

Towards Actualizing Sustainable Economic Development in Nigeria: Functional Education in Focus

Aliyu, Asake Musilimat

Corresponding author: muslimat2008@yahoo.com

Department of Educational Management, Federal University of Education, Kontagora, Niger State

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Abstract

Nigeria has on daily basis experienced an upsurge of activities that threatens and endangers its national security. In recent times, the Nigerian nation suddenly metamorphosed into an abode of insecurity. Despite its abundant oil wealth, there has been unimaginable level of poverty, unemployment, inequality, poor infrastructure, lack of social amenities and negligible development in the region. In view of this scenario, the paper examines the major role played by functional education in achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. Findings from the paper reveal among others that, the security challenges in Nigeria have long historical antecedence and the crises and conflicts in various geo-political regions are the consequences of several years of exploitation, neglect and deliberate abandonment of the regions by successive governments. The paper therefore concludes and recommends amongst others that Government at all levels in Nigeria should continue their contributions towards achieving sustainable development, Recruitment and promotion of teachers should devoid of partisan, politics, ethnicity or religion, but must be based on qualification and efficiency, Creativity and innovation should be the focus on education rather than formality, knowledge regurgitation, certification, political undertone or political agenda. The formulation and effective implementation of policies capable of addressing the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria and that more efforts should be made by governments at all levels to improve the quality of human lives in their respective states and the nation at large.

Keywords: Economic, Development, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Every society, past and present whether simple or complex, traditional or modern have always been engaged in the transmission of the culture to their youths. These include their beliefs, customs, ideologies, philosophies and so on, which are highly valued by the people and which are of benefit to their society at any particular time. It is this transmission of culture that is known as education. Depending on the type of society, education would be intentionally transmitted formally or non-formally.

Education is seen or believed to be the activity of preserving, developing and transmitting the culture of people from one generation to another (Ekwueme, Ekon & Ezenwa-Nebife, 2016). It enables the people to develop the knowledge, values and skills to participate in decision making about them, individually, collectively and globally. This vision of development embraces environmental concern as well as issues such as the fight against poverty, human right, gender equality, cultural diversity and education for all. To this end, Education is a means through which sustainable development can be achieved.

Development is an eclectic paradigm of social change aimed at improving the condition and quality of life of the people, especially that of the majority of the poor and vulnerable people in the society. For development to be meaningful it has to be sustainable, that is continue for a very long time, without causing damage to the environment, to the benefit of present and future generations. Julian and Susann (2017) posited that sustainable development means an ongoing process with systemic approaches that require creativity, flexibility and critical reflection. It emphasized the creation of sustainable improvements in the quality of life of all people through increases in real income per capital, improvements in education, health and general quality of life and improvements in quality of natural environmental resources.

Education for sustainable development has a special role in vindicating how various processes in education, which lie at the heart of promoting change in human behaviour, can be used on a global level to help turn things around (Shobayo & Ajayi, 2023). Ekwueme, Ekon and Ezenwa-Nebife (2016) stressed that education for sustainable development allows every human being to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future. This article is particularly timely

and relevant, as it addresses functional education as a tool for achieving sustainable economic development in Nigeria, a subject with significant global implications.

Concept of National Security

For decades, issues relating to security were on the front burner in the development discourse. Several attempts have been made since the cold war ended to redefine the concept of security. At the heart of this debate there have been attempts to deepen and widen the concept of security from the level of the states to societies and individuals, and from military to non-military issues (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013; Agunbiade, 2024)). According to National Intelligence Council (2023), security as an essential concept is commonly associated with the alleviation of threats to cherished values, especially the survival of individuals, groups or objects in the near future. Ezeala et al. (2023) however, defines security as activities that ensures protection of a country, persons, properties of the community against future threats, danger, mishaps and all other forms of perils. Oyekanmi & Rosenje (2022) provide a broader view of national security, defining it not just as the physical protection and defence of a nation's citizens and territorial integrity, but also as the advancement of their economic well-being and prosperity. They argue that this is achieved within a safe and secure environment that supports the attainment of both national interests and those of foreign partners. Furthermore, Otto and Ukpere (2012) and Ezeala et al. (2023) asserts that security means protection from hidden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life in homes, offices or communities. Security must be related to the presence of peace, safety, happiness and the protection of human and physical resources or the absence of crisis, threats to human injury among others. Security is considered as any mechanism deliberately fashioned to alleviate the most serious and immediate threats that prevent people from pursuing their cherished values (Chris, 2012). Orji, (2012) posits that pivotal to the survival of any society is its law and order which are predicated on national security. National security must be broadened to accommodate economic, environmental and demographic issues as they are important in understanding the new causes of intra-state conflicts. Other dangers that serve as threat to national security include pollution, poverty, crime, and underdevelopment all of which fuel conflicts (Koval et al., 2023). The United Nations Development Programme (2022) defines human security, a key component of national security, as the state of being free from both fear and want. It involves ensuring safety from persistent

