

What is the great purpose of education? – Part 3

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March 22, 2019

There has been for some time in this country, a contrived but absolutely needless Arts versus Science controversy, including a distracting comparison of their respective value to society. It has become fashionable in recent times that policy makers extol Science and Technology over Liberal Arts.

The Arts to Science admission ratio in higher institutions is embarrassingly, disgracefully, skewed in favor of the latter. And this is official. The National Policy on Education, 2013, (6th edition) says in Section 5 (91) (a) that “A sizeable proportion of expenditure on university education shall be devoted to Science and Technology”. And in the (b) part, the provision stipulates that “Not less than 60% of places shall be allocated to science and science –oriented courses in the conventional universities, and not less than 80% in the universities of technology and agriculture”. The idea is being pushed that the scientists and the technologists have or can eventually produce solutions to all of the world’s problems. The unspoken advice to Nigerian youths it seems is to be a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) student or die trying. This is a silly –and distorted- imitation of western education because, notwithstanding the huge achievements in science and technology educational institutions in Europe and the United States still offer degrees in the Humanities and Liberal Arts.

There is no denying that STEM courses have immense value and add unquantifiable benefits to human life. They enable an understanding of how the world works, and these disciplines devise solutions to the physical and other needs of mankind. Yet, I insist that Arts and Science are not at all mutually exclusive; they should not be forced to be intolerant of each other. “All religions, arts, and sciences are branches of the same tree” says Albert Einstein. The genius that he was, he should know.

In response to the rather pervasive pro-STEM mindset, the following opinions are worth quoting. E.F. Schumacher (1983) argued in *Small is Beautiful* that “Science cannot produce ideas by which we could live. [...it tells how things work in Nature, but it tells Man nothing about the meaning of Life]. We turn to the Humanities to obtain a clear view of the large and vital ideas of our age”. Michener (1980) counselled a somewhat unhappy student of Philosophy who wished he were a Science student not to despair because...” forty years from now, the scientists in your class will be scientists [whereas] the liberal arts men will be governing the world”.

Bertrand Russell, in a 1935 essay, ‘Useless’ Knowledge, lamented that knowledge everywhere is coming to be regarded not as a good in itself, or as a means of creating a broad and humane outlook on life in general, but merely an ingredient in technical skill”. Decades after Russell’s lament, those immediately visible products of Science and Technology continue to condition the shallow-minded to view these fields of study more ‘useful’ to mankind than the Humanities. In a 1953 essay *The Impact of Science on Society*, Russell posited that even as Science can abolish poverty and excessive hours of labor, it can achieve this only within an intelligent democracy not misled by some dogmatic creed. I understand this important proviso to mean that, to avoid its use

for harmful purposes, the activities of Science must be guided by a humane, Humanities - centered mind. The story of atomic bomb is a good example in this respect; so too, in recent times, are studies in genetics, cloning, and artificial intelligence (AI). Unless guided by non-scientific, moral and spiritual codes, the fear is abroad that science and technology can be taken too far into humanity's self-destruction.

Prof. Sophie Oluwole, in *The Humanities and National Development in Nigeria* (Eruvbetine and Mba, eds, 1991) cites historian Will Durant's observation that Science taught the West how to heal and how to kill; it reduces their death rate in retail and then kills them wholesale in war. In view of this, Oluwole argues in that "[we] need first and foremost a humanistic world-view on which to structure the discoveries of science...[because] the theories of science are impotent in resolving the complex problems of human existence". So thinks too, Prof. Femi Osofisan. "We learn from Science to be efficient, but only from Literature [human disciplines] how to be humane" he wrote in the June 7, 1987 edition of *The Guardian*.

Prof. Nurudeen Alao in (Eruvbetine and Mba, eds, (1991) writes that the Humanities constitute the bedrock of liberal education necessary for a civilized society and he considers the touted dichotomy between those disciplines as uncalled for, because "... from a societal point of view, the sciences and the humanities are complementary...and in Nigeria, the problem is not one of the rate of trade-off between the two, but that of harmonious development of both for the good of society".

