



Utility Education: A Gateway for Students' Empowerment, Employability and Sustainability in the World of Work

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Abstract

The urgent need to eliminate social vices in our society makes it expedient that government should give priority to educational system that will equip students with practical skills, knowledge and competencies for job opportunities in the world of work. Utility education is a practical-oriented education that will serve as a gateway for students' empowerment, employability and sustainability in order to reduce social vices in the society. This paper highlights the branches of Utility Education offered in tertiary institutions and their roles in National economic development. Random sampling techniques was used to select 160 HND 2 students out of total population of 300 students in Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, Lagos, Lagos State. The instrument for data collection was a 35-item questionnaire, validated by experts from the departments of Office Technology and Management (OTM), Home economics, Computer and Automobile Engineering. The study reveals that Utility education is a functional education that will inculcate in the students the required entrepreneurial and employability skills for job opportunities after graduation. The paper recommends amongst others that government should give priority to utilitarian education through provision of enabling environment in schools for proper development of human and material resources to meet the needs of the nation.

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Introduction

It is quite obvious that there has been a significant rise in unemployment rate, poverty and increase in social vices which the society blames the government for not providing adequate job opportunities nor equipping the students with the required competencies for job creation. This necessitated the urgent need of repositioning the educational curriculum in our tertiary institutions from general education to utilitarian education that would equip the students with the rightful skills and competencies for job creation and self-reliance *ceteris paribus*.

Education is so incontrovertibly and consistently linked with development in all ramifications which is why everyone (including the government) has faith in it as a tool par excellence for effecting national development. In fact, education is undisputedly considered as the "brain" behind any meaningful development be it economic, social, technology to mention just these few. It is also considered as basis and essential ingredient that fosters genuine development and growth of any nation. This is why it

is very imperative that our educational curriculum must be “relevant” in order to meet developmental needs of the country. “Relevant education” here refers to “Utility” (useful) education that will lead to the establishment and empowerment of students for job creation after graduation which is the bedrock of developmental advancement of any nation.

New Venture Creation is the act of making a new business to come into existence or the act of setting up a new business/commercial activity for the purpose of creating employment and generating wealth. Creation of new business venture involves rational thinking to explore available resources and opportunities to discover new ways/methods of producing things in order to meet one’s immediate needs and that of the people around you (the society at large).

Utility education is the type of educational system that emphasizes both character training and acquisition of skills for setting up new business ventures and building mutual trust in such enterprise. Utility education focuses on acquisition of usable and marketable skills needed for employment and establishment of new ventures. No wonder, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) in National Policy on Education (2004) in its educational aims and objectives stressed on the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies as a means for the individual to be useful to himself and thereby contribute to the development of his society. This is why Ihekwoaba, Oguoma, Njoku and Abraham-Ibe (2012) considered Utility education to be ‘useful’ in the development and empowerment of students for employment/job creation after graduation in order to live a life of independence instead of being jobless and a liability. In like manner, Nfukho (2008) asserted that Utility education is education that must involve teaching prospective entrepreneurs how to take action necessary to analyze opportunities to launch and/or grow new business, to finance and possibly harvest it. On the other hand, Ogundele (2007) in Ejeka and Ebenezer-Nwokeji (2017) stated that Utility education is a functional educational system designed to teach the learners the skill and knowledge necessary for

embarking on new business venture. With Utility education there will be possibility of realizing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) number ‘1’ - to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and number ‘7’ - to ensure environmental sustainability in the country (Joseph, 2010 in Oloh, 2015). These Goals according to him targets to integrate the principles of sustainable development into the country’s policies and programmes and reverse loss of environmental resources, as well as achieve by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

Ihekwoaba (2003) as cited in Ejeka and Ebenezer-Nwokeji (2017) stated that Utility education aims at developing the requisite entrepreneurial skills, attitudes and competencies that are necessary for individuals to respond to his environment in the process of choosing a business unit, starting and managing it successfully. He further stated that the training which could be either formal or informal is designed to enable the individuals acquire skills, vocational capabilities, management/entrepreneurial abilities etc. for economic empowerment.

Utility education according to Ihekwoaba (2008) has different branches or subject areas that are offered in schools such as Vocational Education, Technical Education, Technological Sciences, Entrepreneurship education as in Figure 1.

The urgent need to reduce or totally eliminate social economic vices such as unemployment and poverty in our society makes it expedient that government formulate and concentrate on educational policies that will lead to skill acquisition for New Venture creation. There is seeming consensus on the importance of Utility education as a functional education that ameliorates the above socio-economic problems in the society. Hence, the shift from general education to utilitarian or entrepreneurial education becomes necessary in the present dispensation in order to develop and empower the youths in the society for creation of new ventures.

