

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The economic development model is a disastrous notion. Quest for profit and power compels man to use and misuse nature. The current sustainable development paradigm seeks to “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This article used the theoretical method to discuss the education needed to inculcate the values of sustainable development for imperative reorientation for attitudinal and value changes, policy innovation, political transformations, and economic restructuring. It recommends Conservation Education for human well-being, Environmental Education for preservation of natural resources, and Ecology Education for ecological society.

Introduction

Ukeje (1979) defines education as “a process society establishes to assist the young to understand the heritage of the past, to participate productively in the society of the present, and to contribute to the future.” By going through this process one learns or acquires a change in behaviour or ordinary knowledge, a skill or an attitude. Therefore, education is seen as a process, a product and a body of knowledge.

This process through which man acquires a change in behaviour conjures some questions:

- (i) *What do we educate?* This refers to content (or educational curriculum).

- (ii) *Why do we educate?* This refers to the reasons for education (or educational *philosophy*).
- (iii) *How do we educate?* This refers to the method for education (or educational *methodology*).
- (iv) *Who do we educate?* This refers to the recipients of education, i.e. the child (educational *psychology*) or citizen (or educational *sociology*).

Concurring with Ukeje, Nwogu (1994), submits that education is “a process of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours for the overall development of the individual and for the general good of the society.” The process transforms every aspect of man’s personality with a view to modifying, changing, developing, re-orientating it from its original crude or natural state. This is done through exposure to an assimilation of knowledge, tested experiences and new information acquired formally and informally.

In tandem with these views, Inoma (2001), opines that education is “the process of teaching and training for the purpose of developing the academic, physical and mental, moral, spiritual ability of the individual in order to sharpen the personal intellect of man.” It encompasses our relationships in social, economic and political aspects of living so that man can be at peace and be able to live harmoniously with nature and his environment. Thus, the term, *to educate*, means *to draw out*. Education is now interpreted as:

- (i) touching every aspect of an individual personality.
- (ii) a continuous learning process.
- (iii) affected by conditions and experiences both within and outside the school situation.

According to Onigbo (2003), education is a conscious, planned manner of assisting the other person (old or young) to understand and behave in a generally accepted way. It has been accepted by many societies as the process by which every society attempts to preserve and upgrade the accumulated knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, values, etc., in a cultural setting and heritage. Education is dynamic,

changing with the times and environment. It adapts itself to new demands and circumstances. It has a growing quality. By it, citizens are made to understand the environment they are born into, learn the things that members of the society should know and do to enhance the welfare and progress the society and learn why they should avoid doing things that might be injurious to the well-being of the society. This aspect of education is, therefore, integrational.

The Importance of Education

The importance of education can be appreciated against the background of education as a process, as a product and as a discipline. As a process, education is the means by which man can acquire the civilization of the past and is enabled to take part in the civilization of the present and make the civilization of the future. Here civilization is the totality of culture as a means of developing man to enable him live effectively and efficiently in the society (Ukeje, 1979).

As a product, education is the means of bringing changes in man's behaviour. It enables man to acquire power in the environment he lives in; power to be somebody in the society by which he is identified in terms of social status commanded by his personality; and the power to be of higher value. Through man's power nature has been conquered. Man has used education as a very important instrument for transformation and reconstruction of his environment.

As a discipline, education is a body of organized knowledge, dealing with:

- (i) What should be taught? This concerns the curriculum content of the various stages of learning – nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary levels, etc.
- (ii) Why should it be taught? This concerns the philosophy of education, which emphasizes the aims and objectives of imparting a particular subject or course to the society, whether it be science, the arts or humanities, etc.
- (iii) How should it be taught? This explains the methodology and educational psychology to be used or applied.
- (iv) To whom should it be taught? This refers to the learner (child or citizen).

The traditional concept of education emphasizes the mastery of, and competence in, the subject matter or specific study or practice. The modern concept is an outgrowth of continuing research concerning human development and behaviour (Crow, 1965).

Education widens the outlook of the learner and equips him mentally, physically and morally to face problems of life in their different aspects. It systematically builds up the entire self of the learner. It gives growth to the body and the mind. It fixes the child (or learner) to his society. It imparts some skills of hands and recognizes the value of manual work, which is normally called vocation. It replaces illiteracy with literacy, which is the basis for all progress for individuals, community and country.

