REPOSITIONING BASIC EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN IKOM EDUCATION ZONE OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of repositioning basic education on youths' empowerment and development in Ikom Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consists of three thousand, three hundred and eighty-six (3386) learners in the upper basic education level in public secondary schools in the study area. Two purposes were stated and translated to hypotheses. Questionnaire containing twelve items was used for data collection. The instrument was subjected to face validation by experts in Measurement and Evaluation and entrepreneurship studies in the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar. The simple random sampling technique was used for the selection of the respondents used for the study. A total of five hundred (500) learners were sampled for the study, Independent t-test analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.The result of the analysis revealed a significant influence of entrepreneurship and ICT skills acquisition on youths' empowerment and development in the study area. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that; the government should provide facilities that facilitate effective entrepreneurship and ICT skills acquisition among the youths in the school system, the government should ensure the implementation entrepreneurship and ICT education as specified in the currently approved subjects at the basic education level, the government and employers of labour should encourage skills acquisition rather than paper qualification, the government should empower the youths who have completed their programme by procuring computer gadgets and or loan for youths to embark on self-help ventures.

Education can be described as the process through which children, younger or even adults are helped to cultivate and grow their abilities, attitudes, values and other forms of behavioural attributes that represent positive value aimed at changing the individual to enable him/her contribute to the well-being of himself/herself and other members of the society and the society (Amadioha & Akor, 2018). This means education grows advances and has the capability to induce a person with characteristics that would make the person function properly and developed value that could make the person to contribute positively to the development of the society that the people live in. The Federal Republic of Nigeria categorized education into early childhood education, basic education, secondary education, mass literacy, adult and non-formal education, science education, technical and vocational education, tertiary education and open and distance education in Nigeria (FRN, 2004).

Education is an investment in people which eventually pays untold dividends to the society, when that investment is not made or is made inadequately the society suffers a loss (Okoroma, 2005). The empowerment of youths and sustainable development of the society can be achieved through functional and qualitative education where skills acquisition is emphasized than theory and traditional education of test and examination scores. Having realized the importance of education in skills acquisition and development of the right type of values and attitude, people's desire for education has increased tremendously. As a result, there is increase in enrolment at different levels of education, thus making existing facilities and other resources inadequate to the point that standards are compromised. Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN, 2004) states that realizing that part of the national goals can be achieved with the use of education as a tool, therefore, education policy should be based on the overall philosophy and goals of the nation.

Duru and Opara (2017) opined that education is designed to motivate, equip and involve individuals and social groups in reflecting on how they currently live and work, in making informed decisions and creating ways to work towards a more sustainable world. Unfortunately, these are not feasible considering the quality and nature of graduates rolled out by educational institutions in Nigeria yearly which have very little effect on the society. It appears that the school succeeded in training those who will come out to look for the jobs that are not there, these idle youth would seek for a way to keep themselves busy regardless of the effects on the society.

Education at all levels has been seen as a major factor in the achievement of youth empowerment and sustainable development every nation that want to experience growth and advancement. The empowerment and development of youths who are seen as the leaders of tomorrow can enable a nation to key into the today's globalized information and knowledge based economy (Acosta, 2017). Countries expecting to successfully integrate in and benefit from the 21st century economy without a well-educated and empowered youth may hardly achieve their goal. Functional and skills-based education for the youths can serve as a right step in a right direction. Repositioning education to focus on skills acquisition can serve as a tool for empowering the youths in the quest for the achievement of sustainable development of the society (Ekpiken & Ukpabio, 2015).

Repositioning basic education that is aimed at generating opportunities for young people and investing in their capabilities must be prioritized in governmental policy making

at all levels. Development does not begin with goods; it goes along with people and their education, organization and discipline. Its success can be ensured if it is undertaken as a broad, popular movement of reconstruction, with key focus on the full utilization of the drive, enthusiasm and labor power of everyone (Akintayo & Adiat, 2013). Aja (2020) emphasized to invest in research, policies and programs for creating an enabling and rights-based environment for young people to thrive and ensure the prosperity of society. Youth's chance for contribution in nation's economic, social and cultural development is maximized through the process of empowerment (Malyadri & Sumana, 2012).

According to Kanno and Onyeachu (2015) basic education is the foundational educational level. This means basic education is the base-line education on which all other educational advancement depend. The basic education in this context is like the foundation of a building on which all other loads for the building come. This same foundational education from inference determines the stability of the entire educational building that anyone can ever have. Therefore, repositioning basic education is to a large extent what determines the success or failure of all other stages of education that may come on it.

Youths are major productive stakeholders that have innovative ideas in planning, policy making and decision-making as change agents for sustainable development. Cargo (2003), asserted that Youths are the greatest assets that any nation can have, they are regarded as the future leaders and they are the investment for a country's development. They also serve as a good measure in which a country can reproduce as well as sustain itself. Obadan (2012) opined that present generation has empowered our youth with schools without education, with problems without solutions, with corruption without righteousness, with hatred without love, with politics without development. According to Connell, Gambone and Smith (2000) youth empowerment and development is geared toward the goal of helping youth to build a series of assets and skills that are necessary to successfully navigate adolescence and eventually come to adulthood. Youth Empowerment in any development is imperative not only for national development but because the transitional period from childhood to adulthood is quite challenging.

