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Education and Language as Tools for Economic Development and Fighting Insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract

It is quite obvious that education is one of the extremely important factors of development. Whether we are thinking in terms of safety, economic and social progress, education provides opportunity or possibility depending on circumstances. This paper, therefore, attempts to examine the role of education and language as tools for economic development and fighting insecurity in Nigeria. The paper argued that insecurity is Nigeria's biggest challenge at the moment and it further noted that most educated people tend to avoid criminal acts that might lead them to humiliation. The paper opined that education and language are desired tools for economic recovery and development since they empower individuals and the nation at large, by providing them with knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that would transform them and the country for the better. The paper concluded that so long as Nigeria as a country continues to pay lip service to the educational requirements of its citizens, development and progress will elude the nation.

Keywords: Education, language, development, security, and insecurity.

Introduction

No matter how laudable the educational goals of a country are, they can never be achieved in the face of insecurity. In recognition of the importance of education, Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on the following set of beliefs:

- (a) Education is an instrument for national development and social change.
- (b) Education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria;
- (c) Education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society;
- (d) Education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, colour, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenges; and

- (e) Education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society (FRN, 2013).

This paper is not only timely but quite relevant. This is because the Nigerian economy and security are both at stake. The fact that insecurity is Nigeria's biggest challenge at the moment cannot be contested. For example, on the question of insecurity in Nigeria, Senator Smart Adeyemi lamented on the Senate floor that:

We need not run away from the fact that more than ever before in the history of our nation, this is the worst instability we are facing. In fact, this is worse than the civil war... We cannot pretend that we are capable of confronting the situation at hand... Let us shout and call for foreign support... The President should know that this is a bad time for the nation... (Time Base TV Africa 2022, April 10).

Indeed, the country is in trouble, from terrorism to abductions, from banditry to cybercrime, and activities of agitators for secession. Nigeria's hands are full. According to Pepple (2021), for over a decade, Nigeria has been fraught with insecurity challenges from Boko Haram and their ISWAP counterparts to bandits and unknown gunmen. These problems are perceived to have been caused by social problems such as unemployment and poverty. Another factor that is believed to be behind Nigeria's insecurity is lack of justice, trust, and fairness. In the midst of all these, the cost of living continues to rise day by day. Unemployment, mistrust, injustice, and poverty appear to be on the increase and as a result, this seems to give birth to crimes such as banditry; kidnappings; cybercrime; armed robbery, and even agitation for secession. The Nigerian economy continues to struggle; the dollar continues to rise, and industries also continue to be unproductive to the extent that one wonders whether the solutions to these problems could be found. This accordingly, calls for concern among well-meaning Nigerians. It is generally believed that education provides the foundation for development and security, the groundwork upon which much economic and social well-being is rested. A good education also has what it takes to help eradicate poverty in any society in the world. Besides eradicating poverty, quality education can also foster peace and harmony among people living in the society. It is therefore not out of place to state that a good education can transform the worldview of the learners be it political, economic, or social. Buttressing the significance of education, Franklin (2016) said that an investment in knowledge pays the best interest. This statement could be perceived as utilizing knowledge in useful ventures. Investing in knowledge may as well apply to education which is the development of knowledge, skill, ability, or character by teaching, study, training, or experience (Barnhart and Barnhart 1977). Despite the significance of education to the attainment of Nigeria's national goals, budgetary allocation continues to suffer.

Education is not only concerned about how to read and write, but most importantly, it is about doing what is good and right anywhere all the time. Education also upholds human values and thus, people who are not properly informed or educated will accept any education from the wrong quarters that can indoctrinate and corrupt, thus leading to insecurity and economic collapse. Education is necessary for the unity, peace, and progress of the Nigerian society especially because Nigeria's motor is "Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress". It is in the light

of the foregoing that this paper shall examine the role of education and language in economic development and fighting insecurity.

It should be noted that while education is critical to economic development and fighting insecurity, language plays a vital role in education. As pointed out by Oyetunde and Muodumogu (1999), the success of language education is believed to be the success of education generally. The corollary of the preceding statement is quite remarkable in that the success of education implies the success of the language of education. In the Nigerian educational system, for example, the three major languages (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba) and English are the veritable conveyors of education.

Education as a Tool for Economic Development

The goals of education in this era of technology are quite different from the ancient purpose of education because of the current realities and the dynamic nature of the world. In ancient times, the purpose of education was focused on obedience, hunting, and food (Joshua, et al., 2016). Going further, Joshua, et al. (2016) posited that 21st-century education is geared towards political, cultural, social, and economic transformation. This attests to the power of education in economic development.

