



African Journal of Social Work

Afri. j. soc. work

© National Association of Social Workers-Zimbabwe/Author(s)

ISSN Print 1563-3934

ISSN Online 2409-5605

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Indexed & Accredited with: African Journals Online (AJOL) | University of Zimbabwe Accredited Journals (UZAJ) | SCOPUS (Elsevier's abstract and citation database) | Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) | Society of African Journal Editors (SAJE) | Asian Digital Library (ADL) | African Social Work Network (ASWNet) | Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) - South Africa | SJR | CNKI - China | Journal Publishing Practices and Standards (JPPS) | EBSCO

Appraisal of education as youth transformational agent for national development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The roles of youth in national development cannot be underestimated. The roles can be either negative, hampering the development or positive, enhancing the development. The kind of education received by the youth is a significant factor to whatever role they play in building a nation. Nigeria as a nation experiences a period of different violent and criminal behaviours among which are kidnaping for ransom, killing, internet crime (yahoo-yahoo), and money ritual killings and all these are going along with the global Covid-19 pandemic that also has negative impact on the national development. These behaviours are being majorly committed by the youth of the nation. This calls for transformation as a needed phenomenon for the youth in Nigeria using education as the tool, to build them for national development. Adopting desk research, the study was anchored on Omoluabi concept. The study concluded that since education is imperative for youth transformation, the educational stakeholders in Nigeria are to reform the education system that will lead youth to become acceptable adults thereby making positive contribution to the development of the nation.

KEY TERMS: National development, youth transformation, violent and criminal behaviours, Covid-19 pandemic, educational stakeholders, Omoluabi concept

KEY DATES

Received: October 2022

Revised: December 2022

Accepted: January 2023

Published: January 2023

Funding: None

Conflict of Interest: None

Permission: None

Ethics approval: Not applicable

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Current and previous volumes are available at:

<https://ajsw.africasocialwork.net>



How to reference using ASWNet style:

Abolarin, I. O. (2023). Appraisal of education as youth transformational agent for national development in Nigeria. *African Journal of Social Work*, 13(1), 22-29. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ajsw.v13i1.3>

INTRODUCTION

Development is a crucial concern for the government of any nation and lack of it leads to different maladies like setback, conflicts and war that could plague a nation. The position of youth when it comes to development in a nation cannot be undervalued. Youth are the engine for development if they are well educated, nurtured, equipped, and empowered because they possess the power, knowledge, courage, enthusiasm, connections, and creativity/skill among other factors which are needed for development. And when the situation is the other way, the nation will be chaotic having dwindling development if there is any at all. Youth, especially in Nigeria, will be prepared to meet the demand of the present and the future, and be instruments of national development if they are transformed. Evidences indicate that there is urgent need for transformation of the youth in Nigeria because many have given themselves to violence and other risk behaviour. Some of the agents of transformation in the lives of youth include school, families, and communities (Nosimot, 2018), and religion (Adetunji & Nwaomah, 2012). What these four agents do in the lives of people is to give proper and holistic education that could empower people to be morally upright and productive individuals in the society. The kinds of education could formal, informal, and non-formal. Many studies have been carried out on Nigerian youth and education but not much has been written on education as agent of transformation of youth for national development. This study focused on appraising formal education as an agent of transformation, presenting how it has prepared the youth to play their roles in the development of Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted desk research method which is based on the already existing published data available in libraries and websites; and it can be data obtained from surveys already carried out (March, 2022). Therefore, this study consulted plethora of books, journal articles, and internet information useful in addressing the thesis statement of the study. The study collected and summarized these existing data in order to increase the effectiveness of the appraisal of education as youth transformational agent for national development in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on *Omoluabi* concept, which presents that the entire community is responsible for educating children to become people of worth and dignity, possessing good character. This concept teaches that children should develop, cognitively, morally, psychosocially and religiously which amount to a holistic development. In order for this to happen, education is given in the house, on the road, in the market, at religious centre, on the farm, in fact everywhere. And since the arrival of formal education, school becomes of the avenue of educating children, but the goal is to build *iwa* (character) in children (Olanipekun, 2017). This is measured by good behaviour, gentleness, respect, courtesy in speaking, truthfulness, trustworthiness, intelligence, goodwill, diligence, hard-work, courage/bravery, among others. Any child who grows and exhibits these characteristics is known to be educated. The person works hard to build his/her community and in expansion his/her nation. *Omoluabi* is a theory of virtues or cherished values and is used for only a person who is of good character. Becoming *Omoluabi* is preferred to being famous, influential, or wealthy; although an *Omoluabi* can possess these as well. Traditionally, African education is based on customs and values, a reflection of way of life of people. What is taught is meant to assist a child to adjust and adapt to the environment both physically and socially in order that the child might contribute positively to the society and benefit from it. The goal of African education is to prepare individual for life and self-reliance, instilling the accepted standards of beliefs governing correct behaviour in the society and to create unity within the community. The question is, how is the formal education in Nigeria currently changing youth to become people of good character, building the nation?

