

Qualitative and Functional Education: A Panacea to 21st Century Education Challenges in a Developing Economy

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Abstract

Education is meant to better the lot of the individual and then the society at large. 21st century is characterized with advance creativity and technology but the education sector of developing countries are finding it challenging to meet up with this advancement making most of its products unemployable because they are unable to fit in properly to the advanced world. This paper exposed some of the challenges of the 21st century education in developing countries such as outdated curriculum, shortage of teachers, Inability to use most technological gargets in teaching and learning and poor funding to mention a few and how qualitative and functional education can resolve this challenges. It was suggested ``that the curriculum be revisited to accommodate the needs of the society so as to produce a knowledge economy.

Keyword: Qualitative, Functional, Education, 21st Century, Challenges, Developing Economy

INTRODUCTION

Education is seen as one of the powerful instruments man can use to shape his future. The ultimate goal of education is work. Work is an avenue by which anyone can express his self-esteem. The usefulness of an individual to himself and his society can only be expressed through work. Unfortunately, the education system as we have it today, has paid a minimal attention to the concept of work. The result of this is gross unemployment which has affected the economy of the nation. Quality and functional education is the cornerstone for economic development. Its relevant practical

training components hold the key to surmounting the challenges bedeviling Nigeria's economic development.

The foundation necessary to the economic development of Nigeria is the right type of education. Quality and functional education has to be taught and studied systematically at all levels of education. The challenges we are facing today as a nation in industrialization, education, employment and economy are due to the fact that functional education has been neglected. Man has always been known to develop means and ways of solving his problems. Research shows that advanced countries such as America, Japan, China and more, employed quality and functional education as a major tool to advance their economies.

Adikwanduaba (2013), posited that it is necessary to recognize the fact that the growth and effectiveness of technology development to any developed or developing nation is seen through her education curriculum. There is need for education to raise a total child. The child must be educated to effectively fit into all aspects of life as he grows up. Our world is that of work, hence, there is no escape from the necessity to formally prepare an individual for vocational pursuit. If a nation is to come off as strong, then she must have well educated citizens whom she can depend on. These facts are more evident today in our fast changing world of technology with its inherent challenges. In agreement, Nuru (2007) opined that functional education has a role to play in the changes that must occur in a nation's economy to prepare young adults for the jobs of the future.

Olubodun and Adebayo (2014), on their part, argued that quality and functional education has surfaced as one of the most effective human resource development strategies that African countries need to embrace in order to train their workforce for rapid industrialization and economic development. Isuku and Emunemu cited in Thomas et al, (2017), noted that the economic growth and success of a nation have been linked to education. Furthermore, Asogwa and Diogu (2007), averred that there is a dire need for the citizens' attention to be diverted to independent and viable means of livelihood which quality and functional education offers. It is imperative that Nigeria swings into action as regards the issue of quality and functional education in order to develop her economy and become a force to be reckoned with in a fast paced world.

Concept of Qualitative and Functional Education

Qualitative education is a fundamental human right that should be accorded to all citizens. It is the education that prepares the individual adequately for positive socio economic participation. Efue-Ejikeme and Onyekwere (2016) viewed quality education as the education that produces a complete person in terms of being knowledgeable, intellectually sound, morally, upright, physically fit, emotionally stable, socially development and acceptable in any society. Aigboje (2007) also refers to it as the societal values embodied in the school curriculum. Likewise, functional education is the type of education that equips the citizens with the knowledge and skills needed to solve societal problems (Asaju & Adagba, 2014).

Unlike Nigerian education which lays much emphasis on theoretical, academic knowledge and certificate, functional education focuses on acquiring saleable skills that is the skill that the environment needs. Functional education can also be seen as the solution to the individual learner problems and aspiration since it prepares the individual to face his social goals, economic realities and future life challenges positively. Abdu (2005) saw 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 is education that is alive. 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 as 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, improvement in people's standard of living, reduction in crime and increase in economic growth (increase in Agric production), positive attitude to work especially government work, political stability and patriotism.

Concept of developing economy

A developing economy is a country whose economy is characterised by short human development index (HDI), poor standard of living, low per capita income, all-round penury, old-fashioned infrastructure, undeveloped industries and are struggling with extended periods of recession. Developing countries are known to have backward education system. For this reason, students in such countries find it difficult to compete with their counterparts in other countries. Some children in developing countries do not have access to quality education.

Educational Challenges of Developing Countries

1. **Working Children:** Residents of developing countries usually do not earn enough to enable them send their children to school, hence, the children from these homes have to work in order to support their families.
2. **Lack of Schools:** There are some areas in developing countries, especially the country sides, where there are no schools. This makes it extremely difficult for children in these parts to have access to education. Even though some of them may have the desire to go to school, there are no nearby schools to their homes and their parents are too poor to afford transport fares to where schools are situated or to pay for accommodation.
3. **Inaccessibility to Books or Computers:** Poor families cannot afford books for their children to read. Neither can they afford computers so the children from these families are backward as compared to their counterparts from rich homes.
4. **Poor Literacy Rates:** People living in developing countries can neither read nor write well due to the absence of schools and qualified teachers. Most of them are not even interested in education as they are more concerned with earning a living and getting by each day.

