EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR SELF-RELIANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY

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Abstract

Education generally aims at inculcating knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and beliefs into an individual to assist him/her achieve a reasonable degree of competence in the various facets of everyday life. Empowering women through education involves the discovering and enactment of authoritative voice and purpose through their unique experiences. Educating a woman without skills shortens the labour market since women make up about half the nation’s population. This creates room for dangerous manufacturing, (production) and consumption imbalance thereby threatening the nation’s economy. Women are mainly unemployed because they do not possess any skill. This paper looks at the use of vocational education via business education to equip or empower women for self sustainability/reliance. It x-rays the conceptual and theoretical framework of the concept – business education, the role of business education as a wheel for economic empowerment, the constraints of effective business education programme, recommendations for improving and sustaining it for women empowerment and enhancement of their status.

Notwithstanding the fact that women constitute about 50% of the world population, they have been disempowered since creation because of patriarchal culture in some societies. They are traditionally not favoured by societal, cultural and religious beliefs and have been saddled with the main responsibilities of caring for the home, their husbands and raising children as full-time housewives. This scenario seriously marginalized women and brought about inequality between men and women.

Luckily, empowering women has become the order of the day as every nation has realized the need to involve women in the development scene. Empowering women is one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which is an essential tool to development, peace and security. Invariably, the world of women is gradually changing as women are becoming more independent than they were in the past. Women empowerment implies women acquiring the power to think and act freely so that they can exercise choice and fulfill their potentials as full and equal members of the society. Its main aim is to ensure that women become economically, self-reliant and active participants in all decision-making situations. Empowering them involves providing appropriate skills, abilities and competences of both mental and physical nature as necessary equipment for them to live productively in the society. The process of the empowerment, according to Acholonu (2006) involves:

Women’s acquisition of the necessary knowledge, skills, the psychological and moral courage and commitment, essential for a critical appreciation of their disadvantaged situation plus the determination and will power to take the needed action to change the traditional status quo that subjugates and marginalizes them in patriarchal world.

Women empowerment is a clear root to poverty reduction and leads to general development in every nation. Women economic empowerment as viewed by Adetope (2004) refers to the right of women to carefully manage the available resources around them. For her, to empower a woman means to give her enablement, authority and control over her own life situation in economic, political and social independence. Supporting this, Obidike (2006) expressed that:

Economically, women should be empowered by focusing on poverty alleviation and the attainment of sustainable livelihood by assisting them to enhance their entrepreneurial skills, enhanced access to credit and market
Empowering women helps bring them into the mainstream of the development process. Adetope (2004) expressed that emphasis should be placed on the need to empower women to gain economic independence through entrepreneurial development programmes, provision of financial assistance as well as various vocational training programmes with a view to exposing them to different areas of understanding, controlling and directing their financial affairs.

The concentration on mental and the theoretical exercises rather than manual and practical experiences according to Simon cited in Okocha (2009), prepared people for neither jobs nor family, nor responsibilities of citizenship. This virtually shows that acquisition of skill is necessary for economic empowerment and subsequent survival in the society.

According to Obidike (2009), government has employed several strategies for enhancing women empowerment by initiating and creating establishments and women non-governmental organizations that would focus specifically on issues affecting women like Better Life for Rural Women, Family Support Programme, Ministry of Women Affairs, etc; but these approaches have often failed because the beneficiaries of such schemes by the government lack the requisite skills and entrepreneurial knowledge to be able to stand and manage themselves. Regrettably, most of these government strategies are politically biased. A typical example exists where some indigent women were provided with sewing machines without being trained. These women sold the machines to raise money for family upkeep. They were never trained to acquire the skill to sew.

Vocational education is seen as the root to empowering women for self productivity and reliance. Considering the needs and national priorities for development, innovations relating to vocational education should be introduced and sustained as a way to reducing ‘waste’ of talents associated with conventional schools for self productivity. Vocational education is an umbrella of skills which Okocha (2009) saw as a facet of technical education that is concerned more with practical work leading to acquisition of a particular occupation or career. It has been proven that national economies are better managed by the private sector and this is only feasible by effectively empowering the citizens/ people for self-reliance through encouraging and funding adequately business education programme. As this is the only aspect of our educational programme which offers the opportunity for skill training and development for self-reliance and entrepreneurship, this study, highlights the role of business education in the economic growth and development of the nation towards empowerment for women’s self-reliance.

