

**FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF
UNEMPLOYMENT, POVERTY AND NATIONAL UNITY IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between functional education and the challenges of unemployment, poverty and national unity in Nigeria. The correlational research was used for the study. The population of the study consisted of secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom State and all the students in tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State. The sampling technique of multi-stage sampling was used to select 620 teachers (20 each, from the 31 Local Government Areas) in the State. Also, 150 students (50 each from three tertiary institutions of Akwa Ibom State University, Ikot Akpaden, Akwa Ibom State College of Education, Afaha Nsit and Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua). The researcher designed instrument for the teachers and another one for the students. The data generated were analyzed using frequency and percentages. The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between functional education and unemployment, poverty and national unity. The study revealed that there is a mis-match of what our educational system is offering and what the job market (society) needs. Based on these, recommendations were made among others that, a new curriculum must be developed by curriculum experts that will emphasize on practical subjects (courses) and skills acquisition in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Also, there is need for training and retraining of teachers in ICT, entrepreneurial and vocational subjects by their employers.

KEYWORDS: Functional education, unemployment, poverty, national unity.

INTRODUCTION

In the traditional African society, the purpose of education was clear: functionalism. Education was regarded as a means to an end and not an end in itself. It was generally for an immediate induction into society and preparation for adulthood. Fafunwa (2004) added that, African education emphasized social responsibility, job orientation, political participation and spiritual and moral values. The young ones learnt by doing as they were engaged in participatory education through ceremonies, rituals, initiation, recitation and demonstration. They were also involved in practical farming, fishing, weaving, cooking, carving, knitting, etc. This points to the fact that traditional education amongst the Africans was an integrated experience. Everyone had what to do. It was able to meet the needs of the society, then. The seven Cardinal Goals of Traditional African Education, according to Ekeng (2020) include:

1. To develop the child's latent physical skills.
2. To develop character.

3. To inculcate respect for elders and those in position of authority.
4. To develop intellectual skills.
5. To acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour.
6. To develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs.
7. To understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The need for functional education started emerging in Nigeria in the mid-1980s, when Nigerian economy collapsed. Youths and graduates unemployment was at its highest level. There was large scale lay off of government workers and retirement from the federal, state to local government. The then military government came up with Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and it 'sapped' the flesh and blood out of Nigerian people. With these, there was need for a re-structuring of the country's educational programmes and new curriculum development to be encouraged so that education can be used to fight the pressing challenges of unemployment, poverty, moral decadence, indiscipline, etc. According to Umoren (2024), Nigerian education places too much emphasis on theoretical and academic knowledge, with the issuance of certificate instead of emphasizing on what one can do.

A functional education, according to AI Overview, emphasizes practical application of knowledge and skills to improve daily life and contribute to societal development, rather than focusing solely on theoretical knowledge. It aims to equip individuals with the tools they need to be productive members of society and to meet their immediate needs and those of their communities.

From the above definition, one can notice that any educational system that does not answer to:

- practical application of what is learnt in the classroom, i.e. problem solving knowledge,
- providing practical skills to its recipients,
- these skills are used to improve their daily lives,
- with the knowledge gained, they are able to contribute meaningfully to develop their society.
- they make themselves productive and are able to meet their immediate needs and the needs of the people around them, such education is termed dysfunctional.

Looking at Nigerian education and the products of this type of education, one can boldly say that a reverse is the case. Nigerian educational system has produced graduates that are lacking in skills needed in the labour market as it has failed to adequately prepare its graduands for entrepreneurship. One can notice that, there is a mismatch between education and job market needs, lack of practical skills, limited entrepreneurship education, neglect of technical and vocational education, poor public investment and high student population, according to Temitope (2021).

There is an alarming rate of unemployment, and poverty and this had caused great national disunity among the different ethnic nationalities in the country. Unemployment manifests itself when a person actively searches for a job but is unable to find one. This means that people want to work but are unable to find jobs. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), unemployment rate in Nigeria is estimated currently at 4.3% while the youth unemployment rate is higher at 6.5%. Male unemployment rate is 4.3%, female unemployment rate is 6.7%, and urban unemployment rate is 6.0% while rural unemployment rate is 4.3%.

Source: Nigeria Labour Force Survey (NLFS) data for Q1 2024.