Characteristics of a Developing Economy

Low Par Capita Real Income

One of the most defining characteristics of a developing economy is low per capita income. Low per capita real income level leads to low saving and low investment. Investment and saving requires money and when people earn just enough to feed from hand to mouth, it becomes difficult to save or invest. This creates a cycle of poverty that most of the masses struggle to escape from.

High Population Growth Rate

In developing countries, the natural resources are always too small compared to the ever increasing population. High population can only be an advantage to a developing country if there is an equal increase in human capital (Ebong 2006). The huge population is mostly as a result of the misconception that more children could lead to higher labour force for the family to earn money, ignorance of sex education and lack of family planning options. This can also be attributed to higher birth rates and reduced death rates owing to improved health care. As estimated by World Bank (2009), Nigeria has a total population in excess of 154 million, 70% of which, live below the international poverty line (Thomas et al, 2017).

High Rates of Unemployment

Unemployment, according to Thomas et al, (2017), is a state of an individual or group of people not having a job to do. Unemployment is a huge challenge in Nigeria but the government has made efforts to combat it by training youths in relevant skills in order to generate job. However, the efforts of the government have yielded little results as unemployment rate in Nigeria keeps rising and more youths find it difficult to secure a job (Adedeji & Eziyi as cited in Thomas et al, 2017).

Dependence on Primary Sector

Almost 75% of the population of low-income countries is rural based. As income levels rise, the structure of demand changes which leads to a rise in the manufacturing sector and then the services sector.

Dependence on Export of Primary Commodities

Since a significant portion of output comes from the primary sector, a large portion of exports is also from the primary sector. For example, oil accounts for over 90% of Nigeria's export.

Lack of Skilled Manpower

This is a very big problem in developing countries as much emphasis is laid on certificate other than skill due to their inappropriate education system.

Qualitative and Functional Education and Economic Development

Education has been recognized as the basic tool for economic development of any country. This is because of the notion that it enables any nation to surmount the challenges of social, economic and technological changes. In the face of the twentieth century, education, skills, and the acquisition of knowledge have surfaced as important yard sticks to measure a person's and a nation's productivity. It won't be wrong to state that the twentieth century is the "Age of Human Capital" in the sense that the primary determinant of a country's standard of living is how well it succeeds in developing and utilizing the skills and knowledge, and furthering the health and educating the majority of its population. Transforming the economy of a nation cannot be achieved without qualitative and functional education because it has a link with economic development. Many countries' economies have been undergoing drastic changes in the last two decades. These changes include technological innovations, intensified competition in the world market and demographic trends. These transformations paved way for new demands for more adaptable, multi-skilled and creative labour. To satisfy these demands, it is pertinent to bridge the gap between academic and functional education and consolidate the alliance between the education authorities and industries (Tabbron & Yang, 1998). Up until the twentieth century, some countries regarded quality and functional education as only appropriate for the lower social classes. The same thing applied to professions such as electricians, automobile mechanics, carpenters, plumbers, just to mention a few.

Nevertheless, the advent of globalization has turned things around. There is a demand for more specialized labour markets, higher level of skills and diversified vocational education. Over the years, there has been an increasing awareness that general education is too academic, hence, it does not prepare the young ones for the world of work. In comparison to general education, quality and functional education has more direct link with economic and professional development. In accordance with this growth, industries are required to respond in a strategic manner to the transformations which take place so that they can benefit from the economic growth.

As policy makers mount pressure on administrators and educators in quality and functional education, many universities have started modifying their curriculum by including courses like management, management information systems, marketing and finance in a bid to upgrade the qualification of the workforce and provide knowledge-based as well as skill-based instruction.

Well trained graduates of quality and functional education will be employers of labour. Mfon (2007) averred that quality and functional education is a gateway to real growth and development of Nigeria. Any country can reach the peak of economic development if she can offer qualitative and functional education to her masses. In our present global knowledge economy, qualitative and functional education has a place in raising human capital. Qualitative and functional education has huge capacity to foster prosperity in developing countries. (Mobasser & Muhammed as cited in Agbowuro, Saidu & Jimwan 2017). Qualitative and functional education encourages economic and social transformation and offers solution to developmental challenges. The development of a modern society depends largely on the nature and standard of the education she offers to her people. No nation can rise above the level of education of her masses. Qualitative and functional education can motivate people to be more industrious and drive them to climb up the work force (Agbowuro et al, 2017).

The economic growth of a country to a large extent, relies on her technological improvement, scientific and technical manpower. This gives credence to the fact that qualitative and functional education has an important role in accelerating a nation's economic development. It offers one of the most powerful ways for a nation to develop her skilled manpower which is a requirement by different sectors in the economy of a nation. Qualitative and functional education increases an individual's productivity and encourages entrepreneurship as well as technological advancement which are ingredients for economic growth. Many developed nations adopted qualitative and functional education as a strategy in their national development because of the huge impact it has on output and economic development. There is a high demand for qualitative education which will manufacture the needed manpower of global standard to run the affairs of the society.

