Nigeria is a great nation in Africa with greatly endowed human and material resources. Population wise, Nigeria has the highest concentration of human population among African countries, with great diversity of liquid and solid mineral resources, abundant forest and aquatic resources and the most variegated and congenial climatic conditions for the flourishing of her flora and fauna. Nigeria is greatly endowed and blessed by nature.

Education is the bedrock of any nation, and more importantly functional education is what Nigeria needs in order to effectively harness her abundant human and material resources in order to catch up with vision 2020-2020 and be numbered among the developed economies of the world by the year 2020. The Oxford Advanced Learners English Dictionary defines the word “functional” as an adjective used to describe anything that is practical and useful, having a function working or able to work. Thus functional education is education that is practical and useful to the beneficiaries and the society at large.

The idea of functional education has its origin in the United States and Western Europe. In the United States and in Germany, it refers to the type of education that comes spontaneously from the influence of the environment. It is a kind of education that is natural as opposed to the deliberate, goal-oriented education that is directed by man (Zeilberger, 1999). Okafor (1988) attributes the origin of the philosophy of functional education in the United State to three notable Americans, namely, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952).

In Western Europe, functional education refers to education that comes from the child’s needs and that uses a child’s interest as a mechanism for activating him and towards his desirable activities. Its purpose is to develop the life of the mind that acts from the wholeness of organic life, with relation to practical life and values in the present and in future.

In Nigeria and other developing countries, functional education is the education that equips the child with the knowledge skills and values needed for effective living within his environment and the world at large. It is education that incorporates basic knowledge required for understanding and interpretation of nature and events locally and globally. It is oriented towards the acquisition of survival skills for service, productivity and contribution to the development of society.

Functional education inculcates values that are essential for harmonious co-existence as individuals and as nations. In the Nigerian context, functional education is succinctly defined by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, former president of Nigeria, during his launching of the Universal Basic Education Programme in Sokoto on 30th September, 1999 as follows:

Education is not just a matter of acquiring skills. Education is better understood when we see it also as a means of instilling, especially in our young ones; the importance of a number of fundamental values; such as devotion to the well-being of our motherland; respect for the constitution and the importance of democratic governance; a sense of the dignity of
Principles of Functional Education System

For any education system to be functional, it has to be based on the following principles:

1. The education system must see the child from the standpoint of his own world view, describe him in terms of concepts drawn from his experience, teach him according to his criteria, and relate with him as a person that deserves respect and nourishment.

2. The education system must be based on the natural needs of the child, to inquire and to know; to observe and to work or play; by arousing the child’s spiritual longing that will not come by force, but is a free atmosphere of the school’s lively and happy environment where the child will act spontaneously and enthusiastically.

3. The child must be put at the centre of the curriculum whose development is not based on principles that are exterior to the child.

4. The educator should be knowledgeable of the child’s physical and emotional development and the concomitant interest shift as to enable him adapt his teaching to the natural growth of the child.

5. In a functional education system, the traditional externally imposed discipline that is based on fear of punishment or expectation for reward, gives way to the internally developed discipline that is based on genuine interest on the discussed question and the activities connected with it. In effect the teacher should not demand from a pupil an action unless the pupil has a natural need for it. In order to activate the pupil, the teacher has to put the pupil in a condition that will naturally induce that action in order to satisfy a felt need.

6. Functional education develops intellectual and moral capacities of the learner, rather than force-feeding him with facts that have no relevance to his real life, but are accumulated in the memory as foreign substances that are easily forgotten. In a functional education system there is no separation between theoretical knowledge and the learner’s natural action. Facts are interesting if they are related to the current activities of the learner.

7. In a functional education system, the classroom is the laboratory where learning activities form a bridge between the learner and his natural needs.

8. Functional education introduces the child to work and to subject that prepare him for social activities as the child must in future live in a social and economic framework.

9. Teachers in a functional education system are those who stimulate the moral and spiritual needs of the learners, aid them to acquire knowledge through self study and personal experiences rather than spoon-feeding them with facts which are foreign to them. The main quality of such teachers is enthusiasm rather than scholarship and the understanding of the child and his needs rather than following a rigid curriculum.

10. Functional education acknowledges individual differences in the learners and as such does not subject every learner to the same curriculum content and skill development. It however has a minimum of “common core curriculum” and leaves other subjects as “free electives”. Its concept of “equal educational opportunity” is not the subjection of every learner to the same body of knowledge and skill development, but the provision of opportunities that fit individual differences- the gifted, the high achievers and the slow learners or under achievers.

