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## **A Keynote Address:**

### **Education, Economy, Security and Our Digital Response**

**Prof. J. Obi Oguejiofor**

I am honored to stand before you as a keynote speaker. This honor is accentuated by the fact that your association: Philosophers of Education Association of Nigeria is celebrating its fortieth anniversary as well as holding its forty first annual conference. An association that has survived and fulfilled its major objectives for forty years in Nigeria sings its special ode of resilience, propelled by a dint of purposefulness. I heartily wish you more resilience in the special and arduous circumstance of our country. I also wish you more ground-breaking achievements especially as you strive to provide the much needed enlightenment for our dysfunctional society.

That you are gathered here today bespeaks of the fundamental importance of education in our society and indeed in every society. No sane scholar argues that education is not of central importance in the society. We may disagree about the details, the type of education required, the aims and the objectives of such a system, the necessary emphasis as well as the mechanisms of its transmission. But practically, none, except insane ideologues like supporters of Bokko Haram and the Taliban movement can downplay the importance of education in national development. It is thus difficult to disagree with the following statement of Ilham Oztuk:

Education in every sense is one of the fundamental factors of development ... Education raises people's productivity and creativity and promotes entrepreneurship and technical advances. In addition, it plays a very crucial role in securing economic and social progress and improving income distribution.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, development, however it is understood, is a desideratum, a point of common agreement in all socio-economic-political discourse; development understood generally as “change in a desirable direction and encompassing many different dimensions” as Fägerland and Saha<sup>3</sup> put it; and according to Futardo involving such criteria as increase in the production capacity of the society; satisfaction of basic needs; and attainment of the positive and rational aims of various groups within the society.<sup>4</sup> (Futardo, 1977: 636).

Education touches directly the human being who is the primary agent and subject of development. Lee Kuan Yew, the leader and builder of Singapore state in his famous book: *From Third World to First* states that education is the foundation of the progress of the society.

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<sup>2</sup> Ilhan Utzuk, “The Role of Education in Economic Development,” *Journal of Rural Development and Administration*, vol 33 (20019), p 39

<sup>3</sup> I. Faegerlind and L. J. Saha, *Education and National Development: A Comparative Perspective*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> C. Furtado, “Development,” *International Social Science Journal*, 29 (1977), p. 636

He describes education broadly as talent and says: “It had taken me some time to see the obvious, that talent is a country’s most precious asset.”<sup>5</sup>

When we speak of education, it appears obvious that the predominant logic is from the known to the unknown, from what we lack to what we desire to have or to be. Today's world is becoming more and more complicated, especially as regards scientific progress. The education required today is no longer the same as what was needed just a few decades ago. It means that the constant return to education as a concept, as a practice in conferences, in symposia, in individual and collective researches is ad rem and surely not out of place.

However, our discussions must be contextual. We must first understand where we are coming from to know where we are going or where we should go. It requires serious hermeneutics of our context, taking account of our history, our culture our individual and collective tendencies, in fact all factors that impinge on our existence both directly and indirectly. Our context must always be Nigeria and its educational system. In assessing our educational system, there is often the tendency to be triumphalist; to look at those we can call the stars and thus be consoled by their achievements.

Today, for example, most Nigerians are proud to hear that Nigerian immigrants in the United States of America are the most successful group of immigrants in America. By 2015, there were about 376,000 Nigerians and Nigerian Americans living in the United States. 61% of these are university graduates. But the percentage of American citizens who are university graduates is 32%. However, while this appears to massage our fragile ego, hardly anybody remembers that this situation is at least partly possible because so many of those who migrate to America are already university graduates. It means that the country loses a large number of its highly educated individuals, its talents. We call this brain drain, obviously with negative connotation, but what have we been able to do to counter this negative tendency? One progeny of this practice once wrote: “Education was always a major priority for my parents because it was their ticket out of Nigeria.”<sup>6</sup> For this offspring the ticket out of Nigeria is certainly a very useful if not a glorious ticket. But he never remembered that his parents would not have left Nigeria if they hoped for a brighter future in the country?

