

TECHNIQUES FOR IMPROVING PRACTICAL SKILL ACQUISITION IN VOCATIONAL BUSINESS EDUCATION (VBE) FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Dr Magnus P. Udo

Chief Lecturer

Business Education Department

Federal College of Education

Pankshin, Plateau State, **NIGERIA**

ABSTRACT

This article discussed techniques for improving practical skills acquisition in vocational business education (VBE) towards sustainable development in Nigeria. To start with, the paper defined terminologies such as vocational business education, skill acquisition as well as sustainable development. It highlighted the importance of skill acquisition in sustainable development and stated some impediments to it among VBE students in Nigeria. Lastly, the paper concluded by elucidating some techniques for improving skill acquisition among VBE students and makes recommendations on the way forward.

Keywords: Vocational business education, impediments, skill acquisition, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

The development of adequate skills and competencies is an important characteristic of Vocational Business Education (VBE) programme in any levels of the Nigerian education system. In support of this, one of the National Educational Objectives stated that the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical are important for all Nigerians to live and contribute to the development of their society (Federal Republic of Nigeria - FRN 2004). Consequently, the National Educational Policy document (2004) states that the Nation's educational activity should be centred on the students in order for them to acquire maximum skills acquisition for self-development and fulfilment in the labour market. Regrettably, due to some barriers, the level of practical skills acquired by these students, compared with the demands of the labour market and technological advancement, is nothing to talk about. This explains why most employers of labour in this nation and abroad believe that the products of VBE are half-baked and unusable without further training (Ekpenyong, 1988). Consequently, most graduates of VBE in Nigeria are without gainful employment. Worst still, these graduates too are unable to establish their entrepreneurial skills ventures because they would not be able to put into practice what they studied in their tertiary institution since such skills were poorly acquired. It is against this background that this paper is written to explore techniques for improving skills acquisition in VBE and how that could affect sustainable development in Nigeria and to recommend ways of reducing such impediments. Indeed, Vocational Business Education (VBE) is defined as that education that provides skills, knowledge, competencies and attitudes necessary for effective employment in specific business

occupations. According Udo (2008) VBE is a comprehensive activity-based educational programme that is concerned with the acquisition of practical skills, understandings, attitudes, work habits and competencies that are requisite to success in a chosen business occupation while skill is defined by Ekpenyong (1988) as the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution of performance; technical expertness, a power or habit of doing any particular thing competently. He opined that this definition is stressing that a skill is based on using knowledge expertly; the objective of which is to bring that knowledge to maximum level of competency. Hence maximum skills acquisition involves that ability to perform any given tasks with ease, competently and expertly without much stress and sweat.

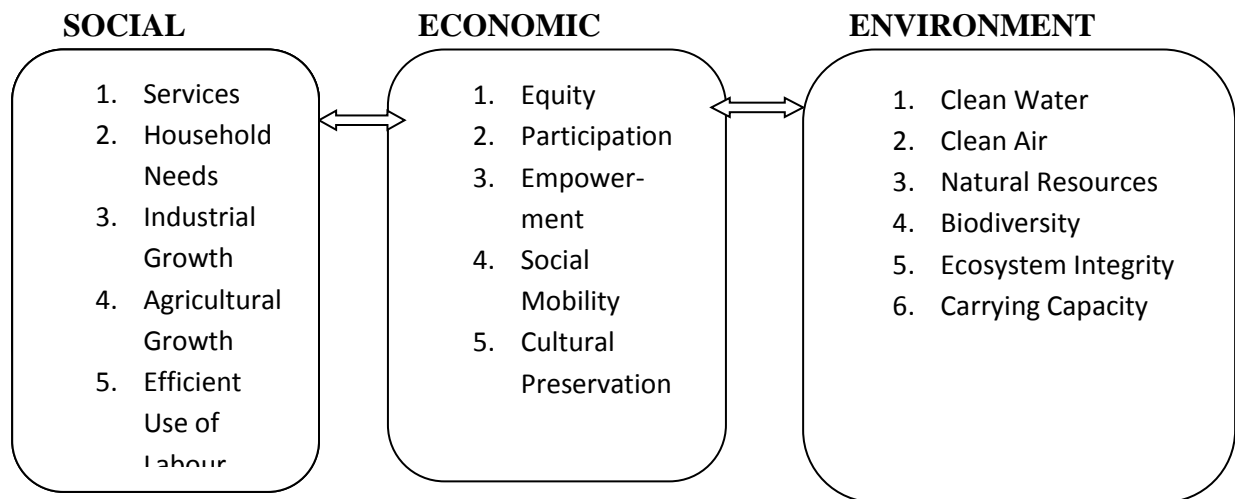
On the other hand, impediments refer to barriers, hindrances and obstructions to maximum skills acquisition in VBE programme while World Commission on Environment and Development Report – Our Common Future (1987) defines sustainable development as that development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs. Indeed, people who are concerned about sustainable development suggest that meeting the needs of the future generation depends to a large extent on how well the present-day decision makers can balance social, economic and environmental objectives when making decisions today (The World bank Group, 2001). By acquiring practical skills to the level of automaticity, recipients of VBE can impact positively on these objectives so as to boost sustainable development in Nigeria.

