

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE SYNERGY BETWEEN INFORMAL AND FORMAL EDUCATION IN MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY IN NIGERIA

Pritta Menyechi Elenwo (Ph.D)

Email: prittaelenwo@yahoo.com

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt

Abigail Ebom-Jebose (Ph.D)

Email: abigail.ebom-Jebose@ust.edu.ng

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt

&

Matilda Ugbe Ajugo

Email: matildaajugo24@gmail.com

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State

ABSTRACT

Education is a lifelong journey that goes beyond the walls of a classroom. While formal education provides a framework that enables learners to gain knowledge expertise in various disciplines, informal education is fundamental in shaping an individual's intellect, character, and skill set. The Nigerian education in the 21st century is facing enormous challenges stemming from the converging impact of globalization, Information Communication Technology (ICT) and knowledge explosion. The visible challenges of Nigerian education in the 21st century include technology advancement, insecurity, politization of education, poor funding and so forth. This paper explores the synergetic relationship between formal and informal education and mapped out strategies geared towards improving on the synergy between both education in meeting the identified challenges of Nigerian education in the 21st century. The paper suggested amongst others that the Nigerian government should adhere to the recommendation of UNESCO regarding the funding of education and politization of education should be discouraged and recruitment and appointment into offices be solely based on merit.

Keywords: Strategies, Synergy, Informal Education, Formal Education, Challenges, 21^s

Introduction

Education is a gradual process which brings positive changes in human life and behaviour. It is also a process of acquiring knowledge through study or imparting the knowledge by way of instructions, training, storytelling, discussion, and directed research or some other practical procedures. According to Onebunne (2022) education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs, habits, and personal development and frequently takes place under the guidance of educators also known as teachers; however, learners can also educate themselves. Education remains the key to human development and is seen as the driving force for meaningful developments in every human society. The goal of any educational system according to Onyenemezu (2012) is to provide or develop a balanced individual capable of surviving in his environment and contributing meaningfully towards the survival of that society to which he belongs. Education can take place in formal or informal settings.

Amaele (2010) described formal education as the type of education that is given in formal institutions of learning like primary, secondary, and tertiary education institutions. It is a structured and systematic form of learning which usually takes place in the premises of the school, where a person may learn basic, academic, or trade skills by trained teachers of a certain standard. Informal education on the other hand lacks the structure and standards of

formal education. Learning happens outside the classroom, whether in educational locations like museums and libraries or in non-educational locations like at home or in non-educational organizations. And unlike formal education settings, informal education is completely optional (Educational News, 2023). Informal education may be a parent teaching a child the rudiments of cooking or making a home. It involves activities like individual and personal research on a topic of interest for themselves by utilizing books, libraries, social media, internet or getting assistance from informal trainers.

Education in the 21st century is characterized by enormous development in Information Communication Technology (ICT) which has revolutionized all aspect of human activities. Progressively, the integration of these technologies in education is making human interactions more and more reliant on these technological developments. Nzeneri (2010) succinctly viewed that our 21st century is characterized by an upsurge in information communication technology which dictates the pace of development and, surely, we have not stopped talking about technological transfer. Education in the 21st century is faced with myriads of challenges which require the synergy between formal and informal education to resolve. It is therefore the intension of this theoretical paper to highpoint the concepts of formal and informal education, challenges of education in the 21st century, synergy between informal and formal education and strategies for improving the synergy between informal

and formal in meeting the challenges of education in the 21st century, draw conclusion and make suggestions for way forward.

Conceptualizing Formal Education

Formal education is the type of education given to its recipients in a school environment by trained and qualified teachers who are licensed to teach. Continu (2023) opined that formal learning is a structured and synchronous learning style that has set goals and learning objectives created by the instructor or instructional designer. It is classroom-base, meaning everything a student learns comes from books and other educational materials with the sole purpose of educating students. In the view of Agabi (2019) formal education has conditions of teaching and learning that clearly separates it from the informal and non formal types of education because it operates on a clearly defined and legally recommended standard. By this standard, education is regarded as formal if teaching is based on a statutory curriculum and teachers are professionally trained, certified, selected and placed in schools to teach the subjects they teach. As opposed to informal education, formal education is controlled by a document known as the National policy on education. According to Agabi (2019) this document establishes the goals, content, and modus operandi of formal education in Nigeria. It also specifies the number of learners that can be taught by a teacher in any one class for any lesson. The content of the policy document in terms of teaching-learning effectiveness also

