

EDUCATION, REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND THE MOBILITY OF LABOUR

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Abstract

The economic performance of most African countries is presently rated poor. Consequently, this scenario becomes worrisome, hence requires an urgent need towards providing the best strategy for reversing the current status of developing African countries. The position of this paper is that regional integration which is the process by which two or more nation-states agree to cooperate and work closely to achieve peace, stability and wealth should provide the best strategy. This claim is further supported by elucidating the benefits of regional integration which include lowering, and possibly eliminating barriers to trade, achieving cross-border cooperation and increasing the well-being of citizens of member states. The paper further argues that labour mobility is a constant possibility from countries within and between poor/rich capital and rich/poor labour force. The Neoclassical economic and Human Capital Theories are employed to critically discuss the role of education as an essential instrument adopted by the society (as a rational actor) for equipping the citizens (human capital) for future societal benefits. Based on these premises and upholding education as an instrument per excellent for the development of society, this position paper upholds that African nations, especially West Africa, should extend their regional integration efforts beyond economic boundaries to include integration of educational institutions, especially higher education. This effort will, no doubt, encourage the flow of ideas, knowledge and the development of more qualified and well equipped human capital who could drive the economy of the developing West African nations.

Introduction

Education in all its forms has contributed immensely to the development of both individuals and nations. Formal education, especially, has become a vital instrument for the emancipation of individuals and nations

from the shackles of poverty, illiteracy and all forms of underdevelopment. Prior to Independence, the aims of education in developing countries outlined by Jekayinfa and Kolawole (2003) are:

1. Learning to live according to the old traditions of the people (Society)
2. Learning the traditions of other countries in order to imbibe their religion, culture, and social life, example clothing, language, hair-do's and so on, and;
3. Learning to live modern life of technologically advanced countries.
After Independence, the aims of education include the following:
 1. To promote national unity and international understanding;
 2. To remove social inequalities, poverty, violent crimes, hunger, disease, squalor, illiteracy, ignorance, superstition, pride and fear,
 3. To provide individual happiness and pleasure, self-realization, public morality and aesthetic development,
 4. To train for good citizenship, health improvement, vocational competence, industrial and commercial developments, and adult literacy,
 5. To produce adequate manpower for economic development so that there could be less dependence on expatriates,
 6. To create a society with high moral standards,
 7. To eradicate the problem of economic and technological dependence on the advanced countries of the world,
 8. To promote public enlightenment and civilized behaviour.

The achievement of the foregoing goals is evident in the level of development of the society. Thus, high level of development is associated with countries with high level of education which results to increased employment opportunities, high manpower development through various empowerment strategies and high level of mobility of labour. Okpaga (2013) posits that national development is a process of economic, political and social changes which encompasses material advancement, industrialization, scientific and technological progress and socio-cultural transformation, all of which result in enhanced welfare of people.

Developed countries are associated with high level of economic development, while developing and underdeveloped countries are associated with low level of economic development. In the developing countries of the world, social and economic activities are also organized in small scale, hence resulting to poor economy, low level of income, high level of illiteracy and unemployment among the citizens. Development, as posited by Lavergne (n.d), requires the organization of social and economic activity on a much

larger scale because increased scale brings with it opportunities for a wide range of benefits associated with lower unit costs of production, increased specialization and competition, access to a wider range of technology and greater sharing of ideas and experience in all areas of endeavour. There is therefore an urgent need towards providing the best strategy for reversing the current status of developing African countries. On the other hand, in developed countries, these have been achieved through the process of regional integration and cooperation among various countries. Hence, the success of such countries in regional integration has revived the interest of West African Countries in regional integration and cooperation.

This position paper focuses on how education could be used as an instrument to boost the economy and development of West African countries through regional integration efforts which will also enhance labour mobility within and between African countries. To achieve this, the following sections guide the discussion:

- Conceptual framework
- Relevant theoretical perspective
- Education and labour empowerment
- Education and labour mobility
- Integrating education, labour empowerment and mobility
- Africa and regional integration with particular reference to West Africa (Needs and Challenges)
- The way forward

Conceptual Framework

Education

As considered in this contribution, education is the process of transmitting knowledge, values and skills. It could take the formal, non-formal or informal form. Etymologically, Farooq (2013, Internet) notes that "... education is derived from the Latin word 'educare' (meaning), '...to bring up'". In other words, education could be considered as a process of helping the individual to develop his potentials, in order to be useful to both himself and his society. To Cecilia (2000), education seeks to refine man by developing his potentials and equipping him to live a meaningful, productive and responsible life in the society. Educated citizens are therefore considered responsible in that they are able to contribute to the development of society. In addition, education provides a key tool in combating poverty and promoting peace, social justice, human rights, democracy, cultural diversity and environmental awareness (WodiandIgwesi, 2016). Furthermore, it facilitates learning or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits (Internet, 2015).