Poverty and unemployment go hand-in-hand. Unemployment is a major cause of poverty, Orakwe (2023) defined poverty as, a point in an individual's life when he experiences lack of basic essential needs in his life. It is a state of having little or not enough aid and sustenance for one's self and family members. She traced the history of poverty in Nigeria to the emergence of corruption in the masses and corruption in the government. AI Overview noted that poverty rate fluctuates year by year impacted by economic factors, government policies and global events. Below is a general view of poverty rate in Nigeria.

- Early Trends (1960-1980s): the post-independence period saw a rise in poverty, likely due to population growth outpacing economic development.
- 1990s-2000s: poverty rate continued to climb, particularly during the military era, reaching a high of 58.4%.
- 2000s-2010s: economic growth, partly fueled by oil prices, led to some reduction in poverty, reaching its lowest point of 30.9% by 2018.
- 2020s: the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine War exacerbated poverty, with rate increasing to 38.9% in 2020-2023, resulting in 87 million Nigerians being in poverty.
- 2022-2024: the poverty rate continues to be major concern, with the number of people living in poverty estimated to be around 68.6 million in 2022.

Specific Years (Examples):

- 2018: national monetary poverty line: 40.1%
- 2022: multidimensional poverty: 63%
- 2023: the number of people living in extreme poverty was estimated at 67.6 million.
- 2024: A report by the World Bank estimated that by 2024, 40% of Nigerians (almost half of the population) were in poverty.

National unity means bringing together people from diverse backgrounds to work towards a shared goal and build a sense of collective identity within a nation. It is about fostering harmony, peace and a sense of belonging among various ethnic, cultural, and social groups, promoting their common interest (AI Overview). The question therefore is, how can our education bring about national unity in the country? Education plays a crucial role in fostering national unity by instilling a shared sense of identity, promoting understanding and respect for diversity and encouraging civic engagement. Education can emphasize common goals and values, develop critical thinking and problem solving skills, promotes a culture of peace and non-violence and build bridges across divides.

With all these problems enumerated through the challenges of unemployment via poverty, the question therefore is, can the education, as given in our primary, secondary and tertiary institutions solve these and bring about national unity and national consciousness among the people. The study therefore hopes to examine how our formal education can be used to curb unemployment and poverty, and at the same time bring the people who may be different in tribe, language, ethnicity, religion, geographical factors (culture) together and foster oneness and cooperation amongst them. It is therefore the aim of this study to examine how we can use education to solve the problems of unemployment, poverty and these will bring about national unity in our country.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to examine how functional education can be used to bring solutions to the problems of unemployment and poverty bedlivering the nation. The specific objectives are as follows:

- i. To examine the extent to which functional education can be used to reduce unemployment in Nigeria.
- ii. To examine the extent to which functional education can be used to curb poverty in the country.
- iii. To determine the relationship between functional education and national unity.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

- i. What is the extent to which functional education can be used to reduce unemployment in Nigeria?
- ii. What is the extent to which functional education can be used to curb poverty in the country?
- iii. What is the relationship between functional education and national unity?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

1. There is no significant relationship between functional education and unemployment in Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between functional education and national unity.

Review of Related Literature

Functional education, which emphasizes practical, job-related skills, can be a powerful tool in fighting unemployment by preparing individuals for the workforce and fostering self-employment opportunities. By integrating entrepreneurship education and focusing on developing marketable skills, functional education helps individuals become more employable and contribute to overall economic growth, according to AI Overview. It went on to state how functional education can combat unemployment thus:

- equipping individuals with practical skills, making graduates more competitive and readily employable

- promoting entrepreneurship; it empowers one to start his/her own business and become self-employed, thus creating jobs opportunities
- addressing skills gaps; by ensuring that graduates possess the knowledge and abilities demanded by employers
- reducing reliance on traditional employment
- it creates new avenues for individuals to earn a living
- enhancing productivity and competitiveness; it makes it easier for business to thrive and more jobs are created
- promoting economic development; individuals are equipped with marketable skills and this helps to reduce poverty
- focusing on local needs; it can be tailored to the specific needs and opportunities of the people, thus promoting economic growth in a sustainable way.

Types of Education that Can Help Reduce Unemployment in Nigeria

To reduce unemployment in Nigeria, the following types of education can be used according to the National Policy on Education (2013). Vocational education, entrepreneurship training, technical education (TVET) that is, technical and vocational education and training.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

The National Policy on Education (2013) stated that, Technical and Vocational Education and Training is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. TVET shall cover the following:

- Technical Colleges
- Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs)
- National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF)

The goals of Technical and vocational Education and Training (TVET) shall be to:

- (a) provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advance craft and technical levels,
- (b) provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development, and
- (c) give training and impart the necessary skills to individual for self-reliance economically.

