

# FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: IMPERATIVENESS AND CHALLENGES

By

**DR. NNEKA G. NWAKA**

*Department of Educational Foundations and Administration,  
Nwafor Orizu College of Education,  
Nsugbe*

## **Abstract**

*This paper examined the impact of functional education on national development in Nigeria. It commenced with an introduction of the features of functional education, and its imperativeness for national development and featured the journey so far on functional education. It also looked at the impediments/challenges to achievement of functional education for national development. Recommendations were made for the purpose of achieving functional education for national development.*

Education has been viewed as a potent instrument of change for any nation. It is the main engine for the development of any individual or nation. Succinctly, no responsible government would neglect its education system. This is because no nation develops above the quality of its citizens. It is the citizens that make things happen; bring about positive changes; and consequently, contribute to the foundation on which national development revolves. These could only be attained through the instrumentality of education which is the total process of bringing up individuals to develop their potentials (i.e. in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains) to the fullest so that they can contribute meaningfully and maximally to the development of the society (Fuandai, Shiaki & Gbari, 2007). In fact, education does not take place on a void environment, but on man who lives therein to translate the educational values for transforming the environment (Efurhievwe, 2012). National development hinges on the kind of educational exposure the citizens have. It is only functional education that can make an individual productive and self-reliant. No wonder many nations have made pronouncements and efforts at using meaningful and necessary educational programmes to equip their youths with knowledge, values, attitudes and skills deemed necessary for them to preserve their values; function effectively and contribute to the overall development of the nation. While many nations such as Russia, France, Germany, Britain and USA have registered remarkable success in this venture, others like China, Nigeria and Mali have not quite achieved their set goals. These later nations are impoverished and underdeveloped because they lack innovation with population explosion without corresponding productivity and lack of functional education system...are victims of slavery, colonial exploitation, neo-colonialism and imperialism (Obiora, 2010)

It is pertinent to note that Nigeria had a history of colonization which affected her education adversely. There is significantly low rate of development, usually

### *Pristine*

attributed to the inadequate system of education bequeathed to her by the British which is more or less Ideological education in outlook; hence graduates can not be self-reliant, but wait for donkey years for jobs instead of becoming employers of labour. This is disgusting. It is to this effect that Fafunwa in Maduewesi (2002) described the old Nigerian who must be transformed into a new Nigerian through practical and technical-driven education. Similarly, Coockey in Maduewesi (2002) berated the type of education which produced people with mere academic knowledge without the ability to produce things. Both Fafunwa and Coockey were disgusted with the type of education bequeathed to Nigeria by the British and so were calling for that education that would equip the young Nigerian with appropriate life skills, values, attitudes, abilities competencies to live in and contribute to the development of his society. Presently, Nigerians live in a changing world and as a result of research findings, new information, knowledge, approaches, methods of instruction and resources emerge. Teachers are expected to keep abreast of such innovations so as to produce functional citizens, who would contribute to the development of the society (Offorma, 2010). Nigeria needs education that would be practical and skill development-oriented or functionally-driven to fortify its youths with skills needed to perform contemporary tasks. Dike & Eze (2009) posited that although the validity of any education system is gauged by the relevance of her curriculum. It must be pointed out that such education is in fact determined by the quality of its implementation process, which in essence requires the training of teachers that would impart the skills to the students in the schools; it must consider the learner and his environment; such as matching the learner with the speed of advancement; produce solutions to learner needs and those of the society.

Nigeria's educational goals among others, are the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society and the acquisition of appropriate skills as well as the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2004). To these effects there are many forms of education in Nigeria namely:

- i. Early Childhood and Pre-primary Education (the creche, nursery and kindergarten),
- ii. Basic Education of 9 years duration comprising Primary Education of 6 years duration and Junior Secondary Education of 3 years duration. It is free and compulsory. This is the foundation upon which all other educational levels are built. It is-the key to the success or failure of the whole education systems.
- iii. Senior Secondary Education of 3 years duration. It prepares individuals for useful living in the society and for higher education,
- iv. Mass literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education,. These include all forms of functional education given to youths and adults outside the formal school system.
- v. Science, Technical and Vocational Education:
- vi. Tertiary Education comprising universities, colleges of education, polytechnic, mono-technics,
- vii. including those institutions, offering correspondence courses. Open and Distance Education and

*Dr. Nneka G. Nwaka*

viii. Special Education etc.

