

## PROSPECTS OF CREATIVE AND FUNCTIONAL LITERACY IN RESCUCITATION OF NIGERIA'S AILING ECONOMY

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### **Abstract**

The present economic meltdown in Nigeria is by no doubt an aftermath of decades of lapses and inertia in leadership and management of the country's socio-economic fortunes. However, it is pertinent to highlight the hackneyed educational process with its teacher centred "banking theory" of bequeathing the beneficiaries of education with literacies devoid of skills and creativity for sustainable development. To address this problem, a threefold functional "literacies" are advocated based on needs assessment of the economic environment: A Critical Literacy approach where the science of teaching and learning (Pedagogy, Andragogy and Heutagogy) would emphasis ability to read texts in active and reflective manner with critical analysis of causes of inequality, injustice and power in human development is desirable. Secondly, the prospect of Entrepreneurship Literacy in equipping beneficiaries with the spirit of innovation and creativity makes it imperative that it should be integrated into all aspects of the educational curriculum. Thirdly, Workplace literacy designed for professionalism and lifelong learning is a window of opportunity for growth and sustainable development especially in this global age of technology to keep abreast with the global realities in economic development. These three fold "functional literacies" have the potentials of resuscitating and developing a diversified and sustainable economic growth and development in Nigeria.

**Key words:** Prospects, Creative, Functional literacy, Resuscitation, Ailing economy.

The trend of inertia in the economic and political development in Nigeria have combined to create a "storm" that have inflicted damage upon the nation's economy and upon its social fabrics. Nigeria's economic recession, is a

condition of contraction in business cycle which has resulted in general slowdown in economic activities. The economic recession has created unsustainable economic environment where the macro-economic indicators as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and Gross National Product(GNP); investment spending, capacity utilization, household income and business profits have fallen leading to bankruptcies and high level unemployment. The present economic meltdown has led to adverse demand shock usually triggered by various events like; external trade shock, adverse supply shock with massive retrenchment of workers especially in the private sector. The summary measures have impacted negatively on underlying economic drivers as; household savings rates, corporate investment decisions, interest rates, demographics, and government policies. The living standards of people dependent on wages and salaries especially those who rely on fixed incomes or welfare benefits are equally negatively affected.

Under ideal economic conditions, a country's economy should have the household sector as net savers and the corporate sector as net borrowers, with the government budget nearly balanced, but when these relationships become imbalanced, recession develop and create pressure on the economy (Koo, 2012).. The pressure on Nigeria's economy at present seem to have overwhelmed whatever economic policies for economic growth and development and hence the present economic quagmire. In all, critics have blamed the present economic

doldrums to an educational system which bequeathed education that is neither creative nor visionary in producing a labour force as managers of the economy. It is expected that from need assessment, the country would have evolved educational curricular that produce functionally literate citizens with critical, entrepreneurial and professional competencies for productivity. It is the only way to bring to a halt the tradition and trend of educational institutions churning out large numbers of functionally illiterate population that lack the ability to read critically, write clearly, and communicate effectively to be active members of the productive sector.

### **Creativity, Functional Literacy and Nigeria's Ailing Economy**

The concept of functional literacy is used in a broader and metaphorical sense to refer to literacy skills and competencies such as; information literacy, visual literacy, media literacy, scientific literacy and other aspects of "literacies" whose goal is for a sustainable personal and community development. However, the definition of functional literacy tends to be diverse and shifting; ranging from the view of functional literacy as a set of largely technical skills to the idea that these skills should be applied in critical ways to examine one's surroundings and push for social change. It is defined as the development of complex set of critical skills that allow people express, explore, question, communicate and understand the flow of ideas among individuals and

groups in a quickly changing technological environments (World Bank, 2000). The OECD had suggested that a more useful concept would be that of multiple literacies; that is, ways of 'reading the world' in specific contexts: technological, health, information, media, visual, scientific, et cetera. The phrase functional literacy therefore, describes those approaches to literacy which stress the acquisition of appropriate verbal, cognitive, and computational skills to accomplish practical ends in culturally specific settings.

Functional literacy is also labelled survival literacy and reductionist literacy because of its emphasis on competency and the preparation of workers for jobs. Functional literacy is defended by proponents as a way to help people negotiate successfully in societies. To be functionally literate is to be creative. Though an accurate definition of creativity may be pretty difficult because of its multifaceted nature, creativity and productivity are attributes and expressions of functional literacy especially when positively pursued. Creativity as an activity is where the mind is involved in initiating new ideas or new ways of connecting and understanding existing ideas with a high level of originality. When creativity is viewed as part of critical analysis, problem solving, inventiveness and innovation, it affects how we live and understand, see, hear, taste, smell and touch the world around us, thus creativity is an integral part of education and learning not an added extra.

