

# EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE WAY FORWARD

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## **Abstract**

*Education is expected to address the socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental problems besieging humanity in their various societies. This is because education plays a major role in the development of man. This paper examines education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and describes education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as being flexible, creative, challenging and complex. The study describes the roles of the stakeholders in education; the school, the teacher, and the learner, and for the stakeholders to create change. The paper also proposed a way forward which is technology to show relationship between man and his work and there is also the need for a true manpower policy. The paper concluded that education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should inherit the system of industrial and technological growth that are simultaneously destroying much of nature.*

Education is an instrument for change and development. Peoples' lives are affected positively as a result of education. In his view Onyeachu (2006) asserted that education brings about changes in the behaviour of an individual. Education is the process of teaching and training of the child. It is the imparting or acquisition of skills for a particular trade or profession in which application method are used. In the views of Fafunwa (1983), education is all positive efforts, conscious and direct, incidental and indirect made by a given society to accomplish certain objectives that are

considered desirable in terms of the individuals needs as well as the needs of the society where the programme is based. Ebonyi (1996) defined education as a powerful instrument for the development of man and the society. From these definitions, education is systematic procedure for the transfer and transformation of culture through formal or informal training of people in a society. It deals with the mental, physical, psychological and social development of the citizens in a given society. The goal of education is manpower development aimed at national growth and development.

### **21st Century Education**

Many educators, policy makers and even the general public respond resoundingly with “that’s impossible” when challenged to adopt a new paradigm of education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Most people today adhere to a paradigm of education that is strictly 19<sup>th</sup> century. But a growing number of educators are believing in and accomplishing “the impossible”. There is a line of mission impossible, and this must be associated with the challenges in the society. Should you choose to accept, it is to take education truly into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is not enough to say that the is already living there. Technically it is the 21<sup>st</sup> century but the schools are not there, and the challenge now is to reinvent schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> century – for the sake of the children, the students and the welfare of the entire world, making such a paradigm shift is not easy. After all, when people think of education it has always been of what people knew as school – the way it has always been. That is how parents, policy makers, politicians and many students think of school. But we have to make the paradigm shift to the 21<sup>st</sup> century education.

### **What is Really 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education?**

It is bold. It breaks the mold. It is flexible, creative, challenging and complex. It addresses a rapidly changing world filled with fantastic new problems as well as exciting new possibilities. Fortunately enough, there is a growing body of research supporting an increasing number of 21<sup>st</sup> century schools.

Today’s kindergarteners will be retiring in next 60 years. The society have no idea of what the world will look like in five years now, much less 60 years, yet people are charged with preparing the students for life in that world. Nigerian students are facing many emerging issues such as global warming, farming, poverty, health issues, a global population explosion and other environmental and social issues. These issues lead to a need for students to be able to communicate, function and create change; personally, socially, economically and politically on local, national and global levels.

### **Role of Education**

It is widely agreed that education is the most effective means that society possesses for confronting the challenges of the present and future. It will also shape

the world tomorrow. Progress increasingly depends upon the product of the educated mind, research, invention, innovation and adaptation (UNESCO, 1997).

The goal of education is to make people wiser, more knowledgeable, better informed, ethically responsible, to identify harmful practices and replace them with useful ones, to strengthen individual and society problems solving capacity, to realize their full potential and participate meaningfully in society and to be capable of continuing to learn.

### **“School”, “Teachers”, “Learner” and “Curriculum” for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

How should education be structured to meet the needs of students in this 21<sup>st</sup> century world? How do we now define “school”, “Teacher” “Learner” and “Curriculum”? Schools in the 21st century will be laced with a project-based curriculum for life aimed at engaging student in addressing real-world problems, issues important to humanity, and questions that matter. This is a dramatic departure from the factory-model education of the past. It is abandonment, finally, of textbook-driven, teacher-centred, paper and pencil schooling. It means a new way of understanding the concept of “knowledge” a new definition of the “educated person”. A new way of designing and delivering the curriculum is required. The author offers the following new definitions for “School”, “Teacher” and “learner” which is appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

**Schools** will go from building to nerve centres with walls that are porous and transparent, connecting teachers, students and the community to the wealth of knowledge that exists in the world”.

