

BEYOND THE FORMAL CURRICULUM: VOCATIONAL/TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES FOR FAMILY SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA

BY

**ALADE, Ibiwumi Abiodun Ph.D: Department of Technical Education, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, Nigeria; curritech66@gmail.com;
E-mail: aladeia@tasued.edu.ng**

Abstract

The roles of functional education through a well designed and implemented curriculum for the economic survival of the populace remains a reference point in policy matters of any country. Notwithstanding, the formal curriculum implemented in schools is often found by many education scholars to be limited in meeting the challenges of Nigerian economy. Since the formal curriculum up till the present era cannot do it all alone, central in the efforts on strategies that will complement it and take care of its weaknesses in practice along with the economic needs of the entire populace is the focus of this paper- "Beyond the Formal Curriculum; Vocational/Technical and Economic Empowerment Programmes (VTEEPs) for Family Sustainability in Nigeria. It begins by examining economic comatose and graduate employability for economic revival along with the place of VTEEPs in family empowerment in Nigeria. Upon the appraisal of the success and failure of formal curriculum, emphasis is placed on vocational/technical and entrepreneurship initiatives between 1946 and 2012 as well as poverty alleviation programmes between 1972 and 2012 as means for family empowerment and sustenance. The paper further identified some other routes to sustainability in Nigeria and sums it up that while most of the relevant vocational/technical economic empowerment programmes which have been implemented in Nigeria should not be allowed to go into extinction, they should be re-envisioned towards sustainability giving attention to the masses.

Keywords: Economic, Family sustainability, Formal curriculum, Vocational/Technical education

Introduction

The history of creation reveals that God made plants, herbs and a host of other environmental creatures for the sustainability of mankind. Thus, the first family members on earth (Adam and Eve) were provided with useful living things for their survival, the deceit of Satan notwithstanding. It is clear that God's purpose for each family on earth is to live in good health so as to promote good things of life, peace, love, joy, longevity and well-being in general. Where family creation is to survive and be together, economic activities play key roles in every way. Family as a social unit and in diverse forms is what grows up to describe a society, and it is the economic viability of families which determines their sustainability and the progress of the society they make up.

Formal education is perceived to be at the heart of family progress. Economic and social prosperity of any nation in this 21st century depend on the ability of such nation to educate members of the society to be prepared to thrive in a rapidly changing world (Kingibe, 2008). Suffice to say that education has an important role to play in leading to development that is sustainable. Functional education is the type of education that prepares citizens for life as productive and consuming members of the society (Onwuzo and Okpala, 2011). It exposes learner to the realities of the environment and adequately prepares him for effective living in the environment which is expected not to be hostile. Its curriculum which is the totality of activities a society intend its people to encounter in order to raise their standard of living and develop that society therefore holds a significant position in the process of education.

Of specific attention is formal vocational technical education curriculum which in the design and practice is expected to empower school-going-youth with saleable skills for job placement and job creation in the society. It is no gainsaying the fact that quality vocational technical education is crucial to the socio-political and economic development of any nation. The reason being that its' curriculum which is

vocational in nature goes a long way to reduce the problem of unemployment and other social vices prevalent in Nigeria. Technical education unarguably, remains the aspect of educational process involving in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences as in the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sections of the economic and social life (Adeturu, 2014).

Regrettably, formal vocational technical education curriculum in practice is bedeviled with divers problems. Some of the cogent among the problems are neglect, misplaced remuneration, inadequate qualified instructors, lack of adequate workshops, inadequate funding and derogatory reference among others (Oloko2017). These problems constitute major setbacks to the realization of the objectives and functions of vocational technical education curriculum in Nigeria. Despite the expectation of the formal vocational technical education curriculum paradigm to achieve the purpose of education for youths, family sustenance and progress, the obvious challenge is that educated youths in different families in Nigeria still struggle for survival as consumers rather than to care, conserve and contribute maximally to sustainability. Particularly worrisome is that without significant improvement in the implementation and innovations of vocational technical education curriculum, it could equip young and adults from families merely to be mere dependants and effective vandals of their respective communities. By implication, it often results into a combination of problems like high unemployment rate, debt burden, more vices, and the economy of the country becomes adjudged to be inadequate.

