

FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION: THE PLACE OF READING IN ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

In the present day practice of Education, emphasis is on the functionality of education. Educational practices involve reading, which is an important language skill that enables an individual to extract information as well as acquire knowledge from written materials. Knowledge gained through reading can be utilized for both individual and national development. One of the many ways of acquiring knowledge through reading is by making education functional. This paper discussed the following: Functional education; reading and its role in acquisition of knowledge for national development; role of knowledge in national development and strategies for achieving functional education for acquisition of knowledge through reading for national development.

Functional education is the type of education that enables an individual to deal with practical problems and challenges of life – at home, in education and at work. Idowu (1999) in William and Anakwe (2010) described functional education as the total process of bringing up individuals to develop their potentials which include cognitive, affective and psychomotor to the fullest and consequently to be able to contribute maximally to the development of the society. Functional education is also taken to mean application of knowledge and skills acquired through reading.

Reading is effective machinery for learning. It enables one to obtain all kinds of information from written sources. Reading is used for acquiring different kinds of knowledge and experience necessary for the development of an individual, as well as the nation. Igwe (2011) sees it as being essential to fully participate in modern society. This is because it adds to life; provides access to culture and heritage; empowers and emancipates citizen as well as bring people together. In essence, reading enables an individual to acquire all kinds of knowledge necessary for national development.

Knowledge according to Hornby (2010) is described as the information, understanding and skills gained through education and experience. It is also a state of

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knowing about a particular fact or situation. Jacob and Asokan (2000) see knowledge as a process by which human-beings become aware of opportunities and challenges, formulate responses, make decisions and initiate organized actions. In other words, where there is a high percentage or high level of reading in a people, the citizen of a nation are well informed, knowledgeable and experienced. Organized actions are transformed into national development - a reflection of individual and societal development.

Development is the general mobilization of resources of each individuals power and creativity as well as the continuous development of the individual in mastering current knowledge and practices in science and technology. Igwe (2011) described it as an improvement in people's life- style, through improved qualitative education, income skills, development and fulfilled employment. That is to say that, people should be able read and write in order to apply these for development.

National development according to Abanobi (2007) emphasizes any variable advancement in educational levels, socio-economic status, media exposition, agricultural innovations, acquisition of technological know- how, mass production goods and services and cultural awareness by the citizenry.

National development results from functional education and functional education leads too acquisition of knowledge, i.e. knowledge which can be acquired through functional reading.

According to Sisl (2004) in Igwe (2011), reading is one of the fundamental building blocks of learning; the quality of learning determines the quality of education acquired. For instance, Laughton (1982) opined that throughout history reading has been the badge of intellect and proof of knowledge and education, while Fakuade in (Nwaiwu 2007) believed that the type of education one acquires is dependent on the quality and quantity of reading one does. No doubt, this in turn determines the level of development in a nation. Knowledge generation imparts directly on the national development especially as the entire world is now globalized; information super-highway have been created, giving access to information, knowledge and skills which help to build the human capacity both for individual and national development.

Therefore interest and ability to read and transfer knowledge and skills acquired through reading for the development of existing infrastructures production and revolutionalization of the economy are pointers to the acquisition of functional education. The main thrust of this discourse is to look at the following: Functional education, Reading and its role in acquisition of knowledge, Role of knowledge in national development and Strategies for achieving functional education for acquisition of knowledge through reading for national development.

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Functional Education

Education has been described as the primary and most effective means so far evolved for transmitting practically useful knowledge from one generation to another. "Functional" means practicable and useful. Functional education then means a type of education that is practicable and can be used by the citizenry for the development of their nation.

Fafunwa (1974) in William and Anekwe (2010) referred to functional education as the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or a young adult develop the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour that are of positive value to the society in which he lives. Ali (2000) in William and Anakwe (2010) posited that functional education will ensure and /or produce food for the people, create jobs, provide services and lead to democracy. Nwokolo (1997) in William and Anakwe (2010) envisaged this type of education as one that in 2010 and beyond should be capable of producing Nigerians who can manufacture raw materials, machines and tools for our industries, produce enough food for local and international; invest new designs, discover drugs capable of curbing diseases hitherto incurable and transform the nation from a consuming one to a manufacturing one. It must be noted here that ability to do these are sequel to acquisition of knowledge about these. Functional education still remains the primary means of transmitting these knowledge, skills and values to the present generation and even to those yet to be born.

