
SUSTAINING THE AFRICAN CURRICULUM THROUGH FUNCTIONAL VOCATIONAL AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS EDUCATION AS A VEHICLE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN STATES

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Abstract

The system of vocational and entrepreneurship education embodied in African Curriculum is still more of academics than skills acquisition for self reliance and self employment. As a result of this, most African graduates at all levels of education end up as job seekers in government departments and companies or are unemployed. For African Curriculum to be sustainable and lead to economic development of Africa, we need a functional vocational and entrepreneurship education that will provide the much needed knowledge and skills for wealth creation through job creation in the areas of small and medium scale size businesses among African graduates at all levels. This paper is therefore advocating for functional, vocational and entrepreneurship education at all levels of African education that will prepare the youths for self reliance, creative ventures and job creation. This paper therefore looked at vocational and entrepreneurship education, meaning, its need, strategies for teaching it, problems confronting it in African education system and made several recommendations. Some of the recommendations include sufficient funding, employment of qualified teachers/lecturers, provision of infrastructures such as classrooms, workshops and laboratories; provision of efficient tools and equipment, introduction of internship and functional Curriculum for vocational and entrepreneurship education where such does not exist.

Keywords: Sustaining, African Curriculum, Functional Vocational and Entrepreneurship Education, Economic Development

Any Curriculum that does not provide room for the eradication of poverty and unemployment is bound to be a failure. A good Curriculum that will provide opportunity for employment through job creation in the area of vocational and

entrepreneurship skills is bound to bring about national development. African Curriculum in this 21st century needs to avail itself with opportunities for entrepreneurship skills and vocational subjects that will prepare their citizens for self employment and thus lead to economic development of African states. This paper therefore seeks to discuss the place or role of vocational and entrepreneurship skills curriculum in the economic development of African states. Vocational subjects at the primary and secondary education levels, if adequately provided, will prepare the youths at this level with skills for self employment at the end of their education while entrepreneurship skills if provided at the tertiary levels of all educational system will provide opportunities for job creation among university graduates.

The introduction of vocational subjects and entrepreneurship skills education in most of African secondary and tertiary institutions have not been able to meet up with the yearning needs of African people. This is simply because most of the vocational and entrepreneurship programmes are more of theory than practice. In most instances too, the subjects and programmes are on the time table but the qualified teachers to teach them are not even available. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) programmes on the need to eradicate poverty and unemployment and wealth, and job creation in African states were aimed at upgrading African youths and adults from redundancy. This programme has not been able to achieve much because most of the African countries never supported these with the needed funds and machinery for practicalising the acquisition of the skills accorded to them to make the learners successful at the end.

The curriculum of most African countries was more or less what was inherited from the colonial masters before independence with little modifications. Initially most of the curriculum had direct bearing with the colonial country either Britain or France with no consideration to the African peculiarities or needs of the African people. The needs, aspirations and interests of the African people were not considered when designing such a curriculum, neither was their future considered as an important phenomena in such a curriculum. Thus the curriculum then only produced the needed man power (Aladekomo, 2004; Fafunwa, 1974) for the colonial administrators/administration.

After independence, most African countries did little or nothing to modify the curriculum to meet up with the teeming population of their countries. In most instances the so-called vocational subjects and entrepreneur skills vocations advocated were mere policies than reality. There were no qualified teachers for these subjects, no practical demonstration with machineries to back up the mastering of these vocational skills and the system was poorly funded. Most of the students graduated with no skills acquired or mastered and where subjects were really taught they were more of theories with out practicals.

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Thus the African curriculum after independence was more of a replica of the colonial curriculum. Graduates from secondary schools and tertiary institutions were more or less being prepared towards white collar jobs which was what was inherited from the colonial system. Today, because most of the graduates have no employment, they have become vulnerable to all the social ills of the society which has led to social unrest in almost all African societies. Most of the youths have become wasted manpower who cannot contribute to the economic development of their various countries. As a result of this, this paper is advocating for a kind of reorientation towards the issues of vocational education and entrepreneurship education as the backbone to sustaining the African curriculum for economic development. There is urgent need for new orientation and emphasis on the structure of the school system in Africa to accommodate what is needed for the transformation of the curriculum through vocational and entrepreneurship education to make Africans self-sufficient, self employed and reduce unemployment and poverty. There is therefore the need for sustaining curriculum through functional vocational and entrepreneurship education that will bring about economic development to Africa.

