

Synergizing Formal and Informal Education Curricular for Sustainable Quality Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Contemporarily, Nigeria pays for the price of unemployment that is occasioned by thousands of hundreds of graduates produced annually that could not be absorbed by the labour market either due to lack of skills or competitiveness of the few job opportunities out there. This paper advocates for creating synergy between both formal and informal education curricular so that students could be equipped with relevant skills that could transform them from job seekers to job creators for overall national economic growth and development. The paper examines the practical strategies for creating and improving synergy between the formal and informal education in curriculum design such as leveraging on educational technologies, integrating informal learning experiences into formal curricula, fostering collaboration and partnerships, and promoting learner-centred approaches to instruction. Further, the paper justifies the benefits of employing these strategies such as enhancing learner engagement, enhancing learner motivation, promoting lifelong learning, fostering critical thinking skills, and facilitating the application of knowledge in real-world contexts. Moreover, the challenges associated with this synergy includes lack of recognition and assessment of informal learning, limited resources, and potential resistance from traditional educational institutions. Lastly, the paper recommends the need for continuous research and development to explore best pedagogical approaches, technological tools, and policy frameworks that can best support the successful integration of informal and formal education for a sustainable quality education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Synergy, Formal, Informal, Education, Curriculum, Sustainable.

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, skills are prioritized in knowledge acquisition so as to support a viable economy and educational system. This is predicated on the fact, that a lot of educators, support including technical skills in curriculum design so that students can learn more than just theoretical knowledge, which could lead to obtaining only certificates that could not guarantee employment in today's global labour markets. Nigeria, currently faces a grave threat from the crisis of unemployment that has resulted in several conflicts and acts of insecurity. These have been linked to the catastrophe of the thousands of school graduates rolled out every year who were unable to find jobs due to shortage of skills or the fierce competition for the few available positions. This paper therefore, argues that in order to equip students with necessary technical skills (sustainable quality education) to enable

them transition from job seekers to job creators for self-employment, self-reliance, and overall national economic growth and development, synergistic avenues between the formal and informal education sectors in Nigeria must be established.

Conceptual Clarifications

For establishing effective framework of understanding, it is sine qua non to expatiate the basic concepts of the topic as employed in the paper. These include synergy, formal education, informal education, curriculum design, and sustainable quality education.

Synergy

The term synergy implies the act of interaction or collaboration among different elements or parts of a system, resulting in a combined effect that is greater than the sum of their individual effects (Fullan, 2014). In the context of education, synergy occurs when various components, such as instructional techniques, technologies, and resources, work together to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. By leveraging the strengths of each component and maximizing their complementary effects, synergy can lead to improved student engagement, understanding, and achievement (Fullan, 2014).

Formal Education

Formal education refers to structured and planned educational processes that take place within established institutions, such as schools, colleges, and universities (Trowler, 2010). It follows a prescribed curriculum and involves the imparting of knowledge and skills through systematic instruction by trained teachers. Formal education is typically characterized by the use of standardized assessments, fixed schedules, designated learning spaces, and the awarding of recognized qualifications or degrees (Oliha, 2019).

Informal Education

The concept of informal education involves the learning that takes place outside of formal educational institutions, such as schools and colleges. It is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values through various non structured means (Colley, Hodkinson, Malcolm, 2003).

Curriculum Design

Curriculum design is the process of creating a structured and planned framework for instruction, taking into account specific learning goals, objectives, and content (Keating, 2014). The scholar further argued that it involves determining what knowledge, skills, and attitudes students should acquire, as well as organizing and sequencing the learning experiences to facilitate meaningful and coherent learning. Hence, curriculum design considers the needs and characteristics of learners, educational standards, available resources, and instructional methods to create a curriculum that is effective and relevant.

Sustainable Quality Education

The concept of sustainable quality education has received various interpretations from different scholars. According to Hassan (2016), sustainable quality education is a term that has gained significant prominence in recent years and refers to a holistic approach to education that addresses the interconnections between environmental, social, and economic systems. It aims to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to build a sustainable future by promoting a deeper understanding of sustainability issues and fostering sustainable practices in various aspects of life. The United Nations General Assembly (2015) has defined sustainable quality education as an educational system that fosters social, economic, and environmental sustainability for present and future generations. It emphasizes the integration of social equity, economic development, and environmental stewardship in education practices and policies.