The rate of knowledge generation in any nation depends to a great extent on the type and level of education designed and attained by the citizenry. Knowledge acquisition for national development is a function of qualitative education, - an education that is expected to be functional such that the citizenry can impart positively using such knowledge acquired for development in the society.

Functional Education is translated from well-structured educational programmes. Both the teachers and the learners must be equipped with skills for proper acquisition of knowledge for development. For instance, Dienye (20011) suggested that in teacher training quality education should be functional to be extent that it equips the teacher with the appropriate aptitudes and abilities needed to promote learning and bring out the best in learners. For the learners, a functional education should imbue them with skills that will lead to consolidation of scientific behaviour, skills that would enable them function meaningful in the society thereby contributing to societal development. In other word, Functional education leads to acquisition of knowledge for national development and knowledge acquired through reading.

Reading and its Role in Acquisition of Knowledge and National Development

Reading is a language skill. It is an indispensable tool for learning in various hierarchies of modern educational system. Infact, it is the major key to progress in learning, all successes in academic pursuit hinge on reading.

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Reading plays certain vital roles in the daily lives of people. It enables them to acquire different kinds of information on different topics, subjects, in all fields human of endeavour from written sources. It also enables one to master the different techniques of writing. It is a psychologically paying past-time especially when one reads for pleasure. It is a past-time which according to Sir Philip Sidney in Abanobi (2005), holdeth Children from play and old one from chimney corners.

Reading exposes one to different ages in history of mankind. Even though it is an arduous process, it is most miraculous when one considers that one has at one's command and for one's use much of the best that has been written by best brains of many centuries.

Reading is paramount to the existence of a society as it is used to keep pace with new development. In fact, the percentage of people who are able to read in any society is a determining factor of their way of life. A highest percentage suggests a move scientifically and technologically advanced people while a low percentage suggests otherwise. In other words, the level of development of a nation is directly proportional to the level of reading of the people. Lending credence to the above, Osundare (2000) in Igwe (2011) opined that a country's level of development is a function of its level of mental and cultural revolution, as well as the state of its educational advancement which is embedded in building high level literacy of the population. It therefore suggests that reading contributes to productivity and prospecting of a nation.

To further buttress the importance of reading to national development, Shaw (1967) in Abanobi (2005) explained that an American university president once remarked that at one point in the history of his country, their leaders found time to read and demonstrated in their own lives and works, the utility as well as delight in reading. It thus becomes clear that the knowledge and skill acquired through reading do not only contribute to creating a prosperous and productive society, but also employment of a fuller and more satisfying life -an evidence of human capacity development.

Reading helps to develop a sound mind. A sound mind is a knowledgeable mind that in turn contributes to national development, which includes; social, political, economic, scientific and technological development. Every day in the world, new ideas new knowledge, new technologies emerge and it only through reading that the individuals of the society keep abreast with knowledge explosions in the world. The individual ploughs bock the wealth of knowledge and experience acquired through reading to the society through association interaction and application of technology. Reading enriches and enables one to learn from the experience of others thereby permitting human knowledge allows one to satisfy personal and functional needs as well as participate filling in contemporary society.

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Generally speaking, reading is vital to being better informed, it makes one to have better understanding, and it makes a man to be thoughtful and constructive, contribute to a democratic and cohesive society. Absence of reading no doubt is a barrier to national development and international competitiveness. In a country like Nigeria where level of reading is very low, the vandalization of oil pipelines, menace of Boko Haram sect, youth restiveness in the Niger Delta region, economic crimes committed by both the low and the high and mighty in our society are because these people are not knowledgeable (functional knowledge) enough to recognize the fact that these nefarious acts affects their own developments. Therefore, acquisition of knowledge through reading, which enables national development, is a pointer to functional education.

The Role of Knowledge in National Development

Knowledge has been described as a process by which human being become aware of opportunities and challenges; formulate responses; make decisions and initiate actions. It is the most important resource in development. Jacob and Asokan (2000) explained that development on a very broad knowledge, technical knowledge for productive processes, commercial knowledge of markets and business practices; personal knowledge of human health and nutrition knowledge of laws and legal processes and public policies, knowledge of organization and management, knowledge of emerging fields of science and most importantly, a conceptual knowledge of nature of development processes it self. So that one may have to unleash and harness energy, resourcefulness and creativity of the people.

