



Education at the Heart of National Progress: A Strategic Framework for Nigeria 21st Century Development

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Abstract

Education in every sense is one of the fundamental factors of development. No country can achieve sustainable economic development without substantial investment in human capital. Education enriches people's understanding of themselves and the world. It improves the quality of their lives and leads to broad social benefits to individuals and society. Education raises people's productivity and creativity and promotes entrepreneurship and technological advances. In addition, it plays a very crucial role in securing economic and social progress and improving income distribution. This paper will discuss the role of administrators in re-thinking education for

Nigeria's 21st century development. The paper will explore the indispensability of education to economic development. No economic development is possible without a good education. It will highlight that a balanced education system promotes not only economic development, but productivity, and generates individual income per capita. The paper will conclude by highlighting the importance of an effective administrative approach in re-thinking Nigeria's policy on education for the nation's economic development and for the future of its educational system.

Keywords: Sustainable Economic Development, Human Capital, Entrepreneurship, Labour Productivity, Technology.

Introduction

There is no doubt that the level of development in a country is a direct reflection of her system of education. In fact, a high rate of development is a product of a well-organized, managed and supervised educational system. Education is the bedrock of any meaningful development. It is a means by which citizens are equipped with the necessary attitudes, knowledge and skills that will enable them to contribute meaningfully to national development. Education provides a foundation for development, the groundwork on



which much of our economic and social well-being is built. It is the key to increasing economic efficiency and social consistency. It increases the overall productivity and intellectual flexibility of the labor force. It helps to ensure that a country is competitive in world markets now characterized by changing technologies and production methods. By increasing a child's integration with dissimilar social or ethnic groups early in life, education contributes significantly to nation building and interpersonal tolerance. Thus, every nation of the world has recognized and accepted education as the springboard of societal development. For developing nations like Nigeria in particular, education remains a potent factor for eradicating poverty and changing the misfortune of under development. Ukeje in Ejikeme (2012) summed it up when he opined that Education is power; it is a process of acquiring knowledge and ideas that shape and condition human attitude, actions and achievements. It is a process of developing the child's moral, physical, emotional and intellectual power for his contribution to social reform. It is the process of mastering the laws of nature and utilizing them effectively for

the welfare of the individual and for social reconstruction. It is the art of utilization of knowledge for complete living.

However, Ejikeme (2012) noted that a diligent and faithful appraisal of the Nigerian educational system would reveal that we have a tragedy in our hands. The standard of the nation's education is undergoing a free fall. The sound system bequeathed to us by the British has been deprived of its soul through bad leadership, corruption, frequent change of policy and poor planning. More worrisome is that the progress made in various areas of the education sector within the five decades of independence was not consolidated, leading to the undermining of the investments made in various aspects of the education sector. Nevertheless, Nigeria's philosophy of education as aptly enunciated in the National Policy on Education (2004) was based on:

- a. The development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen.
- b. The full integration of the individual into the community, and

c. The provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.

Attainment of the above stated philosophy of education presupposes the provision of quality education at all levels to the citizenry. The question however remains: have the successive governments in Nigeria been able to create the enabling environment that could lead to the achievement of the goals set out in the national policy on education through proper funding of education?

The Importance of Education in Economic Development

Prior to the nineteenth century, systematic investment in human capital was not considered especially important in any country. Expenditure on schooling, on-the-job training, and other similar forms of investment were quite small. This began to change radically during this century with the application of science to the development of new goods and more efficient methods of production, first in Great Britain, and then

gradually in other countries. During the twentieth century, education, skills, and the acquisition of knowledge have become crucial determinants of a person's and a nation's productivity. One can even call the twentieth century the "Age of Human Capital" in the sense that the primary determinant of a country's standard of living is how well it succeeds in developing and utilizing the skills and knowledge and furthering the health and educating most of its population. The past decades have seen extraordinary expansions in access to basic education throughout Nigeria. Many countries are now on the brink of a further increase in access to secondary and higher education and in effecting spectacular improvements in the quality of education offered at all levels. As increasing numbers of students complete their basic education, their demand for education at higher levels is similarly increasing. Educating girls and women is probably the single most effective investment a developing country can make, whether women work outside the home. It creates a multitude of positive remunerations for families including better family health and nutrition, improved birth spacing,



lower infants and child mortality, and enhanced educational attainment of children.

Nigeria is increasingly integrated in world markets for manufactured goods. Their ability to compete in these markets and in globalizing service markets will depend on the excellence of

human capital they bring to the competition. Ensuring that all citizens are educated and

numerate, that many possess a wide range of problem-solving skills beyond the basic level, and

that some have world class professional skills will necessitate new curricula, improved teacher

programs, and academic methods that encourage higher order cognitive skills. No country has

achieved constant economic development without considerable investment in human capital.

