

Human Resources Development and Utilization: The Challenges in Education Delivery

¹Musa, C. N. (Ph.D.); ²Musa R. (Ph.D.)

¹Department of Educational Studies and Management, University of Benin, Benin-City.

²Department of Science Education, Delta State University, Abraka.

Abstract

The thesis of this paper is that the professional development and utilization of human resources requires the cooperative working together of both the education system and the various segments of the economy, especially the job market. It is through well coordinated and organized educational institutions that the relevant knowledge and skills are professionally appropriated for the development of the human resources who in turn ply these skills into the respective development sectors of the economy. The paper points out that the Nigerian education system is not delivering adequately as it should in the development equation because of the over four decades of decay and deficiencies in infrastructure, insecurity of lives and property, huge urban unemployment, total development failures at the lower levels of government and acute educational crises in terms of opportunities in the country. The paper also observed the major challenges in the area of the dearth of accurate educational data, the problem of funding, the poor quality of the products of the educational system and their employability. The paper concludes on the note that the education system and other sectors of the economic development system have to work together in order to avoid the glaring mismatch between the absorbing capacity of the development system and the education outputs.

Introduction

Knowledge is essentially a human creation. It is a resource which human beings have invested in very heavily for their unique purposes. All the activities in which humanity has been engaged have their foundations firmly entrenched in accumulated knowledge through the ages. Because humanity is always changing, the knowledge component of humanity must of necessity change in response to the changes which characterize the daily experiences of humanity.

According to Imogie (2002), knowledge and understanding constitute the summit of human needs for civilized consciousness and are predicated on teaching and learning. In the same way, civilized consciousness is always in a state of flux because it is technology driven in the last two decades (Ukoli, 1996). In order to find relevance in humanity-society-civilization matrix and the Information Technology (IT) superhighway, teaching and learning (that is

education,) would continuously have to respond to such changes in order for human being to be properly equipped and developed for effective utilization in the socio-economic milieu. It is this continuous change and the corresponding response to the changes by the education system that has created considerable challenges in the delivery process. This is with regards to what should be taught (the curriculum), who should teach it and how it should be taught, then to what use the products of the education system should be put.

The Refocusing Process and Who is Involved in Education

In all respects, the professional development and utilization of the human capacity and resources generally requires the cooperative efforts of the education system, the major stakeholders and the various sector of the economy as in the Chinese or Cuban educational practice. It is through well coordinated educational institutions that the relevant knowledge and skills are professionally appropriated for the development of the human resources who in turn ply these skills into the respective sectors of the economy. The challenges which educational institutions encounter in the process of the development and utilization of the human resources with the refocusing process can also be found in a careful scrutiny of the functions of education. Olubor (2004) had identified some of the main functions of education as:

.....a major change agent for the political socialization of the young into the national political culture; a major agent for the selection and training of the political elite and power brokers on whom the stability, survival and effectiveness of the political culture depends; a major contributor to political integration and the inculcation of national consciousness and primordial identifies and selfish loyalties as epitomized in the institution in 1973 of the National Youth Corps Scheme (p. 160).

The 1976 Universal Primary Education (UBE) Programme of the defunct Federal Military Government of Nigeria has been easily acclaimed by Fafunwa (1981) as the most ambitious and gigantic educational revolution in Black Africa. But the subtle ways in which the Nigerian civil service and military bureaucracies frustrated the successful implementation of the programme are common knowledge to all stakeholders. And very unfortunately, the implementation of the 1999 Universal Basic Education (UBE) has been thrown into such mundane controversies as the harmonization of the policy guidelines of the federal government and the state governments. Other challenges include widespread corruption among the major stakeholders, haphazard

implementation of otherwise well-thought out projects, a total absence of efficient monitoring mechanisms and above all, the complete absence of reliable data upon which to anchor programme plans (Olubor, 2004).

In refocusing education, to meet some of these challenges which have been posed by the new technologies in a recently globalized world, it has been found that budgetary allocation for education by the various governments have continued to be inadequate at all levels of the nation's educational system. This is why the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) had had a running battle with the governments of over three decades now on the issue of adequate funding of education. This same scenario has also led to the categorization of Nigeria by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is one of the countries that are likely to be unable to meet the 2015 deadline for the attainment of Education for All (EFA) by member countries.