IMPORTANCE OF SKILL ACQUISITION IN NIGERIA

According to Okorie and Ezeji (1988) the acquisition of the requisite skills is a means of increasing the productive power of any nations. Consequently, they added that the Nigerian society should recognize the fact that every citizen should be equipped to contribute effectively to the welfare of the country. The acquisition of such practical skills is important because when efficient and skilful hands are employed in any fields of human endeavours, high productivity is usually achieved. Economically, maximum skills acquisition by VBE students and others will help to enrich the Nigerian society and in this way, tend to make possible sustainable development. Okorie and Ezeji (1988) opined that a rich nation is one that is capable of meeting the economic, social, moral and political needs of the citizenry. Nigeria as a nation will enjoy sustainable development if VBE students in particular and all other students in general acquire maximum skills acquisition and competencies in their specialties.

Furthermore, politically, practical skills acquisition tends to promote personal and national greatness. Okorie and Ezeji (1988) pointed out that the behaviour of an individual in a society or the behaviour of a nation in a community of nations may be influenced by the skills and competencies possessed by that individual or nation. Socially, the acquisition of maximum skills helps a person to provide amusement, happiness, love, affection and enjoyment to other individuals as well as the entire nation at large. It also helps to reduce criminal activities such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and other social vices among the youths. To the VBE students, maximum skills acquisition helps them to be engaged in productive work either for themselves or for employers of labour. This enables VBE students to qualify for and hold productive employment as well as increases their productivity and earns more remuneration. Other importance of acquiring maximum skills and competencies includes: it reduces the drop-out rates

among the Nigerian youths, it helps to make the youths intelligent users of the products of technology as well as the most reliable vehicle for economic prosperity and diplomatic supremacy of the Nigerian nation. These benefits of maximum skills acquisition are still there if VBE students will think twice and change their negative attitudes towards it and turn to develop themselves sufficiently in the skills and competencies inherent in VBE programmes of their institutions. In fact when VBE students fail to acquire maximum skills from the programme, this in turn affects sustainable development negatively.



Adopted from the World Bank Group 2001

The three components of sustainable development are explained below:

According to Oxford University Press (1987), the Social Aspect of sustainable development looks at issues that impact people's lives directly and that either helps or hinders the process of improving the quality of lives. From the diagram above, the social aspect of sustainable development includes elements such as services, household needs, industrial growth, agricultural growth and efficient use of labour. In Nigeria, the curriculum contents of VBE equip the recipients with skills and competencies in direct and personal services, and other commercial services and business activities that help men and women to carry out productive processes that contribute to sustainable development. Apart from that, VBE skills and competencies of accounting, marketing, ICT and entrepreneurship tend to support industrial and agricultural growth and household needs by creating employment opportunities for households, thus enhancing sustainable development in one way or the other.

