

## **Imperative of Inclusive Education for Nation Building: An Overview of Issues for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development in the Post Covid-19 Pandemic Era in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

There are no doubt threats to national development which is hoped to be actuated through quality, efficient, effective and functional education system built upon a viable and pragmatic curriculum; but this has largely been a dilemma and seemingly utopic. The researcher in this paper attempted to project in the public domain critical conceptual and contemporary issues germane to education as an imperative for national development in Nigeria. The study attempted to identify the missing links as well as interrogated the inter-connectedness between inclusive education, its challenges and prospects for sustainable socio-economic development in Nigeria in this post covid-19 pandemic era. The research paper adopted content analysis and descriptive approach in exploring the relevant issues in the discourse. Some valuable recommendations were made by the researcher viz: Government at all tiers should make education policies that will facilitate inclusive education. Stakeholders and Non-governmental Organization (NGO) should help the government in providing essential instructional media, such as hand rails, wheel chairs, hearing aids and brail. Curriculum developers should endeavour to factor in the cherished values of the society ranging from Local Government to State and to the entire nation at large. Teachers will as well implement the curriculum with every seriousness. For a comprehensive inclusive education in Nigeria, there should be technical schools established both learners living with disability and those that are not. Therefore, every learner should be considered.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, national development, challenges and prospects, sustainable socio-economic development

### **Introduction**

The political and social man is formed and informed by education. Little wonder the contemporary man has taken education very seriously. Consequently, there is the demand to continually move, prove and improve the educational system as tool for national development. It may therefore not be dubitable to assert that a good way of generating economic growth is through educational development, which enables individuals with knowledge and ability to apply that knowledge towards the advancement of self and society. Education is therefore commonly regarded as the most direct avenue to rescue a substantial number of people out of poverty and ignorance (Tikly, 2001). If education is proven to wield the greatest influence on economy, government should invest more on

inclusive education in order to harness and develop all the human capital available in the country, and by so doing speedup human and national development.

It is noteworthy that issues of poor quality education in African have always been linked to the oppression, exploitation and imposition of western ideology by the colonial masters through the aegis bad leaders (Byju, 2023). In Nigeria for example, according to Buchmann and Hannum (2001) after her independence in 1960, poor educational standards was linked to poverty, corruption, politicization of educational appointments, lack of effective implementation of educational policies, inadequate funding of education sector and more so incoherent curriculum implementation. However, it is unfortunate that nearly six decades after independence, Nigerians still blame the colonial masters for their educational woes (Fabunmi, 2005). These factors combined contributed to the pathetic situation in the education industry in Nigeria. Suffice it to say that majority of the inadequacies found in the educational sector at all levels may be blameable on government's attitude towards the sector. This non-committal attitude towards education as well as policy somersaults, as posited by Fafunwa (2004) have resulted in the decline of educational values, destabilizing educational system, depreciating connection and thus a deteriorating human development. The system has become so pathetic and disheartening that most if not all Nigerian political leaders and business moguls seldom allow their children to study in Nigeria. They send their children abroad where quality education is assured. The above national, educational and economic crises cannot foster development of a nation.

The phrase nation building is a broad term that includes all areas of human development. As rightly captured by Society for Research and Academic Excellence (SRAE) (2020) the term national development is all embracing. It encompasses every facets of life of an individual and the entire nation at large, it is all inclusive in approach. It is a process of development that comprises various dimensions of societal and national development. It involves revolution in all areas of human endeavours: industries, agriculture, education, social, religious and cultural institutions (SRAE, 2020). Another school of thought BYJU'S Exam Prep (2023) maintains that development of a nation includes the ability to increase and better standard of living of the society. National development on the overall is the extent of a countries development in terms of infrastructures and technologies provided for the citizenry, which includes all the necessary means to meet the goals and aspirations,

and basic needs of the masses. National development implies the ability to improve the standard of living and better livelihood, creation of jobs and employments and providing education for all. Therefore, inclusive education is an important part of nation building which promotes education for all.

