

THE ROLE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

Western education was introduced into Nigeria by the missionaries whose major purpose was to convert Nigerians to Christianity. An additional aim was to produce local religious personnel including middle level staff for the colonial administration. The first National Curriculum Conference was held in 1969; and was followed by a seminar of educational experts in 1973. These two very important meetings gave birth to the Nigerian philosophy of education; and the National Policy on Education. The last document contains the purposes of all the levels of education in Nigeria. However, there are traces that secondary education is not satisfactorily playing its role in developing the virtues of civil responsibility; such as self-discipline, honesty and anti-corruption tenets; national consciousness and unity; among many others. This is due to many decades of neglect of education in the area of adequate funding and, teachers' welfare. School curriculum had not been reviewed for years. It has been recommended that the second National Curriculum Conference long overdue be held without delay. Subsequently, it should be held every ten years.

Introduction

Education is an instrument of development and change to a nation, society, community and to an individual. The first and second world countries have achieved that height of development, that is, socio-political, economic, scientific etc. through education. Likewise the third world countries are where they are because of the level of education they have attained. Education can therefore, play various roles to the society, nation and individuals. In Nigeria, a good percentage of people terminate their education at secondary school level. In this sense, secondary school is a very important level of education not only to the individual beneficiary, but also to the immediate society/community and the nation at large. It is with this background that we would like to look at the role of secondary education in the civic responsibility in the Nigeria nation.

In the pages below, we shall briefly look at the major aims and objectives of the missionaries who introduced western education to Nigeria; the proposed purposes of secondary education to Nigerians; the civic responsibility of secondary education; and the recommendations for the way forward.

The Major Aims and Objectives of the Missions' Education in Nigeria.

Secondary education according to Taiwo (1972:29) is the form of education suitable for the children who have completed primary education and which is given in a secondary school. The National Policy on Education (1998:12) defined secondary education as a form of education received after primary education and before the tertiary stage. By these definitions, it is clear that secondary education is education given to the children or youths in teacher training colleges, technical training and commercial colleges, as well as secondary grammar and comprehensive secondary schools.

The Christian missionaries who introduced western education to Nigeria had as their primary objectives the conversion of the 'heathen or benighted Africans to Christianity via education' (Fafunwa, 1973:81). Ozigi and Ocho (1981:37) held a similar view when they stated that the major objectives of the mission in establishing their schools were the 'expansion of their religious activities...' Secondary education was also to provide lay preachers, catechist, pastors and teachers. Later when the colonial administration was established by the British, the products from secondary schools were used to maintain law and order and to serve as junior civil servants (Mejabi, 1972:50). One can see that secondary education at this time was training its products not only to be loyal to the colonial administration, but also to the commonwealth as a whole. Their participation in the first and second world wars along side the British is a clear testimony of their loyalty. Secondary education continued playing the above role even after independence in 1960, though there were some modifications. **The Purposes of Secondary Education As Contained In the National Policy on Education**

After independence, there was a strong yearning for a national philosophy of education and a need to streamline the purposes of the three levels of education. There was also need to change the curriculum to realize the educational aspirations of the nation. Such as fostering national consciousness and unity, to develop effective citizenship, self-discipline, civic responsibility etc. Ogunsola (1974:77) asserted that there was need to change the school curriculum to reflect more clearly the national aspirations and needs; and to remove completely unacceptable carry over of colonial policies and systems.

The National Curriculum Conference, which took place 33 years ago (was held between 8th-11th September 1969) laid a solid foundation for the National Policy on Education. The National Policy on Education specified unambiguously the role of secondary education to include among other things to:

1. Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others; respect the dignity of labour... and live as good citizens.
2. Foster Nigerian unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity;
3. Inspire its students with a desire for achievement and self-improvement both at school and in later life;
4. Develop and project Nigerian culture, art and language as well as the world's cultural

heritage;

5. Equip students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology;
6. Diversify its curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and roles possessed by or open to students after their secondary school courses;
7. Provide an increasing number of primary school pupils with the opportunity for education of a higher quality irrespective of sex, or social, religious, and ethnic background; the broad aims of secondary education is to prepare students for useful living within the society, and for higher education, (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1998:12).

The other aims of secondary education are to cement political freedom through social and economic freedom; the fostering of national consciousness and unity of the country; and the development of moral values, integrity and uprightness (Taiwo, 1972:33).

The Civic Responsibilities Secondary Education Should Develop.

The following civic virtues or responsibilities should be developed by secondary education:

- a. National consciousness and national unity.
- b. Character training and self discipline;
- c. Patriotism and social progress;
- d. Equip the students to defend the nation's sovereignty and democracy;
- e. Secondary education should also aim at developing values such as truth, honesty, tolerance, cooperation, understanding, decency, justice and morality as well as fair play.