Azeke (2002) has examined in detail some of the challenges in what he christened “contemporary issues in Nigeria education”, and classified them into four broad categories of: General Issues, Curriculum Issues, Teachers' Issues and Instructional Materials Issues. These issues are the same ones which have posed the greatest challenges in the delivery segment of the human resources development efforts of the education industry. Very briefly, therefore, some of these challenges will be examined in this segment of the paper.

The challenges cover a wide spectrum of the society generally. The Nigerian society, for example, has been afflicted with all kinds of vices which have almost threatened the survival of both the Nigerian humanity and the nationherself. For example, the current effort at rebranding the country emanates from the embarrassing level of corruption at all levels of the socio-political and economic lives of Nigerians, with Nigeria being rated as one of the most corrupt nations in the world. This has created very serious problems for the nation in all spheres including the various arms of government, from the executive through the judiciary to the legislature. In addition, the rate of crime has continued to increase with reports of violent armed robbery, kidnapping, youth militancy and restiveness and religious intolerance leading to seizures of some cities and police formations. The recent experiences in Jos and Bauchi had been masterminded by some obscured religious fundamentalists called “Boko Haram” – which started as an anti-Western education violent outfit in Northern part of Nigeria.

In the same way, the Niger Delta of the South-South region of the country has been held hostage for several years by some groups of well armed youth in their agitation for resource control. Other general issues at the international level include the worldwide threats to human survival, inexplicable dramatic changes in the normal pattern of climate which have resulted in very devastating floods and hurricanes. Pakistan was devastated in 2010 by floods which swallowed up entire cities and villages. There have been Tsunamis in Indonesia, earthquake in Haiti, hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico and many more across the globe. Several international talk-shops have been held to ponder on the effects of climate

change – such as the depletion of the life-sustaining ozone layer of the atmosphere which has given rise to droughts and poor harvests with its attendant famine.

On the home front, the recent lawless and violent occurrences in the Nigerian State Houses of Assembly including the National Assembly have been very embarrassing. Unfortunately, the perpetrators of all these vices are not necessarily illiterates; rather, they are products of education system. The implication is that they may have all imbibed the negative values and attitudes as shown in their behaviours either in the political terrain or in the economic sector as was witnessed in the recent sacking of five reputable bank Chief Executives by the Central Bank of Nigeria for various shades of financial impropriety. The variant of the educational values which they have imbibed appears to be one for the primitive accumulation of wealth. This is why our education must be refocused and strengthened to inculcate the right values and attitudes to the youths through the appropriate curricular offering.

Similarly, the overwhelming effects of the phenomenon of globalization have been very telling on our educational system with the result that the certificates and degrees which the system offers to the recipients are becoming increasingly irrelevant on a daily basis. The consequence is that the products of the nation's education have had to be subjected to some serious retraining in order to make up for the deficiencies inherent in their education; already acquired even in the highly professional courses. The educational system should therefore be vigorously refocused to meet some of these daunting challenges.

According to Azeke (2002), Nigerians cannot continue to assume that they are living in world of their own because Nigeria is an independent sovereign country. The whole world has become so intricately interconnected that the occurrences at the South Poles make immediate impact at the North Pole. The recent developments in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) have further reduced the mammoth size of the earth to such a small size that it is now possible to leave Los Angeles at noon and have dinner in Sydney. Again, the whole world was held hostage for over a month by the recent world cup in South Africa because of the presence of ICT. Similarly in August 2010, the same ICT brought the daily devastations of the Pakistan floods in to our living rooms. That is the global village in which humanity has found herself. Ideas, events, practices, values, education practices, curricular innovations, learning systems and even the duration of course programmes across countries are becoming more and more alike than ever before. Nigeria therefore has to focus her educational efforts in order to be relevant. The pervasive influence and effects of science and technology can no longer be ignored anywhere.

