

STRATEGIC CONCEPTS FOR SKILL REFINEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT AMONGST EDUCATIONALLY LESS PRIVILEGED: A FOCUS ON ETSAKO COMMUNITY OF EDO STATE, NIGERIA

By

*Omoregie, Kester O., *Oduntan, E.B, *Obuda V. & **Bada, O.

*Computer Science Department, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi

**Statistics Department, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi

kexstar@yahoo.com, drusi_16@yahoo.com, obudavictor1@yahoo.com

&badaolatunbosun@yahoo.com

Abstract

Bringing education to the nomadic, road transport workers, street artisans, farmers in rural areas, and fishermen in coastal areas whose lifestyle have been so much conditioned by their social and cultural backgrounds has been one major challenge in Nigeria Education sector. For example, it is some cultural belief in Nigeria that men should marry many wives with the sole aim of having many male children that can be useful in farm works. This research paper reveals some ICT innovative concepts for reaching out to some categories of educationally less privileged in our society, keeping in mind the social and cultural background. The focus here is on bike riders, motor mechanics, and farmers in the rural areas of Etsako community of Edo state in Nigeria. The aim is to break through the socio-cultural barriers and bring education to the people in such a way as to enhance their productivity with a refinement on the existing skills, and development of new skills.

Keywords: Skill refinement, Skill development, Socio-cultural barriers, ICT, Productivity.

INTRODUCTION

Bringing education to the educationally less privileged is a challenge that we must address in our society. A number of factors which include family background, tradition and culture of society have made formal education difficult to be realized among certain individuals. Many have therefore resulted in some form of vocation to be able to fend for themselves and the family. So many individuals who have been involved in this over years have become so engrossed in their

vocations that having formal education seems not to give the needed attractions anymore. They have seen their vocation as a venture that must not be toiled with as long as it brings some level of comfort. In some Nigerian communities, it is believed that training the girl child in formal education amounts to a colossal waste since she will eventually get married to someone else who does not bear the family name. This has made many young girls go into early marriage, trading and learning some form of crafts for self development. Also, farming which has been predominant amongst communities in Nigeria has made men marry wives in other to have so many children that will aid in farm work. Farming has become so interesting amongst many people to the very extent that the thought of going to school does not in any way appear in their agenda. Some on the other hand dropped out of school to join their parents in their trades because of the difficulty in coping with the stress in formal education. Having on mind some of these factors, and knowing very well that education still remains the greatest legacy any parent can give to the child, the need to break through the walls of these barring factors to yet make education available for all becomes imperative.

The challenge before us here is how to make such individuals have some form of education while in the business of their vocations. How can they be made to enhance their skills and do better what they have been doing for several years? In this paper, we seek to exploit some available ICT tool that can be utilized in bringing education to these individuals and explore ways by which they can be utilized for effective knowledge delivery and enhanced skill acquisition. Our focus is on the Etsako community of Nigeria. Specifically, we are addressing the educational challenges of four categories of people; the farmers, bike riders, auto mechanics, and street artisans.

BRIEF BACKGROUND OF ETSAKO PEOPLE

Etsako land is located at the Northern part of present day Edo State in Nigeria. The geographical boundaries of the Etsako district have remained unchanged up to date although it has now been divided into three administrative units, recognized in the 1999 Federal Constitution as Etsako West, East, and central Local Government Areas. Within the boundaries of Etsakoland, thirteen clans are recognized: Auchi, Aviele, Avianwun, Awain, Ekperi, Jagbe, Okpekpe, South Ibie, South Ineme, Three Ibies, Ukpilla, Uzairue and Weppa Wannu. These clans are connected by common traditions of origin, and they speak closely related dialects, while at the same time their customs exhibit a high degree of similitude that set them apart from their neighbours. Each of the thirteen clans is comprised of a cluster of villages (Erhagbe 2012).

A major occupational engagement amongst Etsako people is Farming. Some people engage in fishing. These are mainly the inhabitants of the riverine areas like the Weppa-Wannu, Ekperi and South Ineme. These have the benefit of living close to the River Niger and its tributaries. The farmers in Etsako are engaged in the production of food items including yams, cassava, water yam and vegetable. Etsako land is dotted by a number of rivers and streams with the main ones being the Osimile, Obe, Orle, Edion, Ogio, Ezi, Odura and Uba.

Although farming appears as the main occupation in Etsako land, other viable vocations exist. These vocations border on the production of materials for either household utilization or those used for other occupational engagements like farming and hunting. Earthenware pots and hand-woven clothes were also produced.