includes number of children that should sit in a class for science or art practical or for any lesson on practical skill development. This policy is the basis for the statutory control of education in the country in terms of content, quality, and resource provision at all levels of education. It ensures that education activities in the country are all geared towards national socio-economic development. In the view of Munshi (2023) formal education offers a fundamental foundation of knowledge and academic skills that can be crucial in developing critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and subject-specific expertise. It provides a systematic framework that enables learners to gain expertise in various disciplines and have access to a diverse range of subjects, expert guidance, and a supportive community of peers. Examples of formal education are learning in a classroom, school grading/certification, college, and university degrees and planned education of different subjects having a proper syllabus acquired by attending the institution (Educational News, 2019).

What is Informal Education?

Informal education is referred to the type of education received without studying in a school and the usage of any learning method. It is not imparted by an institution such as school or college. Educational News (2019) stated that informal education is not given according to any fixed timetable and no set curriculum required. It is the type of education that focuses on real-world application and consists of experiences and living in the family or community.

Informal education may be learned at some marketplace, by reading many books from a library or educational websites, hotel or at home. Continu (2023) averred that informal education is unstructured asynchronous, meaning it happens whenever without any clear objectives or predetermined goals. On the other hand Munshi (2023) stated that informal education occurs through experiences and activities outside the conventional classroom setting and is often self-directed and driven by personal curiosity, interests, and practical challenges. Munshi further stated that informal education takes various forms, including reading books, attending workshops, participating in online courses, engaging in hobbies, volunteering, and networking with professionals. Additionally, informal education encourages learners to explore and experiment, fostering a deep understanding of subjects and the development of valuable skills like problem-solving, adaptability, and resilience. Examples of informal education include teaching the child some basics such as numeric characters, a child learning his/her mother tongue etcetera.

The Challenges of Education in the 21st Century in Nigeria

Poor Financing

Financing is a major resource of management. It is vital for the payment of teaching and non-teaching staff, purchase of instructional materials and equipment and the building of infrastructure and facilities for the promotion of teaching and learning in schools. Unfortunately, poor financing has been a

major challenge to achieving the above. Both the Federal and States' Governments have failed to adopt the 26 percent of UNESCO budgetary recommendation to education to facilitate efficiency in the educational system. The above statement corroborates Ogunode, Akinlade & Abubakar(2021) who opine that a breakdown of budgetary allocation for the ministry of education for one decade shows that the budgetary allocation for the entire ministry of education has been below the recommended UNESCO 26% of the total annual budget for a year. Poor financing has eroded adequate purchase of 21st century facilities and hampered teachers training and retraining.

Politization of Education

An evident challenge of the 21st century education in Nigeria is that of politization of education which has resulted in inequality. The process of recruiting teachers is enormously bastardized due to the politization of the process. Politicizing the process has shoved away some applicants who are qualified and possess the requisite skills for effective teaching and ushered in some unqualified teachers who are related to those in the corridor of power to pilot the teaching profession. The implication of being taught by unqualified teachers has enormous implications on the educational system. Elenwo (2023) stated that being taught by an unqualified teacher greatly affect the impartation of the right knowledge to the students which equally, will result in producing students without skills, abilities, specified knowledge, and the

required training. In support of the above statement Elenwo, Ofuase and Nte (2023) averred that every year universities turn out thousands of graduates who are not equipped with skills, creative and innovative ideas, knowledge, and competencies which will make them function as entrepreneurs and create jobs after graduation. Teachers are the hub of any educational system and determine the quality of education that is transmitted to the students. Consequently, a teacher cannot give what he or she does not have. Occasionally the Presidents and Governors politicize education by appointing politicians who are not professionally qualified to man the Ministry of Education at the federal and state levels. This often leads to haphazard planning of education thereby leading to non-achievement of the expected goals of education in the 21st century.