There is also the tendency to refer with pride to high achievers, especially in the diaspora. When Professor Charles Egbu emerged as the current Vice Chancellor of Leeds University the Nigerian press was full of adulations and self-congratulatory encomiums. But in such cases, we fail to consider that our home terrain may never allow such people to emerge or to perform at the optimal level that makes us proud of them.

However, our attention should be fixed more on what we can describe as the average products that will as much as possible be representative of the normal products. “An industrial society requires a well-educated total population, not just the brilliant few.”<sup>7</sup> Since we cannot just work only with geniuses, especially given their paucity, we must concentrate on the average product.

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<sup>5</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: Singapore and the Asian Economic Boom*, Harper, New York, 200, p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> “Most Successful Ethnic Group in US May Surprise You.” [www.ozy.com](http://www.ozy.com)

<sup>7</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, p. 619

The English moral philosopher G. J. Warnock stated that “the human predicament is inherently such that things are liable to go badly.” Among other reasons, this predicament is created by some intrinsic human limitations: limited rationality, limited resources, limited information, limited knowledge, and limited sympathy. For Warnock some of these limits cannot be obviated and thus the only rational option for the human society is to ensure that we use what is available to achieve optimal results.<sup>8</sup>

This view of Warnock contrasts very diametrically with one of the most endemic drawbacks to Nigerian: that it does away with merit almost completely. Chinua Achebe pointed this out as early as 1983 in his famous and slim volume: *The Trouble with Nigeria*. To the then minister who proclaimed that Nigeria will “buy, hire or steal technology,” Achebe blasted the ignorance of the minister who failed to understand that technology is rooted on an attitude of mind, and that the people from whom he intended to steal technology are those who will not fill an important position until they are sure the person to be appointed is the best they can find.<sup>9</sup>

Today we keep on using unjust principles to grant admission to our public universities, carefully delineating merit from catchment, educationally disadvantaged areas and discretionary decisions of corrupt Vice Chancellors. Do we speak of the yearly disparate and shameful entrance qualifications for some states into our so-called “Unity Schools” where some children are required to score up to 80% while others gain admission with 3, 4 or 5%? What of the shenanigans within universities where competence is no longer the hallmark of appointments from the Vice Chancellor's position to that of that of the Dean of Faculties and to the Heads of Departments? Do we speak of universities where teaching and administrative positions are bought with money? What we have reaped is dysfunctional and progressive decline in standard. The struggle of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is more than adequate testimony that our educational system has turned in the wrong direction and has relentlessly been heading to the abyss. ASUU has gone on incredibly prolonged strikes to force the government to invest in education and make our universities internationally competitive. Successive Nigerian governments have only been interested in their hold on power and consistently refused to make reasonable investments in education. But “No country has achieved constant economic development without considerable investment in human capital.”<sup>10</sup>

The parlous state of the Nigerian educational system makes the theme of your conference very appropriate. It clearly expresses the link between education, security, the economy and our digital response. The implication is that there is hardly any sphere that is completely isolated and independent of the other(s). That the Philosophers of Education Association of Nigeria has chosen this theme shows that your philosophy is not just that of the ivory tower. It was Karl Marx who made the famous statement that philosophers have spoken so much about the world

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<sup>8</sup> G. J. Warnock, *The Object of Morality*, Methuen, London, 1970, pp. 17 -26.

<sup>9</sup> Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Fourth Dimension, Enugu, 1983, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> İlham Öztürk, p. 39.

but that the point is to change it. In saying this Marx failed to understand (as in many other instances<sup>11</sup>) the need to comprehend the world in order to change it in a desirable direction.

