

# Implementation of Sustainable Creative, Quality and Functional Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Imperativeness

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## Abstract

The significant role of education in the development of nations cannot be over-emphasized. In Nigeria, education has been a sine-qua-non for national growth and development. Education has been conceived as a veritable tool towards ensuring a strong and virile society, rather than a means of civilisation and social re-engineering. Education plays a pivotal role in national development by awakening of citizens' curiosity, proper interest, attitudes and values; and building up proper skills and capacity to think and judge properly. This paper examines the implementation of sustainable creative, quality and functional education in Nigeria, challenges and options to be adopted by the government to ameliorate the challenges bedeviling quality and functional education in Nigeria. It is the hope of the authors that if practical policy implementation steps are taken by the government to tackle the identified challenges, Nigeria and Nigerians would have an education system that is intrinsically appropriate to provide creative, quality and functional education for enhanced rapid national growth and development in line with global best practices.

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### **Background to the Study**

Education is said to be the most potent instrument for measuring national development and indices for economic growth of developed, developing and under-developed countries of the world. Unfortunately, despite the global acceptance of the importance of education in engineering development, economic growth and social transformation, there are still numerous internal crises as well as mirage of external problems facing the quality and ability of education to contribute to the technological advancement of Nigeria. Education is one of the most far-reaching requirements for development, poverty alleviation, improved health outcomes and quality of life, reduction of gender and social disparities, and for enhancing economic productivity. It contributes to economic growth and societal stability through the development of individuals by equipping them with necessary cognitive and life skills for sustaining livelihood, and contributing to the productive sector. This explains why education is seen as a crucial sector in the development and transformation of any nation in the world (Uwa, Lanrewaju and Ojeme, 2014). For education to drive development and social transformation, it requires a major investment in human capital development, which in turn plays a critical role in long-term productivity and growth at both micro and macro levels. This explains why the state of education in Africa and Nigeria in particular continues to be an issue of national discourse at all levels (Lohnan,2019).

The role of education as the foundation of social, economic, political, and cultural development is undisputed. All over the world, education is expected to be highly rated in national development plans. School curriculum needs to be relevant, practical and comprehensive while interest and ability should determine the individuals' direction in education for the acquisition of appropriate skills and development of mental, physical, social abilities and competences as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the society. Education goes beyond literacy alone because for an individual, education means the provision of opportunity for him to realize his potentials and goals in life. Education includes the acquisition of functional skills, moral identity, and ambition to succeed in life and thereby improve the society.

Education is viewed as having two ideas implicit in the world -one is that leading out into new knowledge and experience, the other is that of feeding and thereby growing and developing. Education is the fulcrum that propels meaningful development of any nation. There is no nation that can achieve any development without the right type of education given to the people at all levels especially at the higher level. This is because education is seen as the key factor for national development and empowering the citizens to master their environment in order to compete for survival (Mbachu, 2013). He further asserted that education has to be a powerful instrument and of good quality to enable the recipient grow into a functional member of his family and his nation. It is obvious that several third world countries are enmeshed in poverty, disease infestation, unemployment, and harsh economic conditions; therefore, skills and knowledge acquisition through entrepreneurship education are indispensable in ameliorating these problems, (Ideh,2013; Eunice and Zita,2013; Udoh and Akpan, 2014).

Quality education holds the key to productivity and functional society. Investing in quality teachers' education is crucial for achieving sustainable development, poverty eradication, equity and inclusiveness (UNESCO, 2012). Education is the key to future Africa competitiveness - it is essential for emerging economies such as Nigeria, Ghana, etc. to invest heavily in teachers' education to put the African country's economies on the path to sustainable growth and development. Research conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) exploring the future of all levels of education in the developing world, found that sustainable education is an index of quality education. It equips individuals with the relevant skills needed to contribute to the development of society (UNESCO, 2012). In fact, in the quest for development, nations have acknowledged that investing in education is a must if sustainable development is to be achieved.

A major challenge posed to any system is continued sustenance and functional integration of the independent components of the system. The Nigerian educational system is without a doubt an excerpt of such a system, as it relies heavily on teachers as its functional components. Education is the critical area whose performance specifically influences and even determines the quantity and magnitude of Africa's development (UNESCO, 2008). Quality education is the key to sustainable national development; it serves as a potent tool to stimulate the development of the economic, political, sociological and human resources of a nation. As encapsulated in the Nigerian National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), education is an instrument "par excellence" for effecting national development.