Insecurity

Insecurity is a perennial challenge bedeviling Nigerian education in the 21st century. Over the years schools in the Northern Nigeria are incessantly attacked by “boko haram terrorists”. The word “boko haram” literally translate as “western education is forbidden”. The perception of this group had in the past years jeopardized the lives of both the teachers and students in the Northern Nigeria. Aregbesola (2015) affirmed that many from Northern part of the country live in perpetual fear as lives are lost on daily basis hence leaving the economy of the region comatose. The activities of the terrorists include

taking the teachers and students hostage for ransom and marriage purposes, killing of students and other school personnel, and burning of school buildings. These have led to shortage of teachers and increase in the number of out-of-school-students in that part of Nigeria. The narrative is not different in the Southern part of Nigeria as students are occasionally forced to stay away from school due to the actions of “unknown gun men”.

Technology Advancement

In the digital era technology has made it possible to access world’s best subject experts and specialists in any part of the world allow them to use the world’s most brilliant methods of interactive multimedia communications, and make it easy to teach anyone anything in a way that suits each person’s lifestyle. Society is changing at an alarmingly accelerating pace, but schools remain lethargically stuck with structures that took place in the 19th century (Ranbir, 2018).Schleicher (2015) opined that many of the developing countries have average levels of education in the 21st century that were achieved in many Western countries by the early decades of the 20th century. Many of these countries are struggling to change their pedagogical practices mainly because of politico-social beliefs and lack of resources. Schools teach obsolete skills that are not needed in the digital era. The core changes brought by ICT in society call for research on specific new forms of learning and epistemological

issues regarding how learning occurs and how knowledge emerges beyond the borders of traditional systems of education.

Dearth of Training and Retraining of Teachers

Teachers are inadequately trained and retrained in schools to be able to keep abreast with the globalized concepts and standard of teaching required in the 21st century. The 21st century education is characterized by remarkable developments in Information Communication Technology (ICT). When innovative teachers integrate technology in their teaching student learning is greatly enhanced. Unfortunately, dearth of training and retraining of teachers has hindered some teachers from integrating technology in a way that promotes learning. According to Marlow and Lento in Onebunne (2022) too many children are leaving school without mastering a minimum set of cognitive and non-cognitive skills. The duo further stated that attempted use of computers to improve the obsolete system is akin to using the jet engine to improve transportation by attaching it to a stagecoach. Many countries are pouring billions of dollars to improve the training of quality teachers. The 21st century teachers are urged to become 'knowledge workers' to deal effectively with the growing pressures of a rapidly changing environment and to improve the quality of education in 21st century therefore, it is important to improve the teachers (Onebunne, 2022).

Synergy between Formal and Informal Education

Instead of pitting formal and informal education against each other, it is pertinent to recognize their complementary nature. Both avenues of education serve different purposes and contribute distinct benefits to an individuals' growth and development. By embracing both, learners can unlock a powerful synergy that goes beyond academic proficiency and leads to holistic personal and professional growth Munshi (2023).

1. Bridging the Gap: Informal education can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge gained in formal education and its practical application in real-world scenarios. It reinforces and enriches the concepts learned in the classroom, making them more tangible and relatable.
2. Fostering Lifelong Learning: Embracing informal learning cultivates a thirst for knowledge, encouraging individuals to pursue continuous learning throughout their lives. It nurtures a growth mindset that is open to new ideas and adaptable to change.
3. Nurturing Creativity: Informal education encourages learners to think outside the box, fostering creativity and innovation. It offers the freedom to explore diverse fields and disciplines, providing new perspectives that can enrich formal education.

4. Enhancing Soft Skills: While formal education focuses primarily on hard skills, informal education opportunities allow individuals to develop crucial soft skills such as communication, leadership, and emotional intelligence Munshi (2023).

Strategies for Improving the Synergy between Informal and Formal Education in Meeting the Challenges of Education in the 21st Century.

1. Fostering Teamwork: Teamwork brings people together and encourages sharing of knowledge. Collaboration of knowledge gained from informal and formal education will increase creation of wealth and reduce unemployment, produce creativity and innovation, and increase the total production of a country in the 21st century.
2. Curriculum Diversification: The curriculum requires restructuring and skill acquisition programs are integrated into the educational system. The school curriculum should provide a diversity of learning contents, creative innovations, professional standards, and industrial experiences that will maximize the talents of learners, generate job opportunities, and cater for the critical needs of self-reliant society. The 21st century jobs require demonstrable skills which are lacking among the graduates thereby making them unemployable. This corroborates Emefiele (2021) who charged

educational institutions to ensure effective collaboration with industry players in key sectors of the nation's economy, in the training of relevant manpower to minimize mismatches between the skills required by firms and the educational qualifications of the graduates.

