Review paper

Boy Child Education in Primary Schools for Sustainable Democracy, Peace and Unity in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: Education is the key to sustainable development and in this era no one can do without it irrespective of one's biological affiliation. The federal government launched boy-child education to tackle the high rate of male dropout from schools in the southeast and other parts of the country. This programme is aimed at ensuring the enrolment of about 9.5 million pupils in schools. It is estimated that about 10 million Nigerian children of primary school age are out of school because of some challenges. These include: lack of political commitment, poor planning and management as well as blind curriculum. All these are the clog in the wheel of boy-child education in Nigeria. Sequel to this, Nigeria embarked on Universal Basic Education in a bid to meet the millennium development goal of education for all 2015- target, including the boy-child education. Hence, this paper focuses on boy-child education in primary schools for sustainable democracy, peace and unity in Nigeria. It was concluded that boy-child education should be encouraged at all levels of Nigerian educational system. The paper recommended that the government should promulgate laws making boy-child education compulsory in Nigeria.

Keywords: Education, boy child education, sustainable democracy and development

INTRODUCTION

All Nigerian children who should be in school are not in school. In the southeast parts, one prevalent problem is the boy-child drop-out syndrome (Oluwatobi, 2006). The boys, for economic reasons, refuse to go to school, and those who enter primary schools' dropout prematurely. They refuse to complete primary and secondary education because of the economic problems encountered by the educated in society. Many boys are found in mechanic villages as apprentices to crafts masters, in various types of businesses, or in other engagement outside the school (Oluwatobi, 2006). In the Northern parts of the country, the problem is that of girl-child dropout from school, for reasons ranging from early marriage to cultural values opposed to female education as well as ignorance. Thus there are more boys than girls in schools in that part of the country. Combined efforts of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the

Federal Ministry of Education and State Agencies for Mass Education have been directed at providing Non-Formal Education Curriculum and the associated reading materials development for the out-of-school learners. The Universal Basic Education programme, launched by the Obasanjo administration will, it is hoped, help solve the problem of access to formal education for many school-age children especially the boy-child (Nnabuo and Asodike, 2009).

Concept of education

Education is the process of providing information to an inexperienced person to help him/her develop physically, mentally, socially, spiritually, politically and economically (Off-ramp, 2008). That is why at graduation ceremonies,

one hears the Vice-Chancellors pronounce these words while awarding degrees to their institutions' graduates, "you have been found worthy in character and learning", in education parlance, it means that the individual has acquired adequate and appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes and values, knows as cognitive, psychomotor and affective behaviours to be able to function optimally as a citizen. These behaviours are the focus of training individuals in institutions of learning. The planned and systematic training given in an institution of learning is formal education. The programme is organized, planned and systematically implemented. In an informal education, there is no plan and the training is haphazard and incidental (Off ramp, 2008).

Education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society (Ocho, 2005). It is a process through which the young acquires knowledge and realizes his or her potentials and uses them for self-actualization, to be useful to himself or herself and others. It is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of the society. In every society education connotes acquisition of something good, something worthwhile. Education is one of the fundamental rights of individuals. Article 26, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December, 1949 stipulated that:

i. Everyone has the right to education. This shall be free at least in the Elementary and primary stages.

ii. Elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional Education shall be made generally available.

iii. Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

iv. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (Nwangwu, 2006).

To this end, the first aim of every family and society should be to raise healthy and productive individuals who are physically, psychologically, socially, and mentally well developed. These can be achieved through the education of the boy-child who is the future leader of tomorrow.

Education and Democracy

Democracy in modern day is seen to be the most supported political tool for development and social change in the society of any nation. Democracy is based on equity and justice, the rule of law and the preservation of human rights. Fundamental elements of a thriving democracy are usually a strong civil society, an active and free press, strong and fair legal system, checks and balances on power, and free and fair elections. Democracy as a system of governance, assumes that every individual is capable of enjoying a set of basic

liberties and opportunities, including the capacity to participate in democratic government and hold public offices. Several prominent scholars have linked increase in education with improvements in democracy (Eduardo and Yeaji 2015). This is because education is supposed to promote democracy by influencing the competence and cognitive orientation of individuals, and by providing experiences that instill democratic values. The challenge facing societies and humanity today in terms of achieving appropriate democratic strategies for sustainable development is how to motivate people to change basic behaviours and activities that are problematic to our environment.

