

SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN BUSINESS EDUCATION FOR THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs)

BY

UGWUOGO, CHRISTOPHER C.

ABSTRACT

This paper enumerates the Millennium Development Goals (MOGs) and its targets. It also assesses the progress so far made in the world, Africa and Nigeria in particular. Various reports cited reveal that African countries and Nigeria in particular are not on track in meeting most of the MDGs by 2015. Skill development in business education is identified as one of the steps that will help Nigeria reverse this trend and be on the part of progress especially in eradicating extreme poverty. The paper also discusses the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition and 21st Century Employable Skills as guide for the Government, curriculum planners and implementers in using education to tackle problems of unemployment, poverty, ignorance and disease. A call for retraining of business educators on ICT and entrepreneurial skills is one of the recommendations made.

INTRODUCTION

In the Year 2000, 192 United Nations member States and at least 23 International organizations reached one of the great decisions of the 20th century They agreed to work together to end extreme poverty within 15 years i.e. by 2015. They set 8 goals known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The goals are to:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equity and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV / AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

At the continent's level, the African Union (AU) has organs in the Constitutive Act concerned with economic development in the region such as Economic, Social and Cultural Council, Human Resources, Science and Technology etc, (Egiebade, 2004). The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is AU's strategic policy framework that is aimed at eradicating poverty, placing African countries, both collectively and individually on a path of sustainable growth and development; extricating the continent from marginalization and exclusion in a global world. At the first summits of the AU in Durban, the Heads of State and Government endorsed the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which serves as the mutually agreed instrument for self monitoring by the participating member governments. The mandate of the APRM which is flagship of the NEPAD process is to ensure that the policies and practices of the participating countries conform to the agreed political, economic and corporate governance values.

The achievement of the MDGs requires strategic and sustained actions which include but not limited to massive human capital development. One of such strategic areas of human capital development is in business education. This paper therefore, discusses how skill development in Business Education can enhance the attainment of MDGs by 2015.

MDGs TARGETS

Each of the 8 MDGs has a number of targets which will serve as indices for measuring the attainment or otherwise of the goal. The targets as enumerated in the Wikipedia (2009) are stated here under:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. The targets are:

- a) Halve the proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day.
- b) Achieve employment for women, men, and young people.
- c) Halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education. The target is

- a) By 2015, all children can complete a full course of primary schooling, girls and boys.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women. The target is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary schools preferably by 2005 and at all levels by 2015.

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality. This is targeted at reducing by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health. The targets are:

- a) Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.
- b) Achieve by 2015, universal access to production health.

Goal 6: Combat HIV / AIDS, malaria and other diseases. The targets are:

- a) Have halted by 2015 and began to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- b) Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV / AIDS for all those who need it.
- c) Have halted by 2015 and began to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability. The targets are:

- a) Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources.
- b) Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss.
- c) Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.
- d) By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development. The targets are:

- a) Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system.

- b) Address the special needs of the Least Developed Countries (LDC).
- c) Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small Island developing States.
- d) Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term.

THE MDGs PROGRESS REPORT

Report on attainment of MDGs so far is a mixed bag. Progress towards reaching the goals has been uneven. Report from Wikipedia (2009) indicates that some countries have achieved many of the goals, while others are not on track to realize any. According to the report, the major countries that have achieved their goals include China (whose poverty population has reduced from 452 million to 278 million) and India due to clear internal and external factors of population and economic development. However, areas needing the most reduction, such as the Sub-Saharan African regions have yet to make any drastic changes in improving their quality of life. In the same time as China, the Sub-Saharan Africa reduced their poverty about one percent, and are at risk of not meeting the MDGs by 2015.

In a related submission, the Development Magazine (2008) reports that over half-way to 2015, the world is making progress sort of. It gave account that 34 countries are on track to meet the infant mortality goal; 44 look likely to meet the poverty goal; 47 can meet the education goal. Increased aid and deeper debt cancellation have helped nearly 40 million more African children into school. More than a million people are on antiretroviral treatment in Sub-Saharan Africa as against 100,000 people in 2005. On the contrary, the Development Magazine (2008:4) states thus:

“We are not on course to meet the MDGs by 2015. Not even close to being on course. Seventy-two million children of primary school age are still not in school; only a third of countries are on track to halve the number who have no safe drinking water, and more than half a million women still die annually from treatable and preventable complications of pregnancy and childbirth”.

The Constitution (2006) did not paint a better picture of the situation as it cites Africa as the only continent not on track to meet any of the goals of the millennium declaration by 2015.

According to Igbuzor (2006) in Shu'aib (2008), the 2004 report which was Nigeria's first report on the MDGs states that it is unlikely that the country will be able to meet most of the goals by 2015 especially the goals related to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, reducing child and maternal mortality and combating HIV / AIDS, malaria and other diseases. It further states that for most of the other goals, up-to-date data indicate that it will be difficult for the country to achieve the MDGs target by 2015. The second report in 2005 according to Igbuzor (2006) in Shu'aib (2008) indicates a high potential to attain some of the MDGs namely on universal primary education, environmental sustainability, developing a global partnership for development and eradication of extreme poverty.