YOUTH IN NIGERIA

Although there is no universally agreed definition of the youth age group, but according to the United Nations (2020), the youth can be considered as the persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. These individuals are in the period of experimenting with roles and identities without the burden of social norms and responsibility (Adisa, 2013). The African Youth Charter views youth as people between the ages of 15 to 35; while in Nigeria, the first national youth policy of 2009 considered youth to be persons of 18-35years (Uzoma, et al., 2016).

Since there are different factors—culture, economy, religion—that influence age classification, though some of these are changing in Nigeria, what 18 year old could not do in 2009 are being done these days by 15 or less year old young people, and what 35 year old people were struggling to achieve then are being achieved now by 25 year old. Technology has brought about a change of paradigm in many societal phenomenon including who

the youth are. This brought about the 2019 reconsideration of who the youth are in Nigeria based on the current realities. Therefore, youth in Nigeria are now persons between ages 15 and 29. Since this work is on Nigeria, youth are considered to be individuals of 15-29 years and the focus of the study is not mainly on age but on the persons and who they are as a result of formal education.

The youth generally in Nigeria possess general characteristics that are important when talking about national development. Considering these characteristics helps to understand the roles youth have played and are playing in the development of the nation. The youth are too old to be children and at the same time inexperienced to be adults (United Nation, 2018) therefore, it takes wisdom from adults to really nurture them using every possible tools, especially formal education to make them agents of national development. Uzoma, et al. (2016), identified some characteristics of Nigerian youth to include:

1. Delayed transition to adulthood: there are different cultural philosophies and practices that determine when a child has reached adult age. Sometimes there is a rite of passage celebration which takes different years span based on the culture. Until a person goes through this process, the person is not recognized as adult. High rate of unemployment has also contributed to the delay in transition. A matured individual is seen as someone who is married and this had added complication to rite of passage. Many young people would not want to get married unless they are meaningfully employed.
2. Tribalism/ethnicity: many issues in Nigeria are divided along ethnic and tribal lines; and this is seen in religion, association, employment, politics and ideology. This has become engrained in the system of many youth and determines their attitude to national development. Three things serve as types of identity among Nigerians including the youth, these are ethnicity which is the strongest, occupation and then religion. This indicates that there is little or nothing about national integration and employment.
3. Religion: Nigerians are religious and the nation is religiously pluralistic but can be divided into three religious worldviews which are Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion. The two prominent ones are Christianity and Islam with ideological struggles between them which are seemingly irreconcilable. The youth have been indoctrinated by the adults whereby the youth are used for religious and regional violence which always hinder the development of the nation.
4. Materialism and consumerism: the Nigerian youths have yielded to fashion and enjoyment of life rather than being creative and productive. They have been beclouded by westernization and they love to live in the euphoria of Hollywood and Nollywood. They are prone to demand for foreign products instead of locally produced goods.
5. Enterprising/industrious: Nigerian youths are enterprising with whatever trade or business they find themselves, more especially outside of the country. This is evident in the number of young Nigerians who are located in different parts of the world striving in business and academic world.
6. Sociability/gregariousness: the Nigerian youth can be perceived as socialite. They attend clubs and have heavy presence in the social media where they engage in social, economic and political issues. More of them are becoming entertainers in the music and creative art; they are into fashion creativity, comedy shows and generally in showbiz sector. Their worldview is driven by the media, specifically social media.

Apart from these unique characteristics, Nigerian youth also possess some of the other general characteristics that are common to other youth elsewhere; sometimes these characteristics are negatively employed. For instance, Nigerian youth possess agility. Nigerian youth are agile and rugged; this can be seen in the kinds of life they live which goes with high level of risk-taking. They are ready to face any challenge and take any risk especially for survival purpose. It could be said that they are brave. Many of them have become *okada* (motorcycle) riders for commercial purpose, risking their lives. Many are being used for political propaganda, thuggery, and many of the kidnapping for ransom and money ritual killings are being carried out by youth. These practices require high risk taking and ruggedness. The youth are also exploratory. There are many illegal products like wine and electronic that Nigeria youth have fabricated/concocted; as they are being arrested, so are more youth going into such practices exploring different ways of carrying out the deals. Many are engaged in *yahoo-yahoo* (internet fraud) which is carried out with high level of intelligence and technological skills (Adisa, 2013). Many of the characteristics, though mostly negatively implored because of frustration from the situation of things in the nation, can be channelled towards positive productivity and development of the nation if the youth are given the right orientation through education. Because just as they committedly engage in risky behaviour enterprises, with right worldview, there is high tendency that they will be committed to positive behaviour and enterprise (Imhonopi & Urim, 2018).

