TRANSFORMING EDUCATION FOR UNCOMMON CHANGES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The President-elect in Nigeria won the 2015 elections on the groundswell of popular support, and the promise of change. Change is a strong word that portends the modification, amendment, and adjustment of the basic assumptions that underlie our reforms and developmental efforts. The challenge now is how changes would be felt in all sectors of the nation. The thrust of this paper is that education sector alone can bring about total changes expected in Nigeria, if is hinged on educational liberalism. The paper defines change as the process of becoming different; in order to achieve this, there is need for ‘transforming education’. The paper gives a brief account of how the past governmental reformation programs that did involve education failed. The paper argues that a transformed educational system with its basis on liberal education will empower individuals and prepare them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. To this end, the paper recommends an education system that brings about change in building an efficient and effective polity, inspiring a shared vision, remodeling a corrupt polity, building character and integrity in our leaders, redefining the imperatives of leadership, instilling core values in our youths, and creating the Nigerian dream that will inspire patriotism and commitment in the citizenry.

Keywords: change, education, liberalism, transformation.

Introduction
Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5,000 years, the right to education is undoubtedly the most fundamental. Education is regarded globally, as a potent instrument for introducing and sustaining social change in human societies, as well as shaping its destiny. Apart from serving as a vehicle for enhancing upward social and economic mobility, education is regarded as a key to social reconstruction (Ukeje, 1978), and an instrument for conserving, transmitting and renewing culture (Eder, 1966). Education imparts knowledge, teaches skills, and instills attitudes to the recipients. Imparting knowledge means putting across facts, current thinking, theories, principles or laws; teaching skills is imparting practical skills, comprehension and ability to see implications or solve problems; instilling attitudes include inculcating tolerance, open-mindedness, scientific detachment and healthy skepticism (Langer, 1977). These are requisites for social integration, performance of productive tasks, and for effecting national development (FRN, 2004). It could therefore, be said that the value of education
for the development of society cannot be over-emphasized and that without education, there can be no meaningful development in such areas as physical infrastructure, power, agriculture, intellectual skills and such other attributes, generally referred to as society’s human capitals.

Education is the process of cultivating the human person and inculcating in him qualities that differentiate us from other animals. Whether formal or informal, education makes it possible for the individual not only to understand himself, but also to interact with other people and the society in which he lives. It is through education that we become social, political and moral beings; that we are able to develop ourselves and contribute to the collective wellbeing of society (FME, 2009). This makes education the only priceless treasure that we can bequeath to the next generation.

Historically, in Nigeria, education at all levels has always been faced by challenges rooted in our colonial heritage. The educational system itself was part of a larger colonial package introduced into the country by our erstwhile colonial masters. Scholars like Adedeji (2009) argued that cultural, social, and political factors are responsible for educational problems, while others affirmed that incompetence on the part of the stakeholders, bad policies and developing curriculum without recourse to the societal needs, embezzling funds meant for educational development purposes, employing unqualified personnel, misplacing priorities, poor or lack of research and development, inadequate motivation of teachers to do their work, inadequate facilities in our schools, insufficient laboratories for practical works, bribery and corruption among schools personnel, examination malpractice as well as non-commitment of leaders are contributing factors, (Aba, 2006; Andrew, 2009).

Furthermore, the plight of dropout and out-of-school children is a concern to all and sundry. This is supported by one of UNESCO's reports that one out of every five Nigerian children is out of school (UNESCO, 2013). This is evidently a national disgrace for a country that is the world’s eighth largest oil producer. In the same vein, the UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report stated that Nigeria, with approximately 10.5 million children out of school, holds the world record of having the highest number of its youths out of school (UNESCO, 2005).

Evidently, human capital development will be the greatest problem Nigeria will face in the immediate future. The country places great emphasis on capital and infrastructure development, rather than on the support system that will drive this process. This situation needs to be addressed by reforming and transforming education for desired changes in Nigeria.

Undoubtedly, Nigeria is not a stranger to economic reforms, but great success had not been recorded due to non-reformation in education sector. It could be affirmed that to educate the mind is to liberate it from the shackles of fear, prejudice, ignorance, superstition, and to develop a free, independent and responsible citizenry. Knowledge, attitude, skills and aspiration change through education constitute blocks for human
capacity building. In the light of the above, this paper looks at transforming education as a perforce for uncommon changes in Nigeria.

