

ASSESSING FREE EDUCATION OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *Education is inevitable tool for sustainable development and economic development is the desire of all nations of the world but how to attain a sustainable development remains a challenge to many nations. This paper examined free education and its adaption for sustainable national development in Nigeria. Education is a social service, which is meant to eradicate illiteracy, ensures comfortable living of the citizens as well as the development of the country, it should be provided free for all. In the course of this paper, information and data were gathered from literature and forty two (42) principals spread across forty two secondary schools in the four (4) Local Government Area of Umuahia Education Zone to describe the Concept and support of the arguments raised. The data for the study were collected using an instrument titled "Assessing Free Education for Sustainable Development Questionnaire (AFESDQ). The instrument was validated by three (3) research experts and reliability established using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient with reliability 0.83. Data obtained were analyzed using mean for the research questions while hypothesis formulated was tested at 0.5 level of significance. The relationship between free education and sustainable development were established, the extent of enhancement and factors that facilitate free education were also examined with suggestions including among others, the need to ensure equity and egalitarianism, combat the looming poverty, low manpower/ literacy level and provision of scholarships, bursaries to students and adequate funding from government.*

KEYWORDS: Free Education, Public Secondary Schools, National Development, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Man's survival on the planet earth depends on various developmental activities. The interaction between man and his environment to achieve developmental needs in terms of education have been a source of great concern over the years. In the words of Francis Bacon, "knowledge is power" Power to live a decent life, power to earn a decent income and power that brings you respect and dignity. When knowledge can bestow the power for so many things, why should it be restricted to a few who have the advantage of wealth? Knowledge need to be free for all those who deserves it and what a person deserves should be decided by an individual's capability and intelligence and not by wealth. The best and simplest way to disseminate knowledge to all those who deserve it, is through free education. Free education will lead to more educated people. More educated people in the society leads to overall improvement in the quality of life in the society. The level of education acquired by an individual will dictate the quality of the individual. The higher the quality of the individual in terms of the level of education, the higher will be the level of income. Better educated individual with more income skills will get better job and thus contribute more to the economic growth of a nation. Education

is an important key of achieving a sustainable national development. For a state to achieve a sustainable national development, the quality of its education should be improved.

Sustainable National Development in Nigeria

Sustainable development is not just about conserving our resources. It is about changing our culture and attitude to make conservation a way of life. There has been a growing interest in the financial aspects of education in recent times. Education utilizes large amount of a country's available resources and how it does this affects the well being of the population. Finance is one of the resources and a very important input on which the success of any school system depends. (Aghenta, 2004). One of the problems that have bedeviled the country since independence is lack of proper funding of education. Education occupies such a position in the national system that its ownership and management is the prerogative of government and cannot be surrendered to the whims and caprices of any agency or arm of government. Funding of education has been an intractable problem for the government, which has led to strikes, continuous agitation for improved welfare packages, for academic performance and a drift of students from public to private schools.

Sustainable development is a long term continuous development of society aimed at satisfaction of humanity's need at present and in the future via rational usage and replenishment of national resources, and preserving the earth for future generations. (Erhum, 2015). Singh (2014) argues that sustainable development means attaining a balance between environmental protection and human economic development and between the present and future needs, according to her sustainable development requires the integration of economic, social and environmental approaches towards development.

According to Wiser and Daniel (2005), the concept of sustainability means that development efforts including those aimed at protecting the health and the environment, should be undertaken in a manner that will not frustrate the ability of future generations to meet their needs. There is a growing awareness of the need for development efforts to focus on sustainable longterm economic development if poverty is to be reduced. Sustainable development is a concept that concerns everybody.

