



Vocational Education and Acquisition of Skills for Self - Reliance

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Abstract:

The paper observes that the graduates being churned out today lack the requisite skills needed in today's labour market and this inhibits the graduates from being self-reliant. In view of this therefore, this paper examined the role that vocational education plays in skills acquisition and self-reliance. It also discusses vocational education and skills acquisition for self-reliance. The study made recommendations such as setting up a department of skill training and development by the federal ministry of education in every tertiary educational institution, ensuring that more practical work is introduced to complement theory in institutions of learning so as to provide skilled labour for the economy. Moreover, the federal ministry of education and other stakeholders should embark on programmes that highlight the benefits of vocational skill acquisition training. This will encourage the interest of both parents and students to the programme among others.

Keywords: Education, vocational education, skill acquisition, self - reliance.

Introduction

It is generally observed that university education is no longer a passport to secure employment for graduates. This requires young graduates to consider entrepreneurship and self-employment as a viable career option. The graduates being churned out today lacks the requisite skill set needed in today's labour market and this inhibits the graduates from being self-reliant. Education should not be seen as an avenue to fill the head with literacy and numeracy, rather it should provide an avenue for students to go on a self-discovery journey. Such education does not just focus on the theories taught, but on how those theories could be a target tailored at meeting the needs of each individual thereby helping the students to discover their uniqueness.

The relationship between education and development of society finds expression in huge sums of government revenues committed to educational expenditures. One thing that baffles many authorities, especially researchers in education, is the fact that the stakeholders in-charge have not realized its vision of equipping pre-tertiary graduates with self-employable skills given the fact that there is a rising unemployment rate among graduates of all levels in Nigeria. It has been suggested that the quality of education that is received in



schools are unable to equip students with the skills necessary for self-employment (Addae-Mensah 2000) and once the formal sector employment opportunities are enclosed, graduates have very little to offer in helping themselves for their own livelihoods. One reason that has been suggested to account for the mismatch between education and acquisition of skills is that educational policies usually take after western educational models that disregard the contextual differences in developing regions, especially in Nigeria. These policies are usually designed to offer skills relevant to formal sector employment, knowing that this sector is woefully inadequate to accommodate the teeming unemployed graduates of all levels in Nigeria.

The kind of education needed in the Nigerian economy of today is the one that will help the students to discover their innate abilities, develop and refine them, deploy them with skills and strategies in proffering solutions to the problems of our society both locally and internationally.

Vocational Education

Education is meant to be a tool for an individual to acquire knowledge, use it to build up his/her innermost capacity, become a better person, and touch the world at large. Education in every human community is an indispensable instrument for human progress and empowerment. This suggests that a nation that lacks a sound educational culture and philosophy stands the risk of decay, whereas a nation that sees to the development of its education is bound to achieve great success. Education, whether formal or informal is generally accepted as a life-long endeavour that permeates individual's life course from birth till death (Miranda 2006) and largely involves the acquisition of necessary skills required to perform roles in the economy. Education is human capital. Judging from the human capital perspective, education is seen as the acquisition of assets or resources available to groups and individuals, that is to say, knowledge and abilities people receive through formal and informal education, training and experiences. From this perspective, it can be suggested that education is human capital that, once acquired, enables its possessor to translate it into better job, higher income, more authority and or more satisfying set of vocation.

Vocational Education can be described as an education that prepares individuals to be able to work in a trade or a craft as a technician. Vocational education is sometimes referred to as career education or technical education. According to Thompson (2002), vocational education aims at the development of human abilities in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding in order to efficiently carry out the choice of vocational pursuit. Abdullahi (2011) posited that vocational education and training is an essential part of development for any nation to grow economically. Abdullahi further added that most Nigerian youths have, before now, been of the idea that the traditional four to five year university degree is the only essential tool needed for self empowerment. This idea of vocational training skill acquisition is being addressed as quite a handful of graduates and post-secondary students seek to embrace vocational education and skill acquisition as an avenue to deal decisively with unemployment and unholy dependence on white collar jobs. Hence, the organization of vocational education in a narrow sense aims at developing the occupational capacity of its participants.



Skill Acquisition in Vocational Education

For a third world country especially Nigeria to be economically self-reliant, she must necessarily diversify her economy as well as encourage the youth to embrace self-employment through appropriate favourable policy environment that would facilitate skills acquisition, entrepreneurship, and self-reliance. The place of skill acquisition cannot be overemphasized in the rapid development of other sectors of the economy. The aims and objectives of vocational and technical education as contained in the National Policy of Education (FRN, 2004) are:

- i. To provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and commerce.
- ii. To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commerce and economic development.
- iii. To provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man.
- iv. To give an introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies.
- v. 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.
- vi. To enable our young men and women to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology.

A skill can be seen as a talent or ability an individual possesses and this could be acquired through deliberate personal experiences, training, observation and practice. Skill acquisition on the other hand involves the development of a new skill, practice or a way of doing things usually gained through training or experience. Skill acquisition has been described by many as the recipe for eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by creating avenues for employment, thereby creating an avenue for jobs and wealth creation while instilling self-sufficiency and reliance (Isaac 2011). Acquisition of skill has been conceived as an effective remedy for self-reliance. The whole idea is that, students should be given skill training in addition to their regular academic programme/ curriculum in the crucial sectors as being demanded by the industry.