The curriculum for Technical Colleges shall consists of:

1. General education
2. Theory and related courses
3. Workshop practice
4. Industrial training/production work
5. Entrepreneurial training

Vocational Enterprise Institutions shall be established for graduates of Senior Secondary School who did not make up to five credits and may therefore not continue to tertiary education, for a period ranging from 1-2 years. The GOALS are to:

- (a) Train Post-Basic Education and Senior Secondary students who are desirous of obtaining some specific skills, knowledge and appropriate certificate to pursue a chosen trade or career,
- (b) educate Post-Basic Education and Senior Secondary students to think creatively and transform knowledge through technological processes into wealth and a broader economic base,
- (c) provide technologically based skill training that ensures students understand how their expertise fits into improving the society and fulfilling national goals,
- (d) increase access to technological education at tertiary level,
- (e) provide training that enables students acquire specialized craftsman skills that empowers them to compete globally,
- (f) provide training that enables students to acquire the skills and competences in order to take advantage of life's opportunities, and
- (g) provide training that enables students acquire continuous education that makes them self-reliant, wealth creators and providers of employment.

The training shall cover these areas:

- Adire, Aso-Oke, Akwaete, and other indigenous fabrics and products
- Gwado (local blanket), mats, drums;
- welding, sheet metal work;
- motor vehicle repairs (auto-mechanical, panel beating, auto-electrical, vulcanizing, etc.);
- electrical wiring – domestic and industrial;
- construction (plumbing, painting, bricklaying, etc.);
- catering;
- performing arts (dance, drama, film production, media, etc);
- hairdressing and beauty;
- art;
- agriculture;
- fashion design;
- sport;
- all other vocational skills.

In tertiary level, Technology Education Goals as offered in Universities, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education (Technical) shall include:

- a) Provide courses of instruction and training in Engineering, other technologies, applied sciences, business and management, leading to the production of trained manpower,
- b) provide the technical knowledge and skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development of Nigeria,
- c) give training that imparts the necessary skills for the production of technicians, technologists and other skilled personnel who shall be enterprising and self-reliant,

- d) train people who can apply scientific knowledge to solve environmental problems for the convenience of man, and
- e) give exposure on professional studies in the technologies.

If one takes a cursory look at Nigerian education, can one say that all these GOALS had been achieved and the offerings in our educational institutions are promoting functional education? According to Musa and Joseph (2018), functional education is the total process of bringing up individuals to develop their potentials – cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains, to the fullest and consequently, they are able to contribute maximally to the development of the society. It helps the society meet their developmental needs.

Thus, functional education features include, relevance, accessibility, empowerment, self-reliance, involvement of stakeholders in its design, equipping recipients to harness their potentials and emphasizing the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge for gainful self-employment (Nwaka, 2022).

Education, aimed at economic and technological development should produce the manpower capable of exploiting the nation's natural resources and processing item for consumption and development as no nation can develop beyond its educational standards. Ezewu (1988) noted that, the system of education should maintain close links with the labour market. What is required is: the proper measures to be taken to train a new class of personnel that can guarantee a high level of continuous development, and that, the educational system ensures that the knowledge and skills that are taught are demanded by the labour market. Education becomes dysfunctional if:

- it fails to produce the caliber of workforce needed by the economy.
- It produces people that are not needed by the economy, i.e. if the majority of those who leave school are unskilled.
- It over produces skilled manpower for the economy.

Of the three categories of dysfunctional education as stated above, item two readily applies to Nigeria.

There has been a great demand for school education since independence in Nigeria, but school education in Nigeria has not yet been adapted to the realities of the nation's economy. It is easy to see states in the country having many Secondary Grammar Schools with only a few Technical Schools. One can also see that there are no practicals in most science or vocational subjects offered in West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) examinations. Computer Studies are taught without students using a Computer. Agricultural Science is offered only in the classroom without a child being taken to the farm. Trade or vocational subjects are not given good attention and students who offer these only do the theoretical parts without the actual practicals.

Ekeng (2019) maintained that, in tertiary institutions, over 80% of the courses offered are theoretical, with no technological bases. One can read courses in Engineering for five years without engaging one properly in the practical stages of the course. In Polytechnics, courses that are more of theoretical background are the ones in hot demand by JAMB applicants. Even in Colleges of Education, School of Vocational and Technical Education

consistently records the least number of JAMB applicants, thus having the least number of students admitted every year.

