

EDUCATION FOR MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT

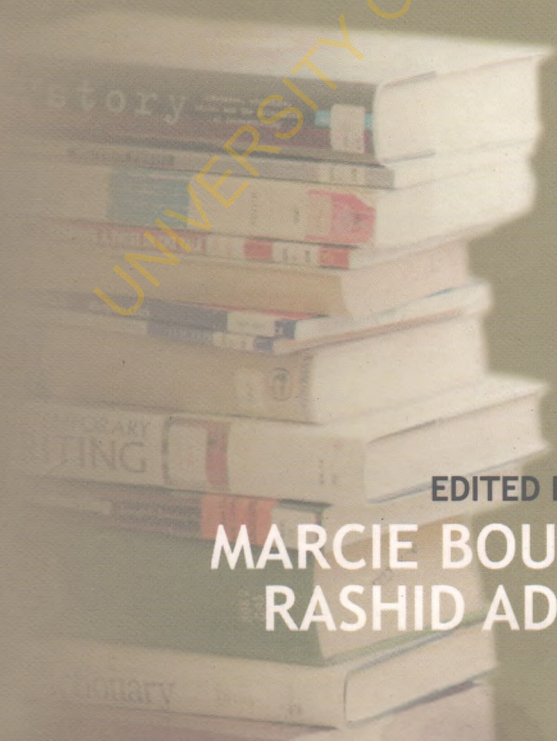
ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF
PROFESSOR MICHAEL OMOLEWA

VOLUME I

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Education for Millennium Development: *Essays in Honour of Professor Michael Omolewa*

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Contents

<i>Prologue</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Foreword</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xvii</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xxi</i>
<i>From the Table of the Head of Department</i>	<i>xxv</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xxvii</i>
Section 1: EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT	1
1. Education for Millennium Development: The Transpersonal Challenge <i>Professor Boucouvalas, Marcie</i>	3
2. UNESCO and Global Partnership for Education Development <i>Fagbulu, Iyabo. PhD</i>	14
3. Re-visioning the Vocational Purpose of Secondary Education Curriculum in Nigeria for Millennium Development <i>Alade, Ibinumi Abiodun. PhD and Adebajo, O.O. (Miss)</i>	21
4. Special Education in Nigeria: Way Out of Millipede Development for Millennium Educational Goals <i>Oyundoyin, J.O. PhD and Eni-Olorunda, Tolu. PhD</i>	34
5. Millennium Development Goals: The Place of Education in Nigeria <i>Akinwumi, Femi Sunday. PhD</i>	44

6.	Millennium Development Goals and the Challenges of National Development in Nigeria <i>Sarumi, Abidoeye. PhD</i>	58
7.	A Critique of Formal Educational System As an Instrument for Sustainable Development in Nigeria <i>Ojokbeta, K. O. PhD and Omoregie, C. O.</i>	82
Section 2: ADULT AND LIFELONG EDUCATION		93
8.	Lifelong Learning through Mentoring Process and Its Operational Dimensions in Society <i>Professor Braimoh, Dele</i>	95
9.	Adult Basic Education and the Challenges for the Realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) <i>Haladu, Abba Abubakar. PhD</i>	109
10.	Prison Education and the UN Millennium Development Goals <i>Yakubu, Ibrahim Ladan. PhD</i>	123
11.	Promoting the Commonwealth of Mankind in Developing Countries: The Challenges of Adult Education in Nigeria <i>Olajide, Olumide E. PhD; Okemakinde, Sunday Oyelowo and Okemakinde, Timothy</i>	132
12.	Peace Education: A Harbinger for Conducive Workplace Environment <i>Ajala, E. M. PhD</i>	145
13.	The Impact of Traditional Apprenticeship System on Occupational Skills Acquisition for Self-Employment in the New Millennium: A Survey of Selected Trades in Ibadan City, Nigeria <i>Akanji, Tajudeen A. PhD</i>	162

