

ACHIEVING THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs) THROUGH SKILLS ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT IN ACCOUNTING

NDIDIKA L. AKAMOBİ
*School of Business Education,
Federal College of Education (T),
Umunze.*

Abstract

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been accepted as targets for the international development efforts and as the standard for measuring the progress and effectiveness of development programmes. However, the achievement of these goals by the year 2015 poses great challenges. Poverty, for example, is a serious threat to the growth and development of developing countries. One major strategy of reducing poverty and diseases is the acquisition of needed skills, particularly, accounting skills. Accounting provides functional skills which can help to alleviate poverty, if not eradicate poverty.

Almost every rational human endeavour requires skills. As there are many different talents, there are also many skills. Skill is therefore not narrowed down to a specific area or field of endeavour. Humans are endowed by nature with multiplicity skills, all of which are being channeled towards solving numerous problems so that the world would be transformed into a better place of living. In support of the above assertion, Hubert and Dreyfus (2008) stated that many of our skills are acquired at an early age by trial and error or by imitation.

Skills can be acquired through formal and or informal education. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) cannot be attained in a “skilless” global environment. However, because it is possible to harness different human potentials/competencies in different parts of the world, from different occupations, vocations or professions, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), can then be a reality *ceteris paribus*. Olayinka and Hassan (2009) observed that the MDGs lay emphasis on the need for skill development in order to improve on the competencies and abilities of people. In this case, competency can be defined as demonstrable characteristics of a person, including knowledge, skills, and behaviours that enable performance. The U.S office of personnel management use competencies synonymously with the knowledge, skill or abilities required to do a job (Dessler, 2007).

Accounting skills or competencies cannot be acquired informally. There is need for formal education in this discipline before one can profess himself as an Accountant

or an expert in accounting. It is through formal education that accounting skills can be acquired and developed. Given the rapid rate of change in business world, the vast amount of information to be managed, and the influence of technology on life in general, accountants need to apply current skill sets as well as develop new skill sets so as to cope with this millennium. Dessler (2007) opined that the centre of gravity in employment is moving fast from manual and clerical to knowledge workers who resist the command and control model that business took from the military 100 years ago. This paper examines the possibility of achieving MDGs through skills acquisition and development in Accounting with emphasis being laid on Goal one (1) or item 1 of the MDGs. Recommendation were also proffered.

Skills Acquisition and Development in Accounting and the MDGs

The MDGs contain array of objectives to be achieved by 2015. Item one (1) of the MDGs was concerned with eradication of poverty and hunger with the following targets:

- (a) That by 2015 the proportion of people living on less than a Dollar a day will be reduced by 50 percent; and
- (b) The proportion of people who suffer from hunger will be reduced by 50 percent.

The emphasis on this paper is to use accounting competences/skills to attain the above stated objectives.

One major strategy for reducing poverty and disease is the acquisition of requisite skills that will 'challenge' poverty, particularly accounting skills. Flamholtz (1999) opined that an individual should possess a trilogy of technical, administrative and human interaction skills; Gupta and Chand (2006) were of the view that apart from the aforementioned skills, that an accountant should in addition possess conceptual skill.

Accounting is an information and measurement system that identifies, records and communicates relevant, reliable and comparable information about an organization's economic activities. Almost every human endeavour is business. Accountancy is therefore the hub and the heart of every business. Acquisition of accounting skills would help people to make better decisions, including assessing opportunities, products, investments as well as social and community responsibilities. Opportunities abound and accounting opens our eyes to new and existing possibilities. Often the greatest benefits from accounting come to those outside of accounting and business. Larson, Wild and Chiapetta (1999) stated that we can use accounting to make better investment decisions. They contended that we can use accounting Knowledge wherever we go and in whatever career we choose.