Entrepreneurship Skills and Vocational Education

According to Etuk and Mbat (2010) entrepreneurship is a process through which individuals and/or government either on their own or jointly exploits available economic opportunities with out being scared by associated risks or inadequate resources under their control. Entrepreneurship is promoted by the spirit of capitalization which in turn promotes economic development and growth through job creation, increasing output of goods and services, as well as enhancing technological innovation.

Olagunju (2004) conceptualized entrepreneurship skill as the ability of an individual to exploit an idea and create an enterprise either small or big, not only for personal gain but also for social development gain. Entrepreneurship skills acquisition at the school level helps to reduce graduate unemployment in the African society and also promote graduate self employment potentials. Entrepreneurship education has been introduced into the school system with the desire to tackle the problems of joblessness among African youths and create room for job creation to reduce poverty level across the African society.

Entrepreneurship education is the acquisition of skills and idea for the sake of creating employment for one's self and also for others. It also includes the development based on creativity. Entrepreneurship leads to the development of small, medium and sometimes large scale business based on creativity and innovation. The success of these businesses in turn helps in developing the African nations. It also reduces poverty rate with visible increment of employment rate among the youths.

Entrepreneurship education is an applied subject. It can be taught inside or outside the school system to provide students with entry level skills to start their own business (Ukoha, 2012). The major objective of entrepreneurship education according to Clayton (2010) in Ukoha (2012) is to make students aware of the career option of entrepreneurship and the rewards and risks involved. The focus of entrepreneurship education is venture creation. Entrepreneurship education arms an individual with knowledge; information and training that will enable him function adequately in a dynamic economy like the African nations (Tashie, 2006). If education of a nation focuses on how to make her citizenry job creators rather than job seekers, there will be a strong urge to build the nation rather than looking for what one can benefit from the country, which can lead to economic stagnation. Entrepreneurship education will be a major tool for effecting change in a nation, and the change must come through the successful implementation of a given ideology through classroom pedagogy, and curriculum innovation to suit her situation.

The Need for Entrepreneurship Education in African Curriculum

Efforts should be made by governments and stakeholders in Africa towards curbing the high rates of unemployment among graduates of various levels. Entrepreneurial education could play important roles in reducing youth unemployment according to Ede (2012) in the following ways:-

1. Entrepreneurship skills acquired in schools make graduates more of employers of labour than job seekers. This is because they have learnt skills on how to create jobs for themselves rather than depending on government for employment.
2. Inclusion of entrepreneurial education in curriculum of schools will make youths more versatile in other areas of life as well as increase their job opportunities. When such youths cannot get jobs in their immediate areas of study, they can easily get it from other career areas learnt in the entrepreneurial studies.
3. Entrepreneurial education will help graduates know source for funds for their businesses and this will help them to be able to source funds and start their business.
4. Entrepreneurial education exposes youths with the knowledge and abilities to study and analyse effectively business and economic environment. This enables them invest when the environment is friendly, to avoid job/career loss (unemployment).
5. Many businesses have failed due to wrong investment decisions made in the past by entrepreneurs. Such business failures have pushed them out of business and are unemployed. Entrepreneurship education will equip youths with the skills to make

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wise investment decisions that will make them float when others get drowned with uncertainties in business environment.

6. Entrepreneurial education in the schools will imbibe creativity skills on the youths to look down in their villages and rural areas and turn into semi products so many agricultural products that waste year in and year out. This will reduce their quest to look for jobs from establishments such as government and companies and be self reliant.
7. Graduates with entrepreneurial knowledge and skills cannot only be self employed but can equally be an instructor or counselor to other business men and women who have business challenges. This will help them raise more money for their living and be equally self employed.

