

Skilled Workforce: A Pathway for Sustainable and Balance Economic Recovery

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Abstract

The position of education in the development of individual and the general society cannot be overemphasized. In fact, no nation can move ahead when education is neglected because it remains a pivoted platform to advance the course of people in the society. Thus, this paper believed that it is about a time to throw off completely the toga of backwardness and underdevelopment and bring forth ideas and workable plans that will give birth to a new Nigeria through Technical and Vocational education TVE was considered in this paper as a backbone for workforce to be a pathway for balance and sustainable economic recovery. Skilled workforce in this study is seen as a strong agent in recovering economy during challenges like economic recession. It was discovered in the cause of this study that TVET and its programmes were neglected. It was equally noticed that it is capital intensive. Again the workforce skills need to be developed through TVET so that they can meet the global need of 21st century as a matter of urgency. Integration of information and communication technology (ICT) was considered important for them to perform optimally. It was upon this that some recommendations were made which include: government must organise education submit on technical and Vocational education to discuss issues related to establishment and students enrolment, Offer of appointment in any organization to be accorded with advantage of further training and should continue as experiences grows and Government should recognize the workforce as the nation's source of wealth.

Keywords: Technical and Vocational Education (TVE), Information and communication Technology (ICT), Underdevelopment, Sustainable, Workforce.

Introduction

A man's calling is the most important aspect of his life and nearly all his experiences revolve around it. Hence, Olaitan (1996) submitted that man needs some assistance in chosen his work, preparing for it, entering into it and making progress in it and for him to succeed, he needs adequate education.

Education is the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for matured life (Dictionary.com, 2015). Therefore for an individual to make a wise choice of occupation within which to acquire and develop knowledge and skills for a living, he needs to clarify, justify, verify and citizen the job or listen to the job description before deciding to enter into it for the actualization of his goals (National Teacher's Institute 'NTI', 2008). The importance of education cannot be over-emphasized. It is the best legacy that a country can give to her citizens (kavya, 2015). Federal Republic of Nigeria regarded education as instrument "par excellence" for effecting national development (FRN 2004). To Renita (2016) it is important because it is used to mitigate most of the challenges faced in life. Hence it is a very vital tool used in contemporary world to succeed.

Many viewed education as a basic human right and considered by many as a key tool for national development. This tenet has been challenged by several economist especially Pritchett (1996), His empirical studies revealed that while many countries, having a large educated population, remain unable to make significant progress. The question generated was that; while education increases globally, what exactly is it that hinders a country's progression? According to Pritchett, (1996) there was no short answer, but a major area of concern is in the type and quality of education the country made available for her citizens. Scholars on this point argued that countries need a well-diversified education system in order to gain sustainable development through Education. Nigeria, as one of the third world countries has not recorded tremendous progress in the area of sustainable development through education. This is due to her inability to priorities technical and vocational education.

UNESCO-UNEVOC (2004) submitted that since education is considered the key to effective development strategies, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) must be the master key that can alleviate poverty, promote peace, conserve the environment, improve the quality of life and help achieve balanced and sustainable development. In other words, for any country to progress and face any challenge, like economic recession, unemployment, underemployment and various vices, she need to embrace TVET. It is upon this background that this paper presents skilled workforce as a pathway for sustainable and balanced economic recovery.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training "TVET"

Technical and vocational education and training is equally known as career and technical education (CTE) or simply technical vocational education and training or Technical and vocational education as one prefer. What is most prominently used depends on what parts of the world you are talking about.

Provision of saleable and all weather skills has for long been traced to technical vocational education. Though the definition given to it varies for example the definition given by Federal Republic of Nigeria "FRN" in her maiden National Policy on Education (1977) defined it as education given in institutions providing both scientific knowledge and practical skills required for a specific trade, employment or profession as crafts men, technician, technologist, scientist or similar levels in business, fields of engineering and applied sciences. This definition considered scientific knowledge and practical skills as prerequisite for any field of endeavour that one may wish to take, business, engineering and other science related fields.

The 1998 edition, FRN (1998) described technical education as that “aspect” of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. The function and component stressed here were less compared to the later.