11. Examination in a functional education system does not constitute a challenge on the regurgitation of facts fed into the memory in the course of study, but an “achievement summary” of the learners performance in the various learning activities during the school year (Zeilberger, (1999), Ferriere (1951), Dewey (1960) Okafor (1988).
Provisions of the National Policy on Education on the Inculcation of Values, Knowledge and Skills

The federal republic of Nigeria (2004) in her national policy on education sees education as an instrument “per excellence” for effecting national development. No nation can truly develop if her citizens lack appropriate values, knowledge and skills. Lewis (1999) sees values as “personal beliefs” but in our context values refer to moral or professional standard or principles of behaviour. Knowledge refers to understanding or perception that one has acquired through learning or education. Skills in our context refer to ability acquired through learning or education about doing a particular job or activity.

A more detail examination of Nigeria’s National policy on Education (2004) shows that education aims at:

(a) the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity;
(b) the inculcation of the right type of values and attitude for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian Society;
(c) the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and
(d) the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competences as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society.

The above national education goals incorporates all the variables of the conference theme-functional education for values, knowledge and skills for national development. The policy as well acknowledges the following values as important and worthy of inculcation through education:

a) respect for the worth and dignity of the individual,
b) faith in man’s ability to make national decisions;
c) moral and spiritual principles in inter-personal and human relations;
d) shared responsibility for the common good of society;
e) promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children; and
f) acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance.

As a measure to ensure the acquisition of values, knowledge and skills necessary for functional education, the education curriculum at the primary and secondary education, has included subjects considered necessary in this regard. At the primary level the subjects to be taught include:

i) Languages
ii) Mathematics
iii) Science
iv) Physical and Health Education
v) Religious knowledge
vi) Agriculture/Home Economics
vii) Social studies and citizenship education
viii) Cultural and Creative Arts (Drawing, Handicraft, Music and Cultural Activities)
ix) Computer Education

Although, each of the above-listed subjects contains learning in the cognitive, the affective and psycho-motor domains, the subjects can as well be grouped into the configuration of values, knowledge and skills. The teaching of languages is meant to enhance the development of communication skills, the teaching of mathematics, sciences, and computer for intellectual and skill development and the understanding of nature; and the teaching of religious instruction and social studies for the development of moral and spiritual values as well as respect for the worth and dignity of individuals, national consciousness, patriotism and shared responsibility for the common good of society.
Physical and Health education promote physical, emotional and psychological development of pupils as well as interest and skills in games and sports as means of relaxation or as an alternative occupation for life. The study of Agriculture, Home Economics or Computer studies provide the necessary preparation and competencies needed in the world of work, economic and self-reliance.

At the secondary school level the subjects to be offered at both the junior and senior secondary school levels comprise the “core” and “elective” ones. The “core subjects” are these considered basic and compulsory for all learners. At the junior secondary school level the core subjects are:
- English language
- Mathematics
- Language of environment
- One major Nigerian language
- Integrated science
- Social studies and citizenship education and
- Introductory Technology

The elective subjects are:
- Agriculture
- Business studies
- Home Economics
- Local Craft
- Computer Education
- Fine Arts
- Music
- Religious knowledge
- Physical and Health education and
- Arabic.

The senior secondary education subjects are also grouped under “core” and “elective” subjects of which we shall not go into their variegated details. From the analysis of the primary, junior and senior secondary school education curriculum and the establishment of the universities, polytechnic and monotechnics in Nigeria, one can conclude that the Nigerian education system has the features of a functional education system. If our enunciated educational policies, institutions and curricular possess the characteristics of a functional education system, why then is there so much concern and cry of the non-functionality and loss of value among the products of the Nigerian education system? Before attempting on answer, may we examine the following.

Ways of Inculcating Values, Knowledge and Skills.
Lewis (1990) has identified six ways by which one acquires values. The ways are authority, deductive logic, sense experience, emotion, intuition and science. The sources of acquiring values are related to those of acquiring knowledge. Nwabuisi (2000) also identified the sources for acquiring knowledge to include revelation, intuition, empiricism, rationality and authority. Revelation is knowledge gained through divine inspiration which Dulles in Nwabuisi (2000) describes as “a free manifestation by God of that which lies beyond normal reach of human inquiry”. The divinely revealed truths are contained in different religious books, such as:

a) The Holy Bible for the Jews and Christians;
b) The Holy Qur’an for the Muslims and;
c) The Bhagaved –Gita and Upanishad for the Hindus, among others.
Scientific knowledge is derived from a synthesis of empiricism, intuition and rationalism. In scientific knowledge man uses sense experience to collect observable combination of facts, intuition to develop testable hypotheses about fact collected, and logic to develop the test, and sense experience to complete the test and give interpretation.

Much of what we accept as knowledge emanates from authority and is sustained by authority. Authorities are custodians of knowledge from tradition, religion, science, arts and the professions. Hence the gurus in their respective fields of specialization are highly venerated and believed. Words of authorities are seen as final and all within their jurisdiction accept their words as truth and nothing but the truth. Universally, teachers are vested with authority. Without authority a teacher would not convince his students that his stuff is worth learning. The authority of a teacher is so fundamental that he is capable of transforming an entire society.

