

5

Application of Learning Styles in the Teaching-Learning Process: Implication for Functional Education in Nigeria

By

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Abstract

Education, universally have been adjudged the only tool to a healthy citizenry and economy. The way out of the comatose economy as witnessed in Nigeria today is basically the function of a functional education system. A competency based education that will equip the citizenry with the right capabilities to take their destinies in their own hands and change it for better is a must. The use of learning styles (LS) in the teaching-learning process is fundamental in this regard. It is a strategy that recognizes the potentials and learning abilities of an individual and helping the individual to learn and develop along that line. It focuses on the principle of putting a square peg in a square hole. This paper outlined some strategies in applying this technique in the teaching-learning process. The recommendations along this line are; the use of multimedia to cater for the diverse characteristics in the classroom, and provision of flexible learning environment that will match the characteristics of learners amongst others.

Keywords: Learning Styles, Teaching, Learning, Functional Education, Comatose Economy.

That the Nigeria economy today is in a state of depression is very obvious. Onyegu, Akinbode, Ugochukwu and Chukwuma (2012), Abdullahi (2013), Osagie (2016) and Ifedobi (2017) unanimously used the word comatose and depression in their write up about the state of the Nigeria economy. The high rate of agitation for restructuring of the nation, resource control, unemployment, militancy, terrorism etc are

all indications of the comatose state of the economy. This has caused a lot of disaffection and dissatisfaction in the system. Despite several efforts made by the government in terms of policies and laws to checkmate this hydra-headed problem, nothing concrete has been achieved.

Education universally has been acclaimed as the solution to all human needs in terms of economic development and technological advancement. It is the solution to illiteracy and poverty. Education is the engine room that will generate the potentials for manpower development which will in-turn galvanize the development of the economy. It is a simple logic that a healthy and functional education will give birth to a healthy and functional manpower which will in-turn give birth to a healthy and functional economy.

The economy of today is knowledge driven and “knowledge they say is power”. To fit into the knowledge power economy requires a functional education system that will equip the individuals with the relevant functional knowledge and skills. A critical look at the curriculum of the Nigeria education system will reveal that the learning content may not be the challenge rather the implementation of the learning content. This borders on the teaching-learning process. A rich and well articulated learning content cannot ordinarily translate into a functional and productive knowledge and skills without a relevant and effective teaching-learning process. The classroom interaction/teaching-learning process is the crucible where the learning content is impacted to a learner to form functional and creative knowledge and skills. This paper argues that the “classroom interaction” process is the bone of contention in the Nigeria education system. It is the cradle where functional and creative education is birthed. Hence, the paper posits the use of learning styles strategy in the teaching-learning process as a panacea to this challenge.

Conceptual Issues

Education

Education as a concept connotes different meanings to different people. There is no consensus on the definition of education, the reason being that education differs with people, culture, society and time. The meaning has therefore evolved over time. The rallying point however as seen from literature is on the functions of education, and that is, that;

- Education helps to remove or chisels out wrong and crude ideas, beliefs, superstitions and information from an individual.
- Leads to the development and sharpening of the inert potentials and abilities of an individual.
- Inculcates into the individual relevant knowledge, skills and values to fit into the society and
- Results in the preservation of the individual and the society at large through the preservation of the societal values, beliefs, aspirations and cultural heritage (Victor-Ishikaku, 2015).

Looking at the functions of education therefore, it will be deduced that education is a process that will make individuals in the society to be relevant and useful to them and the society at large. It is a process that culminates in the growth and advancement of the society for its survival and preservation. This implies that education though an intangible process will lead to visible and tangible product which is the growth and transformation of the society for its wellbeing in every aspect. Education plays significant roles in individual's development as well as the society. Its place in these areas cannot be over emphasized.

What Then is Functional Education?

