

CREATIVE AND FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN A COMATOSE ECONOMY

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The role of education as the bedrock of social, economic, political and cultural development can never be overemphasized. All over the world, education is expected to be highly rated in national development plans because it is the most important instrument of change. Accordingly, any fundamental change in intellectual and social outlook has to be preceded by educational revolution. The fulfillment of this role lies in functional (Udoh and Akpan 143) and creative education.

It is in the above thinking the Federal government of Nigeria through its National Policy on Education emphasised the imperative of functional education thus:

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 individuals 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 (qtd in Udoh and Akpan 145).

Be that as it may, the aim of this paper is to engage in a discourse on the challenges and prospects of functional and creative education in a comatose economy. In fulfilling this aim a clarification of the concepts-education, creative and functional education is made. After that, the challenges facing creative and functional education in a comatose economy have been brought to the fore. This paper also attempts a discourse on the prospects of creative and functional education in a comatose economy in Nigeria and then draws a conclusion, which articulates a summation of the entirety of the preceding discourse.

Conceptual Clarification

The Concept Education: It is very difficult to give one definite meaning of the term 'Education'. Different philosophers, educationists, thinkers, statesmen, politicians, artisans and priests have given widely different definitions of education according to their own outlook on their life and according to the circumstances they have been facing. The reason is that it is an abstract entity and its concept is dynamic. It is a continuous process of evolution and at every stage it had a

different meaning according to conditions prevailing and that is why the organisers of this conference used education as a pivotal tool to drive Nigeria out of its present economic peril.

Education deals with every-growing man in ever-growing society. The concept, therefore, can never be static. It must continue to grow and change. For instance, Kneller sees education as a process by which the society transmits its cultural heritage through schools, college, university and other institutions (qtd in Shishima and Apenda 29). Castle considers education as what happens to us from the time we are born to the day we die (qtd in Ilori 43).

Etymologically, the word education is derived from the Latin word *educare* which means to "bring up", which is related to *educere* "bring out", "bring forth what is within", "bring out potential" and *ducere*, "to lead". That is why Socrates saw the role of education as that of a midwife whose function is to assist the individual to give birth to knowledge. Knowledge in this understanding is something that one gives birth to, that which comes from the individual inner self. Education in this case therefore is the process of knowing that which was already in the individual but was hitherto unseen or unknown.

It must be pointed out that this view of education is based on the idealist epistemology of which Socrates, Plato and Augustine are the founding fathers. According to the realist, knowledge is the acquisition of facts and

information. According to Aristotle the father of epistemological realism, at birth, the human mind is like a tabularasa (a clean state or empty table) on which knowledge is to be written, (qtd in Shishima and Apenda 30) Education in this case is the provision of facts and information to be acquired by the one whom is to be educated. It involves the teaching of facts and information acquired for human advantage. So education is the acquisition of knowledge and skills through an educator.

Education in the largest sense is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. In its technical sense, education is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another. The question that is however left unanswered is the question of, at what point does education become functional and creative?

In response to the above, Udoh and Akpan intimated that "the term 'functional' has been defined as practical and having useful purposes. Against this backdrop, functional education will ensure the availability of food for people, creation of jobs, provision of services, etcetera. According to Adewale, Functional education is a holistic and educational experience that is focused on the identification of situational problems, gathering of information to make decisions in a world of challenges and realities of life, enhancing users and end users to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes to

showcase new concepts as a vehicle of globalising such countries or state for meaningful co-existence, sustainability and developments (qtd in Agbowuro et al 37).

In the same vein, Nwokolo posited that

Functional and creative 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 (qtd in Udoh and Akpan 143).

To, Idowu, functional education is the total process of bringing up individuals to develop their potentials (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) to the fullest and consequently be able to contribute maximally to the development of the society (qtd in Udoh and Akpan 143). If this is the requirement of a functional educational scheme, then is Nigeria as a country fairing well in this regard? What is the necessary link between inputs (certificates in our institutions like engineering) with output? This has presented a paradox in our society and everyone keeps complaining about the quality of manpower we have.

Creative Education: Creative education is a process in which the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, skills and values are in such a way that the learner has the opportunity to think, explore alternatives and venture into the unknown (Robinson qtd

in Ochu 10). Therefore, for education to be relevant in nation building, creativity must be enhanced. This process involves the generation of new ideas and concepts. This implies that students are given the freedom to recognise their capabilities and individual potentials. Such students can think, imagine, explore alternatives and discover. They thus, become creative contributors and not passive imitators.

