

Schooling and Human Capital Development in Agro-Based Rural Economy in Southern Benue, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the concepts and consequences of schooling, human capital development and their implications for economic development in the agro-based rural communities of Southern Benue, Nigeria. It examines and analyses the effects of schooling on human capital development in the first instances and the resources for sustaining economic production in the agro-based rural community economy that relies heavily on human work force or input rather than equipments in the second place. These would require the examination of: The role of schooling in economic development in the rural community especially in growth and development of quality of life. The effects of investing human capital to schooling on the rural community and on the production of goods and scarce commodity and the implications of schooling and human capital development for the economic and social development of the rural areas in Southern Benue. Further, it makes suggestions for a way forward and recommends that schooling should bring about economic and social change that would enhance productivity and large scale production of scarce commodities in the rural communities. A study like this would give useful perspectives into problems of schooling and human capital development which requires to be addressed to solve the economic and social problems prevalent in the rural communities in Southern Benue in particular, and Nigeria in general.

Introduction

In the rural communities of Southern Benue, many communities put faith in schooling their young ones because of the assumption that schooling would promote economic growth of the individual and their society. In this paper positive social and economic change is seen to be associated with production of qualitative citizenry through schooling that would benefit the rural communities. The Southern part of Benue state, Nigeria, as referred to in this paper, is the land area occupied by the Idoma-speaking people. The majority of Idoma speaking people in Nigeria are found in Benue State where they refer to themselves as “Idoma proper”. With a population of about Nine hundred and forty one thousand, six hundred and twenty-one (941,621) people (National Population Commission, NPC, 2006), they inhabit Nine (9) Local Government Areas with a Senatorial District. The Local Government Areas are Ado, Agatu, Apa, Ogbadigbo, Ohimini, Obi, Oju, Okpokwu and Otukpo respectively (Amali 2000).

The Idoma people are predominantly farmers who, with their Tiv brothers (to the North of Benue State), pride themselves with the acronym “The Food Basket of the Nation”. Thus, Agriculture and other economic activities still largely depend on what can be produced from the environment. The Idoma farmers produce crops such as; yams, Guinea corn, Maize, Millet, Cotton, Pepper, Soya Beans, Rice, Ginger, Beneseed and other crops during the raining season. During the dry season they harvest, clear the bush in preparation for the next season (Amali, 2000). Farming is thus, a full life economic activity of the people.

Western Education and Schooling in Southern Benue started in 1924 with the creation of a mission station at Igumale in the present Ado Local Government Area of Benue State. Since then, the demand for schooling continued to increase (Amali, 2000; O’kwu 1976). Recent statistics of population of educational enrolment in Southern Benue is as shown below:

Table 1: Population of Educational Enrolment of Southern Benue as at August 2009

| SOUTHERN BENUE | | | | | | | |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Both Sexes | SCHOOLING STATUS | | | | | | |
| Age Groups | Total | Never Attended | Attended in the past | Attending Pry. | Attending JSS | Attending SSS | Attending Tertiary |
| 6-9 | 146096 | 48131 | 654 | 96310 | 1001 | | |
| 10-14 | 145431 | 24004 | 4795 | 83382 | 28389 | 4861 | |
| 15-19 | 129645 | 21098 | 15430 | 8763 | 30241 | 42033 | 12079 |
| 20-24 | 109092 | 26111 | 31054 | | | 24306 | 27622 |
| 25-29 | 95038 | 29110 | 34104 | | | 5281 | 26544 |
| 30-34 | 73602 | 27696 | 28123 | | | | 17782 |
| 35-39 | 54865 | 21123 | 32097 | | | | 1645 |
| 40-44 | 48960 | 23293 | 24886 | | | | 782 |
| 45-49 | 33777 | 15726 | 17636 | | | | 415 |
| 50-54 | 31928 | 18705 | 12897 | | | | 326 |
| 55-59 | 14333 | 8020 | 6137 | | | | 176 |
| 60-64 | 20204 | 14377 | 5739 | | | | 88 |
| 65-69 | 8528 | 6016 | 2511 | | | | |
| 70-74 | 10822 | 8333 | 2489 | | | | |
| 75-79 | 5101 | 3853 | 1248 | | | | |
| 80-84 | 6966 | 5618 | 1348 | | | | |
| 85 + | 7233 | 5746 | 1487 | | | | |
| Total | 941621 | 306961 | 222635 | 188455 | 59631 | 76481 | 87458 |