Unequal education tends to have a negative impact on per capita income in most countries.

Moreover, controlling human capital distribution and the use of appropriate functional form

specifications consistent with the asset allocation model make a difference for the effects of average

education on per capita income, while failure to do so leads to insignificant and even negative

effects of average education. Investment in human

capital can have little impact on growth unless people can use education in competitive and open

markets. The larger and more competitive these markets are, the greater are the prospects for using education and skills.

Education and Productivity

Clearly the educational provisions within any given country represent one of the main

determinants of the composition and growth of that country's output and exports and constitute an

important ingredient in a system's capacity to borrow foreign technology effectively. For

example: health and nutrition, and primary and secondary education all raise the productivity of

workers, rural and urban; secondary education, including vocational, facilitates the acquisition of

skills and managerial capacity; tertiary education supports the development of basic science, the

appropriate selection of technology imports and the domestic adaptation and development of

technologies; secondary and tertiary education also represent critical elements in the

development of key institutions, of government, the law, and the financial system, among others,

all essential for economic growth. Empirical



evidence at both micro and macro levels further illuminates these relationships. At a micro level, numerous studies indicate that increases in earnings are associated with additional years of education, with the rate of return varying with high level of education (Behrman 1990, Psacharopoulos 1994). In agriculture, evidence suggests positive effects of education on productivity among farmers using modern technologies, but less impact, as might be expected, among those using traditional methods. Education is also an important contributor to technological capability and technical change in industry.

Education alone, of course cannot transform an economy. The quantity and quality of investment, domestic and foreign, together with the overall policy environment, form the other important determinants of economic performance. Yet the level of human development has a bearing on these factors too. The quality of policy making and of investment decisions is bound to be influenced by the education of both policy makers and managers; moreover, the volume of both domestic and foreign investment is likely to be

larger when a system's human capital supply is more plentiful. For a macro prospective, the 'new growth theories' aim to endogenize technical progress by incorporating some of these same effects, emphasizing education as well as learning and R&D. According to Lucas (1998), for example, the higher the level of education of the workforce the higher the overall productivity of capital because the more educated are more likely to innovate and thus affect everyone's productivity. In other models a similar externality is generated as the increased education of individuals raises not only their own productivity but also that of others with whom they interact, so that total productivity increases as the average level of education rises (Perotti, 1993). The impact of education on the nature and growth of exports, which, in turn, affect the aggregate growth rate, is another way in which human development influences macro performance. The education and skills of a developing country's labor force influence the nature of its factor endowment and consequently the composition of its trade. It has been argued that even 'unskilled' workers in a modern factory normally need the



literacy, numeracy, and discipline, which are acquired in primary and lower secondary school (Wood, 1994).

Education and Income

There is also positive feedback from improved education to greater income equality, which, in turn, is likely to favor higher rates of growth. As education becomes more broadly based, low-income people are better able to seek out economic opportunities. For example, a study of the relation between schooling, income inequality and poverty in 18 countries of Latin America in the 1980s found that one quarter of the variation in workers' incomes was accounted for by variations in schooling attainment; it concludes that 'clearly education is the variable with the strongest impact on income equality' (Psacharopoulos, 1992). Another study suggested that a one percent increase in the labor force with at least secondary education would increase the share of income of the bottom 40 and 60% by between 6 and 15% respectively (Bourguignon and Morrison, 1990). An investigation of the determinants of income distribution in 36 countries found secondary enrollment rates to be

significant (Bourguignon, 1995). Education may affect per capita income growth via its impact on the denominator, i.e. population growth. For example, a study of fourteen African countries for the mid-eighties showed a negative correlation between female schooling and fertility in almost all countries, with primary education having a negative impact in about half the countries and no significant effects in the other half, while secondary education invariably reduced fertility (Birdsall 1995, Behraman and Wolfe 1987). The three success countries in terms of reduced fertility, Kenya, Botswana, and Zimbabwe, had the highest levels of female schooling as well as the lowest child mortality rates (Ainsworth, 1995).

