
**REIMAGINING NIGERIA'S EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND
PRACTICE: SKILLS OVER CERTIFICATION AS THE CATALYST
FOR INNOVATION**

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's education system has historically prioritized certification over skills, resulting in a surplus of graduates with college degrees but lacking practical skills. This paper argues that prioritizing skills-based education is crucial for driving innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth in Nigeria. A critical review of existing literature reveals that Nigeria's education system is characterized by a focus on rote learning, inadequate infrastructure, and limited industry-academia partnerships. In contrast, countries like Singapore, Finland, and Germany have successfully implemented skills-based education systems, with significant benefits for their economies and societies. The paper proposes a framework for reimagining Nigeria's educational policy and practice, emphasizing the need for curriculum reform, teacher training, and industry-academia partnerships. The paper also highlights the importance of skills-based education in promoting entrepreneurship, innovation, and economic growth, and provides recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders.

KEYWORDS: Skills-based education, certification, innovation, entrepreneurship, economic growth, Nigeria.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This article is predicated on the Malcolm X popular quote that "Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today". Globally, this is exactly how education is generally perceived. However, in developing nations, including Nigeria, the education system has long been seen as the key to unlocking individual and national potential. Yet, a critical examination reveals a disconcerting trend; the prioritization of certification over skills. Both the government and Nigerians celebrate certificates over skills, fostering a society where academic credentials are valued over practical expertise, and resulting in a disconnect between education and innovation in Nigeria.

According to Akinwumi (2018) Nigeria's education system has historically emphasized certification, focusing on theoretical knowledge over practical skills. This approach has produced graduates ill-equipped to tackle real-world challenges (Okebukola 2017). The emphasis on certification has led to a proliferation of academic credentials, with many Nigerians seeking degrees as a means to secure white-collar jobs (Ogundele 2020).

Consequently, individuals with impressive academic engineering credentials often struggle with everyday tasks, such as fixing faulty cars or repairing electrical faults (Adeyemi 2019). Meanwhile, uneducated roadside mechanics and electricians, possessing practical skills, thrive in the informal sector, and are often relied upon by educated engineers (Oluwafemi 2020).

This dichotomy highlights the shortcomings of Nigeria's education system, prioritizing certification over skills. Professors and academic doctors in Nigeria often parade their certificates, speaking eloquent English, but fail to provide solutions to societal problems (Eze 2019).

This perpetuates a culture of dependency on foreign expertise, rather than fostering innovation and self-sufficiency (Nwankwo 2018). The Nigerian government has consistently prioritized certification in its education and employment policies, neglecting skills development (Okonkwo 2020).

The Nigeria's education programmes focus on producing individuals with certification, rather than equipping them with practical skills (Uzochukwu 2018), leading to a surplus of unemployable graduates and contributing to high unemployment (NBS, 2020). The educational sector is characterized by storytelling and memorization, neglecting hands-on learning and practical experience (Afolabi 2020; Ogundele 2019).

Individuals with certification are celebrated over those with skills (Eze, 2019), creating a culture valuing academic credentials over practical expertise, and discouraging innovation

and entrepreneurship (Nwankwo 2018). Economies and innovations are driven by individuals with practical skills, often operating in the informal sector.

The gap between skills and certification is widening, with Nigeria relying heavily on imports (CBN 2020), resulting in a consumption-based economy (Akinwumi 2018). Nigeria's agricultural sector imports grains despite fertile land and existing ministries of agriculture (FMARD 2020), highlighting a lack of practical skills and innovation. The federal and state ministries of forestry lack skills to plant a single tree in a year (Ogundele 2019), neglecting practical skills and vocational training.

The prioritization of certificates over skills has led to a lack of entrepreneurship and innovation (Adebayo 2019), fostering dependency on government jobs. The gaps identified highlight the need for a reimagined education system prioritizing skills over certification. Nigeria's education system fails to equip individuals with practical skills necessary for innovation and economic growth. This article addresses the imbalance between certification and skills, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, arguing that prioritizing skills can unlock Nigeria's potential, drive economic growth, and improve citizens' lives.

