

Functional Education for Sustainable National Development: The Changing Role of Teachers

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11522076>

Abstract

The sustainable development of any nation today depends largely on the quality of education provided for her citizens. The teacher is vital to the success of any educational system aimed at ensuring that individuals contribute maximally to sustainable national development. This paper sought to identify what would be considered as functional education. It also identifies specific roles of the teacher in providing functional education in view of the dynamic needs of the nation especially with globalization which includes: learning facilitator, provoker of curiosities, motivator, digital instructor, a resource provider, a promoter of engagements and collaboration. It was recommended among others that teachers must recognize the changing roles of teachers and commit to continuous self-development to enable them fit fully into a functional educational system and government at all levels should show its commitment and political-will to ensuring functional education through its funding, policy making, supervision and monitoring of educational projects and programmes.

Keywords: Teacher, Roles, Functional Education, National Development, sustainable national development

Introduction

Education remains the most potent tool for sustainable social, economic, political, and cultural development of any nation. It is the instrument of desired change. Education can be said to be an English derivative of the Latin word “educare” which means to “bring up”, “lead out”, “raise” or “elevate”. Education is thus an instrument for bringing up individuals and citizens of a country or helping to lead out or elevate their latent potentials thereby making them useful members of the society (Oniemola, 2011).

Education must meet the needs and aspirations of the individual as well as the overall goals of the society. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2013) states that, the philosophy of education in Nigeria are based on some beliefs which include:

- educations as a tool for national development and social change;
- education to maximize the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society;
- Education to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society.

Functional education can be conceptualized as the total process of bringing up individuals to develop their potentials (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) and thus be able to contribute maximally to the development of the society (Abolarin, 2019). The quality of education entrenched in its functionality is the vehicle for fostering all spheres of our national life. Functional education must maximize self-development and self-fulfillment of the individual and must also be strongly related to societal needs. Functional education equips learners with requisite knowledge, attitudes and skills that will enable them to relate and adapt successfully to the rapid socio-economic, cultural and political changes in the society.

Despite the prime position occupied by functional education in sustainable development the Nigerian educational system has remained non-functional. It is only when the educational system becomes functional that it will bring about accelerated national development (Musa and Joseph, 2018). The FRN (2013) also lists the specific goals of education in Nigeria to include the promotion of functional education for skill acquisition, job creation and poverty reduction. However, anything short of this goal leads to a poor national economy, weak national security and the corruption practices takes a front seat.

The impact of the teacher as a major factor determining the social, economic, political, and cultural development of any country has been stressed by Niyi (2017), Oniemola (2011), Meneses, Nussbaum, Veas, and Arriagada, (2023). A country cannot transcend the quality of those who teach as the quality of education is directly connected to the quality of the teachers and in effect the overall development of the nation. The role of the teachers in sustaining national development in an ever changing world can therefore not be overemphasized.

Teachers are the chief executioners of any functional curriculum, it therefore means functional education will remain a mirage in Nigeria except there are dedicated and properly motivated teachers hence FRN (2013) states that “teacher education” will continue to be given a major emphasis in all our educational planning and development.

Functional Education

Functional is explained by Cambridge dictionary as “designed to be practical and useful rather than attractive”. The educational curriculum should be relevant, realistic and comprehensive enough to guide learners based on their interest, capacity and the needs of the society to produce individuals who have procured the proper aptitudes and mental capacities, physical and social capacities, skills and competences as gear for the person to live in and add to the general public (Undie, Ugbe and Undie, 2021). Functional education according to Ayoade and Thota (2023) is an education which put a country in a position of being able to manufacture raw materials such, as, machines and tools needed for the industries. Such a country should also be able to attain food sufficiency for domestic and international consumption. In addition to that, it should be able to discover and produce drugs capable of curing diseases. In other words, functional education is one which is capable of transforming a country’s economy, from a consuming one to a manufacturing one.