To address the world around us in this context, is to juxtapose the country's economic crises with the product of the educational system which is anchored on a historically hackneyed human resource development planning devoid of functionality and creativity. It is therefore, not an overstatement to assert that the antecedent of Nigeria's economic recession is engrained in an educational system which is clueless in producing a labour force that is creative and functional in the management of the nation's human and material resources. The products of our educational system do not provide the literacy needs necessary for economic development of the country. In all, the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) overview of Nigeria's economic development had shown that despite the human and material resources the country is endowed with (internal Strengths), and the potentials of using such strengths to exploit the world market (external opportunities), the country's leadership has failed to adequately harness the resources with the resultant low level of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP) (internal weaknesses). Consequently, the mono and import dependent economy now experience trade deficit with other nations (external threats) which is the root cause of the present economic downturn. In developed nations, the educational system is used as reservoir per excellence and as a catalyst for manpower development to drive the country's economy. Such development and planning is initiated with the literacy needs assessment of the

socio-economic and political environment. The needs process assessment which is the road map for educational development include:

- **Performance need:** A state of existence or level of performance required for satisfactory functioning (skills and competencies).
- **Instrumental need:** An intervention, product, or substance that is required to obtain a satisfactory level of functioning in a particular context (literacy education).
- **Conscious need:** Need that are known to those who have them (food, shelter employment, regular income, sound health and freedom) and
- **Unconscious need:** Need that is unknown to those who have them (job satisfaction, job security, freedom and good health (Triner, Greenberry, & Watkins, 2006p5).

The above needs are articulated to develop the curriculum sustainable human resource development. The goal is to develop a functionally literate society with the consciousness and capability to address personal and collective needs of the socio-economic and political environment. The Nigeria educational system is unfortunately skewed to a banking system which a pedagogy of putting the learner on the receiving end and the teacher (tagged the expert), the provider. The approach is devoid of creativity and functionality. The trend has produced beneficiaries of formal education that are neither creative nor productive for entrepreneurship and without the critical

reflective skills to critical socio-economic and political issues and challenges. Consequently, tens of millions of Nigerians are functionally illiterate with paper qualifications that can neither create jobs nor find one in a technologically advanced age. The country year by year, has thus continued to churn out school leavers from all levels of education without jobs. In the long run lack of functional skills has increased the adult population still grasping with the traditional methods of work in their respective endeavours. Such development cannot create a viable economy.

### **Prospects of Creative and Functional “Literacies” in Resuscitation of Nigeria Ailing Economy**

Many schools of thought contend that economic recession is a global phenomenon and countries that experience recession see it as a phase in the process of economic development. However, some are of the opinion that the case of Nigeria is born out of bad leadership for the country has not been fortunate enough with leadership which has now ushered in all forms of crises including the present economic downturn. The government on its part makes us believe that the present recession in Nigeria is occasioned by high level of corruption, financial recklessness and lack of sound economic planning by past political administrations. The above perspectives may not be far from the truth, but such allusions have not provided answers to pertinent questions on why the educational system has not been producing graduates with employable and

entrepreneurial skills that create jobs citizens with reflective imagination for creativity and innovation for sustainable development. It is on this premise that this paper provides the prospect of creativity and functional literacy in resuscitation the Nigeria recessive economy. The failure to address these questions on the course of Nigeria's educational development that is the root cause of the unsustainable economic growth and development. It is equally pertinent to note that economic downturn is only a ripple effect or aftermath of other factors which might have combined to weigh down the economy. For instance, Kaufman, Alicia, & Mayer (2003, 5) had identified (13) thirteen social factors that can precipitate and threaten societal well-being, and as well affect the collective economic viability of a nation as follows:

- a) War and/or riot and/or terrorism
- b) Shelter
- c) Unintended human-caused changes to the environment, including permanent destruction of the environment and/or rendering it non-renewable
- d) Murder, rape, or crimes of violence, robbery, or destruction of property
- e) Substance abuse
- f) Disease
- g) Pollution
- h) Starvation and/or malnutrition
- i) Child abuse
- j) Partner/spouse/elder abuse
- k) Destructive behaviour, including child, partner, spouse, self, elder, and others

l) Discrimination based on irrelevant variables including colour, race, creed, sex, religion, national origin, age, and location and Poverty.