Source: Benue State Ministry of Education Headquarter, Markudi (2009)/National Population Census 2006

The table above shows that the total population of Southern Benue stood at 941,621 people. Out of this figure, 306,961 never attended school while 222,635 of the population attended school before, but not now. 188,455 pupils were in Primary Schools while 59,631 youths were in Junior Secondary Schools and 76,481 youths were in Senior Secondary Schools. The tertiary institution had a population of 87,458 making a total of 412,025 of the population that are in schools across Southern Benue. These represent 43.76% of Idoma population who were in school.

In this respect, schooling would have consciously or unconsciously short-charged the active human labour force which hitherto enhanced the economic production of the rural communities in Southern Benue. This is against the backdrop that an educated population is a productive population as opined by Sakomata and Powers (1995), Woodhall, 1997 and Babalola, (2005).

Education and schooling are two side of a coin termed as an economic good. The economist regards it as both consumer and capital good because it offers utility to a consumer and also serves as an input into the production of other goods and services (Ayara, 2002, Garba, 2002). Thus, schooling as used in this study is an organized spaces proposed for teaching and learning. An institution or centralized location designed for the teaching of students or pupils under the supervision of teachers. In the Nigeria context, it is a formal system of education which is compulsory for all children of ages 6-15 years under the Universal Basic Education Scheme (U.B.E., 2004).

This makes it a process where students or pupils progress through a series of schooling, some of which are Government or privately owned. Both the Christian and Islamic religious organizations have been the forerunners in the development of school systems in Nigeria. Some scholars asserted that schooling require a systematic way of teaching which usually involve the use of curriculum, syllabus, and scheme of work or lesson plan (Bentley, 2006, Harris, 2006). In addition, they observed that typical schools have many areas such as cafeteria, play ground, auditorium, library, laboratories and so on (Rehman, 2008). Schooling has two purposes which Rehman (2008), identified as practical and philosophical. The practical purpose of schooling is its usefulness to the students or pupils to learn that which can make them contributory citizens, workers, scholars and people in an increasing complex society.

These, he said, are derived through the contents taught in school. While in the philosophical context, schooling is designed to make intelligent choices and help them to make informal decisions. In Nigeria, schooling has become a foundation of hope for many parents who sent their children to school because of the career opportunities it offers to its recipients. Human capital on the other hand represents the investment society makes in its members to enhance their economic productivity (Robert, 1991). In most communities, it is designed to bring about positive economic and social change which would enhance productivity and large scale production of goods and scarce commodities.

Babalola (2005), argued that the rationale behind schooling and human capital development is the need for people to be encouraged to develop entirely new ideas, products, process and method through creative approaches, so as to introduce new process, production and social services. Fagerlind and Saha (1997) applied human capital theory to justify large public expenditure on education across the globe, more so that it is consistent with the democratic principles of the Western world. Thus, the maxim ‘‘educate part of the community and the whole of it benefits’’ has become the central notion to the reason why most communities send their wards to school. Views of some classical economist such as Van-Dan-Berge (2001) and Smith (1976), showed that there is positive worldwide externality that the society would gain from a more educated labour force and populace. Paradoxically, Ayara (2002) reported that education or schooling has not had the expected positive impact on economic growth of the rural communities in Nigeria. It is with these incompatible views as expressed by scholars and researchers that this study would seek to examine schooling and human capital development in the agro-based rural communities of Southern Benue, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- a. What are the effects of schooling and human capital development in an agro-based rural economy of Southern Benue, Nigeria?
- b. In what ways can schooling and human capital development improve the economic and social life in the agro-based rural communities of Southern Benue?
- c. What are the possible recommendations towards enhancing productivity and large scarce production of goods and scarce commodities in the rural communities?

Methodology

A cross sectional survey approach was used for this study. Stratified sampling technique was adopted to select different districts from the nine (9) Idoma speaking Local Government Areas of Southern Benue which comprised, Ado, Agatu, Apa, Obi, Oju, Ogbadibo, Okpokwu, Ohimini and Otukpo respectively. This was based on the researcher’s judgment and using a deliberate effort to obtain representative samples by including presumably typical areas or groups in the sampling as substantiated by Kerlinger (1973) and Daramola (1995). Simple random sampling technique was then applied to select subjects that responded to the items in the questionnaire. These were mainly farmers. Thus, a total number of 1350 respondents were drawn from the Nine (9) Local Government Areas of Southern Benue (i.e. 150, each from a local government). It also involved males and females, but more males were involved because males have more expediency to sending their wards to school than the females. The questionnaire items were administered on the basis of face to face interaction with the respondents. The illiterate respondents were guided to indicate their responses.