The result of this is that, thousands of graduates are turned out every year from our tertiary institutions without the requisite skills. These young men and women are not furnished with creative innovative, right skills, knowledge attitude and competences required in the 21st Century that emphasis is placed on science and technological development. They graduate and roam the streets for years looking for white-collar jobs, which are non-existent. Some of them may end up doing some petty trading and some in crime such as cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, drug trafficking, human trafficking, etc. and these may end up in jail (for the lucky ones) or end up in the grave.

A functional education is the one in which the ability to perform productive tasks is more emphasized than the education that aims at producing ideological conformity, according to Asaju and Adagba (2014). They gave the following recommendations for an effective functional education to be achieved in Nigeria.

- Government at all levels should show its commitment and political will to ensuring functional education through its funding, policy making, supervision and monitoring of educational projects and programmes.
- A law should be enacted that will mandate the federal and state governments to adhere strictly to the UNESCO's recommendation that 24% of their annual budget be allocated to education.
- The various supervisory agencies of the educational institutions and the Ministry of Education should be more committed to playing their role as watch-dog in ensuring that all educational institutions from primary to tertiary operate within and abide by laid down standards.
- There should be an ethical re-orientation that aims at raising the consciousness of the citizenry and politicians in particular, to see the sacred nature of education rather than making isolated attempts at turning around a particular institute or university because the forces that prevail against good education in the country, are still very pervasive and behemoth.
- There is also the need for government's commitment to the resurgence of science and technology as well as technical education in Nigeria. This should start from the primary level.
- Government should ensure that the objective of our educational system is geared towards producing a total person with the requisite skills, knowledge and values relevant to the 21st Century and beyond.
- The overwhelming role of entrepreneurial education, as part of the solution to unemployment, poverty eradication, self-reliance and national security and development should be emphasized. The benefits of doing this is enormous, according to Musa and Joseph (2018). Adequate steps must be taken to requite entrepreneurial education by providing, at all levels of governance, suitable environment through proper curriculum planning and implementation, and by proper funding and equipping of entrepreneurship education.

Poverty is a state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions. It is about not having enough money to meet basic needs including food,

clothing and shelter. The World Bank describes poverty as “Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is lack of good clothing. Poverty is lack of education”.

Business Day of January 11, 2022 discussed on how government can reduce poverty through education. It asked, is education really the way for poor people to escape poverty? If this is so, how then can the government reduce the incidence of poverty through education? It opined that poverty itself has prevented many individuals, especially in developing countries from receiving a proper education. There are two schools of thought: One school of thought says that better education will fix poverty and the other states that in order to fix education, we need to fix poverty. Those that support the former opined that education is critical to development, as a quality educational system will empower the people with the required knowledge, skill and information which enables them to know their duties towards the society, develop the capabilities to fight injustice, violence, corruption and other vices which can lead to poverty reduction. It noted that despite the fact that primary education in Nigeria is free and compulsory, 61% of 6-11 years olds do not attend school regularly while 35.6% of children aged 30-59 months are not enrolled in early childhood care and education. The World Bank ranks Nigeria in number 150, out of 157 countries that strive to develop their Human Capital Index. It concluded that improved and sustainable global economic development depends on a strong knowledge sector (education).

Thus, for any country to foster genuine economic growth and development, its educational system must be considered as the bedrock of any meaningful development strategies. Education that will provide equal opportunity to both the rich and the poor to avail everyone with an opportunity to contribute to the nation’s development. Government can reduce poverty through education by:

- increasing the provision of ICT in schools located in rural areas.
- encouraging periodic training to expose teaching to modern day teaching methods.
- increasing teachers incentives in order to encourage more people into teaching profession.
- provide adequate teaching facilities in all educational institutions.

Ogara (2024) maintained that education is instrumental in fostering national unity, particularly in diverse and complex society like Nigeria. With over 250 ethnic groups and multiple religious affiliations, Nigeria faces significant challenges in achieving unity amongst its citizens. He maintained that this unity can be achieved through education, thus;

- education directly promotes cultural understanding and appreciation by incorporating diverse cultural studies into the curriculum.
- education promotes shared values, democratic principles and a sense of shared citizenship by rights, and the rule of law.
- education can help inculcate national values in our children.
- education helps develop critical thinking in individuals.
- education can help lay the groundwork of life long relationships among the students.

