



REPOSITIONING EDUCATION FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-RELIANCE AMONG UPPER BASIC STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored the need for repositioning education for economic empowerment and self-reliance among upper basic students in Nigeria. Education remains a vehicle for economic emancipation. Accordingly the current education reform in Nigeria focused on a comprehensive overhaul of the erstwhile education structure. The reform aimed to create a more relevant and skills-based education. It aimed to align education with job creation with emphasis on skills for competing favourably in the globalized world of workplace. Given the relevance of education to economic empowerment, there had been increase in enrolment of children into primary and upper basic schools. However, despite the various curricula reforms and restructure in Nigeria education, particularly at the basic and post-basic levels, the educational system in Nigeria has been criticized for its inability to equip students with the necessary skills to become self-reliant and contribute meaningfully to the economy. This paper attempted to assess the structure of basic education in Nigeria in terms of curriculum content and pedagogical methods. It examined the impact of pedagogical method of entrepreneurship education on short-term and long-term outcome among students in Nigeria based on analytical literature review, empirical review and the document on the national policy on education. The paper equally examined how handicraft centres and industries collaborate with educational institutions to provide students with practical skills for secured position in industries and to be economically independent. The paper concluded with a proposed model for repositioning education for economic empowerment and self-reliance among upper basic students in Nigeria.

Keywords: Education, Economic Empowerment, Self-Reliance, Upper Basic Students

JEL Classification Code: E = Education, EE = Economic Empowerment, SR= Self-Reliance, UPS – Upper Basic Students

Introduction

Globally, recent curricula reform in education has been an attempt to reflect on the pressing needs of the diverse nations of the world (Organization for Economic Co-operation and development (OECD, 2025). These needs, as they affect education, cut across digitalization, personal learning and skills acquisition for learners. They also encompass the economy, the political, technological and the social environment in relation to conflicts, global warming healthcare and global trade dynamics including the global labour market as they are being transformed by technological advancement, among others (OECD, 2025). The reform in education impacts on students' development based on the understanding of global changes (Sharmila & Vijayasanthi, 2022) especially in making education to be of economic value to learners.

Regionally, particularly with a focus on Africa, recent reform in education aim to aligning education with job creation with emphasis on skills for competing favourably in the

globalized world of workplace (World Bank Group, 2024) in addition to addressing the issue of insecurity and inequality. Despite projected growth in economic activities from 2.4% in 2023 to 3% in 2024, it was reported that millions of Africans, particularly those of school age, remained in abject poverty (World Bank Group, 2024). Although this challenge is said to be associated to conflicts, climate change and soaring debts service costs, it does not take off the fact that most countries in Africa rely on consumption economy rather than productive economy. Hence, the report of the World Bank Group indicate that, despite increase in enrolment of children into primary and upper basic schools, there is a need for these students to be educated and properly skilled in order to secure jobs and take advantage of new digital and green economy.

Nigeria, as part of the global world, is not aloof from the global trend in education reform. Accordingly the current education reform focuses on a comprehensive overhaul of the erstwhile 6-3-3-4 structure. The reform aimed to create a more relevant and skills-based education (Riseedumag.com, 2025) by introducing among others vocational and digital skills into the curricula. This notwithstanding, interrogation of the old education structure and curricula suggests that beyond structural and curricula reform, there is equally a lack of political will in the implementation of the reforms (Riseedumag.com, (2025) which constitute a major bane of achieving for the learner a type of education that will lead to self-reliance, self-employment and economic emancipation

Problem Statement

Despite the various curricula reforms and restructure in Nigeria education, particularly at the basic and post-basic levels, the educational system in Nigeria has been criticized for its inability to equip students with the necessary skills to become self-reliant and contribute meaningfully to the economy (Obeza, 2023). The aim of this paper is therefore to: 1. critically assess the structure of basic education in Nigeria in terms of curriculum content and pedagogical methods; 2. examine the impact of pedagogical method of entrepreneurship education on short-term and long-term outcome among students in Nigeria and 3. Propose a model for repositioning education for economic empowerment and self-reliance among upper basic students in Nigeria.

In order to achieve the objectives, the study adopted analytical literature review, empirical review and also relied on policy document in order to situate the paper within the ongoing discourse on education for economic empowerment and self-reliance.