Physicist C.P. Snow is quoted to remark in his book *The Two Cultures* about "Literary intellectuals at one pole, at the other scientists ... [and] between the two a gulf of mutual incomprehension". I would say directly that if and where it exists, it is a needless, avoidable misunderstanding. If only each group would expand its thinking, it would 'fathom' the eternal truth that all knowledge exist in a harmonious whole.

The Humanities and Science are aspects of the total body of universal knowledge. It is short-sighted—even foolish- to pursue the separation instead of the synthesis and the convergence of the various strands of knowledge. An analogy may explain this. Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body... the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body", is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? ...And if they were all one member, where would the body be? ... But now indeed there are many members yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you"...But God composed the body...And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; and if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it". (NKJV).

It is necessary to state again that, in even those countries from where Nigeria borrowed the Western form of education, the Humanities as a field of study is not at all despised; it is valued and continually applied to analyze, understand, and resolve what I shall describe as the dilemma of the human condition. Alao, a professor of Geography referred in his essay to a certain William Thompson who was formerly Professor of Humanities at MIT and adds, "please note here... the existence of a chair of humanities and the positive cultivation of the humanities at the centre of scientific and technological excellence in the US". From a Google search, the MITOPEN.

COURSEWARE site states that “[although] normally associated with science and engineering, the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (HASS) are a thriving and vital part of MIT”. In sum, nothing can be more thoughtless than to separate knowledge into irreconcilable strands.

Nigeria and the matter of education

Human resource is the most important asset of a nation; intellectual capital is the most precious component of that human asset and education is the means to build intellectual capital. Ask Israel, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore that have little natural resources but possess huge intellectual capital and corresponding productive capabilities. These countries wield global influence far beyond their physical sizes. Brain power is forever the name of the game.

If education is so obviously valuable, beneficial and, ipso facto, desirable, one should reasonably expect it to be the topmost item on Nigeria’s investment plan as indeed, it is in development-focused countries. After all, you can reap dividends only from what you invest in. Alas, there is enough evidence to show that Nigeria’s political leadership does not desire to invest in public education that will benefit the greatest number of citizens.

I single out the political leadership for a reason. Government, in the hands of political leaders, is a crucial determinant of the condition, the direction, the progress, and ultimately, the fate of a nation. Chude Jideonwo (2014) writes that “Government is the single most important force for change in any society...because it has the budget, the resources, the reach, the weight, [and] the capacity to affect all levels and all layers of society”. As I have written elsewhere, this is because, political leadership through the structure of government, holds the allocative, legislative, and the persuasive or coercive powers to make and implement policies that affect every facet of the nation. How much premium –if any at all- is placed on education of the citizens, what type, and to what purpose, is decided largely by the policies of government. In an increasingly knowledge-driven world, the levity in which Nigerian leaders hold education is, depressing and shameful; it is simply unbelievable!

I do not think that Nigeria’s political leaders in the past 50 years (since 1966 to be specific when soldier seized political leadership), have been truly ‘educated’. For, they do not show sufficient appreciation of the value and benefits of an educated citizenry, and the positive difference this can make for the leader in the task of governance. Kofi Annan says “on [education’s] foundation rests the cornerstones of freedom, democracy, and sustainable development” because, says Henry Peter Brougham, “education makes people easy to lead but difficult to drive, easy to govern but impossible to enslave”.

If democracy is, in one sense, all about the highest good of the greatest number in the polity, one should expect that political leaders would do all within their powers to continually themselves as servant-leaders, and also the people they claim to serve. Not so in these parts.

In this country, education of the citizen is not a fundamental and justiciable right in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). Section 18 (3) merely offers that “Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to this end, Government shall, as and when practicable, provide (a) free, compulsory and universal primary education; (b) free university education; and (c) free adult literacy programme”. This certainly goes contrary to the spirit, direction, and the pressing requirements of an increasingly knowledge-driven global society.

Writing, in 1966, the book *Thoughts on Nigerian Constitution* in his Calabar prison cell D UP2, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, suggested, among other recommendations, that a new constitution for Nigeria should provide that “within two years post-primary and post –secondary education of any kind whatsoever shall be free to all who are capable of pursuing and benefitting from these types of education; [that] free and compulsory primary education shall be introduced throughout the Federation within 5 years...”, and a constitutional provision for “Right to education”. Talk of a visionary!

