

Democratization of Education as Prerequisite for Social Economic and Cultural Progress in a Multi-cultural Society

S. C. Madumere, B. U. Olisaemeka
University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria

This paper focuses on democratization of education as a prerequisite for social, economic and cultural progress in a multi-cultural society, such as Nigeria. Attempt was made to define and explain the major concepts in the paper. Education was explained as an instrument of democracy and as function of socialization, culture and economic development of Nigeria as a multi-cultural society. Some factors hindering the effective implementation of educational objectives of the nation were identified. The roles of education in the development of various aspects of life were discussed and suggestions were made on how to improve on the current situation of Nigerian economy.

Keywords: democratization of education, social progress, economic and cultural progress, multi-cultural society, socialization, education and Nigerian economy

Introduction

Nigeria as a country was formerly under the British Colonial rule until October 1, 1960, when it obtained her independence. Before the independence, the school curriculum was British oriented and it did not cater for the needs of indigenous people and also not relevant to the cultures, economic and social activities of the indigenes.

Nigeria is a country that has over 33 different languages, different religious beliefs, traditions and occupation, which need an instrument as a unifying force. The early nationalist leaders like late Chief Obafemi Awolowo and late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe who were political leaders both in the Western and Eastern regions embarked on free primary education even before the national independence of 1960. This was in realization that education is recognized as one of the fundamental human rights and also as an avenue to personal and social development. In Nigeria, before the introduction of compulsory free universal primary education of 1976, there was inequality of opportunity to education. This inequality of opportunity to education is regarded as a grave social injustice.

Education in Nigeria is an instrument “par excellence” for effecting national development. It has witnessed active participation by non-governmental agencies, communities and individuals as well as government intervention.

The need for a national policy on education came about as a result of the 1969 National Curriculum Conference which was attended by a cross-section of Nigerians. The conference was a culmination of expressions of general dissatisfaction with the existing education system which had become irrelevant to

S. C. Madumere, Educational Administration Department, Faculty of Education, University of Lagos.
B. U. Olisaemeka, Educational Administration Department, Faculty of Education, University of Lagos.

national needs, aspirations and goals.

After the National Curriculum Conference, a seminar of experts drawn from a wide range of interest groups within Nigeria was convened in 1973. The outcome of the seminar was a draft document which after due comments were received from the states and other interest groups, led to the final document, the National Policy on Education, first published in 1977, revised in 1981, 1998 and 2004. The fourth edition was necessitated by some policy innovations and changes and the need to update the third edition (1998) accordingly.

The overall philosophy of Nigeria is to:

(1) Live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice;

(2) Promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding.

The five main national goals of Nigeria which served as the foundation for the national policy on education are the building of:

(1) A free and democratic society;

(2) A just and egalitarian society;

(3) A united, strong and self-reliant nation;

(4) A great and dynamic economy;

(5) A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

To realize the above five laudable objectives, education should be democratized as prerequisite for social, economic and cultural progress in Nigeria. Experience has shown that expansion of educational systems, if they are not originally linked to profound social and economic transformations destined to further the interests of the masses, does not automatically lead to the establishment of equal educational opportunity, nor to the national development as a whole (Tangniane, 1990).

The new system of education in Nigeria appeared to be well planned to promote socio-cultural and economic activities, but the implementation of the plans had problems of funding, inadequate provision of school plants, military interventions, poor treatment of teaching force and economic recession.

This paper will, therefore, discuss trends in democratization of education, democratization at higher level of education, democratization for employment opportunity, democratization and cultural values, democratization of knowledge, democratization for socialization, culture, economy, knowledge acquisition and general development of Nigeria society.

Definition of Concepts

Democracy implies a system where an individual has the right to take part in decision-making or having equal right to benefit from a common good of a nation or society. Democratization is a situation, condition or atmosphere in which an individual is free to receive or enjoy certain things that belong to the society. Democratization of education implies freedom of having equal access to education, since it is one of the fundamental human rights of every citizen.

Social value is defined as a body of established beliefs and practices that constitute the social order into which an individual is born (Durkheim, 1938). Socialization is, therefore, the process through which individual is moulded into a social being through learning to think and behave, according to the values and norms prevalent in his society. A well-socialized person internalizes the norms of his society. Society is a group of

people living in a given geographical area. The elements that are very vital in a society include: culture interaction, power, authority, cohesion, conflict and social control.