threats such as hunger, disease, and repression, while also providing protection from sudden and harmful disruptions to daily life within homes, workplaces, and communities. National security can summarily be described as protection from the threat of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression, and environmental hazards (UNDP, 2022). The national security of any nation encompasses other vital areas such as environmental protection, social and food security and more especially the prevalence of internal peace. Without adequate security of lives and property, the system will be rife with lawlessness, chaos and eventual disintegration. It might be military, economic, ideological or cultural (Okonkwo, 2024). The people must not only be secured from external attacks but also from devastating consequences of internal upheavals, unemployment, hunger, starvation, diseases, ignorance, homelessness, environmental degradation and pollution cum socio-economic injustices. Security is vital for national cohesion, peace and sustainable development. It is therefore apparent that national security is a desideratum, sine qua non for economic growth and development of any country (Adediji, 2022)

Concept of Development

Over time, 'development' has carried quite a number of definitions. Too many works exists on the subject, from the writing of orthodox economist, modernization theorist of those of the Marxist and Neo Marxists. Zaki (2012) defined development as a continuous process of positive change in quality and span of life person or group of persons. In this respect, other forms of developments taken as contributory factors of change in the finality and life span of people. Such contributing factor as economic, social, political, technological, and cultural developments are interrelated and inter dependent. In the same vein, Oghator and Okoobo (2015) pointed out that development goes beyond the increase in per-capita income or economic growth, but also include sustainable improvements in the living standard of the people, which is guaranteed through the provision of gainful employment, coupled with the presence and availability of social and economic infrastructures. On the other hand, Seers (2017) defined development by posing certain questions such as; what has been happening to poverty, unemployment and inequality. To him, if all three indices (poverty, unemployment and inequality) are at a relatively high rate, there is absence of development, and vice versa. It follows

therefore that for a country to be classified as developed, there are parameters to look out for which are: the state of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

According to Agwu (2016), development can also be said to simply mean providing qualitative improvement in the lives of people or providing greater quality of life for humans. Development also means the act or process of bringing to a more advanced state, growth or progress; or progressed state or form. Oguntimehin and Nwosu (2014) noted that the term “development” is employed, four distinct but interrelated processes are usually borne in mind, namely: a developing society is changing from simple and traditional techniques towards the application of scientific knowledge at the realm of technology; the developing society evolves from subsistence farming towards commercial production of agricultural goods; the developing society undergoes a transition from the use of human and animal power to industrialization; and the developing society moves from the farm and village towards urban concentrations. There are different forms of development which include: social, political, economic, educational, environmental, cultural, green development and so on. So development can also be described as: material progress or economic growth or reformation of social institutions and infrastructures.

The primary objective of all types of development is to promote authentic human development. Walsh (2020) agreed with this by stating that development has recently shifted from economic progress towards a more humanistic view focused on the individual and the quality of life which is often referred to as “integral and sustainable human development”. This focuses on the inter-connectedness of economics with political, socio-cultural and environmental spheres, as well as the necessities, capacities and potentialities of human beings.

Concept of Sustainability

Sustainability is the ability to sustain, maintain, provide for or nourish something for an indefinite period without damaging or depleting it. In recent years, an understanding of the concept of sustainability has been firmly established by many scholars and researchers. Sustainability consists of three dimensions: the protection of natural environment, the maintenance of economic vitality and observance of specific social considerations about human development. The notion of sustainability can be understood in various meanings and is defined in many contexts as a technical term used in

forestry; as an ecological term; as well as a new definition which refers to the development of humanity and of human societies (Itari & Ugbe, 2018).

Concept of Sustainable Development

There is no single definition for sustainable development but the key idea common to all definitions concerns resource exploitation at a rate that would not prove detrimental to future generations. For instance, according to Emeka (2015), sustainable development could probably be otherwise called “equitable and balanced”. This means that, in order for development to continue indefinitely, it should balance the interests of different groups of people, within the same generation and among generations and do so simultaneously in three major interrelated areas: economic, social, environmental and so on. Shobayo & Ajayi, (2023) described sustainable development as a construct, which envision development as meeting the need of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generation. It implies that while education meets the need of the present it does not compromise the ability of the future generations to meet own needs. Nevertheless, this ability to meet the needs is determined by human capital (through education, technology advance) and through physical capital (machine, tool etc). Akintoye and Opeyemi (2014) argued that continued sustainable development is only possible or assured when it is agreed and indeed concrete steps are taken to raise the level of literacy and numeracy in any society. Educational institutions and their programmes are therefore, the tools with which to achieve development and its sustainability.

Sustainable development has also been defined by Ahenkan and Osei-Kojo (2014) as the development path along which maximization of human well-being for today’s generation does not lead to the decline in the well-being of the future generation. This definition suggests that sustainable development considers the needs of the future and current generations in tandem, and it is rooted in the pursuit of the well-being and welfare of the people. Sustainable development is therefore concerned with the creation and sustenance of the conditions for current and future generations of human to live well on this planet. Hence, as noted by Sims and Falkenberg (2013), right from the beginning, a multi-prong approach to the idea of sustainable society was taken that went beyond concerns for only the destruction of the national environment to include the concern for meeting the essential needs of all people and those needs are met in a sustainable way in consideration of the needs of future generations.