Youths are filled with vigor and fresh energies which need to be properly harnessed through empowerment and development that will discourage them from engaging in social vices which constrain sustainable development in the state. In the process, youths practice the core skills while creating, planning and evaluating their activities. Akpoveta and Agbomah (2009) asserted that the increasing incidence of youth unemployment particularly, graduate unemployment in Nigeria has been associated with existing weaknesses in the nations' educational system which places more emphasis on paper qualification than functional or pragmatic education. Babalola (2011) asserted that sustainable development is the development which permits for economic growth in which sufficient attention is not given to skill training for youth and adults but at the same time demands the protection of the environment and is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs.

The issue of youth empowerment through schooling or acquiring functional literacy requires skills acquisition for self-reliance and self-actualization. It is only when youths are empowered to acquire skills such as entrepreneurship and ICTs that they can contribute meaningfully to sustainable development of themselves, their communities and the nation in today's knowledge-based world. This type of education according Stammers and Patrick

(2006) involves activities which are aimed at developing youth moral values and understanding required in all works of life, rather than knowledge and skills relating to only a limited field of activity. In view of this, education for youths is to provide the conditions essential for young persons and even adult to develop an understanding of the traditions and ideas influencing the society in which they live of their own and to acquire linguistic and other skills, which are basics to learning personal development, creativity and personal development (Ekpiken&Ukpabio, 2015).

Okpeh (2005) stated that, if youths are not empowered and given responsibilities in the society, they are likely to constitute a threat to national survival and stability, especially, if they are allowed to drift unemployed ill-disciplined and morally bankrupt. From this point of view therefore, it is very pertinent to empower the youths through such measures and strategies like entrepreneurship training, ICT skills acquisition, access to credit facilities and qualitative education with unlimited life-enhancing opportunities which would certainly transform the youths from a polite economic entity to the level of high productivity and sustainable development.

Entrepreneurship education contributes to nation building through its ability to provide training that will result in developing individuals who are well adjusted in the sense that they are capable of coping with their communities and the world in which they live and providing the understanding and appreciation of the actual functioning of the economic system due to its competency-based in nature (Adegbija, Fakomogbon & Daramola, 2012). Entrepreneurship education as a course has been introduced into Nigerian higher institution particularly in Business education programme. Youth empowerment through entrepreneurship can be realized through teaching, research, creation, dissemination and services to the community (Okeke & Emenalo (2008). They further maintained that this can also be possible if properly and effectively pursued and complete actualization o youth empowerment is always assured.

Ekpiken and Ukpabio (2015) examined youth empowerment in higher education for sustainable development of developing communities in Cross River State in Nigeria. The design of the study was ex-post facto. The sample of the study was one hundred and forty six (146) youths drawn out of a population of five hundred (500) youths in the study area. The instrument used for data collection and analysis was a self-developed research questionnaire comprising 30 items. The data was analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation analysis. The result of the analysis showed that when youths in higher educational institutions are empowered, they will contribute to sustainable development of their communities.

Repositioning basic education for skills 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 (Osakwe, 2012). The author further maintained that skill acquisition increases competition and cooperation among people. Education aims to train and produce citizens with appropriate skills and competencies so that the individual can live and contribute to the development of the larger society. The quality of instruction at all levels must therefore be oriented towards helping the individual develop the physical, emotional and the needed skills that enhance greater contribution of citizens to the societal development. For a nation to guarantee a sound educational system, its learners must acquire ICT skills for effective development to meet the global innovations in the delivery of important societal obligation.

Governments had made efforts to maintain educational standard, the goal of ICT skills acquisition is yet to be achieved at basic education level which serves as educational foundation. The ICT facilities have not been effectively provided to bring about the desired skills acquisition among students in the society. Therefore, it is observed that schools have not been living up to expectation in solving the problems of life by equipping learners with necessary ICT skills, as such, learners in this 21st century appear to be ICT skill-deficient, the reason learners still lack the basic ICT knowledge, ideas and skills among others. Thus, all learning processes require the full integration of ICT and new technologies as essential working tools. By so doing, it may facilitate the acquisition of more general skills among learners making them functional in the present knowledge-based economy. Skill is a person's ability in performing a given task well as a result of training and practice (Obi, 2015).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has brought about remarkable changes in the society, it encourages independent and active learning and self-responsibility for learning such as distance learning, motivate teachers and students to continue using learning outside school hours, plan, prepare lessons and design materials such as course content delivery and facilitate sharing of resources, expertise and advice (Jonassen, & Reeves, 2016). Nigeria, having realized that education is the most important instrument of change in the society and that any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society had to proceed to educational revolution to include IT education in the basic education subject schedule. UNESCO (2016) asserted that, the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education is rapidly expanding and seen worldwide as both a necessity and an opportunity for improving and enhancing the education offered to citizens across the globe. It is against this backdrop that the researchers seeks to investigate the influence of repositioning basic education on youths' empowerment and development in Ikom Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