3. **Improved Funding:** Both educations operate on limited budgets which make it difficult to have access to technology and learning materials. Improved funding will synergize both education and provide high-quality and up-to-date educational experiences to learners and eliminates difficulty in the accessibility of technology.
4. **Technology Integration:** Integration of technologies in schools will help teachers transform learning environment by engaging learners and facilitating student-directed learning; personalized learning, connecting all learners; supporting virtual learning spaces; improving teacher earning through online materials, collaborative learning communities and building capacity through partnership (Lampe, Ellison & Steinfield,2017).
5. **Training and Retraining:** It is imperative that teachers are trained and retrained in the utilization and application of ICT tools and facilities. This style of training could be in form of conferences, seminars, workshops, networking, and collaborative teamwork.

Conclusion

In the quest to meet the challenges of education in the 21st century, it is pertinent to recognize that formal and informal educations are two sides of the same coin. Embracing both approaches, will empower well-rounded individuals capable of tackling the challenges of the real world with confidence and enthusiasm. Unlocking the synergy between formal and informal education, will pave the way for the real education that can meet the challenges of education in 21st century in Nigeria.

Suggestions

The following suggestions were made based on the identified challenges of education in the 21st century. They are;

1. The Nigerian government should adhere to the recommendation of UNESCO regarding the funding of education.
2. Politization of education should be discouraged and recruitment and appointment into offices be solely based on merit.
3. The Nigerian security personnel should collaborate with local vigilante personnel in intelligence gathering for the safety of life and property in schools.
4. The Nigerian government should advance technology to be in tandem with the reality of 21st century education.

5. Teachers should be regularly trained and retrained on the 21st standard usage and application of technology in schools.

References

- Agabi, C. O. (2019). *E-learning in the formal education system: the enablers, the challenges and the cost implication*. Retrieved from <https://pressbook.com> 11th November 2023.
- Amaele, S. (2010). *Understanding the philosophy of Education: The Western and African perspectives*. Port Harcourt: Harey.
- Aregbesola, S. (2015). *Nigeria's economic crisis: The way forward* retrieved from the guardian newspaper. Available online at <http://www.rcmss.com/index.php/ijpamr;www.academix.ng>.
ISSN: 2346-724X (P) ISSN: 2354-158X (E)
- Continu, T. (2023). *How to apply formal and informal employee learning*. Retrieved from <https://education.com> 10th November 2023.
- Educational News (2023). Retrieved from <https://examplanning.com> 10th November 2023.
- Elenwo, P. M. (2023). Review of decided cases bothering on teachers' misconduct in schools and their implementations for educational management. *European Journal of Contemporary Education and E-Learning*, 1(1), 20-29.
- Elenwo, P. M., Ofuase, I. M. & Nte, O. H. (2023). Entrepreneurial education for skill acquisition and job creation of graduates in Rivers State universities in post covid-19 era. *Vocational and Technology Education Journal (VOTEJ)*, 4(1), 14-25.
- Emefiele, G. I. (2021). *National development and knowledge economy in the digital age: Leapfrogging SMEs into the 21st century. A public lecture delivered at the 51st convocation of university of Lagos*. Akoka: Lagos State.
- Lampe, C. A., Ellison, N. & Steinfield, C. (2017). A familiar face (book): profile elements as signals in an online social network. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on Human factors in computing systems. 435- 444.
- Munshi, G. A. (2023). *Formal and informal education learning – The real education*. Retrieved from <https://linkedin.com> 8th November 2023.

Nzeneri, I.S. (2010). *Adults in battle: Any hope of victory?* Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press.

Ogunode, N. J., Akinlade, O. M. & Abubakar, M. (2021). Quality assurance in Nigerian public higher institutions: Challenges and way forward. *International Scientific Research Journal*, 2(7), 36-54.

Onebunne, J. I. (2022). Education in the 21st century. *Nnadiebube Journal of Education in Africa* 7(1), 24-33.

Onyenemezu, E. C. (2012). Adult education and the challenges of the 21st century in Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 3(5), 1-6.

Ranbir, S. M. (2018). Educational challenges in 21st century and sustainable development. *Journal of Sustainable Development Education and Research*, 2(1), 9-20.

Schleicher, A. (2015). *Education for the 21st Century*. Retrieved from <https://bigthink.com> 28th August 2023.