According to UNESCO (2014), sustainable quality education is a transformative learning process that promotes societal transformation towards sustainability, empowering individuals and communities to reflect on their own values, attitudes, skills, and behaviours, and to make informed decisions and take actions towards a more sustainable and equitable world. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined by the United Nations provide another perspective on sustainable education. Goal 4, which focuses on quality education, emphasizes the importance of education that is inclusive, equitable, and promotes sustainable development. SDG 4.7 specifically calls for education that fosters sustainability and global citizenship. Furthermore, the Earth Charter, a global ethical framework for sustainability, highlights the significance of education in sustainable development. It states that "education for sustainable development should empower learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society, for present and future generations" (Earth Charter International, 2000).

The Empirical Background

Empirical evidences from the literature demonstrated the need for creating synergy between the formal and informal education curricula for achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. For instance, Okechukwu, and Onyishi, (2013) conducted research on integrating formal and informal education systems for quality and sustainable education in Nigeria. The study examined the potential for combining formal and informal education systems in Nigeria to enhance the quality of education. Based on interviews and observations, the research underscored the importance of integrating both systems to address the limitations of the formal system and enable a more holistic educational experience. Similarly, Ojo, and Olaoye, (2014) did research on sustainable education development through synergy between formal and non-formal education in Nigeria. The study investigated the potential benefits of synergy between formal and non-formal education in Nigeria for sustainable education development. The research emphasized that combining both curricula can bridge gaps, increase educational access and quality, and facilitate inclusive education, particularly for marginalized and disadvantaged learners.

Moreover, Nwagwu, and Nlerum, (2016) studied the implications of synergy between formal and informal education in Nigerian National Development. The study examined the potential contributions of integrating formal and informal education systems in Nigeria to promote national development. Having employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches, the study highlighted the need for a harmonized curriculum that incorporates relevant informal knowledge and skills to address contemporary challenges and promote sustainable development. Nevertheless, Adetula, and Dele-Ojo, (2018) investigated the marriage between formal and informal education and their possibilities for quality education in Nigeria. This study explored the potential implications of synergizing formal and informal education in Nigeria to enhance the quality of education. The research emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing informal learning, integrating it into the formal education system, and ensuring teacher preparedness, curriculum relevance, and community involvement for sustainable education development.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, two forms of education co-exist; the formal and non-formal. Each aims to develop human capacity to live a functional life for overall national growth and development. However, it seemed there was no synergy between these forms of education based on the predication that students or graduates of one form of education are not considered fit for the other and are not formally considered fit for employment in some or many official sectors of the economy. This affects the employability of the graduates especially in the contemporary times where the job is becoming scarcer and more inadequate in the country. This caused many graduates to remain as job seekers instead of being job creators due to lack of some skills that make them either employable or job creators. This lack of job creates a lot of tensions in the nation at large and results in to unwanted acts of insecurity and banditry among graduates which threatens the peaceful atmosphere of the country at large. There is therefore, the need to create synergy between these forms of education so that people could be provided with necessary knowledge, skills and technical know-how to enable them be employable in the scarce job opportunities or become job creators for self-reliance, and overall economic growth and development in Nigeria.

Objectives

The objectives of this paper are to:

1. Expatiate the nature and objectives of formal and informal education in Nigeria
2. Explain the rationales for synergizing the formal and informal education in Nigeria
3. Discuss the strategies for synergizing the formal and informal education curricula in Nigeria
4. Highlight the challenges associated with the process of the synergy

The Nature and Objectives of Formal Education

According to the UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED, 2011), formal education comprises different levels, including primary education, secondary education, and higher education. It is designed to provide individuals with a comprehensive and structured foundation of knowledge across various subjects, ensuring a broad base of skills and competencies. Oliha (2019) contends that in a formal education setting, students typically progress through a predefined sequence of subjects and grade levels, gradually acquiring knowledge and skills in a hierarchical and cumulative manner.

