

REPOSITIONING TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN NIGERIA FOR CREATIVITY: A PATHWAY TO ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract

This paper examines the imperative of repositioning Nigeria's teacher education programs to foster creativity as a strategic approach to achieving sustainable development, given that education, particularly quality education (SDG 4), serves as a critical agent for realizing all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The paper argues that Nigeria's lag in SDG realization is largely attributable to an education system that emphasizes certification over skill acquisition, and proposes that teacher education programs must prioritize four essential creative skills: entrepreneurship skills for fostering self-reliance and economic participation; critical thinking skills for enabling independent and systematic analysis of societal problems; problem-solving skills for addressing development obstacles; and information and communication technology (ICT) skills for enhancing teaching quality and promoting lifelong learning. By equipping both pre-service and in-service teachers with these creative competencies, the paper concluded that these trained teachers can transfer the same skills to their students and society at large, creating a cascading effect that positions the Nigerian state to effectively address development challenges and realize the SDGs by 2030. It was recommended, amongst other things, that the government, through the Ministry of Education, should review the teacher education curriculum to shift its focus from mere theoretical knowledge and certification to the deliberate cultivation of creative skills.

Keywords: Creativity, in-service teachers, pre-service teachers, sustainable development goals, teacher education programs

Introduction

Every nation in the world has prioritized the attainment of sustainable development, through the formulation and implementation of diverse policies. The desire to attain sustainable development cuts across developed and, more particularly, developing nations of the world, as they seek to climb up the ladder of development for the improvement of their standard of living, global status, and ranking. There is no unanimous definition for the concept of sustainable development as observed by Adegbami and Adesanmi (2018) because the concept cuts across different dimensions, ranging from the environment and economics to social life. Thus, the concept is defined from different perspectives by different scholars and institutions. While the definition of sustainable development put forward by the Rio de Janeiro Declaration on Environment and Development (1992), covers the environmental dimension, the definition by the World Bank (1992) covers the economic dimension. On the other hand, the definition by Strange and Bayley (2008) covers the social dimension of sustainable development.

Literature (Flint, 2013; Ciegis et al., 2009) agree that these different dimensions are interrelated and interconnected within the concept of sustainable development. Holistically, sustainable development can be defined as the development that seeks to meet the present and long-term development needs of a nation, using every possible means available, without compromising future generations' means of meeting their own development needs (Hanachor&Wordu, 2021). The measure of attainment of sustainable development by any nation in the world is captured within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sustainable Development in the Nigerian State

Sustainable development as captured by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is the blueprint of the United Nations that seeks to bring about development strides in all member states. These goals according to Adegbami and Adesanmi (2018), resulted from the deficiency of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and seek to address all development issues in every community of member states. The Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by the United Nations member states in 2015 and they are seventeen (17) in number. These goals include; 1) No Poverty 2) Zero Hunger 3) Good Health and Well-being 4) Quality Education 5) Gender Equality 6) Clean Water and Sanitation 7) Affordable and Clean Energy 8) Decent Work and Economic Growth 9) Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure 10) Reduced Inequalities 11) Sustainable Cities, and Communities 12) Responsible Consumption and Production 13) Climate Action 14) Life below Water 15) Life on Land 16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions 17) Partnerships for the Goals. The time limit for the realization of these goals by all member states

was pegged at 2030 (UN, 2015).

Literature (Adegbami&Adesanmi, 2018; Ogunyinka et al., 2015) has identified education as a key agent for the realization of the SDGs by member states. A viable, working, and effective education system and institutions are needed for the realization of goal number four (4) of the SDGs – Quality education, which would guarantee the realization of all other goals. Education equips people with the right knowledge and skills to help liberate them from poverty and make them more tolerant, which are essentially needed for achieving a peaceful society. Education also equips the citizenry of any nation with the right mindset needed for assisting their governments in achieving the SDGs (Akinjide & Olusegun, 2018).

In Nigeria, however, it has been observed that in comparison to other nations of the world that got their independence about the same time Nigeria got hers, the realization of the SDGs is only a mirage and has experienced a lot of setbacks (Adegbami&Adesanmi, 2018). Since literature has identified education as an essential agent for the realization of the SDGs, and also observed Nigeria to be lagging in the realization of these SDGs, one explanation that may justify this situation in Nigeria could be its education system. This, no doubt, is not the absence of education but the quality of education practised in Nigeria. Most probably, the forms of teaching and learning that take place in Nigeria's school systems are not directed towards meeting the 21st century needs of Nigeria and its realization of the SDGs. This situation brings to mind so many questions, but a significant one among them is the question asked by Akinjide and Olusegun (2018, p.5), “What form of education do we require to achieve some of the sustainable development goals?” To answer this question, this paper proposes a form of education that promotes creativity.

