

A CRITIQUE OF THE FIVE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF NIGERIAN EDUCATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TRENDS IN THE COUNTRY

J.A. Atoyebi

Abstract

According to Taiwo (1980:75), for sense of national unity, a country where people are of different races, and each race tries to emphasize its own importance and there are social or tribal jealousies, one race fears the domination of another race, it is always very difficult to make for a national system of education. This study is of a critique of the five main objectives of the philosophy of Nigerian Education in the contemporary socio-economic and political trends in Nigeria. The first part of this article is the introduction, which deals with the background information to the study. After the introduction, the said objectives are critically examined one after the other to enable the writer to confirm or fault Taiwo's claim. The flaws in the objectives and their implications on Nigerian Education are also discussed. This last part of the article is the concluding part. It contains the summary and possible solutions to the factors that militate against the successful implementation of the five main objectives of the philosophy of Nigerian education in the contemporary socio-economic and political trends in Nigeria.

Introduction

According to Osokoya (1987:19) the findings of different educational commissions in Nigeria, together with the contributions of a number of Nigerian academics and educationists highlighted the weaknesses of the old educational system as being too academic, theoretical, inadequate and unsuitable for providing an overall development of Nigerians. Hence, there was agitation for a re-evaluation of the old system and a desire or dire need for a national policy on education.

It was an attempt to meet this demand and the 1979 Constitution which brought presidential systems of government that gave birth to 1981 revised edition of the National Policy on Education. The five main objectives of the philosophy of Nigerian education, as stated in the policy document (1981:7) revised edition are the building of:

- 1) A free and democratic society;
- 2) A just and egalitarian society;
- 3) A united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- 4) A great and dynamic economy;
- 5) A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

The above objectives seem to have symbiotic relationship in the light of contemporary socio-economic and political trends in Nigeria. Let us have a critical examination of these objectives one by one.

A Free and Democratic Society

It is clear that this first objective of the philosophy of Nigerian Education means that there would be free press, free assembly, free publication, free religion, free education, to name but a few. It is disheartening to note that the reverse is the case. Free this and free that only exists on paper, and not in practice. As Akande (2003:4) rightly observes, Nigeria got her independence in 1960; and in about 43 years of existence, has had 29 years of military rule. This could be attributed to the desire of a section of the country to continue to exploit the resources of other sections. Speaking in the same vein, Nwachukwu (1990), a councilor in Imo State remarked in 1990 that:

It does not say well of us as a nation, if after 30 years of independence no civilian from the Southern part of this vast country has ever been head of government (Newswatch, October 8, 1990, Vol. 12, No, 15).

Some years back, 2 decrees 2 and 4 were introduced by the military to silence the rule. A number of pressmen and social critics were either thrown into jail without trial or maimed. Newspapers and magazines were proscribed for one offence or the other. There has been little or no change in our political scene. What we have been having since independence is a change of actors and actresses; the current political dispensation inclusive. In fact, they are described as 'old wine in a new bottle'. Nigeria has been virtually ruled by the Army since she attained independence to date. The elected or selected civilian government hardly survives its first term in office. Why this is because the uniformed-men are always itching for a taste of the action which is power. Power will intoxicate the best hearts, as wine the strongest heads. No man is wise enough or good enough to be trusted with unlimited power.

The military always comes back to our political arena on trumped-up charges against the civilian regime who must have inherited the same problems it would then be accused of from another set of uniformed men. The effect of the above Haws on the country is that the right man may never be in government because of the pressure groups, form various quarters to protect the interest of some powerful minority. The answer to 12²/₃ during the Second Republic is still in our memory. June 12, 1993 presidential election result which was annulled is another example.

A Just and Egalitarian Society

This objective means that Nigeria is a free society where everyone is equal and should have equal rights, be he rich or poor. Everybody should get what he deserves. It is, however, very disheartening that the reverse is the case in a 'just and egalitarian society'. Equality, before the law is not practiced per se. How many people have the economic power to pursue and maintain their human rights in Nigeria? There are a number of hurdles on the way. For instance, the politics of federal character and quota system are evolved as a standby approach at rationalizing and justifying injustices. According to Adeyinka (1994:75), "One of the most disturbing issues in Nigerian education today is the obnoxious quota system which lends to favour the weak against the strong".

Nigerians are being treated like aliens in (heir own fatherland. Fafunwa, a leading educationist and one time Minister of Education as cited by Newswatch, October 8, 1990:58, once said, "In a federation such as ours, you have to bring up such a system (quota system) so that no section is left behind".