Philosophy is aptly positioned to purvey such positive and helpful change. Understood in the simplest form as *explicatio rerum per ultimam causa* (explanation of things through their ultimate cause), it aims to arrive at solutions beyond which no human can go. In the case of our dysfunctional educational system, to constantly ask why and how we came where we are is the first and indispensable step to real solutions. It means that philosophy of education is better placed, perhaps more than any other branch of education to analyze our educational system and really understand what is happening and what is at stake. It is of utmost importance because the underlying philosophy is what ultimately determines the success or failure; the progress and the resilience of any cooperate system.

Nigeria, for instance, still holds the deplorable record of the country with the highest number of out of school children in the world.<sup>12</sup> This statistic is reported every year, but what has our governments done to improve the situation? How far have the various state governments striven to root out this cancerous reality in our fragile society. It goes without saying that most of these children are found in the Northern states of Nigeria. The government of Goodluck Jonathan attempted to get these street children to school. When Mohammed Buhari came to power he abandoned the programs of Jonathan and did not replace them with anything. In addition, worsened insecurity has led to the abduction of school children for ransom. And so, in states such as Zamfara, Katsina, Jigawa, Niger and Kaduna hundreds of school children are kidnapped with incomprehensible frequency. Since this scenario became common, three million more children are out of school in Nigeria.<sup>13</sup> And at least six thousand schools are reported to have been closed in Northern Nigeria due to insecurity.

Of course, out of school children coalesce between secondary and basic schools, even though those in basic schools are more aptly described as children. The state of our public secondary schools is also nothing to write home about. In some states, especially in Southern Nigeria, only those who cannot afford it still send their children to public secondary schools. The pristine examples set by our earliest government colleges have all been obliterated by corruption, mismanagement and other vices. Today the annual WAEC ranking of schools in Nigeria based on their performance at certificate examinations is a window to what is happening in our secondary education. For many years, hardly any public secondary school, including our almighty Unity Schools, make the first twenty in WAEC ranking of schools.

### **Top 10 Schools with Best Waec Results in Nigeria, 2020:**

1. Loyola Jesuit College, Abuja.
2. Marist Brothers' Juniorate, Uturu.
3. Lumen Christi International High School, Uromi

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<sup>11</sup> See Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*,

<sup>12</sup> T. Obiezu, "Nigeria has World's Largest Number of Out-of-School Children," [www.globalcitizen.org](http://www.globalcitizen.org).

<sup>13</sup> Timothy Obiezu, "Officials say 3 Million More Children Are Out of School in Nigeria." [www.voanews.com](http://www.voanews.com).

4. Grundwig International Secondary School, Oba
5. Mea Matter Elizabeth High School, Agbani
6. Christ the King College, Gwagwalada
7. The Lagoon Secondary School, Lekki
8. Graceland International School, Port Harcourt
9. Nigerian Turkish International School, Kaduna
10. Oritamefa Baptist Model School, Ibadan.

(cf: [www.dailymedia.com](http://www.dailymedia.com); [www.peakng.com](http://www.peakng.com) )

The WAEC ranking of schools with their performance at certificate examinations clearly shows what is going on. If our basic and secondary education is declining the ranking of schools shows without any doubt that the problem is mainly due to mismanagement and lack of adequate investment. With all the money injected into the Unity Schools, none can make the first 10 or 20 in annual WAEC ranking of schools with respect to their performance in certificate examinations. Today in some parts of the Federation, only in private secondary schools can one have a measure of assurance of good and balanced education.

The same scenario is gradually creeping into our university education. It is obvious that public universities in Nigeria are still holding the big sway in university education. But in my estimation, it is only a question of time before this is reversed. The point is that our public universities are not making the expected improvement. The private universities are on the other hand increasing in lips and bounds. Within a period of barely twenty years, there are now 99 approved private universities in Nigeria with thousands in addition working for approval. The snag is that all these are still admitting only about 6% of university students' population. The only thing that is required for the tide to change is the extension of Government sponsorship to private universities and improved economic growth in the country. We have argued elsewhere that on account of inadequate investment, corruption and mismanagement, the future of university education in Nigeria lies with private universities.<sup>14</sup> It is only a question of time before this becomes a reality. But for the moment there is no gainsaying that our public universities are poorly financed, poorly equipped, poorly managed and the university teachers very poorly motivated.