Creativity

Creativity can be considered a human behaviour or skill that can be taught, learned, and cultivated for maximum productivity. Kerr and Gaglordi (2006) defined creativity as the ability to solve problems in novel ways and to create new and valuable works. According to Kaul and Pany (2016), creativity does not imply creating something out of nothing, but the changing and reapplication of already existing ideas to generate new ones. Olibie and Akudolu (2009, p.3) succinctly capture creativity as “innovativeness, flexibility, self-actualization, risk-taking, originality, and ability to make positive changes”. Creativity should be what the curriculum of every nation's education system should emphasize, but this is not the case with Nigeria, as Iman (2012) observed that the curriculum of education Nigeria inherited from the colonial masters was myopic in scope, and failed in meeting the needs of Nigerians. This curriculum emphasized certification rather than skill

acquisition and creativity (Akinjinde& Olusegun, 2018), and this was considered to be the bane of Nigeria's education system. To remedy this malady and to align with the ever-changing global expectations of education, certain reviews were made of Nigeria's education curriculum, and different National Policies on Education documents were produced. This remedial process cuts across all levels of education, the teacher education program inclusive.

Teacher Education Program in Nigeria

The teacher education program can be defined as programs wherein teachers are professionally educated. According to Osuji (2009), this program seeks to equip teachers with the right attitude, knowledge, and skills for effectiveness in the teaching profession. These teacher education programs are executed in and by teacher education institutions such as Faculties of Education of Universities, Colleges of Education, Teachers' Training Institutes, etc. The program is for both pre-service and in-service teachers. Pre-service teachers are also called student-teachers. They are undergraduate students of teachers' education institutions (Meutia et al., 2018; Nwune et al., 2024) trained to become professional teachers, by helping them connect the gap between the theory of teaching and practice. In-service teachers, on the other hand, are those already in active teaching service (Osamwonyi, 2016) and trained to upgrade their teaching expertise. The teacher education program seeks to produce teachers in all school systems that can positively influence their students and society (Ogunyinka et al., 2015).

Teachers are significant stakeholders in the education system. They play active and significant roles in implementing educational policies in classrooms (Nwune&Obialor, 2021). These roles of teachers are essential, as Ogunyinka et al. (2015) asserted that no system of education can rise above the quality of its teachers. The effects and influence of teachers on their students and society are trans-generational and cut across every aspect of society. Since education is instrumental to achieving sustainable development and teachers play significant roles in the process, the teacher education program in Nigeria must be aligned to engender creativity in teachers, who would also impart the same creative mindset to their students and society at large. This alignment may help the Nigerian state in meeting the 21st century needs of education and realizing sustainable development using the SDGs as a measure.

The above assertion has been emphasized and captured in the vision of the National Teacher Education Policy (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2014). The vision of the policy is to produce, through the teacher education program, teachers who are of high quality, knowledgeable, skilful, and creative, and are capable of raising learners who can compete with their counterparts globally. To achieve this

vision, creative skills must be prioritized by all teacher education programs and emphasized in the teaching and learning practised in these programs. This paper explores some of the creative skills to be emphasized in Nigeria's teacher education programs for the attainment of sustainable development.

Entrepreneurship Skill

Entrepreneurship is a creative skill that can reposition the teacher education program for the realization of sustainable development in Nigeria. Entrepreneurship is a skill-set offered to people in formal and informal settings for self-reliance, independence, and productivity. Amaewhule and Abung (2020) define entrepreneurship as the skills required to seek changes, adjust to such changes and take advantage of them for profit-making. Similarly, Oguezie et al. (2023) defined entrepreneurship as first a mindset, and then an activity based on available opportunities. The skill of entrepreneurship seeks to produce people (mostly referred to as entrepreneurs) who are innovative and flexible in their reasoning, taking risks to solve the problems of society, mostly in exchange for profit.

The importance of this skill in the economy of any nation, especially developing nations like Nigeria, cannot be overestimated, as Naude (2011) posits that entrepreneurship skill is effective for fighting poverty, unemployment, and under-development in developing nations. The researcher further posited that this skill is potent for rapidly growing and developing any nation's economy. Also, Okoro (2021) asserted that this skill is a viable tool for attaining economic development. Since entrepreneurship skill empowers people to break away from poverty, create jobs, become self-employed, and also grow the economy, the teaching of this skill in Nigeria's school system is paramount, considering the ever-increasing poverty and unemployment rate in Nigeria (Adebambo, 2022), which has contributed to the non-realization of sustainable development.