Adopting UNESCO 2001’s definition, the FRN edition (2004) presented technical education as a comprehensive term referring to those aspect of educational process involving in addition to general education the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupation in various sectors of economic and social life. It equips people not only with vocational skills but with a broad range of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are now recognized as indispensable for meaningful participation in work and life (UNESCO, 2001), it implies that education and training plays a vital role in the developmental process. Hence the survival of man economically depends largely on the level he attains both in education and training. It is axiom that education and training as phenomena will continue as long as man lives. It connotes that to be relevant in the society and in one’s calling, the choice of education and training remain of paramount importance. Therefore developing right attitudes, basic education, skills and habits appropriate for world of work is as important as skill training (Okoro, 2006).

A Brief Look at Technical and Vocational Education in Nigeria

Technical and Vocational education in Nigeria has long been crawling without knowing the exact time it will develop and mature to the stage of solving myriad of problems facing Nigeria. Literature abound on how it arrived, place and training and those it was meant for and the intended purpose it was to serve.

According to Fafunwa (2002) Technical education had a slow start and developed less quickly than other forms of education. The reason as revealed was purely due to the fact that the voluntary agencies pioneered western education were unable to increase or popularise it. Since it was more expensive in terms of tools and equipment. Another problem was that there were no specialist among the policy makers who had vocational technical education inclination as many of the policy maker are literacy men and women in literary subjects. Another problem was traced to the then admission policy. Admission to technical colleges were based on passing the West African School Certificate Examination or the General Certificate of Education (GCE) of London University.

Okoro (2006) noted that as at 1909 there were only two institutions offering some forms of vocational education in the country i.e. the Hope Wanddel Training Institute and Nasarawa School that was established by government in 1909. According to him technical education and vocational training were neglected which completely set Nigeria society had unbalanced. Hence establishment of technical institute or schools still affects our economy till date.

On the level of education, it is a post-secondary vocational training programme with purpose of producing technicians. Citing Elliot’s Commission Report 1947, The Federal Ministry of Education FME (2000) stated that *“In Nigeria as in other parts of the world, serious efforts to establish and improve systematic teaching in Vocational and Technical education started in the colonial times. It started outside the formal school system especially at the first third of twentieth century. The high demand for both trade men and high levels of technological manpower led to establishment of formal technological programmes in school setting towards the end of the first half of twentieth century (FME, 2000).*

On the quality and value of TVE in Nigeria, the ministry went forward that;

At the eve of Nigerian Independence in 1960, Ashby commission noted that the major defect in Nigeria education was its strong bias towards the traditional literacy and academic subjects. The consequent effect on this was lack of respect on the part of the public for manual and technical achievement. It therefore made recommendations for strategic development of technical education below the university level. The short coming in the commission’s

recommendation is that while it saw the need to orientate programmes in other sectors of education to national needs and aspirations, it recommended that technical and commercial programmes should lead mainly to certificates of the City and Guilds Institute and the Royal Society of Arts. The commission like its precursor, Asquith Commission Report on Higher Education in the Colonies (1945), made no recommendations for provision/training of teachers in technical and Vocational education.

The revelation above confirms the basic reasons why Technical and Vocational Education (TVE, TVET) has not gotten recognition in Nigeria. The non-recognition of Technical and commercial programmes beyond secondary school level is a strong barrier to our national development and technological advancement. The saving grace of crude oil that seems to be on danger list now has exposed our carelessness on the type of education that could have aided our traditional and inherited indigenous education to flourish. It is true that technical and Vocational Education is capital intensive, yet its importance call for investing on it.

From the evidences provided above, it means that all workers have a singular opportunity of their areas of callings. When challenges comes, the only result will be either retrenchment, rationalisation or termination of appointment without option of substitution. This is the product or end result of an education system that prepare people for white collar job that led Nigeria to where we are today. With embracement of TVET, there will be many opportunities for workforce to change or alternate their jobs without much effect on the general economy. This has being the missing link between Nigerian workforces and TVET as a quality education that alleviate poverty.