Therefore, for any meaningful development to take place and be sustained there must be a medium through which the members of the community or any nation can be made to participate in the programs which will bring positive results. Education is the only means by which people can be conscientized and positive attitudes inculcated into them. This is because education has a central and rather crucial role to play in the mobilization of the citizens for specific national development programs.

Goals of Sustainable Development

The goals for sustainable development are made up of 17 items namely;

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Functional Education for Sustainable Economic Development

Functional education for sustainable development is a lifelong process that leads to an informed and involved citizenry having the creative problem solving skills, scientific and social literacy and commitment to engage in responsible individual and co-operative actions. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without quality education of its citizenry which is free from all forms of discrimination.

Nwogbo and Okorji (2019), described functional education as acquired skills and knowledge that make for self-reliance and relevance in world of work, organizations and industries. Senfuye (2020), argued that it is an education that frees the mind from slavery, and engenders creative thinking in the recipient. Oniemola & Niyi (2024), posited that functional education emerges organically from environmental influences. They contrasted this natural, self-directed process with the conventional model of learning, which they described as a system of rote memorization, rigid routines, and stereotypes that prioritizes

formal qualifications over genuine societal relevance. Ossai et al (2017), regarded functional education as being focused in the identification of situational problems, gathering of information to make decisions in a world of challenges and realities of life, enhancing users to acquire knowledge, skills and attitude to showcase social change. Udoh and Akpan, (2014), defined functional education as something practical and having useful purposes ensuring availability of food for people, creations of jobs and provision of services.

In essence, functional education is the kind of education capable of producing the recipients that can think beyond the box: manufacturing raw materials, machines and tools required for local and international markets; inventing new designs; discovering drugs for curing seemingly incurable diseases; and transforming the nation from perpetual consumers to innovative producers. This was corroborated by Asaju and Adagba, (2014), and Shishima, (2017), that functional education is a type of education, knowledge and skills directed at performance of a productive task to meet the evolving need of society. Shobayo & Ajayi (2023) stated that education for sustainable development enables people to develop the knowledge values, and skills to participate in decisions about the ways they do things individually and collectively, locally and globally, that will improve their quality of life now without damaging the planet of their future. Sustainability includes intergenerational equity, just and peaceful societies, social tolerance, environmental preservation and restoration, poverty alleviation and natural resource conservation. The major essential tools for achieving sustainable development include the following areas:

1. Improve the quality of basic education.
 2. Reorient existing education programmes to address sustainable economy.
 3. Implementing various poverty alleviation programmes
 4. Rural electrification
 5. Developing employment generation and enhancing agricultural output and income
- Education for sustainable development is a holistic approach for school's management and the curriculum, not a separate subject.

It therefore requires reflection on what to teach, and how to teach in order to:

- i. Clarify and extend the ability of students to think for themselves

- ii. Encourage students to reflect and debate issues to enable them to form their own opinions
- iii. Foster learning that emerges from discovery and is relevant to the learner's life experiences

Conclusion

There is no gain saying that Nigeria is in daring need for sustainable development. But there appears to be a number of challenges which have to be addressed in order to make the dream a reality. Functional education has a major role to play in the area of sustainable development in Nigeria; this is because functional education for sustainable economic development is a lifelong process that leads to an informed and involved citizenry having the creative problem-solving skills, scientific and social literacy and commitment to engage in responsible individual and co-operative actions. From the aforementioned, it is clearly believed that functional education is the key in actualizing national security and sustainable economic development. This is based on the fact that functional education appeals to the mind of individual to be law abiding, peaceful, upright, considerate and productive.

Recommendations

1. Government at all levels in Nigeria should continue the contribution towards achieving this sustainable development. However, the need for monitoring, supervising and ensuring that all the financial and other investment on education for the purpose of achieving sustainable development are not diverted for other purposes.
2. Recruitment and promotion of teachers should devoid of partisan politics, ethnicity or religion, but must be based on qualification and efficiency.
3. Creativity and innovation should be the focus on education rather than formality, knowledge regurgitation, certification, political undertone or political agenda.
4. Teachers should live to expectation on issues of morality, integrity and modelling.
5. Mastery, technical skills, productivity and efficiency on the job should be rated higher as against paper qualification, sentiments and economics of affection.
6. Educational institutions should be adequately funded.
7. Employers of labour in institutions should pay workers a living wage and honour extant Memoranda of Understandings (MoUs) without giving room for industrial crises by labour unions.

8. The quality of students being admitted into colleges, polytechnics and universities should be by merit.
9. The state should identify and reinforce patriotic acts, deeds and behaviour while overtly criminalizing acts of indolence, waywardness, sabotage, disloyalty and treason.

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