**Teachers** – From primary roles as a dispenser of information to orchestrator of learning and helping students turn information into knowledge, and knowledge into wisdom. The 21<sup>st</sup> century will require knowledge generation, not just information delivery, and schools will need to create a culture of inquiry”. Teachers may design a curriculum around a theme-based approach in order to incorporate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills into content areas. The theme must be very interesting to students and must allow a wide variety of language skills to be practiced, always in the service of communicating about them (Oxford, 2001). Teachers must utilize a variety of methods for the children to build their own understanding through real world applications and interactions with their peers in many cooperative group activities (Eisner, 2002). The students need to have a deep understanding for the real world in order to become successful individuals and be more technically enhanced.

**Learner** – In the past a learner was a young person who went to school, spent a specified amount of time in certain courses, received passing grades and graduated. Today the society must see learners in a new context. First – they must maintain students’ interest by helping them see how what they are learning prepares them for

life in the real world. Second – they must instil curiosity, which is fundamental to lifelong learning. Third – there must be flexibility in teaching. Fourth – learners must be excited to become even more resourceful so that they continue to learn outside the formal school day. So what will schools look like exactly? What will the curriculum look like? How will this 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum be organized, and how will it impact the way the society design and build schools, how students are assessed, how resources are purchased, how they acquire and utilize the new technologies, and what does all this mean for the society in an era of standardized testing and accountability?

Imagine a school in which the students – all of them – are so excited about school that they can hardly wait to get there. Imagine having little or no “discipline problems” because the students are so engaged in their studies that those problems disappear. Imagine having parents calling, sending notes, or coming up to the school to tell you about the dramatic changes they are witnessing in their children newly found enthusiasm and excitement for school, a desire to work on projects, research and write after school and no weekends. Imagine your students making nearly exponential growth in the basic skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening, researching, scientific explorations, multimedia skills and more!

### **Conclusion**

The achievement of National Objectives of education could lead to national growth and development. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the society is inheriting a system of industrial and technological growth that are simultaneously destroying or depleting much of nature and endangering human and non-human species. Thus, in order to resolve the problems, society must turn her face to education and act in a new way. To this end, education is considered to be crucial for sustainable development (Mckeown, 2002). The educational system of any country should bring social transformation that will be equitable with the demand of the time and involves both student and institution in reflecting on how they currently live and work. It must also assist people or learners in making informed decision and creating ways to work towards a more sustainable world in this changing and challenging world.

### **The Way Forward for Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

From 1993 to 2002 education in Nigeria has been too successful in doing what society has expected it to do. Now fifty-two years of independence society tend to keep pressure on the schools to do more and better from year to year without corresponding increase in financial and managerial investment in education. Scientifically, when weakness appear, the response is to increase the resources, change the methodology or increase the effort. Unfortunately, the concept of what education is or what the school should do according to the Nigerian Society is the same for the most successful. For example, Nigerians believe that schools that are the most selective have the highest quality. They believe that the number of school

leavers entering universities and graduates going into the world of work even without jobs are marks of school quality (Venn, 1970).

Their believes are responsible for increase in indiscipline on the part of school heads, teachers and students. It should be noted that our school today do most of the things that people want them to do and do then quite well. What must the school do, so that a good percentage of today's youth who are handicapped in finding employment and who encounter serious problems in making the transition from the needed manpower in a society that by the year 2015 will find only five percent of the work force, engaged in unskilled work.

In the 21st century the school must change her job in the society from what it has been in the past. Technology has created a new relationship between man, his education and work; a relationship between man and his work. There is need for a true manpower policy. However, people must take into account much more than present needs and predictable demand in the economy. It is technologically possible to produce all the things needed, it requires the assessment of manpower policy in terms of how well it develops the human potential. For positive utilization of available manpower, there is need for in-service and on the job training for workers and unemployed youths in Nigeria.

On how school might change. Venn (1970) identified the following:

1. Involvement and participation of youth at an earlier age.
2. Youth volunteer activities as a part of schooling.
3. Involvement of the school and its students in the major issues of our time.
4. Provision of ways for individual students to participate in real-life action, not always just in preparation for living.
5. Giving Youth Responsibility as well as freedom.

The students should be able to make adequate provision for all academic categories of students. This is possible through a well structured educational program that could reduce or eliminate school drop-out rates in the short-run and poverty level in the long run.

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