Culture is the total way of life of the people, that is, the way we behave and think. It is also that part of our environment that is man-made, as opposed to the natural environment. Culture has three aspects: technological, sociological and ideological. In man's struggle to obtain the necessary means of subsistence from his habitat, he makes artifacts or physical objects. The technological or material side of culture includes man's tools, clothing, shelter, weapons, and so on, and the techniques for his use.

Economy refers to the wealth of the nations which include the stock of physical, material and human resources available and their uses. The growth of the economy depends on the quality of manpower available for the production of other resources.

From the explanation of the major terms of this study, one could discover that socialization, culture and economy are symbiotic and the only instrument that can unite, improve and accelerate them is education. For education to perform this essential role, it has to be free, qualitative and quantitatively available to every citizen of the society which is possible in a democratic society—hence, democratization of education as a prerequisite for social, cultural and economic progress in a multi-cultural society like Nigeria.

Democratization of Education and Social Control/Socialization

Socialization is the process through which individual is moulded into a social being through learning and behavior, according to the values and norms of this society.

Social control refers to those mechanisms by which society exercises its domain over individuals and enforces conformity to its norms and values. Education is the major instrument of social control. Other instruments include law, custom, opinion, religion and morals. In a situation where education is free and accessible to all citizens, illiteracy and ignorance would be eradicated and there will be improvement in the society.

Education and the Economy

Education is the process of training and developing the knowledge, skill, mind and character of people. It is the process by which the latent abilities of the individual are developed, so that they may be useful to themselves and the society at large (Adeogun, 2003). There is a strong link between the economy and the educational sector. In order to satisfy the needs of the people, the resources of an economy will have to be harnessed. To modernize a society like Nigeria, the agricultural sector, social and economic infrastructure like communication, transportation facilities, among others, will have to be improved. Before natural development objectives can be realized, adequate skilled manpower has to be produced. Accumulation of physical capital alone cannot bring about economic development. There is also the need for production of human capital to complement physical capital. This is the relevance of the educational system. Education is one of the factors that have brought significant economic progress in the developed nations through the production of manpower. Education has brought scientific and technological advancement that is now changing the hitherto primitive societies into modern ones.

The relationship between education and economy is that of mutual dependence. The economy supports the education system. The resources invested in the education system are derived from the economy. The level of economic development also determines the resources that are available to provide social services like

healthcare, education and manpower supply and meet the other needs of the society.

The ways in which education promotes economic growth in a developing country like Nigeria include:

(1) Education raises the productivity and incomes of workers whether through the diffusion of skills or the organization of work procedures;

(2) Education increases the allocative efficiency by increasing the flexibility and mobility of the labor force in response to change in the demand for labor;

(3) Education promotes technical change (and thus, ultimately productivity and output growth) in various ways;

(4) Education brings about many other gains of a social as well as economic character, increases social cohesion, stability and democratic values.

Democratization of Education and Culture

Education is the process of developing the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of individuals in order to make him/her acquire skills and knowledge that are relevant to him/her and the society. According to Fafunwa (1994), it is the process of transmitting cultures from one generation to another. Socrates was of the opinion that education should probe into the environment. To John Locke, it should make man to achieve justice, while to John Dewey, education should make a society achieve democracy, equal rights and justice.

From the definitions above, one could see that education is a function of culture and democracy. Culture which is the total way of life cannot be transmitted easily from one generation to another without education. Culture is manifested through social organizations and the people in them. Nigeria as a multi-cultural society has more than 36 languages, different religious beliefs and rules of behavior. It is education through democracy that binds us together. To achieve this, the Federal Government established federal institutions both secondary and tertiary in all the 36 states of the federation for transmission of culture across the nation. National Youths Service Commission was established to provide avenue for youths after their graduation from the universities to serve in different parts of the country other than their states of origin.

Democratization at a Higher Level of Education

Nigeria today is with a population of over 140 million. The need to make her citizens has access to education and the fact that it is a democratic nation and efforts had been made to increase the number of tertiary institutions.

There are 22 federal universities, one military university, three university of agriculture, 26 state universities, 32 private universities and four inter-university centers, totaling 88 universities and many are yet to be approved (NUC, 2008). In spite of the large number of these universities available, thousands of qualified candidates have not secured admissions.

