

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN JUNIOR SECONDARY VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS: AN ANTIDOTE TO YOUTHS UNEMPLOYMENT

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Abstract

Computer education in Nigerian Junior Secondary Schools is yet to start in earnest. Particularly in public schools, students' ratios in computer education are unbelievably small. As a matter of fact, efforts on government's part to put in place needed infrastructures and accessories have also not been adequate. It is imperative that the modern world demands vocational and technological skills for an individual to be relevant especially, in the labour market. This then means that Nigerian schools, no less than her junior secondary schools, should equip the pupils with necessary and relevant computer and information and technology (ICT) skills. Today, we talk about the world being a global village. This is made possible by advanced technology especially (ICT). Acquisition of computer literacy skills has therefore become necessary to be employable in this world of computers. With this in mind, this paper assesses the extent to which the 1987 policy on computer education has been implemented. The paper also identifies the lapses in the policy and proffers suggestions that could be used for the development and improvement of computer education programme in Nigerian secondary schools particularly in junior vocational institutions.

Keywords: Computer education, youth unemployment, vocational, junior secondary schools

Introduction

Precisely, in 1987, the policy of Nigerian government which introduced computer education into the nation's secondary school systems was inaugurated by the then Minister of Education. The policy was inaugurated in an attempt by the Nigerian government to formally introduce computer education into her school systems. The inauguration gave an initial impression of considerable efforts on the government's part with high expectations from the public.

The policy has three main objectives:

1. To promote training for people and apply the scientific and computer knowledge to the improvement of environmental problems for the use of convenience of man;
2. To give training to people and impart the necessary skills leading to the production of technicians, craftsmen and other personnel and,
3. To enable young men and women to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology (Aminu Report on National Committee on Computer Education, 1989, p1).

As at March 2011, 4.90% (www.indexmundi.com) of Nigerians are unemployed and many young graduates roam the streets. This paper therefore examines the journey so far in line with the youth unemployment crisis and the use of computer education studies in

Nigerian Junior Secondary Schools required to alleviate unemployment.

Computer education in Nigerian schools

The policy of the government to introduce computer education into Nigerian Secondary School system came with the inauguration of National Committee on Computer Education in December 1987 by the then Minister of Education. Before this time, the subject had not been taught in any of the government secondary schools. Very few private schools however were offering computer education programmes without uniform standard. The programme was not made examinable in any of the private schools. At best, according to Jegede and Adelodun (2003), the programme was offered as a co-curricular activity and the essence of its introduction was probably for public purpose.

Following the inauguration of the policy, the National Computer Committee recommended an immediate production of a syllabus in line with the standard procedure for the production of same in different subjects at the secondary school level in 1988. One was eventually produced some 10 years later and made available to computer teachers at Minna Computer Education Workshop. Surprisingly, however, many of the serving teachers were not aware of any computer syllabus and many did not attend the said workshop. Even those teachers that attended gave the new syllabus the least popularity.

Some studies had been carried out on the inauguration of the nation's computer education policy and the implementation of its stated objectives. For example, Jegede and Adelodun (2003) examined the extent to which necessary facilities like hardware, computer laboratories and relevant textbooks are available in computer studies; and also examined how well the designed syllabus has been implemented in schools. Oni (2007) also examined the possibilities of integrating computer components vis-à-vis computer education programmes into various vocational subjects currently being run in Nigerian Junior Secondary Schools.

Results of Jegede and Adelodun's study revealed that almost nothing is happening at present in Nigerian secondary schools regarding computer studies. Even in Oni's study, it was found that not much is currently going on in Nigerian secondary schools regarding computer education. Afolabi et al, (1999) had earlier observed that the said introduction of computer education in Nigerian schools was a political propaganda and that acquisition of computer literacy by Nigeria citizenry, which was the initial objective of computer education in schools, is far from being realized almost a decade after.