Achieving The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Through Skills Acquisition And Development In Accounting- Ndidika L. Akamobi

In order to meet up with the MDGs particularly items 1 as aforementioned, an accounting teacher needs to be trained and retrained so as to enable him acquire the necessary competencies that will make him to be proficient. In the UNESCO (1999) convention held on the Republic of South Korea, it was observed, among others, that future jobs will require more diverse vocational abilities and knowledge, calling for educational reforms and guaranteed system of life-long learning. UNESCO (1999) constructed four pillars upon which the future of education should rest. They are:

- i. Learning to know-knowledge
- ii. Learning to do-skill
- iii. Learning to live together-environment
- iv. Learning to be-survival.

The Accounting Education change commission (AECC, 1992) outlined the following goals of accounting education:

- i. A change from knowledge to process orientation
- ii. The development of skills and the strategies that help students to be more effective learners (and members of the society).
- iii. The promotion of an attitude of continual enquiry and life-long learning.

National Policy on Education (NPE) (2004) section 42 stated that the aim of technical and vocational education shall be to:

- (a) provide trained manpower in applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels;
- (b) provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, commercial and economic development.
- (c) give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically.

One can observe from the foregoing that emphasis is being laid on knowledge and skills acquisition for survival. This can be termed functional education; that is education that mainly seeks to help the recipient to grow in knowledge and skill.

Skills acquisition and development is necessary and sufficient for efficient functioning of the learner in the society. Skills development in accounting transcends beyond developing the capacity to learn basic skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing and calculation. It includes those skills that involve the use of hand and head together with those of observation, analysis, inference which are essential for sound decision making and entrepreneurial growth. Accounting as a 'school' subject is intended to inculcate in the learner intellectual and manipulative skills which will facilitate critical thinking, problem solving, research ability, creativity, human interaction and entrepreneurial abilities. In support of the above assertion, the Accounting Education change Commission (AECC) position statement Number one,

1992 Stated, inter alias, that learners and accounting practitioners need skills that go beyond accounting technical knowledge.

In order to eradicate poverty using accounting, learners should be taught the necessary skills so that they can be adequately equipped to face future challenges. Some of the accounting skills that are necessary for poverty alleviation (or eradication) are as follows:

1. **General Business Skills.** Training a learner in accounting means exposing the learner to different aspects of business and other areas of human endeavour and inculcating in him actual business skills necessary for his future life career. Rue and Byars (2003) described general business skills as conceptual skills which, according to them, involve understanding the relationship of the parts of the business to one another and to the business as a whole. This involves planning, decision making and organizing.
2. **Technical Skills.** These are specific abilities that people use to perform their jobs. Collection, interpretation and communication of data to the interested parties are some of the highly technical skills a learner should be taught should he go into practice as either an accountant, an auditor, be employed as an accountant elsewhere or be on his own.
3. **Human Relations Skills:** These involve understanding people and being able to work well with them. Forming partnerships or joint ventures with people or with other businesses require good human relations skills.

The above mentioned skills are necessary and sufficient for combating poverty through accounting. Accounting is a skilled subject and poverty cannot be eradicated or alleviated in a “skillless” economy. In other words, accounting skills provide entrepreneurial skills and employable skills necessary for one to be a functional member of the society

Strategies for Teaching of Skills in Accounting

Different strategies can be adopted to stimulate the learners’ interest in accounting. These strategies include:

- i. Teaching techniques and methods,
- ii. The use of instructional materials
- iii. Assessment and evaluation.

Teaching Techniques/Methods

Teaching methods are the techniques, procedures, approaches adopted by the teacher so as to make learning effective. Olayinka and Hassan (2009) defined teaching methods as the tools used in order to attain specific instructional objectives. Meziobi (1994) defined teaching methods as the broad or general way in which knowledge, content, concepts, skills, competencies, etc, are acquired by learners through the

guidance of the teacher or the cooperative efforts of the teacher and the learner. The use of various teaching methods by the teacher exposes the learner to the subject matter and the same time gives him an insight of the necessary skills.