For education to be functional, it must lead to solving the day-to-day problems as they come, as well as improve the living conditions of recipients for sustainable development. Functional education is viewed as that education that is relevant and adaptable to the needs of learners and society. Abraham (2011) viewed functional education as the education that is geared towards the development of an individual with the appropriate skills that will enhance his or her productivity in the society. Obanya (2014), regarded functional education as that which is focused on the learner's needs so as to enable him or her to become a full functioning member of society.

As a matter of fact, this is in consonance with the Nigeria's philosophy of education which states "there is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria; to this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive..." (FRN,2013, p.8). Asiyai (2013), maintained that functional education is worthwhile and empowers the learners with relevant skills, knowledge, ideas, values and attitudes needed for them to make informed decisions and live a self-sustaining life. Asiyai further added that functional education is synonymous with quality education, which produces a complete or a whole person.

Education plays a very significant role in driving sustainable national development, and for this reason, the United Nations (2000), declared the 21st century, as the era of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Sustainable development has been

defined as the development pattern which encourages and addresses the plethora of problems of the present, while making adequate plans without compromising the place of the future generation's needs (Ukaigwe and Adieme, 2018).

Sustainable education standard should entrench quality as the hallmark that is ready to stand the test of time. The standards that are set as regards quality education should be geared towards all round development in the process of producing sound education that could impact positively towards the development of individuals and the nation in general. It is pertinent to note from the above submission that sustainable education standard is the joint responsibility of every stakeholder in the education industry as each has a critical role to play in the development of the education sector. Igwe (2001), stated that quality at any level of education is strictly based on measurement and degree of meeting the laid down standards, policy formulation to implementing the educational policies, coverage of the curriculum content, the process of teaching and learning, teachers' performance evaluation as well as research and academic environment. In essence, sustaining education standards in Nigeria requires active participation of the parents, students, educational administrators and education policy makers at both state and federal levels (Oyewole and Osalusi, 2016). The role of sustainable quality and functional education in the overall development of Nigeria cannot be over-emphasised. This paper, therefore, looks at the implementation of sustainable quality and functional education in Nigeria; as well as the challenges and way forward.

### **Conceptualization**

The conceptual review is done under the following sub-headings;

#### **Creativity**

Creativity is the entire process by which ideas are generated, developed and transformed into values. It comprises what people commonly mean by innovation and entrepreneurship. Creativity is about liberating human energy. It is the process of developing ideas that are original and of value. Creative intelligence is dynamic diverse and distinct. It is being imaginative or inventive, taking risk or challenging convention, and about original thinking. Creativity is associated with the achievements. In recent years, researchers and educational writers have extended the general meaning of creativity to incorporate ideas about inventiveness and imagination. This reflects a growing acceptance that creativity is not simply about coming up with big ideas but coming up with practical solutions to everyday problems and then applying them to real life situations. Creative education is based on individual needs and abilities; it requires freedom of learning and teaching as corroborated by Agbowuro, Saidu and Jimwan, (2017) - an active mode of learning influences innovative personality development which creates something unique.

#### **Quality Education**

The term quality is a multi-dimensional concept with different meanings, but may be interpreted against local contexts and benchmarks. Materu (2007), defined quality as

“fitness for a purpose, meeting or conforming to general accepted standard as defined by an institution, quality assurance bodies and appropriate academic and professional communities. Ideally, quality should be the prime goal of any educational system. This is because of its significance to private and public sectors and its benefits for improving the quality of education for the individual and the nation at large.

For quality education to be achieved in a nation, the principal actors of learning who are: the teachers, learners are and the environment must be available and properly organised. In other words, the teacher must be adequate in quality and quantity, the students must be well trained and facilities must be provided as well. Quality education promotes more productive workforce and subsequently, a more competitive and successful economy. For individuals, a good education leads to better jobs, improved income, health and greater self-sufficiency. In like manner, quality education in a nation contributes to lower level of crimes, higher level of institutional trust and more participation in democratic processes with better informed debate in public policy.

