

Education and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: An Analysis of the Contribution of UNESCO, 1960 – 2018

Adeoti, Ezekiel Oladele, PhD

Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, Lagos State University, Ojo
E-mail: dellyz08@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

Education plays a very crucial role in national development. It is an instrument of social change which could transform the society in significant ways. For a state or society to achieve sustainable national development, the quality of its education should be improved. This paper examines the contributions and impact of UNESCO on education and sustainable development in Nigeria between 1960 and 2018. The paper adopts historical, descriptive and analytical method. It highlights the various challenges in the Nigerian educational system and UNESCO's efforts to ameliorate the deplorable situation. The paper argues that UNESCO's assistance to Nigerian education in such critical areas as teacher education, technical and science education, adult literacy, girl child education, among others has the potential of promoting education and sustainable development in Nigeria. The study concludes that despite all its challenges, UNESCO created a new literate and educated class, and contributed to the growth and development of Nigeria. Thus, for the nation to achieve an enduring education for sustainable national development, the study suggest that government should increase the funding of education, make provision for girl child education, improving the welfare of teachers, provision of teaching aides and science and art laboratories and equipment, among others.

Keywords: Change, Development, Education, Nigeria, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Education is the master key that unlocks the door to the development and growth of any nation, which brings about knowledge, enhances values and behaviors, determines the lifestyles and well-being of the people. It is perhaps the best investment any nation can make with a guaranteed return on good governance, accountability and probity, enhanced standards of living with modern infrastructure, security and rights to property, among others.

Boyi (2013, p.147) notes that education is the greatest force that can be used to bring about changes that will provide the necessary skills and knowledge. Education and sustainable development are inter-linked, for development provides the pathway to growth and advancement in the society and the economy of its people.

Education for sustainable development is the foundation upon which the future is built by providing the knowledge and skills relevant to competing in the global community. It is a globalization based on local needs and aspirations: of preserving the dynamic customs, culture and traditions of a people, and the preservation of the ecosystem through a renewable architecture.

This paper interrogates the dynamics between sustainable education and development in Nigeria between 1960 and 2018. The paper traces the seminal role UNESCO played in technical, teacher training education, adult education, science and technology, manpower training, among others, which has translated into growth and development of the Nigerian society. One significant outcome is the evolution of a society that is still in search of solutions to basic existential problems. Before going into the problematic, let us examine the following concepts: education, development.

Conceptual clarification

Education

Education has been conceptualized in different ways by different writers. It is often seen as the light that drives away the darkness of ignorance and enables mankind to find its ways through the tortures and labyrinth of development and civilization (Ikechukwu and Farfaru, 2006, pp. 235 – 243).

Education has also been defined as an institution that enables individual to think freely and rationally which makes social progress and innovation possible. Social progress and innovation are the key ingredients of development, when a society progresses, its members are free; they think rationally, initiate certain social change which will invariably promote development (Holborn and Haralambos, 2004, p. 66)

Fafunwa (1974) contends that education is the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviours which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. Fafunwa argues further that education is a process of transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth and for disseminating knowledge to ensure social control or guarantee rational direction of society. We cannot agree less with this submission on education.

Itari and Ugba (2018, p. 41) define education as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences. It is the experience acquired in the process of living, in formal or informal institutions and it is relatively organized learning activity intended to make some persons learn. There is casual learning which is unintended; informal learning mostly associated with the traditional setting where culture and traditions hold sway; non-formal education where people decide what to learn and the methods by which they are taught; and formal education which is structured with basic criteria for admission into institutions, while it is certificate and examination oriented.

Robert and Ofei-Manu (2015) posit that education has a long history which is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The assertion is to improve education and ensure that all people are given a high standard education, which tallies with the post-2015 development agenda. When individuals were asked to list their priorities, over 7.6 million people voted across sixteen potential priorities, but education came out tops (Didham, R. J., & Ofei-Manu, P. (2015). Education is recognized as having one of the highest long term returns on investment of all development goals.

However, UNESCO sees education as the total process of developing human ability and behaviours. It is an organized and sustained instruction designed to communicate a combination of knowledge, skills and understanding value for all activities of life. Education is what can be used by man to solve his problems to improve his life and make it comfortable. It is one of the many avenues that man can use to effectuate change and bring about all round development.

Development

Development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components (<https://www.sid-israel.org>. 19/3 2019). It is a process in which someone or something grows or changes and becomes more advanced (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2019)

According to Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1991: p. 3), development is simply defined as change or a transformation into a better state. This arouses in one's mind, an auto-transformation or change. When the idea is applied to a people, it connotes a process concerned with people's capacity in a defined area, over a defined period, to manage and induce positive change; in terms of ability to predict, plan, understand and monitor change as well as; to reduce or eliminate unwanted change and unwarranted change.

