



SKILL ACQUISITION AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Skill acquisition as a means of youth empowerment has caught government's attention in Nigeria for over two decades. This is so because it is believed that exposing youth in skill acquisition programmes will reduce youth unemployment and enhance their self sustenance. In view of this therefore, this paper examines different skill acquisition programmes established by past and present administrations in the country to ensure youth empowerment. It also discusses different youth empowerment strategies that could imbibe in the youths the spirit of self-reliance and self-dependence. The study also made recommendations such as the establishment of skill acquisition centers in every nook and cranny of the country to make the programme accessible to the youths, the recruitment of competent and experienced craftsmen and women as instructors to make these programmes more viable and the streamline of the skill acquisition programmes to make them effective for the benefits of the unemployed youths in the country among others.

Introduction

Skill acquisition can be defined as the form of training by individuals or group of individuals that can lead to acquisition of knowledge for self sustenance. It involves the training of people in different fields of trade under a legal agreement between the trainers and the trainees for certain duration and under certain conditions. Ochiagha (1995) defined skill acquisition as the process of demonstrating the habit of active thinking or behaviour in a specific activity. He further stated that skill acquisition is seen as the ability to do or perform an activity that is related to some meaningful exercise, work or job. He maintains that for skill to be acquired, appropriate knowledge, attitudes, habits of thought and qualities of character are learnt to enable the acquirer develop intellectual, emotional and moral character which prepares him or her for a brighter future.

Similarly, Donli (2004) is of the view that skill acquisition is the manifestation of idea and knowledge through training which is geared towards instilling in individuals, the spirit of entrepreneurship needed for meaningful development. He stressed that if individuals are given the opportunity to acquire relevant skills needed for self sustenance in the economy, it will promote their charisma in any work environment. He further maintains that skill acquisition increases competition and cooperation among people.

Accordingly, Magbagbeola (2004) posited that skills acquisition requires the accumulation of different skills that enhances task performance through the integration of both theoretical and practical forms of knowledge. He enumerated the guidelines for the sustenance of skill acquisition programme to include the followings;

- Provision of training that gives the trainees the opportunities to acquire skills that are appropriate for preparation in a field of trade for gainful employment.
- Provision of definite skills that relate to each trade that makes one a professional in one field instead of the others.
- that training have to be done by competent, experienced and qualified instructors
- Skill acquisition requires much practice, patience, interest, ability, aptitude and personality traits.
- Skill acquisition requires conducive environment.
- Training requires constructive human relationship, business skills, imitation and constructive ideas.
- The principles guiding training in a particular field in terms of attitude, customer-relationship, productivity, efficiency, supply and demand needs to be appreciated.

From the above scenario, it can be stated that skill acquisition requires a holistic approach in the realization of creative ideas. It helps in the transformation of knowledge and skills into creative venture. This paper therefore, discusses the impact of skill acquisition on youth empowerment.

Youth Empowerment

Youth empowerment according to Jimba (2006) involves different ways the youth can be facilitated to cause changes in their life style. He maintained that youth empowerment means a way of inculcating into the youths the spirit of transformation of ideas into creativeness. Youth empowerment can also be seen as a means of exposing the youths into skills or training that makes them productive. It encompasses different ways youth can be exposed into different trades that may help them to engage in sustainable paid and self-employment.

The purpose of skill acquisition programme as a means of youth empowerment according to Ogundowolo (1998) is to prepare and equip the youths with appropriate skills that can be beneficial to them in future. He maintained that ideal skill acquisition is capable of ensuring value re-orientation among the youths and transforming them into creators of wealth and employment instead or seekers. Basically, the creation of wealth and employment will lead to poverty reduction and increase of welfare status of individuals in the country.

In line with the above view, Ogbé (1996) stated that wealth creation acquired through youth empowerment is expected to reverse the structural weakness and imbalances in the economy by providing strategic focus and direction and inculcating in the youths the right ethics, discipline, values, hard work, honesty, respect and humility among others. To meet up with these challenges facing the youths, different skill acquisition programmes were initiated and put in place by the Federal and State governments throughout the country to instill in them the habit of acting through repetition and practice. The skill acquisition programmes instituted in Nigeria over the years according to Douli (2002), include the following:

- The green revolution programme which was in response to the programme of operation feed the nation 1976.
- The school-to-land programme and skill acquisition programme of 1978.
- The youth employment and vocational skill development scheme of (NDE) in 1986.
- The small-scale industrial and graduate farmers programme of NDE in 1988.
- The national open apprenticeship scheme of 1988.