Literature Review

For the purpose of this paper, the narrative literature review method was adopted. The paper relied on peer-review literature, empirical review and policy document – the National Policy on Education.

Conceptual Clarification

There is a need to conceptualise the terms used in this paper in order to properly situate the contents within the context of existing discourse on education for economic empowerment and self-reliance.

Economic Empowerment: within the context of educational learning, economic empowerment refers to the process of equipping individual learners with the knowledge and skills needed for them to achieve financial independence after completing a specific level of education. It entails the ability of individual learners who completed at least the upper basic education in Nigeria to be able to participate actively in the economic activities of their society

due to the basic skills acquired at school. However, in Bangladesh and India, (sohayota.gov.bd, 2025) the emphasis is on functional education at primary and secondary school as the foundation for life-long learning as a purveyor for later success in the labour market. In addition, Sele and Mukundi (2024) recognized the role of government policies and an enabling environment to realize economic empowerment through education.

Self-Reliance: self-reliance explains a situation whereby individuals who completed a specific level of education according to the national policy on education would have acquired sufficient knowledge and skills needed for them to take financial responsibility for their survival in society without necessarily depending on others. Emeka, Emeka & Onyebuchi, (2023). conceived self-reliance as a programme approach designed to develop and strengthen livelihoods of person of concern (students who completed upper basic education), and reducing their vulnerability and long-term reliance on humanitarian assistance it entails having confidence in one's own skills and ability to create wealth and manipulate opportunities in one's environment for personal survival.

Upper Basic Education: upper basic education is the three-year Junior Secondary School (JSS) component of the 9-year Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. It is prescribed as compulsory and free for all children of primary and junior secondary school age. It has as its goal to provide foundational skills and a basis for life-long learning (Federal Ministry of Education [FGN, 2014]). As parts of the objectives to be achieved for the learner, the policy document stated that Junior Secondary Education is to provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for development and the performance of their civic responsibilities. In order to realize the goal of education at this level, government was to provide, among others, laboratories and workshops (FGN, 2014).

Theories Connecting Education and Economic Empowerment

Despite the several theories that connect education with economic empowerment such as social capital theory, capability and human development theory, this paper is hinged on the human capital theory developed by Theodore Schultz and the functionalist theory. Theodore Schultz (Sean, 2025) posits that investment in education and training was paramount to economic growth. Expounding on the theory, Sean (2025) related it to the educational attainment, knowledge, experience and skills of an employee. By implication, education actually empowers and equips learners with basic skills and knowledge for engagement in economic activities, whether as employees or self-employed as the case may be. This is because, as Sean posits, companies are readily interested in potential employees who have "productive capital". Little wonder why employers ask for job experiences in their recruitment criteria. Notwithstanding, the limitation of the theory lies on the fact that it is talent and ability which are developed through training, motivation and equipment and not necessarily the human capital per se that raises productivity (Sean, 2025). Thus, talent, ability and training can be said to be germane to education, self-reliant and economic empowerment.

Similarly, the functionalists perceive education as a crucial component of society that fulfils societal needs (Nickerson, (2024). The societal needs are achieved through the roles of education in the socialization of the child, preparing the child for various roles in society as well as equip the individual learners with skills needed for work (Thompson, 2015). By implication, education functions to equip the child with all the skills needed for both economic emancipation and social survival in society. It can therefore be reasoned that education remain functional insofar as it achieves for the learner the basic skills needed to be self-reliant and economically empowered.

Relevance of Education as Key to Economic Empowerment and Self-Reliance

Undoubtedly, education is widely recognized as a key driver of human capital development which invariably translates to economic development and growth. Emile Durkheim, a renowned sociologist, rightly conceived education as a means by which society instill the physical, intellectual, and moral ideals necessary to equip individuals with the skills and attitudes they need to become functioning members of society (Sule, 2010; Saha, 2001). However, the educational system in Nigeria has been criticized for its inability to equip students with the necessary skills to become self-reliant and contribute meaningfully to the economy (Obeza, 2023). Consequently, most students who completed schooling at the different levels of the educational system tend to lack the skills and competencies required to secure employment or start their own businesses, leading to high rates of unemployment and poverty.

