



Functional Tertiary Education and the Challenges of Democracy

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Abstract

This paper examined functional tertiary education and the challenges of democracy in Nigeria. It commenced with an introduction to education, democracy and functional education as well as the rationale for the paper. It also looked at the dialectics of democracy, education and development and the role of education in tackling the challenges of democracy. The paper concluded that the development of any nation given by its educational system is assessed by the extent to which it achieves its stated objectives. It suggested among others that tertiary education institutions and government agencies should be actively involved in political and democratic education.

Keywords: Education, Democracy, Tertiary Institution, Educational Elite

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Oguru, C. O., & Amie-Ogan, O. T. (2023). Functional tertiary education and the challenges of democracy. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*, 16(4), 430-438.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is widely regarded as the backbone of development in any country. It propels economic development and the general well-being of citizens. Little wonder that no nation can develop beyond her educational system. In the submissions of Nwokolo in Isiozor et al. (2021), education creates improved citizens and helps to upgrade the general standard of living in a society. The Nigerian educational system cuts across three levels, primary, secondary and

tertiary. Each level is saddled with its unique goals and objectives as specified in the Nigerian National Policy on Education. These goals and objectives are all geared towards the production of the right manpower to serve in various sectors of the economy. However, the increased demand for higher education and the wave of globalization have heaped an untold amount of pressure on tertiary education institutions in Nigeria. Simply put, tertiary education is the education given after secondary education in colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics, universities and other institutions offering correspondence courses (FRN, 2014).

Nigeria's tertiary education needs to be functional before it can be referred to as quality and standard. The much preached about internationalization of Nigeria education system begins with its functionality. Functional tertiary education in Nigeria would bring to a large extent, national development, nation-building, citizenship education, youth mobilization, value orientation and reorientation, civilized society and above all democracy. Okon and Akpan (2014) have noted that the role of "functional" tertiary education as the bedrock of social, economic, political, and cultural development can never be overemphasized in Nigeria. This means that the usefulness of every nation's educational system depends on its functionality. This is why Nwokolo in Isiozor et al. (2021) posited that "functional education should be capable of producing Nigerians who can manufacture raw materials, machines, and tools needed for local international markets, invent new designs, discover drugs capable of curing diseases hitherto incurable and transform the nation from consumption to a manufacturing status".

These Nigerians produced by Nigeria's functional tertiary education should also be able to convert the manufactured raw materials into finished goods and products, operate the machines and tools needed for international and local markets, utilize the invented new designs for the comfort of the nation's citizens, and so on. The overemphasis on functional education is mainly done by countries of the world that are still developing, underdeveloped or undeveloped. This is done to bring the country's educational system to a standard of international repute and make it of high quality. The management of functional education in tertiary institutions in Nigeria would not be an easy task.

Sustainable national development has been an elusive desire in Nigeria. Several studies have shown that despite the multiplicity of attempts to rescue the Nigerian nation from the doldrums of underdevelopment and set the state on the path of sustainable national development, the ailing Nigerian nation has refused to respond to position disruptions engendered through the educational system. It is believed that through functional education, concrete and usable knowledge, insight and skill, not theories and abstract, are acquired and it is the planned and guided application of these that engenders national development which has been defined as the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people by providing social amenities like quality education, potable water, transportation infrastructure, medical care and more.

Functional education does not only lead to sustainable development but also improves the quality of leadership of a given society. This is because no nation develops above the quality of its citizens. It is the citizens that make things happen; bring about positive changes; and consequently, contribute to the foundation on which national development revolves.

It has been perceived that there is a linkage between functional education and democracy. The role of education in democracy which coincidentally match with the present-day phenomenon of democratic governance all over the world is an issue that must never be neglected. It is apparent that democracy is about politics and politics relate to leadership. Education on the other hand refers to knowledge and knowledge is in a literal sense talking about information, skills,

understanding and experience that someone has acquired to make a living, become a good citizen and produce good leaders and leadership. The concepts of education and democracy looks indefinable but these terms must work together to breed effective leadership in democratic settings.

RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY

Across countries, education and democracy are highly correlated. The commitment to democracy and education by statesmen, political philosophers and the populace is now widespread and reasonably genuine for the people in Nigeria in particular and the globe in general. The general objective of this paper therefore was to draw attention to certain questions on functional tertiary education and the challenges of democracy. Specifically, the study elucidated the following concepts:

- Concept of Education;
- Concept of Democracy;
- Functional Tertiary Education in Nigeria;
- The Dialectics of Democracy, Education and Development, and
- The role of Education in tackling the Challenges of Democracy