Prominent among the reasons for the growth and expansion of skills acquisition programmes in Nigeria was the need for the survival of the youths through self reliance programmes. Initially, the efforts of the government towards youth empowerment was in agricultural production but as time went by, the idea was diversified into agricultural, industrial and handcrafts production that can yield income and make the youths viable. In recent years, in order to achieve the desired goal, different training programmes were instituted by the Federal and State government to imbibe in the youths the culture of creativity and entrepreneurship. These training programmes are:

- **National Directorate of Employment**
The national directorate of employment is an organization set up by the federal government in 1986 to assist the youth to ensure a base in life. This according to Idachaba (2006) is achieved through workshops, seminars, industrial loan scheme and a host of others. To make this scheme a reality venture, there was diversity of training by the directorate to make the youths more viable. The training programmes among other things include:
 - **Workshop and seminars**
In this case, the directorate organizes workshops and seminars on different trades and invited the youths to participate in such exercises. Papers were invited from both private and public sectors to enable the trainees acquire skills and knowledge that will be relevant to them in future.
 - **On-the-job training**
New employees of the directorate are usually assigned to specific jobs or work in shops, offices and mechanics workshops, to enhance their creative ability. Effective on-the-job training depends primarily on qualified and competent hands employed to train the youths. This type of training according to Ochiagha (1992) is helpful because it makes the trainees to master the job easily.
 - **Off-the-job-training**
This type of training enables the trainees to leave their job and obtain an additional training which enable them to be acquainted with new ideas in the work environment. The training programme according to Magbagbeola (2004) was initiated by the directorate because of the intensiveness of the training. It is believed that after the training, the trainees get accustomed to their work easily because of past experience on the job.
 - **Programmed instruction**
Programmed instruction is the method of training which uses teaching machines, programmed books or filmstrip in training. The youths are recruited and posted to these training grounds to equip them with new training techniques that will better their future. This type of training differs from conventional training because it is mounted with information and communication technology (ICT).
- **National open apprenticeship scheme**
National open apprenticeship scheme according to Douli, (2002), is the type of skill acquisition programme designed to help in training of unemployed youths such as school drop out to acquire marketable skills that will help them to find meaningful employment on completion of training. In the operation of national open apprenticeship scheme, applicants are given forms to complete by indicating their vocational interest, location and educational background. This implies that to a large extent each applicant has a choice as to what trade he or she wants to learn. The forms according to Ochiagha (1995) are processed in youth employment (YE) and vocational skill development (VSD) department at NDE head quarters. Decision to admit or reject an applicant is arrived at after weighting the individual factors, the quota and other relevant requirement. The trainings are mostly conducted by self employed master-craft-men and women in different trades where training is offered. Trainers are found in government owned or privately owned institutions and workshops. The training programme according to Ozaga (1985) has two components: theory and practice. Practical training is conducted five days in each week representing 80 percent of the training. Saturday is designed for theoretical training which represents 20 percent of the training. Training according to him is by direct on-the-job apprenticeship attachment. The trainer holds the success or the failure of the scheme since he or she is responsible for imparting the required skills to the trainee and supervising all the training activities. The most striking issue in the programme is that the monitoring officers make periodic visits to the training establishments to evaluate training activities. These visits are needed to encourage interaction between trainers and trainees and to find out problems encountered in the course of training (Ochiagha, 1995). Through the interactions, solutions are proffered. The trainees are evaluated at the end of the training period to ascertain the reliability of such training so as to assist in the provision of necessary instrument needed for starting the business or trade.

The unique advantage of such training is that it exposes the trainees to various skills that can make them self-reliant and self-dependent in their area of trade. From the above explanations, it is important to note that out of the whole skill acquisition programmes initiated by the federal government over the years, the national open apprenticeship scheme is the most prominent. This is because of its numerous objectives. The objectives according to Ochiagha (1995) include the following:

- The placement of unemployed youth as apprentices in private and government establishments for a period of one to three years, depending on their chosen trade and experience.
- It equips individual youths with skills that can make them employable
- It ensures that after apprenticeship registration, youths are given an orientation course that matches both their attitude and aptitude.
- It ensures balanced and all round learning which is based on 20 percent theory and 80 percent on the job training.
- It ensures that at all stages of training; the youths are monitored and given counseling where necessary.
- It ensures that the youths who exhibit entrepreneurial skills are given small scale business loans.
- It provides participants with basic kits and working capital to start a self employment venture.

The open apprenticeship scheme enables many participants to set up productive business ventures which empowers them economically.

Types of Empowerment

Empowerment according to Kogi State Government (2004) is a way of changing the attitude and potentials of individual's to positively re-direct them to gain control over their life or situation they are in. This involves making individuals to create and produce goods and services that will help them economically. The various youth empowerment programmes so far discussed can be classified into the four main types namely, economic empowerment, productive empowerment, marketing empowerment, and skill acquisition empowerment.

- **Economic empowerment**

Economic empowerment according to Ogbe, (1996) is the way of motivating individuals in the society to be productive and self dependent by inculcating into the individuals entrepreneurship skills such as personal business initiatives and basic skills in business development. In fact, the best foundation for any business success is to have several possibilities for creating profits. However, profit creation is determined by the choice of the business, self concept, interest, resources, and aspirations which in turn would enable the person to achieve self-development, self-actualization and self fulfillment.

