

THE IMPACT OF POPULATION EDUCATION IN ENHANCING ECONOMIC REHABILITATION AND RELIANCE IN NIGERIA

Austin N. Edegbe

Abstract

Population education is an educational process which provides for a study of the population situation in the family, the community and the nation and the world with the purpose of developing in the citizens a more rational attitude and more responsible behaviour towards improving the quality of their life now and in the future (NERDC, 1985). Population education can help to foster economic rehabilitation and reliance in the light of high population growth rate in the country.

Introduction

Population education is a relatively recent innovation in education in the world today. It is an area of education that has received interest and attention not only from scholars but also from policy-makers. Viederman (1971) defined population education as the educational process whereby individuals learn the causes and most important, the consequences of population phenomena on themselves, their communities and the environment. On the other hand, Wayland (1972) described it as "an educational response which involves both cognition and values. The cognitive problem is the development of at least a minimum level of understanding of the causes of population growth and the consequences of such growth for the individual, his community, his nation and his world. The value problem is the provision of experience which will help the individual to formulate his own attitudes with awareness of the cumulative consequences for the society, of his own behaviour."¹

In the context of the Nigerian Population Education Programme and in NERDC's view, population education is;

An educational process which provides for an articulated and practical study of the population situation in the family, the community, the nation, and the world, with the aim of developing in the individuals a more rational attitude and responsible behaviour towards improving the quality of their life now and in the future. (NERDC, 1985).

Population education can help to foster economic rehabilitation and reliance. This is because it is seen as a process of creating awareness in people of population problems and hopefully thus creating a desire to effect change in ways which will be beneficial to the national development effort. This paper therefore examines the nature of population education and its impact in enhancing economic rehabilitation and reliance in the country.

Nature of Population Education

Visa (1988) stated that situations vary, as do the aspirations, culture and traditions of national communities, so that desired directions for development are variously defined. Similarly, perceptions of the extent and nature of population problems in the process of development are different from one community to another or from country to country and from person to another.

The different positions are illustrated by the following two arguments on the issue of population increase in a country.

It has been generally observed that population increase at times could be an advantage for a country. According to Moms (1967), population increase can have the following advantages:

1. Increase in population would result in an increase in the total demand for goods and services, and that this demand could be met by increased productivity;
2. A growing population would profit a better division of labour;
3. The ratio of labour force to population would improve;

4. A growing population would afford economies of scale;
5. The growth of population would act as a challenge that would lead people to increase their efficiency.

In contrast, Spengler (1972) argued that a large population may be a disadvantage to a country. He enumerated four ways in which population may retard the rate of economic development.

1. It increases the pressure of numbers upon a nation's land resources;
2. It tends to accentuate this pressure through time by accelerating the rate at which the store of exhaustible and non-replaceable natural resources are used up and the costs of their use are increased;
3. It diminishes the rate at which capital can be accumulated;
4. It reduces the rate which the employment of the labour force can be increased.

Whatever the arguments, the fact remains that population education in different countries brings awareness of the interaction between population phenomena and the socio-economic reality, and that this interaction has a significant influence on the present and future quality of life. Population education is problem-centred and value-laden. The teacher must involve students in problem-solving and decision-making exercises. This can only come about when the learners are actively engaged in discovery and inquiry processes and value clarification situations. The subject-matter of population education centres around events, situations and trends that affect the lives of individuals, their families, communities and nation today and in the future.

Objectives of the National Population Policy

The government of Nigeria has taken bold steps in tackling population problems as evidenced in the formulation of National Population Policy in 1988 with the following objectives:

- (1) To improve the standard of living and the quality of life of the people of this nation.
- (2) To promote their health and welfare especially among high-risk mothers and children.
- (3) To achieve lower population growth rates through reduction of birth rates by voluntary fertility regulation methods that are compatible with the attainment of economic and social goals of the nation.
- (4) To achieve a more even distribution of population between urban and rural areas. (National Population Policy, 1988).

Consequences of Rapid Population Growth

(a) Population and Health

Health, life, food, shelter and clothing, are basic human needs. Population pressure due to rapid growth rate and a stagnant or crawling economy may exert a pressure on food supplies with detrimental effects on the health status of the population. The vast majority of African countries are not able to meet the rising demand for health services and are not keeping pace with the population growth and structure.

(b) Population Growth, Savings and Investment

Development cannot take place without capital for investment in the productive activities which will in turn raise the standard of living of the people in the country concerned. Results of some empirical studies carried out in Third World Countries support the fact that high birth rates are inversely related with a country's savings potentials. The negative implications of high dependency rate on low savings and investment potentials arise from these factors:

- (i) Families with large number of children find it more difficult to save, and this reduces volume of savings,
- (ii) High dependency rate affects the level of public investment through the effects on the capacity of the government to raise money through taxation.
- (iii) The burden of high dependency has implications for the distribution of available resources (Mbanefo, 1983).