Gumbari (2011) declared that skill acquisition is the key in the fight for the elimination of hunger and poverty, reduction or elimination of joblessness in the society and reduction of crime through effective engagements of youths. Gumbari also said that no issue should be addressed as a matter of urgent national importance than that of skill acquisition by the youth considering the failure of our basic education to yield the expected positive results with its attendant consequences such as armed robbery, militancy, kidnapping and a host of others.

Donli (2004) is of the view that skill acquisition is the manifestation of idea and knowledge through training which is geared towards instilling in individuals, the spirit of entrepreneurship needed for meaningful development. Donli stressed that if individuals are given the opportunity to acquire relevant skills needed for self-sustenance in the economy, it



will promote their charisma in any work environment. It was further maintained that skill acquisition increases competition and cooperation among people.

Accordingly Magbagbeola (2004) posited that skills acquisition requires the accumulation of different skills that enhances task performance through the integration of

both theoretical and practical forms of knowledge. The guidelines for the sustenance of skill acquisition programme were enumerated to include the followings; (Magbagbeola, 2004 p.57)

- Provision of training that gives the trainees the opportunities to acquire skills that are appropriate for preparation in a field of trade for gainful employment.
- Provision of definite skills that relate to each trade that makes one a professional in one field instead of the others.
- That trainings have to be done by competent, experienced and qualified instructors.
- Skills acquisition requires much practice, patience, interest, ability, aptitude and personality traits.

Skill is very important in the life of every citizen. The reason why many technicians earn higher than our university graduates is because the technicians acquired more skills and were more practical than the theories the graduates were fed with while they were in the universities. The absence of self reliance among our vibrant youth is as a result of the lack of requisite skills to back up what they learnt from their institutions of learning.

A major set-back in the level of global competitiveness is our trained focus on certificate-based education. Here, the major instrument for self-reliance is the certificate: and so students also focus on any means possible to obtain the targeted certification instead of the acquisition of relevant and beneficial knowledge. At the end of the day, a horde of certificate-wielding graduates who are unemployable are churned out. It must be noted that it is not the certificate that excels in workplace situations but the amount of expert knowledge and innovative ideas brought to play by individuals. Most of the world-class inventors and entrepreneurs do not possess more than high school grades. Some are high school dropouts, but they inhabit innovative spirits imbued in them by nature and translated by their environment and orientation. Such environment and orientation are lacking in our clime. Our orientation is that of making so much money within the shortest possible time; a virtue the society recognizes and applauds.

Students and parents' from affluent/middle class homes look down on skill acquisition. They feel it is meant for the less privilege members of the society. They make it unpopular among themselves and exhibit negative attitudes towards it. This partly explains why most graduates are not interested in acquiring skills because they are influenced by the formal sector employment. In the end, a large army of unemployable graduates increases the unemployment rate in the industry.

Skill acquisition is needed in the education sector as it contributes to self-reliance and is seen as essential for preparing one for employment. Thus an educated man is expected to manifest worthwhile disposition in the society, for his own development and the development of society. Ogundele (2010) submits that skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant; people who can understand and adapt to changes in the increasing complexity of



technology; and people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and as solution to environmental challenges for the use and conveniences of man are needed.

Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition

In the fields of education, this is a model of how students acquire skills through formal instruction and practicing. This model was proposed by two brothers named Stuart and Hubert Dreyfus in 1980 in an influential 18-page report on their research at the

University of California, Berkeley Operations Research Centre for the United States Air force Office of Scientific Research (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1980). The original model proposes that a student passes through five distinct stages: novice, competence, proficiency, expertise and mastery. In the novice stage a person follows rules that are context-free and feels no responsibility for anything other than following the rules. Competence develops after having considerable experience. Proficiency is shown in individuals who use intuition in decision making and develop their own rules to formulate plans. Expertise is characterized by a fluid performance that happens unconsciously, automatically, and no longer depends on explicit knowledge. The progression is thus from rigid adherence to rules to an intuitive mode of reasoning based on tacit knowledge.

The acquisition of skills is a learning process and is obviously factual. Hence the Dreyfus model attempts to be a factual-conceptual model, a theory or at least an outlook of how we acquire diverse skills using this model in a prescriptive way must elicit a more critical eye to see if novices must receive an education where rules are the only important things to learn in a de-contextualized environment. Finally, the complexity of all the processes implied in learning must be acknowledged. It should not be by merely accepting the temptation to oversimplify these complex processes, and intentionally ignore information from science, particularly from cognition, psychology, and neuroscience.

Vocational Education and Skill Acquisition for Self-Reliance

Usoro (2010) observed that the failure of Nigeria's higher educational institutions is hinged on their products' (graduates) lack of the skilled required by the labour market and that the trend had resulted in mass graduate unemployment, since they would have assisted them to be self-reliant. There is a high level demand for skilled workers in oil, industrial and service sectors but the supply is far below expectation, and since there are fewer job openings than the graduates, the major challenge facing the nation is to equip the graduates in particular and youths in general, with appropriate skills and competencies for self-employment and self-reliance. The possession of these skills needed by the labour market will enable the youths contribute maximally to national development and make the society safer, richer, better and prosperous.

