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Vocation and Functional Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

By

MUHAMMAD MAHMOUD MINNA

*Department of Integrated Science,
Federal College of Education, Kano,
Kano State.*

Abstract

Education is the key to functional and sustainable development. The purpose of education is to benefit humanity positively. Vocational and Technical (VTE) education tends to address issue of consumption and production of goods and services directly because it will equip the learner with the necessary skills to compete in the labour market. The Nigerian economy and education are in a comatose situation and cannot compete globally with the leading economies despite abundant human and natural resources. The paper seeks to look at the challenges and prospects of the economic and educational status of Nigeria among which include: conflicts and instability, corruption, abundant human and natural resources, inadequate power supply, unemployed University graduates, a comatose economy etc.

Keywords: Vocation and Technical (VTE), Comatose, Conflict, Human and Natural resources and Instability.

In this era of civilization education is viewed from economic and social perspective. It is looked at beyond its conventional boundaries of the four walls of the classroom. It is meant to serve a purpose which should be utilitarian in nature. Education is strategic in the developmental process of any nation. Nigeria as a developing country is in need of functional education that would transform her citizenry's productive capacity in such a way that it can cope with the global economic challenges.

UNESCO (2017), view education as a means to empower children and adults alike to become active participants in the transformation of their societies and that learning should also focus on the values, attitudes and behaviors which enable individuals to learn to live together in a world characterized by diversity and pluralism.

Smith (2015) sees education as a process of inviting truth and possibility, of encouraging and giving time to discovery. It is a social process – ‘a process of living and not a preparation for future living’. In this view, educators look to act with people rather than on them. Their task is to educate (related to the Greek notion of *educere*), to bring out or develop potential-(educate).

According to Zeilberger (1961), the terms "Functional Education" (education fonctionnelle) and "Functional Instructions" have several meanings:

(1) In the United States and in Germany (starting around 1920), the adjective "functional" refers to education that comes spontaneously from the influence of the environment; It is a kind of undirected, "natural" education, that is different from the deliberate, goal-oriented education, that is directed by man.

(2) In Western Europe this term refers to education that comes from the child's needs, and that uses the 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 in the present and in the future. (as cited by Zeilberger,1999).

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) believes 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 determined the individual's direction in education ... for the acquisition of appropriate skills and development of mental, physical and social abilities and competences as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society (Udoh and Akpan, 2014, p145).

In the same vein, Nwokolo (1997) posited that: Functional education should be capable of producing Nigerians who can manufacture raw materials, machines and tools needed for local and international markets, invent new designs, discover drugs capable of curing diseases hitherto incurable and transform the nation from a consumption to a manufacturing status. (as cited in Udoh and Akpan, 2014, p.143).

Vocation Education

The important point to realize is that vocation education like science and technology is human activity. Decisions about technological applications and priorities for their development are used to determine the strength of an economy.

According to Abubakar (2010) Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) refers to a range of learning experiences which are relevant to the world of work. The learning experience may occur in a variety of contexts including educational institutions and work places. He noted that originally preparation for the world of work was the main goal of TVET. However, with the technological revolution

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and innovations in science and technology, the current focus is on preparing knowledge workers to meet the challenges posed during the transition from the industrial age to the information age, with its concomitant post-industrial human resource requirements and the changing world of work (as cited in Uthman, 2013, p.1).

Chukwura (2009) is of the opinion that (TVET) programmes at all levels of Nigerian Education system should be geared toward the inculcating of employable and entrepreneurial skills into the learner and that global competitiveness in this context should be the ability to shoulder with other countries all over the world as far as development is concerned. In this case the country involved should be able to integrate her economics throughout the world through trade, financial flows and exchange of technology, information and the movement of people (as cited in Gana, 2013, p.3).