Inclusive education is the type of education that gives every citizen that inclusivity in the education industry to learn. It is mostly effective when every child is given a fair chance to attend school of their choice to learn and acquire skills they need to be self-reliant. It is estimated that there are 240 million children with disabilities worldwide. Therefore, children with disabilities should be given every necessary infrastructures and technologies, instructional media to facilitate their ambitions and dreams to learn in order to secure their future (UNICEF, 2019). Greensprings Educational Services (2023) maintains that inclusive education recognizes unique contributions and values of individual in their different diversities in classroom. In an inclusive education classroom every learner feels belonged and safe and develops their self. This is one of the main key drivers of an inclusive education. Yet, some physically challenged children are not represented in the policies that guide education system. They are often overlooked in so many schools especially in providing infrastructure and instructional media. This limits their access to quality education as they shy away because of their condition (GES, 2023). Sometimes they avoid participation in the socio-economic and political life. Because of the above situation, a good number of these children are drop outs from school around the globe do to persistent barriers to education emanating from discrimination, stigma, and in ability of policy makers incorporate the in the school system (UNICEF, 2019).

In the light of the above, therefore, this paper seeks to address critical conceptual and contemporary issues germane to inclusive education and its impact on nation building in this post covid-19 era in Nigeria. The writer also interrogates the inter-connectedness between education, its challenges and prospects for sustainable socio-economic development. The paper is issue based and will also proffer possible solutions for actuating a more pragmatic, development oriented inclusive education sector in the quest for nation building and national development in Nigeria.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The paper seeks to find out the imperative of inclusive education in nation building and sustainable socio-economic development of Nigeria. To this extent the paper specifically sought:

1. To interrogate the imperative of inclusive education as a tool for nation building and socio-economic development;
2. To find out the challenges confronting effective inclusive education in Nigeria;
3. To ascertain the correlation between inclusive education, national development and sustainable socio-economic development in Nigeria;
4. To make recommendations regarding how education can serve as effective tool for nation building and sustainable socio-economic development.

### **Method**

The research design employed in this work is the exploratory research design approach which clarifies the exact problem of this study and seeks to provide more understanding to imperative of inclusive education in nation building the issue at stake rather than proffering conclusive evidence. This method is used to bring out the preliminary topics in inclusive education so that there will be no ambiguity to knowledge yet unexplored in imperative of inclusive education in nation building. In doing this it examined what is already known about the subject matter and any additional information that may be relevant. Sequel to this, qualitative research was employed to collect, compare and analyze large information. This research method that gather and analyze non-numerical data in order to acquire more knowledge of individual social reality, attitudes, beliefs and motivation.

### **Conceptual Insights**

The concept of education is widely perceived without losing its central meaning (Elika & Daniel, 2012) Education provides opportunity for inclusive participation in political and socio-economic development of a country. While distinguishing between the educated and the uneducated, he noted that the educated are more likely to perform their civic roles like paying taxes promptly being aware of the uses, they are more likely to participate politically either by casting his votes or being a contestant himself. In most recent times the people are now conscious of the importance of education as it brings about political enlightenment, which is necessary for proper participation in polities

(Igbuzor, 2006). Through enlightenment and education people have been able to understand the problem of the society and the overall national development efforts. This has become recognized by both military and civilian governments. Nation as it were is a group of people who share history, traditions and culture which embodies religion and languages (Paras (2023). In the same vein, a people bounded by common identity, with common culture and belief system work together to develop their identity and that is nation building

It is in this line of thought that education simply refers to the acquiring of knowledge, skills, techniques and specialization on societal needs. This helps for individual developments, self-productive and finally self-reliant and these engender national development. Furthermore, national development implies the use of different means of development that are focused on revamping all the nation's institutions to be at work. And with this the peoples' aims and objectives, needs and aspirations, as well as, goals of the wider society will be achieved and this leads to tremendous socio-economic development and nation building at large.