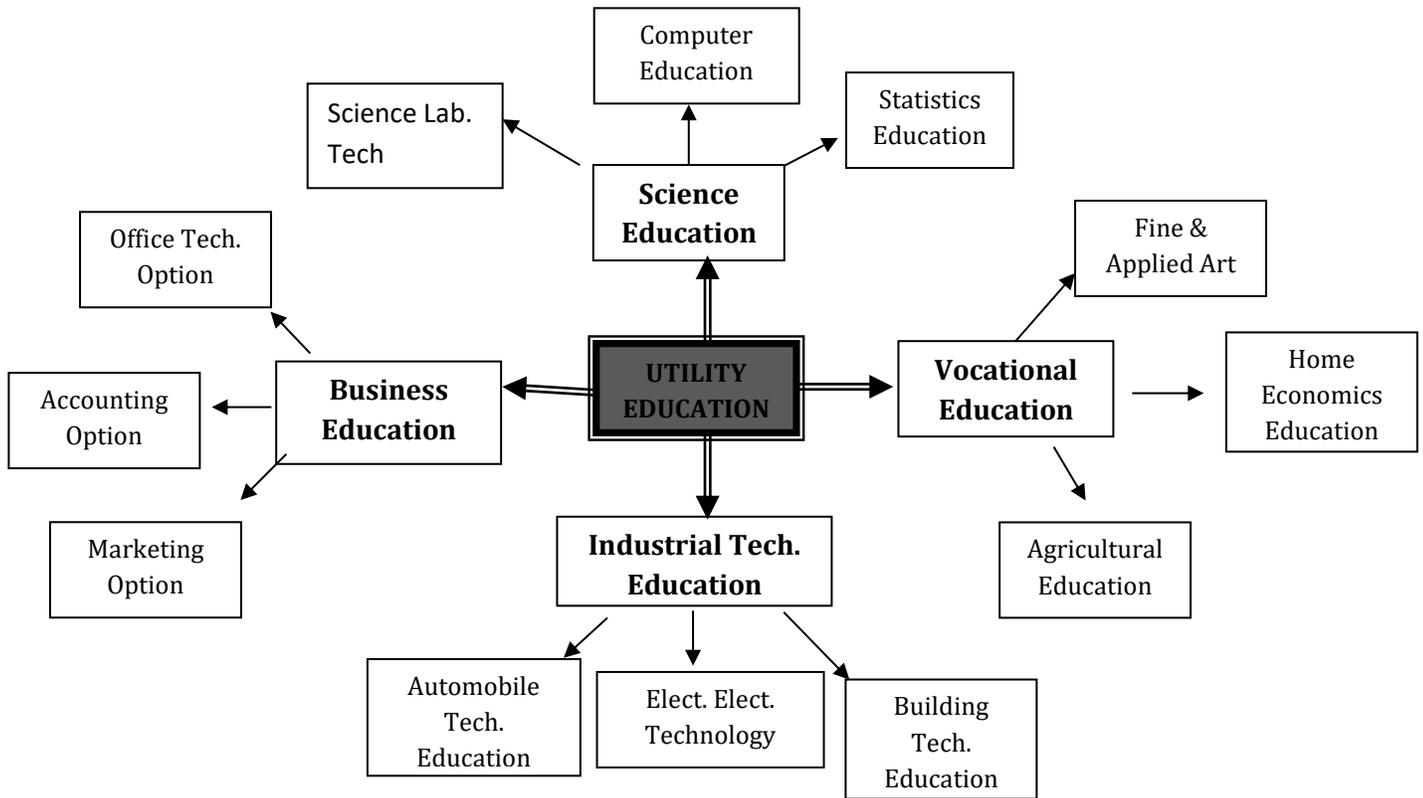


Fig.1: Branches of Utility Education (Ejeka and Ebenezer-Nwokeji, 2017)

It is on this basis that the researcher tries to assess the Contributory Roles of Utility Education in Promoting New Venture Creation for students’ empowerment and economic development.