Qualitative and Functional Education as a Panacea

Njoku (2012) outlined the role of qualitative and functional education in a dwindling economy. They include:

Qualitative and functional education equips the citizens of a nation with lasting skills and knowledge which guarantees them gainful employment. When the members of a society are gainfully employed, it boosts their productivity and enlarges their manpower level. The skills would in turn encourage the individuals to further their education any time in the future.

Qualitative and functional education imbues the citizens of a nation with the right attitude which is the easiest means for a society to be devoid of various social vices. An educated man with the right attitude ensures that he contributes his quota to socio-economic development of his community, state, nation and the world at large.

Emphasis on theoretical and knowledge education is the major cause of the high rate of unemployment experienced in developing countries. Quality and functional education empowers individuals with skills which help them to start their own businesses and become employers of labour or ensure that they get employed after school.

Poverty is the bane of any nation. A poor nation will have hungry citizens and hungry citizens will mean indulgence in all sorts of social vices like prostitution, armed robbery, kidnapping, corruption, to mention a few. The 21st century is the era of knowledge based economy. If due attention is given to qualitative and functional education, it will help to eradicate poverty as individuals will be equipped with life-long skills with which they can fend for themselves and their families. They will also have the right attitude towards life.

A developing economy is usually plagued with high level corruption from both her citizens and foreigners. However, with quality and functional education, citizens will be busy with work and all the juicy opportunities open to them so much so that they would not have time for frivolities and

all sorts of crime. According to Njoku as cited in Njoku (2012), it would reduce the rate of internet fraud and the rate at which corrupt citizens drain the economy through their offices.

Qualitative and functional education has the required instructional content to propel a nation into becoming a technology driven economy which is the heart of the 21st century. This is due to the fact that it equips the individual with the relevant skills to plan and effectively use the resources through the various programmes. The skills acquired will help to fasten socio-economic development at any level.

Challenges of Qualitative and Functional Education in Nigeria

i. Inadequate Funding

This remains the most critical challenge bedevilling the implementation of qualitative and functional education. Functional education is very expensive to finance and our government has starved it of proper funds for long. The result is that our institutions of learning lack well equipped laboratories and workshops, payment of staff salaries is difficult and research grants, allowances and medical bills are also challenging. Anunobi and Ogbonna (2020) maintained that provision of funds helps instructional leaders to carry out their jobs without much restrictions but where this is lacking, instructors become handicapped.

ii. Inadequate Teaching Staff/Poor Quality of Teaching Staff

Coombs in Enefu et al (2018) avers that teachers are the pivot of any education system. Teaching and learning will be impossible in any educational institution without the teacher because he is at the centre of any innovation or reform in education (Anunobi & Ogbonna 2020). In agreement, Ukeje as cited in Enefu et al (2018), observed that if there are no adequate number of qualified teachers who are prepared to take up their responsibilities in our schools, it would be impossible for us to acquire good education and without good education, we shall find it difficult to conquer the challenges of our fast changing world.

iii. Poor Policy Implementation

There is lack of continuity in the implementation of policies and practices. Poor quality delivery is the reason that Nigerian graduates perform badly in the world of work. Anyakoha in Enefu et al (2018) argues that the countries policies are made by professionals who are well read and exposed but the policy implementers usually find it difficult to translate them into practice.

iv. Low Public Esteem

Colonial education policy gave precedence to theoretical, academic knowledge type of education which is why people consider qualitative and functional education as best for the less able in the society. Individuals would rather send their children to knowledge based school than to a technical school where they can acquire sellable skills. This has made qualitative and functional education to suffer low public self-esteem. Efforts to enhance the image of the education system has yielded little result.

v. Shortage of Training Opportunities

Nigeria does not have enough schools where her youths can be trained in functional education in order to acquire the practical skills for them to fit into the work force and by extension, add to the development of the economy. Fafunwa as cited in Udida et al (2007) reported that the universities offering functional education in Nigeria are very few. This condition denies many youths the opportunity of being trained in functional education.

CONCLUSION

This paper stressed the need for the government to grant qualitative and functional education their right place in education in order to facilitate economic development. The researchers believe that the country can achieve a robust, self-reliant and technologically advanced economy if it can place qualitative and functional education in its proper perspective.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Vocational and entrepreneurship education should be made compulsory in secondary schools. This will enable the students to acquire the skills for job creation and financial independence.
2. Our school curriculum should be drafted in such a way that it addresses the current industrial needs and challenges of the modern economy.
3. More funds should be allocated to the education sector and there should be strict monitoring by the government to ensure that the funds are properly managed.
4. The government should ensure that policies are strictly followed and implemented.
5. Skilled and well trained teachers should be employed prepare students for the global market employment.

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