

QUALITY EDUCATION: STRONGHOLD OF FREEDOM

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“No one outside ourselves can rule us inwardly. When we know this, we become free.”

- Buddha

The common question asked when faced with people who are unlucky enough to have proper education is ‘What is education?’. According to Craft (1984), the English word education comes from two separate Latin origins: “*educare*” which means “to train or to mold” and “*educere*” which means “to lead forth”. Both meanings may have different meanings and interpretations but they both connect to the word “education”. But what does education mean? Oxford Dictionary defines education as the process of teaching, training, and learning, especially in schools or colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills. A basic need in which everyone has the right to claim and experience.

Today, I seek to emphasize a fundamental truth that has been at the heart of human progress for centuries, that is, quality education is the stronghold of freedom. It is not merely a pathway to personal growth and success; it is the very essence of liberty and the cornerstone of a just and equitable society.

Throughout history, great leaders and thinkers have recognized the profound connection between education and freedom. The father of modern education, Horace Mann, once said, "Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance wheel of the social machinery." His words resonate with timeless wisdom, reminding us that education empowers individuals to rise above the limitations of circumstance and to embrace their full potential. One of Buddha’s quotes also taught us that “No one outside ourselves can rule us inwardly. When we know this, we become free.” It should be rooted in every individual the core idea that only us has the sole authority to control our attitudes, emotions, and behaviors. It gives us the freedom to take responsibility for every action we take in every circumstance and not to attribute successes and failures to others. This is made possible because of the quality of education one has. Knowledge gives power, thus we become free.

Quality education is the key to breaking the chains of oppression and inequality. It provides marginalized communities with the means to escape cycles of poverty, discrimination, and injustice. It elevates individuals to participate in the economic and social fabric of their nation, ensuring that opportunities are not determined by the circumstances of one's birth but by their efforts and talents. This simply shows that any person, may they be unprivileged in life, but has the passion and dedication to pursue education has a bright future that awaits them. Limitless opportunities to earn a living that would allow them to break the chain of poverty.

Thus, education is a necessity for every individual, for a nation to further develop and rise. According to Ibe (2019), the Nigerian education curriculum is being criticized for being out of date and do not matching the country's demands in terms of job opportunities. This caused fresh graduates to have insufficient skills and capabilities needed by employers, which led to a higher unemployment rate for Nigerian graduates. The World Bank (2017) observed that the quality of basic education based on student learning outcomes needs immediate assistance in Nigeria. As stated by UNESCO (2021), one of the challenges that the education of Nigeria is facing is insufficient funding from the government, receiving only less than 10% of the allocated 26% annual budget for education which leads to limited resources and a lack of facilities to support the education system.

This scenario makes us contemplate the necessity to develop a curriculum that matches the industry's needs and for academic institutions to ensure that the lessons taught can truly develop the skills and competencies of the students making them significant contributors to the economic development of their lives, their communities, and the society. Academic trainings have to be intensified emphasizing competencies in research but never forgetting the need to inculcate the values for compassion towards others. In this sense, education is keen on developing a wholistic individual who is not only intellectually capable but also someone who has a heart.

But, dear friends, we cannot champion the cause of quality education and freedom without acknowledging the inequities that persist within our education systems. Disparities in access to quality education remain, as do systemic biases that disproportionately affect certain communities. As we strive for a society where education truly upholds freedom, we must be resolute in dismantling these barriers and ensuring that education is a right, not a privilege.

Access to education must not be limited to free tuition only but rather it should offer other benefits that shall cover other educational expenses. It is a fact that majority of our population belong to the lower echelons, making it difficult for them to sustain education, much more for higher education. Societal support must be in place to provide scholar opportunities as well as for higher education institutions to offer financial assistance to deserving students. Providing such support could then help provide education opportunities for all.

Along with this, however, is the establishment of a stringent policy that ensures the identification of deserving beneficiaries and the sustainability of such programs. This could also be best if graduates are prioritized when it come to job opportunities thus enabling the underserved members of our society to truly break the chain and escape the cycle of poverty. This shall in turn correct the high-income disparity that exists between economic status.

To conclude, let us remember that education is not merely about preparing students for jobs and careers; it is about nurturing active, informed, and engaged citizens who can safeguard and enhance our cherished freedoms. It is about empowering individuals to break free from the chains of ignorance, prejudice, and inequality. In the words of Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Indeed, with quality education, we strengthen the very foundation of our freedom. It is the stronghold of freedom and the cornerstone upon which societies flourish and individuals thrive.

For when we know, we become free!