Education should make the students to realize the importance of paying taxes, not to hoard essential commodities like petrol, kerosene etc.

Education should develop the civic virtues like honesty and enlighten people to participate in election by voting and be voted for; and not to serve as political thugs.

It is a civic responsibility to place the nation first, the community second and self last. In fact, education at this level should inculcate patriotism leading to the zeal to defend one's political, economic and social freedom; since political freedom without social and economic freedom is a shadow of freedom (Taiwo, 1973:32).

Secondary education is a terminal level of education to most Nigerians therefore, assigning to it the curriculum aimed at among other things the training of the youths in civic responsibility is in order. In addition, the Federal Government policy on establishing unity colleges in every state of the federation, where students from all over the nation are made to stay and study together is very important for self understanding and national unity. The students' exchange programme at secondary school level undertaken by the northern state governments is another move or policy to develop national consciousness, self-understanding and national unity, including other civic responsibilities.

The Need For Reassessment of the Nation's School Curriculum

The 1969 National Curriculum Conference had come and gone; it is now over thirty-three years ago. There is therefore, need to meet again to assess the extent to which the curriculum that was proposed/or developed has achieved the national educational purposes; including the implementation of the educational policy so far and their relevance in the 21st century. In fact, regular review of curriculum is needed; and holding such a conference every ten years, is necessary.

The spread of civic disturbances in many parts of the country during the past few months; followed by the pronouncements by prominent individuals and politicians especially, their call for the resolution of the Nigerian federation. Including speculation that a good number of the well-to do Nigerians evade taxation, have all portrayed that secondary education has problems in achieving some of its important purposes.

It is evident that patriotism, democratic tenets and other civic virtues are neither taught nor practiced in secondary schools. For a good number of the nation's post-primary institutions are run on traditional authoritarian lines both in their programmes of study and their administrative leadership (Ezeomah, 1977:42). Students' leaders of such schools are never democratically nominated and elected by students; but they are imposed on the students by the school authorities. This practice is found in most secondary schools in Benue State. The imposition of the student's leaders on the generality of students in the school system is being reflected in the body politic of this nation. In fact, the imposition of political candidates is a common phenomenon in Nigerian politics now than before. This might have had its roots from secondary schools.

Secondary education, like the other levels of education cannot effectively meet set goals because of long periods of neglect. The past three decades had witnessed a systematic neglect of education in the area of adequate funding and the teachers' welfare. This bred grudging and uncommitted teachers. Ofatunde Lawrence (1972:44) made mention of the public's non-recognition of the status of the Nigerian teachers, many disgruntled teachers and lack of commensurate remuneration as some of the important factors militating against the achievement of secondary education goals. He suggested that such disgruntled teachers should be replaced. However, this was not done; and the long period of non-payment of salary turned more teachers to be dissatisfied and disgruntled.

This is the atmosphere under which most secondary school students had received and are still receiving secondary education. A good number of them might learn to be resentful and intolerant from their disgruntled teachers. Since a hungry man is an angry man; the teachers who were left unpaid for months did not teach all the civic responsibilities listed above.

Nwabueze (1995:47) the former Minister of Education and Youth Development, stressed the same view that, "...character and moral training, the development of sound attitudes, the nurturing of sentiments of patriotism and

other civic virtues; these purposes as objectives of our educational system have been totally neglected".

Recommendations For Enhancing the Role of Secondary Education In Civic Responsibility

In the light of the above, the following recommendations are made:

1. The second National Curriculum Conference, which is long overdue, be held without further delay, since the first conference was held over thirty-three years ago. This will enable the stakeholders to assess the level of performance of the curriculum and the achievement of the national goals; and to amend if need be.
2. The federal and state governments should fund education adequately. And all the issues concerning the welfare of teachers, teachers' registration council, teachers' administrative board etc. should be considered and treated with dispatch.
3. Teachers should be motivated to perform effectively. They should not be the only group of workers whose salaries would be owed by the governments for months.
4. The curriculum in every subject at secondary education level should be reviewed at least every ten years. The curriculum contents should include the elements that will develop all the virtues of civic responsibilities, the needs and aspirations of the nation/society as well as those of the learners.
5. Secondary institutions should democratize their operation by allowing students to nominate and elect their leaders. Students should also be involved in decision-making.

6. Inspectorate Divisions of the Federal and State Ministries of Education should be adequately staffed, and equipped to enable them to monitor and supervise all the schools effectively. This will also make teachers to live up to their teaching responsibility.

Conclusion

Since education is an instrument of national and social development, secondary education programmes should be focused to promote national consciousness and unity, honesty and anti-corruption tenets, self-discipline; including all the other virtues of civic responsibility.

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