Perhaps, the questions to ask include, whether the current pedagogical approach to teaching-learning is sufficient to achieve skills acquisition for learners; at what level of education are students to be exposed to skills acquisition; is the school well equipped to inculcate the necessary skills for economic empowerment and self-reliance; how can the necessary skills needed for economic emancipation be achieved for the learner, particularly those in the middle and upper basic levels of education and those attending schools which are not vocational and technical in nature? Seeing that the vast majority of students attend either grammar school or comprehensive school which do not necessarily blend theory with practical skills, this article argues that education should be reoriented to focus on developing skills that can lead to economic empowerment and self-reliance among upper basic students in Nigeria based on a tested and proven model of blended educational teaching-learning

Overview of Education System in Nigeria

Nigeria educational system has continued to go through a series of metamorphoses both in terms of structure and curriculum, perhaps to satisfy emerging local needs and to align with global educational practices (Asogwa, 2024). The recent revised Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) and Senior Secondary Education Curriculum (SSEC) by the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2025) is a testament of these metamorphoses. The focal content areas in the new revised curricula are expected to enable the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies including basic robotics, positive artificial intelligence, and digital technologies, as well as life, citizenship and sports skills (Riseedumag.com, (2025). The reviewed curricula which took immediate effect from the moment of its unveiling in 2025 also focus on subjects offered by students at each stage of the basic and post basic educational levels that is, primary 1-3, primary 4-6, junior secondary 1-3 and senior secondary 1-3. Nevertheless, it is unclear how much of requisite infrastructure in each school as well as teacher training was put in place for the feasibility of the objectives of the new schools curricula.

Accordingly, it is important to note that the implementation of the contents of the revised curricula and the acquisition of the focal content and subject-based competencies are to be achieved through the delivery process and learning engagements (Uwaifo & Uddin, 2009). The concern here is the media of the contents delivery which will ensure the actual acquisition of the intended knowledge and skills by the target students. The medium of the contents delivery is a concern because, until the review of the educational system in 2008 in alignment with the millennial development goal, the 6 – 3 – 3 – 4 educational system which came into existence in 1983 had as its aim the quest to produce self-reliant youths equipped with marketable vocational skills for self-employment and contribution to the nation's political, economic and technological development (Uwaifo & Uddin, 2009). The educational system

aimed to instil a spirit of hard work and practical knowledge by incorporating technical education alongside formal academic routes. It was also aimed to provide a broad educational foundation which offered options for technical and vocational education to students at the upper basic education (junior secondary school) as well as to those in the senior secondary school level (Uwaifo & Uddin, 2009). In other words, it was expected that students who completed junior secondary, and who do not have the capability for academic rigors, would have acquired basic skills for self-reliant and self-employment. However, after about twenty five years of introduction before it was replaced by the 9 – 3 – 4 educational system, the extent to which the aim of the educational system was achieved remains unsubstantiated.

The Current State of Education in Nigeria

The Nigerian education system has been plagued by several challenges, including inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, inadequate trained teachers, and a lack of relevance to the needs of the economy (Birabil & Ogeh, 2020). The curriculum is often too theoretical and does not provide students with the practical skills required to succeed in the workplace (Uwaifo & Uddin, 2009). This is largely due to inadequate trained teachers and lack of infrastructure (Birabil & Ogeh, 2020; Uwaifo & Uddin, 2009). Consequently, many students graduate from school without the necessary skills to secure employment or start their own businesses. These challenges, though surmountable, are however worrisome because education is seen to be worthwhile insofar as it caters for the need of the society in which it operates. For instance, Sharma (2010) enumerated the objectives of education in the United Kingdom which among others include the need to raise standards at all levels; to make further and higher education more economically relevant and available to larger numbers and to obtain good value for money from the education service as a whole. A cursory evaluation of the educational system in that clime will reveal that the educational delivery actually matches with the educational outcome in terms of the objectives it sets out to achieve. However, such is yet to be said about the Nigeria system of education.

