

BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMME: A VERITABLE TOOL FOR ACHIEVING POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NIGERIA

Okafor J. O

Abstract

Poverty is a global phenomenon and Nigeria, unfortunately happens to *be* a victim of this ugly phenomenon as it is one of the poorest countries of the world. There is the strong belief that poverty can be greatly influenced by - the type and level of education acquired by individuals for economic empowerment. This paper, therefore, examines the concept of poverty, efforts made by government to combat poverty and unemployment in the country. It further discusses the impact of business education on poverty alleviation, finally, this paper proffers useful suggestions on how the quality of life in Nigeria can be considerably improved through enhanced business education programme.

Introduction

There is no doubt that unemployment among school-leavers has reached an alarming rate in Nigeria. There is also this assertion that the problems of unemployment and poverty have their sources in the reluctance of school graduates to enter skilled occupations. Rather, in their search for white-collar employment, they believe that white-collar employment is commensurate with their status as educated people (Ojo, 2005). It can be therefore, concluded that the right type of education to which students are exposed largely determines their vocational aspirations and operation as an independent variable in setting their level of vocational choices. The current socio-economic trends in the country call for youths of our formal educational institutions (post-primary) to redefine, their attitudinal orientation towards paid employment instead of self employment. The imperative role of sustainable business education in ensuring the versatility of its graduates thereby reducing poverty will come into focus

Although business education is often described as education for and about business its primary purpose is to prepare individuals for gainful employment in business occupation whether paid employment or self-employment, the emphasis is on our exposure to and acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes relevant and adequate for employment in specific business occupations (Nwosu, 2003). The value of any business education programme could be determined by its ability to adequately prepare and equip appropriate individuals in such a manner that they could fit into specific jobs or establish their own business on graduation. According to Soyode (2003), business education holds the key to Nigeria becoming technologically relevant, internationally competitive, economically prosperous and even politically stable, if properly packaged and adequately delivered.

Conceptual Framework

The need to alleviate poverty, the scourge that afflicts the society, with economic, social, political and environmental deprivation, has been a source of concern to many Nigerians and particularly the federal government of Nigeria. Alleviation refers to the art of making a poor condition less severe or erasing a state of being poor.

In African continent, poverty is a long time-phenomenon that has been in existence as long as the continent itself. Nations ravaged with poverty are referred to as developing, under-developed or third-world countries. The Western nations use literacy levels, infant mortality and per capita income as the criteria for assessing African countries (Okoye, 2002).

World bank Dictionary (1980), defines poverty as a state of inadequacy, deprivation, want deficiency, owning nothing at all or having not enough for all the necessities of life, having too little to live on; people living below poverty line, below the standard of adequate subsistence as living in poverty.

Poverty is identified with material deprivation, social exclusion, establishing emotions and dependency and political powerlessness. It is associated with the individual or family inability to acquire enough assets, income or public utilities, inadequate education and negligible health service (Adediran, 2002).

A clear application of the "culture of poverty concept" is one observed by Lewis (1966). According to him, the culture of poverty is characterized by a lack of community organization, strong feelings of isolation, marginality and helplessness and dependency of individuals, since children or people learn the symbols, norms and values of groups in their early years, poverty perpetuates itself by creating persons who are psychologically unable to take full advantage of opportunities when the culture

of poverty develops in societies that have a cash economy, wage labour and production for profit, high rate of unemployment, underemployment and low wages.

The need to alleviate poverty as a means of uplifting the living standard of the rural dwellers paves the way for the establishment of various schemes and institutions by government. These cover such sectors as agriculture, water resources, and health educations, housing finance, industry, employment generation, rural and urban development. In order to eradicate the poverty situation in Nigeria, a number of economic programmes have been put in place at one time or the other. These include National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW), family Support Programme (FSP), family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERF), Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), national Poverty Alleviation Programme (NPAP) and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDE).

According to the Federal Government of Nigeria, the objectives of poverty Alleviation programme (PAP) guidelines 1999 are as follows:

1. To stimulate the growth of Nigeria economy through engagement of semi-skilled and skilled labour production activities.
2. To reduce the social vices and tension in the society by removing all idle hands from the streets.
3. To improve or arrest environmental degradation,
4. To minimize rural/urban drift through the improvement of rural communities, and
5. To commit the fund to direct benefit of the participants rather than on services and overhead¹.

To demonstrate and show its commitment towards reducing poverty, the government earmarked the sum of N1 billion for the creation of 200,000 jobs in the 2000 budget.

The Role of Business Education in Poverty Alleviation

A career in business education includes knowledge in technical education; commercial education, entrepreneurship education and vocational education. This is to enable the beneficiary to be competent enough to contribute greatly to national acquisition of business skills, understanding and attitudes to enable the recipients identify problems and to proffer lasting solution to such problems in order to have a beneficial effect on both himself and the society at large (Ojo,2005).

Business Education enables the recipients to develop employment and entrepreneurial skills, Okenwa (1999), perceives entrepreneurship as the willingness and ability of individual to seek out employment opportunity, establish and run an enterprise successfully. Other are pooling of various scarce resources for production and distribution of goods and services, organization and management of the human and material resources for the attainment of the objectives of the enterprise.