India made education justiciable in 2002 by force of a Supreme Court ruling. According to media account of the May, 2013 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education that was submitted to the Human Right Council of the UN General Assembly, this landmark decision was justified thus: “What is fundamental, as an enduring value of our polity, is guarantee to each, of the equal opportunity to unfold the full potential of his personality”. The Rapporteur stated in Section C. 51 that “providing education of quality is a responsibility devolving on all providers of education and its justiciability is crucial for upholding quality and standards of education in the face of general deterioration of quality, and widespread concern with it”. It therefore recommends, among others, that “States [of the world] must fully assume their obligation respect, protect, and fulfill the right to education. Their first obligation in this regard is to give effect to the right in their domestic legal order, and ensure its effective enforcement in case of violation, through national, regional, and international judicial and quasi-judicial mechanisms”. It also recommended that “The right to education should be provided the broadest and strongest legal protection possible”. If Nigeria’s leaders truly mean well for the electorate hat entrust them with political high offices, they must, forthwith, amend the constitution to make education justiciable. Education ought to be classified and treated as a ‘common good’! Meanwhile however, the National Policy on Education (NPE) has, in Section 2 (12) of the 6th edition (2013), improved upon the rather lame constitutional provision quoted above to declare that basic education, the first 10 years of education, is free and compulsory.

As earlier stated, the authors of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) do not seem to see a necessary connection between education and leadership, Nigeria’s supreme manual on governance – in its wisdom or ‘unwisdom’, depending on how one views it – states in Section 13 (d) that a person shall be qualified for election to the office of President if “he has been educated up to at least School Certificate level”. This is the educational requirement too for election into the National Assembly (Section 65 (2) (a). That anyone would prescribe only twelve years of formal education is required to preside over the affairs of or make laws for a 180 million-strong country in this 21st century digital, knowledge society boggles the mind! Furthermore, under Part IV, Section 318, Interpretation, Citation, and Commencement of this Constitution, the qualification to be president is even stretched to include in LL162 (d) “any other qualification acceptable by the Independent National Electoral Commission”. It is anybody’s guess what quality of leadership Nigeria will suffer under such ‘limited persons’.

They say that money answers everything. The budgetary allocation to the education sector by the federal government shows that, in utter contrariness to the ways of progressive nations, Nigeria, under successive political leadership attach to matters of education. If this attitude may be excused among the military class, how is it to be explained in a democracy operated by a well-schooled political class?

Vanguard newspaper calculates that the total federal budget in the 10 years from 2009 -2018 was N55.19 trillion. Only N3.90 trillion, or 7.07 per cent of this amount was earmarked for education. Since 2010, according to a Premium Times analysis, only twice has the education budget hit double digits as percentages of the total federal budget. In 2014 it was 10.54 per cent, and 2015 10.78 per cent. Since 2016, education share of the budget has dropped: from 7.92 percent through 7.4 per cent in 2017, to 7.04 per cent in the yet-to-be-concluded 2018 budget. In concrete figures, N550 billion was allocated for education in 2017, in 2018 it is N605.8 billion. These allocations are miserably lower than the UNESCO recommended range of between 15 per cent and 20 per cent (not 26 per cent as popularly held) recommended by the Steering Committee of Education For All (EFA).

In comparison, Ghana allocated 13.76 percent of its 2018 federal budget or the Ghanaian cedi equivalent of N740 billion, as calculated by Nigeria's Businessday newspaper. In Botswana, Unicef.org notes that "The allocation of the largest share of the budget to education is a long-standing characteristic of expenditure in Botswana". "Public expenditure on education has been steady over the past years, averaging 22 per cent of total budget between 2014/15 and 2018/19... in the current [2018/2019] fiscal year, the priority of education remains nearly identical, receiving about 22.2 per cent of resources in the total budget. This demonstrates that, on the aggregate, the government has continued to exceed the international spending benchmark of 20 per cent of the national budget for education as put forth by Education for All".