These social factors which are the mirror of the socio-political development in Nigeria are more of effect rather than causes of economic recession. However, the only pragmatic and sustainable approach in addressing the current downturn in nation's economic development is to embrace a Pedagogy, *Andragogy and Heutagogy* that develops creativity and functional literacy through critical, entrepreneurial and professional or workplace literacies. The curriculum of such literacies are embedded and born out of needs assessment of a nation's environmental specifics, where the product of education fills or bridges personal and community needs. This paper therefore considers three broad areas of functional and creative literacies that can address the country's economic crises which are: *Critical* literacy in all forms of education, Entrepreneurship literacy and Workplace literacy for professionalism. These literacies are not discrete subject or professional areas but functional elements that are necessary for creativity in any form of educational development.

The choice of the curricula is born out of needs assessment which is an evaluation of discrepancy between the current condition and wanted condition that appropriately identified environmental needs. Need is a desire to improve current performance or correct a deficiency (Triner, Greenberry, & Watkins, 2006). A needs assessment as part of planning

processes, is often used to improve education/training and an effective tool for clarifying problems and to identify appropriate interventions or solutions (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). By clearly identifying problems, finite resources can be directed towards developing and implementing a feasible and applicable solution. Needs assessments are only effective when they are ends-focused and provide concrete evidence that can be used to determine which of the possible means-to-the-ends are most effective and efficient for achieving the desired results. A critical need assessment of the Nigeria educational system makes the study to look at three literacy training needs which are:

- Literacy level assessment needs.
- Literacy education needs and
- Individual literacy needs analysis (Watkins, West Meiers, & Visser, 2012p15).

The first which the literacy level assessment needs identifies the level of skills, knowledge and ability of individuals and a nation have to address socio-economic gaps and challenges. The second level needs assessment is literacy education needs assessment that takes into consideration factors such as; political trends, technology, demographics and the economy. Literacy education needs assessment also examines the skills, knowledge, and abilities required for affected occupational groups. It identifies how and which occupational discrepancies or gaps exist, as well as new ways to do work to fix those discrepancies or gaps.

Thirdly, individual literacy needs assessment needs determines individual and country's needs on how well an individual is doing a job (performance). It determines the individual's capacity or productivity, provides information on which employees need training and what kind of training. Addressing these needs assessment makes literacy functional in meeting individual and societal needs. Thus functional literacy in Nigeria would have to incorporate three broad areas of functional "literacies": (a) Critical literacy in all forms of education (b) Entrepreneurship literacy and training and (c) Workplace literacy for professionalism.

### **Critical Literacy and Ailing Economy**

The term "critical literacy" was developed by the social critical theorists concerned with dismantling social injustice and inequalities. An overview of the economic and political development in Nigeria leaves traces of all forms of injustices in all the sectors where the minority few live in luxury at the expense of the larger society. Such level of injustices are entrenched in the fabrics of the national life entrenched by what is called a *banking process* of the educational system. The process which engendered the process of teaching and learning where knowledge is transmitted to the learners as mere recipients. The process is a contradistinction of the critical literacy approach where the Pedagogy, *Andragogy and Heutagogy* of teaching and learning is centered on developing the ability to read texts in

active and reflective manner in which power, inequality, and injustice in human development is addressed. In the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire provides an example of how critical literacy is developed in an educational context and proposes a system in which learners are made socially aware through critique of multiple forms of injustices (Blackledge, 2000). In such instance, knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, and hopeful inquiry learners pursue in the world with the world and with each other. Facilitating the development of critical literacy promotes the examination and reform of social situations and exposes learners to the biases and hidden agendas within texts. Thus, in order to become critically literate, where education one must learn to "read" in a reflective manner by developing dialogue with learners about needs and interests. Educators can invite learners to take part in a larger community discourse that attempts to solve problems and create alternatives to oppressive situations.

Teachers who facilitate the development of critical literacy encourage learners to interrogate societal issues and institutions like family, poverty, education, equity, and equality in order to critique the structures that serve as norms as well as to demonstrate how these norms are not experienced by all members of society. Teachers engaged in critical literacy serve less as instructors and more as facilitators of conversations that question traditional power relations.

Critical literacy can help develop in Nigerians at all levels, the consciousness of rights to question the causes of inequality and high level of poverty and servitude in the mist of plenty. Such conscious minds interrogate societal issues, question power relations, demand for justice, equity and create alternatives for sustainable development especially in the management of the economy.

### **Entrepreneurship Literacy and Ailing Economy**

Entrepreneurship is a process of actions of been always in search of something new so as to exploit such ideas into gainful opportunities by accepting the risk and uncertainty of the enterprise. Entrepreneurial literacy is a form of functional literacy that addresses the economic environment through capacity building on new opportunities to create employment and diversify personal and national economy. The key development drivers in entrepreneurial master plan are in the areas of information and communication technology, the automobile and vocational training and agriculture.