Concept of Education

Education is the initiation of the individual into activities or modes of thought and conduct considered worthwhile by the society... an educated man is not only knowledgeable but is also committed to the ideas and norms of his society and to standards of performance. Education induces a holistic dimension to the individual that goes beyond mere skills and competence (Anyia, 1993; cited in Anyia, 2008). Education can refer to a process, a product or a discipline (Nwuzor & Ocho, 1985). In this paper, the concept of education is focused upon, in these three contexts - a process, a product and a discipline. Consequently, for an effective education, the raw materials may be borrowed but the finished product must be indigenous. Okeke (2007) further opined as follows: education in its broadest sense encompasses all the processes individuals go through in life to develop and optimally utilize their potentials through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that are necessary for effective living in society. It is a process that starts from birth and ends with death, which means that education is a life-long process. Every experience one goes through in life, affords the person opportunity to advance in education, that is to say, gain knowledge and skills to grapple with challenges of life. Education therefore is a vital aspect of human enterprise and cannot be left to chance. That is why societies and nations take time to organize their education system for maximum benefits (Okeke, 2007). This maximum benefit must include sustainable national development, as desired by all the citizens and striven for, by their legitimate leaders.

Concept of Democracy

Democracy is truly, a difficult issue to conceptualize. However, according to Osakwe (2011), democracy is a political system in which the people in a country rule through any form of government they choose to establish. In modern democracies, supreme authority is exercised for

the most part, by representatives elected by popular suffrage. Hence, democracy is rule by the people. Democracy is not for instance, rule by the elite, even when representatives elected by popular suffrage have formed part of the political elite. Democracy is not essentially rule by elected representatives. Democracy is rather essentially rule by the representatives of the people. Central to the concept and practice of democracy therefore, are the wishes and the will of the people. Thus, democracy in the people's reckoning means improvement in their circumstances (Abati, 2006).

Whenever an attempt is made to re-conceptualize democracy, the effort ends up reaffirming that people are central to the democratic concept and practices. Awotokun (2004) for instance has contended as follows: By democracy I do not mean something as vague as the rule of the people or the rule of the majority; but a set of institutions (among them especially general elections, i.e., the right of the people to dismiss their government) which permits public control of rulers and their dismissal by the ruled, and which make it possible for the ruled to obtain reforms without using violence, even against the will of the rulers (Awotokun, 2004). Besides the express mentioning of the right of the people" in this contention, it stands to reason that the ruled upon which emphasis is placed in this attempted re-conceptualization, also refers to "the people". Democracy is essentially, people-centered. Laski (2008) posited that the democratic form of government is doubtless a final form of political organization in the sense that men who have once tasted power will not without conflict, want to surrender it. The issue of whom the power would have been surrendered to, however remains outstanding. In all, the contention of Laski (2008) referred to the primacy of the people in the democratic concept.

Ogundiya (2010) argued that in all societies of the world today, the issue is not which political system is appropriate but rather when will society become democratized or fully democratic. According to Owolabi (2003) cited in Ogundiya (2010), the democratization project is therefore, regarded as the age of civilization, that every society should strive to attain, rather than a political option among many others. Democracy has thus been recognized as the only moral and legitimate way, through which a society can be administered (Ogundiya, 2010). However, according to Laski (2008), democratic government is less a matter of eulogy than for exploration. Positive democratic impact must be located in the relationship between democracy and other variables, inclusive of education and sustainable national development. For the positive impact to be located, the meaning of education must be clearly understood by both the facilitators and the beneficiaries.

Functional Tertiary Education in Nigeria

Functional education is that education at all levels that is relevant to the current and anticipated needs, problems and aspirations of the individual learner, which is based on the occurrence and changes in the learner's cultural milieu. It is befitting for the needs and aspirations of the society. It prepares the individual to face his social goals, economic realities and future life challenges positively. It means an education in which the ability to perform productive tasks is more emphasized than the education that aims at producing ideological conformity. Abdu (2005) saw functional education as the wholesome training of an individual that makes him/her useful to him/herself, the community and the nation as a whole. It is education that is alive. It works for the benefit of all. It is active; stimulates and empowers an individual with saleable skills and values to; positively solve immediate problems for self and the society; live as ordered and disciplined life; understand his interest and vocation; and have the zeal to succeed amidst all

odds. Functional education can translate into establishment and improvement of infrastructure' such as electricity, roads, health, education, water supply, integrated rural development, poverty reduction, improvement in people's standard of living, reduction in crime and increase in economic growth (increase in agricultural production), positive attitude to work especially government work, political stability and patriotism.

In fact, if tertiary education is intended to promote economic sufficiency for the beneficiaries, then there is a positive relationship between functional tertiary education and national development (Fuandai et al., 2007). Going by these descriptions of functional education, a relevant question to this paper is; to what extent has the objectives of education in Nigeria been achieved in the Nigeria education system since she saw the need to free herself from the shackles of ideological/theoretical form of education handed down from the colonial masters? The answer is simple. The picture appears cheerful. There are evidences of concrete achievements in this regard at least on paper. Evidently, the FRN (2004: Section 1:4d) stated 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 determine the individual's direction in education. The number of technical colleges, polytechnics and colleges of education (technical) has increased. Schools' curriculum has also been overhauled. Specialized universities of agriculture, technology, and petroleum resources among others have been established. These have increased to an extent the number of graduates who have acquired skills (certificates) that are used in making things; creating wealth; harnessing our abundant natural resources among others.