However, Nigerian governments at various times did not rest on their oars. A good number of policies have been made manifest through entrepreneurship initiatives and poverty alleviation programmes as means for family empowerment and sustenance in Nigeria. Realizing the weaknesses and limitation of the formal vocational technical education curriculum in practice therefore, and to complement its success, a good number of VTEEPs have become important survival elements for Nigerian families in post-modern society. The reality on ground in the country however is that despite the initiatives, Nigeria still faces the problem of high unemployment rate (Abolade, 2016). It is obvious that where youths are most vulnerable in the society, family development and sustainability will be hindered. It is crystal clear that the federal government had witnessed a number of transformative economic programmes which aim at ensuring that the lives of the citizenry are transformed socially, psychologically and economically but the poverty level of the citizenry seems unimproved as expected. In support of this observation, Yusuf (2016) reiterated that problems of hunger, poverty and unemployment have become increasingly high and have continued to hunt many homes in Nigeria.

Rather than recording continuous remarkable improvement in the economic sustainability of Nigerian families, the poor masses still suffer. The formal vocational technical education curriculum has long been observed to be too theoretical in implementation coupled with inadequate funding (Alade, 2006). The various austerity measures that were put in place by governments in the 1980s merely pushed people into poverty rather than producing the desired results (Nwenearizi, 2011). Added is the World Bank report that, the poor in Nigeria have a cash income that is insufficient to cover minimum standards of food, water, fuel, shelter, medical care and schooling. All these observations put together informed the nucleus of this paper.

Economic Comatose and Graduate Employability for Economic Revival

In the historical records of Nigeria, the issue which is no longer a news and which on several occasions has appeared on broadcasting networks, local and social media is economic comatose. Economic comatose is conditioned by economic recession. Economic recession is a situation which has thrown Nigeria into severe economic hardships. Where the nation's economy is not properly fixed, graduates are ill-prepared for the labour market nor the rundown infrastructure build for several years, the monumental rot often left behind by any government is economic comatose.

In short, economic comatose in Nigeria is made evident by the dwindling resources from major export earner-petroleum which is as a result of the fallen global oil prices: lack of infrastructural turn around; and retrenchment usually observed in the balance sheets of many companies; closed shops and industries, family poverty, salary cuts, increase in unemployment and unemployable youths among others. What a hungry stomach needs is food, not explanation of platitudes, but the level of graduate employability largely determines economic fix for economic survival. Meanwhile Ajere and Akinbi (2017) have pointed out that the neglect of the valuable contributions of vocational and technical education which several nations pay serious attention to for the development of their nations is part of the reasons while the nation is facing serious economic recession currently p.43. It therefore means that vocational technical education among many of the vocational trades and programmes could determine the employability of Nigerian graduates.

Going-Global (2014) defined the term employability as the possession of relevant knowledge, skills and other attributes that facilitate the gaining and maintaining of worthwhile employment. Graduates well equipped with employability skills are more likely to gain employment and be useful in their chosen occupations, which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. As a result, apart from a formal curriculum, the importance of graduate employability due to the increasingly competitive and volatile labour market, especially during this period of economic challenges cannot be downplayed. Thus, Nigerian higher education institutions as well as public and private bodies concerned with policy landscaping, that is, identifying a high level of awareness as regards the challenges of employability and employability innovation in Nigeria need to provide vocational and entrepreneurship opportunities to advance the frontiers of youth knowledge and skills, and yet useful to labour market demand in the contemporary terms for economic revival.

Formal Curriculum in Nigeria: Success and Failure

The status of formal curriculum in Nigeria should lend itself to verification. This may be evident in the level and quality of the subject matter and learning activities provided for Nigerian children from basic education through higher education. In this regard, the level of success attained through all the avenues of formal curriculum in Nigeria may be determined from the stance of the decision makers or the government, and from the educational institutions' operations level of success that are directly and indirectly commensurate with the level of human and material resources committed to implementing and sustaining the formal curriculum; level of the policy backing by the government; level of partnership involved, and the extent to which the intended curriculum is achieved. It is important to note that formal curriculum analysis has the learner as the central figure in the curriculum implementation process.

Furthermore, implementation of a curriculum is not expected to have been completed until the goals of the educational system for which that curriculum is meant have been achieved. Achievement of these goals is evidenced in societal transformation. So far, the curriculum components provided for Nigeria children from basic through higher education as provided in the curriculum paper have been applauded to be capable of meeting the immediate future needs of the children. In addition, Alade (2013) observed that the outcome of curriculum in Nigeria to at least meet the needs of families for sustainable development is relative. From the implementing institutions, the outcomes are with relative to:

- i. Facilities available for the programme;
- ii. Quality of the teaching staff;
- iii. Quality of programmes installed in the institution;
- iv. Level of richness and appropriateness of delivery and instructional approaches and strategies; and
- v. Quality of administration.