Economic aspect of sustainable development highlights the system that determines how limited resources needed to improve people's lives are distributed and used. The VBE curriculum contents of economic education impart VBE skills and competencies in social mobility, cultural preservation, empowerment, participation and equity. Indeed, the recipients of VBE are equipped with Economics curriculum objectives which emphasize economic literacy, prudent management of limited resources, respect for the dignity of labour and acquisition of economic knowledge for solving the economic problems of the society. Consequently, the VBE students are indeed equipped with all the above economic knowledge and economic understandings. However some of them lack interest in the subject matter, hence the level of skills and competencies acquired

are poor. The implication of this is that although roughly equal numbers of boys and girls who chose to study economics during their tertiary education level, yet the level of skills acquired would not be sufficient to contribute to sustainable development. Lastly, the environmental aspect of sustainable development looks at how the natural resources both renewable and non-renewable that make up our surrounding can help to sustain and better the lives of the people. Indeed, the acquisition of maximum VBE skills and competencies by students of the programmes help them to be engaged in the tapping and conversion of natural resources to the form that satisfy the needs of the Nigerian people nationwide.

IMPEDIMENTS TO PRACTICAL SKILL ACQUISITION AMONG VBE STUDENTS

Efforts to improve the standard and quality of acquisition of skills and competencies inherent in VBE courses to maximum level seems to be slowed down by a number of factors such as VBE students low interest in the skills and competencies, curriculum structure, inadequate personnel, inadequate equipment and facilities for the teaching and learning of the skills, inadequate material resources for training and others.

Many of the VBE students have very low interest in the skills and competencies inherent in VBE courses. This has made them to develop poor attitudes towards the skills and competencies inherent in the VBE courses. Because of such negative attitudes, the personal interest and willingness to concentrate and acquire maximum level of skills expected of them are not there. One of such negative attitudes is failure to sit down and make wise use of their time and energy in acquiring maximum skills for self-development and fulfilment. This is because time is a critical matter in everybody's lives. Consequently, the VBE students fail to find time to engage themselves in practical exercises in courses such as in accounting, typewriting, word-processing, and shorthand to mention just but a few. When assignments and home work are given in any of the subjects listed above, it is often discovered that about ninety percent of the VBE students in the class did not find time and/or take time to do it. Such students fail to take their studies seriously as they often come late to the lesson and even when they know that they are terribly late, yet they would be listening to pop music/other music or talking to people with their phones. A careful examination shows that they put more efforts in playing with their mobile phones and in making calls than they do with their studies. In fact, many of the VBE students often left practical subject lessons to stand outside to answer calls as well as make calls. A great majority of them does not consider the length of time spent outside the classroom for such calls neither do they consider that they have lost quite an important part of the lessons.

In view of the utilitarian nature of maximum skills acquisitions, VBE students should cultivate the habit of working hard, commitment and dedication to studies in order to achieve maximum skills acquisition needed by the employers of labour. Indeed many business students who enrol for VBE programmes do not show commitment and dedication to their studies because they are often attracted by very many unimportant issues during their studies. Such unimportant issues range from peer group pressure to friendship issues and joining the group of students popularly known as NFA – No future Ambition. The latter group can be said to be students who do not worry or who are not concerned about their poor performances at their varsities. All business students should regard hard work, commitment and dedication to studies as the sole reason why they are in school. When they are driven by such forces, they will discover that they are breaking

new grounds in their area of specialties and that they are acquiring maximum level of skills expected of them by labour market.