A Comatose Economy: A comatose economy is typically defined as a sick, sleeping or an economy that is in slumber. An economy that is in recession or depression. Economic recession is generally seen as an economic decline which is accompanied by a drop in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for a period of time, a drop in the stock market and an increase in unemployment. The GDP is the market value of all goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time. The Nigerian economy is presently in recession. The question is why is the Nigerian economy in recession? This is a question for another paper.

The Challenges of Functional and Creative Education in a Comatose Economy

The status of the Nigerian educational system at the moment is unenviable. It is low in quality and standard, limited in its reach and disturbing in its future (Kazeem and Ige 44). Analyzing the problem of education in Nigeria which culminates into the challenges of education, Agi and Yellowe

argued that the problem is not about curriculum or investment in education neither is it non-availability of manpower for the sector, but that many have tended to look in the direction of management of education which include lack of policy analysis to make students to fit into society, yet not relying on the government of the day but the managerial ingenuity of educational managers and administrators to make education a building block of socio-economic empowerment, prosperity, self-reliance, employment, crime reduction and national security, through improved access to quality, functional education at all levels (qtd in Efe 125).

The first and perhaps the greatest challenge facing Nigeria and making it difficult for good quality education that is capable of bringing about sustainable development in an era when the economy is best described as being in the state of comatose is **inadequate funding by the federal, states, and local governments** to the extent that funding has been in response to conditionalities imposed by International Financial Institutions (IFIs). In 1997 and 2000 statistics show that federal government expenditure on education was below 10% of overall expenditure. It noticed that the national expenditure on education could not be computed because various states expenditures on education could not be determined, in relation to the UNESCO recommendation of 26% of national budgets (Mahmoud 1).

Another challenge that is closely related to the above is that which has to do with the **instability of teachers**. Reacting

to the" above, Mahmoud further intimated that "the unstable condition of teaching staff in Nigerian primary and secondary schools has drastically crippled the system...because the condition of service does not favour them to stay in the profession as such looking always for alternatives" (1). The above returns true and coheres with the actual state of affairs **where teacher's salaries at present are not paid for between 10-20 months by some states in the federation**. The situation, the most part of the state governors have explained in different fora is due to the dwindling economy. Contributing to discourse in the above regards Kazeem and Ige rather will account for it in the context of poor remunerations thus:

Poor remuneration of teachers is another challenge facing education in Nigeria. To make ends meet, teachers' resort to 'self help projects'. While Primary and Secondary School teachers became petty traders in their schools, academic teachers in tertiary institution became 'emergency book sellers', publishers and printers. Indeed, students who refuse to buy the books or handouts produced by these teachers are guaranteed carry-over in such courses. Others demand 'money for grades'. High grades and scores are reserved for the highest bidders. Thus most teachers spend little time helping students to learn. Little wonder then that quality in most institutions has been compromised (45).

Yet another problem that constitutes a challenge to education and by extension functional and creative education in Nigeria is the **politicisation of education**. Today, many educational institutions are opened and run in many states on political grounds or other flimsy reasons. In Nigeria schools, admission into universities, colleges, polytechnics, monotechnics, secondary and primary schools are sometimes guided by politicians and not academic performance. Parents today use their political influence for the education of their children and all these constitute drawbacks to the task of delivering qualitative education in Nigeria. More worrisome is the influence of clueless politicians in the recruitment process of teachers at all levels not minding the fact of whether they are both qualified and possess the intellectual capacity to teach. Corroborating the above,

Kazeem and Ige asserted that the problem of quality of teachers in the system can also be traced to teachers' recruitment practice. The practice is doing more harm than good to Nigerian education. Recruitment of academic staff into public education institutions at all levels is no longer based on the time-honoured rigorous process. 'Departments and Faculties in most institutions no longer have a say in the recruitment of staff. Heads of Department are now directed to "admit or appoint bearer". The situation is worse in Colleges of Education and Polytechnics, where the Ministries direct Provosts and Rectors to 'admit bearer' (45).

The resultant effect of the above in the long run is that, we find teachers who

themselves stand in need of being taught how to teach misleading the students and pupils. It is in this regards that the National Policy on Education intimated that "No education system can rise above the quality of its teacher" (qtd in Odo 1) and this underscores the importance of quality teachers in the system.

