

REVITALIZING FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN AS A PRECURSOR TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

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Abstract

This paper examined how functional education can become a precursor to economic development in Nigerian. Nigerian economy is currently in an amorphous state and her youths, which constitute over 60% of a population of over two hundred million, are ill-equipped educationally to change the situation. Functional education is the only potential weapon that can reverse the trend. This paper pings its discussion on the concept of functional education, modalities for achieving functional education, challenges facing functional education in Nigeria, functional education and economic development, and effects of poor education on youth unemployment in Nigeria. Conclusion was drawn based on the discussions and useful suggestion made, which include among others that basic infrastructure should be provided in institutions to facilitate learning. Governments at all levels should increase the budgetary allocation to education to make schools functional. Educational curriculum should be modified to emphasis vocational, practical and skills acquisition programmes. Education should also emphasize quality and not quantity to equip youths with skills needed for self-sustenance.

Keywords: Education, functional education, economic development, unemployment status

Introduction

Education is the bedrock for every segment of national development and an instrument designed for national advancement, particularly when it is relevant to the needs and aspirations of the nation (FGN, 2004). Education is the catalyst that stimulates the development of every sector of the state, including our culture, polity, laws, and a cornerstone for economic and human transformation. Education is the best legacy that committed parents can bestow on their kids as it makes valuable contributions to lives, inculcate morality and cultural values, and expand our horizon of consciousness. For education to achieve its objectives, it has to be functional.

Functional education is aimed at inculcating relevant cognitive, psychomotor and affective knowledge and skills to learners as instrument for personal and national growth. It enables students to imbibe good character, attitudes, develop mental capacity and acquire physical skills that will enable them to contribute meaningfully to the society. Functional education is the key index for any meaningful economic development. Efanya (2015) averred that the future of Nigerian greatness lies in the effectiveness of our schools and the quality of our education.

For more than 60 years of independence, our educational system has not impacted major significant growth in economic, social, political sectors. It has not addressed the changing needs of security, self-determination and aspirations of the contemporary industrial society. The curriculum remains at variant with the societal needs, obsolete teaching methods, inadequate teaching materials and ill-equipped libraries and laboratories. Teachers, who are supposed to be the epicenter of our educational system is clustered with unqualified personnel who are poorly motivated. Adopting

functional education can help to correct the anomalies bedeviling the current curriculum and transform the national economy.

It is an illusion to think that meaningful developmental stride can be attained without access to functional education. The economy distress and fragile security in Nigeria are not least expected in a country that pays lip service to her education, where paper qualifications are honored and extremely valued, and where certificates are bought without fear of litigation. For decades, our education sector has been neglected, the budgetary allocation to it has been far below the UNESCO (2005) recommended standard of 26% of the annual budget, and grants to research development fell below the expected 0.42 percent GDP (Ekaette, Owan, & Agbo, 2019:56). Instead of doing the needful, successive governments were occupied with formulation of policies and programme that only address the face values of the problems. No wonder our educational system has been in a state of quagmires and of course pitiable since independence.

The objectives of functional education are to help facilitate trained manpower in careers such as applied science, technology, and business particularly at advance craft and technical levels. Moreover, it encourages people to opt for careers in technology, science, vocation, agriculture, commerce, industry, and economy (Amede, 2018). It impacts necessary skills to individual to be self-reliance economically, enables graduates secure employment or set up their own businesses and foster rapid national development through production of sufficient trained man power in technology and science (Amede, 2018).

Investment in education is as significant as the plan for national development for a nation in distress. Functional education has the capability to enhance human capital resources, fosters economic growth and raises the standards of living. For our education to achieve its desired objectives, government should address the impediments to functional education at every level, which will eventually become the panacea to our declining economy. It is disheartening to note that just one Nigerian university made up the global top one thousand out of the 170 universities (Sasu, 2022). Nigeria has 35 scientist and engineers per million inhabitants compared with 168 for Brazil, 2,457 for Europe and 4,100 for USA (Jegede, 2016). These negative trends raised the inquisitiveness of the author of this paper to advocate for functional education in Nigeria.

