
Philosophy And Polytechnic Education As Tools For Socio-Economic Sufficiency In Nigeria

Ijeoma Ene

Department Of General Studies
School Of Foundation Andgeneral Studies
Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Rumuola
Port Harcourt, Rivers State
Email: eneijeoma@yahoo.com

Abstract

The social and economic well-being of citizens play a pivotal role in the success of any society. Nigeria is currently bankrupt in that regard. It is currently plagued by social and economic poverty. This paper emphasizes the need to inculcate ethical values and principles into the lives of Nigerians for social development, especially in their formative years. This would also instill moral responsibility where people are held accountable for their actions and inactions. It also holds that with Polytechnic education, economic issues can be resolved in our country. The paper states that this synergy is the pathway to self-development and self-reliance in Nigeria. The paper concludes by stating that this much needed socio-economic advancement can be attainable through the teaching of Ethics or Moral Philosophy and Technical education. Moral Philosophy and Technical education are therefore, the driving tools for socio-economic sufficiency in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Philosophy, moral philosophy, education, polytechnic education, socio-economic development.*

Introduction

Socio-economic development in Nigeria has taken a downward spiral. The economic deficiency has led to her being called the “Poverty capital of the world”. She was once known as the “Giant of Africa”. The Nigerian society has the largest human population in West Africa and extreme poverty has played a negative role with its attendant effects in the socio-economic life of Nigerians. All these vices point to a socially and morally bankrupt society. What then is the way out? The answer lies in the need to instil moral values into the lives of youths in their formative years. According to Unah et al. (2019). “Once such ethical orientations have been inculcated in humans, especially in the formative years of the learners, the orientations take deep root in the life of the people” Philosophy, which is the pursuit of wisdom, liberates the human mind and develops humanity. One of its branches, Moral Philosophy or Ethics is concerned with the rightness and wrongness of human actions. Ethical principles and moral codes regulate the lives of citizens and thereby promote social harmony and stability. There is therefore an urgent need to ingrain moral codes in the citizenry, especially the youths. On the economic aspect, technical education teaches hands-on vocational skills like Welding and Fabrication, building technology, computer expertise, carpentry, web developing, fashion designing, plumbing etc., which would provide self-employment and middle-level manpower employment. Moral Philosophy as a tool for social development would provide rules of social conduct that would foster peaceful co-existence in the country while Polytechnic education provides jobs for economic development in Nigeria. The objective of this paper is to state the connection between Moral Philosophy and Polytechnic education as tools required for socio-economic sufficiency in Nigeria. It states that human development contributes in no small measure to socio-economic growth thereby eradicating poverty.

Clarification of concepts

To give appropriate focus to this paper, it is necessary to first of all clarify the key concepts used. These concepts are Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, Education, Polytechnic Education and Socio-economic development.

Philosophy

Philosophy is an academic discipline that is regarded as the oldest field of study. Etymologically, Philosophy is derived from two Greek words ‘Philos’, which means love and ‘Sophia’, which means wisdom. Hence it means ‘Love of wisdom’. It is an intellectual activity which seeks to proffer solutions to human life, society and problems associated with them. Omoregbe (2007:3) defines Philosophy as “ a rational search for answers to the questions that arise in the mind when we reflect on human experience”. This discipline is divided into five branches namely: Metaphysics, Ethics, Epistemology, Aesthetics and Logic.

Moral philosophy

Moral philosophy is also known as Ethics which is a branch of philosophy that concerns itself with the rightness and wrongness of human actions. Its emphasis is on moral values. Ethics is derived from a Greek word “ethos” which means custom, habit or character. Omoregbe (2006:3) defines Ethics as “the branch of philosophy which deals with morality of human actions”. Morality is a term that involves human affairs which can be private matters while public morality involves activities done in public or service to the public. Oke, et al, 2005: 2 It is pertinent for people to be moral for the betterment of the society.

Education

The process of acquiring knowledge and skills that prepares one for a profession is known as Education. It is the cornerstone of a nation’s economy and a tool for socio-economic development.