Discourse on Free Education

Education has been seen as the greater force that can be used to bring about change. Education is seen as the light that drives away the darkness of ignorance and enables mankind to find its way through the tortures and labyrinth of development and civilization. (Ikechukwu 2006). The best and simplest way to disseminate knowledge to all those who deserve it, is through free education. Making education free at least at the secondary level would benefit our society. The term 'free education' is a synergy of the two words 'free' and 'education'. According to Oxford Dictionary of English, the word 'free' means "without cost or payment". Put together 'free education' is the education that is provided for an individual without Cost or Payment when the cost of educating a child is borne by Government either at the state or national level, or an external agent(s) apart from the parents, it is termed 'free education' (Ige, 2015). 'Free Education' can thus be described as all round education, being provided for a child freely by Government, the Philanthropists, and other agencies without him/her or the parent paying a penny. The idea of free education provision has come of age in Nigeria. Sequel to the restructuring of Nigeria into three regions (i.e. West, East and North) in 1951, education was on concurrent legislative list between the federal and regional governments. This implies that

both levels of government have the right to establish finance and manage educational institutions. Free education as a method of financing learners' education has a long history in Nigeria. January 1955 marked the genesis of free education when the then western region under Chief Obafemi Awolowo launched her fire university primary education (UPE). The Eastern Region and federal capital territory of Lagos introduced free primary education in 1957. The following year tuition was introduced in the east, thereby bringing to an end free education. This experiment in the East collapsed due to lack of proper planning and poor implementation. Presently free education (free tuition) is in practice in Federal Universities for undergraduates. Even with this free tuition, a substantial cost is borne by the students.

Over the years, the issues of whether education should be free for the citizens or not, has been a subject of controversy in Nigeria. It is not a gainsaying that a country such as Nigeria requires education for her citizens, in view of her present developmental challenges and the role it can play in combating these challenges. It is worthy to note that apart from oil, part of the revenue of government is derived from tax on the citizen either directly or indirectly (Ige, 2015) it thus implies that education fund being derived from taxes should be spent for all the citizens.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary school education is fast losing value. There is urgent need to restructure and transform the secondary school system in the country. This must be done if the objectives as stated in national policy on Education for the education sector must be achieved. Secondary education is the second in the tripod of education starting with from the Primary, Secondary and Tertiary stages in ascending order of magnitude. Secondary education must not be allowed to suffer if we are serious about using education to drive national development as obtains in many progressive nations in the world. As clearly stated in the national Policy on Education, secondary education has two distinct objectives which are; preparing recipients for useful living within the society. But the question remains how will our secondary schools meet up with these two wonderful objectives?

Are they providing the students with the vocational skills necessary for useful living if they chose not to go further on their education? Unfortunately, our secondary schools have suffered acute shortage of qualified manpower especially in specialized subjects, it also suffers acute shortage or complete absence of facilities (infrastructure). Also, there is problem of general low morale on the part of the few teachers struggling to make sense out of the situation. A visit to our public secondary schools will provoke one to ask several questions at the same time. Many of them look like abandoned buildings and this is one of the reasons we have been recording poor result from that sector.

It is very critical that attention should be focused on the secondary school sector. I believe that things cannot continue the way they have been if we want to have quality and value from our secondary school system, therefore this paper call on the government both state and federal to restructure, initiate and declare free education to bring about Sustainable National Development in Nigeria. Education and Sustainable National Development are interwoven, intertwined and interconnected. The fact that education and sustainable development shouts glaring connectivity probably explained why scholars emphasized the need for education for the purpose of achieving the desired sustainable development. Umoh 2005 therefore refers education and sustainable development as two sides of the same coin. It is also mentioned by Olubadewo (2006:9) that it is only educated population that can command skills necessary for

sustainable economic growth and a better quality of life. Therefore, there is need to invest, encourage and enlighten people in education.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

- 1: To what extent does free education enhance Sustainable National Development?
- 2: What factors facilitate and enhances free education for sustainable National Development?