The means of transportation in modern days in Etsako land are motor cars, motor bikes, buses, lorries, trucks, canoes for riverine areas. Specifically, bike riding tolls as a viable vocation in

Etsako land. Motor bikes are used in every nook and cranny in Etsako community for transportation. Some people have it as their major means of income for the upkeep of the family. Other vocations which also exist are motor repairs, electrical works, tailoring, carpentry, bricklaying etc.

The background of a number Etsako people did not give them the privilege of having formal education. Especially in the rural areas where farming is prevalent, children are born and raised with the sole aim of taking over the vocations of their parents. Large acres of land are cultivated in farming, and to minimize the use of hired labour, men marry many wives in order to have a large number of children that can help in farm work. This results in large family sizes which almost make it impossible for formal educational training. The poor financial backgrounds in some families have necessitated the choice of other vocations like motor repair, tailoring, carpentry, electrical works etc. Since “appetite grows on what it feeds on”, these people have grown over the years to take so much delight in their vocation with little or no interest in formal education anymore.

SURVEY REPORT

A survey was carried out among the people of Etsako community. The objective of the survey was to determine amongst others:

- a.) The prominent vocation in Etsako land in modern times
- b.) The major factors that have affected the choice of other vocations rather than having formal education
- c.) Their willingness to accept new methods of improving their vocational skills

- d.) Their level of awareness of the available Information and Communication Technologies for skill refinement and development
- e.) Their educational level; ability to read documents

The instrument for data collection was with the use of questionnaire. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed randomly among the bike riders, auto-mechanics, farmers and some other street artisans in the three local government areas of Etsako community (Etsako East, Etsako Central and Etsako West). A measurement of frequency was taken to determine the objectives above. The number of respondents was also 200.

The vocations listed in the survey include, bike riding, farming, auto-mechanic, road transport driving, furniture making, tailoring, and any other. Findings show that a larger percentage (61%) of the respondents indicated they are bike riders. This is followed by farmers (32%). The auto-mechanics are 16% of the respondents, and specifically among the street artisans, the tailors are 19%. This reveals that bike riding is dominant among the vocations in Etsako land. Farming is more prominent in rural areas. The dominance of the bike riders suggest the urge for immediate means of making money to fend for the family. Although farming is another very prominent vocation in Etsako land, it involves some form of long term investment. Auto mechanics are also thriving in Etsako land but they are mostly located in secluded areas where they are allowed to practice their profession. This possibly suggests why the street artisans like the tailors compete and sometimes dominate the auto-mechanics, since they can freely practice their profession at the convenience of their homes.

The question that came to our mind from the findings above is; why did they choose these vocations as their means of livelihood? Why did they not go to formal school setting to acquire formal education? Why have they resigned completely to these professions at the expense of having formal education? How can they be helped in acquiring some form of education even in their business of vocation?

In answer to the major question on why the choices of their vocations, findings from the survey reveal that a large percentage (55.5%) of the respondents had the challenge of not having anyone to sponsor them in formal education, there was financial poverty. This is followed by the problem of large family size (33%). 14.5% indicated that they just want to continue with their family business, while 13.0% indicated that they do not just like to go to school. The impression that this brings to the researchers' minds is that, the problem of large family size has greatly affected the financial ability of many homes in such a way that their children are deprived of formal education. It also suggests that the large family size is geared towards engaging them in farm work or other family business. It is also interesting to note that some individuals do not just like to go to school even if they had financial support.

Statistics from the survey show that the respondents between the age brackets 25 to 39 years have a high percentage frequency of 58% followed by those of 40 years and above. This therefore implies the glaring difficulty in taking formal education from the lower level since they seem to have missed their opportunity. Nevertheless, 75.5% of the total respondents are willing to learn new methods of further carrying out their vocation. This means that with the introduction of new technologies for skill development, the people are willing to embrace it to better their vocations.

Which of the learning technologies are available and which of them are they mostly aware of? 35.5% of the respondents are aware of computers, 33% are aware of mobile phone, 12% are aware of digital display board, and 18% are aware of radio communication. However, only 41% are aware of the fact that these available technologies can be of help to them in enhancing their skills. Whereas 88.5% of the respondents own mobile phones, 83.5% mainly use them to make calls.

ICT TOOLS FOR SKILL REFINEMENT

The following ICT tools are considered in this paper for the needed skill refinement. This list is by no means exhaustive but is intended to guide our thinking and planning of the skill refinement concept.

- **Bulletin Board:** The design of the bulletin board is based on an interactive concept on which messages can be posted and replied. Messages posted can be in the form of text, image or even voice. They can also be posted non-electronically by filling special forms. Each message will be assigned an expiry date and will expire automatically (Deraman & Bahar 2000).
- **Electronic Digital Display Board:** The design concept of the Electronic Digital Display Board has become very useful in modern times. Mounting the display board in strategic locations has been appreciated as an effective tool for workplace communication. The development of liquid-crystal displays (LCD) proceeded from early successes like the pocket calculator to the major milestone of a flat-panel television display you can hang on a wall. The history of that development spans the world's major industrial centers: the U.S., Japan, and Europe (Kawamoto 2012).