The level of at-risk behaviour by Nigerian youth is on the increase and is reaching a potentially dangerous height. Putting it in another way, "Nigeria has become a theatre of youth violence" (Abdullahi, et al., 2016, p. 41). The persistent occurrence of violence has undermined security and development. The violence is carried out in different forms like terrorism in the North Eastern part of the country, clashes among cult members in higher

institution of learning, tribal and ethnic clashes anytime and anywhere, religious clashes, land disputes, communal clashes, herdsmen/farmer clashes, kidnapping for ransom, money ritual killing, among others; and these are prevalent everywhere in the nation, even where someone may think there is safety and possibly the safest place—Aso Rock—which is the seat of the government was invaded by robbers according to BBC News (2021, May). The violence has led to the destruction of many lives and properties.

Youth and national development

While there are youth contributing positively to the national development, currently many of the Nigerian youth are being used for security breakdown and violence because the success of any group, secessionists, banditry, terrorists and other groups depends on the involvement of youth. In reality then, instead of positively engaging the youth for national development, many are being explored otherwise. Raymond and Isigwe (2019), presented that the Nigerian youth have not been successfully mobilized for positive change and profitable development, rather, this formidable force for national development—dynamic human capital energy, capacities, potentialities, know-how, and infinite abilities—is being used to bring the nation down.

As a result of wrong orientation of many youth, Nigeria is going through an unprecedented period in term of systemic breakdown and this is in every sphere of its existence—economic, politics, security, social, educational, religious—even the international image is nothing to write home about. The orientation of youth has changed from service and national building to self and moneymaking only and anyhow. There is a serious need for transformation of the youth for the nation to be on the right path to sanity. Some of the challenges the Nigerian youth are faced with include inadequate tertiary institutions, unproductive educational system which results in unemployment, religious fundamentalism, corruption, lack of visionary leaders, violence, lack of integrity, insecurity, identity dissonance (Odia & Omofonmwan, 2007; Uzoma, et al., 2016). Among millions of Nigerians who are wallowing in poverty, hunger and destitution, majority are youth (Adisa, 2013), and the response of the leadership is not bringing breakthrough to rescue. Adeline and Eme (2015), bemoaned the situation when they stated that despite the elevated awareness of these challenges that youth are confronting in Nigeria, the country has not developed comprehensive and effective policies to handle the issues. And when it comes to development and transformation of the future of any nation, youth are the back bone (Mohamed, 2011).

Transformed youth

Transformation can be considered to be a holistic change from negativity to positivity in a person which often begins from the inside and reflects in the outside. Hence a transformed youth is changed, this time, inside-out. The change begins in the heart which is the driver and organizer of humans' lives; and is the seat of will, the part that needs to be transformed according to Willard (2002). It is from the heart the world is seen and reality interpreted, and from this action and behaviour follow. The crimes, violence, epidemic, pandemic like Covid-19, and other human's situations—positive and negative—to a higher degree, are the outcome of human choices, which are expressions of the heart and education is to bring about the needed transformation of the heart.

Transformation is the profound, fundamental, radical and sustainable change altering the very nature of a person from wrong to right living. When transformation occurs, the person/entity cannot go back to exactly former nature (Teo & Lim, 2009). It is a process that requires different factors like education, training and modelling to take place, especially in human beings. These factors foster critical, creative, and constructive thinking that leads to inner and permanent change in individual and bring about positive character. And character is the complexity of mental and ethical traits, and the moral excellence and firmness marking and individualizing someone (Teo & Lim, 2009) who is *Omoluabi*.

When youth are transformed through education, the perception they have about themselves is positively different, and their worldview is positive. They will be able to identify their God given potentials and ways to utilize them for national development rather than being burden and menace. Youth will cherish integrity and dignity than money and fame. They will be skilled in making different contributions in the society. In their study on positive youth development, Development Service Group (2014), argued that when the youth are transformed, there will be increased safety, greater and better communication with adults, fewer psychosocial problems, decreased involvement in risky behaviours, sense of personal control, better development of life skills, moral competence, and societal and national development.

When it comes to development, Imhonopi and Urim (2018), identified that when youth are transformed, there will be ability to create and build something from nothing, skill for seeing opportunity for development, building working team, ability to aggregate and marshal resources judiciously, ability to innovate and create, willingness to undertake personal and financial risks, and ability to engage in productive activities despite all odds. A functional education produces youth who can stand tall despite all odds (Abolarin, 2019).