(c) Population Growth and Education

The negative impact of rapid population growth cuts across all regions of the world but is more pronounced in the developing countries which incidentally are characterized by young population. What this means is that there are many children within the school age bracket that needs to be catered for. The inability of many governments in developing countries to provide at least free primary education in their societies has led to high illiteracy rates, with unpleasant consequences for development.

(d) Population Growth and Land Use

Population growth is generally reflected in space in the urban and rural areas. The rapid rate of urban population growth in recent decades, coupled with the generally poor locations of post-colonial cities, has remarkable effects on the pattern of land use.

(e) Population Growth and Housing

Housing like food and clothing is a basic requirement. Its availability or otherwise has a profound impact on the health, comfort and productivity of the people. Unfortunately, there is an acute shortage of dwelling houses, particularly in the urban areas following the influx of people into them. Accelerated urbanization and the concentration of educational institutions, industries, jobs and modern amenities in the urban centres have resulted in population pressure on the available houses as also on the other services in the cities.

(f) Population Growth and Transport Facilities

Population pressure on transportation facilities in many parts of Nigeria, and particularly in the urban centres, is today enormous. Today, because of so much migration and concentration of people in the cities, and because of other demands for traffic arising from rapid urbanization and industrialization, many city roads cannot cope with the movement of vehicles, people, animals, goods and services. Heavy traffic also leads to quick deterioration of the existing facilities.

The Impact of Population Education in Enhancing Economic Rehabilitation and Reliance

Population education as an element of both population policy and educational policy, can make a significant contribution to economic development. This is because development is now being measured not only by an increase in the economic well-being of a nation but also by the increasing capacity of individuals to guide and influence the direction of their own lives.

It is believed that greater understanding of the nature of population changes and the consequences of these changes can assist both individuals and nations to better regulate their population situation to meet personal and social goals. An understanding of population issues is a necessary prerequisite to intelligent planning, whether the issue is the development of social services at the national level, or the allocation of land at the family level.

Population education can contribute to the solution of population problems, no matter how defined at both national and individual levels by increasing awareness and understanding of the factors that contribute to population change and its consequences. Population education is equally relevant for countries willing to increase their population, change their rates of growth in either direction to stabilize, or to change their present patterns of population distribution.

Poverty has been directly linked to over population. Most developing countries such as Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, China and others have one thing in common, their population is growing rapidly and most of their citizens live below poverty level (1 dollar a day). Also, population age structures have an impact on development; a high proportion of young dependants holds back economic growth. Population education can promote better reproductive health, family planning and slower population growth. This will also enhance productivity, more savings and more productive investment.

Population education can foster economic rehabilitation and reliance by assisting government

in the formulation and implementation of measures to ensure the effective mobilization of our human and material resources for development and better quality of life. By and large, it can help in recognizing the various ways in which population growth, the constraints on resources development and the pattern of consumption at the family level, etc have contributed to the present state of the economy and quality of life situation in the country.

Recommendations

In view of the great role played by Population Education in enhancing economic rehabilitation and reliance in Nigeria, the following recommendations become tenable.

- (1) For population education to effectively enhance economic rehabilitation and reliance, the planning of infrastructural facilities and services must be done with a full knowledge of the demographic factors and trends at work in the country.
- (2) The inter-dependent relationships that exist between the various facilities and services call for integrated planning and utilization of the facilities and services.
- (3) In order to increase the level of success of population education, there is need for continued efforts on the part of all those involved in the implementation of population education to create awareness and raise people's consciousness as to the population situation around them and it's attendant problems or development.
- (4) Special attention should be paid to the rural population to ensure that they are carried along with the urban population. This can be achieved through public enlightenment campaigns, seminars; workshops, conferences etc.
- (5) There is need to institutionalize population education. This can be achieved by extending its services to all levels of formal education in the country.

Conclusion

Attempts have been made in this paper to discuss the nature of population education as well as the consequences of rapid population growth. The impact of population education in fostering economic rehabilitation and reliance was also examined. It was noted that generally population education is concerned with the interaction between the individual and the family, the community and the world with a time horizon for both the present and the future. Also, population growth at the rapid rates common in most of the developing world shows development. High fertility can reduce the amount of time and money devoted to each child's development. It makes it harder to tackle poverty because poor people tend to have large families. It weakens macro-economic performance by making it more difficult to finance the investments in education and infrastructure that ensures sustained economic growth. Population education can help to foster economic rehabilitation and reliance by helping governments and individuals to recognize the implications of the increasing gap between birth and death rates for the provision of such basic facilities and services as schools, health institutions, water, housing and so on.

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