

Need-Oriented Curriculum in Our Education System: A Strategy for Capacity Building in Nigeria

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Abstract

The early economists, long in the past, saw land as the chief source of the wealth of a nation, but with time it was discovered that countries with rich gifts of nature like fertile land and abundant mineral deposits were not doing better in development. Emphasis then shifted to manpower development, level of technology and capacity utilization. Nigeria today, among other third world countries, is facing serious developmental problem of capacity underutilization as a result of serious unemployment, despite the fact that a reasonable proportion of the national income is spent to expand educational institutions in Nigeria – a striking economic paradox. This paper therefore examined the manpower need and capacity building in Nigeria, the role of education in manpower development, the curricular problem of the Nigerian education system and how to adjust the curriculum to boost capacity building in Nigeria. It however recommended the measures that can improve the situation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Need-oriented curriculum; Education system; Capacity building; Nigeria

Introduction

Long in the past, the early economists saw land as the chief source of a nation's wealth and the expectation was that nation's endowed with national resources such as fertile land and abundant mineral deposits would be wealthy enough and achieve high level of development. With time experience showed that some countries with such natural endowment as fertile land and abundant mineral deposits never achieved meaningful level of development. Rather it was discovered that meaningful development, where it was achieved, was associated with such variables as manpower development, level of technology and capacity utilization in terms of effective exploitation of natural resources, hence emphasis shifted to such variables as pre-requisites for meaningful development.

Many advanced countries today bank on their development of human and man-made resources to attain their level of development. The less developed countries on the other hand face the problem of large supply of undeveloped human resources that culminate into unemployment. Nigeria today like other less developed countries is facing serious problem of unemployment which is tantamount to capacity underutilization. This problem of unemployment is supposed to be solved by providing employable skills in our education system, hence the expansion of our educational institutions.

Of course it is one thing to expand educational institutions but it is another thing to provide education that will take care of the manpower need of the society. Bassey [1] noted that experience has shown that it is more difficult to bring about qualitative change in Nigeria than to bring about quantitative increase in education. No wonder why the provision of more education in Nigeria to reduce unemployment paradoxically increases unemployment. Ideally an education system

should focus on the manpower need of the society and promote capacity building in the society.

Manpower Needs and Capacity Building in Nigeria

No matter the level of technology or the quality of capital, human resources must be integrated as co-operant factor in production, after all both capital and technology are products of human mind, hence human resources constitute very important factor in any economy. As an economy passes through different levels of development its manpower needs continue to change. As the manpower needs change they induce the appropriate reactions from the human resource development agencies. The same is supposed to be the situation in Nigeria. But is it really so in Nigeria?

The Nigerian economy since independence had been undergoing series of structural changes bringing about different dimensions of manpower needs. One thing worthy of note in the pre-independence Nigerian labour market was the increased interest in wage employment. Long before independence the reverse was the case. According to Ananaba [2] the first generation of wage employees in Nigeria were slaves and children of disliked wives. But towards the period of independence the situation changed and people, by then, developed interest in wage employment, agriculture, the major source of self-employment became less attractive particularly to the youth. The dimension of manpower need this period was to produce skills required in white collar jobs. To provide this need the traditional education was helpless and the western education took over.

After the independence the demand for western education at primary school level was over popular in most countries of tropical Africa. Out of every 1000 who reached a standard of permanent literacy in primary schools only 100 – 150 (i.e., ten to fifteen per cent) went on to secondary schooling; thus at the end of primary school stage 850 – 900 out of every 1,000 ready to start work [3].

The reconciliation of the projections and the actual situations of manpower needs and manpower utilization is expected to be achieved through manpower planning, coordination and implementation. This, of course, was the basis of the recommendation of Udoji Commission of 1974 that the manpower planning Division in the Ministry of Economic Development and Reconstruction should be strengthened [4]. Manpower planning and coordination in the second half of the second decade after independence helped to expose the situation of lack of skill, as many vacancies for employment could not be filled despite the fact that the number of unemployed people was by far greater than the declared vacancies.

In the eighties, the third decade after independence the boom in economic activities led to expansion in educational institutions. The number of Nigeria Universities grew from six in 1973 to thirteen in 1977. Also the number of secondary schools in Nigeria which stood at 1,160 in 1970 was projected to rise to 2,296 in 1980 [5]. However the actual number of the secondary grammar schools in Nigeria came to 5,097 in 1981/82 session that is more than twice the 1980 projected figure (Annual Abstract of Statistics 1988). As at 2004 enrolment in primary schools increased by 7.0 percent to 28.14 million while that of secondary school was 6.75 million [6]. Presently Nigeria has more than 60 universities and boasts of an educated labour force (National Planning Commission NPC 2005). Similar expansion continued till the present period even at the lower educational institutions.