Quality in education, according to Babalola, Akpa, Ayeni and Adedeji (2007), is a multi-dimensional concept transferring every action, which goes into making the process of education possible. The authors further maintained that quality education pervades all elements of the activities and programmes undertaken in the course of educating, and total benefits of educational activities to both the individual learner and the society at large. Quality in Education cuts across measurement and extent of conformity to set standards, formulation of policy as well as implementation of educational processes, curriculum content coverage, teaching/learning process, students and teachers performance evaluation and so on. Babalola et al., (2007) enumerated the following essential elements (inputs and processes) that enhance quality in education.

1. The involvement of the society in programme development, acceptance and ownership.
2. Policy must be democratically formulated and articulated, adapted to suit local conditions.
3. The decentralisation of management frameworks, power and initiatives moved to the grass root level and enabling empowerment and autonomy for operations down the line.
4. The teaching force should be qualitatively and adequately educated/trained and professionally prepared.
5. The curriculum must be responsive to needs and aspiration of the individual and society, comprehensive in coverage and suitable to changing needs, time and conditions.
6. The infrastructure should be qualitative, aesthetic and equally adequate, should equally be learners and teachers friendly. Classroom, workrooms, recreational facilities, toilet and first aid facilities should be adequate.

The successful implementation of quality education for sustainability will require adequate funding, responsible and accountable leadership and expertise in systematic education change. (Fagunwa (2020)

### **Functional Education**

Functional education is a process of learning which aids in the provision of skills, preparation of youths for economic, social and political function, transmission and transformation of social, economic and cultural structures from generation to generation. Functional education provides students with the knowledge, skills, and motivations to encourage entrepreneurial success in variety of settings. It is the kind of education which provides for authentic entrepreneurial learning so that students can be better equipped to be ready for entrepreneurial life or self-employment. It has to be offered at all levels of education in developed or developing countries for sustainability (Mbachu 2013). Mbachu added that functional education is an instructional strategy that integrates the teaching of literacy skills and top content to move learners more successfully and quickly towards their education and employment goals. Functional education is education for sustainable human resource development; it is the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society (FRN, 2013).

It also refers to education that is relevant to the current and anticipated needs, problems and aspirations of the individual learner, which is based on the occurrence and changes in the learner's cultural milieu. It prepares the individual to face his social goals, economic realities and future life challenges positively; it is an education in which the ability to perform productive tasks is more emphasised than the aim to produce ideological conformity. Abdu (2005), defined functional education as the wholesome training of an individual that makes him/her useful to him/herself, the community and the nation as a whole. It works for the benefit of all. It is active; stimulates and empowers an individual with saleable skills and values to: positively solve immediate problems for self and the society; live an ordered and disciplined life; understand his interest and vocation; and have the zeal to succeed amidst all odds. Functional education can translate into establishment and improvement of infrastructure such as electricity, roads, health, education, water supply, integrated rural development, poverty reduction, and improvement in people's standard of living, reduction in crime, increase in agricultural production and increase in economic growth, positive attitude to work, political stability and patriotism. In the submission of Fuandai, Shiaki and Gbari, (2007), if education is intended to promote economic sufficiency for the beneficiaries, then there is a positive relationship between functional education and national development.

### **Challenges of Creative, Quality and Functional Education in Nigeria**

Education in Nigeria is not without challenges, despite the efforts of government to provide quality education to its citizens. According Akinjide and Olusegun (2016), the greatest challenge with the use of education to achieve sustainable development goals in Nigeria is found with the severe deficiencies in the structure that carries the education system. By structure we mean "the school buildings, teachers, assessment procedure, and so on". Most of these elements still carry the old order as left behind by the colonial education officials. The problem remains the same across the country. Most of the buildings inherited from the colonial officials are still being used; assessments are

designed to measure performance in examinations, and the quality of teachers is declining by the day. Most institutions of learning in Nigeria hardly emphasise strict adherence to the teaching of 21st century skills and competencies identified by the World Economic Forum.

The World Economic Forum (2015), identifies the skills and competencies needed to thrive in today's innovation-driven economy as collaboration, creativity and problem solving, character qualities like persistence, curiosity and initiative. These competencies constitute the elements of quality education that may support the achievement of the SDGs. Absence of such competencies may hinder the desired quality education needed "to stimulate students to ask questions, analyse, think critically and make good decisions" (Laurie, Nonoyama-Tarumi and Mckee, 2016).