Agbowuro *et'al* sum up the challenges of functional education in Nigeria, according to them, the impact of the economic crisis on higher education in Nigeria will even be more profound. Already Federal educational institutions are facing continuous decrease in funding from the governments. The national politics determines the quality of education policies, programmes and processes and eventually products. Government underfunding and commoditisation of education is likely to worsen the crisis in education. The current economic crisis confronting many governments is creating conflicts in the educational sector of many nations. On one hand they have to reduce, their budget deficits to avoid excess indebtedness. On the other hand, they have to promote education firstly to alleviate unemployment as a short run crisis measure and secondly to avoid the deterioration of human capital in the long run. High percentage of national budgets focus on the public funding which greatly affects the education sector. Some governments have carried out overall budget cuts. These had negative effects on teachers, students and families (38).

Furthermore, according to Odia and Omofonmwan

the gross underfunding of the educational sector in the country in general and the neglect of the maintenance of the physical facilities, instructional and living conditions have deteriorated in many of the public schools. Classrooms, libraries and laboratories are nothing to write home about, all leading to decline in academic standards (qtd in Agbowuro et al 38).

The ever-rising population and the economic crisis are the main causes of Nigeria's deplorable educational scenario. About 40 percent of the total population in the country is aged between 6 and 11, and do not attend primary school. More shocking about 4.7 million children who are of primary school age do not go to school. In an age where education is catered through technological advanced tools, Nigeria is still witnessing classes beneath trees with one teacher assigned to 100 pupils. To reveal a more dreadful estimate 10 million of the total Nigerian children are deprived of formal education. (38)

Corruption: Monies meant for education sector are diverted to private pockets. This has created problems such as poverty and unemployment. Other ills associated with corruption include social vices such as cultism, commercial sex, drug abuse, human/drug trafficking, kidnapping, etc.

Security challenges: The insecurity in the country does not give room for functional and creative education. Indeed in areas mostly affected by

insecurity, the student enrolment is very low.

Despite the challenges of functional and creative education in a comatose economy that is characterized by economic meltdown and recession, there are still prospects of education even in times like this.

The Prospects of Functional and Creative Education in a Comatose Economy

Despite the challenges facing education at the period in the history of our national life when the economy is in its lowest ebb, the fact still remains that the educational system of Nigeria even at this time has got prospects. In fact, the functional, creative and entrepreneurship education possess within itself, the capacity to bring the Nigerian economy which is in the state of comatose out of the woods. In an era where there is a constant call for the diversification of the economy from the much dependent but now failing oil economy, entrepreneurship education which is in itself both functional and creative has demonstrated over time that given its elevation, it possesses the capacity as it were to bring the economy out of the woods. Efe seems to be thinking in the above light when lie spoke of entrepreneurship education in this manner:

Entrepreneurship education is a form of education which makes humans to be responsive to their personal, families and national needs and aspirations. Entrepreneurship competencies carry with it, the

concept of skills and mental awareness which are needed to understand the functioning of an already existing business. Entrepreneurship education is about developing attitudes, behaviours and capacities at the individual level. It is also about the application of those skills and attitudes that can take many forms during an individual's career, creating a range of long-term benefits to society and the economy (128).

He further intimated that Entrepreneurship serves as supplier to other enterprises and bigger organisations, factories or industries. These may include: farm produce such as; cocoa for food and beverage for manufacturing industries, rubber for plastic and applied product industries, cassava and yam for chips, flour and other allied products industries etc. The supply of such products to bigger factories and organisations brings economic power to the entrepreneur, self fulfillment, it nurtures indigenous raw materials, it helps in resources utilization, and it leads to creation of empowerment, reduces unemployment and eradicates poverty. Thus, entrepreneurial education enables recipients live a meaningful and fulfilling life and contribute to national development (130). This will no doubt lead to the revival of the economy which as it stands, is in a state of comatose.

Again, in Nigeria at present, there is a clarion call for a total return to agriculture. This call has been made in most states to the point that chief executives of states and some ministers of the federal republic among other elites have gone back

to the farm in what can be said to be leading by example. The high point of which is the declaration of Fridays as work free day and farmers day in Benue state. That notwithstanding, a critical evaluation of this call reveals that only functional and creative education can lead, as it is to the revival of the economy. Here one discovers that the agricultural development on the basis of such crude implements as hoes and cutlasses constitutes torture and is far from being productive in the manner that can drive or sustain an economy.