In certain parts of the country, people from other parts of the nation are being employed on contract basis. The implication of the politics of federal character and quota system is that most of our establishments are being manned by novices and half-baked 'experts'. The government always gives the dangerous and unfortunate impression that it is better disposed towards novices and feel more comfortable with sycophants who are the real enemies of the government and the general public. The haste with which two bank executives: Dr. Ibrahim Ayagi and Mr. Oladele Olashore of the Continental Merchant Bank and First Bank of Nigeria Pc respectively were retire in 1987 is apposite here. Indeed, hardly anything can be more unfortunate and disappointing than the decision to retire the bank executives on grounds of their 'obvious irreconcilable differences with the nation's fiscal **and** monetary policies'. As Mohammed (1990) rightly observes:

Every appointment by the government is scrutinized to ascertain whether the appointee is a Muslim or a Christian, a Northerner or a Southerner, a Northern Christian or a Southern Muslim. It is not enough that the appointees are Nigerians and are competent to hold those positions. (Newswatch, October 8, 1990, Vol. 12, no. 15).

A United Strong and Self-Reliance Nation

At 43, Nigeria still depends to a large extent, on foreign countries in order to exist. The country is neither united nor strong self-reliance because of one factor or another. We do not have enough manpower to build the economy. It is no exaggeration to say that at 43, Nigeria is more or less a "toddler". Let us have a brief look at the health sector for instance. We do not have enough specialists in our hospitals, even teaching hospitals. A significant number of the few that we have traveled out of the country and more are still traveling out. With the rate at 91 which our doctors, nurses and other paramedical staff are leaving our shores in search of greener pastures, a good number of the

teaching hospitals designated as "centres of excellence" cannot boast of more than a handful of specialists, personnel in various medical fields. This probably explains how and why our leaders spend huge amounts of public fund in the name of medical treatment overseas. Health, they say, is wealth. How can an unhealthy nation be strong and wealthy?

It is also pertinent to note that Government always turns deaf ear to the contributions of men of honour and integrity who are not only prepared to stand above the fog and trappings of high office, but also ready to risk their positions, nay their necks, in defence of what they conceive as the truth alone can lead us away from the path of destruction. Nigeria has suffered a lot of set-backs in the light of political and socio-economic instability. Every new government wants to be recognized with one policy or the other. Examples are Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, War Against Indiscipline, Structural Adjustment Programme, Better Life for Rural Women, Family Support Programme, National Orientation Agency, to mention but a few. As soon as there is a change of government, the government will abandon the programme of its predecessor, whether laudable or not, introduce its own policy or programme. This is no doubt a clog in the wheel of our progress and journey to become a united, strong and self-reliance nation.

A Great and Dynamic Economy

Building a great and dynamic economy means that our economy would be changed for the better. At present, Nigerian economy is complex and things are very expensive that many people especially, young ones are taking to armed robbery in order to survive the hard period. Armed robbers are so daring that they are visiting not only the rich or the middle class, but the seat of government and government lodge. Even police station is not left out.

Since it is difficult for the young to make both ends meet, they try to set the ends against the middle. The economy is consistently recording negative growth rates. Unemployment level in the economy is consistently at high increase. The transportation system in the country is nothing to write home about. A lot of people, even government can hardly buy new vehicles. Thanks to '*Tokumbo*' (used vehicles) imported to the country. Nigeria has become a dumping ground for all sorts of used vehicles. *Okada* or *Inaga* (motorcycles) are used as means of transportation, even in towns and cities across the country. All these because of escalating price of new vehicles. To add more to the prevailing hardship, the federal government, on Thursday, 19th June, 2003 announced increase in the prices of petroleum products. As usual, it is the masses, who have no clout in or with the government that would suffer increase in transport fare and other concomitant problems arise as a result in the prices of petroleum products.

A Land of Bright and Full Opportunities for All Citizens

This is to say that every national of Nigeria would enjoy equal opportunity anywhere and anytime not minding his or her geographical place of birth in Nigeria. It is very discouraging to note that this only exists on paper, but in practice, full and bright opportunities for all citizens seem to be a mirage. According to Oyelade and Adebayo Adeyinka (1994:85).

Here in Nigeria, there is discrimination against one another. It is not easy for a child from the South to gain admission into a post-primary or tertiary institution in the North. If he is lucky to gain admission and he subsequently graduates, he may not be lucky enough to get a permanent appointment in that part of the country.

