



Sustainable Functional Education as a Strategy for the Attainment of Agenda 2030 (UN): a Perspective from the African Child

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Abstract

In September 2015 (25-27), world leaders assembled at the UN Headquarters in New York to articulate plans to make the world a better place for mankind. This paper examined the effectiveness of the education process as a strategy for the realization of the goals of sustainable development and how such a process can be tailored to adequately provide for the peculiar needs of the African child. Data is obtained from primary source in which twenty (20) resource persons drawn from two university communities in the FCT (Abuja) were subjected to interview. Data was also obtained from secondary materials such as books, journals, periodicals, the internet, etc. In a qualitative, content analytic approach, the data yielded results which reveal the relationship between education and the goals of sustainable development. Against the background of such relationships, the paper concludes that the education process should be adopted as a strategy for the attainment of the SDGs (17). Hence some recommendations were made as to how such a process should be funded and the nature of curriculum innovation suitable for Africa.

Keywords: *Sustainable functional education, Strategy, 2030 Sustainable development (UN) Agenda, the African child.*

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Background to the Study

The human brain remains the greatest gift of mankind. This structure (organ) endows man with the great potential for understanding and analysis of events before him. Thus, man is equipped to face, confront, manipulate and conquer his environment (social, economic, physical, etc). This potential is nurtured through the process of education. Hence, this presentation will examine education as a major instrument of development. The paper intends to argue that the crises of development in Africa are consequences of the outcome of the history and development in the education sector and submit that the feasibility of meaningful development in Africa shall depend on our ability to handle and reorganize the education sector. Education carries with it, the connotation of something that is positive, elevating and worth pursuing. It also "assumes the presence of active knowledge and understanding while its recipients are expected to demonstrate the effect of their education in all their undertakings" (Peters, 1967). Ayandele (1967), posits that "it is when this does not happen that we raise questions about the quality and relevance of education". There is also the issue of types and levels of education. These include – a traditional /indigenous education, western education, Islamic education, formal education etc., levels of education such as primary, secondary and tertiary education, etc.(Taiwo 1980, Fafunwa, 1974). History of education has been closely linked to the human evolution and civilization as every society which needs to survive must devote serious thought to the education of her citizens. From this perspective, education must be seen as an aspect of society and as a social institution responsible for the systematic initiation of the younger elements of the society to the culture and ways of life of the community.

African education started from the home, proceeded to the neighborhood, then the community and into the mysterious world of secret cults. Moumouni (1968 p.19), observes that, the pedagogy of traditional education reveals a profound knowledge of the pedagogy of the child and adolescent where pedagogical methods employed in each of these stages show striking evidence of adaptation to the physical and psychological potential of the child.

African education for the most part attained the objectives required in the economic, political, social and cultural context of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Black Africa. For instance, pre-colonial education emphasized hard work through the home and was able to realize its objectives, colonial education aimed at the supply of subordinate personnel necessary for the effective functioning of the colonial administration like clerks and interpreters etc. Colonial education naturally played an important role in cultural expression and depersonalization of the recipients. "The curricular and texts of the period show that everything was directed at convincing the young African of the 'congenital' inferiority of the Blacks, the barbarity of his ancestors and the goodness and generosity of the colonizing nation"(Moumouni, 1967:43). Quality was deliberately lower than those obtainable in the home countries, given only to a small minority, full of ideological conditioning with its psychological consequences. This substantially voided their life of its human content, impoverished their spiritual life to the point where there were almost totally satisfied with their conditions on this level.

Post-colonial education in Africa witnessed an era of initial hope as this period of political independence saw massive expansion in education infrastructure and patriotic fervor. As a nation, Nigeria launched the 2nd National Development plan and a New National Policy on Education. Several education systems were tried and abandoned as the nation is still searching for a better system. Thus, the 6-5-4, 6-3-3-4 systems have come and gone without creating the desired impact on the nation. This clearly reveals that these systems failed to address the needs of the society which bothers on qualitative functional education. Popoola, Olaniyan, Olayide (2004), believe that the way forward is to:

1. Bring back education as the basis of development;
2. Indigenization and culturalisation of the curriculum at all levels and ;
3. Understand education, develop education and utilize education for development.

