

## FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION IN A DEPRESSED ECONOMY: A PROMOTER FOR EFFECTIVE POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NIGERIA

**Bappah, I. Jibrin**

GSM 08035549494

Email: [jibappah4@gmail.com](mailto:jibappah4@gmail.com)

**Dahiru, Maryam**

GSM 07036178902

and

**Shuaibu, Sulaiman Salihu**

GSM 08027379383

School of Business Education

Federal College of Education (Technical), Gombe

### Abstract

*This paper examines the linkages between functional education and poverty alleviation in Nigeria. Data for the study are majorly qualitative and derived from secondary sources that are related scholarly works such as articles in Journals, Conference Proceedings, Newspapers and Magazines. The data derived from these sources were presented and analysed using the content analyses. Findings showed that there is a significant relationship between the quality of educational system and the rate of poverty in Nigeria. The paper suggests that effective and functional education remains the most fundamental vehicle for the reduction of poverty in Nigeria. The paper therefore recommends among others, that serious attention be given to the educational sector in so that the country can produce a total person with the requisite skills, knowledge, and value essential to function effectively in the 21st Century.*

**Keywords:** Education, Functional Education, Poverty, Alleviation, Depressed Economy

### Introduction

The role of education as the bedrock of social, economic, political, and cultural development can never be overemphasized. All over the world, education is highly rated in issues of national development plans, because it is the most important instrument of change. Accordingly, any fundamental change in intellectual and social outlook must be preceded by educational revolution. The fulfilment of this role lies in functional education.

Developed countries of the world like China, Japan, Russia, and United States of America among others have achieved various breakthroughs due to their commitment to ensuring that the educational sector in their countries is effective and functional. Even countries like Singapore, Indonesia, India, countries that have achieved developmental breakthroughs have succeeded because of their commitment to ensuring that educational system is functional in their nations. Furthermore, countries like Japan, Israel, Korea, and China have achieved

developmental breakthrough even though they have no natural resource endowment. The secret of their breakthrough is their commitment to functional educational system. All these nations have been able to overcome several developmental challenges such as poverty, unemployment, inequality and ignorance, which are unfriendly to human existence and whose presence could lead to other social vices like, insecurity, crisis and conflicts, and war among other social ills.

The perennial problems of poverty, unemployment and inequality have bedevilled every developmental effort in Nigeria. For instance, despite several efforts by successive governments in Nigeria through programmes and policy measures, as well as the various intervention programmes and projects by Nongovernmental organisations, and other foreign government agencies, it seems much has not been achieved in reducing the menace of poverty in the country as the rate of poverty is still on the high side.

Statistics from the National Bureau for Statistics (NBS, 2020), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2021), and the World Bank, (2021) still indicate that poverty incidence in Nigeria is over 60 percent. Although several factors have been adduced for the persistent high rate of poverty incidence in Nigeria such as corruption on the part of the implementers of poverty alleviation programmes, ineffective anti-poverty programmes, poor implementation of anti-poverty programmes, lack of government political-will among others. The fact remains that the hallmark for overcoming these challenges is effective and functional education. It is a vital enterprise that touches the lives of both the present and future generations. Its importance in translating the future of great nations cannot be overemphasized (Asaju *et.al*, 2013). However, it seems functional education has not been realised as an effective tool for overcoming some of the developmental challenges like poverty, in Nigeria. Asaju *et.al* (2013) in their study concluded that the declining standard of education in Nigeria has affected its efforts at human resource development with great consequences for government efforts at reducing the high rate of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, which are attributed to other social ills experienced in the country.

However, a depressed economy is an economy which experiences a prolonged or long period of recession and prolonged downturn in the economy. The major features of a depressed economy are declining business activities, falling prices, increasing inventories, public fear, and rising unemployment. In Nigeria, students/ graduates are expected to acquire skills and become entrepreneurs. But on a contrary, some of them have little or no skill and are dependent on the society instead of being self-reliant. So, how can education in Nigeria be made functional to reduce the rate of poverty in the country?