### **Nation Building in Nigeria: Interrogating the Vital Importance of Inclusive Education**

In this post covid-19 pandemic era, majority of people, especially, amongst scholars, voluntary agencies, and governments have contributed heavily towards education because through education individuals realize themselves and it is for the government a tool for development (Aghenta, 2001). In the annual budgeting and planning, what is budgeted to education is 16% annual or little less than 4% of the nation's Gross National Product (GNP) (FRN, 2006). Contributions made to the development of education this era were quite very high, both privately and generally, in the form of human resource (academic and non-academic staff) and social contributions to colleges and universities, inspectors, education officers, researchers and other workers in the Ministries of Education (Aghenta, 2001). The development of education was faced from different fronts: in the public and private sectors, formal and non-formal education because education is the bedrock of development in any nation. This is because without education many functions performed through education, such as teaching and research development, which require freedom and autonomy won't be effective and effectively actuated. This cannot be compromised at any cost (Enemuo, 2008).

However, the question to be asked from onset is; what is the nature of inclusivity in Nigerian education and how has it impacted on national development or nation building as the case may be (Imam, 2001; Umar & Tahir, 2000).). In cognizance of the maxim: *ex nihilo nihil fit* (from nothing, nothing comes) educational accountability is never a goal attained without doing what ought to be done. And while it is true and has never been doubted that the particular type of training a society prescribes for its citizen is an indication of the society's ambitions and coveted goals, it is no less true that what actually is deployed in order to attain the objectives is the actual measure of their ambition (Gelberg, Stein & Anderse, 2007) Educational accountability becomes an obligation only if and when certain pre-conditions are fulfilled by the powers-that-be, invariably a synonym for the stakeholders no less. According to UNESCO (2006) these include, among others; a ready support and guarantee of academic freedom and fundamental human rights, ensuring that education personnel are not impeded in their work, be it in the classrooms or in their research capacity by violence, intimidation or harassment; providing facilities and equipment necessary for the mission of the institution and ensuring their upkeep. In the classroom setting, we reckon that education has taken place once there change has taken place in the learner's behaviour. Such a change in behaviour, informed, as it were by education and enlightenment, marks out education as an instrument for leaping forward into the light of freedom and away from the yoke of the past (Mayer & Wittrock, 2006). This is to be achieved, it requires a curriculum that is inclusive and that will serve the interest and needs of the general public without barriers and discrimination.

An effective, pragmatic curriculum will promote education as training and retraining is usually in some skill is good for some definite purpose. In this context there still exists a missing link yearning to be filled. Adeola (2020) asserts that Nigeria is faced with a lot of challenges and needs boosting the literacy level (now placed at 57% which is below the average for developing nations) to 75% which is the minimum average required for economic take-off; the ever-rising unemployment and school drop-out experience and their attendant social vices. The challenges incidental to globalization are the like problem situations and conditions should be jettisoned. To meet these challenges, Imam (2003) posits that Nigeria has appropriately provided in unambiguous language as educational aims and objectives inter alia the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around and the

acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society (FRN, 2013).

Prior to this provision, the National Curriculum Conference of 1969, organized by Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) made a decision which focused on the important of inclusive education, specifically, university outlined them as follows: involving the physically challenged, teaching and learning, imparting knowledge and researching to discover knowledge, dissemination of knowledge and contributing to national and international dialogue and criticism (Nwakpa & Uzoma, 2016). Institutions like this, is designated as a repository of knowledge where they are assigned the duty of strengthening the other levels of education like inclusive education; developing in them patriotism, national consciousness and loyalty to truth and principles. Thus, it provokes and promotes enlightenment and educates the public in their opinion; and distributing knowledge and disseminating existing information. Nwakpa and Uzoma (2016) Despite the determined spirit to achieve the goal of inclusive education in the education industry; the system still leaves much to be desired. This indeed gives concern for serious concern in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria.