Suffices at this point to define education as the process which involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills, competences, beliefs, attitudes, values, etc which enable an individual to be useful to him/herself, family, environment, community, society, etc. To actualize this dream, the education process must revolve around a curriculum tailored to suit the needs/purposes of the people (community). This is the only way to ensure a qualitative education process that is functional within the framework of sustainable development. It may now be necessary to recall that, the Brunt land Commission in 1987 published a report in its effort to link the issues of economic development and environmental stability christened 'Our common future'. The report provided then oft-cited definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nation General Assembly, 1987, p.43). Apparently vague, this concept of sustainable development aims at maintaining economic advancement and progress while protecting the long-term value of the environment; "it provides a framework for the integration of environmental policies and development strategies" (United Nation General Assembly, 1987). However, long before the late 20th century, scholars argued that there need not be a trade-off between environmental sustainability and economic development.

The Problem

Until recently, development as a concept had been viewed from a narrow perspective. People (individual) well-being had constituted its focus. Such well-being was measured by various authors with various yardsticks Sen (1994), believed the best measure was in terms of capabilities, opportunities, and freedom of choices enjoyed by the individual. This narrow conception of development influenced government policies in the past. Little wonder why major global events were not adequately taken care of in policy-making eg, the great depression, the global economic recession, the various trade cycles of boom and depressions etc. To improve on this situation, there is the need to evolve an integrated, multi-dimensional approach, holistic enough to capture the various dimensions of growth and development to give the world a better direction. This led to the realization of the influence of the environment on growth and development and the evolution of the term 'sustainability'---- a term which has added yet a new layer to the concept of development.

Thus, sustainable development underscores the need to consider the challenges posed by the environment in the course of growth and development. It emphasizes the need for the global system to always strike the fragile balance between the growth process and environmental challenges. It is only by attaining such balance that the needs of the present can be attained in a way that would not jeopardize the chances of the realization of the needs of the future generations.

Striking and maintaining such a balance is a function of a number of factors which include --- knowledge, skills, competences, attitude, beliefs, values, etc.---which fall within the realm of the education process. This is the basis of this study. The paper attempts an explanation of the need to adopt qualitative functional education as a strategy for the attainment of the UN Agenda 2030. The Agenda is made of the goals of sustainable development which sum up to seventeen (17). Finally, the paper will offer explanation for the needs to factor in the needs of the African child in the design and development of a curriculum that would ensure a functional qualitative education on the African continent.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to make a strong case for the adoption of functional Qualitative Education as the strategy for the attainment of the UN 2030 Agenda.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Provide answers to the 17 SDGs through functional qualitative education
- ii. Determine the functional qualitative education process that would enhance the realization of such goals in Africa (Nigeria).
- iii. Assess the issue of corruption in funding education in Africa (Nigeria) with a view to proffering a lasting solution.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide the investigation:

1. How can a functional qualitative education provide answers to the 17 SDGs?
2. What form of functional qualitative education process will enhance the realization of the 17 SDGs in Africa (Nigeria)?
3. How can corruption in education funding be minimized in Africa (Nigeria)?

The Literature

The most often used “definition of sustainable development is that proposed by the Brunt land Commission” (Cerin, 2006; Dernback, 1998; Dernback, 2003; Stoddart, 2011). This broad definition does not limit the scope of sustainability. Its explanation underscores the importance of intergenerational equity. This concept of conserving resources for future generations is one of the major features that distinguish sustainable development policy from traditional environmental policy, which also seeks to internalize the externalities of environmental degradation. The overall goal of sustainable development (SD), is the long-term stability of the economy and environment; that is only achievable through the integration and acknowledgment of economic, environmental, and social concerns throughout the decision-making process.

In adopting this definition of sustainable development, one issue concerns the substitutability of capital. There are several types of capital—social, natural, and man-made. The definition of weak sustainable development explains that only the aggregate level of capital matters: man-made, or manufactured, capital is an adequate alternative to natural capital. Strong sustainability on the other hand, recognizes the unique features of natural resources that cannot be replaced by manufactured capital. “Most ecologists and environmentalists are proponents of the strong sustainability definition” (Stoddart, 2011). In addition to substitutability, this definition of sustainability is also founded on several other important principles. Contained within the common definition of sustainable development, “intergenerational equity recognizes the long-term scale of sustainability in order to address the needs of future generations” (Dernbach, 1998; Stoddart, 2011). Again, the Polluter pays principle states that “governments should require polluting entities to bear the costs of their pollution rather than impose those costs on others or on the environment” (Dernbach, 1998 p. 58). Thus, government policy should ensure that environmental costs are internalized wherever possible; this also serves to minimize externalities.