The objective of the Nigeria educational system is not aloof from the gains of education. However, the means and ways of ensuring that the objectives are attained continue to elude the nation; not because of lack of policies but, due largely to implementation challenges (Birabil & Ogeh, 2020). For instance, while the objective of the educational system is to develop individuals who would be self-reliant and self-employed (FGN, 2013), the economic viability of education services to yield good value for money, first for the individual learner and to the nation in general, is often not imbedded in the education delivery system. Just to buttress the point, the new basic education curriculum (BEC) by the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2025) appears not to be different from the outlined objectives of the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2013) which aimed at helping the learners to develop their full potentials and acquire relevant skills for national development and dynamic economy by emphasizing on the partnerships between the public and private sectors to fund education and to ensure that the curriculum aligns with the needs of the job market. Yet, almost about twelve years after the review of the educational policy, nothing seems to have change in terms of the educational outputs.

Equally interesting is that, seventeen years down the line (2008 to 2025), that is the period between the transition from the 6 – 3 – 3 – 4 educational system and the 9 – 3 – 4 educational system, the viability, marketability and economic proceed from education services still remains a subject of dialogue and negotiations, particularly among education policy-makers without measurable positive outcome (Abdulganeey, Abu, Awah & Umekwe, 2025). A cursory glance at the structure of the various educational systems reveals a mere change in nomenclature without substantial differences in the mode of implementation – Hence, the tools of implementation appears to remain rhetoric. Little therefore wonder why the

continuous decay in the quality of education as measured by the skills possessed by students, particularly those who completed the upper basic education.

Perhaps, the policy makers envisaged the length of time the child spends in acquiring education, especially at the basic levels of education, as the transformative catalyst. Probably, that might account for the transition from the 6 – 3 – 3 – 4 to the 9 – 3 – 4 and the proposed 12 – 3 – 4 structure of the educational system. Of course, the envisaged transformational changes are articulated through the curriculum, but what is observed is that existing school subjects are either blended or new ones are introduced with a view to meet global educational practices in terms of skills development. Arguably, these are only a reflection in the changes of nomenclature rather than in practical implementation (Abdulganeey, Abu, Awah & Umekwe, 2025) as there has not been significant increase in funding of education, if any, in terms of infrastructure and teacher-training.

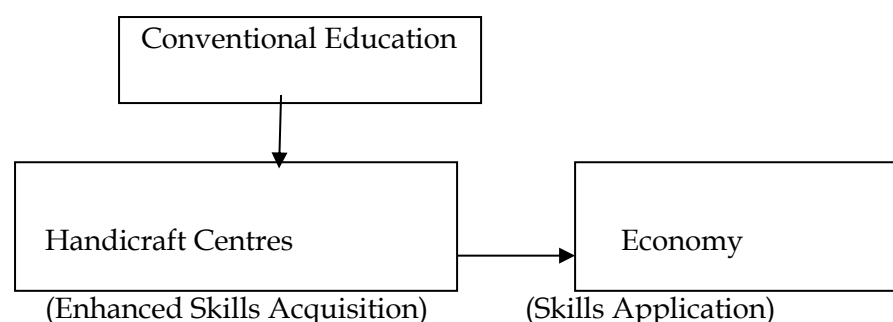
The Need for Economic Empowerment and Self-Reliance

Economic empowerment and self-reliance are essential for individuals to become productive citizens and contribute to a nation's economic advancement. Generally, the global world is driven by the economy, whether it touches on education, political, family, or religious institutions of society (Abdulganeey, Abu, Awah & Umekwe, 2025). Hence, economic empowerment and self-reliance are relevant not only to the individuals, but also in fostering a nation's sustainable growth and reduction in the reliance on external aid (Nwachukwu, 2025). There is no doubt that when individuals are economically empowered, there will be corresponding benefits of socioeconomic progress in terms of improved wealth distribution and individuals' adaptation to economic and social transitions.

It however requires students who are adequately equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to achieve economic empowerment and self-reliance. It is expected that by incorporating entrepreneurship education, technical and vocational training, and skills development into the curriculum education would be able to achieve the desired economic empowerment for student. In the contrary, existing studies (Egbetokun, Olofinnyehun & Adewole, 2024; Alokoleek, Harb, Horb & Al shishony, 2023) indicate while students' knowledge and behaviour increased in the short-term due to exposure to entrepreneurship education, there was however no corresponding increase in entrepreneurial skills and intention in the long-term outcome. This does not however invalidate the impact of entrepreneurship education as a key driver of economic growth and job creation (Boujaddaine, 2023). Accordingly, this paper postulates that while new knowledge may emerge from theoretical exposure to entrepreneurship education, an effective blended learning that integrates practical skills learning with conventional education is required. Of course, the system of education as currently obtained in Nigeria's upper basic schools may not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Hence, this paper proposes a need to reposition education in Nigeria for economic empowerment through a more robust synergy with a strong interconnected framework.

