

IMPLEMENTATION OF FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION FOR EFFECTIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Ikechukwu A. Odum and Eunice O. Ezekwe

Abstract

Education has generally and been considered as the biggest single enterprise in all nations of the world and it does not exist as an Island. When the educational industry is viewed with a scholarly mind, one can deduce that it exists as a microcosm of/in a macrocosm. Education has multiple links with the society hence each sector of the society tries to influence the operations and activities of other agencies. Education is both a product and a determinant of social, economic, political and psychological forces. The desire to do away with vicious mediocrity and institute professionalism and efficiency in bureaucracies created the need for specialized ministries for education, health, agriculture, information, women affairs, finance and budgeting etc. There is probably no nation in the world that has so much truncated and perverted her civil service institutions like Nigeria. This perversion has weakened the ability of the civil service in service delivery and policy implementation. The paper therefore presents the challenges of functional education and its prospects within the gamut of public administration and sustainable national development.

Keywords: Functional Education, Public Administration, Implementation.

Education and functional education have been the subject of every small talk since human existence just as the weather is, for the English. Functional education has proved to be the

fulcrum of human resource empowerment and self-reliance in the global arena. Any aspect of human endeavour that is left to operate or function on its own is likely not to yield the desired result because before there can be any appreciable movement, there must be a mover. A matter remains in a state of inertia until a force is applied to it for a transformation to be achieved. The stirring which is driving the education enterprise to functionality in recent time is entrepreneurial studies/training. A cursory retrospect on Julius Nyerere's Education for self reliance (Nyerere: 1967) and that of Education for Democratic Socialism (Awolowo 1968), we understand that Africa confronts reality in her search for intellectual and moral freedom, she needs a pragmatic philosophy of education, which is based on the African indigenous ingenuity but geared towards her rebirth of entrepreneurial education. In their propositions, Africa requires a rapid renaissance in the area of functional education to be able to revolutionize her educational system to respond to skill acquisition, human relations techniques, proactive leadership, social efficiency, economic efficiency, and due respect for human rights among others.

Intellectual acquisition has become a predisposing factor for skill endowment and vocational training. Parents and educational subscribers in contemporary time do send their wards to skill acquisition centers to learn

leather works, weaving and sewing of textile materials, paint making, food and nutrition, event organization, interior decoration, plumbing works, fish pond making and rearing, animal husbandry, poultry making and chicken production, learning to manipulate musical instruments, information and communication technology, hair weaving and styling, electrical works, building technology, industrial welding and metal construction works, among other numerous psychomotor and manipulative skills. Most parents make sure their wards go for these trainings after their graduation from the conventional university education. This laudable idea will empower the graduate to become a self-reliant person thereby making him/her a contributor to the immediate family and larger society instead of being a consumer or social liability.

Conceptual Overview

According to Iboje (2004), Public Administration as an activity of government deals with the management of public affairs or government business. Public administration started since the onset of social life: that is, since human beings started living together in communities right from the pre-historic time. Social life or living together in communities created two aspects of life, namely, the aspect which concerns the private life of man and his family and the aspect which relates man to the rest of the community. To ensure that community life was stable in terms of rights, benefits and obligation and collective survival, mechanisms were put in place by the way of machineries or institutions to enforce the rules of 'dos' and 'don'ts' and compliance. Such arrangements led to the appointment (or recruitment) of certain individuals to hold specific positions and to perform designed functions in the community.

The key functions of public administration are policy making and programme implementation. The indispensable organ of

government in these functions is the civil service. The stability of the educational system in any nation stems from the deliberate design of the political class. In other words, the functionality of the educational system has to be nurtured and promoted by a conscientious design of the political class which sustains the bureaucratic machinery. As Olugbemi (1979) points that:

In conventional administrative thought, the civil service is an instrument both for policy advice and for the implementation of the will of the state as determined by legitimate political institutions to which the service must be both subordinate and subservient.