The holy books are the source of knowledge and authority in religion and faith. Religious leaders are vested with authority to interpret the contents of their holy books. The interpretation (rightly or wrongly) determines the knowledge, belief and values of their followers.

The development of values and attitude according to Sigmund Freud (In Nwabuisi 2000) spans through oral, anal, latency, adolescence and adulthood stages.

Also in his stages of cognitive development, Piaget identified sensory motor stage, pre-operational or symbolic operation stage, concrete operation stage and formal operation stage. Moral development according to Kohlberg takes three stages, namely pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional stages. From the findings of Freud, Piaget and Kohlberg, the development of values, cognition and morality are in stages.

Raths, Harmin and Simon (1979) have on their part identified seven traditional methods of developing values and attitude among children in Africa, and indeed Nigeria. The methods are by:

a) setting an example either directly or indirectly;
b) persuading and convincing the child with argument why one set of value is preferred to another.
c) inspiring by emotional or dramatic pleas for certain values, often followed by models of behavior associated with the value.
d) limiting choices by giving the children choices only among values accepted to the group.
e) cultural or religious dogmas presented as unquestioned wisdom or principle, on the justification that “our people have always done it this ways”.
f) Rules and regulations which are intended to contain and mould behavior.
g) appealing to conscience by stimulating a sense of guilt associated with some actions or behaviours.

In the advice of Raths et al (1979) effort at helping children develop values should adopt a democratic process as opposed to the traditional methods of trying to persuade children to accept some pre-determined set of values. In the democratic method children are helped to make choices and decisions from among many existing alternatives.

The democratic process is based on the conception of humanity which says that the most appropriate value will come when persons use their intelligence freely and reflectively to define their relationship with each other and with an ever-changing world.

Nigeria, as a democratic nation wants to use education to achieve her five national goals. The goals are to develop:
a) a free and democratic society;
b) a just and on egalitarian society;
c) a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
d) a great and dynamic economy; and
e) a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).

The attainment of the above-listed national objectives can only be possible if basic democratic principles are enthroned in our political system. The principles according to Appadorai (2000) are:
a) the supremacy of the popular will on basic questions of social direction and policy,
b) economic equality and fraternal feeling, and
c) political liberty as the indispensable minimum.

The Role of Education in the Inculcation of Values, Knowledge and Skills

Formal education has today become a major instrument for the development of any society. Human development in our contemporary society is measured in terms of the values, knowledge and skills possessed by the people. The peoples’ knowledge, skills and values also determine the extent to which the infrastructural and economic development of the society can go.

The national objectives and the educational goals earlier highlighted show that the nation depends on her educational system for the actualization of her dreams. Schools are expected to provide the education needed for national development in conjunction with the family, religious organizations and the media.

A closer examination of the Nigerian Society shows that our national values are greatly undermined as can be deduced from the following examples:
(a) the wanton destruction of lives and property as well as human trafficking and kidnapping for religious, political and economic reasons are negations of the value, dignity and sanctity of human life.
(b) lack of patriotism among the citizenry as manifested in looking down on anything Nigerian, having little or no regard for our national symbols and preferring other countries to Nigeria;
(c) embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds,
(d) swearing falsely and making false declaration of assets,
(e) the yawning gap between the rich and the poor through exploitation of the under-privileged and inequitable income distribution policies.
(f) lack of value for time as demonstrated in the “African time syndrome”.
(g) violation of promises and vows with impunity and without qualms of conscience.
(h) examination malpractices in all its ramifications.

With regards to the depreciating levels in the demonstration of knowledge and skills by our school products, the following examples could be cited:
(a) low literacy level among primary school leavers (especially public schools).
(b) high failure rate in public examinations like the West African School Certificate Examinations, National Examination Council Certificate Examinations, University Matriculation Examinations, Aptitude Tests for Admission into various tertiary education programmes.
(c) poor communication skills among students of tertiary educational institutions.
(d) poor performance in employment interviews.
(e) low rating of our school products by the labour market, international organizations and foreign universities.

The falling standard of education is an issue, but not the real problem. The real problem is lack of commitment by all public office holders and not only teachers. From the highest to the lowest
public officer, the focus appears to be how to satisfy our selfish ego through cheating and misappropriation of public resources entrusted to our care. As a way of demonstrating their lack of commitment most teachers have thrown decorum to the dogs and are taking to private business during offices hours, abandoning the students. Some prefer to teach their pupil and students privately after office hours if the parents accept to pay for extra lessons, which have been made compulsory in some schools. In some cases the extra lessons become the only lesson the children receive.