This paper therefore examines the present trend in the educational system with the view to identify its functionality as tool for poverty alleviation in Nigeria. The paper relies on secondary data obtained from the official documents of the federal government such as Nigeria Bureau for Statistics (NBS), official publications of NGOs, Journals, Conference papers, Newspapers and Magazines,

books, and Internet materials. The paper is divided into four sections with the first being the introduction. Conceptual issues in education and poverty were reviewed in the second section. The subject matter of the study, which is alleviating poverty through functional education, was discussed in the third section, while section four contains the conclusion and recommendations.

## Conceptual Issues

### Concept of Education

There is no single most acceptable definition for education. This is because it connotes different things to different people, culture, and society. From Plato through Alfred Whitehead, Emile Durkheim, R.S. Peters, E.B. Castle, D.J. O'Connor to F.C Okafor and A.B. Fafunwa, the definition of the concept of Education continues to evolve in all its ramifications. For instance, while Whitehead (1907) defined education as "the art of acquisition and utilization of knowledge, Fafunwa (1974) sees education as the aggregate of all the processes through which a child develops abilities and other forms of behaviours which are of positive value to society. But Okafor (1981) conceptualised it as a process of acculturation by which the individual is assisted to attain the maximum activation of his potentialities according to the right reason, and to achieve thereby his self-fulfilment or self-realization. However, Okoh (1998) underscored three ways of using the term education, viz: education as a process, which is the activity of preserving, developing, and transmitting the culture of a people from one generation to another. It is an activity of continuous all-round development of individual for life in the society. Secondly, education can be used as a product, which refer to the change whether overt or covert, implicit, or explicit, which education supposed to bring about. In this vein, Okoh contends that the end product of education is supposed to be the "educated man" who has the intellectual and moral strength to make the world a better place to live in. And finally, education as a discipline is perceived as a body of systematic and organized knowledge. In this vein, education can be seen as the process of teaching, training, and learning in Schools and Colleges for the development of knowledge and skills to prepare individuals to live happily with themselves and others in the society where they live. Thus,

education is conceptualised more as a process, activity and outcome of skill, knowledge acquisition which makes the citizen a better and more productive person to himself and to the society at large.

### **Concepts of Functional Education**

Functional education is quite different from the concept of education. While Education simply refers to the process by which knowledge and skills are acquired, Functional Education is more encompassing, meaningful, and most desirable. This is because it is the type of education that equips the recipient with the knowledge and skills needed for that performance of productive task. It is one that helps the society meet their developmental needs. Good (1999) defines functional education as: Education for which there is an anticipated application, which thus assumes that the learner has immediate meaning, transferable into action of his learning activities.

Cookey as cited in Akumah (1998) defines functional education as the education in which the ability to perform productive tasks is more emphasized than the education that aims at producing ideological conformity. It is a kind of education that emphasizes practice more than theory. Cookey suggests further that the Nigerian education has not been functional because too much emphasis has been placed on theoretical and academic knowledge. There is undue emphasis on the possession of certificates instead of on what one can do. Buttressing this fact, Ukeje (1992) states that: "The educational processes are geared primarily to preparing candidates for examinations. Through this process of education, the products acquire knowledge and facts with little real understanding and without saleable skills.

Arogundade (2011) adds 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. The need for functional education started emerging in the mid-1980s. In the mid-80s, the Nigerian economy collapsed while youth and graduate unemployment hit the roof. There was large scale layoff of workers and retirement because of structural adjustment

programmes and bad economic trends in the country. During this situation, functional education, which would have salvaged the situation, was not encouraged.

The result of this dysfunctional education is that schools turn out graduates without useful knowledge and skills and who become isolated from their own environment.

The term 'functional' also has been defined (Geddes and Grosset, 2005 and Quirks, 1995) as practical and having useful purposes. Against this backdrop, Ali (2000) averred that functional education will ensure the availability of food for people, creation of jobs, provision of services, etcetera. In the same vein, Nwokolo (1997) posited that: "Functional education should be capable of producing Nigerians who can manufacture raw materials, machines and tools needed for local and international markets, invent new designs, discover drugs capable of curing diseases previously incurable and transform the nation from a consumption to a manufacturing status.