Methodology

Empirical studies were carried out to elicit information from the final year (HND) 11 students of OTM, Home economics, Computer science and Automobile Engineering departments in YCT, Yaba, Lagos State, Nigeria. It was believed that these students as the graduating class would understand the prevailing circumstances in the Nigerian labour market and so provide relevant data for this study. Simple random

sampling technique was used to select 160 respondents (40 students from each of the above-mentioned departments) from a total population of 300 respondents. The instrument for data collection was a 25-item structured questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale which was face and content validated by 5 specialists from YCT where the study was delimited. Their useful recommendations were incorporated in the final draft of the questionnaire before it was administered to the respondents. The data collected were analyzed using mean rating of 3.50 and above as Agreed (A) while those with mean score equal to or less than 3.49 were regarded as Disagreed (D).

3. Presentation and Analysis of Data

Table 1: Branches or Departments of Utility Education

Q	Item	Branches or departments of Utility Education offered in tertiary institutions.	Total	\bar{x}	Decisions
1.	Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Office Tech. & Management Accounting Marketing 	40	5.00	Accepted
2.	Vocational Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Home Economics Fine and Applied Arts Agriculture 	40	5.00	Accepted
3.	Science and Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Computer Science Lab. Tech. Statistics 	38	4.53	Accepted
4.	Industrial and Technical Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Automobile Engineering Building Tech. Electrical Electronics 	40	5.00	Accepted
1.	Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Office Tech. & Management Accounting Marketing 	40	5.00	Accepted
2.	Vocational Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Home Economics Fine and Applied Arts Agriculture 	40	5.00	Accepted
3.	Science and Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Computer Science Lab. Tech. Statistics 	38	4.53	Accepted
	Industrial and Technical Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Automobile Engineering Building Tech. Electrical Electronics 	40	5.00	Accepted

The data presented in Table 1 above shows mean score rating 4.53 – 5.00 accepted which implies that the above-mentioned departments are branches of Utility

Education that are offered in tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria.

Q	Item	Aims/Goals of Utility Education	Total	\bar{X}	Decisions
1.		To equip students with business and managerial skills required to start and manage a business venture	140	4.56	Agreed
2.		To teach students how to develop business plans, generate new ideas and marshal out needed resources for such plans for creating job opportunities in order to minimize unemployment and other social vices in the society.	116	3.80	Agreed
3.		To prepare individuals to think in a creative and critical manner for innovation in a rapidly changing labour market.	108	3.70	Agreed
4.		Utility education enhances the development of rural areas/decongestion of urban areas and thus improved the standard of living of the masses.	125	4.00	Agree
5.		To equip students with the keys to success and survival of a business venture such as confidence, determination, perseverance and so on.	1.29	4.05	Agreed
6.		To develop the human resources in the country to meet with societal challenges of the 21 st century	160	5.00	Agreed

The result in the above table reveals that all the respondents agreed that Utility education plays a very

crucial role in the overall development of the nation with mean rating of 4.21 and above.

Table 3: Challenges to effective implementation of Utility education in schools

Q	Item	Hindrances to effective implementation of Utility education in schools	Total	\bar{X}	Decision
		The followings are some of the challenges militating against effective implementation of utility education in schools			

17.	➤ Poor funding of schools by government and stakeholders	160	5.00	Agreed
18.	➤ lack of credit facilities and interest-free soft loans to students	160	5.00	Agreed
19.	➤ Lack of adequate necessary equipment in schools for effective teaching/learning process	160	5.00	Agreed
20.	➤ Lack of infrastructural facilities such as electricity and efficient communication	160	5.00	Agreed
21.	➤ Negative attitude of students and parents towards utility education.	154	4.45	Agreed
22.	➤ Limited scope of the curriculum which does not expose students to utility courses for economic empowerment.	148	3.68	Agreed

The result in Table 2 shows that all the respondents agreed that the above listed problems hinder in totality the effective implementation of Utility education in schools with mean rating of 3.68 and above.

On the question of Occupational careers/job opportunities available in Utility education for economic empowerment of students and the nation, oral interviews were conducted with some of the graduating class and this revealed the following occupational careers/job opportunities in Utility education for economic empowerment of students.

Business Education

- Establishment of Accounting, Auditing and Secretarial Institutes
- Establishment of Business Centres/Cyber Café
- Advertising and Sales Promotion Agencies

- Establishment of Employment Agencies for consultancy services.
- Establishment of Day Care centres and Schools for academic activities

Vocational Education

- Establishment of Music and Sports Institutes
- Film and Home Video Productions/Entertainment Industries
- Establishment of Fashion Hair Dressing & Cosmetological Institutes
- Establishment of Shops, Interior Decorations (interior and events)
- Hospitality, and Tourism, Resort/Leisure Centres and Eateries.
- Graphics Designs, Painting Ceramics and Sculptural Designs.