Given that Nigeria's economy is at stake, education is the desired tool for its recovery and development. This is because it stands to empower individuals and the nation at large, by providing "knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to make informed decisions and take responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society" (UNESCO, 2021). Really, with seriousness in education, individual and societal aspirations may come to pass. Through education, global achievements are shared both formally and informally. As pointed out by Orzturk (2001), "education raises people's productivity and creativity, and promotes entrepreneurship and technological advances". In Nigeria, for these aspirations to be realized, more is required in the sphere of education. Typically, FRN (2013), noted that in Nigeria, education is regarded as "an instrument per excellence for social and economic reconstruction of the nation". In the document, it was asserted that "Government regard education as key to the realization of Nigeria's collective aspiration of being among the top twenty developed nations". Today Nigeria's economy is nothing to write home about, yet education is the desired tool for its recovery and development.

Commenting on the International Literacy Day 2021, Blueprint (2021) noted that Nigeria is one of the countries within the African continent that have been branded as educationally disadvantaged. The paper observed that 8.4 percent of Nigeria's annual budgetary expenditure that is channelled towards education is "far below the 26 percent benchmark set by the UNESCO. Whereas Ghana occupied the top position in the continent with 31.0 percent, surpassing the UNESCO minimum recommendation" (Para 10). Apparently, education in Nigeria is in a precarious position. Educational standards are on the verge of collapse, and need to be rescued. Oyetunde, Aliyu, Haggai, and Musa (2010) asserted that:

The general opinion in Nigeria is that a lot still has to be done to improve the standard of education. Indeed, it is widely believed that the standard of education has fallen or

is steadily on the decline and that education would seem to have lost direction. There are indeed signs that urgent measures need to be put in place to make the nation's education respond positively to the social and economic needs and aspirations of Nigerians (p.iv).

Indeed, it may be appropriate to say that the quality of education in Nigeria is quite depressing. Surely, the declining standards of education as asserted in the quotation above need reversal.

Bailey (2020), while referring to the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI), lamented that Nigeria (Africa's biggest economy), dropped three spots to 161 from 2018 among 189 countries. The country's HDI value for 2019 (but reported in 2020) was 0.539 which placed it in the low human development category. One may contrast the value of the low category for Nigeria with those of the very high category, for example, Hongkong, Switzerland, and Norway with the value of 0.949, 0.955, and 0.957 respectively. Also, to be compared with the value of Nigeria is that of the Niger Republic which has the lowest value of 0.394, thus placing it in 189th position out of 189 countries.

From the discussion on education as a tool for economic development, the Nigerian education system needs a total overhaul if indeed it is to remain the giant of Africa. Nigeria should heed UNESCO's (2006) counsel that:

The development goals set by the majority of the world's nations have a slim chance of being achieved unless governments and the international communities rapidly expand learning opportunities, for youth and adults, while assuring every child a good quality education. (UNESCO 2006, back cover).

With regards to the individual, FutureLearn (2021) posited that education increases the life span. According to them, studies have shown that the amount of education that an individual has received is the best predictor of life expectancy, which reasons include better decision-making skills, less dangerous jobs, more money to live a healthy lifestyle, and improved mental health.

Education as a Tool for Fighting Insecurity

There is no doubt that insecurity is everywhere in Nigeria. Largely, in the northeast is terrorism, in the northwest, banditry, and kidnapping, in the northcentral, farmers/herders clashes and in the south, kidnapping and secession movements. The term insecurity is a condition in which people have no confidence in the institutions and leadership that should protect their lives and property and provide for their well-being. Consequently, they live in trauma, fear, anger, despair, suspicion, and mistrust. On the contrary, security is a cherished state of being which constitutes several values that people unavoidably desire (Onuoha, 2005). On his part, Williams (2015) described insecurity as the feeling of anxiety and vulnerability. It can be deduced from the foregoing that insecurity is characterized by restiveness, anxiety, uncertainty, and soberness.

Mordi and Sunday (2020) described national security as a process that allows citizens of a nation to exercise their fundamental human rights without fear of molestation from anyone.

Simply put, national security is a process that allows citizens to practice their constitutional rights without fear or panic. Economic development is very significant for the progress of all societies in the world. Nigeria, like any other nation in the world, desires an economy that can address the basic needs of its citizens, and an economy that can provide employment, food, houses, education, health services, and everything that makes human life meaningful, enjoyable, and worthy living. These will contribute immensely to stabilizing security in Nigeria. That is the kind of economy every Nigerian dream to have; a vibrant economy, quality public education, stable power supply and employment opportunities. It is, however, sad to note that despite these wishes, things are not what they ought to be and consequently, the country continues to have economic challenges which if not well addressed can have negative implications on the nation.

