



The relevance of Technical and vocational skills acquisition programme in the development and empowerment of rural youths in Niger delta region, Nigeria

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Abstract This paper examined technical and vocational education skills acquisition programme in light of its relevance and impact on sustainable rural youth development in Niger Delta region. In the context of this article, technical and vocational education was viewed as a platform for an individual to acquire skills with the right attitudes which are necessary for entrance and progressing in an occupation. It was found that skills acquired in technical and vocational education trades; will provide and improve the standard of living with the insurance against poverty; self sustenance and will also sustain national and rural community development through youths' participation in techno-vocational skills acquisition programmes. In conclusion, rural youths cannot take up jobs that are readily available when they do not acquire skills and knowledge that are relevant to the particular job. Therefore, it was recommended among other things that the wide gap between the classroom and the industry be bridged by instituting an effective skill acquisition policy in the Niger Delta region.

Keywords Technical and vocational education, skill acquisition, rural youth, Niger Delta region

Introduction

The relevance of technical and vocational education skills acquisition programme in the development of youths in rural communities in the Niger delta region cannot be overemphasized. This is because the lack of prerequisite technical and vocational skills to be employed or to be employer of labour in industries constitutes part of the problems of underdevelopment of the people in this region. According to Ogundele, Christianah, & Gana (2014) the "development of infrastructures (roads, railways, power, pipe borne water, communications, health care, etc.) is of paramount value to enhance the economy of a nation". Such that for any nation that is developing to achieve a meaningful growth, a well-articulated and organized Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) programme must be enforced as a panacea. Ogundele, Christianah, & Gana (2014) lamented that, 'in the present global economic crisis and our desire for a strong and stable economy, we need to increase the performance of all the factors of production (land, labor, capital, etc)'. This in turn will as well lead to the development of the various sectors of the economy [1].

Ordinarily in Nigeria young people usually aspire for professions that are 'prestigious' such as Medicine, Law, Engineering, Accounting, and so on. But only a few candidates would aspire for professions in technical and vocational education such as welding and fabrication, photography, tailoring, electrician or motor vehicle mechanic, among others. These young lads were either influenced by their parents, guardians or peers, and sometimes threatened withdrawal of support if they bent on pursuing career in TVE. That has been a misconception which relegates trades in TVE as alternative choices for dull students who do not meet up the requirements for other prestigious professions. The problem is compounded by students graduating from TVE programmes without having enough skill to cope with in their new jobs. This according to Ajibade, 2009 [2]



that there is a skill gap in the area of computer engineering. He went further to say that, the information and technology industry is confronted by knowledge deficiency noting that university graduates are only familiar with theory. Furthermore in Okafor as cited in Ajibade, 2009 [2] asserts that there is a big gulf between what the school offer and the demand of employers. While in Harvey & Bowers-Brown [3] it was identified that employers want employees who can use their abilities and skills to evolve the organization. Therefore, the place of technical and vocational skills acquisition programme cannot be overemphasized in the development of the Niger Delta region and other sectors of the Nigeria economy.

In Nigeria, shifting of emphasis on youth's development in the Niger Delta region is very timely; because of the plaguing youth's restive activities which often seem to be related to the nature of negligence in development of the region. Though, the youth's restiveness was negatively correlated to the development levels of the region. However, the Niger Delta youths are in need of lifelong skills that will enable them impact positively to their immediate communities and the society at large. Therefore this paper is poised to exposing the technical and vocational education (Techno-vocational) skill areas that rural youths need to acquire which will enable them contribute positively to the development of their immediate communities and the society at large.

The concept of Technical and vocational education (TVE) programme in Nigeria

The concept of technical education has been defined "as that aspect of education that exposes the learner to the acquisition of demonstrable skills that could be transformed into economic benefits and sustainable livelihood". Technical and vocational education remained the popular means by which trained manpower is produced for economic and industrial growth of both developed and developing countries in the world [4]. In Nigeria, it was specifically stated in its National Policy on Education (2004) that,

"Technical and vocational education is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the 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 occupations in the various sectors of economic and social life [5]."

This definition was further stressed by Aina, Ogundele & Olanipekun (2013) and they maintained that, technical education is "an aspect of education, which leads to the acquisition of practical, basic scientific knowledge, which involves special manipulative skills, creative minds, and attitudes relating to occupations in various sectors of the economic and social life" [6]. Then, in recognition of skills centered training nature of TVE, Osuala (2004) stipulated "skills in building technology, electrical/electronics, motor vehicle mechanic work, motor vehicle body work, automobile electricity, metalwork, woodwork, drafting and design, clothing and textile, business studies, equipment servicing, computer hard and softwares" among others, can be acquired through technical and vocational education programme [7]. While authors like Audu, Kamin & Balash (2013) opined that, any form of education that is geared towards teaching technical skills and attitudes suitable to such skills can be regarded as TVE [8]. Tilak (2002) emphasized that quality TVE if well planned and coordinated will guarantee; graduates with varied skills, because of changes in production processes resulting from technological advances, the nature of the demand for skills, both in terms of quantity and quality changes [9]. Modern technology requires highly qualified middle and lower level skilled manpower. Finally, technical and vocational education could be summarized; according to Atsumbe, Emmanuel, Igwe & Atsumbe, [10] as follow:

