federal Ministry of Education is to ensure quality within the system, to encourage and initiate innovations, and to ensure that the schools maintain minimum standards of acceptable educational practice. The public perception is that the quality

of education offered is low and that standards have dropped. These perceptions are based on lack of adherence to acceptable educational practice. Teacher qualifications are low. The learning environment does not promote effective learning. Basic facilities, teaching and learning resources are generally not available. Teacher-pupil ratios are high. General performance in examinations is poor and the graduates have low levels of competencies in the work environment.

A detailed survey commissioned by the Federal Government of Nigeria in partnership with UNICEF and UNESCO in 2007 also confirmed that the quality of education offered at the primary school level was low. Three competencies were measured, namely, literacy, numeracy and life skills. The level of numeracy competence was found to be generally low and performance in literacy was the worst amongst the three competencies measured. The pupils performed better in life skills learnt through the curriculum as well as those that were acquired outside the school environment.

Teacher qualifications also impact directly on quality. There are attempts to improve the level of qualification amongst teachers. The Grade II qualification (post secondary school teacher training certificate) is gradually being phased out as a minimum requirement for teaching. The numbers of teachers with NCE (post-school teacher training certificate) has increased and the country seems to be moving towards achieving a goal of having the NCE as a minimum qualification for teaching in the primary schools. There are few ongoing staff development programs that seem to be effective. The inspectorate system has not included staff development as part of its activities. The teacher education programs at pre-service levels have been criticized for being too theoretical and for their lack of a sound practical base needed for good classroom practice.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The focus of this paper is the benefits of distance education to national development and the researchers have identified specific ways in which education contributes to national development. This paper also emphasizes that the contributions of education to national development has been limited by poor funding, politicization of the system, unsteady political environment and corruption in Nigeria. For education to impact positively on national development, some recommendations have been made and if duly followed, will address the crisis rocking the Nigerian educational system.

Prominent among the solutions is that government should be determined to make provision for effective funding of education. The Federal Government should endeavour to earmark 26% of the total budget for educational development as recommended in the United Nations Organization.

Again, education should be a tripartite affair and responsibility of federal, state and local governments. At the

same time, the private sector should also be made to participate in the funding. This will be successful if government on its part shows its seriousness and commitment to the system in terms of funding. The private sector can participate by providing research grants, awarding of scholarships and endowment of Professorial Chairs in universities. An enabling law should also be enacted making it mandatory for multinational companies operating in Nigeria to set aside a minimum of 5% of their profits to finance education and allied projects.

There should also be the need for strong political will among political leaders to ensure continuity of educational policies and doggedness in the fight against corruption in the country. Severe punishment should be meted to financial crimes and other corrupt practices in the educational sector. Education should not be politicized as identified above and there should be a steady political environment to ensure continuity and maturity of educational policies.

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