Importance of computer education to youths employment

Computer has become the need of the day because of its wide variety of applications in different spheres of life. Computers are now ubiquitous and used in almost every sphere of life. By computer education, we mean, gaining the know-how of basic concepts related to a computer and gaining the basic knowledge of computer operation. Knowing about the basic components of a computer, the basic concept behind the use of computers and the know-how of some of the elementary computer applications constitutes computer education (www.buzzle.com). Learning about the computer basics followed by a practical experience of using a computer is the key to computer education (Oak n.d.). It is important to note that computer as a subject cannot be adequately learnt and taught without appropriate syllabus and adequate personnel. Evoh (2007) noted that improved secondary education is essential for the creation of effective human capital in any country. Until these important factors are

ensured and put in place by the Nigerian Education Ministry, no meaningful computer education can be in place in the nation's secondary schools.

As computers are widely used today, acquiring computer education is the need of the modern times. Only computer education can facilitate the use of computers for purposes of communication and entertainment. Computer knowledge coupled with certain other job skills increases one's chances of getting a job. Those with knowledge of computers are considered trainable for many kinds of jobs. As most of the jobs involve the use of computers, computer education is an eligibility criterion for almost all of the modern-day jobs. According to Adomi and Anie (2006), organizations are finding it very necessary to train and re-train their employees to establish or increase their knowledge of computers and other ICT facilities. This, Adomi and Kpangban (2010) believed call for early acquisition of computer and ICT skills by students.

Today, banking transactions and payments of bills can be done over the internet. Similarly, online shopping is becoming widely popular. To be in the race, it is very important to take computer education. To keep up the pace in this fast moving life of today, computer education is extremely important. Introducing computers early in education lays the foundation of most of the major competitive careers (www.scribd.com). Computers play a significant role in one's personal and professional life. Virtually all careers including schooling demand skillful knowledge of computer for one to succeed at one's business. The ability to use computers effectively has become an essential part of everyone's education (Adomi and Kpangban, 2010).

No one would think that computer would have the kind of influence it is having now on our lives considering the computer influence in the 80s. Now, no matter whether it is financing, chatting, e-mailing, or no matter what, we only use computers and nothing else (www.uaseducation.com). Skills such as bookkeeping, clerical and administrative work, stock taking, and so forth, now constitute a set of computerized practices that form the core IT skills package: spreadsheets, word processors, and databases (Reffell and Whitworth, 2002 cited by Adomi and Kpangban, 2010). Thus, computer education is a must in this world that runs virtually on computers. In this modern technological world, if a person is not having a working knowledge of computers, then he will not be able to go far in life as far as his career options are concerned as nothing is there in this world that does not work on computer technology. To this end, computer education is becoming absolutely vital for everyone who belongs to this modern-day society.

Adomi and Kpangban (2010) reiterated that the demand for computer/ICT literacy is increasing in Nigeria. This, according to them, is because employees realize that computer and other ICT facilities can enhance efficiency. On the other hand, employees have also realized that computers can be a threat to their jobs, and the only way to enhance job security is to become computer literate. Thus, with the increased demand for computer literacy in the world of works, the teaching and learning of these skills are becoming a concern among professionals. Nigerian youths should not be left out.

Problems

In Nigeria, the Federal Government constitutes the major source of financing computer education in secondary schools particularly in Federal Unity Secondary Schools. For example in Jegede and Adelodun's study, over 80% of the schools indicated the

government to be their sole financier. About 10% indicated the government and the Parents Teachers Association (P.T.A), while the remaining 10% indicated that government and the old students association were their financiers (Jegede and Adedun, 2003, p.4).

Apart from funding problem, community orientation seems to be inadequate. For example, the awareness level of computer studies seems very low on government's part and government has not shown much enthusiasm to pay realistically for computer education. This is demonstrated by the gross inadequate hard ware and other computer facilities in our secondary schools and thus makes computer studies generally unpopular in the nation's junior and senior secondary schools. Okebukola (1997) asserted that the computer is not part of classroom technology in more than 90 percent of Nigerian public schools. What this implies is that the chalkboard and textbooks continue to dominate classroom activities in most Nigerian secondary schools.