An Overview of Various Reforms in Nigeria
History attests to the fact that many programs targeted at economic reform have been introduced by various administrations in Nigeria. Before the 1980s, the reforms were purely in the form of extended national perspective plans that attempted to mobilize human, material and natural resources of the nation to achieve goals of national life. There was the 1962-68 Plan, then the 1970-1974 Plan, the 1975-1980 Plan, and the 1981-1985 Plan. Often, these Plans went beyond mere economic prescriptions to address social, human and political goals. Thus, the 1970-74 Plan defined the national objectives (see FRN, 2004). These plans paved the way for the introduction of a more fundamental reform program, which sought to restructure the national economy during the tenures of President Shehu Shagari and General Ibrahim Babangida. Shagari in 1980 introduced the Stabilization/Austerity Measures; while Babangida in 1986 launched the Structural Adjustment Program to augment the deficiencies identified in the Shagari reforms. The basic thrust of SAP was liberalization, rationalization and optimization. In 1998, the Abacha’s regime introduced Vision 2010. The aim was to develop a blueprint that would transform the country and place it firmly on the route to becoming a developed nation by the year 2010. Vision 2010 envisioned that by 2010, Nigerians would have rediscovered themselves and reverted to being God-conscious and God-fearing, caring and sincere, honest and accountable in their handling of public trust, and proud of their country and heritage. We can all tell how well that vision worked out with the endemic corruption, bigotry and terrorist attacks that have enveloped our country today.

In 2004, the Obasanjo’s administration introduced the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy as its own transformation initiative. NEEDS addressed reforms in the pensions, telecommunication and power sectors. Memory recounts the inauguration of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission as part of Obasanjo’s transformation agenda.

Sadly, education was again given the back seat. It was only in 2007, under President Yar’adua, that education was mentioned as part of the administration’s 7-point transformation agenda. One would have expected the immediate past administration to continue with this vision to revolutionize the education sector.

From the above historical narrative, we can deduce that our leaders have hardly given priority to human capacity development. If one of these administrations had placed a
Little emphasis on reforming education in any of the transformation agendas, it would have been a total different country today.

Indeed, we all seem to have forgotten the most important function of all, children have a right to quality education in a secure environment. Muna (2014) on education and transformation agenda, voiced out the problem associated to non-reformation of education. According to Muna (2014), “There is disaster looming within our society if the education crisis is not addressed”. Today, only a minority of the population has the privilege of attending good schools. The majority end up either as illiterates or empty university graduates. The irony is that it will be this majority that will end up using brute force, and not intellectual strategy and discourse, to gain political positions. Being empty and ill-grounded, they will wreak more havoc on an already decimated system.

The questions are; what caliber of leaders is today making policies for the wellbeing of our country and for the growth of the economy? And what caliber of leaders are we grooming for tomorrow? Recruitment agents attest to the fact that it is becoming near impossible to find competent candidates to fit job openings. If this is our current reality, imagine what the situation will be by 2020 and beyond. There is nothing wrong in actualizing vision 20:2020, brazing up social development, making an investment haven, reforming the transport sector, improving power, building terror free society as well as ensuring sound economic management of the nation’s resources but education be transformed.

The centrality of this paper is transforming education with principle of liberalism. It is believed that change in education sector gives room for reorganizing societies and social relations, including the key institutions involved in social reproduction (Tickell and Peck, 2005), that is to revolutionize education so that the production of workers for the economy is the primary mandate.

**Theoretical Framework: Liberal Education**

Liberalism can be described as utopian principle promoted by philosophers such as Locke and Hobbes committed to the ideals of personal freedom and possessive individualism (Macpherson, 1962). The core ideas of liberalism are outlined by Macpherson; freedom from dependence on others, the individual is the proprietor of his own person and capacities; human societies consist of a series of market relations, and political society is constructed to protect an individual’s property and goods. In other words, supreme value is given to individual autonomy, agency and property. According to Olssen (2000),
“...liberalism ensures and reinforces those issues pertaining to the relations between the individual and society, the conception of freedom, the view of the self as a rational utility maximizer, the view of the distinction between public and private spheres as separate, and the rejection of any conception of a public good over and above the aggregate sum of individual ends (Olssen, 2000).

On the other hand, ‘Liberal Education’ is an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. It provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g. science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest. Stephen (2007) contends that liberal education makes students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.

Moreover, the broad goals of liberal education have been enduring even as the courses and requirements that comprise a liberal education have changed over the years. Today, a liberal education usually includes a general education curriculum that provides broad learning in multiple disciplines and ways of knowing, along with more in-depth study in a major. Olaitan (2010) says liberal education is adapting to 21st century needs and engaging all students in signature work on significant questions and problems important to them and to society. In other words, liberal education provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing essential intellectual, civic and practical capacities.

**The Changing Nature of Liberal Education**

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<td>- an option for the fortunate</td>
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<td>- viewed as non-vocational.</td>
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Where - liberal arts colleges or colleges of arts and sciences in larger institutions. - all schools, community colleges, colleges, and universities, as well as across all fields of study (recommended).