Functional/Pragmatic Education

Functional or pragmatic education is a general label given to a group of philosophical writings that originated in the United States of America around the turn of the twentieth century. Its earliest and best known proponents were John Dewey, William James and Charles Sanders Peirce. The technical versions of pragmatism focus largely on a logic of justification for knowledge and truth claims. It is a non-negotiable fact that any truth one claims to know that lacks the veracity to produce the desired result is deemed invalid. Problem-solving education is the center stage of the education system of Soviet Union, the Asian Tigers, United States of America as well as most Latin American nations. During the Cold War era (1945-1991), the Soviet Union launched their scientific spectacle of the twentieth century known as "The Sputnik" which they shot into the galaxies in their bid to whittle down the technological strength of their Aero-space rival United States of America. They were able to achieve that fit by restructuring their curriculum to reflect science and technology and pragmatic learning in their schools. Chinese production prowess has launched them to the apogee of the global

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economic index. Other Asian Tigers like Singapore, Malaysia, India, Taiwan etc are blazing the trail in medicine, technological production, functional education etc. Cubberley (1916) aptly remarked that:

Our schools are in a sense, factories shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life. The specification for manufacturing comes from the demand of the twentieth-century civilization and it is the business of the school to build its pupils to the specification laid down.

Functionally in education simply means teaching in a manner that ensures holistic development of students in line with the societal existential needs. It is also defined as the philosophical attitude that the validity of an idea lies in its practical, and useful consequences. However, functional or pragmatic education according to Igboabuchi (2003) is associated with three ultimate names: They are “instrumentalism, Empiricism and experimentalism”. He stressed thus that functionalism is a philosophy based on scientific tradition with its roots in the philosophies of the Ancient Greeks. Hence, it is called experimentalism or consequentialism because pragmatists believe in experiment as the only criterion of truth.

Of a truth, in the provision of functional education, knowledge should be mingled with the benefits of wisdom, intuitive discretion, truth, Aerobic strength and skills, and productive/enterprising potentials to produce meaningful understanding. From understanding comes knowledge, which when effectively applied culminates to self-reliance and satisfactory social integration of the individual. Figure I present an illustration. Wisdom and truth are benefits of freedom that comes from education. In effect, we need to restore wisdom and truth to national education system and National Leadership as well.

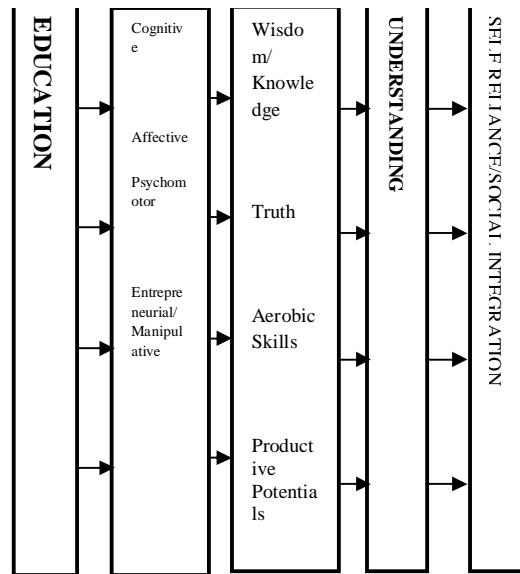


Figure 1: Knowledge and Functional Education

Spotlight on salient Areas of Functional Education

It is noteworthy to state that the following entrepreneurial subjects have been introduced by the Federal Ministry of Education to be taught in our secondary schools and they have been captured in their curriculum as trade/entrepreneurial subjects. However the serious death of qualified instructors and teachers as well as equipment and workshops has turned the scheme into elephant project. These skills include, among others:

- Auto electrical work
- Auto body repair and spray painting.
- Auto mechanic work
- Welding and fabrication
- Air conditioning/refrigerator
- Electric installation and maintenance work
- Radio, T.V. and Electrical work

- Block laying, bricklaying and concrete work
- Furniture making/Upholstery
- Catering and craft practice
- Garment making
- Leather goods manufacturing and Repair
- GSM Repair and Maintenance
- Carpentry and Joinery
- Auto Part Merchandizing
- Plumbing and fitting
- Painting, paint-making and decorating
- Animal husbandry

Be that as it may, it will interest the reader to know that at the School of Education Demonstration Secondary School, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education Owerri, every student is mandated to take up a termly project work from any area of his/her interest. A supervisor is assigned to each student with the close inspection of the form teacher to guide the student throughout the duration of the project. At the end of the every term, the student submits the finished product to the school for final inspection and evaluation. This laudable and much-commended innovation in the school has produced self-reliant students most especially in paint-making, leather works, garment-making/tie & die, animal husbandry, soap and detergent production, production of perfumes and hand sanitizers, wine and juice production, sandals and shoe making and so on.

