

BRIDGING THE GAP IN MANPOWER NEEDS OF NIGERIA THROUGH TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING WORK PLACE PARTNERSHIP

BY

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Abstract

The need for an effective partnership between Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and the work place practices calls for more efforts aimed at a smooth transition from classroom theory into work place habits and industry. In spite of all efforts by the Federal Government of Nigeria at producing graduates of secondary and tertiary education who are ready for employment and the industry, skill gaps persist among the graduates making them unemployable and not ready for the industry. This paper therefore discusses the emerging issues and problems that continue to cause the skill gaps and addresses expected global best practices in School-Industry Partnership aimed at bridging the skill gaps to meet the manpower needs of Nigeria. The paper concludes that a functional TVET-Work Place Partnership holds the key to skilled manpower to drive Nigeria's economy in this era of declining employment opportunities and increasing graduate turn out.

Keywords: Work Place Partnership, School-Industry Partnership, Skill Gaps, Manpower needs.

Introduction

Nigeria is favoured with abundant material and human resources, yet she is saddled with fundamental challenges of graduate unemployment and this has been a cause of concern to Nigerians. It is generally accepted that no nation can develop above the level of quality manpower resources it has. Consequently, in order to meet the manpower needs of industries in an ever-changing technological work place, the manpower work force has to have the right skills, up-to-date knowledge, the right attitude and abilities to do the work in line with the demands of the occupation. All of these can be acquired through a functional and effective Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Work Place Partnership. However, the development of indigenous manpower to serve as the propelling force for national growth and development is no doubt a key to Nigeria's socio-economic and political development (Ake, 1989). Thus, this need for the right manpower for our industries is

fundamental to economic development, political stability, poverty alleviation and human capital development in Nigeria.

In spite of efforts by government through its various policies to make our educational system more functional, there are still growing concerns among our industrialist and education stakeholders that graduates of our higher education lack adequate practical background and relevant job related skills for employment in industries (Ideh, 2013; Idris & Rajuddin, 2012; Ikeoji & Agwubike, 2006). Employers of labour have continued to express their worry over the quality of the current graduates of TVET institutions in Nigeria who are experiencing set-backs due to lack of relevant job related skills for employment.

This skill gaps in recent years have resulted to most TVET graduates in Nigeria tertiary institutions being subjected to several re-training programmes because most of them are

considered to be ill prepared and adjudged unemployable based on the quality of training acquired (Ideh, 2013; Rufai, Abdulkadir & Kagara, 2013; Ikeoji, 1999). And in most cases where industries cannot employ and re-train our indigenous TVET graduates, they technically bring in the 'expatriate' to do the same job. The TVET institutions and industries work place partnership training programmes has failed Nigerians over the years to address the skill gaps, which exist and diminish the usefulness of TVET graduates from the Nigerian educational system.

This paper therefore explores the emerging issues and problems that have continued to create these skill gaps as a necessary background to proffer a projection on how TVET workplace partnership can help bridge gaps in manpower needs of Nigeria through industrial work experience in Agricultural Education in Nigeria.

Concept of Work Place - School Industry Partnership

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) in the National Policy of Education, identified the goals of establishing TVET as to provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advance craft and technical levels; provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development; and give training and impart the necessary skills to individual for self-reliance economically. These laudable goals of TVET cannot be achieved without an effective connecting work place / School Industry Partnership (SIP) relationship. SIP is a mutual work experience learning relationship between educational institutions (school) and the placement industry where the student for training acquires work place experiences for a period of time.

The Involvement and Participation Association (IPA) (2009) sees Work Place Partnership (WPP) as a relationship based on the satisfaction of mutual as well as separate interests given by both parties to those

interests. WPP offers potential work experience benefits to the industrial training students through the Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) programme, and a good relationship with the local and international community (Scott, 2014; Involvement and Participation Association, 2009). Through this symbiotic relationship between the school and industries, TVET students are exposed to industry operations and use of industrial work tools and machines, management structure of industrial organisations and good work habit in their specialized areas through industrial attachment in order to improve the quality of the TVET programme as well as gain valuable practical experiences for participants in the training (Ideh, 2013; Olaitan, Igbo, Ekong, Nwachukwu & Onyemachi, 1999).