Education and Human Capital

Where does human capital come from? What constitutes a successful investment in human capital, either at the individual or national level? One must start with the family. It is the foundation of a good society and of economic success. Families have differed over time, but they are still very important in the modern economy. To understand human capital, you must go back to the



family, because it is families that are concerned about their children and try, with whatever resources they have, to promote their children's education and values. Families are the major promoters of values in any free society and even in not-so-free societies. Families make a variety of decisions. One is whether to have many children or to have fewer children. Also, some try to do more for each child. As countries develop, the trend shifts very strongly toward the latter. Every nation that has developed has done that, some in remarkably short periods of time. Taiwan, for example, has a birth rate lower than the United States. Declining birth rates also characterize Hong Kong, Mexico, and Poland (Becker, 1998). In the developed part of Turkey, the average number of children that families have is lower than the less developed part of Turkey. This is related to the level of education level of families. On average, educated families, particularly educated women, have 1.4 children and uneducated families have 5.1 children in the eastern region of Turkey (Baloglu, 1998). This can also be applicable to Northern and Southern part of Nigeria. Thus, to reduce the birth rate and

inequalities between these regions of Turkey, more importance has to be given to education. Greater education of parents, perhaps of mothers, tends to improve the treatment of children, especially the daughters. The gap between the education of sons and daughters is smaller when parents are more educated.

Education and Health

More educated men and women tend to invest more in their own health and the health of their children. Indeed, education may be the single most important personal determinant of a person's health and life expectancy. The educated persons in the United States and other rich nations are the least likely to smoke. Smoking in the United States is now found in significant numbers only among those with no college education and is especially common among high school dropouts. The educated persons in Turkey are mostly working most of the time. Uneducated people not in work usually sit in cafes and waste their times. Many of them smoke. The education of the poor helps improve their food intake not only by raising their income and spending on food but also by inducing them to make better, healthier, choices.

Studies have shown that educated people tend to eat a healthier diet even when the total amount spent on food is held constant. Of course, the relation between education and better health and life expectancy involves causation in both directions, for greater health and lower mortality also induce larger investments in education and other human capital since rates of return on these investments are greater when the expected amount of working time is greater.

Education and Trade

Some countries have successfully combined openness and investment in learning and education, forming a virtuous circle: openness creates demand for education, and learning and education make a country's export sector more competitive. Knowledge accumulation influences a country's trade performance and competitiveness (Grossman and Helpman 1989); trade, in turn, enhances knowledge accumulation, especially through imports (BenDavid and Loewy, 1995). Lucas (1998) notes that to sustain any kind of knowledge accumulation, a country must be outward-oriented and a significant exporter. Young and Keller find that trade itself

cannot be the engine of growth, but rather must operate throughout some mechanism, such as the formation of human capital, to affect growth. A World Bank study found that economic growth rates in a sample of 60 developing countries during 1965-87 were especially high where there was a combination of a high level of education and macroeconomic stability and openness (Tilak,1989). The impact of trade openness on

long-term growth thus depends on how well people can absorb and use the information and technology made available through trade and foreign investment. It is widely accepted that to adapt to an environment of stronger competition, and to a world emphasizing the role of information, knowledge and skills, advanced economies need continuously to upgrade the overall quality of their labour force.

Strategic framework for 21st Century Development

❖ **Shaping a vision of academic success for all students:** Effective school administrators are responsible for establishing a school wide vision of commitment to high standards and the

success of all students. The academic achievement of every student always topped the principal's agenda. Historically, public school principals were seen as school managers, and as recently as two decades ago, high standards were thought to be the province of the college bound. Career success in a global economy depends on a strong education; for all segments of society to be able to compete fairly, the yawning gap in academic achievement between disadvantaged and advantaged students' needs to narrow. In a school, that begins with a principal's spelling out "high standards and rigorous learning goals," Vanderbilt University researchers assert with underlined emphasis. Specifically, they say, "The research literature over the last quarter century has consistently supported the notion that having high expectations for all, including clear and public standards, is one key to closing the achievement gap between advantaged and less advantaged students and for raising

the overall achievement of all students" (Andrew et. al, 2008). An effective principal also makes sure that the notion of academic success for all gets picked up by the faculty and underpins what researchers at the University of Washington describe as a school wide learning improvement agenda that focuses on goals for student progress (Michael et. at., 2010). One middle school teacher described what adopting the vision meant for her. "My expectations have increased every year," she told the researchers. "I've learned that as long as you support them, there is really nothing [the students] can't do". According to Bradley, (2009), he asserts that developing a shared vision around standards and success for all students is an essential element of school leadership.