The FRN through the National Policy on Education stipulated the educational services that will facilitate the attainment of the policy goals and the promotion of effectiveness of the educational systems such as the planning and establishment of Teachers' Resource Centers, provision of libraries, ICT facilities, radio and television educational broadcasting, in-service education, machinery for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the policy provisions and financing etc.

Unfortunately, today, despite all these stipulated services of which it is not known the extent they are being religiously implemented, the fact still remains that evidently, graduates are being wasted; they still roam the streets; indulge in many ills in the society as a result of the kind of educational exposure they had in the schools. Our graduates now form easy thugs for the ill-feted politicians of the present day. They are used and dumped without permanent jobs. No wonder why Omolayole (2002) pointed out that Nigeria needs to double her efforts in improving her educational systems at all levels and make it more functionally-oriented. This is because functional education is stimulating, practical and continuous in order to aid transfer and sustainability of the required positive attitudes, skills and values acquired through learning .Functional education when inculcated in the young would address the practical needs of the nation and results in increased economic prosperity. At this juncture, it may be necessary to define functional education.

### **Concept of Functional Education and the Journey So Far**

Functional education is that education that is relevant to the current and anticipated needs, problems and aspirations of the individual learner, which is based on the occurrence and changes in the learner's cultural milieu. It is befitting for the needs and aspirations of the society. It prepares the individual to face his social goals, economic realities and future life challenges positively. It means an education in which the ability to perform productive tasks is more emphasized than the education that aims at producing ideological conformity. Abdu (2005) saw functional education as the wholesome training of an individual that makes him/her useful to him/her self, 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. In fact, if education is intended to promote economic sufficiency for the beneficiaries, then there is a positive relationship between functional education and national development (Fuandai, Shiaki & Gbari, 2007).

### ***Pristine***

Going by these descriptions of functional education, a relevant question to this paper is; to what extent has the objectives of education in Nigeria been achieved in the Nigeria education system since she saw the need to free herself from the shackles of ideological/theoretical form of education handed down from the colonial masters? The answer is simple. The picture appears cheerful. There are evidences of concrete achievements in this regard at least on paper. Evidently, the FRN (2004: Section 1:4d) stated that there is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria; to this end school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive, while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education. The number of technical colleges, polytechnics and colleges of education (technical) has increased. Schools' curriculum has also been overhauled. Specialized universities of agriculture, technology, and petroleum resources among others have been established. These have increased to an extent the number of graduates who have acquired skills (certificates) that are used in making things; creating wealth; harnessing our abundant natural resources among others.

### **Features of Functional Education**

The essence of functional education is to bring out the best in the individual. For education to achieve its purpose of being functional, it must possess some features. Fuandai, Shiaki & Gbari (2007) came up with some of the features of functional education such as the following: relevance, accessibility, empowerment, self-reliance, involvement of stakeholders in its design; equipping recipients to harness their potentials, emphasizing the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge for gainful self-employment. Let us look at some of these distinctive features of functional education one by one;

**Relevance-** Education achieves functional purpose when its curriculum is tailored and designed to suit the immediate and future needs of the individual and the society in which, he lives in consonance with the realities of the individual's environment and the modern world. It solves problems in order to meet the needs of the learners. Education loses its relevance if it is not appropriate or relevant to real life encounters of the learner, such as; improving his quality of life.

**Accessibility-** It should be available to all irrespective of age, ability and gender. Nobody should be denied access to functional education. Evidently, Nigeria is a signatory to the Jomtien Declaration on education for all and the Millennium Development Goals which, include increasing literacy by the year 2015.

**Empowerment-** Functional education should equip beneficiaries with the requisite knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes, necessary to function and engage in productive ventures and earn a living. This has a multiplier effect as it will reduce unemployment, improve family income and reduce poverty, reduce infant mortality and raise the standard of living.

**Emphasizes the Acquisition of Original Practical Skills and Knowledge-** Functional education involves original application of skills and knowledge to complex problems

*Dr. Nneka G. Nwaka*

(construction of knowledge) rather than just routine use of facts and procedures. Functional education is practical. This implies that the skills acquired could easily be put into use whenever the need arises! This demands that anyone who has acquired functional education should readily apply such skill or knowledge on the spot without making reference to written materials. It is only functional education that can make a mechanical engineer on graduation to design any mechanical device for use in a given environment and an agricultural engineer to devise alternatives for traditional hoes and knives to till the land and harvest their crops manually. In other words with functional education, they can be gainfully self employed and as well. contribute their quota to the national income and development.

