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Bridging the gap between tertiary institutions and national development

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Introduction

The importance placed on formal education in the African context is quite relative compared to the developed world in the 9th century, and this was as a result of their perspective of what education actually stood for on one hand and the complementary forms of education—informal and non-formal—that were in existence then. At the informal education level in Africa and Nigeria in particular, the development of teacher education is as old as man since the training is often done through instinct and imitation. Learners are not confined to a definite place before teaching and learning take place; for example, greetings and proper hygiene among

the people. Scholars have documented the historical development of informal education (Solaru, 1964; Ikejiani, 1964; Taiwo, 1980; Fafunwa, 1982; and Osokoya, 1997). At the non-formal level, the training, though not documented, is based on apprenticeship system, whereby learners spend considerable period in the acquisition of skills and knowledge at the discretion of the master, who determines the learner's graduation based on his level of competence; for example, carpentry, bricklaying and masonry.

These two systems of education complement the formal one as not everyone could have opportunity of passing through it but everyone is expected to contribute meaningfully to the progress of the community. National development in an agrarian community was ensured. No wonder the secret of education is to respect the learner and that is why every prospective educator should see the learner in pursuit of knowledge and not knowledge in pursuit of the learner.

Formal education came to Africa through the influence of the early missionaries who sought to spread the Christian gospel, an avenue to introduce and interpret the Bible to the natives. Prominent among these missionaries, particularly in Nigeria, were the Church Missionary Society, Wesley Methodist Missionary Society and Presbyterian Church of Scotland, to mention a few. The missionary curricular was mainly theology and teaching methods with syllabus in testament criticism, Christian faith, school method and management, preaching and theology, geography (foreign ones), history, English, geometry and arithmetic. The major weakness of this education was lack of funds, equipment and trained tu-

tors among the missionaries, as well as ill-conceived notion of the needs of the people through an unplanned curriculum.

This saw minimal enlistment due to the people's fear that their wards could be taken away by the missionaries, which was why the first generation that benefited from the formal system of education were predominantly slaves, whom African leaders deemed to have no lasting impact on the community should they lose them to missionaries. This was the genesis of tertiary education in Africa.

Tertiary education connotes all forms of educational settings after the secondary system, and it embraces education at colleges of education, polytechnics and universities, thus the impression that it is exclusively university learning is false. The rationale behind this clarification is not unconnected to the fact that every tertiary institution has specific goals for which they have been established relative to the national objective.

As earlier stated, the concept of tertiary institution refers to all formal educational systems beyond the high-school level, irrespective of the goal to which such institution has been established. For instance, the goal of establishing the colleges of education is to provide the nation with adequate manpower from pre-primary to junior secondary school levels. Similarly, the establishment of polytechnics was based on the premise that no nation could survive without the existence of technical knowhow to maintain existing infrastructures like machines, among others. Furthermore, the university, another citadel of learning, has goals that vary from one to another, prescribed objectives for which they have been established.

School, as the common name given to an established place of higher learning, can be described as a proper subset of society. It is established to serve as places to diagnose some societal problems in terms of providing knowledge, which in turn manifests in the development of the wider society. This is why various programs that could transform society from traditional to modern are mounted toward national development. At colleges of education, various programs toward the development of individuals as teachers range from the arts, sciences and social sciences are mounted to enhance national development. Development in this context refers to the proliferation of the acquired knowledge and the ability to disseminate appropriately. This is why teaching is regarded as a noble profession, with the truism that no educational system can rise above the level of its teachers.

In order to meet the manpower requirements consequent upon primary and secondary education explosion in Nigeria between 1961 and 1976, various advanced teacher training colleges were established in different parts of the country (Ichukwu, 1998). The weakness of the system was noticed in the varying admission criterion into the existing universities until 1989, when the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) was established to ensure uniformity of standard (NCCE, 1998). The advanced teacher training colleges were renamed colleges of education, with the sole responsibility of producing professional non-graduate teachers in arts/sciences/social sciences disciplines (Olaoye, 2004). The reason behind this is not unconnected with the fact that knowledge is precious to human existence, and to acquire function-

main the proper subset of the entire society that demands national development. Hence, curriculum should be diversified in the course of implementation and make it feasible for the students to see inter-relationship between knowledge gained and its application in national development, as demanded by society.

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