Features of Functional Education

The essence of functional education is to bring out the best in the individual. For tertiary education to achieve its purpose of being functional, it must possess some features. Fuandai, Shiaki and Gbari (2007) came up with some of the features of functional education such as the following: relevance, accessibility, empowerment, self-reliance, involvement of stakeholders in its design; equipping recipients to harness their potentials, emphasizing the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge for gainful self-employment. Let us look at some of these distinctive features of functional education one by one:

- **Relevance:** Education achieves functional purpose when its curriculum is tailored and designed to suit the immediate and future needs of the individual and the society in which, he lives in consonance with the realities of the individual's environment and the modern world. It solves problems in order to meet the needs of the learners. Education loses its relevance if it is not appropriate or relevant to real life encounters of the learner, such as; improving his quality of life.
- **Accessibility:** It should be available to all irrespective of age, ability and gender. Nobody should be denied access to functional education. Evidently, Nigeria is a signatory to the Jomtien Declaration on education for all and the Millennium Development Goals which, include increasing literacy by the year 2015.
- **Empowerment:** Functional education should equip beneficiaries with the requisite knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes, necessary to function and engage in productive ventures and earn a living. This has a multiplier effect as it will reduce unemployment,

improve family income and reduce poverty, reduce infant mortality and raise the standard of living.

- ***Emphasizes the Acquisition of Original Practical Skills and Knowledge:*** Functional education involves original application of skills and knowledge to complex problems (construction of knowledge) rather than just routine use of facts and procedures. Functional education is practical. This implies that the skills acquired could easily be put into use whenever the need arises! This demands that anyone who has acquired functional education should readily apply such skill or knowledge on the spot without making reference to written materials. It is only functional education that can make a mechanical engineer on graduation to design any mechanical device for use in a given environment and an agricultural engineer to devise alternatives for traditional hoes and knives to till the land and harvest their crops manually. In other words, with functional education, they can be gainfully self-employed and as well contribute their quota to the national income and development.
- ***Self-reliance:*** Functional education is one which emphasizes self-reliance for the recipients. In other words, it prepares and equips people to be on their own; using their knowledge and skills to be self-reliant, create wealth and employment opportunities. This will go a long way in reducing poverty and crimes among the youths and contribute to the economic and national development. Self-reliance connotes self-direction which is the ability to propel oneself toward a particular direction (Udoetuk & Udofia, 2012). This demands a lot of sacrifice, encouragement and devotion on the part of the students and the teachers. Thus, students are prepared to trust and believe in themselves, trust their capabilities and challenged to carve a niche for themselves.

The Dialectics of Democracy, Education and Development

Anya (2008) described education as an instrument for inducing social change. Education therefore is an instrument of inducing positive change in the processes of democracy. On the other hand, devoid of democracy, education becomes only indoctrination. But education is more than indoctrination. Whatever education may be, good citizenship is clearly a part of it. In this regard, citizenship has been defined as the contribution of one's instructed judgment to the public good (Laski, 2008). It follows therefore that in the democratic process, the demands of citizenship are compelling on both the vote-seeking politician and the voter. In a democracy, the demands of citizenship are compelling on both the elite and the masses. The demands of citizenship can be supplied by education. Indeed, in the views of Laski (2008) the problem of democratic government is not less a problem of finding men apt to the use of its machinery than the problem of a monarchy is to find a race of kings fitted by their endowments to benefit the state. Consequently, the capacity building requirements of the two systems - democracy and monarchy - are functions of education.

Furthermore, Laski (2008) contended that the administration of a modern state is a technical matter and that those who can penetrate its secrets are relatively few in number. Those who can penetrate the secrets of the administration of a modern state are of course the elite. The fewness of this number is anti-democratic and one potent instrument for increasing the number of those who can penetrate the secrets of the technical matter, inherent in the administration of a modern state is massive education which the elite may not be interested in bringing about. The elite are naturally interested in elite education, for the children of the elite; not the type of

education that is the instrument for inducing social change, the type that leads to sustainable national development. Where the required education continues to be of sub-standard value, the state is open to the risk of stunted progress—dearth of development. In Nigeria, the result of the relationship among democracy, education and development has become the impoverishment of the citizens and the consequent increases in inequality and poverty rates. In the consequent inequality that the relationship breeds, the elite do not see that the national economy is headed in the wrong direction. The National Bureau of Statistics has in this regard declared that over 130 million Nigerians are living in abject poverty (NBS, 2022). But the political elite in Nigeria thinks that the NBS, World Bank and other agencies and institutions are brandishing wrong figures about the state of affairs in Nigeria.