At a November 2018 workshop where the Education minister spoke Vice President Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, was reported to say that his government has every year increased the capital allocation of the education budget from N35.99 billion in 2016 to N 56.81 billion in 2017, to N102.9 billion. At whatever official exchange rate to a US\$ during the year 2018, this would amount to much less than half a billion US dollars, certainly inadequate to equip libraries, laboratories and classrooms, improve infrastructure or build additional ones, fund research, etc. The consequence is that, as UNESCO is reported to state in 2014, Nigeria is one of 37 countries in the world that collectively invest about \$129 billion annually in "education without learning".

The NPE states in Section 1:4 that the "philosophy of Nigerian education is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen, and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the basic, secondary, and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system". In Section 6, the document states that " the goals of education in Nigeria include development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic , and effective citizen, total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world, development of appropriate skills, mental, physical, and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in, and contribute positively to society". These are indeed expressions of lofty intentions; hardly does the goal of education come any better. But Nigeria's political leadership has, with shameless consistency, acted against the letters and spirit of the NPE.

The gap between Government expressed intention and the implementation is, characteristically, more than a gap; it is a chasm. Consider the 1-6-3 years of early child basic education. According to Section 2(12) of the NPE, it is "to be provided by Government, [and] shall be compulsory, free, universal, and qualitative". 60 years into self-government, UNICEF calculates that Nigeria still has 10.5 million out-of-school children and this is the highest for any country in the world. 60 percent of these are in the northern part of Nigeria.

Take the Tertiary Education. The seven-point goal as spelt out in Section (81) of the NPE include to “contribute to national development through high level manpower training” and reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labor market”. To these ends, Section 5(82) lists 15 goals that tertiary educational institutions shall “pursue including “generation and dissemination of knowledge, skills, and competencies that contribute to national and local economic goals which enable students to succeed in a knowledge-based economy”.

Has federal and state governments fulfilled these noble ideals? I would say “No”. This failure explains the incessant strikes by academic and non-academic staff of tertiary institutions. Premium Times reports that “Between 1999 and 2018...checks reveal [that] ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities) had gone on strike for over 40 months ...”. The joke is that ASUU strike is, arguably, as regular as the Christmas!

If the Nigerian government followed the UNESCO 15 -20 percent of annual budget recommendation, at least N 1.29 trillion (15 per cent) (or N1.72 trillion at 20 percent) from the 2018 federal budget would be available to improve the education sector at the federal level. And if the states emulated such responsible and progressive example, certainly, the education sector would begin to transform tremendously –provided of course that the funds were judiciously and transparently spent.

In 2006, the High Level Group of EFA (Education for All) proposed that nations devote between 4 per cent and 6 per cent of GDP to education. Nigeria’s GDP in 2017 is reported to be \$375.8 billion. By this advice, a minimum of \$ 15 billion would be available to the education sector in that year alone. That is a huge sum that would, even with the inevitable factor of corruption, make a big difference.

“Education”, says George Peabody, “is the debt the present generation owes future generations”. What endures and sustains society are the moral and intellectual qualities of the citizens. As all reasonable men and women know, the quality of education makes or mars the fortune and future of a nation. The better educated the people, the better a nation for, it is trite to say, people make a nation. And a cultivated human capital is crucial in this context. It is often said, for example, that there is no problem with Nigeria, only with Nigerians.

A wealthy nation is not necessarily a prosperous nation; the one is a material possession, the other is the product of a state of mind of a developed people. Whereas Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), are wealthy countries, Japan, Israel, Singapore are prosperous countries. On Singapore, Daniel Goleman (2013) in his book FOCUS writes as follows: “Singapore has no natural resources, no great army, no special political sway. Its secret lies in its people – and the government has intentionally cultivated [this human resource] as the driver of the economy. Schools are the incubator for Singapore’s outstanding workforce”.

Ian Vasquez of the Cato Institute posits that you can transfer wealth, but you cannot transfer prosperity. He is right. Wealth is a dispensable good; prosperity is an attitude, a state of mind. So, no matter how much foreign direct investments (FDI), and technology transfer come into Nigeria, the DRC, and similar-minded countries, the peoples must first imbibe a holistic attitude of ‘development orientation’ if they are to key into the modern global progress.