Function as an English word means a special role, purpose or activity that a person or something performs. Functional then means being in a state of active or practical use, performing its role and activity very well. Looking at this definition in the light of education, one could say in a general term that a functional education is that education which is performing its role and purpose fully. It could mean achieving its aim and objectives. It is education that carries out its activities, and performs its role well and satisfactorily. Functional education therefore could be said to be that education that achieves its aims and objectives by meeting the needs of the individual and the society it serves. It is activity driven, competency based and productivity oriented. Asaju & Adagba (2016) see functional education as more encompassing than education. The authors noted that it involves acquiring knowledge through education but emphasize the acquisition of skills and competencies for productive ventures. It is a competency based form of education such that it equips individuals with skills and competencies to meet the developmental needs of the society. Its concern therefore is to raise manpower/individuals with the capacity to accomplish creative and productive tasks rather than mere head knowledge. It believes in the ability to translate theoretical knowledge into practical and productive products. Functional education therefore is practice oriented rather than theory oriented, task oriented rather than academic knowledge, and what the learner can do rather than the certificate acquired. It stresses on show me what you can do and not what you have.

Yehuda Zeiberger in Agbo (2017) stated that Functional Education takes into cognizance the immediate environment of the learner and covers every aspect of his daily life and activities. This implies that it could be formal, informal or non-formal, organized or not organized but its major focus is that skills and competencies are learnt at the long run. It also recognizes the learners need and goes beyond to meet the need of the society. It therefore prepares the learners to take care of his needs and that of the society. Hence, it is self-reliant based.

Drawing from the discuss so far it could be said that functional education is that form of education that prepares the life and equips them with relevant skills and competencies so as to contribute meaningfully to the economic, social, political and

cultural development of the society. It could be done through formal, non-formal or informal form of training.

It is practical and productivity oriented rather than theoretical. It aims at meeting the needs of the individual learner as well as that of the society. It takes into consideration the labour market and so equips the learner with skills and competencies to fit into the labour market (Unachukwu, 2009 in Agbo, 2017). It transforms an individual from being a passive member to an active member of the society; such that the individual participates actively and meaningfully in the growth of the society.

Functional education is a fundamental tool for the development of any nation. Its critical position in this regard accounts for the call for education as the fundamental human right of every individual in the society and the need to provide access to education to every citizen. The relationship between human capital development and the economic and social development of a nation cannot be over emphasized. The basis for high level of human capital development which translates into national development is functional education. This relationship cannot be ignored. It is fundamental to mitigating the challenges of the comatose economy that is experienced today in Nigeria.

What about Comatose Economy?

The word Comatose, according to Mifflin (2016) is an adjective describing the state of loss of mental control, unconsciousness or in coma. It means someone being in a state of inability to communicate or perform for some time due to loss of mental control and consciousness (vocabulary.com, 2017). Relating this to an economy, comatose economy could therefore mean an economy that is in a state of lack and want, or in a depressed state and so cannot carry out its legitimate activities. Such economy cannot meet her basic needs. It is an economy that is repellent with huge budgetary cuts, depreciation of the currency, high debt profile, high unemployment rate, corruption, lack of transparency and integrity, high profile embezzlement of funds etc (Onyegu, Akinbode, Ugochukwu & Chukwuma 2017). The indices to identify an economy in a coma as indicated by these authors are poverty, corruption, hunger, insecurity, communal and tribal conflicts, terrorism, militancy, injustice, agitations for resources and power control political insecurity etc. Such an economy needs immediate attention for restoration. Quoting Osagie (2016) in his write up “fixing the comatose economy” in the sun newspaper said “we are at war, economic war”. It implies a comatose economy is an economy at war economically. Economy at war symbolizes a state of depressed economy and such situation is characterized by hunger, poverty, sickness, insecurity, amongst others.

Does the Nigerian Economy Fit into this Scenario?

Regrettably yes. Echoes and reflections in the Nigerian society indicate that the Nigeria economy can be said to be in a comatose state based on the following reports;

Application of Learning Styles in the Teaching-Learning Process: Implication for Functional Education in Nigeria

- The Transparency International, in its report of 2016 on the global corruption index ranked Nigeria as one of the most corrupt countries in the World (Abdullahi, 2013). The author commented that corruption has become the life wire of Nigeria such that she cannot survive without it. Every work and activity is driven by corrupt practices, be it in public or private sector. It cuts across every arm of government; executive, legislators and the judiciary, sector, such as education, agriculture, health, oil, power and every sector religious etc. The rich and the poor, all the rank and files inclusive.

