THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION AND THE SCHOOL-COMMUNITY NEXUS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

It is incontrovertible to assert that education plays a great and prominent role in the development of a nation. Indeed, education is the bedrock of the department of any nation. It is pertinent to note that education in Nigeria is no longer a private enterprise, but a huge government venture since education has been adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria, as an instrument for achieving national development (FGN, 2004).

Education is not only considered as a major catalyst for social and economic reform, but a means of laying solid foundation for a strong and virile nation. Now that education has been recognised aa major factor in the development of the nation, Nigeria as a nation cannot afford to toy with the education of her citizenry because the wealth of a nation is a function of available human resources and not the abundance of natural resources (Oyewole, 2010). Education has been warmly accepted by all levels of government in Nigeria as an instrument for achieving social, economic, political, scientific and technological development as being promoted by the Sustainable Development Goals. A popular adage says if one considers education to be too costly, he/she could then try ignorance. This is why some people have argued that the purpose of education is to improve people's lives by expanding their intellectual capabilities, freedom and dignity. Hence, it is pertinent to say that education is the only bedrock to any meaningful development.

The role of alumni association in building school-community relationship in providing quality education for the overall development of any society cannot be overemphasised. In recent years, educational development has suffered a major setback due to the poor budgetary allocation to the education sector and thereby reducing the standard and quality of education that should be provided by to the teaming population which has consequently affected the national development. Hence, the perceived low standard of education has caught the attention of since scholars, activists, politicians, development workers, local and international organisations in which alumni association and community members play a major role in the process of rescuing the falling standards of education in a bid to reposition the education sector towards serving both personal and societal development.

The Concept of Alumni Association

Alumni is a group of people who have graduated from a school, college or university. Alumni is usually used to refer to a group of graduates of either one or both genders. This group is often referred to as Alumni Association (Adebayo, 2023).

Generally speaking, alumni is referred to as graduates or former students of a particular educational institution; former members, employees, contributes, or the like. They usually come together to organise social events and raise funds to improve their schools. Its primary purposes are to promote the schools' interest, to enhance relationships among alumni, staff and students and more importantly to strengthen the contributions of alumni to the school-community. It is pertinent to note that these goals are accomplished through many varied, ongoing activities and programmes (Wikipedia).

One of the main objectives of alumni association is to support a network of former graduates or old students who will in turn, help to raise the profile of the alma-mata. Just like other organisations within the university and other tertiary educational system, the alumni associations aim to bring together like-minded individuals to actualise common goals for the overall development of their educational institutions. They meet to provide a forum to

form new friendships and business relationships with people of similar vision and background. The role of alumni association is enormous and indispensable in any educational institution as Alumni projects in some schools have helped in no small measure towards facilitating effective teaching and learning process in Nigerian educational institutions.

Concept of School-Community Relationship

School-community relationship is essential in the area of maintaining transparency and accountability in the education system. It is imperative to note that achieving the ultimate objectives of education requires a good relationship between parents and other members of the school-community on the one hand and the administrators and managers of schools on the other (Asaju, 2023). School-community relationship can therefore be defined as a symbiotic relationship between the school and the community that is mutually beneficial.

According to Asodike (2008), school-community relationship in the management of education in Nigeria is not new; it dates back to the colonial era when the educational administrators used local communities to provide and further western education. For example, the parents provided monetary and moral support, local communities provided the land with labour for educational development and guards for safety.

School-community relationship is described by Ojedele (2003) as the ways by which the school relates to the immediate and large communities in which the school is. He further pointed out that through the school-community relationship, the school head learns about the growth, advancement, barriers, purpose and needs of the school; where the community could contribute and support. This is why Ekejimba (2021) opined that school-community relationship helps to bridge the gap between towns and gowns. The importance of having school-community relationship is to enhance goals achievement of the school system because the school is established primarily for the immediate need of the community. Hence, Bell (2006) opined that an open relationship between the school and its community could give the community high opportunities to utilise resources optimally to improve the school.

However, Obi (2004) observed that school-community relationship can also occur between the school and Parent-Teacher-Association (PTA), old students association (alumni), school committees, the school board of governors and school proprietors associations, among others.

The relationship will improve their understanding of the challenges faced by the school, thus encouraging them to offer assistance and support that may enhance the school effectiveness and efficiency for the overall development of educational system.