- Animal Husbandry and Poultry Production
- Fish and Vegetable Farming

- Car wash Centres and Consultancy services
- Establishment of Electrical and Electronics workshops
- Establishment of Building and Construction firms

Science and Technology Education

- Establishment of Computer Training Centres
- Establishment of shops for Computer, Laptops etc sales and repairs
- Manufacturing, Sales and Repairs of GSM and Computer accessories
- Establishment of Cybercafé/Internet centres for ICT services
- GSM recharge card manufacturing/vending
- Establishment of Science Laboratories

Entrepreneurship Education

- Establishment of Agro-allied and Cottage Industries
- Establishment of Drainage/Sewage Construction jobs
- Environmental and Waste Management business
- Embarking on Webb and Programming projects, in soft wares such as Oracle, Cold Fusion, ASP/JSP, digital Photographing, Video editing and JAVA based
- Embarking on Projects such as building solar powered water pump for use in

Technical Education

- Establishment of Automobile Shops
- Establishment of Training Institutes for apprentices in Plumbing, Carpentry, Bricklaying etc.
 rural areas, solar powered streetlights, hybrid powered generators using solar and battery power to generate electricity etc.

The above groupings are in support of the Oloh (2015). When he stated that since 2000 due to the exponential growth in global information technology, a lot of service enterprises have emerged such as shown above. From the above one can rightly say that if Utility education is encouraged and properly implemented it will empower the students for creation of New Ventures after graduation instead of seeking for oil company jobs where fat salaries and “tear-rubber cars” are offered to employees.

Discussion of Findings The analysis in table 1 was geared towards ascertaining the different branches of Utility education that are offered in Nigerian tertiary institutions of learning. The findings showed that Utility education has many branches or disciplines that are offered in schools to prepare students for establishment and management of new business ventures which form the bedrock of the development of any nation. This study is supported by the earlier studies of Ihekwoaba, et al (2012) which pointed out that Utility education is education that incorporates different fields or courses of study which empower students with skills to create employment.

In the same vein, Adekanle and Adekanbi (2014) asserted that training sharpens enterprises as well as opens employment doors to young graduates in order to make wealth for himself and his society in general.

Findings from data presentation on Table 3 on the roles of Utility education on the nation's economy revealed that Utility education is an indispensable tool in alleviating poverty and reducing unemployment. The studies by Joseph (2010) in Oloh (2015) supported this finding when he noted that with Utility education there will be possibility of realizing the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) 1 and 7: "To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and to ensure environmental sustainability in the country". Also, Ihekwoaba (2008) supported it by stating that Utility Education helps to train people for jobs which enable them to create wealth and become useful to the society instead of dependent on it. He further stated that, when people are gainfully employed the rate of unemployment and social vices such as robbery, kidnapping, prostitution etc will be reduced. It is therefore evident that Utility education is relevant in new venture/job creation and can as well add impetus to the attainment of sustainable development of the nation.

Data Presentation on Table 4 regarding the factors militating against effective implementation of Utility education in Institutions of learning shows that respondents agreed that all the listed items in this Table are hindrances to effective implementation of Utility education in schools. Oloh (2015) supported this portion by asserting that small businesspersons do not get red carpet treatment from financiers when asking for loans to set up business ventures; instead they are treated like second class citizens because of lack of collateral security being demanded by these lending institutions.

More so, oral Interviews conducted with some of the students regarding the occupational careers/business ventures available in Utility education revealed that varieties of job opportunities abound in Utility education which graduates can engage in and become employers of labour instead of roaming endlessly in search of white-collar jobs. This is in line with the views of Sonaike (2006), Agetue and Nnamdi (2017),

Umezulike (2011) that Utility education and entrepreneurship inspires significant number of the graduates to venture into the world of enterprise and be successful too thereby reducing the rate of unemployment in the society.

This is also supported by Agomuo (2007) in Esene (2011) that OTM graduates have been so enterprising as to set up secretarial/business institutes, ICT centers and employment bureaus which liaise with employers and link job-seekers with available job openings.

Conclusion

This study has proved that Utility Education helps people become creative and innovative and realize their capabilities in establishment and management of new ventures. When people are gainfully employed (both in rural and urban area) they will contribute their quota in increasing the per capita income and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Creation of job opportunities will help to reduce crimes, unemployment, urban migration/congestion and most importantly development of rural areas which will invariably lead to rapid economic growth of the nation. It is therefore interesting to note due to the economic empowerment of the entire society, there will be tremendous improvement in the standard of living of the populace and national sustainability.

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