The National Policy on Education (2013) highlights that the primary education is compulsory and the foundation of the education system, while tertiary education includes universities, polytechnics, and colleges offering various degree programs. According to Adeyemi, Bello and Oluwole (2015), formal education is guided by the following features or characteristics:

- a. Structured curriculum. Formal education in Nigeria follows a well-defined curriculum that outlines the subjects, topics, and learning outcomes to be achieved at each level of education.
- b. Certification. Formal education provides certification in the form of academic qualifications or degrees upon successful completion of the prescribed requirements.
3. Standardized assessments: Assessments are an integral part of formal education in Nigeria, with standardized examinations administered at different levels to evaluate students' knowledge and skills.
- c. Teacher-led instruction. Formal education is typically teacher-led, with educators delivering instruction in classrooms and students engaging in learning activities under their guidance.
- d. Learning institutions and infrastructure. Formal education takes place in learning institutions such as schools and colleges, supported by appropriate infrastructure including classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and other facilities required for effective teaching and learning.

Similarly, Adeyemi, Bello and Oluwole (2015) buttressed that formal education aims at achieving the following objectives:

- i. Provision of standard and comprehensive body of knowledge in various subjects and disciplines to all categories of students in Nigeria.
- ii. Skill development. Formal education aims to equip students with a range of skills, including critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and technical skills, necessary for personal and professional development.
- iii. Character building. Formal education in Nigeria also aims to develop the character of students, instilling values such as discipline, integrity, and a sense of responsibility.
- iv. Preparation for higher education. Another objective of formal education is to prepare students for higher education by providing them with the necessary foundation and qualifying them for admission into tertiary institutions.

- v. Preparation for employment. Formal education also seeks to prepare students for the workforce by providing them with the skills and knowledge required for employment in various sectors of the economy.

The Nature and Objectives of Informal Education

Informal education occurs in everyday life situations and can be voluntary, self-directed, and based on personal interests and experiences (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). According to them, informal education possesses certain characteristics such as:

- a. Flexibility. Informal education is flexible, allowing individuals to learn at their own pace and according to their specific needs and interests.
- b. Non-structured: Unlike formal education, informal education does not follow a pre-determined syllabus or curriculum. It is based on individual choices and can occur in various settings such as homes, workplaces, communities, or online platforms.
- c. Diverse sources. Informal education draws knowledge and information from a wide range of sources, including books, media, the internet, mentors, role models, peers, and personal experiences.
- d. Experiential learning. Informal education emphasizes hands-on and experiential learning, enabling individuals to learn by doing, reflecting, and applying knowledge in practical situations.
- e. Non-certification. Unlike formal education, informal education does not provide recognized certifications or degrees. It is focused on personal growth and development rather than formal qualifications.

Further, Colley, Hodkinson, and Malcolm (2003) as well as Marsick and Watkins (2001) emphasized that informal education seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- a. Promotion of lifelong learning. Informal education aims to promote continuous learning throughout a person's life, encouraging them to acquire new knowledge and skills beyond formal education.
- b. Enhancing real-world application. Informal education focuses on practical and hands-on learning, emphasizing the application of knowledge and skills in real-life situations.
- c. Fostering personal development. Informal education aims to foster personal growth and development by enhancing self-awareness, self-confidence, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.
- d. Building community engagement. Informal education aims to build strong communities by encouraging individuals to share knowledge, resources, and experiences with others.
- e. Cultural preservation. Informal education plays a crucial role in preserving and transmitting cultural traditions, heritage, and values from one generation to another.

Rationales for Creating and Improving Synergy Between the Formal and Informal Education Sectors in Nigeria

Creating synergy between the formal and informal education sectors in curriculum design has a lot of benefits. These have been illustrated by Ogbeba and Onasanya (2019), Oliha (2019) and Ukeje and Eze (2022) as follows:

1. It allows for a more holistic approach to learning. Formal education provides the structured environment and academic knowledge, while informal education adds real-world experiences and practical application of that knowledge. This combination gives learners a more comprehensive and meaningful learning experience.
2. It helps learners see the relevance of what they are learning to real-life situations. It bridges the gap between theoretical concepts taught in formal education and practical application in everyday life. This connection can increase learner engagement and motivation.
3. It provides flexibility in the curriculum design. It allows for the inclusion of diverse learning experiences, including hands-on activities, field trips, guest speakers, internships, and project-based learning. This variety caters to different learning styles and enables learners to develop a wide range of skills.
4. It fosters critical thinking and problem-solving. By integrating formal and informal education, learners are exposed to different perspectives and approaches to problem-solving. Formal education provides a strong foundation of critical thinking skills, while informal education encourages learners to think creatively and independently. Combining these two approaches encourages learners to develop a more well-rounded approach to problem-solving.
5. It gives room in cultivating a culture of lifelong learning. Learners are encouraged to continue learning beyond the formal classroom setting, exploring new knowledge and skills independently. This integration instils a desire for continuous personal and professional development, preparing learners for the rapidly changing world.
6. It enhances personal growth and self-directed learning. Informal education encourages learners to take responsibility for their own learning and pursue their interests. By integrating formal and informal education, learners can develop self-directed learning skills, such as setting goals, seeking resources, and reflecting on their own progress. This self-directed learning approach fosters personal growth and empowers learners to become independent and lifelong learners.
7. It promotes creativity and innovation. Integrating formal and informal education encourages learners to think creatively and innovate. Informal education provides opportunities for hands-on experimentation, exploration, and expression, which can stimulate learners' creativity. Formal education complements this by providing the necessary knowledge and skills to channel that creativity into meaningful solutions to real-world problems.