Fafunwa (1994) defined education as “ the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviours which are positive value to the society in which he lives”. Etymologically, the word ‘education’ is derived from a Latin word ‘educare’ which means to train, to form or to mold.

Polytechnic education

Tertiary institutions are higher learning, postsecondary institutions. They include universities, colleges of education, polytechnics etc. Polytechnics are tertiary institutions where technical courses are taught and studied. The relevance of technical skills in this technological age cannot be over elaborated. Etymologically, the word “Polytechnic” is from a French word ‘polytechnique’ which means ‘pertaining to many (technical) subjects. Hornby (2001:900) defines the word “polytechnic” as a college for higher education, especially in scientific and technical subjects. Polytechnics now have the same status as universities. The first Polytechnic and higher educational institution in Nigeria is Yaba College of Technology established in 1947. It was originally known as Yaba Higher College.

Socio-economic development

The concept of socio-economic development is a union of two words- socio and economic which refers to the activity of social and economic development in a society that is measured with different indicators like income, literacy(education), level of employment, community safety, GDP, Life expectancy etc. According to Uju and Joy (2014), “socio-economic development is the process of identifying both the social and economic needs within a community and seeks to create strategies that will address various issues and needs in ways that would affect the society over a long period of time”. It is the improvement in the living standards and rise in economic conditions of the people.

The socio- economic status of Nigeria

Nigeria is truly a nation blessed with abundant human and material resources. It is the most populated black country with 206 million people as at 2020. Its abundant natural resources include oil , limestone, lead, zinc, iron ore and fertile land. In 1956, Oil was discovered in commercial quantities at Oloibiri, present day Bayelsa State and became the mainstay of the economy till date. Prior to emergence of oil, other sectors like mining, manufacturing and agriculture were major sources of foreign earnings. Nigeria is the eighth largest oil producing country in the world yet it is home to a large number of poor and unemployed people especially youths. This social and economic disparity has brought untold hardship with the resultant increase in poverty, unemployment, insecurity, hunger, fall in the value of the Naira and related vices. The 21st century is a digital age where knowledge is of priority and this fact clearly distinguishes the developed from developing countries. This shift in focus to technology has helped to improve the economy of developed countries even with the challenges of crash in oil prices and global COVID-19 pandemic that threatened the world’s economy. There is need to diversify the economy from an oil dependent economy to a knowledge-based economy. This can be achieved through the technical training from polytechnics. Technical education and training bring about general and self-employment.

Causes of Socio-economic deficiency in Nigeria

There are many causes of socio-economic deficiency in Nigeria namely but for the purpose of this research, they are limited to the following: Governance, Poverty, Corruption and Neglect of quality education.

a) Governance

Governance which is to govern and be governed is a concept that is as old as human civilization and still of great relevance in contemporary times. UNDP defines governance as “the exercise of political and administrative authority at all levels to manage a country’s affairs” (United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2011. In other words, it is a representation of many by a few people running the affairs of a country for the good of all

b) Good governance

Good governance refers to strict adherence to the constitution in the business of governance. It recognizes that all are equal under the law in decision-making process. To UNDP(2002) “good governance” is about striving for the rule of law, transparency, equity, effectiveness/ efficiency, accountability, and strategic vision in the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority. While Bad governance is a bane of socio-economic development in Nigeria as it is a major threat to the economy.

c) Poverty

A country that is socio-economically viable is one that places value on human capital development as investing on human capital leads to self-sufficiency and reduction in poverty. One major indicator of socio-economic deficiency is poverty. The United Nations defines extreme poverty as “a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information.”(UN 1995 report of the World Summit for Social Development) .The threat of poverty to development is of concern to the United Nation and is the first SDG which was inaugurated on the 25th of September, 2015 with 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). Nigeria is Africa’s largest economy but is plagued by absolute poverty which is a major hindrance to Nigeria’s socio-economic development. In Nigeria, the culture of poverty can be traced mainly to bad governance and corrupt leaders who are seen looting the state and national treasuries. Corrupt leaders infect future leaders who are enticed by their ill- gotten wealth and this act promotes a never ending circle of perpetual poverty upon the citizenry. They also play the tribal card, thereby pitching tribes against each other. They use religion to hoodwink the ignorant populace which now stirs the water of religious intolerance.