The teaching of entrepreneurship skills to pre-service and in-service teachers, through the teacher education programs, may help Nigeria in realizing sustainable development. For example, Muhammad et al. (2018) observed that entrepreneurship skills involve a blend of management and leadership skills, so the teaching of entrepreneurship skills in teacher education programs would equip teachers with these two skills that are essential for championing the effective utilization of human and natural resources found in the environment, for the realization of sustainable development. Also, since entrepreneurship skills call for innovativeness, self-reliance, and productivity, the teaching of this skill to teachers would help them break away from poverty. The same spirit of innovativeness, self-reliance, and productivity can also be transferred to students and society, and gradually, the Nigerian society becomes sufficiently equipped to realize sustainable development.

The teaching of entrepreneurship skills in the teacher education programs will also boost the quality of Nigeria's education system and reposition education for creativity in learners and society. With the global shift from the emphasis on certification to skill acquisition as posited by Adebambo (2022), Nigeria's education system is expected to align with the new trend, and those to champion this course of alignment are the teachers. Since teacher education programs produce teachers for active service in all school systems in Nigeria, the teaching of this skill in teacher education programs will empower teachers to be good ambassadors of creative education for the realization of sustainable development in Nigeria. To be entrepreneurial to realize sustainable development requires thinking outside the box and breaking free from the norm and status quo. Thus, there is a need to explore another creative skill in teacher education programs, the critical thinking skill.

Critical Thinking Skill

Critical thinking skill is a high-order and 21st-century life skill that requires people to think or learn independently. Behar-Horenstein and Niu (2011) defined critical thinking skills as the ability to make purposeful and self-regulated judgements. The need for this skill is borne out of the present-day global reality, which is becoming more competitive and challenging, and to succeed, Trilling and Fadel (2009) posit that a radical change in thinking is essential. This change is not peculiar to individuals alone, but also to nations, as Piro and Anderson (2015) asserted that any nation that seeks to establish a democratic society, maintain a culture, and manage the competition in the global economy must strive to be critical in their thinking. Although this skill can be deliberately taught in schools (Furness et al., 2017), Behar-Horenstein and Niu posited that students are not taught this skill, and the students rarely pick up this skill on their own.

This critical thinking skill is not an inherent ability in students as posited by Szabo and Schwartz (2011). Though some students may be naturally inquisitive, they require some form of training and coaching to become systematic and analytical in their reasoning, as well as open-minded in their search for knowledge. Teachers play a significant role in this training and coaching process through direct teaching (Celik, 2021), and through their behaviours (Ford & Yore, 2012). When students acquire this skill, they begin to question the status quo, criticize ideas, make efficient decisions, and become responsible to themselves and society (Hunaidah et al., 2018). Also, when students acquire this skill, they tend to apply it to all real-life endeavours and practices (Setiawan et al., 2018).

Since literature (Anon, 2011; Hjerm et al., 2018) has shown that teachers play significant roles in inculcating critical thinking skills in their students, this skill must be emphasized and taught in teacher education programs, to prepare teachers to perform their role effectively in training and coaching their students in all school

systems to be critical in their thinking. This assertion is supported by van der Zanden et al. (2020), who posited that teachers can only influence their students to be critical thinkers when they are critical thinkers themselves. As teachers equip their students with this skill, society also acquires this skill by extension (Celik, 2021). As the Nigerian state becomes critical in thinking, through the laying of emphasis and the teaching of critical thinking skills in teacher education programs, they become mentally sound and ready to break away from mediocrity and under-development, thereby paving the way for Nigeria's realization of sustainable development. Being independent, innovative, and thinking outside the box, which are all products of critical thinking, are essential for solving social, economic, and cultural problems in society.

Problem-Solving Skill

This skill combines other creative skills, such as critical thinking and entrepreneurial skills, for solving developmental problems in society. Problem-solving skills can be defined as the ability to engage cognitive processes in solving real-life problems (Shute et al., 2016). A problem is defined as any obstacle to be overcome, to get to a desired outcome (Mayer & Wittrock, 2006). In the context of this paper, the desired outcome is the attainment of sustainable development by Nigeria as measured by the SDGs, while the obstacles are the factors that have continuously prevented Nigeria from realizing these goals. These factors include corruption, an inefficient education system, and a wrong orientation towards development, amongst others.