**Self-reliance**-Functional education is one which emphasizes self-reliance for the recipients. In other words, it prepares and equips people to be on their own; using their knowledge and skills to be self-reliant, create wealth and employment opportunities. This will go a long way in reducing poverty and crimes among the youths and contribute to the economic and national development. Self-reliance connotes self-direction which is the ability to propel oneself toward a particular direction (Udoetuk & Udofia, 2012).

This demands a lot of sacrifice, encouragement and devotion on the part of the students and the teachers. Thus, students are prepared to trust and believe in themselves, trust their capabilities and challenged to carve a niche for themselves.

### **Imperativeness of Functional Education for Skills and National Development**

Globally, the wholesome need and contribution of education especially functional education can never be over-emphasized. Already, functional education is known to be positively related with economic growth and by extension, national development. National development refers to growth, changes, and improvements occurring in a given economy, with the aim of promoting the quality of life among the populace. It must be noted that in any nation, it is the populace that is educated. Thus, after their training; they will be equipped with the requisite knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to function and engage in productive ventures; earn a bountiful living and contribute to the economic and national development.

Against this backdrop, functional education when well inculcated in the individual produces high level man power in different fields of human endeavour. These professionals in turn will provide the technical know-how to develop the vast material and human resources for rapid economic and national development. Thus, Functional education has a multiplier effect as it reduces unemployment, improves family income, reduces poverty and infant mortality, and raises the standard of living. It nurtures the present and solidifies the future.

Functional education develops the beneficiary's intelligence as well as makes him acquire all round development- socially, culturally, economically, politically and technologically suitable to perform various duties that are expected to uplift and support

### *Pristine*

the development of the individual, the immediate community and by extension, the nation.

Functional education equips the recipients with original practical skills and knowledge to harness their potentials; provides opportunities for individuals to develop their latent talents to the fullest without hindrance.

Provision of functional education inculcates the right type of values and attitudes in the recipients, which will consequently, strengthen democracy and promote democratic ideals and the rule of law. A stable and vibrant democracy free from dubious betrayal and corruption is a sine qua non for rapid national development.

### **Impediments/Challenges to Achievement of Functional Education for National Development**

Despite the efforts being made by the government at all levels in Nigeria to ensure that functional education is achieved, one wonders why the educational systems which hitherto produced world acclaimed scholars like Prof. Babatunde Fafunwa, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and many others in their categories have been reduced to one whose products are minors. Regrettably, the quality of educational output and our national development have deteriorated instead of improving. No wonder Fanon (2005) complained that the current system of education in Nigeria has become irrelevant. Among other things; it lacks emphasis on productive work skills at the junior and senior secondary school levels and character development. Some of the identifiable factors that impede/challenge achievement of functional education for national development are;

### **Non-implementation of Policy Statements, Recommendations and Ideas for Improving Education in Nigeria**

There have been varied beautiful and promising policies, suggestions and ideas for improving education by prominent scholars from all works of life. But, seemingly, due to ignorance, politics and corruption most of them are neglected. Interestingly, Nigeria is good at planning and policy making in all sectors of her economy, but when it comes to implementation, she fails. It is one thing to plan a good curriculum and another thing to implement it successfully. Based on this, Nwaka (2012) argued that there is need for an overhaul of the educational programmes and the implementation processes of education in order to ensure the relevant curriculum, right human and material resources are employed. Also, there is need to effectively supervise the instruction being given to-ensure adequate compliance with the required academic standard.

### **Corruption**

Corruption and indiscipline are attributes of character. They touch on the social values, attitudes and morality. Today, bribery and corruption among the politicians-and government officials is daily worsening the capability of education sector in meeting the desired expectations of its stakeholders. Thus, the idealism of youths has been negatively galvanized into turning vices into virtue with the touch of the 21st century. School premises especially tertiary institution campuses are today centre of gross

*Dr. Nneka G. Nwaka*

indiscipline- fraud, examination cheating, impersonation, cultism, drug addiction and murder. On the part of adults, shameless and uncontrolled materialism, ethnicism, unbridled corruption and naked pursuit of power leading to thuggery and hired killings constitute a few of the stock piles of adult misdemeanors (Maduwesi, 2002). Most often, funds meant for education are hijacked or diverted into private purses. All these are pointers to why functional education for national development is yet to be achieved in Nigeria.