- TVE would contribute to such progress, both by reducing unemployment, through creating employment in the fields of pre – vocational specialization and self– employment. It can improve productivity and correspondingly resulting in higher graduate earnings. TVE can establish a closer relationship between school and work.
- TVE is also seen as an equity measure. As an antidote to urban – biased elite education, TVE will promote equity with a rural bias and serve the needs of relatively poor people. More specifically, it is believed to be an effective answer to rural problems, "to alleviate unemployment; to reorient students' attitude towards rural society", to halt urban migration; to transmit skills and attitudes useful in



employment; and as an important measure of development for disadvantageded youths in rural and urban areas.

- TVE is considered helpful in developing what can be termed as skilled-culture “and attitude towards manual work, in contrast to pure academic culture and preference for white collar jobs; and to serve simultaneously the “hand and the mind”, the practical and the abstract Grubb [10].

The concept of Skills Acquisition

Skill is observable competence to perform a learned behaviour regarding the relationship between mental activity and body movements. This implies that to possess a skill is to demonstrate that habit of acting, thinking and behaving in a specific activity in such a way that the process becomes natural to the individual through repetition or practice. Okorie [11] defined skill as a manual dexterity demonstrated through repetitive performance of an operation.

From the foregoing, there are all indications that skill is the ability to do something well, usually gained through training or experience that is needed, while acquisition is the act of getting new knowledge and skills that can be transferable on and to the job. This skill can be obtained through education, training or experience that will inculcate into the individual on how to carry out or discharge effective responsibilities very well with the new knowledge. This is because any work carried out by skilled people cannot be compared with those tasks performed by unskilled people. Skills and competencies acquired can be demonstrated without presenting the certificate. Skill can be acquired through experience and training. It is a kind of education acquired without emphasis on white collar jobs. It is a kind of training given to individuals to be self-reliant and also employer of labour.

The role of Skills in trainee development

According to Igwe & Oragwu (2014) vocational skills development theories provides the strategies for the effective training of individual in various skills areas. According to these authors, vocational skills are knowledge indices and attitudinal development of potential abilities to perform a given task according to specification. Traditionally, vocational schools have not existed to further education in the sense of liberal arts, but rather to teach only job-specific skills and as such have been better considered to be institutions devoted to training, not education [12].

Skill development is an important tool for harnessing a nation’s natural resources and for promoting economic stability. The wealth of any society determines to a large extent, the level of development of that society. Nigeria is endowed with mineral and agricultural resources. If these are to be properly harnessed and economically utilized, there is need for emphasis to be placed on the acquisition of techno-vocational skills, in a prevailing society that is in need of development. Skill development is essential for the development of intrinsic potential in the rural youths in the Niger Delta region. This will enable the rural youths develop their intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual, biological, political and economic capacities and capabilities. Techno-vocational skills acquisition will provide assistance for people to learn and acquire appropriate skills to perform as functioning members in the communities. With this, the rural youths can become aware of the challenges that are associated with a worthwhile life that will boost their career, stability and fulfillment in a world of competitive industry. Furthermore, the development of skills is inherent in both formal and informal education process, as well as in the various forms of educational objectives (Psychomotor, affective and cognitive skills). Skill development also plays pertinent roles in all forms of knowledge, learning and professional training.

According to Ogundele, Christianah & Gana [1] skill is termed as expertness, practiced ability, dexterity and tact. It can be seen as a sequence of organized actions, proficiency executed and usually displaying a flexible but systematic temporal patterning. That is to say, it involves the acquisition of performance capability. Skill development therefore, is the ability to do or to perform an activity that is related to some meaningful exercise, work or job. It is commonly misconceived that the development of skills requires dull brains. Rather, skill acquisition requires intelligent brains. Indeed most skill trainings poses great challenges to the learner on the integration of the practical work and theoretical studies, common sense, a good power of observation and



courage. Ogundele, Christianah, & Gana [1] further retreated that, to possess a skill is to demonstrate the habit of acting, thinking and behaving in a specific activity in such a way that the process becomes natural to the individual through repetition or practice. It means that development of skills varies with the nature, complexity and the type of activity. Hence, the individual who opt for skill training will among other things, possess qualities such as interest, ability, aptitude, patience, personality characteristics and other human/physical qualities that would enable them to succeed in it [1]. Because skill and knowledge are inseparable entities and there are no elements of differentiation between them. It should be noted that all skills are form of knowledge but not all knowledge are forms of skills. However, all skills are dependent on some form of knowledge. It is a knowledge that is translated into practical activity. It may also be described as knowledge that is put into practical use once it is translated into activity [11].