The instrument used for the study was examined by some experts in the Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education, University of Ilorin. Corrections on their suggestions on the content and construct validity of the instrument were effected before it was administered. These were questionnaire items subjected to psychometric scale using ‘Accepted and Rejected’ as basis for ranking the conceptions of the respondents. Using the overall responses under each item in the questionnaire, the findings were analysed using percentage, and mean of normal distribution of different shades of conceptions of the respondents. The data were then analyzed and presented as shown below.

Results and Discussion

The data analysis, interpretation and discussion were to address the first two pertinent Research Questions raised for this study. The respondents were directed to tick ‘accepted or rejected’ to each of the questionnaire items. The data collated was then analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics of percentage and mean. They were reported using tables and figures as presented below:

Table 2: Farmers' conceptions on the effects of schooling and human capital development on the economic and social life of the agro-based rural communities of Southern Benue

| S/N | Questionnaire Item | Accepted | % | Rejected | % | Total |
|-----|--|----------|-------|----------|-------|-------|
| 1 | Do you accept that schooling and human capital development disorientate the work force of the agro-based rural communities of Southern Benue? | 980 | 72.6 | 370 | 27.4 | 1350 |
| 2 | Do you accept that schooling and human capital development has negatively affect mass production of enough food in the agro-based rural communities of Southern Benue? | 850 | 62.96 | 500 | 37.04 | 1350 |
| 3 | Do you accept that schooling and human capital development has negatively affected the lives of peasant farmers who sent their children to school? | 650 | 48.1 | 700 | 51.9 | 1350 |
| 4 | Do you accept that there is a general poverty level of rural communities of Southern Benue due to the effect of schooling and human capital development? | 906 | 67.1 | 444 | 32.9 | 1350 |
| 5 | Do you accept that schooling and human capital development has brought about rural-urban drift of youths in Southern Benue? | 819 | 60.7 | 531 | 39.3 | 1350 |
| 6 | Do you accept that schooling and human capital development depopulates and under-develops the rural communities of Southern Benue? | 1011 | 74.9 | 339 | 25.1 | 1350 |
| 7 | Do you accept that schooling and human capital development destroy the proficiency of the youths in traditional practical skills in rural communities of Southern Benue? | 899 | 66.6 | 451 | 33.4 | 1350 |

Based on the responses obtained and analysed, it is observed that schooling and human capital development in the agro-based rural economy of Southern Benue has adversely affected the fabric of their means of production and economic life. Attestations show the following negative responses towards its effects on their means of production and economic life. This is shown in the table 2(Questionnaire items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6&7) above. In summary, these include:

- ✓ Disorientation of the work force in the rural communities in Southern Benue.
- ✓ Creation of food scarcity due loss of labour force to schooling in Southern Benue.
- ✓ Declining agricultural production in the rural communities in Southern Benue which has a whole range implication for the nation.
- ✓ Creation of economic liability for peasant parents in Southern Benue since schooling is not a free enterprise.
- ✓ Making life in the rural communities in Southern Benue to become more difficult and expensive.
- ✓ Causes negative attitude of rural youths towards manual work and farming.

Table 3: Farmers' conceptions on the way schooling, human capital development enhances productivity and production of goods and scarce commodities in Southern Benue

| S/N | Questionnaire item | Accepted | % | Rejected | % | Total |
|-----|--|----------|------|----------|------|-------|
| 1. | Do you accept that schooling and human capital development enhance earning for individual in the rural communities of Southern Benue? | 971 | 71.9 | 379 | 28.1 | 1350 |
| 2. | Do you accept that schooling and human capital development increase choices of employment for rural youth in Southern Benue? | 720 | 53.3 | 630 | 46.6 | 1350 |
| 3. | Do you accept that schooling and human capital development creates opportunities for job mobility for the rural youth? | 780 | 57.7 | 570 | 42.2 | 1350 |
| 4. | Do you accept that schooling and human capital development enhance agricultural production in the rural communities? | 1209 | 89.5 | 141 | 10.4 | 1350 |
| 5. | Do you accept that schooling and human capital development make life in the rural communities more comfortable? | 481 | 35.6 | 869 | 64.4 | 1350 |
| 6. | Do you accept that schooling and human capital development improve the attitude of the rural youth positively towards manual work and farming? | 501 | 37.1 | 849 | 62.8 | 1350 |