Hypothesis

One null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study and was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H_01 : There is no significant correlation between free education and sustainable National Development in Public Secondary Schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The area of study is Abia State Educational zone with focus on Umuahia. The population of the study comprised of forty two principals (42) spread across forty two secondary schools in the four (4) Local Government Areas of Umuahia educational zone according to statistics of the Secondary Educational Management Board (SEMB, 2015). Purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. The data for the study were collected using an instrument titled "Assessing Free Education for Sustainable Development Questionnaires" (AFESDG). The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A was designed to derive information on principals perception on the extent free education will enhance sustainable National Development using a modified four point rating scale with VHE= Very High Extent (4), HE= High Extent (3), LE= Low Extent (2), VLE= Very Low Extent (1) and sector B was designed to elicit information on principal perception on the factors that will facilitate free education for sustainable national development using a four point rating scale with SD= Strongly Agree (4), A= Agree (3), DA= Disagree (2), SD= Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was validated using Pearson Product Movement Correlation Coefficient formula with reliability coefficient of 0.83. The data obtained were analyzed using mean for the research questions while hypothesis was tested using the Pearson Product Movement Correlation Coefficient. Hypothesis formulated was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

The results of the data analysis are shown in tables 1, 2 and 3 according to research questions and hypothesis.

Research Question 1

To what extent does free education enhance Sustainable National Development?

Table 1: The mean and standard deviation rating of the respondent responses on the extent to which free education enhances sustainable national development.

S/N	Items	<u>X</u>	S.D	Remarks
1	Inculcate skills which are useful in the production process	2.78	0.80	Accepted
2	Rift individuals and Nation from the quaqueire of justice	2.68	0.73	Accepted
3	Achievement of unprecedented rates of Economic growth	3.01	0.71	Accepted
4	Make the individuals to become self actualized and economic independent	2.87	0.91	Accepted
5	Impact knowledge that will make the individual; contribute to the most important aspect of economic growth.	2.86	0.92	Accepted
6	Impact in an individual the spirit of innovation and certainty.	2.56	1.01	Accepted
7	Increase in technological achievement of a Nation	2.81	0.95	Accepted
8	Develop latent capacities for effective and efficient functioning in the society.	2.88	0.90	Accepted
9	Produce men and women of professional standard.	2.86	0.94	Accepted
10	A pathway to stimulating self sufficiency, self-sustainability and self support in the students.	2.71	0.97	Accepted

The data on table 1 revealed that the respondents accepted all the items on table 1 with respective mean scores of 2.78, 2.68, 3.01, 2.87, 2.86, 2.56, 2.81, 2.88, 2.86 and 2.71 with respective standard deviation scores of 0.80, 0.73, 0.71, 0.91, 0.92, 1.01, 0.93, 0.90, 0.94 and 0.97.

Research Question Two

What factors facilitate and enhances free education for sustainable National Development?

Table Two: The mean and standard deviation ratings of the respondent's responses on the factors that facilitate and enhances free education for sustainable National Development.

S/N	Items	X	S.D	Remarks
1	Massive increase of public expenditure in education at all levels	3.01	0.68	Accepted
2	Funding by government and non-governmental organizations	3.24	0.62	Accepted
3	Better remuneration and good working conditions for teachers.	3.01	0.71	Accepted
4	Reviewed emphasis on all subjects	3.20	0.63	Accepted
5	Change in pedagogy	2.61	0.87	Accepted
7	Provision of text books, teachers, guide and other learning materials	3.31	0.74	Accepted
8	Provisions of school based feeding	2.61	0.71	Accepted
9	Tackling the problem of secondary school	2.72	0.81	Accepted
10	Making the basic education functional	3.31	0.71	Accepted
11	Effective management of available funds by stake holders.	3.42	0.61	Accepted

The data on table 2 do indicate that the respondents accepted all the items with respective mean scores 3.01, 3.24, 3.01, 3.20, 2.61, 3.31, 2.61, 2.72, 3.31 and 3.42 with respective standard deviation scores of 0.68, 0.62, 0.71, 0.63, 0.87, 0.74, 0.71, 0.81, 0.71 and 0.61.