14.	Recurrent and Continuing Education As Drives for Attaining Education for All in Nigeria <i>Egunyomi, D. A. PhD; Ekom, Okora O. and Dwa, Usang</i>	179
15.	The Role of School Library in Promoting Lifelong Education <i>Kolade, Helen K. and Olaajo, Pius Olatunji</i>	195
16.	Global Knowledge Economy: The Challenges for Industrial Education in Developing Countries <i>Hassan, Moshood Ayinde. PhD</i>	210
17.	Implications of Budgetary Allocation of Adult and Non-formal Education to Lifelong Learning in Nigeria <i>Olojede, A. A. and Dairo, Lateefat O.</i>	226
18.	A Situation Analysis of International Labour Organisation Conventions and the Nigerian Labour Laws <i>Abu, Peter B. PhD and Bankole, Akanji R.</i>	245
19.	Economic Reforms and Human Development in Nigeria <i>Okunwa, Oluwakemi B.</i>	265
	Section 3: ADULT LITERACY	285
20.	Adult Literacy: From Monitoring to Practice <i>Professor Wagner, Daniel A.</i>	287
21.	Comments On Literacy, Poverty and Democracy: Can We Be Illiterate, Poor and Still Be Democratic? <i>Emeritus Professor Akinpelu, J. A.</i>	316

22.	Communicating With Non-Literates <i>Professor Rogers, Alan</i>	324
23.	Building A Learning Society for the Millennium in Nigeria: Challenges and Responsibilities <i>Aderinoye, Rashid. PhD and Laoye, Deola, PhD</i>	351
24.	Towards the Cultivation of a Reading Culture in sub-Saharan Africa: A Nigerian Scenario <i>Okojie, Victoria</i>	370
25.	Achieving Scientific Literacy by the 21st Century, Agenda for Universal Basic Education <i>Ezeliiora, Bernadette</i>	394
26.	Promoting Information Literacy and Knowledge Economy in Higher Education: The Nigerian Perspective <i>Professor Atinmo, Morayo and Adedeji, Segun. PhD</i>	408
Section 4: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT		433
27.	Psychological Relevance of Participation in Community Development <i>Adekola, Ganiyu. PhD</i>	435
28.	Adult and Non-formal Education As a Panacea for Transformation of Grassroots Communities in the 21st Century <i>Oyebamiji, M.A. PhD</i>	446
Section 5: EDUCATION AND POVERTY REDUCTION		457
29.	The Role of Education in Poverty Eradication <i>Professor Fasokun, Thomas Olusola</i>	459

30.	Education As A Strategy for Environmental Sustainability in Nigeria <i>Campbell, Omolara Ayotunde</i>	476
31.	Empowering the Retirees: A Career Counselling Input <i>Adeyemo, D. A. PhD</i>	495
32.	An Overview of the Effects of Poverty in Nigerian Rural Areas <i>Ebirim, Ugomma</i>	507
33.	Enabling Education for Poverty Eradication in Nigeria <i>Jaiyeoba, Adebola O. (Mrs), PhD and Atanda, Ademola I.</i>	519
34.	Education and Poverty Eradication <i>Lawal, B.O. PhD</i>	538
	<i>Index</i>	551

7

A CRITIQUE OF FORMAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

Ever since 1842, when western education was introduced to Nigeria, various types of educational systems have been practised. While some systems are new, “the six years of primary, five years of post primary, two years of post secondary and three years of tertiary education system of the pre-1969 period was, itself, a revision of an earlier eight years, two years and three years of primary, secondary and tertiary education and, later, a six year, two year and three year programme” (Omolewa, 2001:49). Even the six years of primary school, three years of junior secondary school, and three years of senior secondary school and four years of post secondary education 6-3-3-4 is not a completely new arrangement to the country when it was first suggested at the 1969 National Curriculum Conference. With the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme of the Federal government, a nine years of compulsory primary school, three years secondary school and four years for tertiary education is being proposed to replace the current 6-3-3-4 educational system in Nigeria.