A teacher of accounting skills may use complementary model where two types of teaching methods or techniques are used to make instruction functional. The learner is provided with technical information which will be followed by practical work. This model may take the form of demonstration and practice model as well as observation and practice model. In the former, students are allowed to apply acquired skills in planning and problem solving under the supervision of the teacher. This provides the learners with the opportunity to listen to the teacher, observe activities, ask and answer relevant questions on the topic. In the latter, the teacher demonstrates the task while the learner observes. Thereafter, the learner puts into practice what he has observed under the supervision of the teacher, the teacher later evaluates the learner based on the skill he has acquired. This gives the learner the ability to develop functional skill using real materials and following step-by-step approach.

Use of Instructional Materials

Instructional materials are the materials, equipment and procedures to achieve the desired objectives in the teaching and learning of accounts. Olayinka and Hassan (2009) stated that instructional materials include instructional media and educational media, all of which are derived from information communication and technology (ICT) revolutions which are used to facilitate skills acquisition. The use of computer assisted programmed/packages in the teaching and learning of accounting as instructional materials may be referred to as 'instructional technology'. Durejaiye (2002) referred to instructional technology as 'extra educational factor' which if fully utilized, would bring about mechanized educational instruction which would enhance the teaching and learning of accounting skills.

It should be noted that the traditional model of skills acquisition and development cannot assist the learner to acquire the necessary accounting skills. For instance, learning by imitation model cannot assist the learner to acquire the necessary information needed in any skill before observing and learning the skill (Olaitan, Igbo, Onyemachi, Nwachukwu and Ekong, 1999). Also, the use of directed learning model inhibits information on the reason why an action is taken or a skill is learnt in a way it is practiced.

The use of instructional materials clarifies misconceptions on the topic in question and help drive the message home. It gives the learner the opportunity to ask certain questions on why certain postings are made or decisions taken and the possible implications.

Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment is done in order to ascertain whether the objectives set are achieved while evaluation is used to determine the extent to which the set objectives due are achieved. The teacher of accounts has to ensure that the learner acquires the necessary skills and knowledge of the subject matter at every level of study.

Implications of Accounting Skills on Millenniums Development Goals

The MDGs have been widely accepted as target for the international development efforts and as the standard for measuring the progress and effectiveness of development programmes. While these goals have been accepted as the international benchmark for development, the achievement of the MDGs by the year 2015 posses' great challenges. Poverty, for instance, is a canker worm which has eaten deep into our national development. The country is poor, so to say, and the citizens are poor amid plenty. Is the country poor?

Accounting skills are needed for efficient accountability especially in the public sector (Daniel, 1999). Acquisition and, efficient application of these skills would help to check the excesses of fraudulent and unscrupulous political office holders who have plunged the country and her citizen into poverty.

Accounting skills enhance entrepreneurial development. Agomuo (2001) observed that an entrepreneur is not just a manager who receives remuneration like any other workers; rather he or she is the founder of the business whose reward for undertaking innovation and risk of capital is profit. Hogett (1982) stated that an entrepreneur should posses the following attributes: technical competence, mental ability, human relation skills, high achievement drive and creativity. Osuala (1993) stated that the valuable skills needed by the entrepreneur can be learnt through trial and error, but most of the errors can be eliminated by education.

The bulk of all the skills an accountant should posses could be reduced into two: Entrepreneurial skills and employability skills. Entrepreneurial skills enable an accountant to be on his own, be an employer of labour and a manager of a prosperous business. By being an employer of labour, an accountant has contributed immensely towards poverty reduction or eradication. An accountant is always needed by organizations, be it private or public due to the numerous skills he/she possesses. A "skilled" accountant is an asset to any organization and to himself. His contributions to any organization make the organization to be prosperous while the income he earns by being employed can push him out of the poverty line or trap.