In addition to all the above issues, as Philosophers of Education, we must ask ourselves what the aim of education in our Nigerian context should look like.<sup>15</sup> While education should today equip the human being with the necessary skill to conquer his environment in a sustainable manner, it goes without saying that inculcation of the right values are more important than skills. For instance, of the limitations in the human condition we listed above G. J. Warnock

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<sup>14</sup> J. O. Oguejiofor, *The Future of Private Universities in Nigeria*, PREORC Journal of Arts and Humanities, 5 (2020), pp

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed discussion of the aims of education, see John White, *The Aims of Education Restated*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1982.

opined that the most important is limited sympathy mainly on account of the fact that it permits what can be done to be done to countervail the human predicament: “It is the proper business of morality ... to expand our sympathies, or, better still, to reduce the liability to damage inherent in their natural tendency to be narrowly restricted.”<sup>16</sup>

Today, corruption has widely engulfed the whole of our society.<sup>17</sup> Its inroad into our educational system is unquestioned. It is increasingly difficult to see how those who schooled in our universities can be convinced that honesty is the best policy. Today our public universities choose their Vice Chancellors through bribery; Deans are elected with the help of gifts; HoDs are appointed through lobbying; lecturing positions are paid for – sometimes with up to two years prospective salaries. How do you convince young people who have gone through such experiences to shun corruption?

There are so many other dysfunctional tendencies or vices that are fast becoming the order of the day in our public universities. Take ethnicity for example. Universities are known to engage in the search process to appoint Vice Chancellors. The rationale is to be able to choose the best for the position and to ensure that those who are very good, but for some reasons do not want to apply are not neglected. However, in Nigeria, money is spent for the search process, but there is no state university whose VC is not from the state! As for federal universities, the University of Ibadan recently appointed a Vice Chancellor. Before his appointment, indigenes of Ibadan town insisted that the VC must be a “son of the soil,” a native of Ibadan. When the University of Nigeria was searching for its own VC, Nsukka people also planned to install somebody from Nsukka region as VC. The same scenario was seen at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; and the Alex Ekwueme University, Ndufu Alike in Ebonyi State where they succeeded in installing an indigene of Ebonyi state through an unclear process.

The question is not how an appointee can improve the standard of the university, but whether he is from here or there (from this state or this town!). The point is when we talk of unity, when we discuss corruption and its dismal consequences, how do we make our university the doyen of corruption, ethnicity and other vices and hope to produce conscientious and honest graduates?

It is not arguable that education is strongly linked with national security. The Islamic insurgency, Boko Haram by its name rejects education as sinful or forbidden. This alone is clear evidence that the movement is obscurantist, senseless and irrational. However, how many of its members are well educated? It is contestable whether with a high level of education people can be so easily convinced to engage in Boko Haram insurgency or its ancillary practices like suicide bombing and wanton destruction. Again, if some of the members have a reasonable level of education, would they have been so easy to convert to take up arms against their country as they would have they had improved opportunity of being engaged in gainful

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<sup>16</sup> G. J. Warnock, p. 26

<sup>17</sup> See Daniel Jordan Smith, *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007; C. O. T. Ugwu (ed), *Corruption in Nigeria: Critical Perspectives: A Book of Readings*, Chuka Educational Publishers, Nsukka, 2002.

employment? The same consideration can also be applied to other groups, especially those that are engaged in violent unleashing.

The link between good education and national development is an old issue in the theories of education. Suffice it to note that the productivity of a society increases the more its population is educated. This impacts very directly on the desired development. Development is far from availability of material wealth or natural resources. So many nations without substantial natural resources have grown to be highly developed. Japan is a typical example; Singapore is another. As we have referenced Achebe above, development is founded on attitude; culture, the type that nudges administrators not to fill an important position except the person to do so is the best they can find. It is not assured by mere presence of costly resources: Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Gabon, etc, are not industrialized in spite of their wealth. For Lee Kuan Yew, it is not even assured by democracy, but by social discipline.