Democratization and Employment Opportunity

In spite of the efforts made by the government, stakeholders and private proprietors to provide quantitative and qualitative education in Nigeria, the reverse is the case as employment of graduates is concerned. There is mass unemployment in Nigeria as a result of the poor condition of the economy. Many banks and other private firms have folded up. Most of their workers were sacked and some were retrenched. The negative attitudes of some Nigerians towards expatriate companies discouraged new investors to invest. The epileptic power supply worsened business operations in Nigeria. Some investors have relocated to nearby country like Ghana for their investments.

A cursory look at Table 1 gives a picture of the situation of employment in Nigeria. Table 1 shows the

national unemployment rates between 1985 and 2004. Unemployment appears to be higher in urban area than rural from 1985 to 1998 and from 1999 to March 2005 and it was higher in rural areas than urban areas. The highest rates of unemployment were obtained in rural area in 1999 and 2000. The variation might occur as a result of epileptic power supply, intervention of the military government, drought and economic meltdown.

Table 1

Employment Situation in Nigeria: National Unemployment Rates (1985-2004)

Survey period	Composite	Urban	Rural
December 1985	6.1	9.8	5.2
December 1986	5.3	9.1	4.6
December 1987	7.0	9.8	6.1
December 1988	5.1	7.8	4.8
December 1989	4.5	8.1	3.7
December 1990	3.5	5.9	3.0
December 1991	3.1	4.9	2.7
1992 (annualized)	3.5	4.8	3.0
1993	3.4	4.0	3.2
1994	3.2	4.0	2.8
1996	2.8	4.4	2.4
1997	3.4	5.7	2.8
1998	3.5	4.5	3.1
1999	17.5	11.6	19.6
2000*	18.1	14.2	19.8
2001*	13.7	10.3	15.1
2002*	12.2	9.5	13.3
2003*	14.8	17.1	13.8
2004*	11.8	11.0	12.1
March 2005	11.9	10.1	12.6

Notes. Source: FOS (federal office of statistics) and NBS (national bureau of statistics) (June, 2005); NB: * data obtained from the statistics fact sheet of NBS.

Democratization for Knowledge

Rapid obsolescence of knowledge and constant need to add to what has been learnt makes democratization of education imperative. Educational knowledge, concepts and systems which prepare people for keeping their knowledge up to date are necessary and conducive for life-long education and self-development. Due to scientific and technological advances, education has become ever more important. Modern organizational systems, be it schools, industries, vocational training centers, all require highly trained staff as an indispensable prerequisite to economic development and social progress. Education expansion offers the opportunity of having trained staff which is another strong point for democratizing education.

Democratization in this paper refers to giving equal opportunity in education to all and sundry, giving social justice and rendering equal treatment for achievement in education. This opportunity that was opened to citizens of Western and Eastern parts of Nigeria in 1955 and 1957 respectively paved way for greater percentage of the civil servants, professors and lecturers in Nigeria to emanate from these two areas of the country.

Development of the Society

Democratization in education involves development of the society through education. It is education that is used to reduce illiteracy, wipe away ignorance and make people aware of their rights. Either directly or indirectly, the 1976 compulsory free UPE (universal primary education) has wiped illiteracy and ignorance from Nigeria. As at today, there is no community where one would not get some people who know how to read and write and this has promoted internal trade among various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Scholars discussed the democratization wave in education which prevailed over Nigeria as having brought untold hardship in terms of population explosion and it is tending towards dilapidation in spread of school facilities. The explosion overstretched the existing physical facilities. Boarding schools were de-boarded and dormitories were converted to classrooms. When new structures were created, they were sub-standard, haphazard, grossly inadequate and unsuitable. Though there was an increasing demand for physical facilities, available funds were dwindling owing to economic recession.

The ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Nigeria Universities) went on strike for more than three months in the year of 2009, because of inadequate teaching and learning resources in the institutions of higher learning. The uncondusive learning environment coupled with shortage of necessary facilities and equipment for teaching and research has impacted negatively on the quality of Nigeria university graduates both internally and at the international levels.

Conclusions

This paper has discussed the concepts of democratization, education, socialization, economy and culture. Efforts were made to relate democratization of education to socialization, culture and economy as a pre-condition for social, economic and cultural growth and development of Nigeria. Some factors like inadequate fund, economic recession and inadequate facilities were also identified as forces that hindered effective implementation of education as a major instrument for economic, social and cultural progress of Nigeria.

The paper also explained the role of education in various aspects of life and how it has enabled Nigeria as a multi-cultural society live in harmony as a strong united nation. Efforts should be made by the various governments and other stakeholders to provide necessary facilities and atmosphere to improve the current situation of the country, Nigeria.

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