The continuous expansion in the educational and other training institutions is part of the quest for capacity building. As indicated earlier changes in manpower needs induce appropriate reactions from the human resource development agencies. In the Nigerian situation, are the changes in manpower needs inducing appropriate reactions from our education system? Is continuous expansion in provision of the same type of education an appropriate response to changing manpower needs? Part of the answers to these questions can be deduced from this comment from NPC [7].

Nigeria has more than 60 universities and boasts of an educated labour force. Various independent estimates put the unemployment rate at more than 15 percent of the labour force, with very high rate of unemployment among university graduates.

This historical presentation of changing manpower needs in Nigeria from independence period to present and the attendant responses to the changes, in quest for capacity building tend to suggest that the real problems were not being identified and such problems were not eliciting the appropriate responses from the education system. Perhaps we need to glance at the role of education in manpower development.

The Role of Education in Manpower Development

Education according to Okafor is a process of acculturation through which an individual is helped to develop his potentials and maximum activation in order to achieve self-fulfillment and happiness.

Ajuzie [8] sees education as an essential part of the society process employed to train the human beings to be functional and to adopt the behavioral patterns by the same society. Education is also an ever-present phenomenon in each phase of human civilization however diverse its nature in each era [9].

Embedded in these views is the role education plays in training human beings. The role of education in manpower development cannot be over emphasized. Some people even see the importance of education in human development to the extent of presenting education

as playing a complementary role in creation of human beings, hence they assert that God initiated creation and education completed it. The whole value of an individual that gives him his worth and determines his relative position in his society is a function of his education no matter the type. According to Amao-keinde [10], education, as a process, embodies all forms of activities that fit an individual for social living. It helps to transmit culture from generation to generation.

The desire of every society is that the individuals in the society get developed towards the overall development of the society itself. The school takes upper hand in the process of intellectual development of the members of the society [8]. No society can exist and maintain continuity in norms and values without one form of education or the other. That a human being is different from a beast is as a result of the training (education) he received growing in human society imbibing the norms and values of that society.

The United Nations Development Programs (UNDP) looking at human development maintains that economic growth is surely necessary but not sufficient for human development. Human development concentrates on three yard sticks of well-being which are regarded as essentials of human life namely, longevity, knowledge and decent standard of living [8]. Here the knowledge stands for education, an important index of human development from macro perspective.

Education from the foregoing stands an indispensable social practice in every society for human development. But is education really playing this role effectively in Nigeria? Perhaps not really so, Part of its limitations may come from its curricular problem.

The Curricular Problem of our Education System

According to Ikponwosa quoted by Nwosu [11] the term curriculum derives from the Latin word “currere” which means “race course” or a course through which people have to run in order to get to a set goal. By implication a curriculum in an education system is supposed to be a planned sequence of learning experiences through which specific behavioral changes will be achieved for students within a given learning setting. If curriculum is what it is supposed to be as explained above, it follows that curriculum should be a dependent variable, changing with the needs of the learner. Ipso facto, if a given curriculum is used for learner A to solve his learning need X, that same curriculum cannot be used for the same learner to solve his learning need Y, otherwise the curriculum will be addressing a wrong learning need.

The foregoing analogy readily points to the curricular anomalies of our education system. Examining the Nigerian education system at glance NPC [7] made the following comments:

The educational system is dysfunctional, as graduates of many institutions cannot meet the needs of the country, institutions are in decay, strikes and cultism are common and corruption has become rampant.

In a more comprehensive assessment of our education system that touched on the curricular anomaly, part of NPC [7] comment goes as follows:

Wide disparities persist in educational standard and learning achievements. The system emphasizes theoretical knowledge at the expense of technical, vocational and entrepreneurial education. School curricula need urgent review to make it relevant and practice oriented.

As earlier indicated if the needs of the society continue to change the curricular arrangements ought to change with such needs. Part of

the causes of the problems of the education system is the rigidity of the curriculum. Agbionu [12] noted that the introduction of new education scheme (the 6-3-3-4 system) required building and equipping workshops for the teaching of the vocational subjects and training the teaching personnel that can fit into the new areas. But in practice the same teachers and equipment that operated in the old system continued their usual operation in the new system.

In that case, the new scheme that is supposed to take care of new educational needs continued to repeat the old scheme package in the name of new one. Need-orientatedness in that case was zero. It may not be a surprise to discover that certain methods and contents introduced by the colonial masters in our educational curricula are still waxing strong in the system till to day. According to Anyichie [13] it is very disheartening those 51 years after independence none of the Nigerian national education objectives has been fully achieved.

In Nigeria we are very fond of theoretically developing new and beautiful policies that seem to be addressing current and popular problems but in practice the old and outdated policies prevail. Such is the situation in our education. The greatest problem of our education system today is that the curriculum developed to take care of the graduates that would fill the few vacancies in the modern sector of our economy (modern sector less than 30 percent of the entire economy) is what we presently use to take care of the graduates that can hardly find any vacancy in the modern sector of the economy. This generation of graduates simply needs skills to create jobs rather than the skills to fill existing vacancies. The bias of our education system is to produce skills needed in the modern sector of the economy while our economy is predominantly traditional. As a result of this we produce unemployable skills that culminate into serious unemployment. No wonder our youth are struggling to escape from Nigeria to overseas economies (modern economies for which they are produced by our education system). Given this situation entrepreneurial skills should be provided in our education system. According to Ogundele [14] our system should have no substitute for entrepreneurial ability, appropriate attitudes or needed skills that are needed urgently for sustainable entrepreneurial success.