If a system of education is being suggested again, it means that the former system is deficient. It behooves educators to ask an important question: have all the factors that affect educational systems been considered? Taiwo (1985) identified five factors that influenced, shaped, and determined the Nigerian educational system—historical factor that shows how the system began and grew; the political factor determines the place of education in the priorities of the nation, the national goals and pattern of administration, Social factor of an educational system expresses the traditions and culture of the people, their attitudes and religions, family life and social structure of community, an environmental factor that takes the physical features such as climatic condition and population distribution of the countries into consideration, an economic factor determines the demand and supply of education, the quality and quantity of teachers and students as well as employment opportunities for graduates of the school system.

While the federal government of Nigeria has attempted to fashion educational systems that takes into recognition the historical, political, social and environmental factors, the economic aspect still suffers from due attention. This does not deny the fact that education in the pre-independence and post independence, up to the late 1980s in Nigeria provided ready job opportunities for graduates at every level of educational system. It is a common thing to hear those who were products of that system recall the “good old days” that employers of labour ‘begged’ young universities graduates to consider their offer for employment in the midst of other opportunities. Graduates of those years have reminiscences of office cars and accommodations with loans that could make them live comfortably and wait patiently for their gratuity and pension at retirement. If this welfare packages exist for workers in Nigeria today, it is definitely for very few.

A disturbing trend about education in Nigeria is the high rate of unemployment among educated people and the negative effect on the society. For an educational system to meet the needs of a

changing society, graduate employment “should be of great concern to society because having been exposed to a high level of education, they have great aspirations which could turn into frustration and aggression” (Nwachukwu, 1987: 8). When the expectations of higher institution graduates remain unfulfilled, they would detest the educational institution for not preparing them for productive life and society for not absorbing them. Hence, school graduates would more likely become volatile and dangerous to the society.

Education for What?

According to Bamisaiye (1989), education is a “cumulative process of development of intellectual abilities, skills and attitudes, and all of which form our various outlooks and dispositions to action in life” From this definition, it is clear that education should entail the acquisition of skills and knowledge that a person can use for sustenance. Education should produce practical action, disposition and attitude in the individual. The educational pattern inherited by Nigeria from her erstwhile colonial administration emphasised an attitudinal aspect of education detrimental to vocational skills acquisition in learners. Beecham (1992) revealed that “traditional universities in Britain believed academic education was superior to vocationally based technical instruction...hence they opposed the suggestion of adopting utilitarian, vocational oriented curricular to meet the demands of the industrialisation.”

It can be argued that education and training are different. That is, education is provided in the universities and training in vocational institutions. Adesanya (2001) highlighted three characteristics that distinguish education from training, “education deals with knowledge that is recognised, worthwhile and capable of achieving a voluntary and committed response from the learners; it leads to a quality of understanding that give rise to new mental perspectives in the learners; and uses methods that encourage the exercise of judgment by the learner and the use of his critical thinking. This means that when a university graduate desires to achieve minimum economic

freedom in provision of food, clothing and shelter, he should be able to respond to the reality, given his acquired mental perspective and critical thinking. Unfortunately, a high percentage of Nigerian graduates do not know how to confront the problem of unemployment. Their education is just an acquisition of certificates and when that certificate cannot give them the expected white-collar job they register for the acquisition of further certificates which may not usually solve the problem of unemployment. Jibowo and Ewenyi (1992:17) blamed the curriculum in the nation as an "unadulterated British system, limited in scope, bookish and for examination."

Despite the introduction of 6-3-3-4 system of education to cater for both vocational and academic aspects of education at the secondary school level, little has been achieved in vocational skill development. Therefore, the present situation of unemployed graduates should "once again take us back to the drawing board where we need more soul searching because of the perceived failure of our educational system to meet the social, economic, political and environmental needs of the citizens" (Ayorinde, Kolawole, and Arikpo, 2003:43). Since the system of vocational and liberal education at secondary school has not achieved its objective, what other arrangement is available for Nigeria where higher education appears specialised in the forms of colleges of education, technical colleges, polytechnics and universities of agriculture?