For example, more and more Unity Secondary School (Federal Government Colleges and Federal Government Girls' Colleges) continue to spring up like mushrooms in various parts of the country. The fairness of the criteria for admission to those 'Unity Secondary School' is known only to the government or its representatives. Child of the 'common man' is not offered admission into the schools unless he has clout with or in the government. One-time Minister for Education, Professor Babs Fafunwa, in an Imo State Broadcasting Corporation Television programme, 'Encounter', described the schools as 'Centres for political engineering'. As one-time Pro-Chancellor, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, and former Vice Chancellor of University of Benin, Benin, Professor Tijanu Yesufu at

an address in Ilorin (13-03-1990) at the 13th Annual Seminar of the Committee of Vice Chancellors rightly puts it:

A child who is deprived of an educational opportunity after scoring highly in an examination only because he comes from a so-called educationally advanced state has had tenets and principles of a united Nigeria demonstrably transformed into mockery, if not totally irrevocably destroyed within him (Newswatch, October 8, 1990, Vol. 12, No. 15).

Discussion/Comments

All these flaws are now having a lot of implications on Nigerian Education. The objectives were conceived during the oil boom days. Now that the country is trying to implement the policy document, the money, the general public is made to believe, is no more there. During the Second Republic, the then Federal Government which also doubled as the apostle of 'qualitative education' said that it could not shoulder the responsibility of education alone.

There is no doubt that investment in human resources development, through education, is a catalyst or a pre-condition for enhanced productivity and effectiveness in the business of national development and curriculum implementation in a developing country like Nigeria. Therefore, the question of the nation's primary education or Universal Basic Education, whatever name it is given, lies only absolutely and exclusively with the Federal Government of Nigeria. How many commissions have been set up to work on education since 1960, nobody really knows. When one commission was submitting its report, another was going into the field. According to Solarin (1989); there was a time one chief and a greatman' moaned that country had so much money, but the country did not know what to spend it on. It did not occur to the chief or the any of the great men in the corridors of power that an investment in national education would be the greatest investment ever (Sunday Tribune, Sept. 3, 1989:4).

Our institutions of higher learning and individuals have almost been milked out of existence. Instructional materials are too expensive to import or buy and the country cannot produce most of them locally. Our libraries are no more equipped with the latest and valuable literature. According to Awolowo, an educationist and a political guru, cited in The African Guardian, May 21, 1987:22, "any people that is starved with books, especially the right type of books, will suffer intellectual malnutrition, stagnation and atrophy".

It is also apposite to quote Emenyonu (1990:3) at this juncture. He stated that "Poverty of the mind and barrenness of intellect are the most tragic disease that a country can slip into at any time in its history". As Umezunke (1989:12) rightly puts it:

If there is anything in which we have become experts in this country, it is our propensity to bungle the implementation of policies. Professor Tekena Tamuno was once quoted as saying, "All things bright and beautiful, Nigeria kills them all".

It is only those who can still travel abroad that can find the most highly needed books. Government has been looking for exceptional children raised on old books. The bookshops are either empty or you cannot afford the few they have on offer. In a society in which a newspaper costs between \$460.00 and £4100.00, a weekly news magazine N150.00, a novel \$4200.00 or more, and a textbook from £4500.00-41,000.00 or more in law, medicine, even arts; the country is ruled by people who believe that things must get worse before they get better.

Summary and Conclusion

It is evident from our discussion that our problems can be correctly and clearly seen in the words of Solarin (1989:4) that:

For almost 30 years of independence, we have refused to send all our children to school because 'education makes a people easy to lead but difficult to ride; easy to govern, but impossible to enslave.

Most rulers of this country would want to enslave their subjects. We have witnessed intensive war preparation galore, but we are yet to experience intensive educational effort. Our leaders do not want their subjects being educated because they might be a threat to them, Nkrumah (1970:80) was very correct when he stated that:

...the privileged will not, unless compelled, surrender... They may grant reforms, but will not yield an inch when back pillars of their entrenched positions are threatened.

Nigeria spends huge amount of money on gifted children, on the Unity Schools, on nomadic children, on command schools and such related institutions. These constitute only a few waste pipes that make the realization of the five main objectives of the philosophy of Nigerian Education as stated in the Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education impossible up to now in our country.

Education is a function of stable and viable political and dynamic economic development. Awolowo (1987:17) stated:

It should be crystal clear to you and me that when we speak of the underdevelopment of an economy we are in effect speaking of the underdevelopment of man... educational development is imperative and urgent. It must be treated as a national emergency, second only to war. It must move with the momentum of a revolution.