d) Corruption

Corruption can be defined as the abuse of power for private gain or profit. It is the misuse of public funds which a country’s common wealth for personal profit. Corruption is one the socio-economic problems plaguing most African countries and leaders. Like other developing countries, corruption has eaten deep and has destroyed the economy of Nigeria. It is a hydra-headed monster that has to be combated by all. In the 9th International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) Durban, South Africa, Kofi Annan stressed this point when he observed that “Corruption...is especially destructive in developing countries with their delicate economic situations. It has critically hobbled skewed Africa’s development. There is no point in pretending that this is not true”. (Van Vuuren 2002:1). No sector of Nigeria’s economy is spared from this problem and it is alarming as public funds meant for betterment of citizenry are embezzled by its leaders. The educational sector which is the backbone of human development is one of the worst hit sectors in Nigeria. Funds meant to build facilities for teaching and learning, research and development are unaccounted for and have led to incessant strikes. The future of the country is placed on a balance as human development is truncated.

e) Education

Education is another crucial element for socio-economic growth of every nation. Socio-economic sufficiency is dependent on human development and human development is the core of education.

Education at all levels develops the minds of people whether it be primary, secondary or tertiary levels. The tertiary level of education was designed to contribute to national development through appropriate manpower training. The National Policy on Education in section 6 defines Tertiary Education to be education given after secondary education in institutions as Universities, Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics and other institutions offering correspondent courses. The goals of tertiary education include: To,

- a) Contribute to national development through high level manpower training;
- b) Provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interest of all Nigerians.
- c) Provide high quality career counseling and lifelong learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work;
- d) Reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market;
- e) Promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service;
- f) forge and cement national unity; and
- g) Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

In Nigeria, most of the state and federal educational institutions lack adequate funding and this leads to incessant strikes. These incessant strikes shorten the academic year and eventually lead to production of half-baked graduates who are a threat to the society.

Moral philosophy as a tool for sustainable social development

A society is a group of people who live together and share common institutions. Ogbujah (2006:139) puts it thus "As a social being, man's life is inextricably entwined with those of others with whom he shares space and time. Whether at the level of biology, sociology or ontology, it is admittedly impossible for human life to thrive in solitude". Man has to live in a society for his welfare and existence. This makes man a social being and an integral part of a society. Aristotle a great ancient philosopher observed that "Man is a social animal". Individuals make up societies and investing in these individuals is called Social Development. Social development involves improving the well-being of people by interacting well with others, developing problem solving skills, learning to be empathetic towards others and the need to be accountable. Social development aids people towards the path of self-sufficiency which is a pillar of human development. Human development in all ramifications and locations is still one of the burning issues of this 21st century. Human development is the development of people which aims at improving their well-being, a long-standing interest of philosophy. Education is also an important aspect of human development that concerns the mental development of humans. It is an instrument of change in the life of an individual and society. Annan (1997) observes as follows "Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society. It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development...literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential". In other words, the liberated human mind is an instrument of change in any society. The human mind which is the centre of all mental activities, is of great importance to a philosopher. Education and Moral Philosophy share a common view on the development of the intellect/ mind of a person. There is therefore an urgent need for social development to regulate life in Nigeria. Obi-Oguejiofor (2001) observes, philosophy can contribute to societal development by being "a training in rationality, a critique of ideology and a training in morality".

In the 6th Century B.C., the Socratic philosophers engaged in a human-centered approach to development. The task of philosophers thereafter became that of human development. Every aspect or branch of philosophy deals with the human mind as the mind is where thinking and reasoning takes place. The right mindset produces right results.

