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THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY IN THE EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY

Makinde, O.O. (Mrs.)

Abstract

The paper observes that the objectives of the National Policy on Education are yet to be achieved, going by the numerous problems still confronting education in the society. Thus the need for educational and social reconstruction is seen and the role of the library in bringing about this reconstruction is discussed. However, it is noted that the library itself must be transformed before it can do this successfully.

Introduction

Over the years the word education has been given various meanings by different people. At one time or the other, people erroneously equate education with certain concepts like schooling which is just one of the forms in which education is provided, there are others who believe that education is the ability to read and write (literacy) while the ability to manipulate figures (numeracy); work with shapes, signs and figures (graphicacy) or the ability to determine length, width, volume, distance, weight or measures (measuracy) are what others consider to be education. There are still some who believe that training which is the process of preparing a person or an animal to perform a particular skill or job, is education. Yet to others getting a person to accept a religious or political creed is education. All these essential elements of education cannot be said to be complete education on their own.

The Catholic Church in defining education says that "true education is directed towards the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of the society to which he belongs and in the duty of which he will, as an adult have a share (Obemata, 1996). In talking about education, Rengochekpe (2000) says education is whatever helps to shape the human being to make him what he is and hinder him from being what he is not, adding that education is a continuous process from birth to death.

The realization that life is dynamic helps to inform the direction that the educational system of a society takes as children must be developed as adjustable individuals who can accommodate themselves to the changing situations of life (Dunhill, 1976). In Nigeria, the educational purpose is just the same as the national goals which are aimed at intellectual and physical development of individual citizen and the nation as a whole. However, Nigeria's educational system should be made to incorporate training in ability to solve many problems confronting the contemporary Nigerian society.

Problems Affecting the Nigerian Society Generally

The problems confronting the Nigerian society are numerous and of various nature. There are those that are educational, socio-political and economic in nature. Among them are overcrowded classrooms in public schools, examination malpractices, drug abuse and cultism in schools; shortage of some educational amenities, infrastructure and materials and high cost of others. All these problems are some of those confronting the Nigerian educational system and they have led to fallen standard of education in the country. Many problems can also be found in other areas of the national life which include mass unemployment, mass illiteracy, underdevelopment, overdependence on foreign goods and services, bribery and corruption, religious intolerance, inter-ethnic rancours, political killings and thuggery, armed robbery, ritual killings and human trafficking for prostitution among others.

A good educational system must be able to provide options relevant to the milieu of its recipient (Abe, 1999). Nigeria educational system must therefore address the problems listed above before it can be said to be meaningful to the society.

The Need for Educational and Social Reconstruction

It was earlier mentioned that Nigeria's educational purpose is just the same as the national goals which are enshrined in the National Policy on Education as national objectives which are:

Makinde, O.O. (Mrs.)

1. A free and democratic society;
2. A just and egalitarian society;
3. A united, strong and self-reliant nation;
4. A great and dynamic economy;
5. A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (NPE, 1998 Revised).

In order to achieve these stated objectives, the educational system should be able to inculcate the following values at all levels of instruction.

1. Respect for the worth and dignity of the individual.
2. Faith in man's ability to make rational decisions.
3. Moral and spiritual value in interpersonal relations.
4. Shared responsibility for the common good of society.
5. Respect for dignity of labour, and
6. Promotion of the emotional, physical and psychological health of all Nigerian children (NPE, 1998).

Every Nigerian child is expected to attain all these values aforementioned through education but considering the myriad of problems in the Nigerian society today, it could be clearly observed that Nigerian national objectives are yet to be realised or achieved. Hence the need for educational and social reconstruction.

In reconstructing Nigeria's educational and social system, every segment of the society must be involved. Starting from home, the parents need to reexamine the various values which they are inculcating in their children; the various policy makers must also be careful to make the right policies that will be geared towards achieving the national objectives. But more important in this area of reconstruction is the school which is one form in which education is provided. The various aspects of the school system need to be explored in order to realise the desired changes. However, the aspect that is being considered in this paper is the 'power house' of every school or academic institution which is the library. Going by the definition of the library and the services it renders, it can be easily understood that there cannot be any meaningful educational and social reconstruction without the contribution of the library.