Business education could be regarded as leading to gainful employment and productivity thereby alleviating poverty. Furthermore, World Bank Report (1995) clearly stated that education is a major instrument for promoting economic growth and reducing poverty and specifically, indicated the linkage between business education and poverty alleviation. Business education goes a long way in enhancing the capacity of the individual in conducting his business, be it in engineering, medical, legal or other forms of business endeavour.

Designing Sustainable Business Education for Poverty Reduction

The need to design sustainability in business education programme as a means of alleviating poverty cannot be overemphasized. According to Ajakaiye and Olomola (1999), in Adediran (2002), project, sustainability has several dimensions such as financial, institution, political and environmental. Finance is an essential input in successful implementation and operational sustainability of business education. This implies that for sustainable business education to be able to serve as an instrument for achieving poverty reduction, sufficient financial resources must be put in place to meet the capital and recurrent expenditures associated with the programme.

Emerging issues in Business Education Programme

Parental Influences Due to Misconception: Some parents do not desire their children and wards to study business education because they believe that this is meant for drop-outs or dullards. They rather prefer their children studying such courses like medicine, Law, Engineering, etc. (Okoye, 2005).

Inadequacy of Training Equipment/Facilities: In learning, there is the combination of people, materials, facilities, equipment and procedure that interact to achieve a goal or objective. A good

number of business education equipment and facilities in our institutions of learning are either old, obsolete or non-functional; instructional materials such as accounting machine, typewriters (manual and electric), shredding machines, computers, should be made available to enable learners acquire the needed skills for the current labour market requirements.

Curriculum Content: The need for relevant curricula for the training of professionals in various occupations to meet current labour market requirements need not be overemphasized. This means that business teacher education curriculum must be based on current reported needs and requirements in business and industry as well as the need of the students. There should be some kind of correlation between the curriculum in use and the knowledge and skills required by employers. There is therefore, the need for curriculum planners, evaluators, scholars, students industry and business educators to set appropriate machinery in motion to salvage business education programme from total collapse.

Industry- Institution Partnership: Given the stale of technological changes worldwide,-there is therefore the urgent need to upgrade and update existing stock of labour force.

In attempting to collaborate the much needed relationship between institution and industry Adebayo (2006) opined that vocational education should train their graduates to monitor their progress on the job and in their chosen occupations.

Challenges of Information and Communication Technology (ICT): ICT has revolutionized all aspects-of human and organization life. Some of these identified challenges are:

- (i) ICT is having serious effect on business education syllabi and should be reviewed without delay.
- (ii) Pattern of power supply (electricity) in Nigeria leaves much to be desired, (ni) Telephone (communication) is expansive and can only be afforded by a few people, the GSM services are, often times, having problems, (iv) Illiteracy: The percentage of illiterate people in the country is still high. How can such people enjoy ICT when they do not understand what is happening in their environment.

Conclusion

It has undoubtedly been discovered that poverty is largely associated with unemployment. To reduce the level of poverty in our society, people must be aware of the type of job to do, acquire the skills needed and be fully engaged in the job so as to earn a living. Business education trains people on how to acquire entrepreneurial skills needed in establishing a business, hence for business education to redress the unemployment and .poverty crises, training must be matched with employment opportunity which needs both theoretical and practical approaches.

In the same vein, provision of funds and other necessary facilities must adequately supplied and utilized during the instructional processes in business education. There is therefore, this strong belief that business education, if sustained, can reverse the unemployment trend and minimized the mass exodus of people drifting from rural to urban cntress providing jobs to the people in their locality.

Recommendation

The following recommendations are hereby made to achieve poverty reduction through business education programme.

1. Government at all levels should mount campaigns on the essence of business education for self-reliance, prestige and national development.
2. youths and graduates should be empowered with ICT skills and improvement of small and medium enterprises.
3. the entire business education programme in Nigeria should be overhauled, if we must cope with the challenges of technology.
4. Government, community participation, business organization and philanthropists should increase funding of business education in order to ensure self-reliance and poverty alleviation/reduction in Nigeria.

References

Adebayo, T. O. (2006). Enhancing sustainable business education programme for poverty alleviation in

Nigeria, *Journal of Education for Professional Growth*.

Adediran, O. A. (2002). Poverty alleviation through sustainable business education. *Business Education Book of Reading I (2): 81-89*.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999). Poverty alleviation programme guidelines.

Lewis O. (1966). *La Vida, A Puerto Rican Family in Culture of Poverty* (Scan Juan and New York: Random house).

Nwosu, B. O. (2003). Business education in the 21st century. The challenges of technology, *Business Education Book of Readings*.

Ojo, K. E (2005). Business education as a tool for tackling youth unemployment in Nigeria. *The Nigerian Journal of research and Production 31 -40*.

Okenwa, C. P (1999). *Entrepreneurial Development in Nigeria: A Practical Approach*, Onitsha;; Adson education Publisher.

Okoye, S. N. (2002). Reducing Poverty through sustainable business education *Business Education Book of Reading 151-156*.

Soyode, A (2003). Business education in Nigeria: functionality, Prospects and problems *Business Education Journal 1-5*