The Environment Habit theory of work experience holds that, work experience will be efficient in as much proportion as the environment in which the learner is trained is a replica of the environment in which the learner must subsequently work (Olaitan et al, 1999; Prosser & Quigley, 1949). This theory developed by Prosser and Quigley (1949), reveals the conditions, circumstances and influences surrounding and affecting the development of skills that will be relevant to get work done. The job-in-learning must not be for ordinary exercise, but exact jobs or part of exact jobs or projects with actual tools and machines. In other words, an Agricultural Education student should be trained in the environment with machines and tools similar to that s(he) will use when in employment. However, irrespective of how good a classroom environment is, classroom environment does not provide and compensate real life working environment.

Emergent Issues of skill gaps in TVET in Nigeria

Although SIP has been existing since the post-independence era, it has failed however to connect the cognitive, affective and the psychomotor dynamics of TVET institutions

curricula to meet the current trends of the work place and as a result, TVET students find it difficult to have a smooth transition from school to work. In spite of the exposure of students to industrial training, there are still skill gaps that exist between the demand for employment (manpower needs) and the level of educational preparation of graduates which may be linked to some inadequacies or inherent problems of SIP which continue to widen the gap between theory and practice.

Some weaknesses in SIWES as identified by Okoro (1997) cited in Ideh (2013) include: duration of industrial training being inadequate for the acquisition of meaningful and relevant experience; students were sometimes placed on jobs other than the ones in which they were enrolled in school; conflict often arise between what was taught in school and what is actually done on the job; students oftentimes did not receive training throughout the industrial training period. Other emergent issues leading to skill gaps include: poor funding of TVET institutions; poor school to work transition curriculum; inadequate facilities in our training institutions (Obioma, 2015; Ideh, 2013; Olorufemi & Ashaolu, 2008), lack of comprehensive career guidance of students; lack of commitment of industries towards undergraduate training; poor working relationship between schools and industries (Offiong, Akpan & Usoro, 2013), lack of awareness of new technological innovations in the work place; over emphasis on certification (theory) at the expense of work experience training (practice); poor planning and inaccurate research data; teacher incompetence (poor material and resources); inconsistent monitoring and evaluation; and inability of TVET institutions to develop other forms of work place partnership that will incorporate theory and practice (Rufai et al., 2013; Olorufemi & Ashaolu, 2008; Canice N.I. & Samuel S.A. 2006).

These perceived skill gaps identified among TVET graduates will be discussed under:

Fundamental issues; Teacher and student related issues; and emerging global issues.

Fundamental Issues of skill gaps

1. **Poor Integrated School-to-Work Transition Curriculum:** The curriculum and assessment procedure of TVET institutions have continually failed to incorporate transferable job skills that would enhance the employability opportunities of graduates (Obioma, 2015). The TVET programmes have tended to remain traditional and stagnant over the years and this has affected the smooth transition from school-to-work. The traditional teaching methods based on sound theoretical background, group discussions, field trips and SIWES have not successfully impacted positively on students practical skills acquisition which is a prerequisite for employment (Rufai et al., 2013).
2. **Lack of Funding:** Funding TVET programmes has been a bone of contention over the years. The Federal Government of Nigeria and the private sectors have failed to direct financial resources appropriately towards funding of TVET institutions that would produce the manpower needs of industries (Obioma, 2015; Olorufemi & Ashaolu, 2008). These funds are needed for the provision of infrastructural facilities and development of research findings that bridge skill gaps.
3. **Inadequate/Obsolete Facilities and Information Linkage Issues:** Most of the multi-national organisations in Nigeria source their major scientific research skills and facilities from their home countries with little or no inputs from the local scientific research (Rufai et al., 2013) while our TVET institutions have training facilities that are obsolete and inadequate for practical training to meet the modern technological trends in the industries. This situation is worsened by the lack of direct link and interaction between the industries in Nigeria and the TVET institutions in

research activities because they do not have much involvement in training, funding and curriculum development, which are the hallmark of industrialization in the developed nations (Olorufemi and Ashaolu, 2008).