In this country, we worry about food security, energy security, and national security. But there is not enough concern about knowledge security. I believe that every form of security must be built upon knowledge security. In a knowledge –driven world, what you know – or do not know – can be the death of you, literally and metaphorically. Besides, it is so clear that knowledge superiority is essentially the foundation on which rest the advancement of some nations as well as their capability to outwit -and colonize – other nations. He who outthinks you will outsmart you, goes the saying.

The Teacher factor in Education

There is a general decay of the nation’s intellectual infrastructure as exemplified by dilapidated class rooms with broken furniture –or none at all-, near empty libraries and laboratories, and repeatedly inconsistent policies that disorient both the educator and the educated. Most important of all, the ‘teacher factor’ is not given the deserved consideration as the most crucial in quality of education. “Teacher growth” notes Roland S. Barth (1990), is most closely related to pupil growth”. In utter disregard for this truism, Nigerian teachers at all school levels are mistreated to the point of contempt. This is a violation of the letter and spirit of the NPE.

On Teacher Education, Section 5 (B) of the National Policy on Education (NPE) policy document aims to, “in recognition of the pivotal role of quality teachers in the provision of quality education at all levels “provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment... enhance teachers’ commitment to the teaching profession”. But all that is on paper. Nigerian teachers are owed many months of salaries while some state governments pay fractions of these just remunerations with a ‘you should be grateful to get something at all’ attitude.

There was a time in this environment when the teacher was revered; she rubbed shoulders with the chiefs and other high-ranking personalities in the community. That was in the days of yore. Today, Nigerian teachers are not at all treated with appropriate considerations. Barth cautions that poorly remunerated, ill-equipped, dispirited teachers cannot raise enthusiastic students and he advocates that an education system must provide every necessary resource for teachers to replenish themselves in order that they can replenish others. Sadly, Nigerian leaders do not seem to think that the quality of the teachers is a key determinant of the quality of education.

Taking a cue from its leaders; the Nigerian society so flagrantly disrespects its teachers to the point that hardly can one find a young man or woman who makes education her first choice to study, or to make a career. Even the higher institutions have, for years, offered Education as only the last option to applicants not admitted for other courses. Low and delayed wages, and the generally poor treatment of educators have devalued teachers and the teaching profession. Whereas elsewhere, teaching is considered “the most important profession in the world” (William G. Carr), in Nigeria, “the regard for teaching is becoming a lost tradition”, in the words Jacques Barzun.

If anyone is in doubt about the reverence accorded teachers in decent societies -ancient and modern- we should note that the great sages of the world are teachers who are remembered not for their material wealth, but because of the enduring value of their teachings. The death of a teacher, goes an Arab saying, is more painful than the death of an entire village because he gives knowledge. “A teacher affects eternity; no one can tell where his influence stops” says Henry Adams. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is repeatedly referred to as ‘teacher’ by His questioning audiences.

The inevitable and sad conclusion to draw from the Nigerian story is that Nigeria's political elite, through successive governments, is willfully and demonstrably anti-public education. This is outrageous and shameful because, this largest country of black people should be a leading light in what is arguably the most important means of human development. This attitude was put in a context by my best friend, Pita Onaiyekan.

Except for a few, the story of education in most African continent countries are depressing. Nigeria, is just one, albeit an inexcusable disappointing example of the state of education on the continent. The 2018 Mo Ibrahim Index on African Governance (IIAG) reports that, whereas "all three underlying governance dimensions of Human Development (Welfare, Education, and Health) have improved over the last 10 years, worryingly, progress is slowing in all of them". Further, it says: "In Education, progress in the last 5 years has almost ground to a halt, with almost half of the continent showing deterioration in this area. [Indeed], over the last 5 years, Education Provision, which assesses the extent to which the public are satisfied with how their government is addressing educational needs, is the most deteriorated indicator in the Human Development category, and the 3rd most deteriorated in the entire IIAG".

How much education is enough?

No amount of education in whatever form, is enough because no one can know enough live by. Continuous learning should be a way of life. "The education of a man is never complete until he dies" says Robert E. Lee. I would say that the sorry state of Nigeria and even the world generally, can be attributed to what George Seldes laments as "the rather small minority of civilized people who read books".