### **Concept of Poverty**

Poverty has been defined by different authors from different perspectives. These definitions cover the absolute and relative dimensions of poverty. In a simple term, poverty is a condition in which individuals and households cannot meet or satisfy the necessities of life i.e., food, clothing and shelter and other basic social services and privileges that will make them to live a decent and fulfilled life. Okoh (1998) defines poverty as "a state of deprivation in terms of both economic and social indicators, such as income, education, health care, and access to food, social status, and self-esteem and self-actualization". Poverty is a pronounced deprivation in well-being and comprises of many dimensions. It includes low incomes and inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. It also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water, and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life (World Bank, 2014). Poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a

family; not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living; not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households, and communities. It means vulnerability to violence, and it often implied living in marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water and sanitation (United Nations, 2019). From the above definitions, poverty is no doubt synonymous to underdevelopment. Thus, development implies the eradication of poverty. The definition of development by Seer and adopted in this paper gives acceptance to the above assertion. Development cannot be achieved without eradicating poverty since poverty is a major attribute of underdevelopment especially in developing countries. Poverty implies economic, social, political, and cultural deprivations. Therefore, developmental goals should be geared toward improving the economic, social, political, and cultural needs and aspirations of the people. But the question is, is Nigeria a developed nation based on the above criteria? The answer is obviously "no". There is therefore the need for capacity building through a qualitative and effective education.

### **Alleviating Poverty through Functional Education**

Education is the most viable investment that individual, and nations should endeavour. Education is an inevitable tool for human survival and vital enterprises that touches the lives of both the present and future generations. Connor (1957) sees educational system of any society as an elaborate social mechanism designed to bring about in the persons submitted to it, certain skills and attitude that are adjudged to be useful and desirable in the society. Education generates new knowledge in various fields of learning, accelerate economic growth, equalize income distribution, forge national unity and integration, and enhance cultural and social advancement (Umo, 1978).

Also, through functional education, qualitative manpower is produced. The educational system of any nation determines its type, nature, and calibre of manpower to be supplied. The educational system and the commitment to human resource development have been attributed to their level of

achievement and other breakthroughs experienced in these countries. The economic success of the so called 'Asian tiger' has been attributed to the educational system which are functional, and the priorities given to human resource development. Referring to the successes of these developed nations, Park (1992) opined that when there are fairly well-developed human resources, lack of abundant supply of other factors such as physical capital and technology does not pose any insurmountable barrier to sustained growth.

Human resources not capital or income, nor material resources constitute the ultimate basis wealth of a nation because they are just passive factors of production. It is the human resource that accumulates capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic, and political organisations, and carry over national development (Harbison, 1973). All these are achieved through a functional education. No wonder, countries like Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland were adjudged to be the best countries to live due to their commitment to education (UNDP, 2019). While the developed countries have continued to achieve breakthroughs in every facet of their economy, the underdeveloped nations are still struggling to cope with the numerous developmental challenges inhibiting their progress. The development of these nations are still be-devilled by challenges of high rate of unemployment, poverty, inequality, diseases, ethno-religious crisis, and war political crisis among others that brought about untold hardship and pain to their populace (Asaju, 2012, Asaju, 2014).

The above situation is not farfetched in Nigeria where about 70 percent of the populace still wallow in poverty; income inequality gap is still widening. A world bank report has noted that the number of poor persons in Nigeria will rise to 95.1 million in 2022. The number of poor people was 89.0 million in 2020 and would be 95.1 million in 2022. Unemployment rate is still high (53%) at 2022, maternal mortality rate is high, and life expectancy at birth is put at 55 years (NBS, 2022, in Premium Times, 2022). Nigeria is pronounced to be one of the richly blessed countries in terms of human and material resources. But using this wealth to better the life of her populace has continued to be an