Hypothesis One (H_0):

H_0 : There is no significant correlation between free education and sustainable National Development in Public Secondary Schools.

Table 3: The Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient between Free education and Sustainable National Development.

S/N	Variables	Independent variable	Dependent Variable
1	Independent variable free education	0.000	0.685
		0.000	0.000
		42	1.000
2	Dependent Variable. National Development	0.685	1.000
		0.000	
		42	42

The data on table 3 revealed that there was a moderate positive significant correlation between free education and sustainable National Development. This was indicated by the value of 0.685 and p value of 0.000 which is less than 0.5. Thus, this indicates we reject the null hypothesis.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data analysis has shown that there is a significant correlation between free education and sustainable National Development in the mean rating for achievement of unprecedented rates of economic growth, develops latent capacities for effective and efficient functioning in the society and give the individuals the opportunity to become self actualized and economic independent. Education plays invaluable roles in the life of individual. Aside the contributions to individual's development, it contributes to national development. (Ige, 2009) he also identified that there is a close relationship between literacy level and life expectancy. With a higher life expectancy, individual can reap higher return from their educational investments thus increasing the rate of economic growth. In addition he agrees that education brings more highly educated women who are likely to have low fertility rate, other things been equal, a lower fertility rate, which implies a higher national income per capital especially in those countries with high rates of unemployment and over-population.

The study also has shown that provision of textbooks, teacher's guide, and learning materials enhance free education for sustainable National Development. That for a better result or development of the youth Basic education must be made functional and the government and non government organization should provide enough fund more so effective management of available funds by stakeholders.

Asodike (2007) advocates that students in secondary schools who incidentally form the bulk of the unemployed and easily lured into activities that impede developments such as youth restiveness should be made to acquire income generating skills while at school. Confirming this view, Maclean (2008, 15) opined that effective skills development for employability and sustainable livelihood is essential if sustainable development is to be achieved. Supporting this view, Ololube (2013) opined that persistent distress in Nigeria economy has resulted to the adoption of harsh economic policies that have adversely affected school management. He further explained that funds made available for the running of school system by the Government are exceptionally too little for effective management.

Testing null hypotheses (H_0) suggested a significant correlation in the opinions of the principals that there is a moderate positive significance correlation between free education and Sustainable National Development. Thus, the result indicates a rejection of the null hypotheses. This result was not surprising considering the fact that education according to NPE (2004:8) is the most important instrument for change: any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an education revolution which indicates an instrument for change and national development because development is championed through education. It is also mentioned by Olubadewo (2006:9) that it is only educated population that can command skills necessary for sustainable economic growth and a better quality of life. The fact that Education and Sustainable National Development are interwoven, intertwined and interconnected shows a glaring connectivity which probably explained why the principals interviewed in this paper emphasized the importance and need for free education, for the purpose of achieving the desired sustainable development.

Therefore, there is need for a more decisive and better action taken if free education is to be made functional to improve qualitatively and be available to all

CONCLUSION

The study, based on the findings, concluded that government should practice free education to its citizens at the post primary level as education is the cornerstone of achieving a Sustainable National Development. There are no doubts achieving Sustainable National Development is the goal of all developing nations. As such there are the needs to invest, encourage and enlighten people on education as the situation in Nigeria makes it imperative for the education of the citizens to be allowed priority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are made based on the findings of the study.

1. In view of the importance of education in individuals and national development, Government should devise strategies that can ensure that education is available to the majority.
2. Government should reach out to the international charity organizations for financial assistance in the education sector and re-introduce education to students in educational institutions with interest free or reduced interest.
3. Schools should endeavor to manage their resources as provided by Government to enable accountability and achievement of set goals.
4. For the purpose of achieving sustainable national development. There are needs for learning under a conducive environment. As such, the dilapidated infrastructural facilities in schools must be improved while gender disparity between boys and girls drop out should be discouraged.

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