Furthermore, all business students should be determined to overcome the poor reading culture prevalent in the Nigerian society. In fact without a strong determination to overcome it, they will not be able to read their study materials and textbooks intensively and extensively. Globally, very many Nigerians are often associated with poor reading culture. In fact, there is a dictum among the people of colour, that if you have something worth millions of dollars to be given to Nigerians, then hide that inside a textbook and give it to the Nigerians to read and discover it, they said they are sure the Nigerians will never read the textbook to discover that treasure. Poor reading culture has affected the fabrics of our society so much so that many Nigerian students are held captive to it. Intensive and extensive reading is very pertinent because it equips the readers with all the information and knowledge required for success in the acquisition of VBE skills and competencies. However, many Nigerian students hate being given voluminous materials to read and in this way miss out the knowledge, skills and competencies that go with such materials. Some of them will even nickname the lecturers trying to involve them in intensive and extensive reading exercises as a way of discouraging them. Such students forget that a well-read student is bound to do far better than a poorly read one in all facets of life.

Another issue that affects maximum skills acquisition among VBE students in particular is their refusal to use their money to buy material resources for their own training. Indeed, most of them prefer to use their money to buy expensive handsets and recharge cards to phone their parents, friends and relatives at the expense of their studies. They forget that there is no substitute for having the correct textbooks, and other necessary materials when it comes to learning a skills to the maximum level of it. The VBE students should remember that having a personal laptop nowadays can help them to obtain knowledge, skills and competencies in information, and communication technology which in turns will help them to secure a lucrative job in the labour market. In disregard of this, VBE students prefer to use their money to go for anything that does not help them to learn business subjects at all. The other issue about the negative attitude of Business Education students is their unwillingness to change their thinking and behaviour positively. It is common place that one hundred (100%) percent of Business Education Students' success in life or in their studies is dependent on positive attitude to whatever they are taught. Indeed, the willingness to change positively their attitudes and behaviours help the students to acquire maximum skills expected of them for the labour market.

Unfortunately, many of the business students are often unwilling to change their negative attitudes. In fact, a majority of the business students in our schools and colleges are often unwilling to concentrate and study the skills content of business education to maximum level. For example, in the teaching and learning of typewriting, many students only want to operate the typewriter or computer keyboards with two or three fingers instead of their nine fingers. When teaching the students that they should use their nine fingers to type so that they could achieve maximum skills level, those who are used to operating the keyboard with two or three fingers would remain adamant and would be unwilling to change. Consequently, such students would not be able to achieve maximum skills level for the labour market.

The next issue to discuss here on impediments to maximum level of skills and competencies needed to enhance sustainable development in Nigeria is that VBE students do not want to be hard-working enough in their chosen careers. It is quite unfortunate that many business students choose to study a particular business subject and yet to refuse to work hard enough to acquire enough skills expected of them. In fact often times, when business teachers want their students to become serious and very hard-working in their studies; such teachers are often called nicknames by those lazy students. A majority of the business students would not appreciate the efforts of their teachers who want them to be hard working for wellbeing in the future; instead they looked at them as being wicked, cruel and not cooperating with them.

Another impediment to acquiring maximum VBE skills acquisition and competencies is the failure of governmental agencies, private organisations and local communities towards investment in the purchase of relevant equipment and facilities needed in the training of their VBE students. The governments, parents and others lack the will to invest in the education of their children. They are not ready to buy and install modern facilities and equipment needed for practical assignments in their classes. For example, there are inadequate number of manual and electric typewriters in almost all our schools and colleges. Also, there are no computers for the teaching-learning of information and communication technology (ICT). However, this is not the case in schools and colleges in Britain, China, Japan, America and other countries abroad. In fact, in those countries, primary school pupils play with as well as learn with computers and other educational resources right from kindergarten. Here in our nation, kindergarten children study under shades of trees, sitting down on the fields, or blocks without seeing anything like a computer or a manual typewriter. Indeed very many VBE students often go from one class to another without properly learning what are expected of them. In the end, such children cannot do well in their studies in schools and colleges.

The other factors impeding maximum skills acquisition in our schools and colleges include: inadequate trained personnel to teach the skills and competencies plus too many students admitted into one class, poor maintenance culture, lack of electricity and dishonest students and leaders. In the case of having too many children to be taught at a go, it is not surprising to see over five hundred students in one VBE subject class. Many of them have no seat and no writing table. Even when there are tables and seats, too many children are squeezed into one seat. Consequently, they lack the comfort and conducive atmosphere needed for maximum skills acquisition. Again, the curriculum structure seems not to allow enough hours for practical work, thus the VBE students learn more of theory than practical work.