School-community relationship is today gaining more momentum than ever before. School administrators are paying more attention to the role of communities in managing schools. According to Fiore (2006), when families, schools and community institutions (e.g. local businesses, community colleges, and health agencies) collectively agree upon their goals and collectively decide on how to achieve them, everyone benefits. This symbolises the give and take syndrome that people societal development.

The Alumni Association and School-Community Nexus

It is pertinent to note that the cord of inter connectivity between alumni association and school-community cannot be broken. The alumni members are the outputs of the educational institutions who now become inputs for community development as a result of the training and adequate knowledge which have been imparted to them while they were in school. The products now take both social, economic, political, technological and scientifical drive of the society. They now become responsible members of various families and organisations.

Working together, schools, facilities and communities can adequately prepare for a more promising future. School-community relationship involves providing human resources like employment of teachers and material resources, safety and maintenance of infrastructural facilities in their local school, prompts repair and renovation of blown-off school roofs; providing relevant human and materials resources, provision of infrastructural

and institutional materials in schools to support the efforts of the government; assistance in the procurement of books for school libraries to improve reading and writing skills of the students; provision of school uniforms and books to wards and children, raising funds to help the schools in the areas of needs, encourage enrolment and retention of students in schools. Some of these areas shall be highlighted and discussed to x-ray the link between the alumni and school-community in promoting the ideas which are required of a good educational system.

It is pertinent to note that some alumni association are becoming very string and influential that they seem to have taken firm control of their educational institutions in order to maintain quality of education and school discipline. Notably, some alumni are principals of the schools where they graduated from. It is not by accident but internal arrangement with the relevant government agencies. For example, some secondary schools in Ekiti State are administered by alumni members. These include Christ School, Ado-Ekiti, St. Louis Grammar School, Ikere-Ekiti, Annunciation School, Ikere - Ekiti among others.

The roles of alumni association are complementing the effort of the school-community towards ensuring qualitative education and school discipline. There is no doubt to remark the laudable projects which have been embarked upon and successfully commissioned by various alumni associations in different educational institutions at both secondary and tertiary levels of Nigeria educational system. Hence, there will be need to now highlight the contributions of alumni association in helping the school-community to provide qualitative education to the citizenry.

a. Provision of school infrastructural facilities

Having good and adequate number of school infrastructural facilities will definitely facilitate effective classroom instructional delivery. The role of alumni association and members of the school community in providing school infrastructural facilities in the area of school building are well appreciated. These include construction of classrooms, administrative offices, libraries, laboratories, gymnasiums, cafeterias, school halls and other notable structures within the school environment. The design and maintenance of these buildings are quite essential for a conducive and a productive learning environment. There is no exaggeration of the claim that some alumni members play a multiple role and contributions in providing some of these facilities. For example, it is very possible for an individual to be an alumnus, a parent and a philanthropist. Hence, such a person could contribute simultaneously through alumni association, Parents-Teacher Association (PTA) and also being a self-donor. In this situation, there is a synergy of collaboration of efforts in getting some project works completed through a diversified means of raising fund to put in place some of these school infrastructures. The buildings donated by alumni association or PTA are usually labelled to show case their landmark contribution to education development.

b. Maintenance of school infrastructural facilities

The level of infrastructural facilities decay in many of our public schools is quite worrisome. Many of the school buildings owned by the government especially classrooms, libraries, laboratories have become dilapidated. The government alone can no longer provide fund for the maintenance of these facilities. However, school facilities maintenance is concerned about more than just resource management. It is about providing clean and safe environments for effective teaching and learning process. The place of the alumni association and school community members in the maintenance of available school facilities in their various schools is very instructive. The physical assets in education system should be placed on preventive, planned, responsive and emergency in terms of maintenance.

c. Provision of instructional materials /resources

Instructional material which could also be referred to as teaching/learning materials are very collection of materials including animate and inanimate objectives and human and non-human resources that a teacher may use in teaching and learning situations in order to achieve the desired learning objectives (Wikipedia). It is pertinent to note that some

instructional materials such as computer sets, textbook, laboratory equipment/apparatus are being donated by some alumni associations, philanthropists, PTA, Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) to schools from primary to university levels in order to facilitate effective teaching and learning process and consequently an improved level of students' academic performance. This is one of the collaborative efforts that are yielding positive results in revamping the education sector through public-private partnership. There are situations where the services of some teachers are hired and paid for by the PTA to teach some subjects in schools where there is dearth of teaching personnel.