Education enables the learner to live honestly and help his community. It fosters development of lively curiosity that leads to a search for knowledge of the immediate environment and of the outside world. It leads the learner to the fullest, truest, noblest and most fruitful relationships with the world. It helps to develop the learner's hidden talents to improve his life, and prepares him to adapt to duties and pursuits. It enables the learner to understand the community, its values, its development and the individuals' contribution to it. It turns out good citizens, useful members of the society, people who can play and work with their fellow citizens in a friendly and co-operative spirit and with good manners. It enables the learner to appreciate things in life – law, government, rendering services, etc. rather than pursuit of money for its sake and for the power it brings (Inoma, 2001).

The Aims of Education

According to Georges Danton (1759-1794), "After bread, education is the first need of people." This organized body of knowledge aims at (Whitehead, 1962):

1. Imparting an intimate sense for the power of ideas, for the beauty of ideas, and for the structure of ideas, together with a particular body of knowledge which has peculiar reference to the life person possessing it.

2. Sharpening the mind for use. The mind is never passive, but in perpetual activity, delicate, receptive, responsive to stimulus. You cannot postpone its life, but can sharpen and appropriate it.
3. Producing men who possess both culture and expert knowledge in some special direction.
4. Addressing life in all its ramifications.
5. Using the knowledge of the past to equip people for the present.
6. Acquisition of the art of utilization of knowledge.
7. Using the school as the true educational unit in the national system for safeguarding of learning and efficiency.
8. Training and valuing trained intelligence.

Ways of Acquiring Education

There are three main ways through which the society carries out this all important process. They are:

- (b) The informal way – through interaction with members of the family, peer group, society and things around (environment). This is the first form of education available to human society.
- (c) The formal way – through the medium of organized learning, i.e. school or institutionalized learning.
- (d) The non-formal way – through deliberate and systematized efforts to organize learning outside the regular school activity, example, the National Youth Service Corps, Scout Movement, functional or adult literacy campaigns, apprenticeship system, correspondence course, mass media sensitization, etc., all of which are change agents.

All these efforts put together refer to what is now termed “Education For All” (EFA) and “Education For Life” (EFL), according to the Jamitan Declaration of 1990 and the Dakar Framework For Action of year 2000, which also projected education as “an instrument par excellence for effecting national and international development.”

Theories of Education

Socrates (469-399 BC) believed that in every particular action, there are general principles that are the same for everybody and for all time. If action is guided by these underlying fundamental principles, society

would become stable. Such fundamental principles include temperance, justice, wisdom, courage, loyalty, etc. (Nwuzo, 1992:21).

The Greek believed that the chief purpose of life was to achieve virtue (moral excellence, goodness, good quality). According to Socrates, virtue is knowledge, and without knowledge no action of an ignorant man can be regarded as good. And so virtue can be taught. He set about to teach his followers and others the fundamental principles of goods through general definition. Thus, he started what was later called the Socratic method of teaching, which was the method of induction and definition. In this method, the teacher helps the student to see what is wrong in the ideas he holds, guides him to correct and refine his ideas, and thus arrive at general principles that could be guides to actions. Such principles could help one to know whether a particular line of action is good or bad and why. He also believed that right action should be based on understanding. Through the knowledge of virtue, he believed that education is capable of improving morality and good conduct.

The theory of education by Plato (427-347 BC) stressed that the goal of man is to work towards his own perfection and the perfection of the state because there cannot be a perfect man without a well ordered and perfect state. Man can become perfect through education. Man can attain ultimate knowledge, which is the knowledge of the *Good*. According to him, a perfect state is one in which there is discipline, justice, social and political harmony. This ultimate education emphasizes self-discipline to ensure that future leaders should develop harmony and moderation in behaviour.

Education is developed from within. The work of the teacher is to create the necessary environmental stimulus that will help the child (learner) to unfold his abilities. Education is all round development of the individual – physical, moral and intellectual development. Education cannot be good if the environment/society in which it is given is not good. Ruler/leader should not be ignorant people, but people that have received the ultimate/best form of education, which emphasized harmony, self discipline and moderation in life.

According to the theory of education by Aristotle (384-322 BC), the purpose of life and therefore the aim of education is self-

fulfillment, which is the realization of the capabilities and potentiality of the individual. Education should be planned physical, character (moral) and intellectual education – one complimenting the other. Moderation was seen as the best in all things. He recommended the formation of right habits, character, intellect and self-discipline.

He believed that education is the building up of knowledge for utilitarian purpose – the philosophic knowledge/wisdom through which man arrives at scientific knowledge of the order and causes of all natural things.

Uses and Types of Education

Education is applied to many uses, which can form the basis of classifying it. Thus, there are many types of education, including education for awareness, conservation education, ecology education, etc.

