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EDUCATION AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Education is seen as an instrument of development in all ramifications of our life. Efforts have been made by the Nigerian governments to bring about good education to Nigerians. Innovations have been made and huge amount of money have been expended on the execution of education policies. Although several governments and individuals efforts are daily proposed, the government is seen here as not measuring up to the standard in complementing the teachers' efforts towards bringing about good citizens that would make Nigeria conducive for both political and economic development. This is believed to be the cogs in the wheels of alleviating poverty among the Nigerian masses. To achieve our national goals, Social studies education must be complemented by the government efforts. Suggestions were therefore made along the line. The belief is that there cannot be conducive atmosphere for political and proper economic development if proper moral education is not given a place in our society. Economic and political development would in turn alleviate the poverty of many Nigerians.

Keywords: Education, Poverty alleviation, Problems, Prospects.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Believing that education is a mother to knowledge, one is made to agree that a well –educated society is likely to solve its problems with ease. The role of education to humanity could not be exaggerated after all. This is because it is believed to be the correct ‘drug’ that is used to heal the ailments in the society. In support of this fact, (Umaru, 1995) the chancellor of Obafemi University, Ile –Ife in his address at the 24th Convocation ceremony of the University disclosed that the objectives of the University include the production of educated young men and women whose knowledge would be relevant in dealing with the problems of the modern society. He was of the opinion that the higher education industry produces high-level manpower, which under ideal condition thereafter becomes an instrument for the transformation of our society while meaning strategic sectors of the economy can improve the quality of life of the citizenry and

generally moves the country forward. Another scholar that has the same belief is [Nwosu \(1984\)](#) when he says that;

After the brief historical survey above, we can now define education as the formal and informal process by which the individual learns to live constructively in society.

Along the line, some institutions agree that education is a process which was essentially an instrument for character development ([Unibadan, 1982](#)), attainment 'Goof Life' and production of good citizens. People see education as a savior when it comes to the problem solving issue in the society. This is probably the reason why the [University of Glasgow \(1988\)](#) opined that 'Education is at the heart of all we are as a society'. Lastly, [Federal Republic of Nigeria \(1981\)](#) enunciated the objective of education in Nigeria part of which is the provision of a free democratic society and a just and egalitarian society. All these and more, point to the development of man with the hope of making life comfortable for himself and others.

2. DISCUSSION

Several efforts have been made by individuals, teachers, governments and other institution to make education achieve the aims for which it is set in Nigeria. For example, the history of education could be traced to the period of the early man when informal education was the order of the day until the whites and the Arabs introduced formal education. The ideology behind the introduction of education then was the making of people learned in their different religion and specifically, the white used this in addition and a means of providing labor forced for its civil service. The ideology went along the line of making people to develop some skills and becoming good citizens in future. To bring this into reality several Quranic and Missionary schools were established.

As soon as Nigeria got independence in 1960, and having realized that education is the foundation for political, social, economics and even physical development, the focus of the government centered on the establishment of more schools. Twenty-one years after political independence, Nigeria modified the educational structure inherited from the British and introduced the 6-3-3-4 education system. To achieve the objectives of education set in the National Policy of Education, many school disciplines are either introduced, encouraged or emphasized. The training of mind, skills and knowledge in different spheres of life are not left out. For example, Social studies were introduced to focus on mass problem of survival. [Adeogun \(1999\)](#) defines "social study as a study that equips an individual with tools necessary in solving personal and society related problems. Such tools are knowledge, values attitudes and skills.' Social studies equally helps other subjects like Civics, Government and History in the inculcation of political education in the children.

This paper therefore, would want to concentrate on the aspect of the Nigerian attitudes and behaviors – the foundation of impediments to the overall growth and development of the nation itself.

It is evident that Nigeria of today is plagued with problems :- National enmity and inequality, colonial slavery and chauvinism, National oppression and intra or inter-tribal conflicts. Also, political riots/upheavals reign in the present capitalist Nigeria. As a testimony to the numerous problems ubiquity Nigeria, [The Interim National Government \(ING\) \(1993\)](#) had this to say:-

*In what have been very difficult times, the interim
National Government is our chose bridge, across the
Chasm of chaos, anarchy, civic war and disintegration,
That will lead us to the green pasture of our dream-
a nation of unity, peace, progress and above all,
Democracy, which commands international respect and
is organized and managed under the rule of law and led
by proven men and women of commitment, moral
rectitude and vision.*