Adjusting the Curriculum to Boost Capacity Building

From the preceding section it is obvious that our education system produces graduates that are alienated to their home environment rather attracted by foreign economies, they are usually roaming the streets looking for non-existing jobs [15]. It is necessary to note that education is incomplete until it satisfies the aim of the person being educated [16]. This is a challenge to our education planners. The bedrock of our education system - the curriculum has to be reviewed drastically in terms of both methods and contents and adjusted to cater for the needs of our immediate environment.

In reviewing the curriculum much care should be taken to avoid repeating what we have been regretting to have had for decades. For instance going through the beautiful recommendations as policy thrust on education published by NPC [7] on National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) I discovered that the whole recommendations boil down to new messages following the old tracks to the old target. This is not unusual; Uwazurike quoted by Ugwu noted that despite all the provisions in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, the UBE policy is not being implemented in different states. Most of the recommendations are on making the

necessary efforts to create conducive environment for effective teaching and learning, in the language of the educationist, to achieve the instructional objective. But nobody questions the nature of the objective. Perhaps when a secondary school presents students for School certificate examinations and they all passed, each student making A grade in all subjects, the objective is 100 percent achieved, well achieved in deed even if at the beginning of the next session the students start fighting their parents out of the frustration in being stranded at home. What then is the essence of the 100 percent achievement of objective that creates worse problem than before?

A meaningful revolution in our education system has to start from isolating education for certification from education for living and deciding for one. Much of the bane of our education system is inherent in education for certification. Examination malpractice, certificate forgery the quest of every parent for his or her child to attain the highest level of education irrespective of the ability of the child, truancy and others are all imports of education for certification [17]. In education for certification efforts to gain knowledge are not usually made since the understanding is that certificate if obtained covers both existing and non-existing knowledge. In that system jobs are obtained based on certificates and not based on capability. These imports of education for certification can hardly promote capacity building since the ultimate certificate may or may not go with the relevant knowledge necessary for meaningful human development.

Education for living on the other hand has to do with acquiring knowledge that will help an individual to earn his living and survive in his own environment. In this case the individual goes for the knowledge that will help him solve his needs no matter when, where and how the knowledge is got. The ultimate in this case is the capability to function. A typical example of education for living is the traditional education. The vocabulary of traditional education has no room for applicant ship; hence no body looks for employment. Having completed the program, practicing the skills and having the demand for the skills are automatic. This is because the education is not for the fun of it but adjusted to take care of the immediate needs of the society. Education for living promotes capacity building because the more individuals the education system produces the more the utilization of human resources with the attendant increase in total productivity of the society [18].

Should we decide for education for living in our modern (western) education we need to adjust the contents and methods of the curriculum, make access to education (formal and non-formal) a right to all individuals and modify employment policies.

Recommendations

The drastic measures that should be taken to improve the situation in Nigeria are as follows:

- The curriculum should be reviewed in both the methods and contents to address the immediate needs of the environment such as producing entrepreneurs who create jobs. Emphasis should be on education for living and not education for certification.
- For us to hope to produce entrepreneurs after secondary and tertiary education, inclination to vocational education should be introduced right from primary education.
- Vocational education should be taught practically in junior secondary schools within formal and non-formal setting, using local craftsmen where necessary.

- Entrepreneurship skills should be taught practically and integrated to all sections of the secondary school namely, Science/technical, Arts and Vocational education.
- To have the right teachers at the primary and junior secondary schools, the number of ordinary colleges of education should be reduced to expand colleges of education (Technical).
- The tendency for all children (supported by their parents) to go to the University irrespective of their aptitude and cognitive ability should be discouraged, at least for now. University should be for those who are of above average intelligence.
- To expand the production of middle manpower, polytechnics should not be upgraded to Universities rather the number of polytechnics should be increased. The polytechnic programs should be more practical than theoretical trying to link the world of knowledge with the world of work.
- To encourage education for living and de-emphasize education for certification employment in the public sector should not be based on certificate alone but on proven ability supplementing certificate.

Conclusion

The manpower needs in Nigeria have been changing right from the period towards independence to the present period while the education system that is meant to be taking care of the changing manpower needs has not been adjusting realistically to take care of the changing needs. Part of the problem of the education system is outdated curriculum that lays emphasis on education for certification and as well focuses on the needs of the modern economy at the expense of the needs of local economy that is predominantly traditional. The result is that most of the products of our education system are frustrated in unemployment and tend to leave Nigeria for overseas economies in search of employment, to improve the things drastic measures have to be taken.

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