In addition, there is poor maintenance culture in our schools and colleges. Consequently, the buildings in schools and colleges are dilapidated, and windows and doors are often broken down. The headmasters and principals are often not disturbed about the poor state of facilities and equipment in their learning institutions. The government in power does not release money for yearly maintenance culture. In fact, most of our schools and colleges are worse than piggery farms in abroad. There is also lack of electricity in our schools and colleges for practical work and we have many dishonest students and leaders are all out to steal and destroy whatever the government has made available in our schools and colleges.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the above impediments to maximum skills acquisition in VBE, the following recommendations are made: The VBE students should be willing to cultivate keen interest in the skills and competencies inherent in the VBE programmes. They should also determine to be more industrious and to show appreciation to teachers who could make them to work harder. They should learn to do away with poor reading culture and be prepared to read and practise intensively and extensively. The students should be seriously committed and dedicated to their practical contents of their programme. Both VBE students and their student leaders should learn to do away with all forms of dishonesty. Furthermore, provision of basic facilities, equipment and material resources for the teaching-learning of VBE subjects should be made available. Proper investment should be made towards boosting the teaching and learning materials in VBE in our schools and colleges. As VBE equips the recipients with firm-specific, industry-specific and general skills and competencies, this paper therefore appeals to all VBE students to make sure they acquire maximum and sufficient skills and competencies that will help them to live and contribute to sustainable development in Nigeria. The writer therefore lists the following techniques as a means of improving skill acquisition in VBE: 1. Establishment of more VBE skill acquisition business centres, where VBE students could go and acquire skills of typewriting, shorthand, accounting, marketing, salesmanship, etc. 2. All facilities and equipment required for the business occupations are to be put in place in order to enhance training in all the business skills. 3. Guidance and counselling units should be put in place in all the business centres and technical colleges so as to create career awareness to the trainees. 4. Teachers of VBE departments should be trained and retrained so that they will update their training to fill the gap between school training and the industries. 5. Establishment of functional skill acquisition business centres for intensive and extensive practice before graduation and 6. Establishment of a special scheme whereby interested VBE graduates will be supplied with a take up equipment and loan to enable them start their own skill acquisition business centres.

REFERENCES

- BBC English and HarperCollins Publishers (1992) *BBC English Dictionary, A Dictionary for the World*. London: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Ekpenyong, L. E. (1988) "Vocational Content in the National Curriculum for Nigerian Secondary Schools: How Industry Can Help?" *The Vocational Aspect of Education* Vol XL (106) 57 – 62.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) *National Policy on Education*: Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Okorie, J. U. And Ezeji, S. C. O. A (1988) *Elements of Guidance, Vocational and Career Education*. Onitsha: Summer Educational Publishers Nigeria Limited.
- Osuala, E. C. (1998) *Foundations of Vocational Education* (4th Ed.) Onitsha: Cape
- Osuala, E. C. (1987) *A handbook of vocational-technical education for Nigeria*: Anambra State, Nigeria: Pacific Publishers.
- Oxford, Oxford University Press(1987) *From the World Commission on Environment and Development's (the Brundtland Commission) report Our Common Future*.
- Oxford Popular School Dictionary (2002) *Oxford Popular School Thesaurus, Tested in Schools, The Student Support Centre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Telsang, M. T. (2007) *Industrial and Business Management*. New Delhi: S. Chand and Company

Limited.

The Worldbank Group (2001) Website: <http://www.worldbank.org/depweb/sd.html>

Udo, M. P. (2008) *Principles and Methods in business education*. Jos: Calvary Press.

Udo, M. P. (2012) *Gender Dimensions in the teaching and learning of VBE in Nigerian senior secondary schools*. Unpublished PHD Thesis submitted to the University of Leeds, Leeds, England.