Aspects of insecurity or precariousness in Nigeria, take the forms of Boko Haram/ISWAP attacks, kidnapping, insurgency, isolated shooting of unarmed people, herdsmen and farmers' crises, burglary, armed robbery, rape, deadly attacks by ritualists, assassination, and general perilousness. On the question of insecurity, FutureLearn (2021) pointed out that people who are educated are less likely to fall into criminal behaviour. A point of note here is that through education we learn virtues such as tolerance and unwillingness to take risks. FutureLearn (2021) further observed that education "prevents history from repeating itself". The fact is that "without an education, it is difficult to understand exactly how our actions can affect the wider world". According to FutureLearn (2021), knowing about terrible things from the past, through history, offers us the opportunity to learn from our mistakes, thus playing a large role in preventing future tragedies. In Nigeria, a lot could be learned about the civil war, through history, which education shares, together with likely solutions. Noting further the role of education in fighting insecurity in Nigeria, Radda (2013) affirmed that people who are well educated will always endeavour to protect the good image of the nation within and in the diaspora. This is of strategic importance to national security and peace.

Language of Education

Language is a phenomenon unique to human beings. Much as development is the ultimate goal of all educational programmes, language is the driving force or conveyor. It is therefore a powerful factor in education. A study carried out by Sabe (2018) on the mass failure of 100 level students in Biology at Gombe State University revealed that the students' poor grasp of the English Language was very much responsible for their failure. By extension, limited linguistic skills affect one's pursuit of education. This lends support to the importance of language in education.

In Nigeria, there are indigenous and foreign languages serving as languages or propellants of education. The FRN (2013) stated explicitly that "the medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of immediate environment for the first three years in monolingual communities", during which period, English shall be taught as a subject. From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction. The implication here is that indigenous languages and English are used for education.

Uguru (2007) corroborated this position that “enhancing the study of indigenous Nigerian languages and following a carefully – planned approach to the study of English language will help us to develop our indigenous technology, enhance the transfer of Western technology and yield rapid national development” This is the role of language in education. It is how people can come together for a common development goal. It is also how a social group cooperates. English as a second language is a veritable language of education in Nigeria and being a world language, the country stands the chance of reaping the benefits of synergy at work in respect of security partnership and cooperation. Typically, the many commonwealth countries the world over, can partner and cooperate through intelligence gathering and sharing in English as a medium of communication. What is more, English being a unity language can be used to build bridges of understanding and veritable coexistence in multilingual Nigeria. Furthermore, the regional lingua francas in Nigeria, such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and Pidgin can as well serve as means of communication for speakers of the numerous indigenous languages for development.

Language is not the same as ethnicity, while ethnicity refers to ethnic status and character, language refers to human speech spoken or written. Language enables individuals not to only interact with their physical environment, but their social environment as well. It is important to point out that language plays a very critical role in education. The essence of knowledge is to transmit it and that cannot happen without communication and that communication can only happen using language. The language used in the classroom becomes a crucial determinant of the outcome of the educational process. The foregoing discussion implies the worth of language for development because for instance, if the language used in the classroom by a teacher is not well understood, the students can not apply it in such a way that it will benefit them and the larger society. Supporting the foregoing discussion, Boyer (1996) as cited in Oyetunde and Muodumogu (1999) described language as significant to not only learning but life itself.

Conclusion

This paper has thrown open to its readers the major challenges, complexities, and inspirations accompanying the role of education and language, as tools for economic development and fighting insecurity in Nigeria. The paper noted that while education develops knowledge, skill, ability, or character by teaching, study, training, or experience as affirmed by (Barnhart and Barnhart 1977), language is the conveying vehicle for communication. Both education and language are highly instrumental to individual and national development and the fighting of insecurity in society. Unfortunately, however, education has not received the needed attention in Nigeria. This explains the pathetic situation of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) having embarked on a strike for quite a long time. Of course, key among the reasons for the strike is the demand for a revitalisation fund which essentially aims at revitalizing infrastructure in the universities. This corroborates the assertion by Blueprint (2021) that budgetary allocation for education in Nigeria continue to fall below the united nation’s minimum recommendation of 26 percent. This position is not good for Nigeria’s national security and development, the paper, therefore, recommends that Nigeria should avoid the part of backwardness and servitude, and stop paying lip service to educational matters and rather pursue quality education vigorously.

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