illusion. Even meeting the necessity of life such as food, cloth, shelter has been very difficult for many of her citizens. The question is, is the educational system effective in solving the problem of poverty in Nigeria? Scholars have tried to prove that there is a relationship between underdevelopment in Nigeria and its educational system. Olaofe (2015) argued that the underdevelopment and its challenges witnessed in Nigeria because of low quality or standard of education in the country. To him, the resultant effect of the low quality of education has been witnessed in the lack of modernisation across all sectors of the country. Lack of the functional education has placed Nigeria far behind in the modernisation process and the defect has been the mother and father of all evil that follows; poverty, debt burden, conflict, corruption, abuses of human right, abuses of power, killer diseases, epileptic democratic government, insecurity and so on. The statistical figure backing up these ends are scary and depressing. Nigeria is at the bottom of list of 21 African nations in terms of learning achievement (Olaofe, 2017). There has been that agreement among scholars and other stakeholders that the education standard in Nigeria has been declining. The falling standard of education in Nigeria is now as frightening as the pursuit of the education itself. The more government attempts to solve the problems the more numerous other seemingly insurmountable problems prop up in the system (Abubakar, 2019). An extensive study of the state of the educational system carried out in 2018 indicates that the educational system in Nigeria has gone crooked (Tell Magazine, 2018). Similarly, Onyechi (2014), asserts that, that a whole lot is wrong with education in Nigeria today is an understatement and a country that denies education to its people denies them and their country a future; denies them civilization and optimum utilization of God-given human resources which is a key factor in individual entrepreneurial and national development.

The quality of the products of the educational system, the level of learner's achievement, the desperation of pupils to succeed as evidenced by unabated incidences and sophistication of examination malpractices, and falsification of credentials, frequency of teachers strike, and their poor quality, all point to inefficient performance of

the system (Aina in Abubakar 2019). The gross underfunding of the educational sector, coupled with other related problems of infrastructural decay, dearth of infrastructural facilities at all levels of the educational institutions, inadequate teaching and learning materials, incompetent teaching and learning materials, incompetent teaching staff, inconsistency and lack of clear cut education policy.

Therefore, a functional educational system in Nigeria will bring about high-quality manpower that will turn around the available resources into wealth for the nation. The country will also experience a turn-around in science and technology, which will in-turn affect all other sectors of the economy. Thus, the wealth of the nation will be redistributed to favour the poor populace. There would be many employment opportunities which will lead to income generation and invariably the decline in the high rate of poverty and inequality. This will further bring about an improvement in the wellbeing of the populace

Functional education is a leveller of opportunities. The case in Nigeria where majority of the graduates of the educational institutions search for white-collar jobs that are very scarce and difficult to secure will be a thing of the past. Functional education will bring about graduate who are entrepreneurs and self-dependent and ready to practice what they had learnt in school. These entrepreneurs will also become employers of labour. With this chain, more jobs will be created, and income generated. The result is that many will be uplifted from the dudgeon of unemployment and poverty. Thus, it can be adduced that there is a symbiotic relationship between functional education and poverty alleviation. Aina in Abubakar (2018) has attributed the poor quality of education in the country on the increasing level of poverty and unemployment in the country. He opined that if the problem of unemployment and poverty can be addressed in the country, the standard of education will improve. Therefore, both poverty and functional education affect each other either way. Solving the problem of poverty will also reduce or lead to the elimination of other developmental challenges and social ills presently experienced in the country. Thus, vices like corruption, insecurity, bad governance, ethno-

religious crisis and even illiteracy among others could be attributed to high rate of poverty in the country. For instance, the Boko Haram insurgency has majorly been attributed to the high level of poverty and unemployment in the country, especially in the north-eastern zone of the country, banditry in the other part of the country.

### Conclusion

Therefore, functional education is a promoter for reducing the high rate of poverty in Nigeria. Although, the educational system in Nigeria is still inefficient due to many factors, its functionality will bring about accelerated growth in the economy. When graduates of the country's educational institutions can independently practice what they learnt in school without waiting for government jobs, more jobs will be created, and income enhanced. The technological revivals that will follow will also positively lead to industrial revolution which will lead to more job opportunities, thereafter, reducing poverty.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations were made.

- a. 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.
- b. 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.
- c. The various supervisory agencies of the educational institutions and the Ministry of education should be more committed to playing their role as a watchdog in ensuring that all educational institutions from primary to tertiary operate within and abide by laid down standard.
- d. 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
- e. There is also the need for government's commitment to the revival of science and technology as well as technical education in Nigeria from the primary level.
- f. Government should ensure that the objective of our educational system is geared towards producing a total person with the requisite skills, knowledge, and values relevant to the 21st Century and beyond.

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