- Many of the challenges which the system faces in delivery of education are deeply rooted in the very faculty foundation of the system. Basic educational efforts have not provided the appropriate tools and the right orientations, whether it is the 1955 Universal Primary Education (UPE) of the defunct Western Region, the 1976 UBE of Obasanjo's Federal Military Government or even the latest, the 1999 Universal Basic

Education (UBE) of the new democratic dispensation. The new focus must be the provision of basic courses which create awareness, literacy, economic empowerment, value reorientation and a general attitudinal reengineering as opposed to the present system which engenders primitive accumulation of material wealth as exemplified in the new Nigerian political elite. Emphasis should immediately to such basic issues as hard work, healthy competition to earn some honest living, sex education, population education, consumer and entrepreneurship education.

Strengthening and Refocusing Education through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The millennium development goals appear to be an area where the Nigerian education delivery system should strengthen its efforts and properly refocus its attention. For example, all the 192 member nations of the United Nations (UN) and not less than twenty world class international organizations have agreed that by the year 2015, some eight international development goals (MDGs) would have to be achieved. This resolution was informed by the recognition by the UN member states of the urgent need to assist impoverished nations more aggressively. The eight identifies goals were to spur developments by improving social and economic conditions of the less developed countries (LDCs) including Nigeria. These goals derive from international development targets which were officially established at the 2000 Millennium Summit. The eight development goals fashioned out are:

1. To eradicate poverty and hunger.
2. To achieve universal primary education.
3. To reduce child mortality rate.
4. To promote gender equality and empower women.
5. To improve maternal health.
6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
7. To ensure environmental sanitation.
8. To develop a global partnership for development.

It does appear that Nigeria has been identified as one of the LDCs which may have problems in attaining these goals at the expected date, hence the need for a refocusing and strengthening of the educational efforts. If Nigeria is to make a headway in her efforts, Obanya (1994) proposed that the education delivery system would require the upward push in science and technology which would result in the preponderance of computers and assortment of other specialized technologies in the everyday life of the average Nigerian and in the educational process. It would then become relatively easier to process the ever increasing volume of information which the new generation of learners would have to contend with. They would also be able to reason more creatively and finally

evolve some widespread push button habits in all spheres of life from the kitchen to the dining table, from the classrooms to the laboratories, on the highways with all brands of motor vehicles and then the research libraries, for example the emergence of the virtual library and internet.

And only recently, the American presidential electioneering campaign and fundraising involved e-networking – and the Obama victory has unarguably been attributed to the electronisation of the process. The Nigerian presidential electioneering campaigns for the 2011 elections effectively keyed in on these devices with President Jonathan blazing the trail with his “facebook” indication of interest and intent to run for the 2011 Presidential election. It is these kinds of immediate responses that should be expected in the field of education especially in the delivery system. Learning and teaching should embrace the “tube” in response to the goings-on in the world of information dissemination via ICT – i.e. satellite technology.

A broad field integrated approach should be evolved in the teaching-learning system if the products of the education system are to be relevant in the 21st century. A science-society and technology intercourse should be the focus of the new approach. By this means, learners will be opportune to make informed choice in terms of what is good for themselves, their families and the larger society. From the same broad field's integrated approach, such knowledge would easily find relevance in several other areas of life including biotechnology and agriculture. There was time when agriculture was Nigeria's economic mainstay. Such new focus should lead to a rediscovery of the agricultural potentials with the emergence of a new breed and varieties of products in the food market as we now find apples, carrots, cucumbers and water melons in all parts of Nigeria throughout the seasons. Such products should engender some more decent living as a result of better feeding, better yielding farm products and so on. When food is available, citizens, including learners will feed well and learn better.

New Focus in the Nigerian Education System

The human resource development and utilization component of the education system should venture into the brave new world of human problem-solving as the reduction of poverty through some creative use of the locally sourced materials. The widespread adoption of entrepreneurial education programmes by universities for example, is a step in the right direction. In Lagos State for example, gender barriers have been broken by the widely acclaimed acquisition of the “Keke-Napep” by the female-folk as a means of eking out a living and at the same time helping to solve the hydra-headed problem transportation (intracity). Unemployment problem has also been creatively tackled by the girls both in “Keke-Napep” and in the automobile maintenance (mechanic) industry.