Many problems in the Nigeria tertiary education system according to Okonta (2010) have occurred because of the policies of education. For example, the cries of educational financing, frequent strikes by ASUU and riots by students have become almost a permanent features mainly because of excessive centralization of educational planning, federal government hijacking of educational system, poor accountability of education resources, and Federal Government intervention in matters which should be handled by the states and government at various levels muzzling the authority of the managers of the education institutions to achieve cheap political goals.

### **Correlation between Inclusive Education and Nation Development in the Post Covid-19 Era**

With inclusive education, the degree of political awareness and participation of the people becomes accentuated. Access to education widens the scope of one's confidence in his ability to act effectively in political process. Adigwe (2004) commenting on this, asserts that "it would be a sad thing if on account of ignorance voters cast their votes without having reason to do so." He further stressed that

it is pertinent that the electorates should understand the rudiments of government. Again this may be unnecessary advice for a Briton or American today, but in most African States where illiteracy has a firm grip on a sizable proportion of the population, it needs to be repeated a thousand times (Nwagwu, 2007; Nwagwu, 2011; Odukoya, 2009). Inclusive education has been generally acknowledged to widen the scope of one's acquaintance with political facts as to increase capacity to perceive the personal implication of political events or to increase one's confidence in his ability to act positively. Milbrath (2009) further pointed out that the more education a person acquires the more distinctive his orientation and values. He said "we know that in Western culture, educated people are likely to participate more in conventional politics and to hold more regime level participatory value than their less schooled counterparts". Education constitutes the instrument through which the individual acquires the ability to utilize the right to judge and choose in a rational non-biased manner, it sets the individual free from ignorance and superstitions. Thus, Laski (2016) posits that the defects in democracy are largely due to ignorance. He again said that to strike at ignorance is to attack the foundation upon which these defects are built. And this remains a political role of education; for there cannot be a responsible government until there are educated electorates.

Finally, Olaniyan and Obadara (2008) also took this stand when he said through education has been the source of development in the Sub-Saharan Africa since the advent of the imperialists. It remains the pivotal point of dislodging of the European rule in Africa. Education has also been the instrument for the development of human capital and viable leaders who challenged and outstare the imperialist subjugation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts human capital model of Robert and Thomas, (2011) which maintains that inclusive education is a necessary means of improving human capital in the nation, active participation in politics, increases the output in productivity and revamp the levels of technology across the world. Through inclusive education quality human capital can be developed which is an important factor for responsible for the growth of nation's economy like in the East Asia, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan which was why they were called Asian Tigers (Olaniyan & Okkemakinde, 2008). More still, Schumpeter (2004) views education especially skill acquisition as responsible for industrial

revolution. It is through education that innovations and inventions, new ideas and enhanced techniques, new technologies and new products are produced in the world.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Despite the challenges confronting the education system in Nigeria, it still remain tangential that inclusive education is an instrument per excellence for actuating national development. With reference to Nigeria, the quest for nation development remains an ongoing process. Therefore it is needful to make deliberate efforts to put in place reforms and programmes that can salvage our collective dilemma, instead of the fruitless disposition of lamentation. This way, we can redeem and “salvage what is left” from our endangered Education system as this will in no small measure help in the realization of national development in Nigeria.

Regarding recommendations, the following strategies are apt for policy in enhancing the imperative of inclusive education in national development;

- 1) Relevant stakeholders and three-tiers of government will have to parley to redesign the education policy in such a way that each States or Local Governments will have their cherished values embellished into the school curriculum. The present time demands result oriented pragmatic curriculum implementation so as to fill the prevalent mismatch in human capital development.
- 2) Government at all levels must commit vast resources towards the school infrastructures and education manpower so that worthwhile knowledge can be guaranteed.
- 3) For a comprehensive inclusive education in Nigeria, there should be technical schools established both for learner living with disabilities and those that are not. Therefore, technical education should be revamped because that is where the future technocrats and technologists are made.
- 4) The knowledge of intro-tech (Introductory Technology) should be re-introduced into school curriculum, so that the goals and objectives of inclusive education can be met

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