The above assertion (still very relevant)shows the summary of the problems facing this nation. The statement came from the horse's mouth- the then leader of this country. In his justification for an interim government, he argued that ;

*It is a legal government established by laws of our land
and is constituted of heroic patriots who in face of
overwhelming national anxiety and confusion
political boiling-point temperatures, soothe frayed
social nerves, resuscitate the heart-beats of our
economy and gently but promptly shepherded the
country to the culmination of our long march and return
to full boom ballot- box democracy*

In conclusion, Chief Earnest Shonekan agreed very seriously that the political climate of Nigeria is poisoned, economic activities being at low ebb while corruption, indiscipline and other social ills reign supreme. Other relevant statements from important dignitaries within and outside Nigeria show a serious appreciation of the magnitude of the problems that this country has. [Attah \(1995\)](#) in his address at the twenty-fourth convocation ceremony of the Obafemi Awolowo University disclosed that if we reflect on the fact that the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow, one would appreciate the magnitude of the problems that this country might face in future unless there is a deliberate effort to x-ray our social values and inculcate the spirit of discipline and patriotism in our youth. He discussed the problems in Nigeria as examination malpractice, certificate racketeering for admission or employment, continuous operation of secret cults or cultism in our tertiary institutions and the incidence of drug trafficking.

Other problems are armed robbery, depravity and moral turpitude among the Nigeria Youth. [Shonekan \(1993\)](#), [Attah \(1995\)](#) argued that the total disregard for uprightness in our society which has enthroned wealth by all means is quite worrisome and infact it is believed to be a serious threat to our national development. Conclusively, one would agree that the problems in

Nigeria are numerous and education would best be suggested as the correct medicine for healing the wounds.

If education would solve the problems, then once would wonder why the problems keep on increasing in spite of the establishment of schools, introduction of educational policies, devices of measures along its effectiveness and the huge amount invested in the sector in the annual budgets.

All the same, the education believed to be the answer to our problems has its won inherent problems. The problems do not only make its tenets ineffective but equally weaken its stability and definite focus.

The major problem that debar education from achieving its intended goals of solving human problems in Nigeria is political leadership and the attitudes of the government agents. The problem of corruption and get-rich-quick mania, which have become canker worms in all spheres of our national life, is more seen in the attitudes of the Nigerian leaders. The splash back effect of these attitudes calls for ineffective education and worst still a general style of such life being daily imitated by the youth.

Most of the problems that we have today have their root causes in the attitudes of our leaders and adults. Example is the law enforcement agent that uses roadblocks as a means of personal revenue. We hear of the ten percent kickback syndrome during contract award by leaders. These and more encourage the acts of indiscipline in our schools.

Another example is the examination malpractice, the major concern of our schools, which could as well be regarded as the 'foundation' for other social vices in later life like election rigging, embezzlement, corruption and others in the line of making people to achieve goals which one might not necessarily have achieved without working hard. Acts of indiscipline in schools could be regarded as the preliminary stage or doming for effective practice of the above misdeeds in later life. Certificate racketeering, cultism and other acts of indiscipline are geared towards making people to achieve goals with little or no effort of mastering the skills there in. The result is poor leadership and low productivity in the spheres of life of the affected people. The issue of military coups is not an issue borne out of necessity but a serious display of the same act of indiscipline on the part of the khaki boys and a die hearted move towards the same corruption and get-rich-quick motive. The intervention itself is a problem to democracy, another source of underdevelopment.

Mainasowa (1982) who claims to be in the know about January, 1996 coup plans, gave reasons for staging the coup as;

Thus, the political struggle and that consequent drifting apart of the various people of Nigeria went on over the years unchecked, to an extent that the Federal parliament was reduced to an inter-tribal battlefield. Sporadic physical violence erupted from time to time between the various people of Nigeria to mark the end of each phase of the rapid drift towards total disintegration.

It could be concluded here that, despite the numerous years of military rule in Nigeri, the above problems are still very much readily available. Coups and counter coups and its incessant occurrences are not only disturbing and destructive but have caused a lot of inconveniences to the masses than the flimsy 8excuse of the so-called 'sporadic' physical violence erupting from time to time.