In a more comprehensive examination of the concept of education, Nwosu (2015:2) submits as follows:

Education is a fundamental human right and the most powerful instrument for development and transformation of the individual and the society. It is the development of desirable qualities in people. It is a social process which is expected to bring positive changes in the knowledge and behaviour of the learner. Education endows learners with the requisite affective, cognitive and psychomotor abilities necessary for effective living in an ever-changing society.

Considering the foregoing examination of the meaning of education, it becomes essential to note that no society with the desire for sustainable development, could toil with education as an institution because the development of every society is hinged on its effective functioning.

Regional Integration

From the Oxford Dictionaries (Internet, n.d), the word 'region', among other things, relates to a large area of land usually without exact limit or borders. In many cases, it is part of an entity, usually with its defined socio-cultural and political characteristics. On the other hand, the term integration connotes the act or process of combining two or more things so that they work together. In relation to human being, it could be considered as the process of mixing people who may have been previously separated usually because of colour, race, religion, among other things. For Mugerwa, Anyanwu and Conceicao (2014), it relates to free and unlimited movement of goods, services, people and capital within and between natural markets. In some cases, it is a process in which neighbouring states enter into an agreement, in order to upgrade cooperation through common institutions and rules (Wikipedia, 2006). Regional integration could be further seen as the process by which two or more nation states agree to co-operate and work closely to achieve peace, stability and wealth.

To Wandrei (2018), regional integration refers to various types of political and economic agreements that form closer ties between sovereign countries. Such policies vary from trade agreements to more extensive treaties in which individual member countries sacrifices part of her national sovereignty. Regional integration is useful for economic, political and social

development of countries, in terms of progress, development and people (Tanyanyiwa, and Hakuna, 2014)

Mobility of Labour

The word mobility relates to movement. Hence, mobility of labour means movement of workers. Brent (2018) asserts that labour mobility is the ease with which workers/labourers are able to move around within an economy and between different economies. Similarly, Jason and Joseph (n.d.) postulate that labour mobility consists of changes in the location of workers both across physical space (geographic mobility) and across a set of jobs (occupational mobility). Geographic mobility can be subdivided into short distance and long distance moves as well as into voluntary and coerced migration, while occupational mobility can be lateral (within a broad class of jobs similar in socio-economic status or vertical (from one job to a better or worse job).

Brent (2018) further states that the ease with which employees can move from a job in one particular industry to another in a different industry determines how quickly an economy can develop. For example, if there was zero occupational mobility, members of the society would still be hunter-gathers and no one would have become a farmer or a specialist in other fields of endeavour. Jason and Joseph (n.d.) also assert that the reallocation of workers across regions permits the exploitation of complementary resources as they are discovered in new places, while reallocation across sectors makes possible the use of new technologies and the growth of new industries. At the individual level, mobility allows improvements in the economic circumstances of those whose skills or aspirations are a poor match for the job or location in which they find themselves.

Relevant Theoretical Perspectives

Neo-Classical Economic Theory

This comprises the earliest theoretical framework that explains labour migration. David Ricardo was known to have provided the foundation of the neoclassical economic theory but Alfred Marchall (1842-1924) was considered to be the its father and the latter was known for his theory of demand and supply, among other things. Other contributors included William Stanley Jevons (1835 – 1882) and Karl Menger (1840 – 1925), to mention a few. The theory, at the macro level, sees migration as the result of geographical differences between labour supply and demand which may exist either at the international or national level. While emphasizing the importance of value as the push factor for demand and supply, the theory also assumes

that international migration is caused by the differences in wage levels between countries and labour markets, reason being that if wage-differences are eliminated, labour migration will stop. The theory further suggests that the bulk of labour migration moves from capital-poor/labour force (rich countries) to capital-rich/labour force (poor countries), while in contrast, capital moves in the opposite direction expecting a higher return on investment made in capital-poor countries. Among other things, the theory emphasizes the importance of technical skills as a major source of economic growth and labour movement. The theory argues that migration is anticipated to continue occurring till the expected earnings (wages plus probability of employment) equalize internationally.