The precautionary principle establishes that “where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measure to prevent environmental degradation”. (United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, 1992). Therefore, the proponent of an activity bears the burden of proving that this action will not cause harm. Explicitly stated in the Rio Declaration, the notion of common but differentiated responsibilities recognizes that each nation must play her own part on the issue of sustainable development. “This principle also acknowledges the different contributions to environmental degradation by developed and developing nations while appreciating the future development needs of these less developed countries” (Brodhag & Taliere, 2006; Dernbach, 1998; United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, 1992). Developed nations therefore, bear greater responsibility in the light of the resources they require and the pressure they exert on the environment.

The key principle of sustainable development underlying all others is the integration of environmental, social and economic concerns into all aspects of decision making. All other principles in the SD framework have integrated decision making at their core (Dernbach, 2003; Stoddart, 2011). It is this deeply fixed concept of integration that distinguishes sustainability from other forms of policy. Institutionally, government organizations are typically organized into sectoral ministries and departments. This works fairly well until the system encounters something very comprehensive and highly integrated in nature, such as sustainable development. In practice, sustainable development requires the integration of economic, environmental, and social objectives across sectors, territories, and generations. Therefore, sustainable development requires the elimination of fragmentation; that is, environmental, social and economic concerns must be integrated throughout decision-making processes in order to move towards development that is truly sustainable.

Theoretical Perspective

By utilizing economic tools, early theorists offered that policies to protect the environment could also promote innovation and turn a profit. In 1920, Arthur Pigou observed that the presence of incidental uncharged services, act as a barrier to achieving equilibrium in the market. In this work, "The Economics of welfare", Pigou noted that the divergence between marginal private costs and benefits, and marginal social costs and benefits, create what we now refer to as "externalities" (Pigou, 1920). These externalities are conceived as transaction spillovers, or costs and benefits unaccounted for in the given price of a good or service. In order to correct the market failure, Pigou proposed a tax on those activities which produce negative externalities at a rate equal to those external costs. By levying this charge called a Pigouvian tax, the market price will more accurately reflect the comprehensive costs and benefits of the activity.

Flowing from the above, Michael Porter and Class van der Linde, theorized that pollution is a sign of inefficient resource use. Win-win opportunities for the environment and economy can therefore, be captured through improvements which reduce pollution in production processes (Porter & van der Linde, 1999). These authors argue that competitive advantage rely on the capacity of innovations; thus, "by stimulating innovation, strict environmental regulations can actually enhance competitiveness" (Porter & van der Linde, 1995, p. 98). As the Porter hypothesis states, properly designed environmental policies that make use of market incentives can encourage the introduction of new technologies and reduce production waste. Hence, Cooper & Vargas (2004), believe that "market-based environmental tools are generally perceived as more "business friendly" than traditional command and control policies".

The appreciation of our natural resources constraints is also in our best interest. Truly rational and effective governance requires a nation to consider and protect the environment and natural resources on which it's current and future development depend. Any other approach is self-defeating. "The connections between the environment and development thus provide a powerful rationale for environmental protection; enlightened self-interest" (Dernbach, 1998 p.20). This inherent interdependence between the long-term stability of the environment and the economy is the foundation of the field of sustainable development. Similar to Porter's Win-win hypothesis that a trade-off isn't necessary, sustainable development policies aim to tackle the sources of environmental degradation, not just the symptoms, while still providing opportunities and creating incentives for economic advancement (Porter & can der Linde, 1995).

Components of a healthy environment, such as clean air and water, are considered public goods in that they are non-rivalrous and non-excludable. Thus, it is up to the public sector to maintain the provision of these goods and services. More recently, nations have moved towards the implementation of these market-based mechanisms to internalize the complete costs of pollution and ensure long-term stability of the environment; in other words, to ensure sustainable development.

Research Methodology

This study is a descriptive analysis of ways by which the education process could constitute a major strategy in the realization of the UN Agenda 2030 (17 SDGs). Data is obtained from primary source (interview) just as the mode of analysis as largely qualitative. The sample population consists of twenty resource persons since the data required is such that can only be obtained from persons with certain knowledge level and exposure. The purposive sampling technique was therefore, adopted.