d. Awards of scholarship/prizes

A scholarship if a form of financial aid awarded to students for further education. Generally, scholarships are awarded based on a set of criteria such as academic merit, diversity and inclusion, athletic skill, and financial need especially to poor indigent students. If a student should get a scholarship to a school or university, the student's studies are paid for by the school or university, government or by some other organisations inclusive of alumni association. This is an avenue through which alumni association could give back to the society in order to further societal development. Similarly, prizes could also be instituted and sponsored by alumni association, PTA, philanthropists, corporate organisations and NGOs to promote academic excellence. This is also another method of rewarding hard work and diligence in the part of the student and consequently motivate them for improved academic performance. Some of these prices are very common in secondary schools, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Universities which are usually presented to the best students in various disciplines during the convocation ceremonies. This is a good network of academic cordial relationship between alumni association and school-community members.

e. Interconnectivity/Human capital development

The level of interconnectivity of members of alumni association becomes stronger when they come together to organise social events. The meetings always provide a forum to form new friendships, strengthen old friendships and develop business relationships with people of similar vision and background. The role of alumni associations is indispensable in promoting human capital development as some members have benefited immensely through the support and magnanimity of other members who are highly placed in the society. Some alumni members are heads of institutions, captains of industries, heads of government agencies, political leaders, spiritual leaders to mention but a few. Many of their members who would have been "fetchers of waters and lowers of word" have been repositioned with better jobs that could help them feed their families. In this wise, some members of the society have been able to transform from abject poverty to descent means of livelihood through the spirit of brotherhood and fraternity. The alumni association in some circumstances has filled the gap in the process of enhancing and improving the skills, knowledge, abilities and overall potentials of some of their members within the society. This is evident in many of the social programmes such as investing in people through nutrition, health care, quality education, gainful employment opportunities, jobs and skills which have helped to develop human capital, and this is key to reducing extreme poverty and creating a more inclusive society.

Implications for Educational Development

The alumni association and school-community relationship have great and positive implications for educational development in Nigeria.

The budgetary allocation to education coupled with the funding of education in Nigeria is grossly inadequate at present and there is no likelihood of remarkable improvement by the government in the nearest future due to the dwindling allocation of funds to education. The highest budgetary allocation to education in the last ten years was 10.7% in 2016 (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2020). This falls short of the 26% of national budgetary allocation to education as suggested by United Nations Scientific and Cultural Originations (UNESCO). Therefore, for effective education service delivery in Nigerian educational institutions, there is urgent need for school administrators to partner with

host communities of schools of which alumni associations prominently feature to source the needed human, materials and financial resources for the overall growth and development of education. The provision and availability of these resources will ensure a conducive environment for teaching and learning which will lead to the improvement of the academic performance of students. To buttress this assertion, Asaju (2003) in her study observed a significant positive relationship between school-community relationship and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Edo State, Nigeria. This is quite instructive of the synergy between alumni and school-community members to collaborate for students' academic performance.

The role of alumni associations and school-community members in ensuring adequate provision of school infrastructural facilities, maintenance of school facilities and adequate provision of instructional materials will surely help to restore the lost glory of the education sector in Nigeria. This unique effort will help to maintain the high quality and standards in educational institutions and complement the efforts of government in providing quality education to the citizenry.

In the area of maintaining school discipline, the alumni associations and school-community members need to collaborate in order to restore the ethical values into the school system and by extension reduce the level of moral decadence and anti-social behaviours which are noticeable in Nigerian society today. Many of the students need to learn from old students in order to achieve success in life. This is where mentoring and role modelling become very instructive as many of our youths are now conscious of making quick wealth by all possible means. Hence, the need for career talks and seminars to be organised and anchored by alumni members and some notable individuals in the society. In the light of this, many of the problems facing Nigeria today from economic to social security could be effectively tackled through effective monitoring and guidance.

Conclusion

The various challenges which have bedevilled the education sector is a clear signal that many things have fallen apart in Nigerian educational system. This is evident in the inadequate budgetary allocation to education sector, inadequate funding, inadequate school infrastructural facilities and dearth of instructional materials in many educational institutions. Therefore, education cannot be solely funded by the government. It requires collaborative efforts of relevant stakeholders in education industry. It becomes highly imperative that alumni associations and other school-community members such as parents, private sector, religious bodies, philanthropists, teachers and students should form a synergy with the government at all levels to revamp the education sector in order to maintain high quality and standards of education at all levels of Nigerian educational system in line with achieving global educational standards and sustainable development goals.

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