The farmers conceptions used to examine the second research questions are based on the positive theoretical formulation of schooling as consumer and capital good as postulated by Ayara (2002). Thus, the conceptions were used to determine how schooling and human capital development:

- ✓ Enhances earning for individual in the rural communities of the Southern Benue.
- ✓ Increases choices of employment among rural youths.
- ✓ Creates opportunities for job mobility.
- ✓ Enhances agricultural opportunities in the rural communities of Southern Benue.
- ✓ Improves productivity and production of food and other scarce commodities in the rural communities of Southern Benue.

The findings in the study recreated a paradox of schooling and human capital development in spite of the positive theoretical formulation that schooling would stimulate growth and development as opined by Ayara (2002). Instead, schooling and human capital development have created an economic paradox in the growth and development of the rural economy in Southern Benue by making life difficult due to loss of labour that facilitates agro-based rural economy.

Thus, schooling and human capital development affected their indigenous economic growth and development at the community level. This has created inequalities in income distribution at the individual level where those who went to school enjoyed better life. Therefore, to view schooling and human capital development as a panacea for the attainment of development objective is perhaps risky for the people of southern Benue. This is because there are few available jobs for those who went to school from the rural communities after completing their studies. In this regard, Ayara (2002) asserted that the learning efforts have not led to commensurate economic gains. Added to this, is the declining quality of education motivated by politically lopsided system of education. These should be addressed at the government policy level.

Implications and Recommendations

Schooling and human capital development should not be the only panacea for the attainment of development because, education as Barbara (2008) opined, cannot on its own achieve the desired societal goals without structural reforms and attitudinal change. The reform should be government guided and directed. This would require curriculum reforms that would also address the problems of the rural communities, particularly in safeguarding their means and methods of economic production.

This would require the re-investment of those who went to school by creating a system that would plough them back to their communities for better socio-cultural and economic development of their localities. The creation of job opportunities, establishment of social amenities such as good roads, hospitals, schools, electricity supply, portable drinking water, other infrastructural development and investment on agro-based industries in the rural areas would be essential in this respect.

The impartation of values, ideas, right attitudes and aspiration for communal interest is required in our school curriculum. This would have direct consequences on the practical developmental process of the children we sent to school in their communities.

We should try to build our new concept of schooling by ascertaining the facts about education we wish to use as our foundation for overall development of our people. Like Babara (2008) asserted, after independence and fifty (50) years of development in Nigeria, we have not yet get a clear idea of the ingredient for success in schooling our children and to give them the job to do. Also we should ask ourselves about the factors that support schooling and human capital development. This is because in the years ahead, our educational provision should be the one that would help our future students to meet the changing and challenging agenda of schooling especially with respect to growth and development of our rural communities.

Thus, it is now important that we should focus on the advancement that technology offers which has increased our access to information to improve education given to our children. Also, there should be changes in our society's attitude towards learning and the learners. Our schools should also shift from its heavy reliance on intelligence quotient to determine individual achievement and development.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There is ambivalence in schooling and human capital development in the agro-based rural economy of Southern Benue, Nigeria. The paradox is that, in spite of its positive theoretical formulations that schooling, human capital development would stimulate growth and development of the rural communities, there still exist under employment, loss of workforce, low capacity for effective production of goods and scarce resource and a general disorientation of attitude from their basic means of life sustenance, which is agriculture. These have created economic and social problems and not development in the agro-based rural community of Southern Benue as examined in this study.

There should be various policy formulations to responsive and functional education system that would help address the socio-economic needs of the rural society. As examined in this study, it is not a noble achievement that negligible contribution is made to the economic growth of the rural communities which are not commensurate with the demand of human capital put into schooling by the rural communities. Therefore, there should be the need for Government's strong commitment to address the paradox created by schooling the human input used for sustaining productivity in the agro-based rural communities of Southern Benue, Nigeria.

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