### **Teacher Factor**

Many teachers do not adapt their teaching-learning programmes and processes to meet the challenges of changing technological advances and current needs. Most often they neglect the use of variety of teaching methods and repeated practice of tasks by which learners grow in skills acquisition. There is a strong relationship between success in mastering tasks and repetition. No education can rise above the quality of its teachers. If teachers have poor knowledge of the subject matter and the strategies/methods to impart the knowledge learning is impeded (Nwaka, 2012). Teachers are seen as reservoirs of knowledge so when they fail to teach students adequately they would not function effectively in the society. Notably, no teacher teaches best what he does not know; Onyeachu (2009) observed. Nigeria needs without delay teachers with good expertise and the determination to transform her citizens into people that are easily employable; can set up their own entrepreneurship business and contribute to national development.

### **Nature of our Educational System**

The deteriorating nature of education and or lamentable conditions within the schools in Nigeria, do not favour functional education for skill acquisition and national development. Most teachers in public schools are potentially radicalized; attending ceremonies and labour union meetings more than class teaching sessions. There is the issue of low wages, salary arrears and alienation of teachers in decision making coupled with lack of genuine consultation on education policy formulation (Bankole, 2002). If all these are not tackled, education would continue to be dysfunctional. Functional education requires appropriate educational equipment, adequate supply of education materials, and practice by the learners for sustainable livelihoods.

### **Lack of Non-Formal Skill Training**

Non-formal skills training such as; handicrafts/handwork- making of brooms, baskets, fans etc, are today not provided for the youths in our schools. In effect, when they leave school, they will not be self-reliant or even marketable because they are not adequately equipped to live in and contribute to the development of the nation. The lack of non-formal skill training (as in the traditional education) in our educational systems does not favour functional education for national development.

### **Examination Malpractice**

Currently, examination malpractice is a serious problem in the Nigerian systems of education. Today, teachers, parents and learners instead of engaging in activities that

### ***Pristine***

will make inculcation of the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and capabilities in the learners; waste their time in planning one form of examination malpractice or the other. Thus on graduation, because the graduates' are not qualified but certificated, they become unemployed or unemployable and, consequently, could neither be gainfully self-employed nor contribute their quota to national income and national development. The implication of faulty educational system could be devastating; for example, it is capable of increasing rate of examination misconduct and production of half-baked products (graduates) due to lack of solid foundation rendering the individual less qualified to handle serious work assignments (Olowo-onyanemi & Edetanlen, 2008).

### **Inadequate Funding**

It is no more news that funds meant for education programmes in Nigeria are inadequate. This calls for pity because the problem of education in Nigeria has continued to worsen day after day. Funding is a central factor to an effective functional education. All systems of education today complain of poor infrastructures, dilapidated classrooms, poorly equipped libraries and laboratories and consequently poor educational standard. All these are linked to under funding of education. An effective functional education is hinged on adequate funding, equipment, facilities, and materials as well as effective motivation of the teachers and the learners in the schools. Behgo (2010) observed that the Nigerian education sector has deteriorated rapidly over the decade due to lack of monetary investment in this area (less than 7% of our national GDP is allocated to education; 17% below the UN recommended amount). This amount is considerably lower than what other poorer African countries invest. Chronic under-funding has made it impossible to realize functional education in Nigeria.

### **Poor Monitoring and Supervision**

Regular monitoring and supervision of education programmes, the teaching-learning process and actions guarantee improved education system and goal realization. Once a curriculum is poorly implemented the aim of such curriculum is jeopardized.

### **Poor Educational Materials**

In most Nigerian schools equipment and educational materials are grossly inadequate to go round the teeming population of students, hence poor mastery of the practical skills training. Consequently, students at times cannot match theoretical knowledge with practical. In some other cases, most of the equipment have become obsolete due to technological advancement: Modern tools are not purchased to reflect current global technological trend.

### **Poor Orientation**

According to Nwaka (2012), Nigerians want to have as much as they could without expending the least effort. Thus, it may not be any news that many of the Nigerian youths are not interested in producing things; not even in self work; but they want to belong in the society because of the way they were brought up. They consider doing things with their hands as a career-path for the less academically endowed. Prospects of financial security and the feeling of belonging as a worthy member of the



*Dr. Nneka G. Nwaka*

society are among the cherished values for achievement by the learners. Therefore, for functional education to take root in Nigeria there is need to establish financial security for the students after years of study.