The Challenges of Functional Education

Internal Conflicts and Insecurity

As reported in the 2011 World Development Report, 1.5 billion people live in areas affected by fragility, conflict, or large-scale, organized criminal violence. From 1998 to 2008, thirty-five countries experienced armed conflict. Fragile situations [Insecure and Unstable] are defined in the 2011 World Bank Development Report as periods when states or institutions lack the capacity, accountability, or legitimacy to mediate relations between citizen groups and between citizens and the state, making them vulnerable to violence. The Inter Agency Network on Education in Emergencies includes that in fragile situations, governments may have lost the ability to provide basic services to their citizens. Fragile situations include situations of political instability that hinder economic productivity and growth, and may be accompanied by serious social dislocation. In 2011, around 28 million children of primary school age in conflict-affected countries were out of school according to that year's Global Monitoring Report. This makes up approximately 42% of the total out of school children around the world (*Educate a child n.d.*)

One of the greatest threats to economy and internal security arises from outbreaks of emerging internal conflicts and political instability. These are common phenomena in developing societies like Nigeria, as situations that affect peaceful co-existence and the attainment of sustainable development. According to Afegbua (2014) inter-religious confrontations and the proliferation of sectional groupings in the last 50 years of Nigeria's nationhood are other sources of tension and instability in the polity. Religious extremism, fanaticism and intolerance in some parts of the country, becomes an extension of inter-ethnic, inter-communal conflicts. Inter-ethnic struggles over issues that border on Public Office and resource sharing take coloration in the formation of ethnic militias.

Conflict variables from the Correlates of War (COW) project have revealed how do different types of conflicts affect country growth rates? It finds that wars slow the economy. Estimates indicate that civil war reduces annual growth by 0.01–0.13 percentage points, and high-intensity inter-state conflict reduces annual growth by

0.18–2.77 percentage points. On the other hand, low-intensity conflict slows growth much less than high-intensity conflict, and may slightly increase it. The detrimental effect of conflict on growth is intensified when examining non-democracies, low-income countries, and countries in Africa. (Polachek and Sevastianova, 2012 , p.361).

Incessant Power Failure

The prevalent epileptic and anaemic kind of power supply cannot support meaningful research activities in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Available statistics has shown that poor electricity supply in the country is endangering the growth of the critical sectors of the economy in which the education sector is not singled out. In the education sector, only a trickle of daily electricity production reportedly goes in to the country's 93 higher institutions of learning (Odiegwu, 2009). The situation is still the same today and has no doubt, rendered research equipment dysfunctional especially the ICT systems- The resultant effect is that some tertiary institutions resort to diesel propelled generators which on their own are expensive and environmentally unfriendly. Also, research processes are disrupted as they only work for a limited period (as cited in Nwakpa, 2015, p.3).

Corruption

According to Lamido (2013), the level of corruption in the country has assumed a threatening dimension which is also disastrous and destructive to the economy. This definitely has negative effects on education and research. Corruption has eaten so deep into the fabrics of the national life that even the education sector is not spared. Ultimately, this has affected the quality and quantity of scientific findings, up-to-date equipment and infrastructure facilities for good research (as cited in Nwakpa, 2015, p.4).

Although Nigeria's educational institutions in general are in dire need, the most troubled of the three tiers is the primary education sector. The recent statistics on primary education available to this writer shows that there are about 2,015 primary schools in Nigeria with no buildings of any type. Classes are held under trees. The quality of lectures conducted under such an inhumane condition would not be anything to be proud of. With this dismal statistics, the government is still in the habit of allocating less money to the educational sector. Nigeria has toiled with some educational programs, which have only served as conduits to transfer money to the corrupt political leaders and their cronies. For instance, the nation launched the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 and Universal Basic Education (UBE) 1999. As stated by Bollag, (2002) the ugly tradition of corruption still persists; the public tertiary institutions have been left to rot away. Some of the loans received from the World Bank toward education during the 1990s were used to purchase unnecessary, and "expensive equipment that could not be properly installed or maintained and many

institutions received irrelevant and useless books and journals (as cited in Dike, 2005, p.3).