- Every Nigerian citizen earns less than \$1 US dollar per day which is equivalent to about ₦157.00 naira (Ifedobe 2017).

- Ifedobi went further to state that Nigeria is in a depression with the actual unemployment rate at 53% and inflation rate at 58% as against 13% and 18% respectively officially reported by the government.

- The official exchange rate of naira to dollar was ₦200 to \$1 as at mid 2015 but went up to ₦500 to \$1 by the end of March 2017.

- Osagie (2016) called for the government to declare a state of emergency in the Nigerian economic sector if the looming “economic monster” must be overcome.

- The recent United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) survey ranked Nigeria as the 13th poorest out of the 16th nations among the West Africa countries, 26th poorest out of the 54 countries in Africa and 158th poorest out of the 187 countries covered in the survey. The indices used for these ratings are; education, literacy, life expectancy and standard of living (Agbo 2017).

- In a television interview a medical doctor commenting on the state of the health care system of the Nigerian citizens stated that the budgetary allocation for each citizen on health care is about ₦1,000.00 only per year. This is far below what any individual can use for a month to meet health care need. It is a crisis situation that needs urgent attention.

These findings and reports clearly indicate that the Nigerian economy is in a depression and needs immediate attention. One panacea to this challenge is a functional education powered by the application of Learning Styles (LS) in the teaching-learning process.

Learning Styles (LS)

The concept of learning styles began with the great philosopher Aristotle in the year 334BC. Aristotle observed that there were differences amongst individuals. Each individual was unique and peculiar in some ways as they exhibited different characters, abilities, talents, potentials and skills. This he called individual differences. These observations gave impetus to researches in the area of individual differences that exist amongst individuals. This resulted in theories and classification on individual differences.

The concept of individual differences presupposes that no two individuals are exactly alike. Each individual is unique in his/her own way. These differences affect how the individual carry out daily life activities including learning. Learning styles

therefore focused on the differences that exist amongst individual as regards how they attend to learning activities. Dictionary.com 21st century Lexicon defined learning styles as an individual's preferred way of learning which is based on the individual's strength, weakness and preferences. Keefe, J. W. saw it as a characteristic cognitive, affective and psychological behavior that serve as relatively stable indicator of how learner's perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment. To Nyenwe (2009) it is the pattern through which a learner attends to a learning task, acquires information, processes, retains and retrieves the information and how the information is applied in a novel situation.

Learning styles focuses on the preferred pattern by which an individual perceives and acquires information, how the information is processed, assimilated, and internalized, and how it is stored and recalled when needed. Simply put, it deals with the different ways through which individuals learn. This implies that all learners are never exactly the same in their learning abilities and the way they attend to their learning activities. Taking cognizance that a classroom comprises of learners from difference homes and background means that a classroom has diverse learners with unique learning styles. Several studies have shown that learning style has to do with many variables such as psychological and physiological nature of an individual which is observed in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of the individual. They are therefore inherited but could change with time due to the influence of certain factors such as the environment, and culture which the individual interacts with. It could also be influenced by age, level of maturity and experiences of the individual. These variables may be overt or observable as they are expressed by the individual while some are covert and unobservable. Two main influencing factors on the development and operations of the learning styles in an individual are heredity and environmental factors. This goes on to say that the personality trait of an individual has a lot to do with his/her learning styles.

Studies have revealed that learning styles influence how an individual learns if a learner or how the teacher teaches if a teacher. It determines how an individual interact with the learning environment. Its importance therefore in the teaching-learning process cannot be ignored. Learning styles focuse mainly on;

- Ability and manner of acquiring information; verbally, visually, auditory or tactilely
- Way of processing information; piecemeal/bit-by-bit or globally/holistically
- Preferred way of learning whether through guidance or without guidance
- Level of persistence when carrying out a learning task and
- Way of attending to a learning task; either by one-way approach or multi-dimensional approach.