A Framework for Repositioning Education

A Framework for Repositioning Education



The above framework is the authors' novelty which derives from literature and it posits that if conventional education is to be functional, it must have a link with the institution that provides practical skills to learners. It also suggests that education does not directly translate to economic profit unless it is interfaced with the institution that provides practical skills to learners. In other words, given the current educational system in Nigeria in terms of funding and infrastructure, conventional education will remain non-functional insofar as there is disconnect between it and the necessary institution that provides the skills and entrepreneurship required by industries and other economic institutions. In practical terms, this proposition differs from the connotation of 'public-private partnership in education' because the understanding of the concept, as it appears, is that the private ventures are to replicate the role of the government in education.

Handicraft centres, however loosely used to represent a ray of industries providing practical and technical support for education, performs intermediary role between education and the economic institution which is a key to balancing the gap between theoretical learning and practical skills required particularly in the production sectors of the economy. Handicraft centres as used in this paper is distinct from its' general conception as the showcasing of items made by hand using only traditional means for economic gains (Nzei, 2024). Such centres as conceived in this paper do not showcase already made items, but engage and train individual learners who would have opportunity to produce items which in turn can be displayed to generate income for the individual. Such centres serve to provide leverage in the realization of the objectives spelt out in the educational curricula for the learners.

It is the submission of this paper that, while conventional education instils moral values and enhances skills, the skills that drive the economy are acquired through hands-on training in collaboration with handicraft centres and entrepreneurship. Arguably, the current deficit in educational infrastructure and the seemingly inadequately trained teachers constitute a clog in the wheel of attainment of the educational objectives spelt out in the national policy on education and the educational curricula.

Connection between Education, Handicraft Centres and Economic Empowerment

The dictum, "Doing the same thing the same way produces same result" is as constant as truth itself. It does appear that the education policy crafters operate on the assumption that a change in the structure of the educational system remains the only way to achieve the educational aim and objectives. Sadly also, another trend likely to have been assumed by the educational policy makers is that a change in nomenclature of the curriculum content, with elongated duration in the years students spent at one level of education, particularly at the basic educational level, will yield the desired economic empowerment and self-reliance for the

learner. Unfortunately, a tenacious belief in educational practices in this direction will perpetually result in vicious circles.

Sociologically, education is perceived as a means of transmitting a societal culture from one generation to another (Nickerson, (2024). It goes therefore to say that to achieve economic empowerment and self-reliance for the learner; there must be innovation in the changes which periodically take effect in the educational curricula. Such changes ought to incorporate a sort of collaboration between education and the institutions that provide practical skill and hands-on training, hence the handicraft centres and entrepreneurship. Obviously, a functional perspective offers a better understanding of this proposed model.

The connection between education, industries (handicraft centres and entrepreneurship) and economic empowerment is a necessity for the realization of the marketable value of education in Nigeria. The partnership of industries with education ensures the relevance of education for self-reliance and economic empowerment. Although this practice is reflective through students' industrial work experience scheme (SIWES) and internships (Emeasoba, 2017), it does not cater for the generality of the students particularly those at the upper basic education level. This reveals the gap in the realization of the goal of the 6 – 3 – 4 educational system which envisaged that by the time a student completed the 9-year basic schooling (that is 6 years of primary school and 3 years of junior secondary school), he/she would have been well equipped with the basic skills necessary for self-reliance and economic survival in society.

Studies such as Hossain (2025) identified some of the benefits of industries partnership with education to include improved curriculum relevance, providing practical training opportunities and apprentice with strong feedback mechanism.