Thus, there is need for education policy makers and educators to prioritize curriculum reforms, teacher training and infrastructural development in our schools. Stakeholders must work together to create inclusive learning environment and initiatives that foster national unity. Education therefore can help us overcome socio-cultural divides and build a more

harmonious, peaceful and prosperous society. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Goal 1: No Poverty – “End Poverty in all its Forms”; Goal 4: Quality Education – “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning and opportunity for all” and Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions - “Promoting Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”, will all be achieved in Nigeria.

Materials and Methodologies

The research design adopted for the study is descriptive survey design. This design was deemed appropriate for the study because the researcher collected data from a given population of the study to determine how functional education can be used to solve the problems of unemployment, and poverty in the country and how we can achieve national unity with the instrument of functional education. The study was carried out in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised of 2 sets of respondents: (1) Secondary school teachers, and (ii) all the students (tertiary institutions) in Akwa Ibom State. The sample size comprised of 30 secondary school teachers from the 31 Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, and this summed up to 620 teachers. Also 50 final year students were sampled from Akwa Ibom State University, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic Ikot Osurua, Akwa Ibom State College of Education, Afaha Nsit. This summed up to 150 students. Structured instruments were given to secondary school teachers and final year students in tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State, respectively.

All the items in the instruments were structured on a Four-Point Likert rating of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) and these were weighted 4,3,2,1 respectively. The data were analyzed using frequency and percentages for answering the research questions.

Table 1: Percentage Analysis of how Functional Education can be used to reduce unemployment in Nigeria (for teachers).

S/ N	Items	Frequency		Decision			
		%tage		SA	A	D	SD
		% A	% D	4	3	2	1
1.	I was taught some skills in my primary, secondary and tertiary school days.	17.4	82.6	30	78	410	102
2.	The present secondary school curriculum emphasizes skill acquisition but does not provide equipment or materials for the practicals.	76.7	23.3	385	91	86	58
3.	Our education is more of theory than practical	87.3	12.7	472	69	51	28
4.	I teach practical subjects in the laboratory, farm, kitchen or workshop	22.5	77.4	74	66	388	92
5.	Government encourages skills by providing enough learning (instructional) materials to students.	8.7	91.3	24	30	55	511
6.	My school has specialized teachers teaching ICT, Technical/vocational subjects.	66.6	33.4	102	311	109	98
7.	My teachings develop the skills of listening, writing, drawing, and reading in my students.	87.1	12.9	98	442	47	33
8.	I incorporate the three domains of learning (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) in my classroom lessons.	90.6	9.4	71	491	38	20
9.	Trade subjects are taught in my school.	43.8	56.2	84	188	301	47
10.	My school has a farm for practical teaching.	80	20	299	197	88	36
11.	Computer studies is taught in computer laboratory in my school	21.3	78.7	63	69	77	411
12.	My students can create jobs after secondary school	19.5	80.5	38	83	111	388
13.	I am engaged in my own business after school hours.	35.3	64.7	111	108	291	110
	TOTAL PERCENTAGE	50.5%	49.5%				

Table 2: Percentage Analysis of Using Functional Education to Curb Poverty in the Country (for students).

S/ N	Items	Frequency		Decision			
		%tage		SA	A	D	SD
		% A	% D	4	3	2	1
1.	The curriculum has prepared me for job market, after schooling	28	72	12	30	79	29
2.	The knowledge I gained in school will help me start a business and be self-reliant after school	24	76	16	20	31	82
3.	I plan to seek for employment after school.	78	22	84	33	19	14
4.	My courses are more of theory than practicals	68	32	72	30	26	22
5.	I attend skill acquisition programme on my own, during school vacation.	28.6	71.4	18	25	70	37
6.	We use laboratory for practical courses.	24.7	75.3	18	19	22	91
7.	I was taught ICT related courses in my school and I can operate a computer system effortlessly.	28	72	22	20	77	31
8.	The education I received is good enough to help me become self-reliant after school.	23.3	76.7	17	18	35	80
9.	Schooling exposed me to using technology to improve my livelihood	70	30	48	57	29	16
10.	I am planning to acquire skills after graduation because the school did not expose me to any.	74.6	25.4	78	34	28	10
	TOTAL PERCENTAGE	44.7%	55.3%				

Table 3: Percentage Analysis of Using Functional Education to Achieve National Unity (for Teachers).