Nigeria's education system is bedeviled with myriad of challenges. Consecutive administrations have neglected the needs of functional school curriculum regardless of inadequacies (Odigwe & Owen, 2019). The results afterward are not far-fetched. Nigerian youths have been in a state of despair and hopelessness because of inadequate skills, absence of welfare schemes and support, and lack of credible empowerment programme. Nigerian economy has witness setbacks because of unemployment, militancy, insurgency, kidnappings, and political tugs for decade. We witness on a daily basis how young girls and boys are being used as terrorists.

No country can achieve sustainable economic development without substantial investment in human capital. This vacuum in our education system has been capitalized on by fraudsters, insurgents, terrorists and kidnappers. In the face of these realities, functional education needs to be exploited to salvage the situation and empower youths to be self-determined. It is unfortunate that we are industrially backward as a nation and the story turned inexplicable as we import tooth-pick, comb, needle and threads from the Asian countries that used to be far behind our in National development index. What ludicrousness!

Studies have shown that functional education can affect attitudes and intentions (Onongba, 2015), students awareness and perception (Kurako, 2005) and provide youths with more set of skills (Gatewood, Shaver, Power and Gartner, 2020)). It is against this basis that this paper examined how functional education can become a precursor to economic development in Nigerian.

Statement of the problem

Functional education is machinery for political, social and economic transformation for a country in economic distress, a catalyst for change and a precursor for youth empowerment. When the current educational system is retooled towards functional education, the buck will be at its disposal to revitalize our moribund industries, invigorate our agriculture, rein our country tourism and position the economy to be investor friendly. An education system that cannot serve the needs of the society, make the recipients fit into the society or empower them socially, politically and economically cannot enhance national development.

Many Nigerian universities exist only in names and have become a mess in terms of academic prowess. The current educational system in Nigeria is bedeviled with obsolete curriculum, insufficient qualified manpower, inadequate facilities, attitudinal problems, poor funding etc. Students admitted into technology related disciplines are thought merely in theories because of deficiency in functional laboratories needed for practical skills. These brought to the fore by the huge ratio of youths roaming the streets in search of elusive jobs without requisite skills. The challenges this paper examined include: To what extent can functional education help to reposition our educational system and empower our teeming youths to contribute towards economic development in Nigeria?

Concept of Functional Education

Functional education is a multi-dimensional concept. It is the kind of education that satisfies the yearnings of the government, the needs of the society and the desires of industries. Functional education can be viewed from different perspectives. It refers to as a system where skills are acquired and an avenue that stimulates the process of teaching and learning. The society regards education to be functional if the products can suit the job demands of industries and solve societal needs. The model of functional education ought to address the inadequacies of our curriculum, teachers, materials and fund to adapt to the modern trend.

Functional education is a holistic educational experience that is focused on the identification of situational problems, gathering of information to make decisions in a world of challenges and realities of life, enhancing beneficiaries to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes to showcase new concepts as a vehicle of globalizing, meaningful co-existence, sustainability and developments (Adewale, 2014). Functional education should be capable of producing citizens who can manufacture raw materials, machines, and tools needed for local and international markets, invent new designs, discover drugs capable of curing diseases and transform the nation from consumption to a manufacturing status (Udoh & Akpan, 2014).

Association of African University (2008) defined functional education as fitness for purpose, transformation from one state to the other with value-added, attainment of a flawless product, excellent, attainment of exceptional high standard. According to UNICEF (2018), functional education should include the following elements:

- Learners who are physically healthy and mentally ready to learn. These also include a loving and supportive family.
- A learning environment that is safe and well protected, with sufficient facilities and resources.
- Courses of study along with sufficient materials, teaches basic skills, health topics and other pertinent issues in the society.
- Qualified and professional teachers that utilizes effective teaching methods and assessment techniques that are focused on the child, facilitates learning, and is always open for further development.
- Observable results that include acquiring appropriate attitudes, relevant knowledge and useful skills that the child can use to effectively participate in society as well as global community.