This paper focuses attention on business education, an aspect of vocational education which can easily be acquired by women for self productivity and reliance. Business education programme is skill oriented and rich in content that women have no need for the elusive white collar jobs. Regrettably, business education has been so neglected and abandoned by successive governments. Besides, its effectiveness has been constrained by a lot of factors such as lack of basic instructional tools, over burdening of women with such programmes which deny them the required attention on the course. To overcome these myriad of problems constraining effective business education programme, it is suggested among others that adequate teaching facilities like computers, word processors, etc. be provided, workshops and laboratories for effective practical skill training be available, business education curricular be reviewed and restructured to meet labour market demands and business education programme be better funded by the government, philanthropists, etc. These and other recommendations made will alleviate the constraints if not total eradication of the problems of business education cum unemployment and under-employment and self reliance. Re-engineering women education for self-reliance implies re-directing their education for self-reliance (self employment) and making them become self made – rich women who can even create jobs for others if they are successful.
Women education in essence should be re-directed or re-engineered through acquisition of skills so as to empower them effectively and this can conveniently be done by introducing vocational education fully into the school system from the grassroot.

The Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of Business Education

The concept business education is recognized as an integral part of vocational technical education. As observed by Popham, Schrag, Blockhus (1975), business education as a field of learning prepares students for entry into and advancement in jobs within business. And equally important, it prepares people to handle their own business affairs and to function intelligently as consumers and citizens in a business economy. It provides the required entrepreneurial skills which learners must acquire in schools.

In the views of Calhoun cited in Aina and Beecroft (1982), a major goal of business education is the development of occupational competence for obtaining a job in a business career. To this end, business education has the role to prepare the individual to adjust to the work environment in terms of skills he/she is equipped with.

In the opinion of Aina and Beecroft (1982), traditionally, the primary objective of business education has been to develop vocational knowledge and skills needed for initial employment and advancement in a business career. Added to this objective is that of the development of personal use skills, he pointed out.

Essentially, this broadening philosophy of business education, shows the dynamic nature of the subject, which is in consonance with the undertone of the new national policy on education. Stressing the role of business education in the face of rising unemployment, one cannot but learn the lessons from President Johnson’s 1964 “War Against Poverty” message that “very often, lack of jobs and money are not the cause of poverty but the symptom”. One can then say that the cause of poverty is lack of skills which business education stands as a sure remedy.

The Role of Business Education as a Wheel for Economic Empowerment

According to Nwokolo and Otubelu (1995), the contributions of business education to our society are very enormous. It constitutes a formidable force in equipping the women and every other person with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the production of goods and services required for the survival of the nation. It inculcates in women desirable social and cultural behaviours.

Business education is known as a sub-field of vocational education which contributes in no small measure to national development.

Emphasizing furthermore on this, Ulinfun cited in Nwokolo and Otubelu (1995), however predicted that business education accounts for over 60% of total education’s contribution to the national growth.

Oladebo (1978) lamenting on the role of business education noted that business comprises both private and public and is the engine that powers Nigeria’s economy. Equally, he pointed out that there is a general contention that our society and our free enterprise system can survive only with an educational, economically skilled literate population. However, recognizing the need for this type of literacy, the present national policy on education focuses greater attention on vocational skills of the graduates both at the secondary and tertiary levels.

The vocational skills acquired by graduates of business education are no doubt saleable in the labour market either by employing themselves or being employed. This should be extended to women.

Corroborating this view, Abdulkadir (1985) observed that manpower requirement in our economy is vast. This resource is important in terms of entrepreneurial skill, skilled and semi skilled people required to man various projects. He asserts that those skills are greatly in demand despite increasing outputs of the country’s educational system from year to year.
Essentially vocational business education as an important area in our public education today stands ready to improve and expand its vital services to the business community and to the nation in general. Business education, it must be noted, does not cost, it pays literally. It can meet the needs of this nation in her economic revival for greater promotion of employment. If women are self employed, they would be able to raise fund enough to get into bigger businesses and even acquire collateral so as to access loans for their business growth and creation of job opportunities for others.

The Constraints to Effective Business Education Programme

Inspite of its importance and contributions in providing the much desired business competence skills for self-reliance and employment, business education development has been hampered by myriad of problems which have affected the achievement of its objectives. They include problems such as the following:

(1) Business education programme lacks basic instructional tools for effective and proficient skill training. Most training institutions offering the programme lack facilities and equipment required for the programme. There is inadequate number of teaching facilities like typewriters, dictating machines, etc.

