

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR ACHIEVING MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs)

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Abstract

Every responsible citizen either works or needs to work. Those that are not working are either being prepared for work or are terribly disabled. The policies and systems of each nation continue to be dynamic as determined by her socio-economic political and technological needs. This makes old systems to become inapplicable, old skills to become either obsolete or redundant, new technologies to emerge, human element require new skills, new attitudes and most importantly new orientation. All these are directed towards achieving a particular target for development. This paper shall examine the necessity of functional vocational education in the Universal Basic Education scheme to enable Nigeria achieve the Millennium Development Goals and some recommendations were made.

Faced with the realities of the economy, the Federal Government of Nigeria has put in place a system of education which is aimed at making education more result-oriented, more technical and vocational, creative and innovative. It targets new

orientation, new spirit and new determination with the aim of making Nigerian youths self-confident. The self-confidence is geared towards ushering each youth into the world of work. This is the overall idea of Universal Basic Education (UBE).

Universal Basic Education (UBE) is an educational scheme for Nigerian youth which is aimed at producing a work force which becomes self-employable early enough at the end of Junior Secondary School. This is with the intention to reduce the problem of unemployment and idle school drop-outs.

This paper intends to emphasize the urgent need for an effective, functional vocational education in the Universal Basic Education (UBE). This will ensure the targeted achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria.

The Concept of Universal Basic Education (UBE)

The Universal Basic Education Scheme will better be explained in three segments: Universal refers to the people irrespective of age, status, ethnic group or gender. The second segment; Basic calls to mind the root, foundation on which the rest is built. Education refers to the systematic presentation of learning experiences with the aim of preparing or developing the body, mind and mental faculty to meet up with expected challenges of life.

Universal Basic Education therefore can be summed up to mean a fundamental training of all categories of people without a fee. Mbuk (2008) acknowledge this when she wrote that education is a total sum of activities carried out through instruction in order to train the mind and body of the recipient to understand his culture and be equipped to function well in a challenging environment.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) as a reform programme has the following features.

1. Free formal education
 2. Compulsory, uninterrupted nine years of primary and junior secondary school education;
 3. Provision of mid-day meals to enhance children's access, retention and completion of the school circle;
 4. Emphasis on curriculum diversificational and relevance to effectively and adequately cover individual and community needs and aspirations;
 5. Separation of junior secondary school from senior secondary schools
Realignment/integration of junior secondary schools with primary education
 6. Individualized teaching methods;
 7. Introduction of rudiments of computer literacy;
 8. Appropriate continuous teacher professional development; and community ownership of schools, including participation in decision making in schools.
- Kpangban (2008).

The Concept of Vocational Education

Vocational Education is a training that prepares the recipients skills and attitude for a particular job. It is aimed at making the individual productive in a given aspect of the economy. Vocational education according to Tuhemba and Amokaha (2009), is that

form of education that seeks to develop the status of an individual and that of the nation. In addition to providing the recipients with knowledgeable, skills and the right attitude, vocational education prepares an individual for the world of work.

Be that as it may, the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) in her Education policy document has it that vocational education is designed to prepare individuals to acquire practical skills, basic and scientific knowledge and attitude required as craftsmen and technicians at sub-professional level.

It can therefore, be summed up that vocational education takes dual responsibility – vocational preparation and prevocational preparation. These are two important and complementary aspects. The acquisition of skills and the development of attitudes and knowledge which will enable young people to play their part in the working community and help them work more effectively.

Vocational education has these as its aims:

- i. to equip young people with certain basic job skills and knowledge;
- ii. to enhance their understanding of their work environment;
- iii. to motivate them to develop their potential and extend their basic job skills and knowledge;
- iv. to help them to develop the personal skills needed at work and in adult life generally;
- v. to help them to access their potential and to think realistically about jobs and future prospects. Olaiya (1992).

From the above discussion, vocational education is an education designed to develop skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habits and appreciation, encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to enter and make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

In the year 2000, nations who are members of United Nations met and agreed on what became known as the Millennium Declaration. It is targeted at renewing commitment to human development. The declaration includes eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Each of the goals according to Sheshi (2006) is with quantified targets to motivate the international community and provide on accountability mechanism for action taken to enable millions of poor people to improve their livelihood.