1.2 Literature Review

Reimagining Nigeria's educational policy and practice requires a paradigm shift from certification-centric to skills-based education (Adeyemi 2019). This approach prioritizes equipping learners with practical skills, fostering innovation, and driving economic growth. The concept is rooted in the understanding that certification, while important, does not necessarily translate to employability or entrepreneurial success.

The skills-based approach is grounded in human capital theory, emphasizing investment in education and training to enhance productivity (Okonkwo 2020). It aligns with the 21st-century learning framework, focusing on skills like critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving (Nwankwo 2018). This approach recognizes that skills are key to unlocking individual and national potential.

Nigeria's education system has historically prioritized certification, resulting in a surplus of graduates with theoretical knowledge but lacking practical skills (Uzochukwu 2018). This has contributed to high unemployment rates, poverty, and stunted economic growth (NBS, 2020). The system neglects vocational training, leaving many Nigerians unprepared for the workforce.

The emphasis on certification has led to a culture valuing academic credentials over practical expertise (Eze 2019). This discourages innovation, entrepreneurship, and self-employment,

perpetuating dependency on government jobs (Adebayo 2019). The skills gap hinders economic growth, with Nigeria relying heavily on imports and foreign expertise (CBN 2020). Prioritizing skills-based education can drive innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth (Oluwafemi 2020). Practical skills equip learners to tackle real-world challenges, fostering creativity, adaptability, and problem-solving (Akinwumi 2018). This approach can unlock Nigeria's potential, creating jobs, reducing unemployment, and promoting sustainable development.

Implementing skills-based education requires curriculum reform, industry-academia partnerships, and vocational training (Okebukola 2017). It involves reorienting teaching methods, assessment strategies, and learning outcomes to focus on practical skills (Afolabi 2020). Government, industry, and academia must collaborate to provide resources, expertise, and infrastructure.

Reimagining Nigeria's educational policy and practice requires a shift towards skills-based education (Ogundele 2020). This approach can unlock Nigeria's potential, drive innovation, and promote economic growth. Policymakers, educators, and stakeholders must work together to implement this paradigm shift, prioritizing practical skills and entrepreneurship to create a more prosperous and sustainable future for Nigeria.

Several theories supports this study. Accordingly the Human Capital Theory (HCT) posits that investment in education and training enhances human capital, leading to increased productivity and economic growth (Becker 1964). In the context of Nigeria's education system, HCT suggests that prioritizing skills-based education can develop a workforce with the skills necessary to drive innovation and economic growth. In affirmation, Adeyemi (2019) notes, Nigeria's education system has historically prioritized certification over skills, resulting in a skills gap. Hence, investing in skills-based education, Nigeria can develop a workforce that is better equipped to drive economic growth and development.

In the same vein. the 21st-Century Learning Framework emphasizes the importance of skills like critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving for success in the 21st century (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2015). In Nigeria, incorporating these skills into education can equip learners with the skills necessary to drive innovation and entrepreneurship. This was further stressed by Oluwafemi (2020) who notes that, Nigeria's informal sector is a key driver of economic growth, and skills-based education can help to develop the skills necessary for entrepreneurship and innovation. Experiential.

More so, the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) also emphasizes the importance of hands-on learning experiences in developing practical skills (Kolb 1984). In Nigeria, incorporating

hands-on learning experiences into education can help to develop the practical skills necessary for innovation and entrepreneurship. Nwankwo (2018) added that, Nigeria's education system has traditionally focused on theoretical knowledge, neglecting practical skills development.