In the classical theory, Smith, (in Blenman, n.d), a Scottish economist and philosopher who was considered as the forerunner of economic thought in the 18th century, discussed many elements central to employment. According to the classical theories (n.d), wages were determined through the law of supply and demand, not necessarily by the government. Hence, labour would be attracted to the jobs where needed most and the resulting employment conditions would ultimately benefit the whole of society. Stressing the importance of education, the classical theorists argued that the quality of workers' skill was the central determinant of economic progress. In addition, workers, according to Smith would need to be compensated by increased wages, if they were to bear the cost of acquiring new skills. Other contributors include David Ricardo, Jean-Baptiste Say and Robert Malthus (1766-1834)

Human Capital Theory

The Human Capital theory was an offshoot of the term "Human capital" which was coined by an American economist, Schultz, in 1960. Gary Becker who was an American student of Schultz however was instrumental to shaping the human capital theory. Becker treated human capital as the outcome of an investment process. According to him, rational actors will make investments only if the expected stream of future benefits exceeds the short-term costs associated with acquiring the skills. The short-term cost for instance is the cost of acquiring knowledge which includes direct costs paid by students as well as the opportunities to earn wages which they have to forego.

Fitzsimons (2018), in discussing the human capital theory, also elucidated that a key strategy in determining economic performance has been to employ a conception of individuals as human capital and various economic metaphors such as technological change", "research", innovation", productivity" education' and competitiveness'. The basic concept of human capital theory is therefore that investment in individuals can be mathematically

measured, based on the economic value they are able to contribute to society. Human capital theory (n.d.) notes that there are categories of human capital such as cultural capital, social capital, economic capital and symbolic capital. Economic capital is typically measured by the ability to perform labour which results in economic value, while social and cultural capitals refer to the relationships and influence an individual contributes to society. Education, job training and marketable talents comprise different ways in which humans increase their ability to acquire knowledge and generate higher wages. Samoszuk, (n.d.) also added that the human capital theory derives from Neo-classical economics, which separates economic activities from social activities, almost as though the economy is a separate world outside of society itself, and it assumes people act in generally rational and intentional ways at all times.

The Relationship between Education and Economic/Human Capital Theories and Regional Integration

Education and Labour Empowerment

Every society needs a labour force that is efficient, effective, current, educated and informed for her economy to thrive, especially in this era of Information and Communication Technology. This understanding brings to the limelight the need for societies to empower their workforce (labour), in order to achieve this goal.

Empowerment denotes equipping an individual with relevant and useful knowledge, skills, information, attitude and understanding that can assist him/her to take control of his/her affairs (Murtala and Zakari, 2013). Citing Kam (1996), Murtala and Zakari maintained that empowerment emphasizes people's power and participation in the raising of peoples' consciousness and changing the environment to eliminate the social constraints acting on peoples' lives. The duo has equally highlighted the position of human capital as being at the apex of all other major means of production for development in society. Consequently, education becomes an essential tool for the training and development of essential knowledge and skills development for labour movement, interaction, adequate division of labour and societal development in any given society.

Considering its aims and objectives, education has always been very instrumental to the empowerment of individuals. Imhabekhai (1998) asserts that workers' education provides clientele the opportunities to acquire new skills that are relevant to their day-to-day operations and renew both outdated and irrelevant skills. He argues that workers become more proficient and

efficient in carrying out their official duties. They also become an informed, professional and self-reliant group of workers who are always at alert to resist any form of oppression. Similarly, Shetty (2015) considers education as a milestone for women empowerment because it enables them respond to challenges, confront their traditional roles and change their lives. In all, the labour force has to be provided with the necessary skills, knowledge and conducive environment that will motivate members leisure for efficient performance.

Different types of empowerment have been identified. According to Youth empowerment (n.d.), they are as follows:

(i) Youth empowerment: This is the process that is aimed at improving the quality of life of young people in the society. Through this process, the youths are encouraged to take charge of their lives. Youth empowerment can be achieved through training in skills acquisition and formal education.

(ii) Community empowerment: This is the process of enhancing the community through leadership development, improving communication and creating a network of support to mobilize the community to address concerns.

(iii) Psychological empowerment: This process enables individuals to address the problems confronting and limit the quality of their lives. It is achieved through training in self-consciousness, belief in self-efficacy, awareness and knowledge of problems and solutions to various problems and issues of life.

(iv) Organizational empowerment: This is aimed at creating a base for community resources. This is achieved through voluntary organizations, associations and unions that promote, protect and advocate for the needy and the powerless.

(v) Economic empowerment: This type of empowerment focuses on exposing the individual to entrepreneurial skills' training, as well as the generation of income security.

(vi) Social empowerment: This provides the opportunity for helping youths to interact freely with others. In other words, it teaches social inclusion and helps them find resources to be proactive.

(vii) Cultural empowerment: This helps to recreate cultural practices and redefines cultural roles and norms especially for the youths.