### **The Way Forward**

The following recommendations were carved out to re-engineer/improve functional education for national development:

- i. Suggestions and ideas for improving education programmes in Nigeria such as Entrepreneurship education programmes, should be properly implemented by the education authorities;
- ii. Exam-malpractice, corruption and indiscipline which rob Nigerian education sector the capability of meeting the desired expectations of its stakeholders should be avoided and fought collectively by all and sundry;
- iii. Teachers should adapt the teaching-learning processes and programmes of the youths to meet the challenges of changing technological advances and current needs;
- iv. Teachers should often use variety of teaching methods and repeated practice of tasks by which learners grow in skills acquisition;
- v. Teachers should be more committed to their profession blowing fully well that the learners are not to be blamed for the nature of education and or lamentable conditions within the schools in Nigeria;
- vi. Government should urgently make conditions of teaching service favourable for the teachers as well as stop alienation of teachers in decision making coupled with lack of genuine consultation on education policy formulation in order to guarantee functional education for skill and national development;
- vii. Schools, especially primary and secondary schools should commence non-formal skills training (handicrafts/handiwork- making of brooms, baskets, fans etc), for the youths so that when they leave school, they would be self-reliant or even marketable because they are equipped to live in and contribute to the development of the nation.
- viii. Government should take the issue of funding education very serious .in order to provide conducive conditions; educational infrastructures; facilities and materials for functional education to take root and sprout self and national development;
- ix. Nigerian youths should be made to become interested in-producing things; especially, in self work; and be provided with financial security and the feeling of belonging as worthy members of the society;

### **Conclusion**

The development of any nation given by its educational system is assessed by the extent to which it achieves its stated objectives. The goal of education in Nigeria includes developing in the learner a well-integrated person who is socially adjustable, morally dependable, mentally and physically alert, intellectually honest, economically efficient, scientifically literate, vocationally equipped, nationally and internationally oriented and culturally adjusted. All these can be achieved only through effective and

### *Pristine*

efficient functional education where-in laid the bedrock of any nation for purposeful acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills and development.

### **References**

- Abdu, A. (2005). Functional secondary education for self-reliance. The way forward. Multi-dimensional *Journal of Research and Development*. 5 (1), 101-108.
- Behgo, B. T. (2010). A cost effective mobile solution to support ICT and education in Nigeria. Retrieved on 12/01/12 from <http://www.futuresoft-ng.com/IT-Talk/Articles/ict-education-africa>.
- Dike, H. I. & Eze, R. O. (2009). Designing a curriculum. In U. M. O. Ivowi, K. Nwifo, C. Nwagbara, J. Ukwungwu, E. Emah & G. Uya (Eds) *Curriculum theory and practice*. Abuja: Curriculum Organization of Nigeria
- Efurhievwe, F. A. O. (2012). Utilization of education values for the development of national stability through democratic, process in Nigeria. *Journal of Qualitative Education*. 8 (2), 75-79.
- Fanon. J. (2005). Investing in Africans future through its universities. *This Day*. September 25, 18.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *National policy on education*. Lagos: NERDC.
- Fuandai, C. M., Shiaki, B. & Gbari, U. S. (2007). Functional education as a spring board for national development. *Multi-dimensional Journal of Research and Development*. 5 (2), 147-150.
- Maduwesi, E. J. (2002). Education for character and skills development. .In E. A. Yoloye & A, O. Osiyale (eds) *Education for character and skills development*. Fafunnwa Educational Foundation. 1-9.
- Nwaka, N. G. (2012). The state of tertiary education in meeting the needs of the modern Nigeria society. In O. Ibcnerne, B. Alumode & H. Usoro (Eds). *The state of education in Nigeria*. Kano: West and Solomon Publishing Coy Ltd.
- Obiora, O. M. (2010).the role of education in sustainable development of Nigeria: A philosophical appraisal. -. *Journal of Educational Studies and Research*. 5 (1). 174-189.
- Offorma, G. C. (2010). Re-engineering teacher education in Nigeria for quality service delivery. A keynote address presented at Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, during the School of Education Biannual Conference held October 11-15, 2010.

***Dr. Nneka G. Nwaka***

- Olowo-onyanemiy Z. O. & Ed'etanlen, M. E. (2008). Educational reforms in Nigeria: (Challenges and the way forward). Omolayole, M. O. (2002). Education for character and skills development. In E. A. Yoloye & A. O. Osiyale (eds). *Education for character and skills development*. Fafunnwa Educational Foundation Series, vii-x.
- Onyeachu, J. A. E. (2009). Refocusing tertiary education in Nigeria towards entrepreneurship education: challenges for the 21st century in P. Egbule, J. E. Tabotndip & D. A. Aboho (eds). *Refocusing education in Nigeria in the 21st century*. Kano: West & Solomon Publishing Coy. Ltd.
- Udoetuk, U. & Udofia, W. (2012). Fundamental roles of vocational and technical education for national development. *Journal of Qualitative Education*. 8 (2), 162-167.