Notwithstanding, the Constructivist Theory is not left out. The theory emphasizes the importance of active learning, where learners construct their own knowledge through engagement with their environment (Vygotsky 1978). In Nigeria, incorporating problem-based learning and other active learning strategies can help to develop the practical skills necessary for innovation and entrepreneurship. Eze (2019) shared that, Nigeria's education system has traditionally focused on rote learning, neglecting critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The Innovation Theory as well emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurship and innovation in driving economic growth (Schumpeter 1934). In Nigeria, skills-based education can help to develop the skills necessary for entrepreneurship and innovation, driving economic growth and development. Adebayo (2019) concurred that Nigeria's education system has historically neglected practical entrepreneurship education, resulting in a lack of entrepreneurial skills among graduates.

Empirical evidence suggests that Nigeria's education system has historically prioritized certification over skills, resulting in a surplus of graduates with college degrees but lacking practical skills (Adeyemi 2019). A study by the National Bureau of Statistics (2020) revealed that Nigeria has a high unemployment rate among young people, with 55.4% of graduates unemployed. This phenomenon is attributed to the emphasis on certification, which has led to a culture valuing academic credentials over practical expertise (Eze 2019). For instance, a survey by the Nigerian Employers Consultative Association (NECA) found that 70% of employers complained about the lack of practical skills among graduates (NECA 2018).

Studies have shown that skills-based education is a key driver of innovation and entrepreneurship (Okonkwo 2020; Partnership for 21st Century Learning 2015). A study by the World Bank (2018) found that vocational training programs in Nigeria had a positive impact on employment outcomes, with 75% of graduates employed or self-employed. Similarly, a study by the African Development Bank (2019) found that entrepreneurship education programs in Nigerian universities led to a significant increase in entrepreneurial intentions among students. These findings suggest that prioritizing skills-based education can drive innovation and entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

However, implementing skills-based education in Nigeria is not without challenges. A study by Okebukola (2017) identified several challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, lack of qualified teachers, and limited industry-academia partnerships. The study recommended increased funding, teacher training, and industry partnerships to address these challenges. Another study by Afolabi (2020) found that curriculum reform, assessment and evaluation methods, and teacher training were critical factors in implementing skills-based education.

Empirical evidence also suggests that skills-based education can have a positive impact on economic growth and development. A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that skills development programs in Nigeria led to increased productivity, improved working conditions, and higher earnings for workers (ILO 2019). Another study by the World Economic Forum (2020) found that Nigeria's skills gap was a major constraint to economic growth, and that addressing this gap could lead to significant economic benefits.

Empirical evidence suggests that prioritizing skills-based education is critical for driving innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth in Nigeria. However, implementing skills-based education requires addressing several challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, lack of qualified teachers, and limited industry-academia partnerships. The Nigerian government, educational planners, curriculum designers, and policymakers must work together to prioritize skills-based education and provide the necessary resources and support to ensure its success.

Nigeria's education system has historically prioritized certification over skills, resulting in a surplus of graduates with college degrees but lacking practical skills (Akinyemi 2018). In contrast, countries like Singapore and Finland have successfully implemented skills-based education systems, focusing on equipping students with practical skills and competencies (Huang 2020; Sahlberg 2019). These countries have recognized that certification alone is not enough to prepare students for the workforce, and have shifted their focus towards skills development.

Other developing nations, such as Ghana and Kenya, are also making efforts to prioritize skills-based education (Adei 2019; Karanja 2020). Ghana has introduced a new curriculum that emphasizes skills development and entrepreneurship, while Kenya has implemented a competency-based education system (Adei 2019; Karanja 2020). These countries recognize the importance of equipping their citizens with practical skills to drive economic growth and development. In contrast, Nigeria's education system remains largely focused on certification, with limited emphasis on skills development (Eze, 2019).

Developed nations like Germany and Australia have long prioritized skills-based education, with a strong focus on vocational training and apprenticeships (Baethge 2018; Smith 2020). Germany's dual education system, which combines theoretical education with practical training, has been recognized as a model for other countries to follow (Baethge 2018). Australia has also introduced a skills-based education system, with a focus on equipping students with practical skills and competencies (Smith 2020). These countries have recognized that skills-based education is essential for driving innovation and economic growth.