United Nation Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (2015) noted that functional education is expected to encourage learners' creativity and emotional development, support the objectives of peace, citizenship and quality. Functional education determines the level of national stability, integration and economic development. It is indispensable for every nation, especially developing ones like Nigeria. It is a misapprehension to presume that consequential developmental stride can be accomplished devoid of functional education. Education should develop skills, not certificate and develop new subject areas like biochemistry, nanotechnology, bio-engineering etc. based on current needs. Functional education enables people to develop every aspect of their attributes and skills to attain their potentials, and contribute to the social and economic development of the society. It also provides the foundation for equity in the society.

Modalities for achieving Functional Education

The modalities for achieving functional education include the following:

(i). Curriculum review ---Educational curriculum is the tool that directs teachers to contents and activities for students. The current school curriculum needs to be reformed and revamped for good. It should be reversed to keep pace with global trend, research interest and social needs. Educational curriculum should equip people with a repertoire of relevant skills to be self-employed, not prospective job seekers of unavailable vacancies. Education should as well develop knowledge economy and apply research to the need of the society and industries.

(ii). Vocational and Technical Education --- Vocational and technical education is designed to develop occupational skills and to give individuals the knowledge to live, learn and work as productive citizens in a global society (Dike, 2009). Vocational and technical education nurture skills that are necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development and thus build a self-reliant nation (Obunadike, 2013). UNESCO (2010) noted that revitalizing this important sector is among the ways to improve economic opportunities, not just for the citizens but for national transformation.

(iii). Research Development--- Functional education shows commitment to people oriented research aimed towards harnessing and galvanizing all intellectual and scientific force of inquiry towards finding solution to problems Education should develop knowledge economy and apply research to the need of the society and industries. UNESCO (2005) recommended about 0.42 percent of their GDP on research and development. The targeted one percent benchmark has only been

attained by Tunisia (Jegade, 2016). Tertiary institutions should develop research versus industry linkage to have solid foundation for economic growth..

(iv). Training of Teachers --Teachers should be adequately qualified and professionally prepared, pedagogically skilled and well-motivated to be able to facilitate functional education. Teachers should be sufficiently trained to be able to impart knowledge. UNESCO (2015) stressed that Nigerian needs 1.4 million teachers by the year 2030 and 450,000 lecturers in the higher education sector. Government should equip teachers training institutions with learning and teaching tools and ensure that only qualified teachers are employed to teach in our schools. Furthermore, teachers' welfare should not be toiled with and should be enhanced to motivate them.

(v). Adequate Funding--Government should provide adequate fund to the education sector, which should be promptly released and prudently utilized. Federal Government education spending averaged nearly two billion US dollars annually between 2010 and 2014, which amounts to 7.8% of aggregate spending or 0.5% of real GDP, (Nwoko, 2015). This amount is grossly inadequate to sustain functional education, youth empowerment programmes and enhance economic revolution in the country. The government should strive to meet up with the UNESCO (2005) recommended standard of 26% of the annual budget to education and contribute 0.42 percent of their GDP on research development (Ekaette, Owan, &Agbo, 2019:56).

Challenges Facing Functional Education in Nigeria

Functional education in Nigeria is being hampered by poor funding, deficient curriculum, inconsistent implementation of policies and programme, poor attitudinal dispositions and lack of facilities (Amede, 2018).

Obsolete curriculum ---Obsolete curriculum constitutes a major weakness to our educational system, and an impediment to functional education in Nigeria. Buhari (2016) identified obsolete up to date curriculum as the major cause of low quality engineering products in Nigeria. Outdated equipment, lack of robust Wi-Fi network for teachers and students, books with outdated information and use of old-fashioned language constitute the current educational curriculum. Emphasis on paper qualification should be discouraged. Curriculum should be re-examined and reviewed to keep pace with global development and societal needs (Odigwe & Owen, 2019).