Education is therefore an instrument for empowering every societal member. At the formal, non-formal or informal levels of education,

knowledge, values and skills are inculcated in members of the society. This empowers them for useful living in the society. Women who are vulnerable groups in the society are also empowered to be relevant in the society through various empowerment strategies such as formal education and training in skills acquisition.

Education and Labour Mobility

It has been established earlier in this paper that changes in the location of workers can occur across physical space (geographic mobility) and within/between a set of jobs(occupational mobility). Fitzsimons (2018) notes that education, job training and marketable talents are ways in which humans increase their ability to acquire knowledge and generate high wages. In Nigeria for instance, the higher the educational level of an individual, the higher the possibility of moving from an occupation that attracts a lower pay to the one that attracts a higher pay (Okeke, 2016; Blakemore and Cooksey, 1981). Thus, higher educational qualification results to both occupational and geographic mobility Labour mobility is connected to social mobility because it has the ability to lead to social mobility.

As Musgrave (in Okeke, 2016:72) notes, social mobility refers to the “movement ... up or down the social class system”, considering income, occupation, prestige, power and educational qualification. Education is a primary channel of mobility because it is highly correlated with income and occupation and the higher the educational level, the more prestigious the occupation leading to higher annual income. This is in turn associated with prosperity, prestige, social status and power. However, education can only facilitate upward social mobility, if equal educational opportunities are provided, without any restriction.

Integrating Education, Labour Empowerment and Mobility

When there is empowerment of labour, an individual’s chances of both labour and social mobility are increased. Hence, any factor which impacts on labour empowerment will most likely affect labour mobility. Education is an essential instrument for labour empowerment and mobility. At all levels, education empowers individuals with skills and knowledge. This creates an opportunity for both occupational and geographical mobility.

Sekah and Subburay’s (2014) study on identifying the impact of education on women’s overall empowerment shows that educational qualification plays a significant role in women empowerment. The study concludes that the only medium through which women’s empowerment could be achieved is through education. Similarly, Baum & Payea (2005), writing on









the individual and societal benefits of higher education, state that the society as a whole also enjoys a financial return on the investment in higher education. In addition to widespread productivity increases, the higher earnings of educated workers generate higher tax payments at the local, state and federal levels and consistent productive employment reduces dependence on public income- transfer programmes. Among other things, the benefits of education to individuals as identified by Baum and Payea (2005) are as follows:

- (1) There is a correlation between higher levels of education and higher earnings for all racial/ ethnic groups and for both men and women.
- (2) Any college experience produces a measurable benefit, when compared with no post-secondary education but the benefits of completing a bachelor or higher degree are significantly higher. Education therefore empowers individuals with knowledge and skills, thus providing them an opportunity for mobility of labour

Baum and Payea (2005) further state that the society enjoys financial returns on the investment in higher education through widespread productivity and higher earnings of educated workers which generate higher tax payments at the local, state and federal levels.

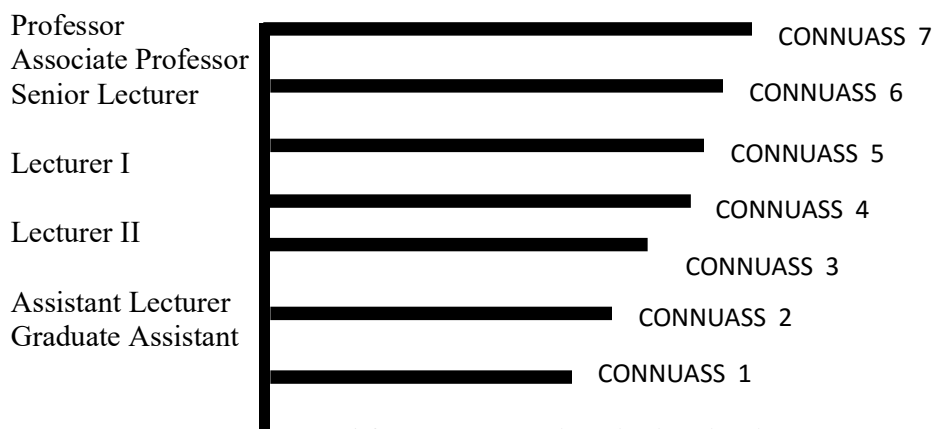
Below shows median earnings and tax payments by level of education of workers in United States of America.

Table I: Median earnings and Tax payments by level of education of workers

Professional Degree		\$95,700
Doctorate Degree		\$79,400
Master Degree		\$59,500
Bachelors Degree		\$49,900
Associate Degree		\$37,700
Some College, No Degree		\$35,700
High School Graduate		\$30,800
Not a High School Graduate		\$21,600

Source: US Census Bureau, 2014

In Nigeria for instance, the social status of University lectures can be used to reflect the difference in their earnings and the mobility trend among them as it relates to their educational level.