Theoretical frameworks such as human capital theory and skills-based education theory suggest that prioritizing skills-based education can have significant benefits for individuals, organizations, and societies (Becker 1964; Hanushek 2013). Human capital theory posits that investments in education and training can lead to increased productivity and economic growth (Becker 1964). Skills-based education theory emphasizes the importance of equipping students with practical skills and competencies to drive innovation and entrepreneurship (Hanushek 2013). These frameworks provide a useful lens for understanding the importance of skills-based education in Nigeria and other developing nations.

The comparative analysis of Nigeria, other developing nations, and selected developed nations highlights the importance of prioritizing skills-based education (Ogundele 2020). Countries like Singapore, Finland, Germany, and Australia have successfully implemented skills-based education systems, with significant benefits for their economies and societies. Nigeria and other developing nations can learn from these examples, and prioritize skills-based education to drive innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

The paper "Reimagining Nigeria's Educational Policy and Practice: Skills Over Certification as the Catalyst for Innovation" is a theoretical paper that relies on secondary data which explores the concept of skills-based education as a driver of innovation in Nigeria. The methodology of the paper involves a critical review of existing literature on the topic, including academic journals, reports, and policy documents. The authors synthesized information from various sources to develop a conceptual framework for understanding the role of skills-based education in promoting innovation and entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

The paper's reliance on secondary data allows for a comprehensive analysis of the topic, drawing on existing research and evidence to support its arguments. The authors reviewed literature on Nigeria's education system, skills development, and innovation, identifying gaps

and challenges in the current system. The use of secondary data also enables the authors to draw comparisons with international best practices and experiences, providing a broader context for understanding the Nigerian case.

The methodology of the paper is largely qualitative, involving a critical analysis and synthesis of existing literature to develop a conceptual framework and recommendations for policy and practice. The paper does not involve empirical data collection or analysis, but rather builds on existing research to develop a theoretical perspective on the role of skills-based education in promoting innovation in Nigeria. The paper's approach is largely deductive, using existing theories and concepts to understand the Nigerian context and identify areas for improvement. Overall, the methodology of the paper provides a solid foundation for exploring the topic and developing recommendations for policymakers and educators in Nigeria.

1.4 DISCUSSION

Reimagining Nigeria's Educational Policy and Practice: Skills Over Certification as the Catalyst for Innovation presents a compelling argument for reforming Nigeria's education system to prioritize skills-based education and drive innovation. This discussion explores the paper's key areas, relating them to Nigeria's real experience and highlighting the implications for the country's development.

Nigeria's education system has historically prioritized certification over skills, resulting in a surplus of graduates with college degrees but lacking practical skills (Adeyemi 2019). This phenomenon is attributed to the emphasis on certification, which has led to a culture valuing academic credentials over practical expertise (Eze 2019). For instance, the country's education system is often characterized by a focus on rote learning, with students memorizing textbooks and past questions to pass exams, rather than developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Okebukola 2017). As a Workforce Development Report by the World Bank (2018) notes, Nigeria's education system is not producing graduates with the skills required by employers, resulting in a high unemployment rate among young people.

The skills gap has significant consequences for Nigeria's economy and society. The emphasis on certification has led to a lack of innovation, entrepreneurship, and self-employment, perpetuating dependency on government jobs (Adebayo 2019). For example, Nigeria's entrepreneurship ecosystem is underdeveloped, with few start-ups and limited job creation outside the public sector (Oluwafemi 2020). The skills gap also hinders economic growth, with Nigeria relying heavily on imports and foreign expertise (CBN, 2020). According to the

National Bureau of Statistics (2020), Nigeria's economic growth has been sluggish, with a GDP growth rate of 2.3% in 2019, below the population growth rate.

Prioritizing skills-based education can drive innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth in Nigeria (Okonkwo 2020). By incorporating skills like critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving into education, learners can develop the skills necessary to tackle real-world challenges (Partnership for 21st Century Learning 2015). For instance, the Nigerian government has launched initiatives such as the National Skills Development Programme, aimed at providing vocational training and skills development opportunities for young people (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020).