However, researches on learning achievement of pupils and students from primary through higher institutions have shown a gap between the intended curriculum and what the pupils and students actually learn. Ajibola (2008), Akpochofo and Fiiho (2006) reported that studies and opinions of experts showed

that Nigerian universities are not producing high-quality graduates, meaning that the university curriculum is inadequately implemented. This is evident in the fact that a proportionate number of Nigeria graduates of today are faced with the problem of inability to create jobs and be self-employed. Secondary school leavers and products of Nigerian polytechnics, colleges of education and colleges of technology among others are not left out. Onwuzo and Okpala (2011) observed that this has resulted in increase of unemployment among youths.

Succinctly put, the inadequacies of formal curriculum in Nigeria have obviously been identified to be part of the causes of high crime rates, high mortality rates, increased child labour, rural-urban drift and brain drains, growing urban slums, increase in women and child-headed households, family subordination, displacement of people etc. All these characterize many family settings in Nigeria that are in rural and urban slums. The implication of failure experienced from the inadequacies of the formal curriculum in Nigeria has contributed to the poverty level of many Nigerian families. Thus, poverty, as a social problem has in turn created and sustained other societal problems (Akeredolu-Ale, 2000). From all indications, formal education through various institutionalized systems and their curriculum that goes from pre-school to graduate studies, which in the end after competing and completing successfully grant students certificates that allow them to be accepted into the formal labour market is no longer sufficient.

Family Empowerment for Sustainability: The Place of Vocational/Technical and Economic Empowerment Programmes

VTEEPs in their various forms provide useful background in developing the right attitude towards the acquisition of vocational skills. Vocational skills are usually acquired in different ways through vocational schools (school-based), apprenticeship schemes, skill acquisition centres and various combinations of on-job and off-the-job training. At the college level, vocational technical education are structured to develop in the youths the necessary technical and vocational skills aimed at: providing trained manpower in applied science, technology and business, particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels; providing the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development; give training and impact the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

The main features of the curricula activities for vocational/technical education include: General education, theory and related courses, workshops practice, industrial training production work, and small business management and entrepreneurial training. It is believed that on completion of vocational/technical programmes, trainees will have the opportunities to secure employment; setup their own business and become self-employed; pursue further education programmes. However, despite the integration of formal vocational technical education curricula into Nigerian education programmes, Nigerian families like other developing countries often face many socioeconomic maladies in economic history. Similarly, the reliance of Nigerian government on formal education as a tool to alleviate poverty and economic chaos among families is not enough in the contemporary society. There has been growing skepticism has to the ability of formal school system to propel meaningful and sustained national or sectorial development (Odunlade, 2016). A proportionate percentage of Nigerians are still illiterates, and need to be empowered beyond the formal curriculum.

Meanwhile, where there is economic stagnation or recession and series of problems like high unemployment rate, poverty, conflict and hunger, coupled with disequilibrium between labour market requirements and lack of essential employable skills by the youth graduates from tertiary institutions, more problematic conditions are created for the transition and empowerment of youths from childhood to adulthood and from schools to workplaces. These situations pose great challenges to the masses who are especially parents, government leaders, education trainers and all others involved in the training of the African child for worthwhile living in the society (Alade and Odunlami, 2017). One of the challenges is that many families in Nigeria especially the poor, that is, those who have a cash income that is insufficient

to cover minimum standards of food, water, fuel, shelter, medical care, and schooling live with peculiar and unmet needs which lead them into a lot of other social problems.

The foregoing influx of social and economic maladies are not left to fallow in Nigeria vocational/technical and economic empowerment programmes in form of initiatives and alleviation programmes which have been on record for societal sustainability. For instance, the need for empowerment came to the limelight in the 1980s when it was embraced by community development specialists who saw citizens' political and social roles as ingredients of development (IPG, 2003). To the Independent Policy Group (IPG), once citizens are empowered to play these roles, they can change their condition. Rather than being mere consumers in the society, family members through vocational/technical and economic empowerment programmes beyond the formal school system would be able to develop their true potentials so that they contribute meaningfully to the development of the society in which they live or belong.