If the aim of our technical colleges is to give training and impart the necessary skills leading to the production of craftsmen, technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant (UNESCO- Nigeria project, 2001), then we need to revisit our policy on Technical and Vocational education. This will align our technical and vocational education with the global demand of putting in place the right workforce that will actively involve in sustaining our economic development through TVET particularly during a period of challenges.

Habits in Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Habit formation is the process by which new behaviours becomes automatic. Old habits are hard to break and new habits are hard to form. The reason being that the behavioural pattern we repeat most often are literally etched into our neural pathway. The good news is that, through repetition, it is possible to form and maintain-new habit (Nir Eyal, 2017). Analysing the behavior of an individual in the society in relation to the knowledge and skills acquire psychology emphasizes the importance of right habit for teaching and learning of technical skills.

Respective training derived from habits psychology helps in the development of skill and attitudes in specific occupations. This principle is relevant to one of the theories of technical vocational education. This theory according to Olaitan (1996) stated that education will be effective in proportion as the specific experience for forming the right habits of doing and thinking are repeated to the extent that the habits developed are those of the finished skills necessary for gainful employment. It must be emphasised here that TVET develops expertise in techniques related to technology, skills and scientific techniques to span all aspect of the trade. This is a process that classified TVET as using procedural knowledge.

TVET is particularly necessary for all categories of Nigeria workforce at this period of economic recession which has brought atrocious and awful changes to every available systems. A situation where available knowledge and skills become obsolete, means of livelihood almost in accessible, commodity prices skyrocketed beyond the reach of common man, men of valour become coward, workers becomes beggars as a result of cumulated unpaid salaries, security is

no more guaranteed, vices becomes order of the day and education almost loses its credibility of providing solution to man's problem. The entire situation has become the survival of the fittest as many prefer suicide to life as a result of unbearable human conditions – what a pathetic and detestable state of affairs.

In a precarious situation of this nature, individual's education and level of training and adaptation to changes particularly for workforce become the last result. Habit formed will go a long way in addressing the problems.

Economic Recession

Recession has been variously defined by many authors, for example Edward (2017) simply defined recession as a general downturn in any economy which is always accompanied with high unemployment, slowing Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and high inflation.

It is a period of general economic decline and is typically accompanied by a drop in the stock market, an increase in unemployment and decline in the housing market. The blame of its occurrence is always on the federal leadership. According to him, when an economic boom busts, it causes a recession.

Investopedia (2008), presented the definition given by National Bureau of Economic Research as shown below:

The national Bureau of economic research defined economic recession as: 'a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy and lasting for more than few month, normally visible in the real gross domestic product (GDP) wholesale, retail sales, industrial production, employment, real income, gross domestic product' In general it is declined by a long-lasting increase of unemployment, drop in the stock market, negative growth of G.D.P and decline of the housing market. Nevertheless, it's less severe than economic depression.

Recession and GDP

An economic recession is typically defined as a decline in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for two or more consecutive quarters. GDP is the market value of all goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time (Mckinney, 2003).

One of the major factors of a nation's economic recession is that it reduces real salaries. This is connected with salaries adjusted for the inflation. Falling of real salaries mean that the workers can't buy the same amount of goods. They can make the same amount of money, but the purchasing power is reduced.

Causes of Economic Recession in Nigeria

The causes of recession in Nigeria is attributed to poor economic planning, high inflation rate, high interest rate, high taxation, policy conflict, stoppage of pipeline contracts and Implementation of treasure single account (Ibenegbu, 2017).

Other key factors that could not be expatiated because of limited space but highlighted according to Ibenegbu (2017) includes High Interest Rate, A stock market Crash, Falling Housing prices and sales, A slowdown in manufacturing order, Massive swindles, Deregulation, Wage-price control, and Reduced consumer confidence.

Economic Recovery

Economic Recovery is the opposite of economic recession, this is a period of increasing business activities signaling the end of recession. Economist indicators such as GDP, inflation, financial markets and unemployment to analyse the state of economy determine whether a recovery is in progress (Investopedia, 2017). Common feature of economic recovery and

expansion include GDP growth, stock market gain, declining unemployment and higher consumer confidence.