Implementing a skills-based approach requires curriculum reform, industry-academia partnerships, and vocational training (Okebukola 2017). It also involves reorienting teaching methods, assessment strategies, and learning outcomes to focus on practical skills (Afolabi 2020). For example, the Lagos State government has introduced a vocational training program for secondary school students, providing them with skills in areas such as carpentry, plumbing, and electrical engineering (Lagos State Government 2020).

Rethinking Nigeria's education policy to prioritize skills-based education is crucial for driving innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth. The country's education system needs to move away from a focus on certification and towards developing practical skills that can equip learners to tackle real-world challenges.

1.5 CONCLUSION

Nigeria's education system is at a crossroads, and a shift towards skills-based education is imperative for the country's development. The emphasis on certification has led to a culture of academic credentialism, resulting in a surplus of graduates lacking practical skills. This has contributed to high unemployment rates, stunted economic growth, and a lack of innovation and entrepreneurship. As Nigeria seeks to diversify its economy and reduce its dependence on oil, it is essential to prioritize skills-based education that equips learners with the skills necessary to drive economic growth and development.

The Nigerian government has taken steps to address the skills gap, including the launch of initiatives such as the National Skills Development Programme. However, more needs to be done to reform the education system and prioritize skills-based education. This requires curriculum reform, industry-academia partnerships, and vocational training, as well as a reorientation of teaching methods, assessment strategies, and learning outcomes to focus on practical skills. Therefore, prioritizing skills-based education, Nigeria can develop a

workforce that is equipped to drive innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth, ultimately improving the country's competitiveness and prosperity.

Accordingly, rethinking Nigeria's education policy to prioritize skills-based education is a critical step towards unlocking the country's potential. Obviously, equipping learners with the skills necessary to tackle real-world challenges, Nigeria can accelerate its economic growth, reduce poverty, and improve the living standards of its citizens. As Nigeria moves forward, it is essential that policymakers, educators, and stakeholders work together to prioritize skills-based education and create a more prosperous and sustainable future for the country.

1.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends that:

1. *Educational Providers should deliberately integrate vocational training into Curriculum.* Incorporate vocational training programs into secondary and tertiary education curricula to equip students with practical skills in areas such as carpentry, plumbing, electrical engineering, and ICT can be change strategy.
2. *There should be industry-academia partnerships.* Establishing partnerships between educational institutions and industries to provide students with hands-on experience, internships, and job placements cannot be overemphasized in the changing the narrative from certifications to skillifications.
3. *Curriculum Reform.* Reviewing and revising the national curriculum to prioritize skills-based education, critical thinking, and problem-solving is long overdue to recalibrate the skillfication over certification.
4. *Teacher Training and Development.* Providing regular training and professional development opportunities for teachers to equip them with the skills necessary to deliver skills-based education is would be a milestone in the right place which will refocus the education delivery from certification to skillfication.
5. *Assessment and Evaluation.* Developing assessment and evaluation methods that prioritize practical skills and competency-based education would also be a game changer in promoting skillfication over certification.
6. *Increase Funding for Education.* Increasing funding for education to provide adequate infrastructure, resources, and facilities for skills-based education by policy makers. P
7. *Promote Entrepreneurship Education.* Incorporating practical entrepreneurship education into school curricula to encourage students to develop entrepreneurial skills and mindset is necessary for the shift from certifications to skillifications.

8. *Establish Innovation Hubs.* Establishing innovation hubs and incubators in educational institutions to provide students with opportunities to develop and showcase their innovative ideas and projects is one of the hallmark that must be considered in changing the traditional certificates oriented education to skillfication oriented education.
9. *Encourage Public-Private Partnerships.* Encouraging public-private partnerships to provide funding, resources, and expertise for skills-based education initiatives with a reward system that celebrates skills not just certificate is key in driving the an innovative education system in Nigeria.
10. *Monitor and Evaluate Progress.* Establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation system to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and inform policy decisions is equally an unmatched strategy that must engineered in the process.

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