Another important issue of concern in education is access to quality education. The World Bank's report (2003), acknowledged the essential connection between the quality of education and labour, and economic growth. Regrettably, Nigeria trails behind other countries in the sub-Saharan Africa in offering quality education. On quality education, The Foundation of Hispanic Education (TFHE) stated that "most African countries languish near the bottom of the Knowledge Economy Index (KEI). South Africa, Botswana, and Mauritius record scores near the middle, but Nigeria, Cameroon, Malawi, Tanzania, and others have struggled, scoring less than two out of a possible ten points" suggesting that most African countries with low quality education stand no chance in promoting sustainable development (Bloom and Chan, 2005).

Van Fleet (2012) reported that there are seven countries in which 40 per cent or more of children do not meet a minimum standard of learning by grades 4 or 5. The author identified countries such as Ethiopia, Nigeria and Zambia, where over half of in-school students are not learning basic skills by the end of primary school. Nigeria is one of the countries on this list; and it is therefore, not likely to embrace critical pedagogies geared to future and system thinking, participatory and experience learning, critical thinking, partnership working and values reflection widely used in education and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2012). This is due largely to its education system which lacks the necessary structure to provide for creativity and innovation.

According to Fanon (2005), the current system of education in Nigeria has become irrelevant. Amongst other things; it lacks emphasis on productive work skills at the junior and senior secondary school levels and character development. Some of the identifiable factors that impede/challenge achievement of functional education for national development are:

*Non-implementation of policy statements, recommendations and ideas for improving education in Nigeria:* There have been varied beautiful and promising policies, suggestions and ideas for improving education by prominent scholars from all works of life. But, seemingly, due to ignorance, politics and corruption most of them are neglected.

It is remarkable to note that Nigeria is good at planning and policy making in all sectors of her economy, but always fail at implementation; the education sector is not excluded; it is one thing to plan a good curriculum and another thing entirely to implement it successfully. Based on this, Nwaka (2012), argued that there is need for an overhaul of the educational programmes and the implementation processes in order to ensure that the relevant curriculum, right human and material resources are engaged. Also, there is need to effectively supervise the instruction being given to-ensure adequate compliance with the required academic standard.

***Inadequate funding:*** It is no more news that funds meant for education programmes in Nigeria are in adequate. This calls for pity because the problem of education in Nigeria has continued to worsen day after day. All systems of education today complain of poor infrastructure, dilapidated classrooms, poorly equipped libraries and laboratories and consequently poor educational standard. All these are linked to under-funding of education. An effective functional education is hinged on adequate funding, equipment, facilities, and materials as well as effective motivation of teachers and the learners in the schools. Behgo (2010), observed that the Nigerian education sector has deteriorated rapidly over the decade due to lack of monetary investment in this area (less than 7% of our national GDP is allocated to education; 17% below the UNESCO recommended amount). This amount is considerably lower than what other poorer African countries invest.

***Corruption:*** Corruption and indiscipline are attributes of character. They touch on the social values, attitudes and morality. Today, bribery and corruption among the politicians-and government officials is daily worsening the capability of education sector in meeting the desired expectations of its stakeholders. Thus, the idealism of youths has been negatively galvanized into turning vices into virtue with the touch of the 21st century. School premises especially tertiary institution campuses are have become centres of gross indiscipline- fraud, examination malpractices, impersonation, cultism, drug addiction and murder. On the part of adults, shameless and uncontrolled materialism, ethnicism, unbridled corruption and naked pursuit of power and wealth leading to thuggery and hired killings constitute a few of the stockpiles of adult misdemeanors (Maduewesi, 2002). Most often, funds meant for education are hijacked and diverted into private pockets. All these explains why functional education for national development is yet to be achieved in Nigeria.

***Teacher factor:*** Many teachers do not adapt their teaching-learning programmes and processes to meet the challenges of changing technological advances and current needs. Most often, they neglect the use of variety of teaching methods and repeated practice of tasks by which learners grow in skills acquisition; neglecting the inherent use of repetition in the mastery of skills. It is instructive to note, that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. If teachers have poor knowledge of the subject matter and the strategies/methods to impart knowledge, learning is impeded (Nwaka, 2012). Teachers are seen as reservoirs of knowledge so when they fail to teach students



adequately they would not function effectively in the society. Notably, no teacher teaches best what he does not know; Onyeachu (2009), observed. Nigeria needs without delay teachers with good expertise and the determination to transform her citizens into people that are easily employable; who can set up their own entrepreneurship business and contribute to national development.