It bears repeating: one can ever have enough education. Every new experience with people, in places, in time, is a form of education. The 'School of Life' is full of complex surprises and there is never the same answer to any two 'life questions'. Each question poses its unique challenge to our thinking capacity and our problem-solving capability. The better educated one is, the better is the ability to discern both obvious and hidden meanings. James A. Michener (1962) warned in 'When Does Education Stop?' that "adults who are unwilling to reeducate themselves periodically are doomed to mediocrity". To avoid mediocrity and even ossification therefore, as long as we live, we must keep learning how to live, advises the Roman statesman and philosopher Seneca. Even Albert Einstein has been quoted to say that once you stop learning, you start dying.

Education and the Reading Habit

Most people are simply not reading at all; some read their Holy Books only, some read only newspapers, many read the stuffs on the social media. I am of the regretful impression that in Nigeria today, there is a "rather small minority of civilized people who read books" to use the words of George Seldes. Some would even say this applies to the Black race. There is a joke on the social media that if you want to hide a thing from the black people, put it in a book. It may sound funny but alas, there may be some truth to it.

I believe that the human mind is wired to inquire. We are drawn inexorably to an investigation of the unknown (Gallup Jr. & Proctor, 1984). To not read –and read incessantly too – is to deny oneself the unquantifiable benefit of continuous education. It is, in a sense, what James F. Welles (1986) terms as the "epistemological" definition of 'stupidity' meaning "the failure to gather and use information efficiently". "Reading is to the mind, as exercise is to the body" says Sir Richard Steele; Jeremy Collier admonishes that a man may as well expect to grow stronger by always

eating, as wiser by always reading”. The short and long term gains of reading is summed up by philosopher Francis Bacon that “Reading maketh a full man...” and by Aldous Huxley thus : “Every man who knows how to read has it in his power to magnify himself; to multiply the ways in which he exists; to make his life full, significant, and interesting” And Prof. Niyi Osundare, on the need for leaders to read, says that he can tell the type of leader a man will make from the books he reads – or does not read. Indeed so. “A man”, writes Samuel Smiles in his 1987 book *Character*, may usually be known by the books he reads, as well as by the company he keeps. For, there is companionship of books, as well as companionship of men”. In this age of the Internet of [almost] Everything (IoE), no one has the moral right to remain ignorant. Absolutely no one.

Because we can never know enough, because we must, as Seneca said, keep learning how to live as long as we live, because we can never travel enough, the cheapest and shortest means to, in the words of St. Paul, “continually renew our minds” is by reading. No wonder that in 2 Timothy, he asked that books and parchments be brought to him along with some clothes. Of course, Paul knew too well the spiritual value of reading and the thinking power that a reading habit enables. Indeed, if he was not a reading man, how could this messenger of Christ to the Gentiles explain his new found faith with such erudition to Greeks and Romans not a few of them intellectuals of no mean standing? Paul certainly could not have so lucidly, and confidently justified Christ to intellectually sophisticated Greeks, Romans, and non-Jews if he did not possess knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.

With knowledge from reading comes understanding; from understanding, we distil wisdom. The Book of Proverbs has much to say on the clear, definite connections between knowledge, understanding, and wisdom .A man must get knowledge, and he must seek understanding. If he does not go beyond these, he can, I should think, make a living. But rising beyond understanding into wisdom assures that he will make a life.

I recommend that one should read, besides the holy books, all types of literature; each has a way of deepening one’s understanding of and respect for this unfathomably complex world. Every author has some new knowledge to share that cannot but enrich the reader’s repository of knowledge. There is a saying that nothing is so complicated that is not, fundamentally, simple. From reading wide and deep (a little learning is a dangerous thing, says Pope), we make an eye-opening discovery: the inherent simplicity of the fundamental truths. In the words of T.S. Eliot, “we shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and to know the place for the first time...”

What, then, is the great purpose of education?