Proposed Model for Repositioning Education for Economic Empowerment and Self-Reliance

The proposed model is otherwise referred to as the Lagos model of 1980s, as distinct from the skills and vocational training provided through the Lagos Agency for Mass Education (Lagosame, n.d.). The model provided skills acquisition to pupils at the middle basic education (primary 5 pupils). It was based on collaboration with skills acquisition centres respectively for male and female pupils and was situated in each of the educational zones across the State. For instance, at Ebute-Metta, there was a handicraft centre for boys at Ojo Oniru and a craft and catering centre for girls situated at Eleja primary school. The centre for boys had three sections – metal, electrical and wood works. Students from within the educational zone attended the centre once a week depending on the schedule for their schools. In other words, all through their primary five, the students attended school four times a week and a day at the training centres. This practice was probably to pave way for a smooth transition from the primary to the junior secondary school where students were expected to continue with both theoretical education and vocational and technical skills training in line with the 6 – 3 – 4 educational system.

The proposed model is similar in form to the dual-educational practices obtained in most industrial countries like Germany, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Austria, Singapore,, South Korea and India (BIBB, 2024; SWI, 2022). In practice however, the model differs from that of the industrialized countries in terms of collaboration, engagement and duration. In the industrialized countries, the system is based on standardized curriculum and regulated by an act. It involves a direct engagement of the industries with students who received on-the-job training with paid income. This is different from the SIWES which is more of internship training for students.

In the industrialized countries, students spend maximum of three to four years on the dual-education and are graduated and awarded degree as skilled workers alongside the theoretical learning received at school. In other words, while students received theory at school, they received practical skills at the companies. Thus, this eliminates the issue of having to be required to produce evidence of cognate work experience before employment. What this implies is that not only is unemployment reduced in such countries, companies do not need to train or retrain students who graduated from conventional schools as they have literally trained those who would work for them immediately after graduation from school.

However, the model being proposed in this paper is akin to students acquiring some sort of basic skills not directly linked with the theoretical learning they received in the classroom. Although such skills are not specifically tied to any company, but at least, it provides the students with basic skills with which they can afford a means of livelihood. This also in itself is a measure of reducing over-reliance on paid jobs and increasing the internally generated income of the states. Why the dual-education as practiced in the industrial countries may not be advocated for Nigeria is due to the inadequate industries operating in the country.

The Lagos model nevertheless provided a dual-education that made transition from primary school to junior secondary school to align with the 6 - 3 - 3 - 4 educational system. The model served as synergy between the handicraft centres and the formal school system. First, the centres in a way helped to solve the challenges of space and inadequate practical learning equipments particularly for basic technology subjects at the upper basic education level. Second, it mitigated the issue of lack of trained teachers especially in the trade subjects offered in school.

Besides, the significance of the model will help to concretize entrepreneurship education which though is incorporated into the curriculum nevertheless still teaches theory as alternative to the practical skills that will develop the competencies required by students to start and manage their own businesses. It will also cater for vocational training by equipping students with practical skills that can be used to secure employment or start their own businesses such as carpentry, plumbing, and electrical work. More so, it can lead to increased employability of students who completed at least basic education. It can also encourage students exposed to dual-education to start their own businesses whereby creating jobs and contributing to economic growth. By so doing, poverty will be reduced leading to redistributive economy and enhancing resilience to economic uncertainties.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding that the focal content areas in the new revised educational curricula are expected to enable the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies including basic robotics, positive artificial intelligence, and digital technologies, as well as life, citizenship and sports skills, there is still gap in the requisite infrastructure and teacher-training to achieve these educational goals. The identified gap has been a bane in the realization of the objectives of the educational systems and the earlier curricula particularly for basic education in Nigeria. This suggests that there is a disconnection between the educational objectives and pedagogical delivery methods. Since it may not be feasible to have a well-equipped facilities and sufficient trained teachers in skills and technical knowledge for each school across the nation, there is a need for collaboration with other institutions and industries that provide services that blend theoretical learning with practical skills needed by students. Adopting this educational model will necessarily reposition education for economic empowerment and self-reliance particularly among upper basic students in Nigeria, who in turn will be able to contribute to economic development of the nation.

Recommendations

- i. There should be a synergy between conventional schools and institutions that provides opportunities for translation of theoretical knowledge into practical skills.
- ii. Handicraft and catering and craft centres should be established in each educational zone across the nation to serve as practical skills centres for students in upper basic schools within each education zone.
- iii. Dual educational system should be introduced at the basic educational level where students would receive theoretical knowledge twice or thrice a week while spending the other school days at the skills acquisition centres that blends theoretical learning with practical skills

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