Public Administration Context in Education

Education is interlinked with the economic, political and social factors. As Okeke (2007) stressed, that education is a political war theatre. He added that it is no longer difficult to argue that our education departments and schools are webs of politics. The activities in our education system lend support to the fact that the procedures for the activities in our education system, the school expansion; the course we offer, the appointments, postings and promotions

of headmasters and teachers, pupil placement and evaluation; allocation of staff; the curriculum, to mention but a few, are all bound up with political decisions and value judgment. The activities in our education system, in essence, mirror the social and political forces in the society. Education as instrument of change had been largely political while the context, process, control, and government had remained matters of political dispute. Therefore, education by its nature and process is a public Administration matter.

Education is one of the policy thrusts in public administration. It is one of the major ministries that take the centre stage in decision-making in public administration activities. In Ibodje (2004), quoting Gortner, Public Administration has to do with coordination of all organized activities having as its purpose the implementation of public policies which education is one. The above premise leads us to believe that education's goals are often determined by political leadership in the society. As Manley in Thompson (1981) indicates:

even in a multi-party situation the central truth remains that education is a political agent because it must, in its very nature, either tend to preserve the status quo or promote change, depending on how it is Organized, who organizes it and the purpose to which it is put.

From the above, it could be deduced that if the vision of the political administration toward education is life-empowering, the products from our schools will be self-reliant and socially efficient thereby creating a functional society for all to live in. In America during the space race (cold war era as mentioned earlier), the political leadership initiated a revolution in mathematics and science education especially with the launching of Sputnik by Russia. In less than ten years

after the event, the Americans overtook the Russians by landing men on the moon. The Chinese revolution in 1949 by Chairman Mao Zedong brought in its wake a new system of education that changed the Chinese society. In Africa, both Eyadema of Togo through his new deal and Nyerere of Tanzania by his education for self reliance provided political leadership for educational development in their respective countries. The centralized education system in France is a decision of successive French government. Whereas, the laissez-faire attitude in education policy in most African countries is a product of their governments' decisions and indecisions (Kosemani 1995). Clearly then, the vision, enthusiasm, motivation or lack of these by political leaders will determine and influence education character to be functional or dysfunctional in any country.

The Challenges and Way Forward

The processes of politics and administration are dynamic when we interlink them with education. The long military incursions into the politics of Nigeria contributed to the pervasive anti-intellectual posture of Nigeria's political leadership presently. Nigeria's educational system is suffering as a result of leadership/administrative crisis. Our leadership strives on "having" rather than "being". It is from what you are (your being) that you become an attractor of what you desire in life. It has been observed that Nigeria allocates to her educational sector far less than the UNESCO's recommendations of 25%. Nigeria is recorded to have only 0.06% of its gross income allocated to education which rates her among the lowest countries in the world in terms of education funding. This pathetic situation of the educational sector prompted Achebe (1985) to refer to our educational sector as "cult of mediocrity" where every form of shortcoming prevails. The absence of a buoyant economy can make nonsense of grandiose, well thought out and articulated

educational policies and plans. This might explain the collapse of the Nigerian system of education, or the pathologies in the Tanzanian educational experiment. This paper therefore recommends that:

- Nigerian government should institute a policy that will mandate every university graduate to enroll for a one year entrepreneurial skill acquisition scheme immediately after graduation. This scheme should replace the normal one year National Service.
- Facilitators and entrepreneurial teachers should be trained and posted to secondary schools and higher institutions and the curriculum should reflect that in clear terms.
- There should be development of Entrepreneurial Universities in Nigeria that should have its exclusive focus on the training and production of highly skilled individuals who will become employers of labour in different vocations.
- Governments should strictly adhere to the UNESCO'S recommendation of 25% education funding.

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and

Eunice O. Ezekwe

Department of Mathematics,
Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education,
Owerri.

Ikechukwu A. Odum

Department of Political Science,
Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education,
Owerri.