Education for Awareness

Education is a necessary condition for political awareness and emancipation for a free and democratic society because education is very important for progressive leadership and enlightened followership as well as political socialisation.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that a country cannot afford to neglect the education of its people (pupils). Fafunwa (1994), posits that every society, whether simple or complex, has its own system for training and educating its children. Education for good life of the society has been one of the most persistent concerns of men throughout history. By equipping the educated man with appropriate skills, new ideas, guided orientation, etc., expertise to cope with life will emerge. Joseph Addison (1711), recognized this much when he stated that “Education is a companion which no misfortune can depress, no crime can destroy, no enemy can alienate, no despotism can enslave ... It chastens vice, it guides virtue, it gives grade to the individual and genius to the government. Without it, what is man? A splendid slave, a reasoning savage” (Inoma, 2001).

Conservation Education

Conservation education aims to improve natural resource management and reduce environmental damage. It helps people to become aware of the value of the natural resources and the ecological processes that maintain them. It shows people what threatens the well-being of their environment and how they can contribute to its improved management. It motivates people to do what they can to improve environmental management. These three objectives distinguish conservation education from other types of education (Outreach No. 75).

Ecology education

Ecology education teaches people about their interaction with the physical, social, political and biological environments in which they live and work. There is growing interest in how people interact with the environment. Studies show that environmental interaction work at three levels. First, environments and how they are structured and arranged for maximum growth; second, how the environments interact with each other; and third, how people are affected by more abstract environments, such as societal and political, e.g. legislation (Morrison, 1984).

Sustainable Development

The oldest concept of development is the economic paradigm that speaks mainly of increasing production. It is very materialistic, patriarchal and paternalistic. This model of development, which was based on obsession with materialistic acquisition and economics, has disastrous nature. Profit and power are the gods of this notion of development. Man is supreme, and can use and misuse nature as he wishes. Development is a project to conquer nature rather than live in harmony with it. This belief, coupled with the hunger for power and profit, led to disaster. It led to cutting of virgin forests; poisoning of rivers, seas and lands; and a series of ecological disasters. The 20th century witnessed the most murderous wars. This concept of development means centralisation of power and also destruction of the rich values of diversity. It destroys people's creativity and capacities, making human beings less creative, less autonomous, less powerful,

less human. It marginalises and further disempowers women (Bhasin, 1991).

This notion of development has been replaced with sustainable development paradigm. Development is sustainable if it “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Sustainable development is all about equity, defined as equality of opportunities for well-being, as well as about comprehensiveness of objectives. It aims at preserving the environment for the future generation, without denying the present generation the ability to meet their needs. It is a balance at meeting the socio-economic needs of the present generation and preserving the environment and saving the mother Earth (Soubbotina, 2004:9).

Sustainable development is “a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potentials to meet human needs and aspiration.” It is about long-term conditions for humanity’s multidimensional well-being. Sustainable development is not about the society reaching an end state, nor is it about establishing static structures or about identifying fixed qualities of social, economic or political life. It is about promoting equitable and balanced development (Baker, 2006).

Sustainable development is a comprehensive process involving complex relationships among various aspects of the society including population growth, improvements in education and health, environmental degradation and globalization. It seeks to reconcile the ecological, social and economic dimensions of development, now and into the future. It aims at promoting a form of development that is contained within the ecological carrying capacity of the planet, which is socially just and economically inclusive, so as to achieve the common future of humankind (Baker, 2006).

Education for Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is the latest concept of development. Education plays an indispensable role in its success by teaching people on how they can go about the present-day values and interests, while

ensuring that future generations inherit the necessary conditions to provide for their own welfare.

Sustainable development can be achieved by adopting dynamic education of the alternatives that lie before the future society. These alternative futures can be visioned and taught to the people in order to bring about the needed attitudinal and value changes, policy innovation, political transformations, and economic restructuring. Ecology education and conservation education work at creating an ecological society that lives in harmony with nature. This means recognizing economic activity, social progress and environmental protection and the promotion of human well-being which does not depend on the destruction of nature. This can be achieved through awareness education.

Social stability requires the preservation of natural resources, knowing that the deterioration of the natural environment causes social disruption and impairs human health. Through environmental education people will learn not to destroy the ecosystem by indiscriminate dumping of refuse, pipeline vandalism, air pollution, water pollution, noise pollution, as well as other human activities that occasion global warming, ozone layer depletion, land degradation, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, desertification, and atmospheric contamination.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has broadly looked at the concepts and theories, importance, aims, uses and types, as well as ways of acquiring and applying education for sustainable development. It recommends:

- Conservation education for promotion of human well-being without destroying nature.
- Environmental education for the preservation of natural resources.
- Ecology education for creating an ecological society.

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