The World Bank Report submits that development is a process of enabling people to accomplish what they could not do previously, for instance, to learn and apply information, attitude, values and skills previously inaccessible to and unaffordable by them. In practical terms, development involves capital and technology both of which require human knowledge and efforts. Thus, human learning is central to development (World Bank Report, 1978).

In their own argument, Lichman and Markovitz (1972, p. 57) observed that a developed society is the one that has succeeded in providing a source of living for the majority of its inhabitants and that in such a society priority is given to elimination of poverty, provision of food, shelter and clothing to its members. This view corresponds with the opinion of Todaro and Smith (2006, pp.20-21) that see development from the modernizing paradigm as a multi-dimensional process which involves the sustained elevation of the entire society and social systems towards a better or humane life. This emphasizes the basic needs of life in transforming the individual in the society to self-actualization.

The term sustainable connotes ability to continue with unwavering resolve, an activity once set upon. When this concept is juxtaposed with development, it means that development, which in the main, is positive change or transformation can be continued with an unwavering resolve until the objective of a better state is achieved.

Relationship between Education and Development

Education for Sustainable Development according to UNESCO allows every human being to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future. (<https://www.ukessays.com> 5/2/16). UNESCO aims to improve access to quality education on sustainable development at all levels and in all social contexts to transform society by reorienting

education and help people develop knowledge, skills, values and behavior needed for sustainable development. (<https://www.unesco.org/themes>).

Education for Sustainable Development is about the learning needed to maintain and improve our quality of life and the quality of generations yet unborn. It enables people to develop the knowledge and values and skills to participate in decisions about the way we do things individually and collectively, both locally and globally, that will improve the quality of life now without damaging the planet for the future (<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk>)

Education is also an “Interdisciplinary learning methodology covering the integrated, social, economic, and environmental aspects of formal and informal curriculum.” The World Commission on Environment and Development of 1987, also known as The Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present generation without putting at risk the capacity of generations to come in meeting their own requirements (Ajibola and Audu, 2014).

Nnabuo and Asodike (2012, p. 2) see sustainable development as a construct, a need to meet the yearnings of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generation. To do this, it is assumed that there is human capital which is provided by education and technological ability, and physical capital, which is the provision of machine tool technology. It is equally taken for granted that there is a difference between having certificates and requisite literacy and numeracy.

However, development implies change or growth or an increase in the structural facilities of a people, community or society (Itari, 1995). This can also mean the ability to solve problems with wisdom, knowledge, experience and resources with a view to eliminating poverty, pestilence and starvation. Economic growth relates to a people’s ability to achieve a rapid and sustained rise in output of all gainful economic ventures but this has now been substituted with human development which is measured by life expectancy, adult literacy, access to all levels of education, including the people’s average incomes.

Education plays a significant role in sustainable development because it is an instrument of social change which could transform the society in significant ways; and can be delivered through a variety of ways, casual, informal, non-formal and formal; and oriented towards future development. This involves learning how to make decisions that considers the long term future of the economy, ecology and the communities; empowers the people; educate, train and undertake research to contribute to the sustainable development of the society. Education will also provide learners with skills, perspectives, values and knowledge to live sustainably in their communities.

Challenges UNESCO faced in Nigeria

UNESCO played a significant role in education and sustainable development in Nigeria by trying to develop the society for the growth of the economy and for the benefit of the masses. Among UNESCO’s long term interventions were programmes tailored towards the preservation of the environment. One particular example was the role UNESCO played in preserving the Osun Osogbo grove as a world heritage in Nigeria.

There were also enlightenment campaigns in promoting the arts and culture of the Nigerian people. In order to achieve its goal of inclusive and quality education, UNESCO provided funding for the Nigerian government to finance basic education, of which Nigeria was classified as a low income country [EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2012].

In Nigeria, education was underfunded by the Federal, the state and the local governments. The Federal government and the state governments neglected to put down their own counterpart funds for the educational sector. Another major challenge was the widespread misappropriation of funds provided by UNESCO, UNICEF, and Global Partnership for Education, among others, which cuts across the Federal, the state and the local governments. Other challenges UNESCO faced were administrative bottlenecks and unnecessary red tapes.

Nigeria neglected the educational sector by not providing adequate infrastructure such as school furniture, desks, textbooks and libraries. Teachers' salaries were not commensurate with the work they did. When compared to the emoluments given to the elected politicians, Nigeria paid scant attention to education. A relevant example will suffice; the elected members of the 9th National Assembly inaugurated in June 2019 will be spending over N300 billion for its welfare while the total budgeted amount on education is significantly less than ten per cent of that.