4. **Undue Emphasis on Certification Issue:** One of the fundamental issues why skill gaps still exist despite all effort is the rush for certificates at the expense of acquisition of relevant production skills. Most TVET institutions are theoretically oriented with curriculum drawn from libraries than from the work place settings and this kind of learning suits the intellectually able students who have less aptitude for practical work (Olaitan et al., 1999).

Teacher and Student Related Issues

1. **Teacher Related Issues:** Some of the teacher's related issues have also been identified. The teacher's poor training background, incompetence in motivating students, poor salary and allowance benefit and lack of initiative are some of the related issues that are causing skill gaps (Obioma, 2015; Ideh, 2013). Others are: motivation to carry out their duties, low teachers capacity in terms of knowledge, competency and modern skills of TVET institutions (Olorufemi & Ashaolu, 2008). These issues need to be addressed so as to produce skilled work men for the labour market.
2. **Student Related Issues:** The student skill problems begins as a result of poor motivation of learning outcomes apparent when the basic principles of TVET are not understood coupled with the conflict between what is taught at school and what is obtainable in workplace. Other issues resulting to skill gaps include: short duration of training, wrong placement of student-job-in-training, and lack of student focus on the work experience training (Obioma, 2015; Olorufemi & Ashaolu, 2008).

Emerging Global Issues

1. **Information and Technological Modernization of Industries:** The way an occupation or job is carried out is very important and goes a long way to influence the quality of result to be achieved and the learner therefore should be trained to absorb the habit of doing a job in the proper manner (Olaitan et al., 1999). There is poor awareness of new technology and up to date information on the occupation of work of our TVET institutions, most schools lack modern facilities for training, and in most cases industrial attachées are not allowed to use modern tools and equipment where available because of fear of being damaged. Similarly, TVET institutions are failing to catch up with the modern trends in information and communication technology of the work place because of communication gap in SIP, poor internet facilities in these institutions, poor communication/link with other TVET institutions outside Nigeria that will keep them abreast with modernization and as a result, skill gaps are created among our graduates upon employment.
2. **Education for All and Poverty Reduction Issues:** Poverty alleviation in Nigeria is a debatable issue, especially as most of the population living in the rural areas lives under conditions of abject poverty. One of the major issues that confront curriculum planners in recent times is how to meet the ideals of the internationally agreed goals of development such as those of the Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) now Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) through providing appropriate curriculum and pedagogical guides that will reduce illiteracy level and eradicate poverty (Obioma, 2014). In the bid to meet these lofty goals, graduates are produced from our institutions yearly that cannot fit into the work place.

3. **Issues of other Forms of Work Place Partnership:** Other forms of work place partnership have not been fully tapped in Nigeria. People look down on apprenticeship system as training meant for drop outs, internship as time wasting, SIWES as too short a period of time for proper work experience. Our curriculum has failed to incorporate other forms of work experience into our educational system as it is attainable in developed countries like Germany, China, Japan, and United States of America.

Best Practices to School-Industry Partnership: Bridging the Gap to Meet Manpower Needs

Partnerships are diverse and address concerns unique to different TVET institutions and local community industries, but best global practices that are geared towards developing alternative education programmes for TVET students to gain valuable work experience with industries found within and around the school community is a key for meeting manpower needs of industries (Soares, 2010). Scott (2014) identified the key elements of a smooth transition of school classroom theories to work practice in an occupation of work to be: (a) Collaborative partnership; (b) Integrated curriculum; (c) Technological advances; (d) Adaptable friendly workers (Industry based supervisor); (e) Comprehensive career guidance; (f) Work-based learning; and (g) A step - by - step approach. These practices and key elements of school-to-work transition use partnership resources, relationships, and activities to build alternatives to classroom theoretical instruction that would develop a student towards manpower needs of industries. These global
Canice N.I. & Samuel S.A.
include as discussed under.