The likelihood of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger is being threatened by the current global food shortage and economic meltdown. Also, the international organizations definition of extreme poverty in developing nations as having a household income of less than US \$1 per day needs a rethink. This is so against the backdrop of the current cost of living. The Nigeria's only hope of eradicating extreme poverty is through massive skill development of her citizens.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

The Microsoft Encarta Premium Dictionary (2009) defines a skill as the ability to do something well; usually gained through training or experience. Similarly, Guthrie (1952), defines a skill as the ability to bring about some end result with maximum certainty and minimum outlay of energy or of time and energy. On the other hand, development is the process of changing and becoming larger, stronger, or more impressive, successful or advanced, or of causing somebody or something to change in this way (Microsoft Encarta Premium Dictionary, 2009). Skill development, therefore, is the process of causing somebody to acquire the ability to do something well through training or experience.

The Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition cited in Wikipedia (2009) postulates that when individuals acquire a skill through external instruction, they normally pass through five stages. The five stages of skill acquisition are:

1. **Novice:** At this stage, a person follows rules that are context free and feel no responsibility for anything other than following the rules. It is characterized by rigid adherence to rules and no discretionary judgement.
2. **Advanced Beginner:** At this stage, the situational perception is still limited and all aspects of work are treated separately and given equal importance.
3. **Competent:** Competence develops when the number of rules becomes excessive or organizing principles need to be developed and information sorted by relevance. At this stage, the individual partially sees action as part of longer term goals and there is conscious and deliberate planning.
4. **Proficient:** Proficiency is shown in individuals who use intuition in decision making and develop their own rules to formulate plans. The individual has a holistic view of situation, rather than in terms of aspects, and sees what is most important in a situation.
5. **Expert:** The individual no longer relies on rules and guidelines and has intuitive grasp of situation, based on tacit knowledge and vision of what is possible

The progression is thus, viewed as a gradual transition from rigid adherence to rule to an intuitive mode of reasoning that relies heavily on deep tacit understanding.

EMPLOYABLE CAREER SKILLS

The unemployment among school leavers especially graduates has always been attributed to the fact that most graduates were ill-equipped with sufficient skill for a particular job (Ugbe, 2002). Developing employable skills is a sure way of curbing youth unemployment and reducing poverty. Brandau (2009), listed the following 10 skills that if acquired and refined, will increase professional confidence level on the recipients and make them more employable in the 21st century.

1. **Constantly adapt to technology:** Dependency on technology in the future will increase not decrease Spend time learning new computer programmes but more importantly, make applications to your daily routine and strive to use technology as an enabler of productivity, not as toy with tons of cute features that you do not use.

2. **Embrace diversity:** Get comfortable with other ethnic cultures, religions and customs. Be curious about what makes people from other cultures tick. Learn a little about the customs and attitudes that belong to workers from other countries.
3. **Be a life-long learner:** The new century will require one to be a continuous learner. Be prepared to reinvent oneself as constantly as information changes.
4. **Practise impeccable integrity:** Employers need to feel employee's spirit and have the quiet assurance that they are honest. Taking integrity beyond just simple honesty, however, means that when one commits to a deadline, one is fully committed to producing results, not excuses.
5. **Be a self-starter:** Those who learn to work on the optimistic side of life not the pessimistic side, are more valuable to the organization as they create a positive work environment that produces higher productivity.
6. **Demonstrate personal discipline:** Employers want to hire people who have disciplined work habits and disciplined thinking, When one demonstrate personal discipline, one and ones manager can spend more time on solving problems and moving the organization forward.
7. **Prioritize and evaluate daily:** Two of the biggest time wasters in the world are not knowing where to start when one gets to work in the morning and working on low priority items. To compete in the global work environment takes meticulous prioritization of tasks and ability to identify the highest priority item that one tackles first every morning.
8. **Be adaptable:** Change is inevitable. Do not resist change initiatives. Learn to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Ask tough questions that define the future and actively look for ways to support the new change initiative.
9. **Think creatively and innovatively:** Contributing to ones organization demands thinking outside the box and looking for creative ways to solving nagging problems, increase productivity or produce a new product or service.
10. **Have the can-do attitude:** Do not succumb to pressures and frustrations of work. Train your mind to see the positive, to find the positive and to see the opportunity lurking in the obstacle. If one can master the positive can-do

attitude, one will add value to everything one touches and be more employable in an increasing negative world.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

The career skills mentioned supra are soft skills and there are other hard and soft skills peculiar to a particular occupation which individuals need to acquire. The developed countries of the world used education, technology and resources at their disposal to solve the problems of poverty, ignorance, disease, social and economic problems. Nigeria can also explore skill development in business education in order to solve her problems of unemployment, poverty and hunger.