Prospects

Human and Mineral Resources

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with an estimated population of 180 million people. The Nigeria's population and human resource base make it one of the most attractive countries for foreign investment in Africa. As foreign and local firms increase their involvement in Nigeria, they will need to build capabilities and utilise local competencies. The sensitivity to individuals' socialization as well as economic, historical, political, and social contexts according to Azolukwam and Perkins (2009) may enable organisations to capitalise on the potential to transplant forms from parent country cultures to developing countries such as Nigeria. Most organizations in Nigeria now offer a continued education and training to help its people cultivate the right skills and expand their career within a truly global/collaborative workplace (as cited in Fajana, Owoyemi, Elegbede and Gbajumo-Sheriff, 2011, pp. 2-3).

Looking at figure I below with dedication, seriousness and the right policies put in place, Nigeria as a country has the potential of becoming one of the largest economies. United States with largest economy have an estimated population of over 326 million, China over 1.3 billion, India over 1.3 billion also then, Japan over 126 million, India over 1.3 billion and Brazil over 211 million.

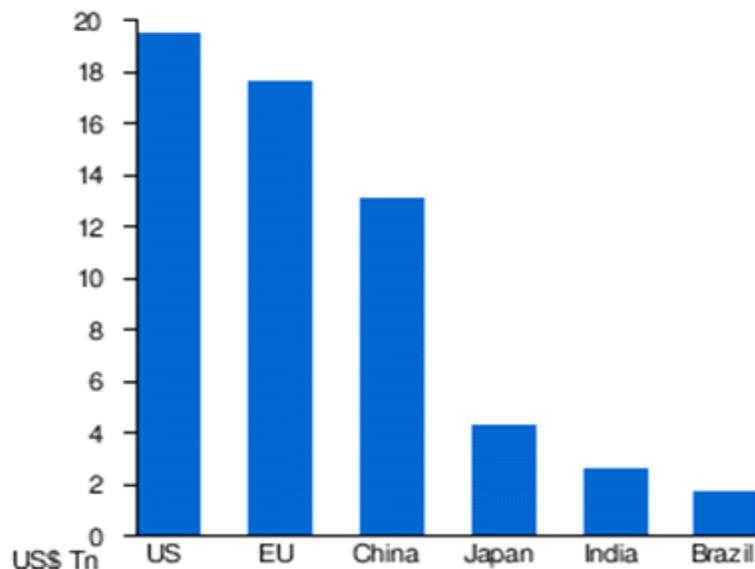


Figure I
Largest economies by nominal GDP in 2017

(counting the economies of the European Union as one)
according to International Monetary Fund estimates

Recent studies by the mining, minerals and sustainable development project (mmsd) (n.d.) asserts that natural resource abundance (particularly minerals) has adverse consequences for economic growth. Many of the world's richest countries have benefited greatly from minerals extraction. Australia, Canada, Finland, Sweden, and the United States, for example, have all had extensive minerals industries and used them as a platform for broad-based industrial development.¹ By any standards, these are now some of the world's most successful economies: in 2001 all five were among the top 10 countries in the Human Development Index prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Moreover, in these countries minerals development seems by at least some measures to have brought benefits specifically to regions with mines.

Conclusion

For Nigeria to compete with largest economies economically and educationally there is need for patriotism and sacrifice from its citizenry. Commitment and dedication to humanity is the key to Nigeria's problem. Conflicts tend to reduce the level of national development despite abundant human and natural resources. Whatever commitment is on ground if there is no peaceful coexistence between a populace it is a wasted effort.

Recommendations

Energy and security of lives and properties are key drivers in a prosperous economy. No economy will thrive when there is no adequate power supply and peaceful atmosphere for coexistence. Based on these the following recommendations are suggested.

- Government should be committed to local energy supply as it will boost research and development in our institution of learning
- Security of lives and properties should be the government's priority. All necessary measures should be put in place to safeguard them.
- Human and natural resources should be harnessed positively. There is need to develop local technology using the available resources around.

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