The problem of youths' inability to have access to quality, functional and appropriate education is due to ignorance and poverty. The stakes of these forces are particularly high for low income households that find it difficult to provide three square meals talk less of paying children school fees. Given the low level of educational attainment and skills deficit among youths in general and the labour force in particular, the yearnings of the people more importantly the youths is for repositioning basic level of education to effectively inculcate and implement ICTs and entrepreneurship skills acquisition in the educational programmes to enhance sustainable youths empowerment and development. In response to that, the government included information technology (IT) and pre-vocation as subjects in the basic education level. It is observed that the inclusion of the subjects was theoretical since appropriate materials and facilities are not adequately put in place for it to thrive, as such, the situation still remain the same. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the influence of repositioning basic education on youths' empowerment and development in Ikom Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the influence of repositioning basic education on youths' empowerment and development in Ikom Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the researchers sought to;

1. Determine the influence of entrepreneurship skills acquisition on youths' empowerment and development in Ikom Education Zone.

2. Ascertain the influence of ICT skills acquisition on youths' empowerment and development in Ikom Education Zone.

Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study;

1. There is no significant influence of entrepreneurship skills acquisition on youths' empowerment and development in Ikom Education Zone.

2. ICT skills acquisition does not significantly influence youths' empowerment and development in Ikom Education Zone.

Method

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consists of three thousand, three hundred and eighty-six (3386) learners in the upper basic education level in public secondary schools in the study area. Two purposes were stated and translated to hypotheses. Questionnaire containing twelve items was used for data collection. The instrument was subjected to face validation by experts in Measurement and Evaluation and entrepreneurship studies in the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar. The simple random sampling technique was used for the selection of the respondents used for the study. A total of five hundred (500) learners were sampled from twenty public schools and used for the study, Independent t-test analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis one

There is no significant influence of entrepreneurship skills acquisition on youths' empowerment and development in Ikom Education Zone. Independent variable is entrepreneurship skills acquisition (positive and negative influence); while the dependent variable is youths' empowerment and development. Independent t-test analysis was adopted to test this hypothesis. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of entrepreneurship skills acquisition on youths' empowerment and development (N=500)

Influence	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	t-value
Positive	294	27.1293	2.61298	
				5.65
Negative	206	27.2816	3.19080	

* Significant at .05 level, critical t=1.96, df = 498.

The result in Table 1 revealed that the calculated t-value of 5.65 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 498 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis that there is no significant influence of entrepreneurship skills acquisition on

youths' empowerment and development in Ikom Education Zone. was rejected. This implies that there is a significant influence of entrepreneurship skills acquisition on youths' empowerment and development in the study area.

Hypothesis two

ICT skills acquisition does not significantly influence youths' empowerment and development in Ikom Education Zone. Independent variable is ICT skills acquisition (positive and negative influence) while the dependent variable is youths' empowerment and development. Independent t-test analysis was adopted to test this hypothesis. The result is presented in Table 2

TABLE 2: Independent t-test analysis of influence of ICT skills acquisition on youths' empowerment and development (N=500)

Influence	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	t-value
Positive	294	27.8367	2.52237	
				4.345*
Negative	206	28.7379	1.88685	

* Significant at .05 level, critical t=1.96, df = 498.

The result in Table 2 revealed that the calculated t-value of 4.389 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 498 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis that there ICT skills acquisition does not significantly influence youths' empowerment and development in Ikom Education Zone was rejected.

Discussion

The results of the two hypotheses indicated that, both entrepreneurship and ICT skills acquisition significantly influence youths' empowerment and development in the study area. The researchers observed that most schools in the study area do not have entrepreneurship or computer laboratories as a result, most learners only hear and see computers on textbooks talk less to operate it. It was also gathered that, the absence of entrepreneurship or computer laboratories has make such skills acquisition impossible in the study area. This means that youths are not empowered or developed to be self-reliance which has resulted in the many security challenges reported or observed in Nigeria. Okpeh (2005) stated that, if youths are not empowered and given responsibilities in the society, they are likely to constitute a threat to national survival and stability, especially, if they are allowed to drift unemployed ill-disciplined and morally bankrupt.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

1. The government should provide facilities that facilitate effective entrepreneurship and ICT skills acquisition among the youths in the school system

2. The government should ensure the implementation entrepreneurship and ICT education as specified in the currently approved subjects at the basic education level.

3. The government and employers of labour should encourage skills acquisition rather than paper qualification.

4. The government should empower the youths who have completed their programme by procuring computer gadgets and or loan for youths to embark on self-help ventures.

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