The Millennium Development Goals are stated below:

- i. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- ii. Achieve Universal primary education
- iii. Promote gender equality and empower women
- iv. Reduce child mortality
- v. Improve maternal health
- vi. Combat human immuno deficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency
- vii. Ensure environmental sustainability
- viii. Develop global partnership for development Sheshi (2008)

From the year 2000 when the Millennium Summit took place, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as stated here continued to play the role of key objectives in planning and implementation of developmental efforts all over the globe. This is with the hope of combating the problems besetting the world.

In spite of these efforts the daily basic needs of life are still far from reaching the nook and crannies of the world. It means that millions of people are still under the slave chains of hunger, illness and as a result early death. There is need to do more. Perhaps with the twine of an effective vocational education in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme, much more will be achieved.

Junior Secondary School Certificate and the World of Work

Junior Secondary School Certificate is the Certificate awarded to graduants of the Universal Basic Education (UBE). But of what value is this document? Rather, how ready are the graduants for the world of work? Better still, how ready is the world of work to absorb these products of Universal Basic Education (UBE)?

The junior secondary school certificate which is usually awarded to graduants of Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme does not attract any job neither is any employable value attached to the qualification. Worse still, the graduants of the UBE scheme do not possess any skill that attracts employment. The world of work which seeks to engage those with employable skills does not accept the graduants of the scheme. On the ground that they are not skilful enough to enter a career and successfully be productive without being retrained.

From the plan of UBE, it is expected that a child spends six years in primary school where the prevocational subjects are taught. The same child according to the plan and vision of UBE scheme shall proceed uninterrupted to junior secondary school where vocational subjects shall be taught. This is the period in which the child is expected to be exposed to the various careers. Necessary skills and attitude required for each occupation is opened to the learner at this level to enable him/her to make choice.

But that is just the plan. In actual, the training environment at the junior secondary school does not in any way appear similar to that of the world of work. This absence of machines and facilities at the training environment makes the actual training difficult. All training has to be done in theory. The learners are taught how to operate machines without the physical machines, workshop attitude without workshop, skill acquisition becomes impossible for competence it is said is acquired through practice.

Vocational education will only be effective in proportion as the environment in which the learner is trained is a replica of the environment in which he must subsequently work. This means that the machines and other facilities which are used in training the learner should be the same type as those that exist where he will work after training.

Implications for Achieving Millennium Development Goals (1 and 2)

Any nation that has productive youth has hope for the future. Vocational education has it as an objective to equip young people with certain basic job skills and knowledge.

These if given the necessary requirements for effectiveness will make youth productive. Productivity is a strong weapon against poverty and hunger. The skillful youth will be employed; will earn a living; will produce to raise a particular sector of the economy. The result will be a boost in economic activities. Supply will be raised among citizens of Nigerian – nation.

Universal Basic Education will be achieved with much ease when the products are seen uninterruptedly flowing into the junior secondary school and subsequently transmit into the world of work without difficulties. This will require proper funding of the UBE to accommodate effective vocational education in the scheme.

Conclusion

Youth are the hope for the future of every nation. Employment of the youth strengthens the work force of the country, raises productivity and pushes the nation's economy to greater development. Economic development of every nation assures her citizens of improved livelihood. This is the target of the Millennium Declaration which has come to be known as Millennium Development Goals on which the nation's development plan now hangs. To achieve this therefore, the training and employment of youths must be properly provided for. The right route to this, is the repositioning of UBE to adequately accommodate effective vocational education.

Recommendations

1. Junior secondary schools are operating without training environment, it will be continuously impossible for products of UBE to be equipped with employable skills, knowledge and attitude that is required in the world of work. Funds be made available to upgrade junior secondary schools to accommodate effective training environment for vocational education.
2. Competence is acquired through practice. The consumables required to run machines and facilities such as electricity be supplied consistently to ensure continuous practice by the youth in training as the result will help achieve the Millennium Development Goals (2).

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