Nigerian governments did not rest in their efforts to ensure that the lives of people are improved through what are described as Vocational/Technical and Entrepreneurship Initiatives (VTEI) and Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAP) in Nigeria in this paper. Specifically, at the federal level, numerous economic empowerment programmes most of which are vocational-based were introduced by different presidents of the federation during their tenure as part of their efforts towards entrepreneurship training and poverty alleviation programmes for family sustenance. On Entrepreneurship Programme (EP) in Nigeria, the entrepreneurship promotion on record between 1946 and 2012 as recorded by Oyinloye (2013) are subsumed in the VTE presented in table 1 of this paper.

Table 1: Vocational/Technical and Entrepreneurship Initiatives in Nigeria between 1946 and 2012

Entrepreneurship Initiatives	Period(s) Year
Small and Medium Scale Enterprises Scheme	1946
Industries Development Centres (IDCs)	1962
Ministry of Trade and Industry	1970
Small Scale Industries Credit Scheme (SSICS)	1971
Industrial Training Fund (ITF)	1971
Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industries (NBCI) (Absorbed by Bank Industries)	1973
Small Industries Credit Fund (SICF) in the third National Development plan	1957 – 1980
National Directorate of Employment	1987
Family Support Programme (FSP)	1993
National Poverty Alleviation and Eradication Programmes (NAPEP)	1999
National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND) (transformed into Bank of Industry in 2001)	2001
Bank for Industry	2002
National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS)	2003
Youth Empowerment with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN)	2011
Subsidy Re-investment Programmes (SURE-P)	2012

Although the vocational/technical and entrepreneurship initiatives scheme in table 1 were established, the inadequacies of their beneficiaries from different locations and families background affected their effective implementation. Majority of the schemes failed as a result of inadequate management skills and entrepreneurial capacity of beneficiaries (Oyinloye, 2013). On poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAP), some Nigerian Presidents introduced some initiatives with a view to transforming the citizenry economically and socially for sustainable development. The National Assembly Legislative Digest (2002) puts on record the poverty alleviation programmes of the Federal Government of Nigeria which focuses on the economic needs of the citizenry. Mufutau (2013) cited the National Assembly Legislative Digest of

2002 when he identified the names of the programmes and the years when they were introduced as well as the presidents that introduced them. In this paper, table 2 presents the poverty alleviation programmes between 1972 and 2012 as means of family empowerment and sustenance.

Table 2: Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria between 1972 and 2012

S/N	Year of Introduction	Name of the Programme	Names of the President
1.	1972	National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP)	General Yakubu Gowon
2.	1976	Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)	General Olusegun Obasanjo
3.	1979	Green Revolution Programme (GRP)	Alhaji Shehu Shagari
4.	1984	Go Back to Land Programme (GBLP)	General Muhammed Buhari
5.	1985	Structural Adjustment Programme (AP)	General Ibrahim Babangida
6.	1986	Peoples' Bank (PB) Community Bank (CB) Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) National Directorate of Employment (NDE)	General Ibrahim Babangida
7.	1993	Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) Family Support Programme (FSP)	Late General Sanni Abacha
8.	1999	Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) Metamorphosized to National Poverty Alleviation Eradication Programme (NAPEP)	General Olusegun Obasanjo
9.	2011	Youth Empowerment with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN)	Goodluck Jonathan
10.	2012	Subsidy Re-investment Programme (SURE-P)	Goodluck Jonathan

Observations from table 1 and 2 indicate that all the initiatives and alleviation programmes are to provide and promote technical knowledge, vocational skills and economic empowerment for self-sustenance, industries, agriculture, business, home economics, fine and applied arts, and technical trades among many others. Altogether, the economic empowerment programmes initiated by various governments in Nigeria are vocational and entrepreneurship-based. They are vital in the survival of families and the development of the nation. The economic schemes are indeed tools for virile economic and societal peaceful co-existence because vocational/technical programmes or trades are usually carried along with most of them. However, the major impediment to all these economic empowerment programmes is lack of continuity. As a result, the vulnerability of many Nigerian families remains unabated in social and economic terms.

Notwithstanding, hope is not lost if vocational technical education and its various forms of curricula at different levels are well articulated in policy, planning and implementation, all for family sustainability. There is therefore the continuous need to give vocational technical education a pride of place and provide all necessary facilities to make it functional. By so doing, the vocational and entrepreneurship economic programmes outside the school system would remain the added supplement to enhance the economic survival of the entire populace.