Source: (CLNGC, 2007). Association of American Colleges and Universities, p.18, F.5

Considering the nature of twenty-first century liberal education, educational system in Nigeria can undergo transformation without hitches. Education is by far the biggest and the most hopeful of the Nation's enterprises. Long ago our people recognized that education for all is a necessity not democracy’s obligation. To Cox (2011), education is the foundation of democratic liberties, without an educated citizenry alert to preserve and extend freedom, it would not long endure.

At this crucial time in Nigeria, the only sector that guarantees change is education; and education that prepares us for change is a liberal education. In periods of change, narrow specialization condemns us to inflexibility--precisely what we do not need. We need the flexible intellectual tools to be problem solvers, to be able to continue learning over time (David & Xerox, 2002). In this wise, liberal education provides a number of key principles required for restructuring education sector which changed the mandate (what it is that the education system should do), forms of capacity (the means through which the mandate can be realized e.g. fiscal and human resources) and mechanisms of governance of the education sector (that is, the means for coordinating the system).

Perhaps the most challenging task for Nigerian government to deliver the promise ‘Change’ is the need to recreate values that will order and direct the citizenry. Again, it could be said that a transformed education through liberalism is required. Negative values have been likened to the mathematical symbol of zero (0). Whatever is multiplied with zero, becomes zero. One billion or trillion Naira in excellent planning and budgeting, when set in a multiplicative function against zero, is zero. Our national problem is thus zero values and ethical bankruptcy in national life. If our infrastructures became the best on the African continent, with our upside-down values, they would soon become decrepit and run-down, monuments to crass inefficiency. Men without values constitute a blot on the nation’s psyche:

a. A Teacher without proper values will sell grades for sex and money;
b. An Engineer without sound values will build roads and utilities that will neither endure nor give real service;
c. An Architect without values will design buildings that will collapse and kill their occupants;
d. A Judge without values would be a stranger to justice, selling and buying *ex-parte* motions, and standing fair conduct on its head;
e. A Politician without values will be an opportunist in the corridors of power - greedy, malevolent, deceitful, master of double speak, dishonest and above all, dangerous to the nation’s well being; and, 

f. An Accountant without values will substitute “expediency for priority, imitation for innovation, cosmetics for character, style for substance, and pretence for competence” (Covey, 2003).

At this juncture, our education should be more of practical than theory. This calls for ‘liberal education’. A liberal education is a practical education because it develops those capacities needed by every thinking adult: analytical skills, effective communication, practical intelligence, ethical judgment, and social responsibility. This is supported by Adeolu (2009) who says liberal education will instil core values into the citizenry and lift individual performance beyond our normal limitations.

**Liberal Education as a Perforce for Uncommon Changes in Nigeria**

“...when we ask about the relationship of a liberal education to change, we are asking a question with a long history in the Western philosophical tradition, we are drawing on Socrates' concept of 'the examined life,' on Aristotle's notions of reflective citizenship, and above all on Greek and Roman Stoic notions of an education that is 'liberal' in that it liberates the mind from bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world” (Martha, 1998).

Similarly, a report by College Learning for the New Global Century affirms that education serves democracy best when it prepares citizens for the kinds of questions we face now: questions about a wider world, about our own values, and about difficult choices we must make both as human beings and citizens. . .the approach to education that best serves individuals, our globally engaged democracy and an innovating economy is liberal education (CLNGC, 2007).

From the foregoing, the virtue of liberal education could be linked to the delivery on the promise of human rights (civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights), which is the centre of change that Nigerians desire. There would be no change if the institutions of governance did not effectively guarantee the right to health, adequate housing, sufficient food, quality education, fair justice and security of life and property, (Human Rights, 2007). Therefore, it is appropriate to say Nigeria and Nigerians expect all round change, especially in the following aspects;

- Over 70% of Nigerian citizens live below the poverty line (International benchmark is $1.5 per day), and Nigeria is ranked 156th out of 187 countries in the world ranking of nations using the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2011). Meanwhile, Nigeria has earned close to $450 billion since 1970 on oil receipts alone. Between May 1999 and June 2008 alone, the country earned over $205
billion (Cited as Wokoma, 2008). In Switzerland, 7.4% of the population is below the poverty line. Nigerians demand change in poverty rate.

- The anti-corruption group *Transparency International* has consistently ranked Nigeria among countries most riddled with corruption. It described Nigeria as a *Gangster’s Paradise* where “...you pay a bribe to see a key official in many an establishment. You pay a bribe to get a job. You pay a bribe to get the passport that is yours by birthright. If you do not give or collect bribes, you remain poor and an object of scorn despite your several degrees and cognate experience until providence intervenes for you” (*TI*, 1998). Nigerians expect total change from then and now!