While talking of security and development, it is clear that we are in the digital age. It is surely a huge opportunity. Our educational system must key into this opportunity. It is an opportunity to be knowledgeable: “The industrial society is giving way to one based on knowledge. The new divide in the world will be between those with the knowledge and those without.”<sup>18</sup> The information super highway makes it possible to be abreast with what happens in the USA even before the citizens know about it. Francis Bacon says that knowledge is power and the super highway facilitates knowledge in a wonderful manner. But to realize this, we must wake up from our dogmatic slumber. The current situation of our digital response is again very pitiable. As far back as 2001, the University of Cologne had provided the possibility of surfing the internet to its students by creating free internet posts at every corridor. How many of our “mighty universities” are able to do so 20 years after. During the corona lockdown of 2020, universities of the world resorted to online teaching. Some distributed free data to all their students and teachers. Our own universities were on strike and those who were not did not enable the lecturers to teach or the students to hook to the online teaching. That we were on strike when others were perfecting digital online lecturing is epiphenomenal of the shortsightedness of our university administrators.

Similar inefficiency bedevils our employment of digital technology to ensure steady improvement of the society in general including the economy and security. Today our society is demonizing the so-called Yahoo Boys. While we must condemn their use of digital knowledge to swindle fellow citizens we must note the inability of our leaders to harness the profound knowledge of these young people for positive ends. Our security agency are doing practically the same in their ineffective fight against bandits. In some Northern State there is complete black out of all digital communications in order to hamstring the communication of the bandits through mobile phones. What happens to those who use mobiles phones for business and for communication? It is like cutting your nose to spite your face, like closing your shop and your business to pursue thieves.

In 2020, an American was kidnapped in Nigerian border with Niger Republic. He was taken to some hideout in Nigeria, but in a few weeks, the American Special Forces located their hideout

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<sup>18</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, p. 691



in Nigeria from the USA, sent a group of soldiers who rescued their citizen and wiped off the kidnappers.<sup>19</sup> If America can do so much for one single citizen, why are hundreds of our school children kidnapped in Northern states and released only after the payment of huge ransom? The reason is that our security agents are corrupt and grossly inefficient. In July this year the *Punch Newspaper* reported that a major policy tracking equipment has been inoperative for more than six months. That is precisely the time when hundreds of kidnapped school children still remained in unknown places. The reason for the dysfunction of the equipment is purportedly non-subscription and failure of necessary system upgrade.<sup>20</sup> In my humble opinion the real reason is nearer mismanagement and corruption as the money needed for these maintenance services could have been paid more than once, while the equipment remains dysfunctional and nothing happens to the administrators. The lesson is that *Ike nine bu ofu ike!* (all capabilities are basically the same!). You cannot have a corrupt, mismanaged and ineffective society with efficient security situation; booming economy and excellent educational system.

Still we are not to be despondent. What we have tried to show in these few pages is that our educational system mirrors the state of our society, its economy, its development, its prospects and its security situation. If so our efforts to improve our society must start from rejigging our education in all its ramification. In this respect philosophy of education is the right angle to start this all important and necessary process.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf: "Niger: American Hostage Rescued by US Special Forces," [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com)

<sup>20</sup> Eniola Akinkuotu, et all, "Major Police Tracking Equipment Down, Detectives Struggle to Trace Bandits, Others," *Punch Newspaper*, 11 July, 2021, [www.punch.com](http://www.punch.com).

<sup>1</sup> G. J. Warnock, p. 26

<sup>1</sup> See Daniel Jordan Smith, *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007; C. O. T. Ugwu (ed), *Corruption in Nigeria: Critical Perspectives: A Book of Readings*, Chuka Educational Publishers, Nsukka, 2002.

<sup>1</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, p. 691

<sup>1</sup> Cf: “Niger: American Hostage Rescued by US Special Forces,” [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com)

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