Ayoade and Thota (2023) opines that functional education seeks to prepare people, especially youth, to be responsible, enterprising individuals who become entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial thinkers who will contribute to economic development and sustainable communities. Musa and Joseph (2018) emphasized that functional education is that which will provide life and occupational skills that will enhance the potentials of individuals thus reinforcing self-sufficiency and improving quality of life. In the same vein, Okeke (2021) defined functional education as education for which there is an anticipated application, which thus assumes that the learner has immediate meaning, transferable into action for his learning activities. Accordingly, a non-functional educational system would lead to a poor national economy, national insecurity, corruption and several other challenges (Abolarin, 2019).

Functional education is very important in that there is urgent need for all post basic education schools in Nigeria to comply with the presidential directives to the effect that entrepreneurship are made compulsory for all students of post basic education in Nigeria, irrespective of their area of specialization. This policy decision was based on government awareness of the crucial role of entrepreneurship education and training in fostering employment generation among the teaming youth, economic growth, and wealth creation

Some objectives of functional educational system as identified in Okeke (2021) and Undie, Ugbe and Undie (2021) are:

1. The integration of the products of the system into the society and not to alienate them from it.

2. To make its products of the system become self-reliant and create employment for other members of the society
3. To serve as a tool for social and cultural stability and economic sufficiency.
4. To provide solutions to the social and economic problems of the society
5. To promote the character development, the fulfillment of individual goals through the acquisition of knowledge and skills and ability for the benefit of the society.

Sustainable National Development

The concept of sustainable development was described by Brundtland, (1987) in the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable National Development is improvement that is outfitted towards the development of the people in the economy and which would likewise upgrade the advancement of the country and such advancement ought to be consistent over the long haul.

The United Nations launched the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 to replace the Millennium Development Goals and it was aimed at addressing the issues of poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. All of the 17 goals are expected to have been realized by 2030 in every country around the world including Nigeria. The United Nations in its Sustainable Development Report (2020) currently ranks Nigeria 160 out of 166 countries captured on the 2020 world's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index. This leaves much to be desired.

Undie, Ugbe and Undie (2021) surmised that the slow rate of national development in Nigeria is blamed on the poor quality of the nation's education and there is a general agreement among educationists that if Nigerian education is made functional, there would be an emergence of positive changes which can accelerate national development in the country. Achieving sustainable national development whether through the SDGs or any other developmental drives can only come to reality on the long haul through functional education (Ategwu & Igbinoia, 2023).

Changing Roles of Teachers

Teachers are the key to sustainable national development as they are the foremost agents of societal change as drivers of the education system (Meneses et al., 2023). The breakneck speed of science and technological impacting today's world has not spared teachers and the entire educational system. It has made education global and by implication learners in Nigeria will be competing against those in other nations of the world. As such functional education must meet the needs of the individual the national society and the global society. The role of the teacher is also fast changing. The name teacher is fast becoming more of a facilitator. According to Parker, Asare, Badu and Ossei-Anto (2022), the term facilitator is now becoming more prevalent as it goes together with

the huge volume of work and the job descriptions of teachers all over the world. Long gone are the days of only books and chalk and talk methods. In modern schools one sees how, by using dynamic and exciting teaching methodologies, the learners are drawn into the world of self-actualization and realization of their aims, aspirations, dreams, goals and hopes (Ramesh and Mamatha, 2020).

In times past teachers were the major knowledge source and leaders for learners in school. These days however, teachers provide information and guide learners to solve problems. Although they are still considered to be a kind of leader/controller in the class, they can be thought of as facilitators in the learning process. Teachers are also faced with a new set of tasks which involves the operation of and use of gadgets such as computers, projectors, interactive boards, photocopiers and public address systems. The teacher thus becomes not just an expert at operating these gadgets but also a troubleshooter and a technician. The ICT revolution among others has placed new demands on teachers aside the existing ones. The teachers today must possess the following additional skills; information media skills, digital skills, technological skills and interpersonal skills.

Today's teachers are confronted with the challenge of a revolution in communication and information has led to changes in all circles of human endeavor: science, technology, politics, economy and culture. The momentous role played by teachers cannot be overstressed when it comes to preparing learners to confront tomorrow with self-confidence, responsibility and purpose (Buenvinida, Rodriguez, and Sapin, 2020). In the area of school management, the teacher has become a manager of the learners, fellow teachers and parents.