Strategies for Creating Synergy Between the Formal and Informal Education in Curriculum Design in Nigeria

According to Oliha (2019), Ukeje and Eze (2020), the following are the major strategies for creating and enhancing synergy between the formal and informal education in Nigeria:

- i. Promoting learner autonomy. Empowering learners to take ownership of their learning experiences, by encouraging them to engage with informal educational resources and incorporate them into their formal education.
- ii. Recognizing and valuing prior knowledge and experiences. Acknowledging the expertise and experiences learners bring from their informal learning, and aligning them with the formal curriculum to create meaningful connections and enhance learning outcomes.
- iii. Implementing flexible learning pathways. Allowing learners to choose different learning pathways, which can include a combination of formal and informal educational experiences, taking into consideration individual needs, interests, and learning styles.
- iv. Leveraging technology-enabled learning tools. Utilizing digital technologies and online platforms to facilitate interaction and collaboration between formal and informal learning environments, fostering a seamless integration of both modalities.

Challenges Associated with the Synergy

Some significant challenges that are potential in demystifying the synergy between the formal and informal education systems in Nigeria as observed by Ogbeba and Onasanya (2019), Oliha (2019) and Ukeje and Eze (2020) include:

- a. lack of recognition and assessment of informal learning,
- b. limited resources,
- c. resistance from traditional educational institutions,
- d. inadequate funding,
- e. infrastructural deficiencies,
- f. overcrowded classrooms,
- g. insufficient teaching resources, and
- h. persistent mismatch between educational outcomes and the demands of the labor market.

Conclusion

It is worth concluding that improving synergy between the formal and informal education curricular in educational technology brings enormous impact in equipping students with relevant skills that could transform them from job seekers to job creators for self-employment, self-reliance and for contribution to overall national economic growth and development. Thus, the paper examined the strategies for improving synergy between the formal and informal education in curriculum design such as leveraging educational

technologies, integrating informal learning experiences into formal curricula, fostering collaboration and partnerships, and promoting learner-centred approaches to instruction. Further, the paper justified the benefits of employing the strategies in bridging the gaps between the formal and informal education sectors such as enhancing learner engagement, enhancing learner motivation, promoting lifelong learning, fostering critical thinking skills, and facilitating the application of knowledge in real-world contexts. Moreover, the challenges bedevilling the synergical processes were duly examined and these include lack of recognition and assessment of informal learning, limited resources, and potential resistance from traditional educational institutions.

Recommendations

In view of the foregoing challenges, this paper recommends the need for:

1. Governments at all levels to leverage on educational technologies in order to enhance concretization of learning experiences, critical thinking and problem solving among the students of both formal and informal settings.
2. Integrating informal learning experiences into formal education curricula so that the students could be equipped with both knowledge and necessary skills to be able to employ themselves after graduation and even employ others,
3. Fostering collaboration and partnerships between educational institutions and informal learning centres/providers to come up with better approaches or models of operation.
4. Promoting learner-centred approaches to instruction in the integrated learning educational institutions.
5. For proper recognition of these forms of education and standard assessment of informal learning.
6. Provision of adequate human, material and other technical resources for effective teaching delivery and enhance learning in the institutions.
7. Making orientations and awareness campaigns on the need to have synergy between the two systems of education so as to avoid resistance from the side of the traditional educational institutions.
8. Adequate funding of the institutions.
9. Provision of adequate infrastructural and instructional facilities.
10. Provision of adequate classrooms that could translate to proper student-teacher ratio

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