- The 2011 Ibrahim Index of African Governance released by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, ranked Nigeria 41st out of 53 African countries studied. The Index seeks “to provide a robust, comprehensive and quantifiable tool for civil society and citizens to hold governments to account, to stimulate debate on governance and to provide a framework to assess governance quality in Africa” (*Obi*, 2009). The Index ranks good governance in four major areas: Safety and Rule of Law, Participation and Human Rights, Sustainable Economic Opportunity, and Human Development. Some of the scores proved quite interesting: Cape Verde scored 78.0, Ghana 66.0, Sao Tome 60.2, and Nigeria 46.5. Indeed, Nigerians desire change in governance.

- In 1998, the World Economic Forum (based in Germany) rated Nigeria 22nd out of 23 African countries in the order of competitiveness for foreign aid. Of the five factors cited as the culprit, corruption was the star of the pack. Indeed, the other factors - poor infrastructure, lack of clear direction in market-oriented economy, political instability and military dictatorship - owe their potency to the escalating effect of corruption. Nigerians want to change to real ‘democratic’ system with its benefits.

- As a matter of exigency, Nigerians expect change in these orders;
  - A mono-cultural dependence on oil;
  - The near-total absence of an industrial infrastructure;
  - The absence of a productive culture;
  - Abuse of the Budget process;
  - A debilitating public sector-led economy and a private sector that grows “a rent seeking and unproductive culture of over-dependence on government
patronage and contracts, with little or no value added” (Harneit-Sievers, 2004).

**Recommendation**

As espoused in the national policy, education shall continue to be highly rated in Nigeria’s development plan because of the belief that as the most important instrument of change, any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution. Nigerians do need a productive liberal educational system. The mandate Nigerians gave to this Administration for Change of the polity is one that seeks for the style of governance that will:

- Recreate our value system as a people - replacing patronage appointment with an insistence on merit, and restoring the moral tone of our public officers;
- Inculcate a healthy work ethic in the citizenry - developing the individual worker intellectually and equipping him to do a good job, providing efficient supervisory and management skills at the workplace, selection and placement of staff on merit rather than on nepotic and ethnic considerations, and a fair reward-incentive scheme that motivates;
- Resolve our national identity crisis by forging one united people out of the diverse ethnic nationalities that comprise our nation. One of the enduring wonders of our age remains how the United States has become a melting pot of different nationalities living together just as Americans, notwithstanding the fierce nationalistic struggle and rivalry that described their past. Today, whether they are Italian-Americans, German-Americans, Anglo-Americans, or Afro-Americans, they all have one proud heritage as Americans. Perhaps, the best gift any Nigerian leader can bequeath to his countrymen today is to forge one united nation and people out of the disparate peoples of Nigeria;
- Lead the nation in a deliberate and determined battle against corruption. Corruption has penetrated the warp and woof of the Nigerian society. The boss and his messenger, the police officer and the recruit, the classroom teacher and his student, the politician and the voter, the judge and the lawyer, the pastor and his parishioner - none can remain untainted by this stigma. The greed of the ruling class, plays upon the poverty of the larger majority of the people to perpetuate this scourge. Unfortunately, the battle against corruption is being prosecuted by men who are not morally qualified to lead in the crusade. Success in this battle demands on the part of the leader, commitment, sincerity, and consistency, and must be pursued relentlessly, no matter whose ox is gored;
- Redefine our national priority in favour of hard-work, diligence, honesty and patriotism. So long as people make it because of their connections, so long as tribe and old school ties are the basis for progress in public service, so long will all the talk about National Rebirth and Reorientation, be mere talk. We must build a system that respects excellence;
- Unleash the creative potential of our people. This will mean encouraging challenges to current ways of thinking and doing, establishment of goals that explicitly contain creative
components, cultivating an attitude of focussed freedom to apply natural and acquired skills in a defined area of activity, and associating creative efforts with specific evaluative domains.

Conclusion
Without any doubt, education unlocks the doors to modernization and delivers from shackle of ignorance. Put differently, liberal education is an indispensable tool for economic, social, cultural and moral development of both the individual and the society. Therefore, any reformation program in Nigeria today should focus on education. Change in education sector extends change to all sectors. Change from oil-dominated to a more diversified economy; Change from public-sector dominated to a private-sector driven economy; Change a passive oil industry to a more pro-active one; and, Change the country from centralized federalism to a more decentralized federalism with greater political and financial powers ceded to local governments towards empowering communities to manage their development. Nigeria’s New Deal demands nothing less.

Reference


Obi I. (2009), Index of Governance, October 7.