Further Routes to Family Sustainability in a Comatose Economic in Nigeria

Efforts at achieving sustainability in a critical economic situation require that attention should be given to societal and economic conditions in the pursuit of development and improved quality of life (Chikondi,

2010). There is no single route to family sustainability, as a result, the understanding of and visions for sustainability will be different for each of us and that we will need to work together to negotiate the approaches and the process of achieving family sustainability. From the author's perspective, there are many different players in family sustainability, they include: government, business, educational institutions, media and youths to mention a few. Apart from the place of vocational/technical and economic empowerment programmes discussed above in this paper, the following sustainability approaches have important roles to play in leading to family survival that is sustainable in Nigerian environment:

1. **Curriculum Paradigm:** There is always the need to re-vision formal education systems and training towards capacity building and learning-based strategies for individual change. The challenge with the curriculum is how knowledge is organized in separate subject in the training manuals as modules, and this approach does not consider the relationship of issues as expected. As curriculum revisions continue to break disciplinary boundaries among subjects at all levels of education, interconnectedness should be encouraged along with transformative and participatory approaches in curriculum delivery. In addition, the curriculum course contents differ considerably from institution to institution. Some teachings obviously appear theoretical irrespective of the vocational base of the discipline. Also, the presentations and applications of most teaching cannot impact adequate skills on the students. As a way forward, emphasis should be placed on diversity, coherence, flexibility, curriculum empowerment skills which are labour-driven/marketable skills.
2. **Educational Programmes Target:** Educational programme must focus the poor groups in the population. It is education for the masses. The Universal Basic Education programme is a positive step in this direction. Reduction in illiteracy is a right step to reducing economic poverty, and vocational-based curriculum should never be taken with levity hands.
3. **Adequate Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition and Development Programmes:** Aside from what a formal curriculum can offer to Nigerian citizenry, entrepreneurial capacity development of people which has picked up rapidly as a result of acute poverty, unemployment, and large-scale corruption among others need more attention. Okonkwo and Udechukwu (2014) put it that entrepreneurship has become the best option if our families are to recover their lost glory. Entrepreneurial skills acquisition and financial enhancement will make people go into small or large scale business enterprises. With entrepreneurial skills and competencies, many young people and families would be self-employed for better economic stability. This would yield economic development of families. After all, the main purpose of economic development is to raise the standard of living and the general well-being of the people in an economy (Ande, 2012). Entrepreneurship skills acquisition and development programmes should be the responsibility of ministries like the Ministry of Women Affairs, private and individuals, schools, colleges, religions houses and associations, all to prepare youths from families for today's world of work. Adequate training in skills acquisition should be fostered, and should be characterized by relevance to the needs of the community and comprehensive in scope, in skills development, creativeness, positive self-concepts and individual effectiveness.
4. **Communities and Government Relationship:** Communities and government should work harmoniously to share information about families' economic and social well-being as well as economic empowerment programmes for family sustenance. As a result, the author encourages communities to adequately take action and interact with government bodies on their economic state and family challenges.
5. **Increase in Government Subsidies:** The government is advised to increase her subsidies in the productive sectors, health and education which in effect will improve the welfare of Nigerian populace and a reduction of poverty.
6. **Rural Development Approach:** The suffering families in Nigeria are not uncommon in the rural sector, and, the level of paid employment in this area is very minimal. As a result, the rural development approach advocates for the provision of adequate basic amenities of life such as food, shelter, save drinking water, education, health care, employment and income generating opportunities to the rural dwellers in general and the poor in particular.

Conclusion

This paper has actually examined the means of family sustainability beyond the formal curriculum in Nigeria. It is made clear that despite the formal curricula practices in Nigerian education, the apparent weaknesses observed in term of a proportionate graduates void of adequate skills for gainful employment and inability to effectively create jobs for family survival at various times led various Nigerian governments to launch several economic initiatives treated as vocational/technical and economic empowerment programmes in this paper. Still, the problems of hunger and poverty among the populace which have become increasingly high and have continued to hunt many families in Nigeria has result of economic comatose demand better routes to family sustainability presented in this paper. In a nut-shell, as Nigerian relevant stakeholders continue to make formal curricula more relevant and responsive to societal needs for family sustainability, vocational/technical and economic empowerment programmes initiatives should further be re-envisioned for national development.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward.

1. The sustainable approaches identified in this paper would play important roles in leading to family survival in Nigeria.
2. Vocational/technical economic empowerment programmes which have been launched at various times in Nigeria should not be allowed to go into extinction through adequate administration.
3. Formal curriculum at all levels of education in Nigeria needs regular revision so as to meet the current economic realities of contemporary Nigeria.

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