To solve any problem, according to Jonassen (2004), requires people who understand the problem, and follow a systematic process to solve it, beginning with the development, implementation, and evaluation of the solution. This is a complex process that requires teaching and mentorship to achieve. Thus, the need to teach this skill in teacher education programs as teachers are in a better position to exert a significant influence on their students and society to become problem-solvers. This skill, according to Ismet et al. (2020), should be taught in teacher education programs, since it provides teachers with the ability and opportunity to help their students become critical in their thinking, manage their learning process, and solve real-life problems in society.

The necessity for emphasis and the teaching of problem-solving skills in teacher education programs stems from the complex problems teachers are expected to solve during their teaching and interactions with students and society (Castro et al., 2010). Teachers are expected to show their expertise in making pedagogical decisions geared toward solving classroom problems and the problems of society (Pitton, 2010), and a teacher who has not been taught this skill will end up not being a

problem solver themselves, and also may not be able to inculcate the same skill or value in the students and society. Where this is the case, the realization of sustainable development may be far-fetched, because it takes people's problem-solving skills to solve problems bothering on sustainable development. Ismet et al. (2020) posited that to effectively solve 21st-century problems and those of sustainable development, teachers must incorporate the use of technology efficiently in their pedagogy. This ability requires the knowledge and acquisition of information, communication, and technology skills.

Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) Skills

The concept of ICT describes the use of computer-based technology, such as radio, television, projectors, and the internet, to make information available to a large population. ICT skills, as defined by Nikitakis (2007), are the ability to recognize, evaluate, and utilize information to solve problems. These skills, according to Oguguo et al. (2020), are used in various systems of society for solving problems bothering on development, and for paving the way for advancement.

In the education system, ICT skills enhance the quantity and quality of teaching and learning by eliminating time and space barriers (Yushau & Nannim, 2018). These skills, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2017), guarantee access to education, equity in education, teachers' professional development, transfer of quality teaching and learning to real-life issues, and a host of other benefits. The importance of this skill in education was also buttressed by Tjoa, A.M. and Tjoa, S. (2016), who asserted that ICT skills guarantee inclusive and equitable education, and also promote lifelong learning.

The importance of ICT skills to the realization of sustainable development was duly captured by the United Nations (UN, 2015). This importance goes beyond education as Tyagi et al. (2020) highlighted the following as the importance of ICT in realizing sustainable development: provision of employment opportunities, poverty eradication, income generation, and the boosting of a nation's economy, which are all necessary for the attainment of sustainable development. Generally, this skill guarantees self-reliance and helps increase a nation's participation in the global economy, and also helps solve new and emerging global problems and challenges.

Considering the prospects ICT holds for self-reliance of the citizens of any nation, as captured by Saidu et al. (2014), this skill must be taught in teacher education programs in Nigeria for the realization of sustainable development. When teachers are equipped with ICT skills and utilize them in instructional delivery, they transfer the same skills to their students and society. The transference of ICT skills

from teachers to students and society guarantees the self-reliance of students and society and positions the Nigerian state for attaining sustainable development.

Conclusion

The realization of sustainable development in Nigeria, as captured by the SDGs, is intrinsically linked to the quality and relevance of its education system, particularly the teacher education program. This paper has argued that a fundamental reorientation towards a creativity-based curriculum is not just beneficial but essential for national progress. Thus, by deliberately integrating and emphasizing creative skills such as entrepreneurship, critical thinking, problem-solving, and ICT proficiency within teacher education, Nigeria can produce a new generation of teachers who are not only innovative and self-reliant but also capable of inspiring these same transformative qualities in their students and the wider society. These skills directly equip both teachers and students to challenge the status quo, tackle pressing developmental challenges like poverty and unemployment, and actively contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, thereby positioning the nation on a more viable path toward meeting the 2030 agenda.

Recommendation

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations were made;

1. The government, through the Ministry of Education, should review the teacher education curriculum to shift its focus from mere theoretical knowledge and certification to the deliberate cultivation of creative skills.
2. To effectively equip teachers with the necessary ICT skills for self-reliance and modern pedagogical delivery, the government and relevant education stakeholders should invest in establishing well-equipped and functional ICT hubs and e-learning centres in every teacher training institutions across Nigeria.
3. Teacher education programs should move beyond theoretical instruction in entrepreneurship by mandating practical, hands-on entrepreneurial training and industrial attachment for all student-teachers.
4. Teacher training institutions should cultivate an organizational culture that actively encourages, recognizes, and rewards creativity and problem-solving among both faculty and students.

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