In the United Kingdom, Skills for Life is the national strategy adopted for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills. The strategy according to (Bomer & Bomer, 2001) was targeted to improve the basic skill levels of adults. The wider objective was to tackle the adult skills gaps by increasing the number of adults with the skills required for employability and progression to higher levels of training with the commitment to become a

world leader in skills with the basic skills objective of improving the skills of adults.

Entrepreneurship literacy has to target all groups for entrepreneurship and more relevant to redress the unemployable unemployed, jobseekers, prisoners, public sector employees, and low-skilled people in employment. It is also relevant for young adults, and other groups at risk of exclusion, parents and those who live in disadvantaged communities. As a matter of necessity there is need for post-literacy and out-of-school training projects through which education, skill-training and income-generation are achieved *pari passu*. Entrepreneurship literacy will no doubt mobilize the entire citizenry to active and productive sector for viable and sustainable economy.

#### **Workplace Literacy, Professionalism and Ailing Economy**

Workplace literacy is essentially literacy programme for [human-resource](#) development strategy. Work-force and workplace development evolve from a problem-focused approach, addressing issues ranging from low-skilled workers' competency needs to a holistic approach in considering barriers and the overall needs of the beneficiaries' professionalism. The Objectives among others include: To improve the basic skills levels of adults and learners for employer engagement: To engage and increase participation of young people and adults from priority groups in literacy and for numeracy learning for capacity building. Workplace literacy improve quality and standards by remodeling and

professionalizing skills for life workforce. It is a functional literacy process that improves achievement and progression through further learning to encourage social inclusion and economic outcomes(Akinpelu,2005).

The imperatives for functional literacy is to keep abreast of trends in economic growth, technological change and international competition. The knowledge-based economy and socio-demographic changes exert major influence on employment and workforce skills in a general shift in labour demand from lower to higher levels of skills which has increased unemployment among those with low skills and the need for capacity building through functional education and training.

Now that skills has become increasingly important in the knowledge economy, individuals and countries with higher levels of skills adjust more effectively to challenges and opportunities opened up by globalisation. Similarly, firms are more flexible and better able to absorb and adapt new technologies and work with new equipment. The perception of creativity and functional literacy skills are therefore, essential ingredient in the process of up- skilling.

In summary, within the performance improvement framework, functional literacy and creativity has become pivotal and critical in the improvement process as new technologies now create valuable learning contexts that enhance education and training, providing effective learning process and outcome. Thus creative and functional literacy,

provide learning that is; active, constructive, collaborative, intentional, conversational, contextualized and reflective on the economic realities which today in Nigeria. In the context of the country's economic recession, adult functional literacy offer the skills, knowledge and talents to drive the growth pedigree through multiple competences and streams of income to cushion the effect of the economic recession particularly in curbing unemployment or joblessness.

### **Conclusion**

Creativity and functional literacy in both formal and non-formal education is the only means of producing a generation of Nigerians with the literary skills for creative and entrepreneurial skills to turn around the economic fortunes of the country. Critical literacy as an aspect of functional literacy can encourage learners to be active and not passive recipients of knowledge. The conceptual approach points to the development of multiplicity of skills in the process of learning to be job creators and not consumers. Thus, critical literacy, workplace literacy and entrepreneurial education have to be integral part of education and learning. The idea is to be in tune with globalization, technological change and development which are today shaping both the supply of, and the demand for literacy skills in the information age for a vibrant economy.

### **Recommendations**

One of the cardinal goals and objectives of education is to provide the human resource in quality and numbers to manage a nation's resources and sustainably satisfy the socio-economic and political needs and aspirations of the people. Literacy education needs assessment involves assessing the literacy needs that people have in order to live in: an economically sustainable environment, a community that maintains and develops viable social capital, a way that meets own economic and financial requirements. However, based on the continued downturn on the economic fortunes of the country based on several factors, the following recommendations are made where creative and functional literacy can be used to address the present economic recession.

1. Contemporary life is now immersed in a digital world, natural talents have to be harnessed to drive the economic growth pedigree through functional literacy.
2. There is need for multiple competences, among youths and adults and entrepreneurship literacy and training as a measure to curb increasing global joblessness.
3. As a means of economic diversification, Nigeria must look to agriculture, and improve the functional literacy level of farmers to keep abreast of modern agriculture
4. As we move into the information age, the role of knowledge and skills in information and communication technology in all disciplines makes room

for creativity and enhanced productivity, growth and innovation.

5. Functional literacy as a process of up skilling, should be an insight for policy makers in designing a lifelong learning.

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