Integration of Entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition and Vocational Education into African Curriculum

In the education system of any country, there is always a Curriculum which contains a group of courses, planned experiences in proper sequence of contents and topics designed to prepare an individual for efficient service in a specific vocation (Esu, 2012). Integrating entrepreneurship education and vocational education into the curriculum of African education helps to equip school graduates with the necessary potential to establish private business ventures which in turn makes them self-reliant and create jobs for others.

Curriculum devoid of entrepreneurship skills and vocational education at any school level will merely prepare and produce job seeking graduates for negative opportunities. According to Esu, (2012) because such graduates are unable to secure the desired jobs of their choice, they turn to armed robbery, prostitution, cultism and kidnapping as alternative jobs. However, when curriculum is considered as all learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried out in groups by the school, or by individuals, entrepreneurial skills would become a subject of innovation. Kilby (1971) quoted by Esu (2012) stated that the array of possible entrepreneurial skills encompasses the perception of economic opportunity, technical and organizational innovations gaining commands over scarce resources, taking responsibilities for internal management and for external advancement of the firm in all aspects of the teaching enterprise.

Strategies for Inculcating Entrepreneurial Skills and Vocational Education on Students of Schools in Africa

Entrepreneurship and vocational education is expected to give African students physical and intellectual skills which will enable them to be self reliant and useful

members of their society. In order to make African graduates versatile in acquiring knowledge and skills in entrepreneurial education, various strategies are needed to inculcate such needed skills. Some of the strategies that can be adopted will include either of the following:

1. Inclusion of entrepreneurial and vocational education into African curriculum at all levels. All schools right from primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in Africa should include vocational and entrepreneurial education as a compulsory subject or course for all students. This will help make the graduates at all levels acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to be used to set up small scale businesses.
2. Training and retraining of teachers in vocational and entrepreneurial education skills. More teachers should be trained and those already on the job retrained to acquire the necessary competencies for teaching the skills needed by the students in entrepreneurial and vocational education.
3. Using appropriate teaching methods for teaching entrepreneurial and vocational education by teachers. Appropriate teaching methods such as demonstration, team teaching, collaborative learning and field trips should be used in teaching the skills in entrepreneurial and vocational education concepts. These methods should equip students/graduates with knowledge that will help them identify viable business opportunities, secure finance, manage human resources, minimize risk and establish personal business for self-employment and wealth maximization.
4. The use of internship at all levels. Students should be made to undergo holiday internship with local entrepreneurs within their immediate locality. This internship programme will provide students with opportunities to practice with a small business organization, with the view to exhibiting the skills they have learned in the school.
5. Establishment of practical entrepreneurial/vocational education counseling units in schools. This unit will counsel students, highlight the benefits and contributions of entrepreneurial and vocational education to economic development of African countries. The counseling unit will also acquaint students with the skills of writing business plans, feasibility report, securing finance and establishing small scale businesses.
6. Constant use of field trip to local business outfits. Students should be exposed to local business organisations within their localities through visits or excursion to give them opportunities to become familiar with entrepreneurial activities and its challenges.

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7. Resource persons: Business entrepreneurs can be invited by schools as resource person from time to time to instruct students on education and skills required for the establishment and sustaining of small scale business centres (Ede, 2012).
8. Setting up of special micro finance houses/banks to secure loans for graduates.

Constraints to Vocational and Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition in African Schools

There are a lot of problems militating against entrepreneurship and vocational education skills acquisition in Africa. According to Alison (2012), some of these problems include:

1. Lack of qualified teachers with the necessary pedagogical skills needed to disseminate knowledge in the areas of vocational and entrepreneurial education.
2. There is inadequate funding especially for the establishment and furnishing of functional workshops and laboratories for these programmes in schools.
3. Obsolete and dysfunctional equipment and workshops.
4. Lack of essential facilities such as water and power supply.
5. Inadequate or dilapidated infrastructures such as classroom building workshop and laboratories.
6. Lack of motivation for technical teachers.
7. Inadequate or outright lack of basic tools and essential instructional materials.
8. Poor perception of entrepreneurship and vocational education by parents and teachers and the entire society.
9. Curriculum focus on producing a graduate work force with ambition but no matching skills, who are focused on acquiring white-collar employment rather than being the creators of labour.