All said and done, one would want to ask this question; Why has education in Nigeria been unable to solve our problems? Before independence, social vices were not so rampant in our society. The reasons then were that the norms, customs and beliefs of our people were kept. For example taboos, folk tales were used as checks and balances to modify the attitudes of the people especially the youth. One should not forget the sanction attached to each misdemeanor. In which ever angle one looks at the above. They are all the products of education imparted either by the parents, separate institutions, peer groups or self-learned or education received through accident. The fear of sanctions and the value attached to the maintenance of a good name were all checks against social misbehaviours – the result being a comfortable and harmonious living among the people in the society. It should however be noted that the pre-independent society was not totally left out in the scheme of some social problems. The fact still remains that the rate of social vices was not so alarming and the act of misdeeds were accordingly rebuked. For example, cultism had been in existence long before colonialism. It was used as a security measure. It wasn't a problem to the masses the. Banishment, ridicule were enough sanctions against theft. Oracles helped along the line of choosing leaders- a very effective means of shunning the problems of election rigging, gerrymandering and others along the line.

During the colonial days, formal education came and serves as a helping hand to informal education system. The modern teachers were introduced into the scheme of education and the writing and reading factors became signs of dignity in the society. The teachers were well catered for. Infact, the so-called essentials of life were easily come bye by the teachers. Brilliant pupils eyed and imitated teachers. Students worked hard to get enlisted into the lucrative teaching job. Missionaries fulfilled their requirements in time and the involvement of colonial governments in education did not bring regret to the people, pupils and in fact to the teachers. The effect was that teachers were able to perform effectively their tasks and pupils were able to be 'moulded' along the teachers intentions. The Quranic education rendered the same purpose. Religious education was duely emphasized and the tenets in the subjects were seriously observed and imparted especially in missionary and Quranic schools. Cases of social vices in our institutions were at a low-ebb during this period.

Before independence many schools were built by some communities in addition to the existing religious institutions. Government Secondary Schools later followed. Policies of education became championed by the government all in the name of enhancing the liberation of our people. Few of these included the Mass literacy programme, establishment of special education centers, the establishment of schools and colleges and in fact the training of teachers. It could be concluded here that the Nigerian Government is still up and doing in making people well

informed with the expectation that they would make their useful contributions towards making Nigerian a great nation.

Despite all these efforts, Nigeria is still not able to solve her problems; social vices and poverty are yet to be removed in the lives of people.

One could therefore ask himself or herself the following questions;-

1. Is it the type of education that we receive in Nigeria that brings About all these political, economic and social vices?
- 2.If education is an instrument of development, have we used our education for the growth or detriment of the individual or nation?
3. Are these selfish and at times our self-imposed loafers not educated
4. Did they acquire a wrong type of education/

It could therefore, be suggested that, Nigerians should be thorough in their choices of political leaders. This means that people of good and enviable character should be allowed to contest election and as much possible the numerous electioneering problems should be solved. This would pave enough way for people of noble character to come to power. Records of previous service of those who may want to contest should be used as a prerequisite for contesting elections. The type of leaders in mind should be those that possess moral rectitude and impeccable integrity. Leaders with a minimum of ordinary National Diploma Certificate with some years of working experience either at the private or public sector would be reasonable enough to know the implications of their misdeeds while in office or even after. Past leaders should be probed and those found guilty should be duly punished. It would serve as deterrence to both the present and future leaders. It would serve as deterrence to both the present and future leaders. It should be remembered that a dishonest and unpatriotic leaders would not likely gain the support of his followers the situation, which could bring social and economic instability.

The government should be mindful of the law enforcement agent. The situation whereby law enforcement agents openly collect illegal fees makes a mockery of education especially the principle of inculcating citizenship education. Students who see the illegal practice think that they have no guilt in involving themselves in school related problems, which in later life could lead to the acts that can cause political instability, human right abuse and the like. It could be emphasized that if this acts of indiscipline on the part of law enforcement agent are not checked, we are not likely going to achieve our social studies goals because we cannot rule out the effect of the behaviours of this government representatives contaminating the minds of innocent children.

Education is essential meant to make people know the rights and wrongs in the society. As an educated person, one is expected to work towards the ideal and contribute positively towards the growth of his/her environment and mankind in general. To accomplish the aims, schools were established and mores are still expected to be found. Disciplines of difference sorts exist to take care of one area or the other in order to make education achieve its goals. Among the important subjects is Social studies which essentially deals with the study of man and his relationship with others and his environment. Social studies teach us the need for peace and harmonious co-

existence in the society. It orientates students towards ideal life and encourages them to contribute their quota towards the development of their environment.

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