The functional teacher is expected to perform the following added roles (Buenvinida et al., (2020), Ramesh and Mamatha (2020);

- a. Career planner
- b. Learning facilitator not a controller of learning
- c. Provoke curiosity and motivation not source of knowledge
- d. Resource provider
- e. Digital instructor not just a board user
- f. Digital learner
- g. Lover of technology
- h. Promotes collaboration
- i. Relevant and engaging learning
- j. Leader and education advocate

According to Okeke, (2021), the most significant stride to be taken in Nigeria's desire to achieve functional education is to revolutionize the teaching profession. Well qualified, highly motivated and dedicated teachers are needed to meet the challenges of the ever increasing and sophisticated roles of teachers needed in a functional

system of education. They should be properly remunerated and at the right time so that they can be better motivated to do their duties. Any nation with a shortage of qualified and committed teachers cannot have functional education.

Adapting to the Changing Roles of teachers

- Invest in continuous self-development. Perhaps the greatest necessity for the teachers in a fast changing world in order to ensure sustainable development of Nigeria would be access to information and training. Teachers should ensure professional development through higher certifications and professional renewal through capacity building workshops, seminars and conferences.
- Prepare to be a better communicator. With the information and communication age, the teacher must be prepared to be a good communicator within and outside the usual school hours. The learners are getting more inquisitive and have access to plenty of information. The teacher must be conversant with the use of SMS, emails and social media (Parker, Asare, Badu and Ossei-Anto, 2022).
- Start using technology in all aspects of the teaching and learning process in order to prepare the learners to be functional in today's world (Nwogbo and Okorji, 2019). Start small and keep improving without completely abandoning the old methods. Feel free to communicate your difficulties and successes with fellow teachers.
- Improve on counseling by guiding learners to be critical thinkers, learn, share, succeed, and develop a positive attitude to life, resilient and persistent. Teachers should be a leading light and be ready to be influential as learners in a functional system would require a lot of mentorship (Nwogbo and Okorji, 2019).

Conclusion

Since education should be directed towards the economic progress and sustainable development of the country, youths need to be taught functional skills that lay the foundations for earning a living and self-actualization. Education, if properly functionalized, should be used to sustain our democracy, reduce poverty, curtail insecurity, and create employment and productivity. The quality of teachers determines how functional an educational system would be and this is strongly linked with sustainable national development. For education to be fully functional, teachers need to take on new roles that are not only learner centered but also motivational and technology based. In view of this, Nigerian government at all levels should give the necessary assistance and support in enforcing the National policy on education and functional curriculum that can take adequate care of the nation's developmental needs.

Recommendations

This paper recommends the following:

1. The government at all level should show its commitment and political-will to ensuring functional education and functional curriculum that can take adequate care of our development needs. This can only be achieved through curriculum modifications and enhanced modern teaching instrument.
2. The various supervisory agencies of the educational institutions and the Ministry of education should be more committed to playing their role as a watch-dog in ensuring that all educational institutions from primary to tertiary operate within and abide by laid down standards for functional education.
3. A law should be enacted that will mandate the federal and state governments to adhere strictly to the UNESCO's recommendation that 24 percent of their annual budget be allocated to education.
4. Teachers must recognize the changing roles of teaches and commit to continuous self-development to enable them fit fully into a functional educational system.
5. Employment and re-training of adequate number of well-qualified and dedicated teachers. This is imperative because no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers.
6. The overwhelming role of entrepreneurial education, as part of poverty eradication, self-reliance and national security, and development has been succinctly stated in this work. Since its benefits are enormous, adequate steps should be taken to requite entrepreneurial education by providing at all levels of governance-federal state and local government areas, suitable environment through proper curriculum planning and implementation, proper funding and equipping of entrepreneurship education.
7. There should be an ethical reorientation that aims at raising the consciousness of the citizenry and politicians in particular to see the sacred nature of education rather than making isolated attempts at turning around a particular institute or university because the forces that prevail against good education in the country are still very pervasive and behemoth.
8. The government at all levels should show its commitment and political-will to ensuring functional education through its funding, policy making, supervision and monitoring of educational projects and programmes.

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