The political elite prefer to spend billions on politics and the absurd; they gloss over the very glaring challenges and did not invest in education. Ultimately, the future would be for only those who are courageous and with sufficient knowledge to challenge, to dominate and prosper in the global economy.

While Nigerians entrusted decisions on education to politicians and their cronies in government, children continued to drop out of school. According to the Universal Basic Education, UBEC figures of 2018, Nigeria holds the record of being the highest out-of-school children which rose from 10.5 million to 13.2 million in 2018 (Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism, 2019). Alarming, the reality remains grim and is getting worse by the day.

At Independence in 1960, Nigeria had a good reputation in education, supported by the funding organizations with grants and exchange programs. This provided opportunities in the arts, medicine, law, among others, where scholarships were provided for students by communities, religious organizations and Western donor nations. Later, the situation changed as Nigeria failed to meet even the UNESCO's minimal recommendation of spending 26 percent of the nation's budget on education. Corruption and changing policies in the educational sector had created the discrepancies. The neglect not only affected the quality of education in Nigeria, but also the safety of the children. The level of awareness on failure of policy and execution was low. The threat of the environment and global warming remained. However, the cost of corruption and the determination of the Nigerian child to access basic education in spite of the daunting obstacles remained, sadly, the reality (Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism, 2019)

Nigerians became familiar with the images of dilapidated school buildings, poor or derelict science and art laboratories, poor sanitation facilities, especially for the girl child, which within its everyday context remained a reflection of the systemic underdevelopment, of corruption in government and decay of infrastructures. People live in a society that excel on impunity and total disregard of civility and accountability, are not too critical of government policy that cannot put

down counterpart funding, nor are motivated into action to put an end to stealing the future by the corrupt public officers in charge of policy.

UNESCO Contributions and Impact Assessment

The first formal initiatives to establish UNESCO's presence in Nigerian education and a UNESCO Country Office in Lagos began in 1961. A National Commission for UNESCO was approved and ratified by Parliament in 1963, and composed of 36 members drawn from the Federal Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, Information and Culture, Health and Social Services, the National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure, the National Library of Nigeria, National Commission for Women, National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education, among others (UNESCO, 1996: pp. 6-8). Representatives were also drawn from states, from Universities, from NGOs and others on merit. Nigeria as a co-signatory of the General Conference of UNESCO, adopted among others, policies such as equal rights and non-discrimination in education, mass literacy programmes, women's education, science and technology education.

UNESCO introduced into Nigeria educational policies, priorities and initiatives which have influenced the shape and direction of education in Nigeria. This ensured that Nigerian education is current and not isolated from world trends (UNESCO, 1996: p. 10). To a greater extent Nigeria has benefitted from continuous innovations and renovations in education without any loss of relevance. One area of such benefits is in secondary school teacher education. In the immediate post-independence period which witnessed the departure of expatriates who were holding key teaching positions, UNESCO supported the establishment of Federal Advanced Teachers Colleges in Lagos, Zaria, Owerri and Ondo which effectively replaced the Grade II Teachers who lacked the required qualifications to teach in secondary schools. (UNESCO, 1996, p. 11).

The UNESCO experiment in higher teacher education which was introduced into the African educational system in both the Francophone and Anglophone countries was widely accepted and the National Certificate of Education, NCE pioneered by UNESCO provided quality teachers and filled the gap in Nigerian schools (UNESCO, 1996, p. 12).

These institutions evolved into Colleges of Education and were affiliated to different Universities. Moreover, the NCE Diploma became acceptable for admission considerations into the university. The UNESCO program was supported by United Nations Special Funds.

One other area of successful integration was the replacement of the City and Guilds of London Certificates with the National Technical Teacher Training College diplomas awarded for the Ordinary National Diploma in Technical Education. Most significantly, the disparities between British and French degrees and diplomas were removed. UNESCO also provided scholarships and fellowships to Nigerians in a variety of disciplines. Between 1961 and 1994, UNESCO awards and fellowships were given to: Mr. S. A. Folorunsho in 1972 to study Hydrology in the United States, Mr. P. B. Udom in 1974 to study Conservation of Cultural Property in Rome, Mr. O. K. Lawal in 1980 to study Scientific Instrumentation and Workshop in the United Kingdom, Mr. Itse Sagay in 1980 to study International Law in both the Netherlands and France, Mr. O. K. Lawal in 1980 to study Scientific Instrumentation and Workshop in the United Kingdom, Miss Gold Oruh

in 1990 to study Television Communication in Korea, Mrs. I. V. Oghagbon in 1996 to study Home Economic in Denmark. In all, over 160 scholarships were given. (UNESCO, 1996, pp. 77 – 83)