(2) A critical examination of the programme shows that of women of such programme are over burdened with too many family problems and responsibilities that little or no time is devoted to the skill acquisition.

(3) Worrisome is the serious dearth of textbooks and other instructional materials for business education.

(4) There is also the problem of inadequate resource persons or business educators needed to develop and inculcate the desired but elusive skills into the teeming underemployed women in the country. There is inadequate number of personnel teaching business education.

(5) Inspite of the growing awareness of the need for skill training in development efforts, there seems to be lack of adequate information on the concept of linkage between education and working life.

Other constraints to effective business education programme include:

(a) Inadequate teaching hours allocated to the subjects in the time table.
(b) Inadequate business education workshops.
(c) Poor attitude to the programme by school authorities and even parents.
(d) Lack of incentives to business education teachers.
(e) Inadequate funding of business education programme by the government.
(f) Academic inferiority which involves both business and technical education teachers.

These teachers feel relegated to the background for teaching students in the JSS classes which are the preparatory classes.

Conclusion

The issue of women empowerment has become over-orchestrated with rhetorics without adequate strategies to achieve it. Government seems to be at loss with unemployment in Nigeria growing at a geometric progression. Unemployment poses a great danger to our society and ailing economy with its attendant social vices plaguing the nation.

More so, unemployment and under-employment among women have been attributed to the fact that most women are ill-equipped with skills for particular jobs.

Even though federal and state governments have engaged different strategies to curb and combat disempowerment, the canker worm seems to have defied them all. However, the utilization of the strategies is not just a matter of providing specific number of jobs but it is a matter of training women for skill acquisition that will give self employment and reliance which business education offers the opportunity.
Empowering Women through Vocational Education for Self-reliance and Productivity

Recommendations/Suggestions

The role of business education has become obvious and imperative in the objective of empowering women for meaningful economic contribution and self-reliance. It has proved to be the antidote for the growing unemployment and underemployment rate in the country. To enable business education to fulfill its role as the wheel for economic empowerment, the following recommendations are made in view of the constraints to the achievement of effective business education programme.

1. Provision of adequate teaching facilities such as typewriters, computers, word processors, etc for effective teaching and learning.

2. Provision of business education workshops and skill acquisition centres for effective practical skill training and instruction. The existing ones should be well equipped so as to create enabling learning environment.

3. Appointment of business educators as heads of schools and academic institutions of higher learning. This will ensure better planning of the curriculum for business subjects and adequate emphasis on crucial areas of the subjects and for optimum use of available facilities, and effective supervision.

4. The business education curricular should be reviewed and restructured in line with the demands of the labour market and to replicate what is obtainable in the developed economies of the world.

5. Training institutions should sponsor their teachers in business education to conferences, workshops, seminars and symposia as a way of increasing the supply of business educators to meet the present demand. This will also keep the educators abreast of current issues in the programme.

6. Increased allocation of teaching periods/hours to business education to ensure adequate coverage of the syllabus.

7. An enlightenment programme for the education of students and parents on the importance of business education programme should be organized by the government and other stakeholders.

8. Incentives should be given to business educators to write more textbooks. This can also be done for women so as to entice them into the programme.

9. Government should increase their funding of business education programme.

10. There should be effective and efficient supervision of the business education programme by the NBTE and other professional bodies such as ABEN.

11. Primary school curriculum should be weighted heavily in favour of preparing majority of the children for life since primary education may turn out to be the terminal level for this category of children especially girls who eventually become adult women.

12. Technical and business education teachers should realize that they are holding the technological stance for the nation’s development. They should therefore put in their best in teaching students.

13. Guidance and counselling support services with a view of generating a conducive climate for accepting innovations in educational programmes and career opportunities should be introduced in the society. The guidance counsellors should be allowed to run private counselling services in communities since they can give clear understanding of the relative importance of such programmes like vocational education issues and objectives.

14. Government should also establish public counselling centres and deploy counsellors for these services to get to the grassroot. This proves an effective way of facilitating the dissemination of innovations within and outside school system and the society in general to achieve meaningful attitudes in desired direction.

15. The adult education centres already in existence should be strengthened and well funded while communities should be encouraged to establish new centres on their own. A well funded learning centre will provide, inculcate the education and training that can make the beneficiaries particularly the women vital links in the socio-economic development of the society.

16. Women should be given assertion training so that they will be able to air their views without being shy and withdrawn. They will then be able to demand for their rights and acquire some
useful skills for self confidence, positive self concept and function better in the society without being aggressive.

References