Poor funding ---Inadequate funding is the core problem hindering the attainment functional education in Nigeria. The nation cannot attain its peak of development without judicious allocation of finance to the education sector. Budgetary allocations to education by the federal, states and local government areas in Nigeria have consistently fallen below the UNESCO (2005) recommendations (Nwoko, 2015). The government should strive to meet up with the UNESCO (2005) recommended standard of 26% of the annual budget to education and 0.42 % of our GDP to research development (Ekaette, Owan, &Agbo, 2019:56).

In 2020, the education sector received a total of 686.82 billion, about 6.5 per cent of the total approved budget for the year. For 2021, the sector received N742.52billion allocation which is about 5.6 per cent of the total budget for the year, the lowest budget education had ever received, which was the lowest in 10 years ([Kafilat, 2022](#); Kuni, 2022). Out of N13.08 trillion budgeted for the year 2021, N742.5 billion was allotted to the entire education sector. That is just 5.6 percent, the lowest of allocation since 2011.

Recently, out of the 2022 budget totaling N [17.13 trillion](#) a sum of N923.79 billion was allocated to education sector. Though the figure increased, the budget is at 5.4 per cent of the total budget approved by the National Assembly. The percentage of the budget allocated to the sector in 2022 is lower than both 2020 and 2021 figures ([Kafilat, 2022](#)). It is not uncommon to see children learn under tree shades as classrooms, and under other poor learning environments.

Unfulfilled Promises

Experience has shown that when it concerns public education, the government always wants the people to believe that funding is not available because the government is broke! (*Erakbrumen, 2022*). In July 2021, the Nigerian government had promised, at the Global Education Summit held in London, to meet up with the global benchmark of 20 per cent and to also increase the 2022 education budget by 50 per cent and to 100 per cent in subsequent years. According to President Muhammadu Buhari “ we commit to progressively increase our annual domestic education expenditure by 50 percent over the next two years and up to 100 per cent by 2025 beyond the 20 per cent global benchmark ([Kafilat, 2022](#)).”

Few months after the promise was made, President Muhammadu Buhari presented the 2022 budget before the National Assembly on October 7, 2021. A total of N1.18 trillion, an estimate of 7.2% of the total budget was allocated to the education. The allocated amount shows that there has not been any increment in the amount dispensed to the sector ([Kafilat, 2022](#)).

Inadequate trained teachers ---The success of any educational programme depends on the quality and competence of available teachers who are the epicenter of the teaching and learning process. No educational system can grow above the level of the teachers in the system. The number of trained teachers in our schools is insufficient and many of them are devoid of necessary skills. They are not regularly exposed to professional development and training programme.

Poor implementation of policies ---Poor implementations of educational policies have halted the dream of functional education in Nigeria. Successive governments have established some programme with the prospect of revamping our educational for good, but contrary was the case due to poor implementations. The programme of Universal Basic Education, the policy of Entrepreneurship Education and 6-3-3-4 educational system are some educational policies and programme that have not achieved their objectives because of inadequate implementation.

Lack of facilities ---Absence of standard facilities in schools constitutes a major factor that derails functional education in Nigeria. According to Onuma (2016), schools at all levels lacked basic infrastructure and qualified teachers, suffer inadequate allocation, inadequate funding, abandoned projects, such as library and laboratories. Thus, it is unsurprising to see the so-called small countries like Kenya, Ghana, Cameroon, and even Equatorial Guinea, overtake Nigeria in terms of educational standing (Human Development Report, 2018). These days many Nigerians now run to such small countries for education, and those with academic certificates from such countries are respected so much in Nigeria. The same politicians who refuse to fund the education sector now send their children to foreign countries for education, due to the poor state of education in Nigeria. For our education to be functional, infrastructure should be of quality, aesthetically and spatially adequate, learners and teachers friendly and fully integrated pedagogically space (classrooms, laboratory, recreational facilities, etc.).