Business education is defined by Nanacy (1979), as that aspect of the total education programme that provides the knowledge, skills, understanding and attitude needed to perform in business world as a producer and as a consumer of goods and services that business offers. UNESCO in Ugwuogo (2008), posits that an effective education in the 21st century must provide a harmonious balance between academic education and practical skills development, including technical and vocational education which business education is a part of. Skills in business education revolve around Information and Communication Technology (ICT). These skills should go beyond keyboarding as a basic literacy skill to include composing, editing, enunciating, electronic handwriting, scanning, internet surfing, desktop publishing, binding, accounting, secretarial, marketing etc.

One of the objectives of business education as documented by Federal Republic of Nigeria (2008) is to equip graduates with the right skills that will enable them to engage in a life of work in the office as well as for self-employment. The world presently is revolving around ICT and entrepreneurship and business education is at the centre of this renaissance. Little wonder then that the NCCE Minimum Standards in addition to core business education courses lay much emphasis on the acquisition of ICT and entrepreneurship skills.

For business education to deliver on its mandate of self-reliance, these skills should not be scratched on the surface. The University of Tennessee (2007) identifies mandatory ICT skills to include, basic knowledge of computers, proficiency in using productivity software, electronic communication skills, internet skills and ability to move files. Similarly, entrepreneurial skill should cover areas such as concept of entrepreneurship,

entrepreneurial theory, types of risks and their managements, types of businesses, business financing, business and technology, and feasibility study. Others include; site selection and location of business, consumer behaviour, succession issues, business registration, record keeping, human resource management and a host of others.

As much beautiful as a curriculum document may be, it is meaningless if poorly implemented. At the core of curriculum implementation are the teachers, students and administrators. The teachers have to be skilled themselves. As the going says *nemo dat quod non habet* meaning nobody, gives what he/she does not have. Resource materials do not achieve any values on their own. Their usefulness depends on what the teacher and learner make out of it. Unfortunately, many of the teachers are the analogue type. It was on this account that Nwosu (2009) laments that the reason why some of the available ICT facilities are not used is that teachers (and some students as well) lack the necessary skills to operate them.

Students on their part should realize that teaching and learning had shifted from subject centeredness in which the teacher dominates the learning scene to learners centeredness in which the learner dominates by actively doing the learning himself. Finally, the administrators should be supportive of training and re-training initiatives to update the knowledge and skills of teachers. They should also provide conducive learning environment through the provision of necessary learning facilities and resources.

CONCLUSION

The MDGs are targeted at eradicating extreme poverty and hunger among others by 2015. For these goals to be achieved practical and utilitarian, education has to be in place. The development of Ia and entrepreneurial skills in business education is sine qua non to the achievement of MDGs. For these skills to be developed, teachers have to be updated in their knowledge and skills, students have to move from receivers of knowledge to active participants in the learning process. Above all, the administrators have to be supportive of all the processes that will facilitate functional business education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Business educators should be re-trained on Ia and entrepreneurship skills to be able to impart these skills on their students.

2. Business educators should actively involve students in the learning process by constantly giving tasks and assignments.
3. An in-depth study of la and entrepreneurial skills are sine qua non to self-reliance and therefore, should not be scratched on the surface.
4. Administrators of business education programme should provide adequate conducive learning environment, facilities and resources.

REFERENCES

- Brandan, K (2009). Ten Career Skills to Keep you Employable in the 21st Century Retrieved on 4th August from <http://www.changingminds/articles/ltencareerskills.htm>
- Development Magazine (2008) Half way to the 2015 target data, can we still achieve the Millennium Development Goals? A publication of the British Department for International Development (DAD) Issues 40 4.
- Egiebade, Al. (2004) From OAU to AU: The Quest for development The Constitution 4(3) September 59-71.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2008). Minimum Standards for NCE Abuja: National Commission for Colleges of Education.
- Gutherie (1952). Skill Acquisition and Proficiency. Retrieved on 4th August from <http://www.exxx.net/psychology/skill.html>
- Microsoft Encarta Premium Dictionary (2009). Definitions of Skill and Development
- Nancy, L.C. (1979) Principles and Trends in Business Education London McGraw-Hill Book Company
- Nwosu, A N. (2009). Office technology and management programme in the Polytechnic Instructional System: Emerging issues in vocational education. Business Education Book of Reading 1 (a). 48 - 53.
- Shu'aib, KM. (2008) The place of entrepreneurship for achieving the MDGs in Nigeria. Bichi Journal of Business Education. 1(1). 101-108.

The Constitution (2006). G8 Gleneagles 2005: Africa. The Constitution 6(1). March. 138.

Ugbe, AS. (2002). The role of business education towards creation of employment in Nigeria's economy The Educator 2(2). 409-415.

University of Tennessee (2007) Information and communication technology skills. Retrieved April 17, 2009 from <http://www.sis.ulkedu/computing>.

Wikipedia (2009). Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition. Retrieved on 7th August from http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/dreyfus_model_of_skill_acquisition.