The education industry had always been characterized by the production of unemployable graduates who are bereft of any creativity or initiative for self-

employment. Graduates of banking and finance should be creative enough to set up micro-finance small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) (Esusu) in very creative ways as to put into practice all the theories of financial and human resources management. The new reform focus should be geared towards the production of such graduates who are very creative and innovative, who are ready to venture into areas that have never been explored by job-seeking university graduates.

Food processing and vending is another very fertile unexplored area which graduates of Nigerian universities have ignored for decades. At the University of Benin and in several major street locations in Benin, the Omega Restaurant has become a household name in culinary terms. It was simply the creative ideas of a group of UNIBEN graduates who, instead of writing applications, got themselves together and came up with the idea of an eatery which has blossomed and is providing employment for other job seekers: drivers, cooks, stewards, accounts clerks and so on. While making money for themselves, they are equally providing solution to the unemployment problem and at the same time reducing poverty in line with the first of the MDGs.

Teacher Preparation

The Teacher Education programmes in Nigeria provide very great challenges in the education delivery system. Teacher education problem have many phases – right from admission/selection, training and on-the-job. Studies have shown that less than two percent of all applicants to the Nigerian universities choose education as course of study (Okebukola, 1999). Available records both in the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB) and Admission Offices of Nigerian universities also confirm that the number of education applicants is very negligible. In fact, it is reported by the Admissions Office of the University of Benin that most of the candidates who found themselves reading courses in education never really applied to read the course. It is a kind of “selective-rejection”. Candidates who could not obtain marks high enough to read courses of their choice have always been counseled into education. For example, if a candidate does not score high enough for Accounting in the Faculty of Management Sciences, he or she may be considered for Accounting Education in the Vocational and Technical Education Department of the Faculty of Education. Similarly, while the Faculty of Science would select the high-scoring candidates for degrees in single Honours Mathematics, the “leftovers” who are generally low-scorers in the matriculation examination would be drafted to read Mathematics/Education. The same is true for almost all the faculties which service the Faculty of Education. By implication therefore, students who study for degrees in Agriculture, the Social Sciences, Management Sciences and even Arts generally parade some superiority complex over their Education counterparts. It is not a healthy practice. Candidates who did not apply to read courses in education should not be

admitted into Education. It is the beginning of a frustrating career which until recently was a major educational challenge at the delivery level.

On training, focus should be both on the acquisition of the appropriate knowledge in the academic discipline and pedagogy. No one is more important than the other. A good idea of the essential knowledge in Maths will also require a commensurate accumulation of the appropriate pedagogical skills for effective teaching and learning. The current universal practice of running prospective teachers through a haphazardly organized teaching practice for 12 weeks is most unacceptable. In fact, 12 weeks was the traditional duration for practicum. In many universities' faculties of education, the period has gradually diminished from 12 weeks to 8 weeks, to 6 weeks and even 3 weeks with or without supervision by faculty staff. This is most unacceptable for a proper teacher education programme. It is in realization of this shortcoming that the Deans of Faculties of Education of Nigerian Universities have asked for a five-year duration for an effective teacher education programme with one of the 5 years devoted exclusively for teaching practice experience. This will be in line with what obtains in many other professions like Law or Medicine.

After a defective selection process and then the poor training, the teacher, on the job showcases a feeling of inferiority among his peers. In the same way his/her employer would subject him/her to the same indignities. To address the issue, of teaching as a profession there is a new fad of the Teachers Registration Council (TRC), a regulatory body which should harmonize the various sectors of the profession.

Conclusion

Attempts have been made in this paper to critically look at the education delivery challenges which call for reforms and refocusing. It has been pointed out that knowledge is in a continuous state of flux and so all those engaged in knowledge dissemination and acquisition, that is, teachers and learners should not be oblivious of such changes. We live in a world that is increasingly becoming more intricately interconnected. We need to look beyond our borders to see what obtains in the technology of education. The teacher education component of the Nigerian educational endeavors would need refocusing so that the country can realistically re-enter the race for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015.

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