One of the biggest UNESCO's contributions to educational development is the establishment of the National Teachers' Institute (NTI) in Kaduna as part of raising the quality of teachers at the primary school level in Nigeria. Following the introduction of the Universal Primary Education Policy in 1976 by both the Federal and State governments, the various governments had employed large numbers of ill-trained and unqualified teachers, many of whom were holders of the old Teachers Grade II Certificate. The attempt at up-grading their quality through in-service courses led the Federal Government with UNESCO to establish the Teachers' Institute, Kaduna in 1978 which contributed immensely to the harmonization of teacher training curriculum in Nigeria.

Apart from providing equipment such as printing machines, computers, experts, etc. UNESCO empowered NTI as a key institution with the responsibilities for training and testing in teacher education by distance learning and In-Service training. UNESCO also funded seminars, workshops and conferences which led participating countries to acquire new skills and expertise in education, the establishment of libraries and museums, promotion of language and literature, among others.

UNESCO has been of assistance to Nigeria in a myriad of programmes and projects. Such technical assistance has been financed through the UNESCO Special Account for Increased Aid to Developing Countries and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Some of the areas in which Nigeria has received assistance from UNESCO include teacher training, especially in science and technical subjects, literacy campaigns, the development of high level manpower in the area of science, the training of journalists, and special education. In 1980, the Director General of UNESCO visited Nigeria and held discussions on areas of cooperation between Nigeria and the organization. The most significant outcome of that visit which led to cooperation between Nigeria and UNESCO was the award of US \$ 150,000 by the agency in support of the Nomadic Education programme (<https://www.researchgate.net>).

Since independence in 1960, over 148 such conferences had been held in Nigeria while the reports, communiqués and conclusions of many others held outside the country have helped in shaping the form, content and policies governing Nigerian education. Of the UNESCO-funded meetings, two stood out: the first being the 1969 National Curriculum for Nigerian Conference held in Lagos (8 – 12 September 1969) which charted the road to a more relevant and responsive curriculum for Nigerian education; and the second, the National Conference on Educational Policy for Nigeria between 26th and 28th February, 1973 (Okpaku, 1991, p. 136) which led to major structural revision in Nigerian educational expansion and diversification.

UNESCO also encouraged the development of science in Nigeria by funding staff recruitment in science from abroad, so as to address areas of pure science and technology since they were the areas most affected before independence in colonial education. To ensure quality in science education, the Federal Government with the support of UNDP and UNESCO as executing agency set up the project to “Repair, Maintenance and Production of School Science Equipment in Nigeria” between 1972 and 1979 (UNESCO, 1996, p. 25). Federal Science Equipment Mobile workshops were also set up to supplement limited available space for installed machines. Short courses were organized for teachers and laboratory technicians while there was also systematic

training for the production of school equipment laboratory assistants. Such were organized in Port Harcourt in 1972 and at Abraka in 1979. One unanticipated effect of the training was that these technical staff migrated to industries.

In-service training of school laboratory staff was provided while systematic training courses were mounted during long vacations with a view to qualifying candidates for career employment. The result was that the repair and maintenance of science equipment led to improvement in the practical teaching of science while the teaching equipment was well-maintained leading to the development of a maintenance culture. A total of 160 teachers in the old South-Eastern and East Central states were beneficiaries of the training in 1972 while 80 laboratory attendants benefitted in Port Harcourt in Rivers State.

UNESCO's role in conceptualization, funding and setting up of the centres impacted positively on the quality of science teaching in Nigeria while it has continued to sustainably increase the number of youths and adults with relevant skills for accelerated national development. It has produced the needed personnel for Nigeria's polytechnics, Universities and even industries, among others and has continued to produce employable youths.

UNESCO assisted in the provision of Technical Assistant professionals to African countries while there was the recruitment of operational personnel to fill gaps left by expatriate civil servants but UNESCO's training awards and fellowships were only tenable abroad if no local facilities were available in Nigerian or African universities and colleges. It is notable that this continues to be important till date.

Another important area of intervention was the support for the provision of statistics and an accurate database for Nigeria. This led to an awareness of the importance of accurate educational data in all the states. Some of these states have computerized while others still use record-books.