**Examination malpractice:** This presently constitutes a huge problem in the Nigerian systems of education. Today, teachers, parents and learners instead of engaging in activities that will make inculcation of the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and capabilities in the learners; they are busy planning one form of examination malpractice or the other. Thus, on graduation, because the graduates are not qualified but certificated, they become unemployed or unemployable and consequently, could neither be gainfully self-employed nor contribute their quota to national income and national development. The implication of faulty educational system could be devastating; for example, it is capable of increasing rate of examination misconduct and production of half-baked products (graduates) due to lack of solid foundation rendering the individual less qualified to handle serious work assignments (Olowo-onyanemi and Edetanlen, 2008).

**Poor monitoring and supervision:** Regular monitoring and supervision of education programmes, the teaching-learning process and actions will guarantee improved education system and goal realisation. Once a curriculum is poorly implemented the aim of such curriculum is jeopardised.

**Lack of non-formal skill training:** Non-formal skills training such as; handicrafts/handiwork- making of brooms, baskets, fans etc., are today not provided for the youths in our schools. In effect, when they leave school, they are unable to be self-reliant or even employable because they are not adequately equipped to live in and contribute to the development of the nation. The lack of non-formal skill training (as in the traditional education) in our educational systems does not favour functional education for national development.

**Infrastructure deficit:** In most Nigerian schools, equipment and educational materials are grossly inadequate to go round the teeming population of students, hence, the resultant effect of poor mastery of practical skills and the inability to match theoretical knowledge with practical. In cases where some equipment is available, most of them have become obsolete due to technological advancement; and as Nwaka puts it: modern tools are not purchased to reflect current global technological trend (Nwaka, nd).

## **Conclusion**

Education that is creative, qualitative and functional is a veritable tool for economic and national development. There is therefore, the need for stakeholders to be involved in taking adequate steps to ensure that quality education is achieved. The level of development of education is said to determine the level of development of a nation's economy. Improved development in the nation's economy is only possible if a nation is

ready to address itself to the various demands related to personal and societal survival and development (Obanya, 2004). In order to ensure quality and functional education in Nigeria, a fundamental change is compulsory in the way we think about education's role in national development. Education has a responsibility to be up-to-date with 21st century challenges and aspirations, and foster the right types of values and skills that will lead to sustainable and inclusive growth and development. The effectiveness of such education however depend on the decision to review the content and implement practical approaches that would tackle the challenges confronting the present state of the education system in Nigeria

### **Way Forward**

In order to overcome the challenges facing creative, quality and functional education in Nigeria, the following suggestions are made:

Government at all levels should take the issue of funding of education very seriously. There should be adequate budgetary allocation for education and such funds should be channeled to each institution; while proper management should be ensured proper monitoring and evaluation. Despite the recommendation of UNESCO that 26% of national expenditure be devoted to education, a closer look at Nigeria's expenditure on education reveals that government expends between 4% and 17% annually on education. The percentage is grossly inadequate to address the requirements/challenges of education. The government should increase the fund that goes to education annually in order to enhance creative, quality and functional education in Nigeria. Increased funding will also help to improve the infrastructure and facilities of educational institutions.

Since the Government in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) recognises the fact that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers, the government of Nigeria at all levels should improve the quality of teacher education programmes through training and re-training of existing teachers; improved welfare packages, good working conditions and environments so as to attract quality and qualified teaching professionals.

The school curricula and syllabuses that are tested, trusted and found effective should be adopted for teaching in primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities in order to provide creative functional education for rapid national growth and development. The school curriculum/programmes should be relevant to the changing trends, so as to be able to meet the needs of industries, society and the international community. Curriculum should be made robust enough to accommodate the needs and desires of every Nigerian child. Thus, the nation needs a curriculum that delivers what students need for their future, what parents want and what the nation requires in an increasingly competitive and globalised world.

For quality to be achieved in Nigerian education system, in terms of effective supervision, teaching and non-teaching staff, inspectorate division, should be given in-service training; this can be achieved through the provision of sufficient personnel who are

professionals in the field of education to carry out supervisory role, rather than employing non-professionals who have little or no knowledge about expected outcomes of education.

Entrepreneurship education should be made compulsory at all levels of education. Government should ensure the development and retraining of personnel who have the responsibility of entrepreneurship education.

The government should put in place policies, programmes and practices that would enhance economic empowerment and developmental strategy in all areas of education in order to make it creative, functional and qualitative in line with global best practices.

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