I cannot answer this better than to quote three of the fine minds that have pondered this question. “The supreme end of education is expert discernment in all things; the power to tell the good from the bad, the genuine from the counterfeit; and to prefer the genuine to the bad and the counterfeit” posits English author Samuel Johnson. Thomas Henry Huxley argues that a “Perhaps the most valuable result of education is the ability to make yourself do the things you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not”. And Kenneth L. Woodward says “To know the best of what has been taught and written, to be able to think critically, to be morally discerning and aesthetically discriminating, [these are] the marks of an educated man” (*Newsweek*, October, 1980).

A great purpose implies a worthy end higher than self. An educated person pursues an end that is larger than his personal desires, and narrow interest, that is nobler than self-interest. He aims to and works for what J.B. Priestley sums up as “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” in society.

Action is to our education as work is to our faith; active knowledge is akin to active faith. James advises in James 1: “...be doers of the word and not hearers only...” “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works...faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. This ‘Faith in action’ should produce such fruits as excellence, integrity, and selflessness. At the risk of stretching comparison too far, I say that education that does not result in communally beneficial action is worse than ineffective, it is dead.

The great purpose of a man’s education would be seen and felt in his action. Awolowo, Soyinka, Achebe, Dangote, Einstein, Davidson, and Gates: these men did indeed receive formal education. But they have in their respective ways gone beyond what they know to act on it in the service of humanity. They have created tangible and intangible products – knowledge, software, consumer goods, etc. – that expand human thinking and productive capabilities.

What action of an educated man will qualify as serving ‘a great purpose?’

I would say that the action of an educated man will, every time, be ‘good’. As an effect of his enlightenment, refinement, and lofty thinking, he feels, irresistibly, a necessity upon him, as Paul would put it, to seek the public good, to be what Dr. Martín Luther King, Jr. terms ‘a good neighbor’. In ‘On Being a Good Neighbor’, he writes that ‘a good neighbor looks beyond the external accidents [such as clan, tribe, class, race, and nation] and discerns those inner qualities that make all men human and therefore, brothers’. “In nothing do men more nearly approach the gods, than by doing good to their fellow men” says Cicero.

To do what we ought, as a moral obligation, to take the broad view, to courageously stand up for what, to the best of judgment we believe to be true and fair, in sum, to be a good neighbor: these are choices before us each every day. God has given man the freewill to make his choice –and to bear whatever consequence comes with it. Says the Book of Ecclesiasticus : “He has set and water before you;/ put your hand to whichever you prefer./ Man has life and death before him;/ whichever a man likes better will be given him”. (The Jerusalem Bible) Doing good, in the sense of doing what we ought is even its own reward. The book of Proverbs puts it thus: “The merciful man does good for his own soul...” (NKJV). One derives emotional and psychological satisfaction from doing ‘good’ or ‘the right thing’.

Myles Munroe is reported to say that [we] were not born to make a living but to make a difference. We can make this difference only by a commitment to and pursuit of a purpose larger and higher than just living. To this end, the great purpose of education includes providing solutions to problems. If this is granted, we reasonably should expect Nigerian higher institutions to develop and implement solutions to some of the urgent problems society. We should expect and therefore demand that the polytechnics, the universities generate their own electricity and produce their own clean water first, for the school community, and then for the adjoining community- if only in fulfillment of corporate social responsibility.

A university, as a place of knowledge -and of light -, ought to be demonstrably better governed than the rest of society: a community of the enlightened should be light to the world and salt to the earth. And, against the backdrop of the link between education and leadership stated above,

good governance should be obviously reflected in institutions and organizations headed by intellectuals in the Humanities. The enlightened – in the sense of one armed with knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and discernment – ought to (can it be otherwise?) act as ‘lights’ of integrity, humaneness, and equity and, I should add, courage to stand up for these qualities for, the man dies in him who fails to defend his beliefs. The world will not get better unless its leading lights shine brightly enough to overcome darkness, and to light a path to a purpose higher than self.

Olufemi Taiwo (2011) in *Africa Must Be Modern* argues that society should not mandatorily require that “its scholars do research that relates one way or another to practical problems [of society]” because such scholars “are unlikely to display their rich, fecund imagination that reaches out to ideas, issues and problems that have not been apprehended”. I do not agree. At a particular stage of its development, a society must harness all its resources – tangible and intangible- to address those immediate and urgent challenges to its survival and continued existence. Then can it be free to concern itself with rarefied ideas. Pray, why a country should confronted with food insecurity, energy insufficiency, insecurity of life and property support research into space travel, the age of the Universe, or speculative thinking of what type of beings inhabit Pluto? Of course there are, even now nations that engage in these kind of studies. But that is because, they have largely, but not completely, taken care of basic issues such as food security, energy security, and national security. Maslow’s ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ is still a valid guide to human priorities.