UNESCO has been involved in special education, education for nomad and migrant fishermen, adult education and mass literacy. Thus, UNESCO facilitated access of Nigerians to education, education of women, environmental education, special education, and nomadic education, education of migrant fishermen, adult education, mass literacy and Education for All by Year 2000. In collaboration with UNDP, UNESCO equally paid major attention to special education and funded the Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo so as to extend equal access to all groups in society as part of the National Policy on Education.

The establishment of nomadic education was an attempt at providing functional literacy for personal health, animal husbandry and agriculture, improving the traditional methods of herds' control, animal diseases and breeding, and better marketing of their products as well as socio-political needs, including voting during elections. Mobile and collapsible classrooms were designed by the Federal Science Equipment Centre and distributed to pockets of nomadic settlements that sprung up in various states.

By 1991, statistical survey of nomads in the 19 states and Abuja had shown considerable progress had been made with an enrolment of about 35,000 in over 400 schools. Suitable textbooks were developed, nomadic teachers were trained and syllabus for Islamic education was developed.

Payment of teachers' salaries was also settled. UNESCO collaborated with UNDP and the Federal Government Ministry of National Planning in funding the project to the tune of \$1, 911, 567 (UNESCO, 1996, p. 59). Education for the families of migrant fishermen of the riverine communities in the southern states was also vigorously pursued and encouraged.

In the effort of the UN to create a literate world, the Year 2000 was dedicated to world literacy and the government established the Nigerian National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education in an attempt to extend access to education in and out of school. Since 1960, UNESCO has contributed to the national effort in adult literacy through recruitment and funding of experts, technical Assistance Program Fellowship and Scholarship awards tenable overseas, sponsorship of conferences and seminars in adult non-formal education and literacy.

The Mass Literacy programme funded by the UNDP is supported by UNESCO in the form of cooperating agency to provide technical back-stopping the recruitment of international experts, provision of equipment and materials, monitoring and valuation of the project periodically.

At the end of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005 – 2014), otherwise called the Decade and the beginning of UNESCO Global Action Programme (GAP) on Education for Sustainable Development, Nigeria needs to scale up so as to expand successful projects and involve more schools and institutions. (Robert, Nonoyama-Tarumi and McKeown, 2016).

One outcome of this is the importance of dynamic quality, modified according to the social, economic and environmental contexts. ESD is generally explained as “integrating the principles and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning, to encourage changes in knowledge, values and attitudes with the vision of enabling a more sustainable and just society for all.” (McKeown, 2000). Across all levels and types of education – formal, non-formal, informal – ESD is also helping to advance the change in teaching and learning processes, bringing in approaches that stimulate pupils to ask questions, analyse, think critically and make decisions

Conclusions

In conclusion, the vocational and technical education championed and funded by UNESCO created a new literate class of artisans and technicians who enjoyed improved living standards and created opportunities for others. Many Nigerians who were unable to go through normal school system had adult education. They now became literate in English and arithmetic which greatly impacted their trade and improved the economy. Vocational and technical education helped improve living standards by creating new opportunities for Nigerians to be self-employed in the different professions. This created employment and helped reduce social vices across all strata of the society. Many Nigerians were also trained and obtained professional teachers' certificate which improved the quality of teaching.

UNESCO kick started the technical and vocational education revolution in Nigeria which equally led to the establishment of polytechnics and increase in the numbers of technicians. Emphasis shifted from the heavy focus on the humanities to the sciences. The national curriculum policy now gave preference to the sciences with about 60 per cent intake over that of 40 per cent of the humanities.

Though people looked down on technicians who graduated from these technical and vocational institutions, including also the diploma graduates of the polytechnics, there developed an over reliance on paper qualifications from the universities to the detriment of proficient technicians and other skilled professionals from the colleges and vocational schools.

The result was that Nigeria began to experience economic growth without development. Since economic growth did not automatically translate into human development, the corollary was the destruction of the middle class and the rise of poverty. The teeming mass of unemployed youths, including the unemployable made up of graduates and drop-outs has indeed become the timing bomb. The greater the number of Nigerians graduating from the universities and other higher institutions, the higher the increase in unemployment followed by a loss of cultural identity. Even in environmental protection and conservation, the nation suffered an alarming deforestation and the destruction of natural resources. However, there appears to be hope on the horizon with the Federal Government's introduction of entrepreneurial courses in the secondary and tertiary institutions which is more or less to encourage proficiency in the technical and vocational education.

In spite of the challenges confronting UNESCO in the discharge of their duty notwithstanding, it had impacted in no mean measure to the growth and development of education in Nigeria. For the nation to achieve an enduring education for sustainable national development, it is suggested that adequate provision should be made for proper funding of education, remuneration of teachers, and provision of infrastructure, among others.

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