1. **Curriculum and Instructional Transformation:** SIP can bring about meaningful changes to traditional TVET curriculum and instructional practices. Employers play critical role in ensuring

this transformation of students from school-to-work place upon graduation (Obioma, 2015; Scott, 2014). Contextualization of Vocationalisation (Scott, 2014; Ikeoji & Agwubike, 2006), competency-based curriculum, work place based learning, occupation-to-job-task analysis orientation education are some forms of transformation that can be adapted into TVET curriculum in Nigeria.

2. **Academic and Social Support:** SIP can create sustained academic and career navigation supports for TVET institutions and employers of labour. The transfer of knowledge from TVET institutions to industries and vice versa is imperative to enhance a better school-to-work transition of students upon graduation. Similarly, employers giving social support to TVET institutions and students is critical also in building highly priced quality relationship in SIP.
3. **Funding and Shared resources for Sustainability:** SIP can contribute to sustaining newly developed educational innovation and reformation in Vocationalisation (Ikeoji & Agwubike, 2006) over time as well as create avenues for financing TVET on specific research into job task as needed by funding industries to meet a particular requirement or modernization of the industry. In doing so, industries can develop best SIP relationship of the work place that would enhance a sustainable workforce that would meet the industries manpower needs. Offiong et al.(2013) suggested funding of TVET institutions through endowment, collaboration with companies and Non-Government Organisations, establishment of internally generated revenue projects, Parent Teacher Association, and Alumni Associations.
4. **Mustering Political Will for Vocationalisation:** Education stakeholders, employers of labour, curriculum planners, policy makers and legislators can look at what tools and

information that are needed to make SIP evidence based best practice in the development of TVET students to secure employment or be self-employed upon graduation and thereby improving Vocational Education in Nigeria. The political will of the government of the day is paramount in promoting the goals and philosophy of vocationalisation and this can be done through: (a) developing a typology of partnership between TVET institutions and industries that foster systematic research and innovation; (b) developing adequate and up-to-date data base to track the outcomes of Work Place Partnership participants and the students demographic characteristics; and (c) evaluating the return on investment from SIP for students, TVET institutions, and industries (Soares, 2010).

5. **Adequate Infrastructural Facilities for Vocationalisation:** One of the major consequences of under-funding education in Nigeria is the existence of inadequate and dilapidated infrastructures in our TVET institutions (Obioma, 2015; Rufai et al., 2013; Igbozor, 2006). For TVET institutions to meet manpower needs of industries, adequate provisions of the right technological work base learning facilities to train the TVET students on the current practices involved in world of work must be made available for effective and functional learning to take place.
6. **Entrepreneurship and Skill development:** Entrepreneurship education is a lifelong learning process and a tool through which socio-economic and political development could be achieved if properly planned, funded and implemented (Alabi, Alana & Bahal, 2014). This education would foster job creation, reduce unemployment and alleviate poverty in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Nigeria is a country with the unique distinction of having enormous resources

juxtaposed with abject poverty and the solution to this situation is an effective and functional TVET Work Place Partnership. This partnership will provide the key to the production of manpower that would be able to utilize the abundant human and material resources through the platform of SIP that offers TVET Students the unique opportunity of developing the needed manpower to meet the ever changing world of work.

Recommendations

Having explored the emerging issues in today's workplace SIP in Nigeria, the following recommendations are put forward to fill the identified skill gaps among TVET graduates:

1. The Federal Government of Nigeria should have the political will to improve links of employers of labour with Vocational Education Institutions academic work;
2. TVET institutions curriculum should emphasize more on work environment habit inculcation into students in order to make them abreast with the emerging trends in the occupation of work;
3. Adequate monitoring and supervision of SIWES programme should be intensified as well as developing a synergy of information between the school and industries; and
4. TVET institutions should encourage and give credit points to students who do long semester holiday placement training in relevant industries in their field of endeavour in order to improve and boost the student working experience for a smooth transition from school-to-work.

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