It is the phase of the business cycle following a recession during which an economy regains and exceeds peak employment and output levels achieved prior to downturn usually characterized by abnormally high level of growth in real GDP, employment, corporate profit and other indicators. It is a turning point from contraction to expansion.

Skilled Workforce as Pivotal for Sustainable and Balanced Economic Recovery

TVET as an educational system raises people's productivity and their creativity and promote entrepreneurship and technological advancement. Alakija (2017) says education leads to an improvement in the quality of life and levels of broad social benefits to individual and the society at large. Developing right attitudes and possession of basic education and habits appropriate for world of work. (Okoro, 2006) are the basic ingredient required for both the workforce and the new entrants.

The special feature of TVET is that as part of lifelong learning it can take place at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary level and include work based learning and continuing training and professional development which may lead to qualification (UNESCO, 2015). It implies that even when one is gainfully employed, he can still learn more and acquire qualification that can positively promote him in the work place. If per adventure hard changes or challenges comes, to make adjustment will not be difficult. This proofs the function and relevance of TVET as:

- A means of preparing for occupation field and for effective participation in the world of work.
- An aspect of lifelong learning and preparation for responsible citizenship.
- An instrument for promoting environmentally sound, sustainable development and
- A "key" for alleviating poverty.

The most important thing is the readiness of individual and the organisation in which they work to make available to time an arrangement that will assist workers smooth transition and adjustment during the period of challenges. Infact, TVET is dedicated to the eradication of ignorance and incompetence as a fundamental causes of poverty. Osaguah (1995) noted that Nigerian education's contribution to job performance and productivity appears less than commendation. Furthermore, Toby (2000) observed that throughout the spectrum of Nigerian workforce, we find too many who have not mustered the combination of knowledge and skills necessary for effective work performance. This was attributed to their brittle intellectualism. Hence when challenges occurs or strikes, they easily eroded. On a clean note, he stressed that TVET is what Nigeria as a country need to embrace to face her various challenges.

On quality, Eyibe (2000) submitted that the value of TVET programme rests on the quality of the activities it provides. He emphasized that learning through involvement enhances both motivation and retention of how to do, repair, construct, fix, or assemble. A continuous training of workforce on the basis of TVET principle will guarantee smooth flow of economy as the contribution of individual workforce will enhance economic stability. at the local, state and federal levels. It is our believe that what the entire workforce need before, during and after economic crisis is TVET which if put in place will produce clear evidence that the situation will remain normal.

Traditionally, when TVET has prepared learner or students for specific skills however, in the post-Taylorist work environment, workers are expected to perform more broadly defined Job (Hirsch and Wagner, 1995). This is why further learning and on the job training are necessary.

Kavya (2015) observed that, with evolving lifestyle, steep inflation rate and luxurious transcending into needs, it is only impossible for a family to depend and thrive on one bread

earner. It depicts that as individual, you ought to work for self-sufficiency and dependency and education help you to gain opportunities for financial independence.

An economically independent society is the stepping stone to combine productivity that leads to an economic growth of the nation as a whole. Economist believed that economic growth and development were technology driven and human capital dependent. This is why the organisation for economic co-operation and Development O.E.C.D (2012) called for systematic and comprehensive approach towards policies for meeting the skill needs of increasingly unpredicted labour market. It acknowledge that skill have become the global currency of twenty-first century economy. Thus any economy that will sail through will rest and depend on skilled workforce

As TVET comprises formal, non-formal and informal learning for the world of work, its purpose is for young people, women and men to learn knowledge and skills from basic to advance levels across a wide range of institutional and work settings and in the diverse socio-economic context. The purpose is to enhance the development of more equitable and sustainable societies (UNESCO 2012). Due to the changing pattern of processes, products and services in the world of work are factors that drives the improving standard of workforce in the world of work. For this course, as a transformative tool, TVET prepares learners for vocational and generic skills they need for lifelong learning and gainful employment. It is therefore necessary that workforce and new entrant must attached the necessary importance to full implementation of TVET policies that may be provided by employers.