Entrepreneurship and Vocational Skill Acquisition Priority Areas in Africa

A recent survey conducted by the African Union (AU) on the state of skill training in 18 African countries points to a number of priority areas of vocational training in Africa (Abubakar, 2012). The agricultural sector receives the highest priority followed by public health and water resources, energy and environmental management, information and communication technologies, construction and maintenance and good governance. Some of the entrepreneurship and vocational skills education programmes advocated include:

1. Building and construction (including bricklaying and concreting);
2. Carpentry and joinery;
3. Welding and fabrication (including manufacturing of simple agricultural implements and tools);
4. Agriculture (crop production and animal husbandry);
5. Electrical installation and electronic equipment repair;

6. Car repair and maintenance;
7. Water supply and sanitation systems maintenance; including domestic plumbing works;
8. Handicrafts and traditional skills;
9. Basic ICT skills (word processing, data management, internet, etc);
10. Tourism related skills (hotel management,tour guides,cooks,waiters etc);
11. Business entrepreneurial skills and attitudes (including time management, marketing, basic accounting, micro business management, joint ventures, etc).

Conclusions

The curriculum of most African countries has been geared towards producing graduates who are of white collar job seekers. As a result of this, there is unemployment among African graduates who are mostly youths who are vulnerable to social unrest as witnessed all over Africa today. Today many African youths who have graduated from schools without jobs have found themselves involved in such dubious behaviours such as drug abuse, armed robbery, kidnapping, prostitution and all forms of social evils to eke a living.

The current curriculum of most African countries did not give entrepreneurial and vocational education the right place it deserves. These subjects were more of academic subjects than vocational subjects which should prepare African youths for self-employment. Most of the subjects were taught without the required practical experiences, as a result of lack of qualified teachers, infrastructure in terms of classroom workshops and laboratories, assorted tools and equipment and lack of funding and serious support on the part of the governments. Students graduate from these subjects half baked without the required knowledge and skills for establishing small business of their own, rather they end up in the job market seeking for government employment.

As a result of all the above, this paper is advocating for a functional vocational and entrepreneurial education curriculum which will sustain African curriculum by producing youths that are equipped with skills and knowledge that will help them to establish their own businesses and be job creators rather than job seekers. African governments should support these subjects with qualified teachers, good infrastructure, fund and tools and equipment for making these subjects to be functional at all levels. When youths are able to establish their own businesses, they will become employers of labour and contribute to the economic development of Africa.

Recommendations

Entrepreneurship skills acquisition at the tertiary levels and vocational education at primary and secondary levels of African education have become necessary

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prerequisites for eradicating unemployment and poverty in Africa. For this to be realised in sustaining African curriculum and in contributing to the economic development of Africa, the following are hereby recommended:

1. Good infrastructures in the areas of laboratories and workshops must be provided at all levels of African education system.
2. Qualified teachers in the areas of vocational and entrepreneurial education should be employed for all levels of African education.
3. Funds should be made available by African countries to back up the establishment of viable and functional vocational and entrepreneurship education centres by providing the necessary tools and equipment needed for practicalising the knowledge and skills to be learnt by students.
4. Compulsory internship system should be introduced where students at all levels can participate in local businesses within their localities to acquire the practical skills needed in establishing and running small scale businesses.
5. Entrepreneurship and vocational education counseling units should be established in schools at all levels to give students the necessary counseling skills needed for the establishment of small scale businesses.
6. Functional vocational and entrepreneurship education curriculum should be introduced in all African schools where they have not been done before. This curriculum should be backed up with good classrooms, laboratories, machineries, workshops and equipment that will make its implementation possible.
7. Constant training and retraining should be provided for all teachers/lecturers of vocational and entrepreneurship education, which will equip them with the latest skills and knowledge of information dissemination in this area to the students.

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