St. Augustine’s College and the great purpose of education

Now I bring the original question home. As alumni of St. Augustine’s, what should be the great purpose of the education that we received from this iconic college? This is a question for every alumnus to ponder, even to worry about. And for good reason we should worry.

Our response has been very poor to the celebration plans of the Diamond anniversary of the school that gave us so much. The facts are there on the SACKOBA Worldwide platform. Notwithstanding the concerns, effort, and contributions in various ways (Chief Babayemi, Mike Lewu, and members of the Planning Committee I salute you in this respect), our collective response does not at all indicate that we have imbibed sufficiently the great purpose for which this college educated us.

It bears repeating: the great purpose of any education should be to add value to self and to the world, wherever we find ourselves. Toward St. Augustine’s College, Kabba, I would say that most of us have failed to meet this expectation as indeed we ought. I believe we can, we should, and we must.

We owe so much to this college, but except for a few among us, most have done little for it. We must increase our commitments as well as improve on them. Examples: let those with the money put it down; let who have books donate them to the library, let retirees and those on leave from the hurly burly of the city donate time, knowledge, and experience to teach subjects in their areas of competence.

Quality time spent by a new face of an old boy, sharing knowledge and experience with young students can make a difference in their understanding of a topic. Let us hold periodically, career talks, seminars on History, and Current Affairs; let those among us who have foreign connections arrange to twin our college with similar schools abroad in order to attract assistance and exchange students and programmes.

An educational institution can –nay must- catalyze development in its host community. In other words, a school must serve a general good beyond its immediate, community. I suppose this is part of what is meant by the ‘common good’ in the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church that “The common good therefore involves all members of society , no one is exempt from cooperating, according to each one’s possibilities, in attaining and developing it...it requires the constant ability and effort to seek the good others as though it were one’s own good”.

Beyond nurturing human resource, we must think up ways that this school can contribute to the physical development of the Kabba and neighboring communities. Can we create a St. Augustine’s College Public Library open to non-student general readers? Can we periodically stage plays for public audience as the school once did in the ‘70s? I recollect with pride and nostalgia that in 1972/73, Mr. Akanbi, our teacher in Literature and an outstanding dramaturge, brought together students of our school and St. Monica’s College to stage for public viewing in Kabba and colleges in nearby towns the play Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw.

I was Sanitation Prefect in 1973. As an act of corporate social responsibility, (CSR), can St. Augustine’s College students periodically carry out community service such as cleaning the streets and gutters, as a way to encourage public awareness on sanitation and the keeping of a healthy environment? If we think creatively, there are countless ways we can, and should put our education to the great purpose of making St. Augustine’s College an institution of excellence it deserves to be. This way, we can confidently, proudly, enroll our children and grandchildren in our alma mater. Surely, such a measure will bond us more strongly to this school.

Conclusion

I now speak for myself. Having received the best tradition of Catholic education and the Catholic faith here, I see the great purpose of my education is multidimensional. First, it is to be a proud and worthy ambassador of St. Augustine’s College wherever I go. Second, it is to give back to every school that has nurtured me as much and in as many ways as I can. Third, it is to choose what I ought above what I will in moments of critical decisions. Fourth, it is to courageously, but not rashly, stand for what is, to the best of my knowledge and judgment, right, true, and fair. Fifth, it is to be “a good neighbor” who “looks beyond the external accidents and discerns those inner qualities that, make all men human, and therefore, brothers”. Sixth, it is to live as a citizen of the world not of a clan, a town, or a country. Seventh I believe that the great purpose of my education in this school and elsewhere, is to leave wherever I find myself better than I met it. I conclude this lecture by asserting that every time an alumnus fails to meet the great purpose of his education, he fails this college. I pray that God grants us the wisdom and the will to act the great purpose of our education.