Moral Philosophy which is a branch of philosophy is derived from a Greek word “ethos” which means character. It is concerned with human conduct, principles and moral values. Ethics as it is sometimes called is normative science on human conduct and a reflective study of what we ought to do, or how we ought to live. It studies fundamental issues of practical decision making and its concerns include the nature of ultimate value and standards by which human actions can be judged right or wrong, good or bad (Ezeocha,1990:52).

Oke, et al , (2005:65) lent credence to this by stating:
Ethics , to restate , is concerned with the study of the nature of the standard, the ideal, the end, or the criterion which could serve as a point of reference from which conduct can be judged good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust.

Ethics is important to every society as it helps in shaping of individuals’ behaviour which is the core of social development. In this digital age, the world seems to be experiencing a widespread weakening of morality. Immorality has eaten deep into the fabric of society so much so that societal structures are now nonexistent. Ethics is hereby proposed to resolve issues that affect social ills in the society like bad governance, terrorism by promoting the values of social responsibility. It teaches the need for appropriate behaviour from people within a society that would promote peace and a harmonious life for people in the country which would aid development. As observed by Omoregbe (1990: 95) “...the development of a nation is primarily the development of human personality” .Akinola and Odozor (2016: 2-3) put it thus that the human mind is the workshop of the philosopher and if properly channeled could have morality instilled in it. They went further to state that “Development is not all about material development but moral/spiritual development, particularly, the development of the mind-set”. In other words, the human mind directed towards moral uprightness will produce a morally upright person. Social development which is investing in people reduces poverty and morally upright individuals would make their societies socially developed.

Polytechnic education as the panacea for economic deficiency in Nigeria

Unemployment is one of the major socio-economic problems Nigeria is facing today. This paper holds that the issue of unemployment can be addressed through education and more specifically, technical education which would lead to self-reliance, self-development and self –employment. There is an urgent need for diversification of Nigeria’s economy from an oil-based to a knowledge based economy as being knowledgeable enhances appropriate participation in other segments of development. Technical education offers the much needed skills for entrepreneurship and employment. Ofori- Bruku (2005) defines Technical education as the “instruction in a skill or procedure, usually of a mechanical type, and at a level between that of the professional scientist or engineer and that of a skilled craftsperson”. These vocational/technical skills are taught in Polytechnics. Wokocha (2014) defines a polytechnic as “a non-university tertiary institution” offering a variety of vocational and scientific subjects at the certificate and diploma levels. He further states that Polytechnic education is to impart vocational and technical skills at handling tools, materials and equip them with both theoretical and practical knowledge and experience. The National Policy on Education in Nigeria states that Tertiary Technology Education offered in Polytechnics in Nigeria were established to fulfil the following goals;

- Provide courses of instruction and training in engineering, other technologies applied science, business and management, leading to the production of trained manpower;
- Provide the technical knowledge and skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial, and economic development in Nigeria;

- give training that impart the necessary skills for the production of technicians, technologists and other skilled personnel who shall be enterprising and self-reliant;
- train people who can apply scientific knowledge to solve environmental problems for the convenience of man; and
- give exposure on professional studies in the technologies (NPE,2014)

Polytechnics play an important role in technical education. They were established to provide technical training for self-reliance and employment which would aid economic development in Nigeria. Polytechnic graduates are employers of labour. Technical education is therefore the panacea for economic deficiency in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Nigeria is indeed a nation blessed with both abundant human and material resources. An oil-rich country once known as “The Giant of Africa” is now home to the poorest people in the world. This extreme poverty has brought untold hardship with its resultant hardship to its citizenry. She is presently faced with serious socio-economic challenges. This paper emphasizes the need for moral education at all levels of study especially in the tertiary institutions where career paths are chosen. It also holds that there is the need for a synergy between the study of Ethics and Technical education as a panacea to the socio-economic deficiency in Nigeria. The study of Ethics provides the much needed moral values which would aid social development while Technical education produces graduates with vocational skills that would improve the economy of the country.

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