Functional education and Economic Development

Education contributes immensely to technological development both in terms of the acquisition and adaptation (Omotor, 2017). An educated man is more efficient with a high degree of productive capacity and nominal waste. The significance of education can as well be perceived in the sociopolitical stability of a nation. The attendant effect of this is overall economic growth and development (Omotor, 2017). It follows from these assertions that there is a clear difference between an educated man and another who is not educated in terms of socioeconomic, political, religious, and technological contributions to national development.

According to Offem, Aniah, Agunwa, and Owan (2017), the quality of human resource available in any nation is dependent on their skills, creative abilities, training, and education. If the human resource of a country is well skilled and trained then the output would also be of high quality. On the other hand, a shortage of skilled workers hampers the growth of an economy, whereas the surplus of labour is of lesser significance to economic growth. Human resources of a country should be adequate in number with required skills and abilities so that economic growth can be achieved. The educated population is a major determinant of economic growth (Offem et al., 2017).

There is the need for functional education to reboot employment opportunities for youths and inspire economy revolution. Functional education empowered youths to contribute to national economy through increase production, payment of taxes and boasting foreign exchange. They commercialize new products, promote social welfare, and facilitate the transfer of technology, redistribution of wealth and employment opportunities.

Nigeria is sitting in 24th position out of 54 African countries, and 157 in the world in terms of educational development, and lagging behind several West African countries like Ghana, Cameroon and Kenya (Human Development Report, 2018). Nigeria is also characterized by low human development when countries like Seychelles, Mauritius, Algeria, Tunisia, Botswana, Libya, and Gabon are cruising at the top with high human development figures (Human Development Report, 2018; Odigwe & Owen, 2019).

According to **Okeke** (2024), Nigeria's headline inflation maintained a consistent upwards trajectory. Inflation has risen from a level of 21.34 per cent as of end-December 2022 to closing year 2023 at 28.92 per cent, a rate widely considered to be the highest in about three decades. The high and rising inflation in Nigeria, currently at a staggering 29 per cent as of December 2023, is a complex issue with no single cause. Thus, in less-than-obvious way, rising money supply has been one of the drivers of the runaway inflationary trend in the country. The subsisting economic fundamentals and policies do not show any likelihood that the consumer price index (CPI), which measures inflation rate, would in any way be decelerating to attain the 21.25 per cent projection in the 2024 Federal budget. In point of fact, the factors driving the runaway inflationary trend remain more potent in 2024 than they were in the past couple of years (**Okeke**, 2024).

One must pose a potent question like: where are our economics and financial experts that graduated through our current educational system? No doubt, Nigerian contemporary challenges have defiled products of her educational system, hence the need to advocate for an educational system that will produce competent graduates with practical knowledge to solve our present predicaments in mutually every sector of our national life.

Effects of Poor Education on Youth Employment in Nigeria

Youths constitute an important segment and flexible endangered component of our society. When left uncared for, they can be used as agents for social vices, become economic saboteurs and derailed national development. The high rate of dependents, poverty, and unemployment among Nigerian youths has underscored the need for Nigerian education to inculcate skills acquisitions to the teeming youths.

In the first quarter of 2021, a report published by the National Bureau of statistics (NBS) (2022) noted that Nigeria's Unemployment Rate has risen from 27.1 per cent in the second quarter of 2020, to 33 per cent. Aside from making it the second Highest on Global List, the NBS report, going by analysis, shows that 'more than 60 per cent of Nigeria's working-age population is younger than 34. Unemployment for people aged 15 to 24 stood at 53.4 per cent in the fourth quarter and at 37.2 per cent for people aged 25 to 34. The jobless rate for women was 35.2 per cent compared with 31.8 per cent for men. The recovery of the economy with over 200 million people will be slow, with growth seen at 1.5 per cent this year, after last year's 1.9 per cent contraction (International Monetary Fund, 2022). In 2022, the unemployment rate in Nigeria is estimated to reach 33 percent. This figure was projected to at 32.5 percent in the preceding year. Unemployment Rate in Nigeria increased to 4.20 percent in the second quarter of 2023 from 4.10 percent in the first quarter of 2023. Unemployment Rate in Nigeria averaged 4.16 percent from 1991 until 2023, reaching an all-time high of 6.00 percent in the fourth quarter of 2020 and a record low of 3.70 percent in the fourth quarter of 2013 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). The number of people looking for jobs will keep rising as population growth continues to outpace output expansion.