The African Environment; Opportunities and Deprivations of the African Child

Gordon (2003), defines poverty not in terms of income but in terms of 'severe deprivations' of food, safe drinking water, and basic social services. The results presented in respect of child poverty in developing countries, situates Africa in a poor stead. According to the study, the region has highest rates of absolute child poverty in the world-where 207 million children- about 65% of all children in the region, suffer from two or more types of sever deprivation. More than 80 percent are severely deprived of one or more basic needs. "Among rural children, more than 70 percent live in absolute poverty and 90 percent suffer from severe deprivation. Thus, a non-governmental organization operating under the auspices of Girls Power Initiative (GPI) has decried the spate of suffering and deprivation by African children despite global efforts to curb the suffering. The head, Youth Development in the organization, Helen Kanu, disclosed that "this year's (2013) Day of deliberation provides ample opportunity to draw global attention to issues affecting children in the continent". She went ahead to express shock that the girl-child was often a victim of forced and early marriage, with its attendant implication on her health. "Child marriage affects the victims physically and psychologically; they suffer low self esteem and are traumatized. It also has serious implications on their health" (Kanu,2013).

Adopting Education as a Strategy for Attaining Sustainable Development

For many people, the importance of education lies in future job prospects; for others, it is the quality of citizenship, others just want literacy, critical thinking and/or creativity. However, behind all the differences in opinion about what it means to be educated is one basic idea: and educated person is someone who perceives accurately, thinks clearly, and acts effectively on self-selected goals. It stands to reason therefore, that accurate perception and clear thoughts are realized through a process as it does not come overnight. Therefore, 'education' must be rightly conceived as a process – one that facilitates the acquisition of the power of thinking and perception. This paper does not intend to dissipate so much energy and time citing various definitions. It defines education as the "the process which involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills, competences, beliefs, attitudes, culture, values etc., which enable an individual to be useful to him/herself, family, group, community and the entire human society". It involves a runway through which such acquisitions are possible – this is the curriculum which is referred to as the lessons and academic content taught in a school or a specific course or programme. Typically, the curriculum refers to the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn which include, the learning standards or learning objectives that are expected to be met, the units and lessons that teachers teach, the assignments and projects given to students; books, materials, videos, presentations, and readings used in a course, tests, assessments, and

other methods used to evaluate student learning. An individual teacher's curriculum, for example, would consist of the specific learning standards, lessons, assignments, and materials used to organize and teach a particular course. How functional an education process could be depends on the quality of the curriculum. Given the current holistic and multi-disciplinary conception of Sustainable Development, innovations in curriculum would constitute the mainstay of a functional qualitative education. Such a functional qualitative education would be one that factors-in the various ingredients of Sustainable Development.

The Perspective from the Africa Child

It is gratifying to note the clarion call on African leaders and governments to key into the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Thus, through Agenda 2063, the African Union's commitment to "put children first" and to "fulfill their obligations to children as an intergenerational contact in order to develop Africa's human capital, build effective developmental states as well as a participatory and accountable institutions of governance" (Popular version, Agenda 2063). The challenge is to make this happen because, it is one thing to make a commitment and another to translate it into reality. "The benefits of investing in children are uncountable" (Jacques & Peng, 2005). Article 7 of the AAAA rightly acknowledges that public investment in children is a critical strategy for achieving peace, economic growth as well as inclusive, equitable and sustainable development for the present and future generations. A report of UNICEF reveals that, "for every dollar invested in child nutrition programmes in developing countries, there is a corresponding return of at least \$3. A world bank study found that for every dollar invested in pre-school programmes, there is an estimated return of at least \$7.16." (Rees, Chair & Anthony, 2012). The point to note is that such investments should focus more on education to guarantee the needs of the present and future generations. At this point, an interview is conducted with twenty (20) resource persons to elicit response (information) on the effectiveness of education in facilitating the attainment the seventeen sustainable development goals.

Results/Findings

The interview recorded a hundred percent response. All respondents were quite positive in acknowledging the importance of education in realizing the 17 SDGs. However, a particular respondent insisted there was only a single SDG which was identified as goal one (SDG I). For this respondent, the remaining 16 SDGs were only components or aspects of goal one. For him, education is quite necessary to lift people out of poverty (generational, inter-generational, etc). It follows that any process which affects SDG one (1), automatically affects the rest of the components. Interestingly, the remaining nineteen (19) respondents took the goals one after the other and outlined ways by which the education process could impact positively and enhance the realization of the SDGs. This yielded a good volume of information whose content was analyzed alongside data from secondary materials like the internet, books and journals, etc. to establish the relationship between the SDGs and the education process as outlined below. Some respondents were quick to underscore the issue of funding and corruption in education as posing a great threat to attaining the SDGs.