Dewey (1958) opposed the idea of establishing separate schools solely for vocational instructions because such an arrangement would be undemocratic, in so far as vocational education would apply only to those students who did not have the economic means (or requisite qualification) to pursue studies leading to a university degree (emphasis ours). Despite the establishment of technical colleges and university of technologies, there is still a high rate of unemployment. This means mere separation of liberal and vocational education is not the way out of graduate unemployment in Nigeria. Adesanya (2001:68) suggested that vocational education should be

for all, like the commission of vocational education in United States of America that claims that vocational education can develop competencies in students “personal skills and attitudes... communication and computational skills and technological literacy, employability skills ...broad and specific occupational skills, knowledge and foundation for career planning and lifelong training.”

Education for Poverty Alleviation

Poverty has been comprehensively defined in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s poverty reduction strategy paper (2000:5) as: “Including the lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods.” This definition enables us to see poverty as a structural deficit which requires a multi-agency response, in which education and lifelong learning can play a part (Preece, 2005).

There are four major types of poverty according to Preece (2005), namely: income poverty, capability poverty, participatory poverty and consequential poverty. Income poverty means lack of income. The World Bank concept of poverty is living below \$1 a day or without sufficient means to purchase common goods. This type of poverty is usually measured by income derived from the head of household. Ogwumike (2001) showed that:

The lower the educational level, the higher the poverty rate tended to be... poverty rate increased for all educational grouping between 1980 and 1985. Household headed by those with non-formal education were consistently the major contributors to total poverty in Nigeria from 1980 to 1996.

Income derived from the male head of household may not materialise into income for other members, nor does the bald figure of income show how many household or people that particular income caters for (Bailey, 2003). The criterion for measuring income poverty removes male graduates who could not marry for economic reasons from being measured because it is based on household head.

Capability poverty was conceptualised by Sen (1999) as an absence of freedom to participate in economic life of the community. This includes deficiencies in the range of things people can do, a limitation in the knowledge and skills needed to act independently for productivity or personal welfare consumption. To be free from capability poverty, Nigeria graduates sometimes, by the assistance of extended family members or personal effort, need further studies in order to challenge inequitable systems that perpetuate exclusion from better paid employment opportunities. This effort is defeated by the trend of appointments in Nigeria which is fraught with political and tribal affinities instead of merit. The United Nations Development Programme (2002) refers to participatory poverty as a deprivation in the participation in social, political life and inclusion in decision making processes. It seems that Nigerian graduates do not suffer from this type of poverty since the 1999 Nigerian constitution clause 65(2) requires only a secondary school certificate for any elective position from the membership of the house of assembly to the presidency. The assumption, in all these cases, is that the school certificate programme must comprise a body of knowledge adequate enough to prepare its beneficiary for national service" (Omolewa, 2001:51). Taking more than a cursory look at this provision, the university graduate is not denied any elective post but he is not favoured either. The saddest aspect of the situation is that Nigerian leaders who barely have this minimum requirement only pay lip service to the funding of education with less than 15% of its revenue which falls abysmally below the UNESCO 26% standard.

Consequential poverty occurs as a result of deliberate human and political interventions on the natural or social environment whose harmful effects are felt by the people. What creates this poverty is unbridled exploitation of resources resulting in soil degradation, environmental disaster and health problems. This form of poverty manifests itself more acutely in Niger Delta areas of Nigeria. Sometimes, the oil industries give scholarships to students but how many of these students are given employment and pay the salaries of the expatriates after graduation?