❖ **Creating a climate hospitable for education:** Effective school administrators ensure that schools allow both adults and children to put learning at the center of their daily activities. Such "a healthy school environment," as

Vanderbilt researchers call it, is characterized by basics like safety and orderliness, as well as less tangible qualities such as a “supportive, responsive” attitude toward the children and a sense by teachers that they are part of a community of professionals focused on good instruction (Ellen, et. al., 2009). Is it a surprise, then, that principals at schools with high teacher ratings for “instructional climate” outrank other principals in developing an atmosphere of caring and trust? Or that their teachers are more likely than faculty members elsewhere to find the principals’ motives and intentions are good? Indeed! Creating a climate hospitable to education will inevitably defeat teacher pessimism and regarding themselves as hardworking martyrs in a hopeless cause. To change this kind of mindset and begin to combat teacher isolation, closed doors, negativism, defeatism and teacher resistance, the most effective school administrators focus on building a sense of school community,

with the attendant characteristics. These include respect for every member of the school community; “an upbeat, welcoming, solution-oriented, no-blame, professional environment;” and efforts to involve staff and students in a variety of activities in the school.

❖ **Cultivating leadership in others:** A broad and longstanding consensus in leadership theory holds that leaders in all walks of life and all kinds of organizations, public and private, need to depend on others to accomplish the group’s purpose and need to encourage the development of leadership across the organization (Yukl, 2009). Schools are no different. Principals who get high marks from teachers for creating a strong climate for instruction in their schools also receive higher marks than other principals for spurring leadership in the faculty, according to research from the universities of Minnesota and Toronto (Seashore Louis, Leithwood et al., 2010). In fact, if test scores are any indication, the more

willing principals are to spread leadership around, the better for the students. One of the most striking findings of the universities of Minnesota and Toronto report is that effective leadership from all sources – principals, influential teachers, staff teams and others – is associated with better student performance on Maths and reading tests. The relationship is strong albeit indirect: good leadership, the study suggests, improves both teacher motivation and work settings. This, in turn, can fortify classroom instruction.

❖ **Improving instruction:** Effective principals work relentlessly to improve achievement by focusing on the quality of instruction. They help define and promote high expectations; they attack teacher isolation and fragmented effort; and they connect directly with teachers and the classroom. Effective administrators also encourage continual professional learning. They emphasize research-based strategies to improve teaching and learning and initiate discussions about instructional

approaches, both in teams and with individual teachers. They pursue these strategies despite the preference of many teachers to be left alone. It means that leaders must become intimately familiar with the “technical core” of schooling, i.e., what is required to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Kenneth, et. al, 2004). To improve the instruction, administrators can engage in formal evaluation, classroom visits or learning walks, spending time in classrooms (or ensure that someone who’s qualified does), observing and commenting on what’s working well and what is not. Moreover, they shift the pattern of the annual evaluation cycle to one of ongoing and informal interactions with teachers. This means that evaluation won’t be one-off activities done at the end of the term, rather, it’s continuous and spontaneous. These visits enable administrators to make formative observations that will be clear about learning and professional growth,

coupled with direct and immediate feedback.

❖ **Managing people, data and processes:**

No matter the size of school, whether big or small, as an organization, the challenges facing the administrators are relatively the same. To get the job done, effective leaders need to make good use of the resources at hand. In other words, they must be good managers. They manage both the man and material resources available in the school in a well-defined process in order to achieve optimum result. Effective administrators nurture and support their staff. They hire carefully but adhere to the rules and regulations and procedures governing hiring of teachers in order to employ capable and able teachers. They also engaged in aggressively weeding out individuals who did not show the capacity to grow. When it comes to data, effective administrators try to draw the most from statistics and evidence, having learned to ask useful questions of the information, to display it

in ways that tell compelling stories and to use it for promotion and collaborative inquiry among teachers. They use data as a means not only to pinpoint problems but to understand their nature and causes in other ways to find possible means of solving them. A good school administrator engages in the process of planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating/controlling, directing and evaluating to achieve educational goals and objectives, thereby helping in solving the global problem (Andrew, 2008).

Conclusion

A successful school is about much more than teaching. While good teaching and learning are crucial, the administration that underpins it is key to providing a well-rounded education that encompasses the whole child, learning environment, and society for economic development. Effective administration and operations support an education that goes well beyond imparting knowledge, but practical solving of the societal problems relevant to the 21st century world. School operations teams



ensure that students' daily needs are met; that they receive healthy and nutritious meals, sleep and learn in a safe environment, and receive appropriate medical care and mental health support in other for a comprehensive instrument in finding solution of the society. Beyond the day-to-day, the administrative team are often the ones responsible for recording, [checking and analyzing student data](#), so they can enable those responsible for both learning and wellbeing to tailor their approach to the needs of the student and the society. Fullan (2002) has gone as far to conclude that, Effective school leaders are key to large-scale, sustainable education reform. This reform/re-think is key in competing at the world stage for economic development.

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