Source: Data sourced from a State University in Nigeria

The more the investment of education in individuals the more they are empowered to earn higher in the work place. This is because their contributions to the development of the institution also increases. Workers with higher educational qualifications also have better opportunities for both occupational and geographic mobility, especially to regions that are capital rich but have low labour force.

West Africa and Regional Integration: Needs and Challenges

Regional integration efforts started in Europe with the formation of European Economic Community (EEC) which was created in 1958 after World War II to foster and increase economic cooperation between six countries in Europe. These countries were Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The name European Economic Community (EEC) was changed to European Union (EU) in 1993 and the membership has increased to twenty-eight (28) countries. The goals of the European union included:

- Abolition of border controls between EU Countries. This means that people can travel freely from one EU member country to another.
- Giving same treatment to citizens of EU member countries in the area of employment, social security and tax purposes.

The regional integration efforts in Europe benefit member countries in several ways including the following:

1. It is a very important building block in curbing violent conflicts between nations because as members of the same organization with common interests, constructive dialogue is used to settle disputes.
2. Education and cultural exchanges among member countries
3. Lowering of barriers to trade, cross-border cooperation in areas of job creation and breakdown of language barrier through common social and cultural activities (Frasch and Wolski, 2016)

The success of European experience in regional integration in Europe revived the interest of West African countries in regional integration. Hence, the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) was established on 28th May, 1975 as a trade union with the main goal of promotion of economic integration in all fields of activity among its members. ECOWAS is made up of fifteen (15) member countries namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote D'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo. The goals of ECOWAS are to:

1. Foster ideal of collective self-sufficiency of its members
2. Create a single, large trading block through economic cooperation in all fields of activity including industry, transport and telecommunication
3. Create an integrated region where members enjoy free movement, have access to efficient education and health system.

The Need for Regional Integration in West Africa

Many West African countries had small and fractured economies working in isolation from Independence. This gave rise to the need for regional integration as a means to facilitate structural transformation and overcome the constraints associated with small and fractured economies. Lavergne (n.d.) notes that West African countries today are weakly integrated nationally, regionally, and internationally. He also observes that these countries are divided by a wide range of institutional, legal and infrastructural barriers which hinder economic growth. According to him, a large country that is weakly integrated internally due to poor infrastructure, ethnic rivalries, or sociopolitical factors may provide fewer opportunities for development than a smaller country that is well integrated.

The Need for Regional Integration in West African Countries therefore arises because:

1. Regional integration has the potential for driving more robust and equitable economic growth.

2. It has the potential of promoting poverty and unemployment reduction in West Africa.
3. It is an important step towards structural transformation in the society.
4. Regional integration will help West African countries to overcome the constraints associated with small and fractured economies.
5. Through regional integration, conflicts between and among West African Countries could be averted and be replaced by constructive dialogues. This is because membership of same organizations with common interest has the potential to eliminate conflict situations.

Challenges of Regional Integration in West Africa

Regional integration in West Africa is facing a lot of challenges. Vogt and Ouattara (2012) identified these challenges as:

1. The inherent rivalries between various regions and countries of West Africa constitutes an impediment to regional integration efforts.
2. Regional integration has been centred more on monetary or economic cooperation and less on the elimination of barriers to free movement of goods and services and the harmonization of economic policies. It has also neglected regional integration of formal educational activities.
3. Lack of capacities and resources and also lack of coordination and mismanagement of scarce resources;
4. Low economic and political interdependence of West African countries;
5. The pluralistic societal setting in ECOWAS is not connected to her decision-making unlike in the European Union where the private sector and the political elites are its driving force.

The Way Forward

Having considered the need and challenges of regional integration in West Africa, these steps are recommended towards achieving a fruitful regional integration efforts and sustainable development in West African countries.

1. Regional policies should not be formulated in a haste but after much thought and deliberations on their efficacies and implementation strategies.
2. Both the elites and stake holders should collaborate to formulate thoughtful policies that will move West African countries forward.
3. Efforts should be geared more towards ensuring peace between/among West African countries.

4. Regional integration efforts in West African nations should be extended beyond economic and monetary boundaries to include integration and collaboration between educational institutions (especially higher education). This will encourage the flow of ideas, knowledge and the development of more qualified and well-equipped human capital who could drive the economy.
5. The educational institutions should be well positioned to develop effective and adequate human capital through adequate funding and provision of both human and material resources needed by educational institutions.

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