S/ N	Items	Frequency		Decision			
		%tage		SA	A	D	SD
		% A	% D	4	3	2	1
1.	The current curriculum promotes national unity	69.5	30.5	111	320	106	83
2.	Education has a major role to play in promoting national unity.	71.1	28.9	342	99	104	75
3.	I studied outside my state of origin (primary, secondary or tertiary level) – any of these.	6.8	93.2	22	20	66	512
4.	I can speak (understand) other local language apart from my mother tongue.	5.3	94.7	10	23	58	529
5.	Social Studies and Civic Education aim at promoting national unity	80	20	85	411	73	51
6.	Civic Education can be used to instill sense of belonging and civic responsibility among students.	70.2	29.8	333	102	98	87
7.	The establishment of unity schools (Federal Government Colleges) has brought unity in Nigeria.	18.5	81.5	29	86	402	103
8.	Education can be used to reduce ethnic/religious tensions and promote peaceful coexistence in the country.	78.2	21.8	96	389	77	58
9.	National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) has succeeded in promoting ethnic-religious cooperation in Nigeria.	81.1	18.9	101	402	79	38
10.	Parents and teachers have roles to play in order to promote national unity.	88.2	11.8	455	92	52	21
	TOTAL PERCENTAGE	56.9%	43.1%				

As shown on Table 1, the different variables attracted different responses from the Secondary school teachers. Those who Agreed (comprising of SA and A) had a percentage of 50.5 and those who Disagreed (comprising of Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed) had a percentage of 49.5 This implies that functional or job related skills education is a powerful tool in fighting unemployment in Nigeria. It has the ability of equipping the individuals with practical skills, promoting entrepreneurship, addressing skills gaps, reducing reliance on traditional employment, enhancing productivity and competitiveness and promoting economic development. Unfortunately, the responses show that, even though on paper the National Policy on Education (2013) encourages functional education but what is taught in the school does not translate to using the knowledge in order to create job for the school leavers (primary, secondary or tertiary).

As shown on Table 2, the 150 final year students from tertiary institutions in the State responded to the Questionnaire as: Those who Agreed (comprising of SA and A) had a percentage of 44.7 while those who Disagreed (comprising of D and SD) had a percentage of 55.3. This means that functional education, even though recognized by Nigerian education system as a tool that can be used to reduce poverty in the country, the curriculum, in its practical and application level has failed to achieve this aim of poverty reduction in our country by increasing the provision of ICT in rural schools, in particular, periodic training of teachers on modern teaching, increasing teachers incentives and providing adequate teaching facilities in rural (poor-children) schools. This is in line with Nwaka (2022) who stated that functional education is an anticipated application, which thus assures that the learner has immediate meaning, transferable into action for his learning activities. It is relevant to the current and anticipated needs, problems and aspirations of the individual learner and is based on the occurrence and changes in the learner's cultural milieu.

As shown on Table 3, the responses from the secondary school teachers show that, those who Agreed (SA and A) had a percentage of 56.9 while those who Disagreed (D and SD) had a percentage of 43.1. This means that functional education can be used to achieve national unity in Nigeria. This affirms the position of Ogara (2024) when he posited that education directly promotes cultural understanding and application, promotes shared values and citizenship, it helps develop critical thinking and can lay the foundation of life-long relationships among the students. Thus, even though the curriculum stresses need for national unity, there is widespread diversity among the different ethnic groups in the country.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that:

- There is a significant relationship between functional education and unemployment in Nigeria.
- Functional education can be used to curb or reduce poverty in the country.
- There is a significant relationship between functional education and national unity. Functional education promotes national unity in our diverse nation.
- There is a mis-match of what our educational system is offering and what the job market (society) needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and the conclusions reached, the following recommendations are made:

- A new curriculum should be developed by curriculum experts that will emphasize more of practical subjects (courses) and skills acquisition in our institutions of learning (from primary, secondary to tertiary).
- Teachers must be trained and retrained in ICT, entrepreneurial and vocational subjects through in-service trainings, sponsored by their employers.
- Government should provide employment opportunities for graduates and other school leavers.
- Teacher training institutions and Faculty of Education in the Universities must be encouraged to admit students who make Faculty of Education as his/her first choice

and who score 50% and above, that is, not less than 200 marks in Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination conducted by Joint Admission and Matriculation Board. With this, there is hope that they will have the ability to impart knowledge and their passion will be tailored to raising the educational system in the country.

- Social Studies should be studied in the Senior Secondary and made a compulsory subject in Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) and National Examination Council (NECO), in addition to Civic Education.

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