Youths unemployment in nigeria

Unemployment is one of the most serious problems facing Nigerians today especially the youths. Within the last 10 years, Nigeria has been enmeshed in mass production of young graduates from secondary and post secondary institutions without commensurate employment opportunities. Many youths today roam Nigerian streets in search of jobs which are not there. In 1986, the Nigerian government established the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) to find solution to unemployment crisis in the nation. The statutory functions assigned to NDE are to:

1. Design and implement programs to combat mass unemployment;
2. Articulate policies aimed at developing work programs with labour intensive potentials;
3. Obtain and maintain a data bank on vacancies and employment opportunities in Nigeria with other government agencies, and
4. Implement any other policy as may be laid down from time to time (NDE, 1992,p.5).

The NDE functions are hinged to its philosophy. The philosophy is based on self enterprise which emphasizes self-employment and self-reliance in preference to wage employment. This philosophy is pursued through policy planning as well as articulated programmes of Rural Employment Promotion (REP) which diversifies into Small Scale Enterprise programme (SSE); Vocational Skills Development programme (VSD) and Special Public Work programme (SPW). Even with these philosophically emphasized NDE functions, youth unemployment still stands at 4.90% as earlier indicated. Many youths today have been forced into oil bunkering; internet fraud popularly called "yahoo-yahoo", kidnapping for ransoms and armed robbery because there are no jobs and no conducive environment for self employment.

The above unemployment data to some extent seem incredible. For example, if the nation's unemployment rate is just 4.9%, why are graduates still without work 5 years after graduation and why pervasive poverty among youths? The answer to this question may not be farfetched considering the fact that many young school leavers are without vocational skills that can make them employable in the modern labour market that is computer infected! Thus, it becomes imperative that implementation of the National Policy on computer education especially in Nigerian Junior and Senior Secondary Schools need to be ensured. This is a major way of imparting the ever growing population of youths and school leavers

with necessary computer literacy skills that would guarantee their employment in nation's labour market. Getting sales clerk jobs, office attendant/secretary demand the workable knowledge of computer. These young school leavers must start from somewhere!

Suggestions and conclusion

This paper suggests the use of computer education in Nigerian Junior Vocational Secondary Schools as an antidote to youth unemployment. Currently, however, the types of job we have in the country are-driving, trading, pure water selling, phone recharge cards selling, phone booth operators, street hawking, professional begging, wharf rats, bus conductors, check point toll collectors and commercial motor-cycling among others, (for junior cadre). These are consumerist force jobs without security and tenure that we call jobs in Nigeria. These jobs can be classified as secured and tenable employments in developed or advanced country.

The antidote to the problem of unemployment generally is self-employment and self-sufficiency and Nigeria government must be prepared and be ready to solve this problem particularly as regards the youths who are the future hopes. This can be done by early impartation of relevant job skills in youths in their early education. Nigerian government must realize that unemployed graduates are ensnared by crime, such as fraud also called "419" in Nigeria, armed robbery, kidnapping/abduction, oil bunkering and internet crime among others.

Conclusion

Prevention, they say, is better than cure. The youth unemployment can be well-prevented if the government at all levels in Nigeria will ensure the implementation of the policy on computer education in our schools. If we desire positive changes and drastic reduction in unemployment rate then, things must be done differently. One cannot continue to do a thing the same way and expect a different result. Nigerian education programmes must be practical/vocational oriented. This is a major way forward. The implementation of the policy on computer education presupposes adequate funding, provision of human and material resources that will guarantee successful and productive computer education. This will enable the schools to provide quality education for students who will graduate to become self-employed and self-sufficient and consequently will be able to:

1. Shift their mindset from roaming the streets or being someone else's servant to becoming a master on their own (self employed/self sufficient);
2. Demonstrate creativity, ingenuity and innovation and be able engage in small scale ventures on their own.

In addition to graduates being able to perform the above functions of self-employed self-sufficiency, it is strongly believed that if there is good commitment on Nigerian government's part in adequately funding of computer education, the status of computer studies will be heightened in such a way that its objective will be realized in no distant time.

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