Unemployment is at the nerve breaking level in Nigeria and the reality of it was dawn on Nigerians when 300,000 applicants went for 3000 thousand job vacancies, police website crashed in less than 24 hours due to heavy traffic of applicants, with over 700,000 applicants for 10,000 new recruits. Back in 2014, 20 died of stampede over immigration recruitment and 43 died for 700 vacancies in 2015 with over 195,000 applicants. Nigerian youths have become a waste asset as over 250,000 graduates are churn into the labour market by the 170 universities without the hope of securing jobs, thereby exacerbating the situation (Sasu, 2022).. Possible way out of the menace looks deem as the parallel lines of employment and unemployment are undoubtedly growing at an astronomical geometry.

Although unemployment is a global problem, Nigerian case is exceptional and calls for immediate action of all stakeholders. Instead of amassing military artilleries and spending billions of naira fighting militancy, insurgencies and related crimes, government should address the root cause of the problem, which is unemployment. In view of the dwindling and sordid state of our economy, industries and ministries are downsizing their workforce and retrenching workers, thereby worsening the unemployment rate. Foreign embassies are jammed with Nigerian youths seeking for visa to opt out of the country. Our teeming youths are guile, incarcerated and are slaughtered for committing crimes abroad.

Government needs robust policies, and should move beyond parochial partisan and ethnic interests, and set up a versatile economic team comprising eminently qualified personnel from both the public and private sectors to think tank on the way out of the unemployment asphyxiation. The youth are disenchanted, confused and have lost hope in the Nigerian state because of limited opportunities in

the land. Many remained attached to their parents' apron string year after graduation, when they are supposed to be manning their own families. The government owes it as a responsibility to cater for her teeming youths without flimsy excuses. Successive governments have failed in the past but the only available chance of halting the trend is for the current rulers to invest in and restore the dignity of our able-bodied youth through functional education. Posterity will judge them if they follow the antecedents of past governments.

Implication for Counselling

Professional counsellors should talk and write to educational stakeholders and governments at all levels to arrest the deplorable state of our education and not keep mute and allow it to rot. Counselling bodies, like the Counselling Association of Nigeria and SSIN should influence the educational stakeholders and governments to modify the education curriculum to reflect the 21st century demand for labour force in industries. They should prevail on governments to increase the annual budgetary allocation to education and monitor its implementations to address our educational needs.

School counsellors at the school level should organise seminars and workshops for teachers to prioritize practical and demonstration teaching methods to encourage practicing and doing instead of popular lecture method. School heads should be sensitized to equip the libraries with the desired books and make them digital. Laboratories should be stuffed with the desired tools, implements and equipment for practical and skill acquisition.

Conclusion

Every nation of the world has their economy driven by skilled, qualified graduates of her educational system. For Nigeria to salvage her economy and solve the recurrent social problems militating against national development, education should be given due preeminence. This paper pings its discussion on the concept of functional education, modalities for achieving functional education, challenges facing functional education in Nigeria, functional education and economic development and effects of poor education on youth unemployment in Nigeria. On the basis of conclusion drawn, useful recommendations were made.

Recommendations

- i. Basic infrastructure should be provided in institutions to facilitate learning
- ii. Governments at all levels should increase the budgetary allocation to education to make schools to be functional.
- iii. Educational curriculum should be modified to emphasis vocational, practical and skills acquisition programme.
- iv. Functional education should be made accessible in schools. Education should emphasize quality and not quantity to equip youths with skills needed for self-sustenance.

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