Teaching Diverse Learning Styles

Considering the fact that learners come from different backgrounds with different learning styles, planning for lesson and instruction will require putting

Application of Learning Styles in the Teaching-Learning Process: Implication for Functional Education in Nigeria

together the strategies that will carry all the learners along. This strategy will enable the teacher plan for them to be able to meet their learning needs. This will require the following;

- Using demonstrative and participatory teaching materials such as role play, discovery method, discussion method, songs, poem etc.
- Use visual instructional material such as graphics, picture, slides, CD etc.
- Give the learners short notes to copy in the course of teaching
- Form small discussion groups for them to share ideas and make presentations in class.

To meet the need of diverse learning styles will demand a multi-sensory instructional approach such that the learner can grasp the information through different channels and from the different pathways it is carried into the brain for processing. Multiple acquisition of information will create room for reinforcement which will lead to better understanding and retention.

Types of Learning Styles and Strategies for Teaching them

There are primarily three types of learning styles, when we talk about how information is received. They are visual, auditory and tactile learners.

Visual Learners: This group of learners assimilate information through the sense of sight in form of images and pictures. They relate learning activities with images and process information by seeing and imaging in their mind.

Characteristics

Visual learners are

- i. Very focused
- ii. Identifies details/pay attention to details
- iii. Prefers to observe rather than talking or acting
- iv. Internalizes through picture, images, and graphics
- v. Have challenges with verbal instructions
- vi. Loves planning ahead
- vii. Are good with writing and spelling

Teaching Strategy

To help the visual learners to maximize learning, the teacher should apply the following steps;

1. Visual learner should be made to sit close to the front, so that they can see clearly.
2. Visual materials should be included in the instructional materials
3. Important information should be highlighted with the use of colours
4. Note taking and jotting down salient points of the lesson should be encouraged

5. Instructional materials such as illustrations, diagrams, charts, etc should be used.

Learning Strategy

For a visual learner to achieve better in learning during private studies, the following steps should be taken;

1. Jot down points during private reading/study
2. Identify salient words, visualize them in your mind and
3. Repeat the words to yourself over and over

Auditory Learners: The auditory learners assimilate information through the sense of hearing. They prefer receiving information verbally than written information in order to learn. They pick messages through sound.

Characteristics

Auditory learners are known to;

- i. Solocognize always
- ii. Easily distracted, lose concentration easily and often day dreams
- iii. Love singing, and enjoys music
- iv. Have challenges with text materials
- v. Enjoys talking

Teaching strategies

Teaching auditory learners to achieve will require using the following strategies;

- i. Keep them away from distractions
- ii. Use songs, rhymes, audio tapes, catchy phrases in instructional delivery.
- iii. Encourage learners to repeat salient points of the lesson
- iv. Use effective communication skills during instruction.
- v. Make the teaching-learning process democratic, where the learners will contribute
- vi. Instructional materials such as book tapes, audio tapes, lectures, verbal instructions etc are more suitable for them.

Learning strategies

Steps for better understanding during private studies for auditory learners are;

- i. Read aloud during private studies and repeat salient points aloud
- ii. Discuss with other learners on important points
- iii. Listen to audio tapes and review materials

Tactile/Kinesthetic Learners: They learn by touching and doing. Active participation in the learning activities by way of physical activity is the means of acquiring knowledge.

Characteristics

Some of their characteristics are;

- i. They are always active with their hands and legs and are always in motion or busy
- ii. Likes touching people while talking
- iii. Enjoys doing things physically
- iv. Are not good with reading and writing but working with physical objects
- v. Likes solving problems by action, are active and cannot stay idle
- vi. Loves to discover new things

Teaching Strategies

They are better helped to learn by the following way;

- i. They should be made to sit at the back of the class free from obstruction.
- ii. Plan of lesson and instruction should include breaks for movement and stretching
- iii. Role play and discovery teaching strategies should be incorporate as teaching methods
- iv. Instructional materials such as realia, model and make-up, hands-on-projects, multi-media, experiment, dioramas etc are their preferred instructional material.