- **Mobile Phones:** Increasingly these allow communication via photos, videos and text messaging. Mobile devices make possible assessment-centred learning as well by enabling the provision of continual feedback throughout the learning process, presenting learners with diagnosis and formative guidance as to what might be improved or what might be learned next. Moreover, in providing prompt feedback, mLearning maintains the appeal of learning and provides a motivating factor that can at times be lacking in traditional modes of education (Geddes, 2004). Mobile phones also facilitate community-centred learning, meaning learning that the learner deems valuable because of its relevance to the surrounding social context; mLearning facilitates learning that can be used to achieve socio-economic goals that respond to problems, such as problems related to health or family care confronting the surrounding community (Sharples et al., 2007, p. 223; Wagner & Kozma, 2005, pp. 83-85).
- **Radio Transmission:** Radio waves are used for commercial AM and FM broadcasting. Citizens Band (CB) is a specific range of radio frequencies set aside for short-range public communication uses. Digital radio encodes numerical sequences that are sent via radio waves. Less familiar, perhaps, are the VHF AM and shortwave radios used by aviators and ships at sea to communicate with land-based operations (Miller 1995).
- **Computer Animations:** The term "Computer Animation" suggests that computers bring something new to the traditional way of animating. According to Magnenat-Thalmann et al (1990), a definition of computer animation could be: a technique in which the illusion of movement is created by displaying on a screen, or recording on a recording device a series of individual states of a dynamic scene.

STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION CONCEPTS

Some of the strategic implementation concepts opined by the researchers include:

- a) The mounting of Digital Display boards or bulletin boards at strategic locations where bike riders can stop to quickly view information. Education materials can be uploaded which may be geared towards financial management, road management, first aid management, bike maintenance. Such course modules with a lot of graphic images that can attract the bike riders to briefly stop to watch and learn can be uploaded on a daily basis. The learning materials should be made simple enough in order to create deep impression on the mobile bike riders.
- b) The deliberate outreaches into farm settlement areas with projectors and computers to showcase computer animations that demonstrate modern farming techniques. Learning modules can be created in local languages to bring learning to the grassroots. Since rural farmers may not be patient with the secular learning concept, the need to create pictures and animations which provide skill enhancement and development cannot be overemphasized.
- c) Radio transmission can be very useful for learning purpose in homes, offices, shops, etc. Artisans at the comfort of their homes, offices, shops can learn while carrying out their vocational practices. Learning schedules can be communicated through the radio to address vocations of various street artisans. The communication structure of each learning module should be clear and precise enough for easy understanding. The use of mobile phones can also be very useful here for feedback purposes.
- d) Mechanic workshops can be upgraded to support academic institutions. A collaborative effort between the auto-mechanics and the students and teachers in

academic institutions where mechanical engineering is offered can help in creating some form of enhanced skill development. Since the auto-mechanics have the direct technical know-how with low educational backing, the influence from students and teachers in environment of new discovery can greatly help in enhancing their skills. Technological aids like the bulletin boards can be useful in posting messages and current information. The mobile phones can be used to produce some form of teleconferencing where technical discussions can go on while the job is in progress.

EXPERIENTIAL OBSERVATIONS

From experience, certain observations have been made. The first all is the mounting of Electronic Digital Display Board at the main gate of Auchi Polytechnic by the students of Computer Science Department. The main gate of the Polytechnic is located at the side of Benin-Okene express way in Etsako-West Local Government Area. It was observed that very busy bike riders stopped to watch the content of the display board mounted at strategic location. Contents were deliberately changed at the control room to create different forms of attraction. With this, it became clear that if education contents are showcased from the control room with some form of clarity, busy bike riders will stop to see, thereby creating learning opportunity. Below is a picture of the Digital Display Board mounted by Computer Science students of Auchi Polytechnic.



Another observation is the fact that Auchi Polytechnic has a Radio station operated from the Department of Mass Communication. While driving, or at home, or in the office, we observe that vital information are communicated. At our convenience, we are able to listen and note the vital information. This therefore indicates that educational materials can be communicated for people to learn at their convenience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we see the possibility of refining the skills of the educationally less privileged. Modern learning tools are available which can be explored for ease of learning in the work place. We have brought to limelight the strategic ways the modern learning tool can be utilized for reaching out this category of people, thereby creating an expanded learning forum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A deliberate and concise effort is hereby recommended to the full implementation of these concepts. Government should constantly be aware that development of individuals amounts to a development of the society. Therefore no one should be undermined in the development process.

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