- **Production empowerment**

Production empowerment according to Idachaba (2006) is a basic focus of entrepreneurship initiatives. It is determined by what the person trained wants to produce, how to produce and to whom those goods are produced. Personal trait and initiative will instinct in the person on what to produce which depends on the resource available. How to produce the goods depends on the factors of production available to him. Finally to whom such goods are produced depends on the market. Knowledge of the factors of production which determines how the goods are to be produced and to whom they are to be produced can be imbibed mostly through training and marketing strategies.

- **Marketing empowerment**

Marketing of goods and services produced in any economy according to Magbagbeola (2004) is one of the crucial attributes of a businessman. This is because it creates in a businessmen or women the ability to convince a customer that what have been producing is the best. Acquisition of adequate marketing skill through training enables the entrepreneurs to market their product easily. Usually, different marketing strategies are learnt and are applied to convince the customers of the need to purchase the products. The marketing strategies include effective communication, self confidence and self esteem.

- **Skill Development Empowerment**

Skills are acquired as ability for individual or group of individuals to acquire more skills for the resolution of a particular situation. Youth empowerment as an act of skill development therefore signifies different creative measures of developing basic ideas through training in skills that are relevant to the social and economic survival of the nation (Ochiagha, 1995).The above empowerment strategies are expected to imbibe in the youths the spirit of craftsmanship and entrepreneurship which makes them job creators instead of job seekers. However, most youths in the country fall short of this empowerment either because they fail to participate in the youth empowerment schemes or because of the flaws in the implementation of the empowerment schemes which may include the followings:

- **Location of skill acquisition workshop:**

Most of the skill acquisition workshops are located in the major cities of the country which may be far from the house of abode of most unemployed youths. This means that most of them who are not residence of that environment or location are expected to rent rooms to live alone. Living alone and living far way from homes may constitute a lot of problem for the youths and the scheme all over the country.

- **Problems of instructors: lack of trained and competent instructors to handle the workshops is another problem that might constitute a lot of threat to the smooth running of the scheme. According to Ogundowolo (1988) most instructors recruited for the scheme are neither experienced nor well trained to handle the scheme. Consequently, most of them cannot competently handle the programme.**

- **Lack of money and start-up-kits: lack of money according to Ozoga (1985) is one of the major problems confronting the youths in the scheme. This is because most of the youths may lack pocket money and that**

reduce their interests in the scheme. Also provision of money and start-up-kits for take-off among the graduating apprentices might be problematic to many homes and that may militate against the youths joining the scheme.

- Interest of the youths: one thing about a project is who and who is interested and who will benefit what? To be able to ascertain who among the youths is interested in the scheme, actual census of the youths who are unemployed and who are interested in the scheme is expected to be conducted annually to make sure that the benefiting youths are those who are interested. But, from experience and available statistics, most of the youths in the rural areas are discriminated against in the recruitment of participants.

Following the above assertions therefore, to streamline the skill acquisition programmes in line with the dream on which it was established for, the following recommendations are put forward;

First, skill acquisition workshops should be established in every nook and cranny of each states of the Federation to make it accessible to the youths. This is because establishing such schemes in selected states and urban areas in the country may discourage a large proportion of the youths from different states and rural areas of the country from benefiting on the programme.

Secondly, competent and experienced craftsmen and women of reputable character should be recruited by the federal and state Governments as instructors to sustain and make the programmes more viable.

Thirdly, money and start up-kits-stocks and tools should be made available to each participant in the scheme promptly to start or set up his or her own business after graduation.

Fourthly, the situation where the graduates wait for assistance from friends and relatives to enable them embark on their own businesses is not healthy for the sustainability of the programme.

Furthermore, the census of the actual youths who are really eager to undertake such training should be ascertained yearly to guard against the act of negligence in inviting and selecting participants who have no interest in the programme who after the training will abandon the programme/

Finally, the rural areas of the country should not be discriminated against in the implementation of the youth empowerment programmes. All the youths in the rural areas who are unemployed should be identified and encouraged to bridge the gap of inequality between the rural and urban centers in the country. This can be achieved through rural based empowerment programmes. The issue of considering urban centers alone for the programme should be discouraged.

Conclusion

Youth empowerment involves different ways through which the youths could be empowered to achieve self sustained national development instead of depending on government for provision of empowerment opportunities. It is believed that training through skill acquisition programmes will enhance the sustainability of the youths in different fields of trade. This is possible when the culture of creative ideas is instilled in youths to make them productive and self-reliant members of the society. This is very important because as Olaitan (1996) rightly stated, skill acquisition is meant for those who need it, want it, and can profit from it.

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