Although, one is not suggesting that alleviation of poverty among higher institution graduates would significantly lower the level of poverty in Nigeria since significant proportion of those who apply for higher education in Nigeria are usually denied such access by the body regulating admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria – the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) less than 10% of the population has access to higher education source of information. The contention is that the expenses on higher education and its import to the development of the society would no longer worth the effort, if graduates suffer virtually from all the forms of poverty in Nigeria. The argument that the benefits of the acquisition of any higher education goes largely to the individual as a ‘private good’ for which beneficiaries and their families should pay (Okebukola, 2003) would no longer be justified when graduates have no job to do or create when they leave school. Even with job opportunities for graduates, that higher education is for private good, calls for more critical investigation when society should demand social responsibility from its citizens.

Poverty and starvation are often not the mark of an absolute lack of resources, but arise from a failure to distribute them equitably or... “a failure of will to distribute the food that is literally rotting in central government warehouses” (Preece, 2005:15). Amidst the natural and human resources available in Nigeria it should be a misnomer that the educational sector is starved of funds and the graduates of the sector live like paupers especially when every successive government keeps repeating the slogan that education is the bedrock of sustainable development.

Successive Nigerian governments have made several policy efforts towards poverty alleviation such as Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life Programme (BLP), Peoples Bank’ of Nigeria (PBN), Community Banks (CB), Family Support Programme (FSP), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Petroleum Special Trust Fund (PSTF) and Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP). According to Ajakaiye and Adeyeye (2001:5), “most of these

programmes have however been largely ineffective and have consequently been scrapped. In spite of their number and diversity, poverty has continued unabated.”

None of the poverty reduction programmes has any educational dimension at any level of education in Nigeria. Little or no effort has been made by the government agencies to either mobilise learners when they are still in school or contribute to the educational system by overhauling curricular to reflect the needs of the people in the changing society. In other words, the present educational provision, especially at the tertiary level is with too emphasis on knowledge acquisition at the detriment of skill acquisition. This situation explains why graduates of tertiary institutions will still depend on the government or the private sector for employment after graduation. To reverse this trend, our educational system must be restructured to accommodate both knowledge and skill acquisition. For example, different vocational centres should be established in tertiary institutions so that a student while acquiring knowledge in his or her chosen discipline can acquire skills in one vocation by enrolling in the vocational centre. A student of economics can enroll to learn carpentry in which he may eventually develop his skills. He may graduate to set up a carpentry outfit and earn his living without having to wait for government or private-sector employment.

Conclusion

The prevalence of poverty among graduates of the formal educational system challenges the admissions procedure, curriculum design, and measurement of academic achievements. It shows that at least something needs to be done to rescue the state of the formal education system. Akinpelu (2005:229) suggested an educational system that integrates the formal and non-formal, where both are equally funded but differently administered under the Ministries of Education. There is need for the two systems to usefully influence each other so that the nation can reap the full benefits of the intellectually oriented school education and pragmatic as well as practically oriented non-formal education. In other words, a close

collaboration between the school and traditional apprenticeship system is long overdue. Cross fertilisation of ideas and practices are possible between the formal school and the apprenticeship non-formal system.

Nigeria should return to the past practice of encouraging community participation in the administration of the schools (Omolewa, 2001:63). It is high time we returned to the practice of community based support for our educational development especially at the higher school system. The broad social education can only be handled by the community. In the traditional African society, vocational skills were handled by attachments of individuals to experts craftsmen. In those societies, families and communities were known by particular trades or crafts and are called by the names of their professions. Each profession was identified with the families and the youth simply were incorporated into different professions.

Another feature of the traditional education is that it allows the learner to be shown how to do a job from the simplest to the most complex operations. The intimate contact between the instructor and the learner enhances a continuous monitoring and evaluation of learners' performance on the job. There is no gap between the theoretical instruction covering the whole operation and putting into practice what has been learnt.

The indigenous educational system suggests that even if the formal educational system inherited at independence were alien to Nigerian culture, there is no excuse for still using the old wine in new wineskin. Like the African traditional society, where the master ensures the welfare of the apprentice even after graduation, unemployed graduates of formal educational system should at least provoke their teachers to engage more in practically oriented instruction that would put food on the table of its clientele and guarantee accomplishments of individual and social needs.

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