Education and Sustainability: The Nigerian Context

Ikeoluwapo B. Baruwa
Queen’s University

Indeed, anything can be sustained—from Yosemite to fascism—and it’s about time that we get clear, as educators, about what is to be sustained, and where, and how.¹

The educational system of Nigeria, specifically that of higher education, is peculiar. I have considerable experience within the Nigerian academy, and I have witnessed what is often taken as the status quo. This paper regards what is being overlooked within the Nigerian polity. I argue that the status quo remains a stumbling block in the sustainability of the Nigerian educational system and the development of the nation.

Many studies have identified various challenges hindering the Nigerian education system. Some of the challenges include corruption, mismanagement, and misappropriation of funds by the government; inadequate facilities; inadequate staffing of competent or merited personnel; lack of funds, grants, and scholarships; and many others.²

In recognition of these problems, I begin by examining the significance of education to humanity, and how it shapes our insights. I argue that education is best understood as a practice of sustainability. Accordingly, it is necessary to explicitly deconstruct its current place and function in Nigerian society.

Without a doubt, education is a means of protecting, fostering, and passing down a people's culture from one generation to the next. It enables people to acquire the knowledge, values, and abilities necessary to take part in decisions that affect them, both locally and globally. Every individual should get the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values essential to sculpt a meaningful future through education that is conceived as a practice of sustainable development. In short, education as a practice of sustainability means satisfying current demands without jeopardizing the capacity of future generations to meet their own.³

Is the Nigerian Education System Worth Sustaining?

The Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations include both education and development. Sustainable development was described as "development that satisfies the need for the present without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their own requirements" by the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Bruntland Commission.⁴


leaders of the 193 member countries following the expiration of the Millennium Development Goals implementation timeline. 5 17 goals make up this agenda, often known as Agenda 2030. Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Agenda focuses on providing all people with access to quality education and promoting opportunities for lifelong learning. One of the nations that ratified and endorsed the Agenda for implementation in September 2015 was Nigeria, which started implementation right away.

Sustainability can be a misused or taken-for-granted concept which is sometimes equated with environmental education (which necessarily focuses on social, environmental, and economic areas). 6 By way of contrast, in this paper, when I speak of sustainability, I mean a transformative paradigm which puts into consideration the sustenance and enrichment of humankind.

The Nigerian education system is faced with a myriad of problems, and this ultimately makes it impossible to transition into a sustainability paradigm. For example, the Nigerian universities have been on an incessant strike which has led to closure of universities since February 2022. While the government’s negligent policies may be to blame for the strike, the university system is not exempted from blame.

As a graduate student, I have come to realize other shortcomings, particularly as they related to mentoring. As relational as it could be, there is hardly a true mentorship within the Nigerian institutions—it puts many graduate students on the search for “who is the supervisor.” Beyond titles and professionalism, hardly will you find a professor hiring and paying a research or teaching assistant in the Nigerian universities. I am fortunate to be mentored by one of the exceptions.

Finally, there are problems of planning and leadership. Witness the recent crises at the Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Ibadan, where regional politics almost led to the election of vice-chancellors with no emphasis on the competence and leadership skills possessed by the supposed leaders.

In the words of Akarue, sustainability must ultimately become a global network, hence knowledge production, collaboration, and distribution are important, especially in revitalizing contexts like that of the Nigerian academy. 7

Building the Bridges

I am thankful to have an engagement with an international peer who assisted me and offered her time that I may cross a bridge. She looked beyond race, color, and language, and offered her humanness for the sustainability of all people.

In building the bridges, we must look beyond self and engage with others. Sustainability has no restrictions of regions or continents; it extends and offers the possibilities of building bridges to make the world desirable.

This article is not meant to belittle the efforts of Nigerian intellectuals and universities, but rather advocates a repositioned academy where students and professors work together for the betterment of all. 8 In response to the arguments of some people who are of the view that many university graduates are not well equipped to aid their respective societies, 9 the position of this paper is crystal clear: any education received

---

6 Akarue, “Sustainable Education.”
7 Akarue, “Sustainable Education.”
must be such that brings about special quality of agreeableness in the present and that exerts positive influences on the later experiences of being. In cases where this position is not possible, then, there is no sustainability. For sustainability to therefore emerge, the activities must be transformative, critical, reflective, progressive, and relational.