This implies generally that, skills comprise two components; the knowledge component and the activity component. While the latter, is made up of motor and perceptual skills. Both the knowledge and activity components combine in different proportions for different skills. The practical or activity components of skill relate to those areas of knowledge that is concerned with the mode of doing. It enables the individual to acquire the know-how of a variety of skills that is related to a particular trade or occupation. Theory and practice must be fully integrated into a teaching-learning process for the purpose of effectiveness and worthwhile result. All teaching should help the learners acquire a blend of theory and practical skills in order to achieve his objectives. The range of courses in the technical colleges to attain these objectives shall be as wide as possible and include but not limited to: Mechanical trades; computer craft practice; electrical engineering trades; building trades; wood trades and construction trades. These are the trades offered in institutions under technical education programmes that can assist rural youths in the Niger Delta region.

Rural youth development in Niger delta region

Rural youth make up a large segment of the total rural population, but they are often neglected and overlooked by government policy makers and international agency development strategists. This, he noted can be attributed in large part to the overwhelming concern for immediate solutions to problems of national development with an accompanying inaccurate perception that youth are not yet productive and contributing members of society. Furthermore, it was explained that ‘millions of young people living in rural areas are a significant and untapped resource available to assist in rural development process.’ While in the report of Adesope [13] “the youths because of their sizeable portion in the entire population are useful engines for development.” That is why Adesope further noted that despite the significant proportionate of these youths they have been found to have moderate level of participation in community development and also they have favourable attitude towards community development. It was observed that ‘youths are involved in community development because they want to help their communities, to be recognized, to interact with peers, and to gain personal benefits.’ There is eagerness in youths because they are at a developmental stage in life that place them strategically for activities related to community improvement, and matters related to development of the environment.

The Niger Delta area is made up of youths who are disadvantaged for some peculiar reasons; their needs are also peculiar and different from the needs of youths in other parts of Nigeria. For instance, African Youth Development Foundation (2002) appealing to individuals, private organisations, government agencies, donor organizations and bilateral organizations requested for support in the areas of information exchange, technical cooperation and financial aid. This confirms the fact that youths have many needs including skills needs in the Niger Delta area. These needs bother on both their individual development and the development of the region. The spate of restiveness which recently has culminated into hostage taking, kidnapping, infrastructural vandalization, bombing of oil facilities and environmental degradations; could only have arisen out of the fact that priorities have been misplaced by governments, cooperate bodies and other authorities.

For any programme to meet its set objective, its design must address the needs of the learners, the needs of institution of learning, that of the society into which the learner belongs and Nigeria at large [14]. It is expected that if the needs of the rural youths are properly identified, the youths can be assisted through provision of techno-vocational skills acquisition programmes in the areas of specialization which will include but not limited to masonry works, Carpentry works, Automobile mechanics, Ceramics productions, Hair dressing/barbing



saloon, Leather works/shoe making, Fashion designs/tailoring services, Catering services, Fishery/aqua-culture, Plumbing works, Detergents/soap making, Concrete designs, Automobile driving, Out boat engine mechanics, Tilling works, Painting and decorating work, Computer services, Arts/graphics, etc [14] achieving some of these needs to a large extent in the rural areas in the Niger Delta states of Nigeria.

Conclusion

It is a well established fact that most Nigerian educational institutions of learning do not furnish the students with adequate training in skills to fit them for productive work. The search for better jobs has drawn thousands of Nigerian youths (some without saleable skills) from rural areas to urban cities. Apparently, those with requisite education and skills are quickly absorbed into jobs while those who possess neither sufficient academic nor technical skills live in subsistence level and often out of desperation and frustration which constitute a nuisance in the society.

The world is embracing a knowledge-based economy. We need to acquire more knowledge and skills for economic growth because every sector needs better skills to keep it running. By accommodating this, we need to equip the youths and working adults with employment skills and knowledge to meet the increasing demand for technical manpower by various sectors of the nation's economy, through effective facilities planning for techno-vocational skills acquisition programmes in both formal and informal training.

Recommendations

In the light of the above therefore, it is recommended among other things that the wide gap between the classroom and the industry should be bridged by instituting an effective skill acquisition policy in the Niger Delta region. That Technical and vocational Skill acquisition development should be mandatory in our schools to solve the problem of unemployment among school leavers; thereby allaying economic meltdown in our country.

There should be more practical work to complement theory in our tertiary institutions of learning, to provide skilled manpower development for the production sector of the economy. Finally, government should look into and improve programs that will encourage skill acquisition for our rural youth's empowerment in the Niger delta region.

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