The Role of the Library

The library is one of the most important set ups in an educational setting. It is more like a workshop or powerhouse which generates, stores and disseminates information for the use of researchers, scientists and general users in order to produce new information. Davies (1974) describes it as the mainstream of the instructional process saying that it is a source for educational excellence. *Encyclopaedia Americana* explains the library function as collecting and preserving educational materials in all subject areas and stimulating users to use these materials. In her own contribution to the usefulness of the library, Mabawonku (1976) says libraries are particularly useful for independent study as it is a place where one learns how to find out and use the resources. Thus it could be seen that the library is a necessity in all educational institutions and a force to reckon with in reconstructing the educational and social system. This fact is more glaring from the general roles of library which include the following:

Information Dissemination: The library is the resource centre of any institution, organisation or establishment, a depository of information that can be consulted in order to expand upon and enrich the work of individuals and bodies (Quadri, 1993). This role of the library will definitely help researchers and other stakeholders in education industry source for information and produce more information that will aid the much needed educational and social transformation that can help people to be gainfully employed or make potential job seekers to be employers of labour themselves.

Independent Learning: As libraries are particularly useful for independent study, individuals can go there and learn at their own pace in the course of using the library resources, this process will help these users to understand concepts better and such knowledge they can put to better use in reconstructing the educational systems for the overall development of the nation.

Economic Role: Since it is not possible for every individual to buy all the needed information sources, the library comes to their aid by supplying a wide range of information formats that can be used to further the course of educational and social reconstruction.

Recreational Role: By stocking such materials like newspapers and magazines, the library helps its users broaden their horizon in the course of relaxation and the knowledge acquired in the process can also be channeled towards educational and social reconstruction.

Social Role: Esdaile (1989) in talking about the role of the library observes that by preserving the record of the nation's literature, the library gives the society a sense of oneness and serves as the powerhouse for the leadership of the society. He goes on to say that for any man to be worthy of his freedom he must make a right use of libraries. Thus it is very clear that even policy makers can benefit from library resources to help them make the right decision towards reconstructing the educational and social lives of their populace.

Bibliotherapy: This is a form of psychotherapy whereby printed materials can be used to explain certain social problems and their solutions. Books that preach morals and expose evil consequences of social ills are most useful in these areas. The library can draw the attention of recalcitrant youths to these in order to reconstruct their lives educationally and socially.

Conclusion

The concept of education has been discussed and it has been noted that the objectives of the National Policy on Education are yet to be realised going by the numerous problems that are still confronting the Nigerian society generally. Therefore, the need for educational and social reconstruction is seen and the role of the library in helping to bring about this transformation has been mentioned.

However, going by what obtains presently in the educational sector, one cannot fail to note that before the library can contribute meaningfully to educational and social reconstruction it must be reconstructed itself. The state of most libraries in our nation is appalling therefore reconstruction of the library can be done in a number of ways which include the following:

- (a) Government and school managers must ensure that libraries are adequately funded to help them make provision for more clients and current information instead of the many obsolete books that are presently found on library shelves. Provision must be made for new information technology to be installed.
- (b) Library administrators should ensure that whatever fund the library gets is put to judicious use. They should endeavour to satisfy all categories of users thus acquiring information in all spheres of life. They should also encourage people to patronise the library through positive disposition towards library users. Through conspicuous display of resources hitherto overlooked and some other ones the reading interest of library users can be stimulated.
- (c) Establishment of more public libraries is also very necessary perhaps through private participation of corporate organisations, or well to do individuals. This will make it possible for more people to have access to the library, even at very low charges.

Nevertheless, if the government makes more fund available to the library; library administrators, do all they can to stimulate the reading interest of the library clients and libraries abound everywhere but people still remain lackadaisical in their attitude towards the use of library, the library may not be of much help in bringing about educational and social reconstruction. Therefore the government and librarians must do (like some are already doing) everything possible to educate or sensitize the general populace about the benefits in using the library.

If the suggestions given above are taken, then the library would witness a radical transformation which will help educational and social reconstruction.

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