To move a modern state forward requires massive functional education, which is antithetical to elitism. Asobie (2008) also opined that the decisive factor in development is human resource but sees human resource as referring to leadership. Human resource that is decisive for development is seen in this paper as having to do more with education. However, Asobie (2008) further posited that there is a correlation between democracy and development or more specifically, between types of democratic states and development. Indeed, the relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development is a relationship of correlation. This correlation requires the cooperation of the political and educational elite.

The Role of Education in Tackling the Challenges of Democracy

The role of education in democracy which coincidentally matches with the present-day phenomenon of democratic governance all over the world is an issue that must never be neglected. It is apparent that democracy is about politics and politics relate to leadership. Education on the other hand refers to knowledge and knowledge is in a literal sense talking about information, skills, understanding and experience that someone has acquired to make a living. To harmonize the two concepts therefore, education and democracy are two inseparable terms that must work together to breed effective leadership in democratic settings.

In a wider perspective, the great men of western world are of the opinion that the two terms are positively correlated. Plato for example studied politics and government; he believed that the best government has a philosopher in charge. The minds of philosophers were trained to use reason and understand ideas. He maintained that the knowledge they acquired would help them govern their people wisely and create best conditions for the people they rule. Karl Marx, a German philosopher maintained that working people (Elite) everywhere should revolt and take control of governments. His ideology encouraged working people to over throw Russians government and accept communism. John Adams, the second president of the United States of America wanted a powerful and active government controlled by the best educated people. Greece and Rome laid the foundations for modern Europe.

The Greeks made astounding advances in math, science, philosophy, and the arts. They invented democracy. The Romans made great strides in engineering, government and law. They invented cement. Some Romans- built roads, canals and bridges are still used today in Europe. Today Greek civilization still shapes the way people think, speak, study, govern, design buildings and spend their leisure time. Many words in English language come from Greek roots. Questions raised by Greek philosophers are still debated. The influence of Ancient Greece is felt throughout Europe and in all the lands that European nations once ruled. Athens too was a democracy. All adult male citizens had the right to elect leaders, serve on jurist and debate

government plans. Athenians prize learning and arts. They ask the best artist, architects, philosophers and writers to live and work in their city. In West African sub region, the influence of Islamic jihad movement across the region which led to concurring of many empires had equally played a vital role in determining the type of leadership operating in the area and their knowledge of religious practices.

From the foregoing narrations of the leadership concepts and knowledge acquisitions, it is vividly clear that an effective leader should have the knowledge of his subjects, their ways of living in terms of cultural norms and values, wishes and aspirations, likes and dislikes as well as be aware of their level of civilization and development. For such a leader to lead his subjects successfully therefore, he must possess the ability to plan, organize, co-ordinate and arrange his administration joy fully and pleasantly to the satisfaction of every one under his stewardship. He must be a man of vision and mission with manifestation of wisdom in his actions and reactions. All these leadership qualities cannot be achieved under the influence of ignorance, selfishness, greediness and transgression but from the illumination of knowledge and sincere commitment to lead others by example. On the other perspectives, the primary aims of education is to initiate individuals into the values, attitudes and modes of behaviour appropriate to active participation in democratic institution. This means that education offer an opportunity to learners for them to become future political leaders. Education promotes democracy because it raises the benefits (or reduces the costs) of political activity. The core insight of the functional tertiary education model is that democracy requires support from a broad base of citizens who face only weak incentives to fight for it, while dictatorships offer strong incentives to a narrow base of supporters. Education raises the benefits of political participation and draws relatively more people to support democracy.

CONCLUSION

The development of any nation given by its educational system is assessed by the extent to which it achieves its stated objectives. The goal of education in Nigeria includes developing in the learner a well-integrated person who is socially adjustable, morally dependable, mentally and physically alert, intellectually honest, economically efficient, scientifically literate, vocationally equipped, nationally and internationally oriented, culturally adjusted and politically sound. All these can be achieved only through effective and efficient functional tertiary education where-in laid the bedrock of any nation for purposeful acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills and development.

Suggestions

Based on the scholarly articles reviewed in this paper as well as conclusions drawn, the following suggestions are put forward:

- Tertiary education institutions and government agencies should be actively involved in political and democracy education. The curriculum should be born out of Nigerian political history and experiences and also deliberately designed to equip learners with the knowledge about leadership, citizenship and democracy.
- Citizenship education should be taught at all levels of education in Nigeria.

- An urgent inclusive national conference on democracy, education and sustainable national development be convoked by the Nigerian state actors / the political elite, in collaboration with the educational elite

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