Learning Strategies

Their best ways for learning are;

- i. Create interval for break and movement during private study
- ii. Write and draw salient points while reading
- iii. Avoid distractions and distracting physical objective while studying
- iv. Create enough space for moving about during private reading

(Chittom 2012)

Why Learning Styles

The need for the application of learning styles in our teaching-learning process is becoming more necessary as our learning environment has become more diverse with heterogeneous learners from different background, culture, prior experiences and intellectual abilities (Nyenwe 2009). The learning environment also has become replant with innovative instructional materials which has made the teaching learning process more diverse.

It is pertinent that the teacher recognizes the range of learning styles exhibited by the learners as well as recognizes that the teacher's learning styles are expressed in the way they teach. Therefore, the teacher should consider the individual difference that exists in the class in his or her lesson planning and not always focus on his or her learning styles as the only mode of lesson delivery. The knowledge of learning styles

~~Frank C. Victor Ishikawa Ph.D~~
Frank C. Victor Ishikawa Ph.D To plan lessons, instructional resources and for effective lesson implementation.

The knowledge of learning style is necessary as it prepares the teacher to know how to handle the learners. This is because

1. Learners' learning styles affect their behavior and way of life
2. Helps the teacher plan learning activities in line with the learners preferred learning channels.
3. When learners acquire knowledge and information according to the preferred learning styles, it enhances their level of understanding of the lesson contents, motivates them to learn and to retain what they have learnt (<https://teach.com.....>).
4. Helps the teacher to select instructional strategies and instructional resources according to learners learning styles.

How to Identify Learners Learning Styles

There are varied ways a teacher can identify the learning styles of his or her learner. It is mostly done based on the age of the learners. Some common ways are;

- By the use of personality inventory test
- By the use of learning styles inventory test such index of learning styles by Felder and Solomon; Felder & Silver man.

Conclusion

It is a truism that putting a square peg in a square whole is fundamental for effective result. It is therefore necessary to apply this principle in the teaching-learning process if our learners will be functionally fit to revive our economy and take it to a level in which it can compete favourably with the economies of the world powers. Education is the crucible that produces the needed man power for the growth and development of any society. Functional education in that matter is fundamental to this transformation hence the call for application of learning styles in the teaching learning process as a prerequisite for achieving functional education in Nigeria.

Recommendation

Based on this premise the following recommendations are made;

1. Use of multi-sensory instructional approach. Use of multi-sensory instructional approach for teaching learners so that the learner can acquire and apply knowledge and skills through different channels. The use of multi-sensory instructional media, and approach creates room for individual differences to be taken care of. It is a multi faceted approach that carries learners with diverse learning styles along.
2. Provision of relevant instructional media. There is the need for relevant stakeholders to provide the relevant instructional media so that every learner will find a place or fit into the teaching-learning environment as to be carried along for maximum learning to be achieved. What this means is creating a flexible learning environment such that every learner will find a comfortable mode of learning that suits his or her

Application of Learning Styles in the Teaching-Learning Process: Implication for Functional Education in Nigeria

Every learner is properly catered for as to be functional in the society. No potential is left untapped or wasted rather all are harnessed and invested in the growth and development of the society. This will in turn bring about the transformation of the society for the better.

3. Identification and application of learning styles principles in the teaching learning process. Teachers should make concerted efforts to identify the learning styles that exist amongst the learners in the classroom and to plan lesson and learning resources bearing these differences in mind.

4. Funding: The government and the education stakeholders should make available the funds to provide the needed facilities to create an enabling teaching-learning environment that will take into cognizance these principles for effective learning in the classroom.

5. Training and retraining of teachers and technical support team to handle the instructional media. There is the need to regularly give teachers refresher courses to keep them abreast with the trend in global best practices in the teaching learning process and innovations in the classroom activities. This will equip them with relevant skills to help their learners to learn better and be functionally fit to transform Nigeria into a strong and viable economy. This will also place the learners in a better position to be able to compete favourable in the world global village.

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