Education will no doubt collapse if there is no stable government and dynamic economy. There is a crying need for a visionary leader to develop a perspective plan and a strategic doctrine to guide the nation in the Herculean task ahead. The visionary leader should have the capacity to understand what is needed to be done and the courage to do it. The country is still grappling with the problems of under-development while the projections of its population paint terrifying implications for the economy. The bottom line, nonetheless, remains that the country is endowed by nature, with resources which could be harnessed for development and national pride.

The implementation of the five main objectives of the philosophy of Nigerian Education is manacled by and encumbered with cultural differences and tribal suspicion among different tribes that make up the geo-political entity called Nigeria. Some groups see themselves as being dominated by another politically. Another group sees the political power as its own birthright. Distribution of natural resources is another bone of contention.

To come out of the problems that militate against the realization of the objectives, there must be a conference of representatives of all the tribes that make up Nigeria to discuss and agree on our continued staying together and the policy that would be suitable for our co-existence as a nation.

Until we get Nigerians whose ideas run counter to the beliefs and practice of our leaders (past and present), the five main objectives of the philosophy of Nigerian Education will continue to be a mirage.

References

- Abacha, S. (1984). Announcements by the New Military Government in Reverse Order. *Sunday Concord*, Lagos: January 1, 1984.
- Ademoyega, A. (1981). *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Ltd.
- Adesina, S. et al (1985). *Foundation Studies in Education*. Ibadan: University Press Limited.
- Adeyinka, A.A. (ed.) (1994). *Popular Topics in Comparative Education for Nigerian Tertiary Education Students*, Lagos: Raytel Communication Ltd.
- Akande, B. (2003). *Restructuring Nigeria's Approach to True Federalism*. Ibadan: FASCOM Printers.

- Akaraogun, O. (1989). Aminu Overseer of Our Education. *Sunday Champion*, Lagos: August 20, 1989.
- Bodade, A. (1989). Apocalyptic Mind of a Youth Corper. *Daily Champion*, Lagos: Thursday, June 1, 1989.
- David-West, T. (1989). Leadership as Panacea. *Sunday Tribune*, Ibadan: August 20, 1989.
- Echiejike, L. (1989). The Politics of Varsity Closure. *Sunday Concord*, Lagos: July 21, 1989.
- Emenyonu, E.N. (1990). A Reading Culture as an Imperative for Realistic National Development in Nigeria by the Year 2000 A.D. An Address at a Conference Organised by the University Press Ltd. In Association with Oxford University Press at Concord Hotel, Owerri, Nigeria.
- Emenyonu, E.N. (1994). *Ideas and Challenges in Nigerian Education*, Enugu: New Generation Books.
- Fafunwa, A.B. & Aisiku, J.U. (eds.) (1982). *Education in Africa*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1979). *77/e Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. Apapa: A Daily Times Publication.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981). *National Policy on Education (Revised)*, Yaba: NERC Press.
- Newswatch (June, 1987). *Awo: A Special Publication of Newswatch Communications Limited*. Ikeja: Newswatch Communications Limited.
- Newswatch (Sept 14, (1987). *How Powerful is the Press*. Ikeja: Newswatch Communications Limited.
- Newswatch (October 8, 1990). *National Question One Nation, Many Destinies?* Ikeja: Newswatch Communications Limited.
- Nkrumah, K. (1970). *Class Struggle in Africa*. London: Panaf Books Ltd.
- Okonkwo, C.E. et al (1991) *Basic Issues in History of Education*, Owerri: Grace of God Press.
- Osokoya, O.I. (1987) *6-3-3-4 Education in Nigeria History, Strategies Issues and Problems*, Lagos: Bisinaike Educational Publishers and Printers.
- Solarin, T. (1989). The Nigerian Child: Born to Suffer. *Sunday Tribune*, September 3, 1989.
- Taiwo, T. (1980). *Education for Peace, Progress and Prosperity: Appraisal of the Great Educators and Philosophers*. Mushin-Lagos: Taiwo (Esqr) Publishers.
- The African Guardian (May 21, 1878). *Awo 1909-1987*, Lagos: Guardian Magazines Limited.
- Umezurike, G.M. (1989). Uplifting the Social Education and Moral Standards in Contemporary Nigerian Society. *An Address on the Occasion of the 16th Foundation Day and Prize-Giving Ceremony of Federal Government Girls' College, Owerri, Nigeria*.