Education and its role in transforming youth

Education is considered to be basic to accelerating development, improving productivity and any other needs of human society (Raymond & Isigwe, 2019). It is central to the development and improvement of the lives of youth and empowering youth to tackle problem and challenges that may face them (UNESCO, n.d.). Education can be formal, informal and non-formal (Author, 2019), to produce a person who will be a useful member of a society and nation (Orobosa, 2010). This study focused on formal education which is consider as a necessity for every child.

Formal education engenders in the person a disposition of personal autonomy, responsibility and relevant forms of life, thought and action. In relation to youth, a proper education is evolution that fosters wellbeing and builds courageous behaviour of youth to enhance their participation and engagement in nation building (Mohamed, 2011); in essence education builds *Omoluabi*. A transformative education should promote the development of youth in four different domains of being, which are cognitive, emotional, physical and spiritual domains (Author, 2015; Mohamed, 2011); and this process begins from pre-school (Mohamed, 2011).

As important as education is, educational deficiencies have been a major factor leading to delinquent youth (Sedlak & Bruce, 2010). With 170 universities in Nigeria (Varrela, 2021), scholars have written about the failure of the education to prepare people who are skilled enough to bring about development in the nation (Lawal, 2013; Uriah & Nwosu, 2012). Specifically, Lawal (2013), argued that education has become a tool for destruction rather than being instrument of national development. And Omojuwa (2019), complained that graduates from Nigerian educational institutions are poorly prepared for work. Therefore, there is a need to reconsider how the education in the country can become a transformational tool because high-quality education is critical to individual's life and to national development. Education that transforms does not only based on abstraction, it is practical, planned and executed to meet the societal needs and upgraded as need arises to make it relevant and productive (Author, 2019). In such education, teachers are to instruct with information that make ideal person, and then show by modelling, youth are to imitate by using the information given to produce a real person—*Omoluabi*, teachers are then to reinforce by given feedback and encouragement, and finally youth are to apply things learned in practical life situation. It is important that teachers are trained regularly to actively teach appropriate behaviour, mentor students, make creative strategies available, and make available a collaboration between school, parents and society (Skibba, et al., 2005).

The indication here is that the three domains—cognitive, affective and psychomotor—of learning should be focused in every aspect of educational process leading youth to holistic development that equip them for positive contribution (Author, 2021). This by extension brings positive changes in youth in the areas of moral, physical, social, spiritual, and emotional. Educating people in only intellectual produces a menace to society.

As a way of transforming youth through education, Odia and Omofonmwan (2007), encouraged that education should not end in classroom but lead to invention of products that society needs, discourages academic irregularities, adequately funded, with standard upheld. This kind of education instead of feeling of inadequacy will make youth eager to use their skills and commitment positively for nation building. Education has power to change life and a nation. Therefore, there is a need for educational stakeholders to put emphasis on true education and skill development (Narita, 2021), improve the quality of education in relation to the needs of Nigerian youth in building them holistically in discovering their God's given potential and ways to utilize them contrary to the observation by UNESCO (n.d.) that many education and training systems have not provided young people with skills needed to be productive. When education is transformed, youth will be transformed.

Education is a process of building youth into responsible and productive individuals called *Omoluabi*. The process cannot be without positive relationship between the youth and the teachers, and the strategies can be employed only in an environment with positive relationship. The environment should be conducive for the youth to seek help, ask questions, and converse freely with respect and dignity; an environment without power-distance syndrome. This kind of education will lead youth into maturity beyond just intellectual prowess to the level of making them creative, contributing to the development of the nation. The youth that experience such education system will discover their position in the building of the nation rather than being a menace to the society.

CONCLUSION

Education is beyond passing a course of study or making good grade; it is building of individuals, especially youth, in holistic way that leads them to becoming *Omoluabi*; fully equipped and built with courage to change the society and the nation positively. True education is a potent agent of transformation that brings about a holistic development of youth. The situation of things in Nigeria, especially with different violent and criminal behaviours that are rampaging every part of the nation being carried out by the youth, calls for education system that will transform the youth from who they are (at-risk) now into creative and productive individuals who cherish integrity, honesty, hard-work, good character, honour, and good name (*Omoluabi*) rather than money and fame. Educational policy makers should re-examine the effectiveness of the current educational system and the curricula and come

up with the type that will change the youth into ideal citizens, building the nation. Teachers are to be reoriented on what education is about, and every education stakeholders need to have a new understanding of education. While youth are to experience education that the lead them to be people of integrity, every effort should be put in place to remove frustration from youth. The youth are the engine for national development, adults especially politicians should not engage them in political crime and violence. Education being a powerful transformational tool should be employed to produce educated and transformed youth, people of character, in essence *Omoluabi* in Nigeria.

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