It is a truism that custodians of our public systems do not patronize them. They rather patronize the private systems. Abandoning our public system is an admission that they are worthless. Free education without the presidents’, governors’, legislations’, chairmen of councils and other public office–holders children attending public schools is a clear demonstration of lack of faith in the quality, functionality and value of the system.

It is only when public officers see themselves as stakeholders in our public education system that many ills in the system will be minimized and commitment by the operatives ensured. Government on her part is not ignorant of the decline in value and the falling standard of performance in our educational institutions.

Several pro-active measures had been taken in the past and some are currently being taken to ensure the restoration of societal values, motivating good citizenship and improvement in the education system. Among the current government measures are:

a) The introduction of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme.
b) The singing of the national anthem and recitation of the National pledge in schools.
c) The re-introduction of religious instruction and corporal punishment in primary and secondary schools.
d) The award of scholarships to deserving students.
e) The renovation and equipping of schools for effective teaching and learning.
f) The training and re-training of teachers for optimal performance etc.

At the general societal level government has equally introduced measures to check corruption, encourage hardwork and stimulate value-orientation. Some of these measure are

a) The introduction of National honours Award,
b) National productivity merit award,
c) Code of conduct Bureau for public officers;
d) The independent corrupt practices commission (ICPC)
e) The Economic and financial crimes commission (EFCC)
f) National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC);
g) Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON)
h) Consumer protection Agency of Nigeria
i) The inclusion of national ethics and fundamental human right in the national constitution (Federal Republic Nigeria, 1999).
j) The law enforcement agencies
k) The establishment of the judiciary etc.

From the above presentation so far we can all agree that several measures aimed at restoring values, knowledge and skills to our educational system had been implemented with varying degree of success. In our present circumstances what should be our next line of action?

Conclusion

Functional education for values, knowledge and skills development is a necessity for Nigeria to achieve her national objective and vision 20-20-20. Nigeria’s educational policy and programme
that have been put in place are adequate enough for her functional education programmes to succeed. What has made functional education to elude Nigeria is the lack of will and commitment to policy and programme implementation on account of corruption. By the time Nigeria succeeds to eliminate corruption from her national life, all other socio-economic and political programme will become attainable, functional education not being an exception.

They Way Forward
Our educational policies and curricular contents for the different levels of education are adequate and rich in contents. Our problem with the inculcation of values, knowledge and skills is in the implementation of the curricular. Below are suggestions on how each of the afore-mentioned variables could be improved in our educational system.

Inculcation of Values
Values such as respect, dignity of the human person, moral principles, shared responsibility for the common good of society etc cannot be effectively taught through sermons or public lectures.

(a) The teachers of the values and the custodians of our culture need to exemplify these values in their daily lives and actions. It is said that examples are better than precepts. Our practical life-styles are the examples that the younger ones follow.

(b) The state must through her legislations harmonize private with public interest by providing effective criminal laws.

(c) State must ensure that the civil laws that guarantee security of lives and property and equality among the citizenry are effectively implemented without leaving rooms for sacred cows.

(d) The state should in line with Jeremy Bentham ensure the provision of “the greatest happiness to the greatest number” through curbing the egoistic, greedy and aggressive nature of the few rich and powerful in the society. This can be done by protecting the rights of the common man.

(e) Agencies like the EFCC, ICPC, code of conduct Bureau must not only bark but bite.

(f) The punishment system for offenders of the law must not only be deterrent, but reformatory, retributive and utilitarian (Dzurgba, 2007).

Inculcation of Knowledge and Skills
To ensure a functional education system where not only values, but knowledge and skills are adequately demonstrated by the product of the system, the following measures should be taken:

(a) No education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. To this end teacher training institutions need a total overhaul in skill orientation through adequate curriculum design, staff recruitment and student in take in the envisaged areas of knowledge, skills and values to be acquired.

(b) Provision of adequate laboratories, studios, workshops and libraries in teacher training institutions should be ensured.

(c) Provision of ample opportunities for trainee-teachers to practically demonstrate their acquisition and mastery of desirable knowledge, skills and values through seminars, workshops and practical teaching and learning exercises.

(d) Equipping primary and secondary schools with adequate human and material resources for effective teaching and learning.

(e) Student industrial work experience scheme (SIWES) should be made more functional to ensure collaboration between industries and the training institutions.

(f) Access to training funds such as those provided by the industrial training fund should be made accessible to trainee-teachers to ensure a more effective teaching practice.

(g) Maintenance of minimum standard in educational institutions should be ensured by appropriate agencies charged with the responsibilities through periodic accreditation and supervision.
h) There should be adequate funding, provision of adequate human and infrastructural facilities in tertiary educational institution to ensure the attainment of set objectives for establishing them.

i) Education must be placed among our top priorities at the national, state, council and family levels in funding, provision of logistics and supervision.

References