Integrating ICT into TVET Activities Boost Performance

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in simple term connect the world through internet. Connecting the workforce in Nigeria to others in the world will improve their job performance as their linking will improve their competency and experiences.

Employ technologies in TVET structures optimally and effectively improves the quality of skills learnt which will improve the activities work involve and productivity. Productive work plays prominent roles in eradicating poverty and improve economy. This according to UNESCO (2012) will improve learning outcomes (product) and services to students and establish new paradigms and environments for developing the knowledge and skill required for tomorrows world of work. UNESCO agrees that the development of ICT and new mode of learning – such as distance, online and flexible learning is one such change that TVET needs to responds to, if it is to ensure for example that learners are equipped with the technological skills necessary to carry out their current and future jobs. Too few young people and adults are gaining the skills, knowledge and attitude. They need to find decent job employment in today's rapidly changing job market, where the capacity to learn and adapt is essential. (Irinna bokiva, 2012)

The economic competitiveness of a country depends on the skills of its workforce. The skills and competencies of the workforce, in turn, are dependent upon the quality of the country's education and training system.

Similarly, inadequate facilities and resources, inhibites efforts to maintain high quality standard technical vocational education and training (Mustapha and Greenan 2015). According to Mustapha et al (2015) citing Browmand kep, (1999), Distler, (1992), an international comparison show that employers in the US and UK, believed that the present state of vocational education in their respective countries is inadequate to train students effectively for the changing demand of the workplace. He however asserted that minimal empirical work or research exist in developing country. Economic recession in a developing country like Nigeria, need attention and concerted effort by all and sundry particularly the workforce, to re-strategies effort to rebuild the collapsing economy. Such effort will bring a dependable economic recovery particularly at this period of economic down-turn. The current economic recession

had brought hardship to average Nigerian workers with massive depreciation of their power, job losses and unpaid salaries and benefits. There is a correlation between a productive workforce and economic growth and overall wellbeing of any nation. (Onyewuchi, 2017). This is not so in Nigeria case.

Now that economy is being more globalized than ever, it is important to have a background and a skill set that allows graduates to become immersed in the global economy right away from graduation. The importance of skills innovation in Information and Communication Technology education and entrepreneurship will allow them to properly fit into the global market place on which today's economy depends. In this wise, good quality general education background will make trainees trainable and adaptable to market place. ICT is seen here as a strong supportive to TVET.

Therefore to invest in people's skills with quality education and lifelong learning programmes enables skill portability and better prospects, which facilitate and enhance employability (G20, 2010). With mobility and portability of workforce in a downturn economy the recovery and stabilization of such economy will not pose much problem.

Conclusion

This paper actually examined the position of technical and vocational education in Nigeria. It looks at the importance of the workforce and the need for various organization and employers to keep them on continuous learning through TVET so that transition or adjusting to change during challenges will not be difficult. Various strategies that can aid the workforce were discussed particularly during economic crises called recession and how they can bounce back on economic recovery without stress. Causes of recession in Nigeria were highlighted and probable solution through the workforce. The paper finally advised that effort be made on integrating ICT into TVET programmes at all level so that many problem could be solved through its application without undue stress.

Recommendation

- With the present economic situation, government must organize education summit on technical and Vocational education to discuss issues related to establishment and sustenance of good student enrolment.
- Sensitization programmes must be put in place for the entire workforce on the importance of TVET and its relevance to their job.
- Programmes of TVET should be made active in all levels of education right from Secondary School and Technical colleges.
- Offer of appointment in any organization must accorded the advantage of further training and continues as experiences grows or progresses.
- Government must take funding of TVET schools and their programmes as priority as such, money allocated in annual budget particularly meant for education should be released in full without misappropriation.
- Nigeria as a matter of urgency should partner with local and international organization like UNESCO, UNEVOC, ILO, OECD to keep pace on developments about TVET in the world
- Provide a conducive environment for workers or workforce so that they can use their wealth of experiences to continue sustaining economy.
- Prioritize the workers' salaries and other benefit.
- Government should recognize the workforce as the nation's source of wealth.

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