Self-reliance is the autonomy of decision- making and full mobilization of a society's own resources. It also means self-confidence, reliance primarily on one's resource, human and natural, and the capacity for autonomous goal-setting. A self-reliant person is an individual who relies on oneself or on one's own powers and resources, depending less on other people in the management of human and material resources. According to Ofoye (2010), individuals will be self-reliant when they have possible cause to access and utilize the

essentials of life which includes good food, clothing, shelter, medication, transportation and functional education.

For most people, education has not realized its expected ends because majority of students from pre-tertiary to tertiary institutions usually leave school lacking the basic skills for entrepreneurship. Nyerere in Sabbi, Amankwah and Boateng (2009) on educational policy of “Education for self-reliance” suggested that basic education should not just be a preparation for higher education, but instead, it should be complete education in itself that provides knowledge, skills and attitudes. It should go beyond teaching school children the

basic numeracy and literacy but rather produce individuals that are thoroughly integrated into local life. This is the idea of self-reliance propelled by education.

Self-reliant education could be viewed as the development of knowledge, power, as well as the feeling of responsibility in the individual. It emphasizes freedom and independence of the self, it encourages creative thinking as well as practical creative transformation activity and it means self-emancipation and self-realization (Nyerere in Sabbi, Amankwah and Boateng, 2009). Nyerere also opined that quality education is one that prepares learners for occupations in agriculture, carving, blacksmithing, etc. and when education fails in any of these fields of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for change in both the individual and the society, then the society’s progress falters and learners may come to find that their education has prepared them for a future which is not open to them.

Self-reliant education should not be confined to manual or physical capacities only, but also to one’s intellectual, social and political life. Critical thinking is a crucial attribute of a self-reliant person. He or she must be critical and independent in his thinking and action.

Impact of Skill Acquisition

Persons with relevant and additional skill set will be fully engaged in the Nigerian society where opportunities abound, waiting for the skilled graduates and youths to take up. Such engagements will not only provide them with the basic needs of life but will in turn provide jobs for others. Acquisition of additional skill set will bring about societal empowerment by providing jobs, develop entrepreneurial ability which in turn will ensure financial independence and assure a better standard of living.

It will help the youths to develop positive attitudes towards work and labour. A large chunk of our youths roam the streets and it is disheartening that all we do is brandishing them as street urchins. Nwanaka and Amaehule (2011) opined that possession of skills is important in preventing youths from becoming social misfits; because these skilled persons become gainfully employed through vocational training and acquisition of skills. Nwanaka and Amaehule also said that vocational and technical training helps to arrest some social ills such as armed robbery, stealing and youth restiveness among others. When a skill is acquired in any discipline, it is assumed that the future gains that would result from it will be of great significance to productivity. It will prepare the individual to fit in readily to employment in all sectors of the economy, showcase his/her talents, and make intelligent use of the brain in terms of new discoveries and innovations that will upgrade the individual’s status within the society.



Acquisition of skills will develop individuals who are problem solvers and economically productive, individuals who do not need to wait for a white collar job to survive but will create jobs for others. It will enable them have the spirit of adventure, exploration and discovery which will in turn help the nation to overcome the problem of unemployment which is currently bedeviling the nation.

Skills acquisition involves different ways through which graduates and youths can be trained to achieve self-reliance rather than waiting for jobs in the formal sector alone. It is believed that training through skill acquisition programmes will enhance their sustainability in different fields of trade. This is possible when the culture of creative ideas is instilled in them to make them productive and self-reliant members of the society.

Recommendations

1. Tertiary institution students should be given vocational skill training in addition to their regular academic programme in the crucial sector as being demanded by the industry, as a remedy to the mis-match between educational output and requirements of the labour market in order to enhance the employability of students passing out of school.
2. The federal government and well-meaning Nigerians should help these young people undertake trainings to acquire relevant skills that will take them out of the streets and make them contribute meaningfully both to their families and society at large.
3. Educational planners should pay careful attention to the logistic and support factors in the educational policy which are crucial to the attainment of the quality of education for self-reliance. This should be done by improving the curriculum requirements for desirable skills outcome.
4. Due to the negative attitude of some parents and students towards skills acquisition, there is the urgent need for the director in charge of school services in the federal ministry of education and other stakeholders to embark on programmes that highlight the benefits of skills acquisition training so as to encourage the interest of both parents and students to the programme.
5. The wide gap between the classroom and the industry should be eliminated by skills acquisition policy through the adoption of a 30:70 ratio of theory to practical. Educators should administer more practical work to complement theory in our institutions of learning in order to provide skilled labour for the economy.
6. A department of training and development should be set up by the federal ministry of education in every higher educational institution. This department will be responsible for identifying training needs of youth, designing and implementing training and development programmes which would ensure high performance level of youths on graduation.

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