Relationship between the SDGs & Education

Goal	Content	Facilitation by the education process
1.	Poverty Reduction-End poverty in all ramifications	Education is critical to escape chronic poverty. For some people, poverty is transitory and is passed on the children. Such tendency can only be eradicated by educating the African child.
2.	NUTRITION IMPROVEMENT- End Hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.	Advice on healthy eating and weight control tends to be more effective with better educated people, again, the African child stands to gain.
3.	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.	Maternal education reduces all the factors that put children at risk of dying from pneumonia, including failure to carry out measles vaccination or the use of traditional cooking stoves that let off harmful smoke and fine particles.
4.	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.	Access to education is a necessary but not sufficient condition for education to positively impact on development outcomes everywhere particularly in Africa.
5.	Achieve gender quality and empower all women and girls.	Education is a necessary passport for women to enter the labour market.
6.	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all	Educated households are: (a) Also more likely to use different methods of water purification though filtering and boiling.
7.	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.	(b) By increasing awareness and concern, education can encourage people to reduce their impact on the environment by using energy and water more efficiently.
8.	Economic Growth – promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.	Education generates productivity gains that fuel economic growth.
9.	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.	
10.	Inequality Reduction – reduce inequality within and among countries.	The expansion of education has played an important role in narrowing global income inequality by reducing poverty and creating a middle class in middle income countries.
11.	Urban Development – make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.	The concentration of educated populations in urban areas drives local economic development and innovation.
12 -15	Environmental protection/Resilience 1. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. 2. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its effects. 3. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.	The multiple threats of environmental degradation and climate change have assumed an unprecedented urgency. By improving knowledge, instilling values, fostering beliefs and shifting attitudes, education has considerable power to change environmentally harmful lifestyles and behavior. As it becomes increasingly clear

	4. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation as well as loss of biodiversity.	how much human action has led to environmental degradation and climate change, especially through the release of green house gases, attention turns to education and the need to tap its potentials. Education increases environmental awareness and concern.
5.	Peaceful, just and inclusive societies.	Educations' vital role in promoting human rights and the rule of law is enshrined in the Universal Declaration Human Rights. It states that "every individual and every organ of society... shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedom". Good quality education enables people to make informed judgments about issues that concern them and engage more actively and constructively in national and local political debates. Education strengthens inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making.
6.	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.	Education enhances the ability of an individual understanding other individuals, people, issues, etc. This is a vital ingredient in the relationships amongst people and nations.

Summary/Conclusion

This paper presents a multi-disciplinary approach to the issue of sustainable development. It views the concept as the character of the system to encapsulate all components necessary in evolving a holistic approach to making the world a better place for mankind. On the basis of such an approach, world leaders assembled in a summit at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York and packaged a set of seventeen Goals and 169 objectives to facilitate the realization of the dream. This is referred to as the 2030 UN Agenda for sustainable Development. It is a clarion call for all nations to key into an effort to grapple with an urgent global challenge. Following this development, African leaders proposed Agenda 2063 to address the issues from their own perspective, having the African child as its focus. In doing this, it must be underscored that the inability of this region to attain the eight (8) MDGs even by year 2016 requires additional effort and sources. Against the background of the findings from the responses to the interviews, this paper concludes that education can guarantee the realization of the SDGs. It should be adopted as a strategy for the actualization of the UN Agenda 2030.

Recommendations

There is a wide disparity in the ability/capability of the developed and developing nations in the effort to achieve sustainable development. In view of the above, this paper makes the following recommendations.

1. There should be a good measure of global partnership in every aspect of the education process. No nation can do it in isolation.

2. The educational curriculum of various countries must be tailored to suit the peculiar circumstances within the framework of the global partnership.
3. Global financial institutions must occupy the center stage to midwife the finance of educational projects. It must also device ways of sanctioning erring/ defaulting nations.
4. The United Nations should provide the technical expertise and advice on curriculum development and innovation to ensure harmony.
5. Corrupt practices in the education sector must be checkmated by means of a global utilized.
6. Project evaluation in the education sector of each country should be undertaken by global institutions formatively and sumatively.

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4. Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8. Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9. Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
10. Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12. Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*
14. Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15. Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16. Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
17. Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development