Subba (2014) identified some democratic values, beliefs or principles which include: freedom, equality, justice, autonomy, cooperation, and shared decision-making, sense of community, respect of life, justice, self-esteem, tolerance, responsibility, safety, peace and development. Establishing democracy mostly depends on the understanding, skills and attitudes of people which would be the primary responsibility of education. Abdullahi, (2007) posited that in any democratic society, education remains at the core of national stability, security and an instrument for

Political and economic growth and development. This is because schools have the essential role in this process as they maintain structured and formal educational programmes. Subba (2014) claims that democratic values must reflect in both the formal curricula and through unambiguous teaching. Therefore, to be recognized as a democratic institutions and systems according to Westall (2015), the society must have popular controlled environment, inclusiveness, adequate information and understanding of the position of others and transparency in decision making.

In spite of its widespread acceptability, democracy is still struggling to develop in Nigeria. This is because it is assumed that democracy has not been able to enhance the provision of basic human needs and equal distribution of available resources that sustains development of a nation. The question according to Carry (2008) is, does our educational systems encourage, support, and cultivate a democratic experience for students? Hence how do we understand the word democracy and how it is taught in schools throughout the formative years of these young adults? This is because it has become an obvious factor that institutions have an important role to play in cultivating and shaping the democratic experiences for students in relation to their present and future attitudes, behaviours, belief system and commitment regarding democracy. To this end, it has become important to identify and put forward strategies for enhancing civic knowledge, skills and active participation in democratic activities.

There is the need to equip the populace with change of attitude, action and participation towards democratic activities by acquiring relevant education and skills in

order to promote developmental efforts in our nation. Efforts to promote democracy for sustainable development involve training and information aimed at building and equipping the populace to abide by the following principles which include: social and work ethics, integrity, responsibility, respect for laws and regulations, productivity, punctuality and change of attitude towards work and national development. This implies not only providing our youths with knowledge, laws and regulations but also to impact the necessary skills needed to promote, apply and sustain these values and attitudes in their daily life. In the study carried out by Eduardo and Yeaji (2015), using an expanded data set on educational attainment that covers most of the post war era, the study findings indicate that increases in level of education improve levels of democracy. The study also reveals that democratizing effect of education is more forceful in poor countries.

According to UNESCO (2015), other fields that are related to and supportive of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education are global citizenship education, education for mutual respect and understanding, peace education, education for sustainable development and intercultural/multicultural education. These areas are essential in order to prepare young people to be active, responsible and caring participants in their communities and the nation for sustainable development. Furthermore, UNESCO (2015) asserts the need for competence-base curriculum approach with learner outcomes to include knowledge, attitudes, skills and the development of dispositions and capacities among young people to be able to apply the appropriate democratic principles in their daily lives. At a point, the ideas of sustainable development and democracy overlap and are interdependent. Common to both sustainable development and democracy is participation (Westall, 2015). Participation in terms of commitment by all stakeholders to tackle some of the global challenges and also ensure that the differences between the two ideas are resolved to ensure that current political democratic systems adapt in the direction of achieving sustainable development. He stated that the justice, legitimacy and transparency achieved by democratic contests and safeguards can also make the achievement of sustainable development fairer, more widely justified, and acceptable. Hence sustainable development can be seen as a process and a set of desirable outcomes. In other words, sustainable development is a pre-requisite for thriving democracies.

Education and Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is a continually evolving concept, therefore, difficult to define. Ugwu and Ijah (2011) defined "sustainable development" as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. According to Okafor (2015), sustainable development is believed to have three components: environment, society, and economy. The well-being of these three areas is intertwined, not separate and a society relies on the resources available to ensure a healthy environment. There is the need for the appropriate education that will improve understanding of social institutions and their role in change and development; increase awareness of resources availability and effects of human activity on the environment and climate change; and to create sensitivity to the potential and the limits of economic growth and its impact on society and the environment. Therefore, education directly affects sustainability plans in areas like imbibing the culture of implementing the informed sustainability goals, good community-based decisions which will affect social, economic, and environmental well-being; and improves the quality of life of its citizenry. The National Town Meeting on Sustainability (Rogers, 2009) believe that sustainable development means new technologies and new ways of doing business, which allow people to improve quality of life without prejudicing the ability of future generations. The goal of educational system according to Onyenemezu (2012) is to provide a balanced individual capable of surviving in an environment and contributing meaningfully towards peace co-existence of the society to which they belong. The culture of peace fosters sustainable development since it is aimed at helping people cope resiliently and creatively with ethical, cultural, political, environmental and other social transformation. What is needed for a culture of peace is an integrated, comprehensive education covering human rights, democracy, international understanding, tolerance, non-violence, multi-cultural and other values conveyed through the coordinated behaviour as presented in a school environment. These can be achieved through re-examining curricular at all levels (pre-school to professional education) to address the need for sustainable development. (Onyene et al., 2015).