The above situation necessitates the imperativeness of an intermediate technology that will bridge the seemingly wide and intractable gap between the tractor and such crude farm implements like hoes and cutlasses. This type of technology would be both cheaper to procure and maintain and only guaranteed when there is increased funding and sponsorship of research in the area of science and technology. These technologies as it were will be locally produced and amenable to the environment and might also be exported to generate foreign exchange earnings for the nation at this time.

Finally, the prospects of functional and creative education in a comatose economy lies in the overall importance of education to any nation that can be said to be serious and wants to experience economic growth. It is in this regards that Odo explained that national development encompasses development in every aspect of life of the citizens. However, human resource development is central to any

development. So any nation aspiring for development must identify the human and material resources it needs and their values, integrate them for a sustainable development (3). Contributing to discourse in this regards, Agbowuro *et al* maintained that:

Education in every sense is one of the fundamental factors of development. No country can achieve sustainable economic development without substantial investment in human capital. Education enriches peoples understanding of themselves and the world. It improves the quality of their lives and leads to broad social benefits to individuals and society. Education raises people's productivity and creativity and promotes entrepreneurship and technological advances. In addition it plays a very crucial role in securing economic and social progress and improving income distribution. The economic growth of a country largely depends on technological improvement and on its scientific and technical manpower. Technological education therefore has a crucial role in speeding up a country's , industrial development. It provides one of the most potent means for development of skilled manpower as required by various sectors in a country's economy. Technical and vocational education has been an integral part of national development strategy in many societies because of its impact on productivity and economic development. Vocational technical education gives individuals the skills to live, learn and work as productive citizens in a global society (39).

Nigeria has a huge population of intelligent and energetic youths who are physically and mentally sound to assist in the development of this nation. This is a very huge asset that the state must utilise effectively. Many of these youths are educated and ready to serve the nation if empowered. This is to say that there is hope and there are still prospects for this Nation.

It could be remembered, the federal government is fighting corruption and insecurity which are the bane of development in Nigeria. If the war on corruption in particular is won, our education would improve. This is because monies meant for education sector and other development projects are often squandered or taken away by those saddled with the implementation of the programmes. Insecurity too does not give room for business to thrive.

Conclusion

As we draw to the conclusion of this paper, it suffices to state here that the Nigerian educational system is not spared the pangs of the present economic realities. This is evident in the fact that funding to the sector has been drastically reduced leaving little or nothing to rely upon. Be that as it may, it remains imperative that budgetary provisions as concerns the educational sector should be made 26% that is recommended by UNESCO for the effective running of the education sector. In view of the imperative of education for national development and economic revival, the training and retraining of teachers, not

forgetting the strengthening and building of infrastructures in schools at all levels should be elevated with the payment of teacher's salaries and other incentives given a pride of, place in the scheme of things. The position of this paper at this juncture is that an understanding of the times and the near comatose nature of the economy, means mat all hands should be on deck with the intent of helping the educational sector successfully meander its challenges and hence, deliver a creative and functional education which in itself possesses the tendency and capacity of bringing the economy out of the woods.

Nigerian universities as a matter of urgency must introduce courses that will teach students how to fish and not to buy fish, to create job opportunities for themselves. Rather than looking for employment after graduation, our university graduates having acquired creative and functional education, should be able to provide employment opportunities for themselves and others (Gundu 1).

Nigerian universities have to trigger a paradigm shift from routine to creativity. Thus our universities have the task of training students who will come out to establish their businesses and be employers of labour.

Nigerian universities should introduce courses that will bring the country out of the economic recession. Some of these include: Creative and Functional Catering, Tourism and Hospitality Studies, Commerce and Trade Studies, Creative and Functional

Computer Science/ Computer Education, Creative and Functional Engineering, Science/ Technology, Entrepreneurship Education, Vocational Education, Fine and Applied Arts, Creative and Functional Geography, Urban and Regional Planning, Health Science/ Health Education,

Creative and Functional Mentoring, Coaching and Counseling, Human Resource Development, Creative and Functional Religious and Moral Education, Creative and Functional Women and Youth Empowerment Education etc All these areas should be looked into by the participants of this conference.

I invite scholars in their various contributions to supply the educational nutrients and vitamins that will drive our great country out of this economic quagmire.

Thank you and God bless you all.

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