Knowledge is a productive resource. By this, it is meant, that knowledge is a very essential input for education; for scientific research and industrial technology. It is a catalyst for social change and economic development. It serves as a basis for civilization and cultural values that promotes social integrity and harmony which are essential foundations for development. These attributes of knowledge become necessary in this globalized age. Ability to acquire information and knowledge and use them helps to improve the quality of lives of the citizens and then this rubs off on the nation.

Knowledge for development can be acquired through both formal and informal means; from knowledge developers and adapters to those responsible for application of knowledge in the society. In the formal setting, knowledge is disseminated in the classroom through the teachers, instructors and facilitators. It is also disseminated through a variety of informal channels especially through educational media such as published works, cable television which has enormous potentials of delivering access to household; the internet which at present is the fastest growing media channels world over through which different kinds of knowledge are acquired and disseminated.

Knowledge is therefore very essential for survival in an increasingly complex world. This is because activities leading to development in the world are knowledge-

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based and knowledge for development follows certain processes. Jacobson and Asokan (2000:2) equally identified four knowledge processes;

- i. Knowledge generation and acquisition through scientific discovery, research and development as well as transfer of technology.
- ii. Knowledge adaptation through innovations in a particular fields' needs and operating environment
- iii. Knowledge dissemination through formal and informal channels, from knowledge developers and adapters, to those responsible for applying the knowledge in the society
- iv. Knowledge application through skilled action in fields, factories, classrooms, hospitals and every other field of activity to achieve practical results.

It must be recalled that knowledge is power. For centuries, humanity's knowledge base has been accumulating slowly and with the spread of information technology and telecommunication facilities and the internet, wider access to a much greater range of knowledge have been created and the pace is doubling in this age and time. One of the ways of harnessing this knowledge is through functional education.

Strategies for Achieving Functional Education for Acquisition of Knowledge through Reading for National Development

Based on the tripartite roles of reading, knowledge and functional education in national development, the following strategies have been enlisted for achieving functional education for proper acquisition of knowledge through reading for national development.

1. Reading is synonymous with formal education and since educational achievements attest to one's ability to read and apply what has been read, it is therefore very apt that the speed of education be accelerated. By this, it is meant that efforts must be geared towards reducing illiteracy level by providing qualitative expansion of the educational system to accommodate more learners both young and adult learners.
2. Qualitative education is achieved through equipment of existing institutions with learning resources that are acknowledged worldwide to facilitate learning and knowledge acquisition for both young and adult learners in a more dynamic, entertaining and interesting way. These spur in the learner the zeal to read and become interested in applying learning.
3. Promotion of reading culture is a must in Nigeria. This is because it is only when one reads that one is able to apply experiences from what has been read to the development of the nation.
4. As a result of the fact that a developed nation is an offspring of a reading society, there is a need to establish new libraries – National, State, Institutional and even private and family libraries to encourage good reading habits.
5. Functional Education is possible when the education sector is properly funded. UNESCO has recommended a minimum of 26% of a nation's budget to education. If this is properly implemented, educational resources which include

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- provision reading materials, well equipped library would be put in place for the improvement of citizen's knowledge-base for national development.
6. Due to the fact that we now live in an Internet age, with regards to acquisition of knowledge and information, multimedia forms of school programmes and lesson delivering should be encouraged over the internet. The internet now offers an exciting new learning medium that can literally transform the concept of school and curriculum from physical into virtual realities. Reading can be encouraged through this medium.
 7. Educational practices in the present times are learner-centred. There is a shift from teaching to learning. Teacher now guide students in the process of knowledge acquisition as he/she exposes learners to varieties of sources and means. Qualitative expansion of educational system will ensure that education provided is of adequate quality to keep young people enrolled in schools as well as improve their capacity for social adaptation and achievement.
 8. Above all, the educational system should deemphasize teaching and encourage learners to read more on their own in order to explore more. This will spur in them the zeal to put into practice experiences acquired through independent study.

Conclusion

Reading has over the ages remained a reliable way to acquire information, knowledge and experiences of other people. Functional education leads to acquisition of functional knowledge of which reading plays a great role in achieving. Knowledge in turn is a factor of national development. There is therefore a need to restructure the education system to encourage reading for acquisition of proper knowledge leading to national development.

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