The society can gain a lot from skilled accountants. They (society) can be advised on how to take loans and to utilize the loans or invest the loans collected. For

instance, accountants can advise a group of people to form cooperative society by pulling their resources together. It is assumed that if the members act in good faith and work very hard, that the returns from their investment would be tremendous enough to remove them from poverty

Conclusion

Almost every rational human endeavour requires skills. Skills can be acquired through formal and or informal education. However, accounting skills or competencies cannot be acquired informally. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) cannot be attained without accounting skills. The Millennium Development Goals lay emphasis on the need for skills development. The MDGS contained an array of objectives to be achieved by 2015; among which was the eradication of poverty and hunger. One major strategy for reducing poverty and diseases is the acquisition of accounting skills. Accounting skills are numerous and they provide entrepreneurial and employability skills to the recipients which also affect the society favourably. If this course is made compulsory at senior secondary school and tertiary levels, it is hoped, *ceteris paribus*, that poverty will be drastically reduced

Recommendations

Accounting should be made compulsory in schools. It should be made compulsory at the senior secondary and tertiary levels. It should be incorporated as a “compulsory” ancillary course for those who are not specializing in the course.

There should be public enlightenment programmes on the importance of accounting to the society. Poverty cannot be alleviated without proper management of the revenue generated. Individuals cannot remove themselves from the shackles of poverty when they cannot plan. There is no execution of an unplanned action. Accounting is the answer to all these problems.

Most people could not make any viable investment due to lack of expert advice. This is one of the major causes of business failure. The public should therefore be encouraged to seek the advice of professional accountants before they should make investments. Furthermore, the inability of most people to get loans from banks is not necessarily due to lack of collaterals but mainly due to lack of expert advice. Some micro finance banks, for instance, do not attach much importance on collaterals but on the viability of the projects the loans were taken for. A viable project can easily pay back the loan taken, create employment and at the same time make some returns to the investor(s)

References

- AECC (1992). Objectives of education for accountants. *Education Review* no 18. Sept/October p16.
- Agomuo, E.E (2001). Entrepreneurship life model for civil servants for working period and retirement. Public lecture delivered at Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze. March. p.5
- Daniel, G.I (1999). *Public Sectors Accounting* Zaria. Ahmadu Bello university press.
- Dressler, T. (2007). *Human Resource Management*. New Delhi. Prentice Hall.
- Durojaiye, M.A (2002). Moving Instructional Technology forward in the 21st century in *Technology Educational Advancement* Lagos State University Publications.
- Flamholtz, E.G (1999). *Human Resource Accounting: Advances in Concepts, Method and Applications* (5ed). New York Kluwar Academic Publishers.
- FRN (2004). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos. NERDC publishers.
- Gupta, R.N & Chand, .S (2006). *Business Organization and Management*: New Delhi. S. Chand and Company Publishers.
- Hodgetts, I (1982). *Effective Small Business Management*. New York . Academic Press.
- Hubert C & Dryfus, S. (2008). *Apprenticeship and Learning to become an expert*. WWW. Angel fire. Com/ks/learning /skill hubertstuart dryfils. htm.
- Larson, K.D, wild, J.J & chiapetta, B (1999). *Fundamental Accounting Principles* (15thed). New York Irwin and McGraw Hill.
- Meziobi, K.A (1994). Social Studies Education and National Building. *Concerns and Insights in social studies in Nigeria*. Onitsha. Out right publishers.
- Olaitan, S.O, Igbo, C.A Onyemachi, G.A, Nwachukwu, C.E & Ekong, A.O (1999). *Current Development and Management in Vocational Technical Education*: Owerri. Cape Publishers.

Achieving The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Through Skills Acquisition And Development In Accounting- Ndidika L. Akamobi

Olayunka, I.S & Hassan, A.K (2009). Modern Approaches and Trends of Teaching and Learning of Skill Acquisition In Social Studies. *Journal of Childhood and Primary Education*. 6(2): 178.

Osuala, E.C (1993). *Principles and Practice of Small Business Management in Nigeria*. Nsukka. Fulld Publishers.

UNESCO (1999). Second International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education Report. 8 (1): 10 April.