The boy-child is a biological male offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This is the age before one becomes a young adult. This period covers the crèche, nursery or early childhood (0 – 5years), primary (6 – 12years) and secondary school (12 – 18years). During this period, the young child is totally under the care of the adult who may be his parents or guardians and other siblings. It is made of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stages of development. During this period, the boy-child is malleable, builds and develops his personality and character. He is very dependent on the significant others, those on who he models his behavior, through observation, repetition and imitation. His physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional developments start and progress to get to the peak at the young adult stage (Off-ramp, 2008).

The education of the boy-child before now has never dominated public discourse, because males have always been viewed as more educationally advantageous than their female counterparts (Isibor, 2012). The national campaign on back-to-school for the boy-child in the South East launched by the Federal Government in Enugu State may not have come at a better time than now. There are several men from the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria who never had access to formal education. Investigation shows that many adolescent males in the region prefer to take up a vocation in trading than continue in formal education, which has created a huge gap in boy-child education in the region (Isibor, 2012). It is in view of the above that the Federal Government launched the back-to-school programme to address the challenge of boy-child education in the zone. The back-to school programme could be seen as a replica of the Almajari Education system also launched by the Federal Government, but in the northern part of the country, which is expected to take children off the streets. There are estimated 9.5 million indigent children on the streets begging for arms in the northern part of the country (Isibor, 2012).

Boy child drop out in school

The federal government launched boy-child education to tackle the high rate of male dropouts from schools in the southeast. With the launch of boy-child education for the southeast, the federal government seems to have kept faith with its promise to ensure the education of Nigerian citizens (Hopkins and Kedon, 2015). The boy-child education which was launched at Micheal Okpara Square in Enugu State, was aimed at arresting male dropouts, which is mostly experienced in the southeast (Ocho, 2005). Although the southeast is blessed with natural resources, all these will remain hugely untapped if the skilled human resources are not readily available to drive the process. It is therefore for this reason that all hands must be on deck to support government's effort in ensuring that boys from the region are fully engaged in schools. The approach to solving the problem, he suggested will be for each state to work in tandem with the local government councils in the states, traditional rulers in the various communities and the town unions in identifying the unique challenges of the boy-child education in their respective areas.

The administration has developed a four-year strategic plan of the development of the education sector in the country. Among the strategies is the 'access and equity' campaign, which is identified as one of the major steps of letting millions of Nigerian children that are currently out of school to redress their steps. The state government has made education free and compulsory from primary school up to junior secondary (Hopkins and Kedon, 2002).

It is estimated that about 10 million Nigerian children of primary school age are out of school because of some challenges. These include: lack of political commitment, poor planning and management as well as blind curriculum. Foremost Nigerian Nationalist, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in his book, "Silent Resistance: High School Dropouts Among Igbo-Nigerian children," recommended that "curriculum should be relevant to global needs such as the inclusion of more science and technology in the basic curriculum, but not at the expense of a holistic view of the needs of the society in question. Schooling is designed to produce literacy in all fields of life, but especially literacy in one's culture". There has been a decrease in male dropouts in the southeast in the last four years. Statistics has shown that the southeast has the highest number of students admitted into higher institutions in the country between 2002 and 2007. Records culled from the University Examination Matriculation (UME), showed that the southeast led in the number of students admitted within this period followed by south-south and then southwest (Uzondu, 2012). The north has been historically lagging behind in education since amalgamation in 1914. Also the figure of males from the zone surpassed their counterparts from other zones. The federal government's programme is aimed at ensuring the enrolment of about 9.5 million pupils in schools irrespective of their gender.

Conclusion

Education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society (Ocho, 2005). It is a process through which the young acquires knowledge and realizes his or her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization, to be useful to himself or herself and others. There have been remarkable advances in the nation's educational system at all levels, although several problems have continued to plague the educational system especially that of boy-child education. However, with the launching of boy-child education in southeast and almajiri model education in the Northern states, and the successful implementation of Universal Basic Education (UBE), Education for All (EFA) especially, boy-child education has become a reality in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. The politicians and other members of the public should leave politics out of the education sector and work together towards supporting all the learning institutions to enhance boy-child education.
2. The government should propagate laws making boy-child education compulsory in Nigeria.

3. Entrepreneurship education should be introduced into Nigerian educational curriculum to elicit boy-child enrolment to acquire professional skills for future self-dependence.

4. Given that one of the challenges facing the society today in terms of achieving appropriate democratic strategies for sustainable development is how to motivate people to change basic behaviours and activities, it therefore becomes necessary for the reorientation of young adults for sustainable development.

5. There is need to integrate sustainable development programmes into the school curricula at all levels of education to imbibe the culture.

6, Decision makers and curriculum developers should include comprehensive and appropriate policies and curricula in schools that will sustain and promote civic education to enhance sustainable development.

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