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Lifelong Learning: A Panacea for Enhancing Work Skills and Competencies of Technical College Students in Nigeria

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Abstract

The changing patterns in the workplace caused by advancement in technology and the current economic situation have exerted pressure upon individuals to maximize their work skills. Besides, it is obvious that the formal school system cannot provide all the knowledge and skills students need for their entire career. This brings into focus the importance of Lifelong learning skills as a means of enabling students to cope with rapidly changing demands and to survive in the workplace when they eventually take employment. Therefore, this paper reviewed literature on the need for improving work skills and competencies of technical college students in Nigeria through lifelong learning. The paper looked at the concepts of lifelong learning, work skills and competency. The need for lifelong learning by technical college students was also discussed and recommendations on the way forward were suggested.

Introduction

The explosive growth of technology and globalization has made it necessary for graduates in Nigeria to develop work skills and competences needed for them to be able to face the realities of today's workplace. As students move from the classroom to the technology dominated world of work, there is need for effective training so that they are well prepared for the contemporary workplace. It is widely accepted that no nation can develop above the skills level of its human resources. Therefore, the development of relevant work skills by students who will eventually be among Nigeria's workforce becomes imperative. Ogwo and Oranu (2006) stressed the inability of the formal school system to meet the needs of the students in recent times. This implies that the knowledge and skills needed by students for their entire career cannot all be provided or acquired in the formal school system. This calls for a new

type of learning known as lifelong learning.

Concepts of Lifelong Learning, Work skills and Competency

Lifelong learning according to Tylor (2001) is the social, cultural and economic development of individuals and groups through education and learning throughout their lives. Longwort and Devies (1996) define Lifelong learning as the development of human potential through a continually supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, skills and competencies they will require throughout their lifetimes and to apply them in confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances and environments. Smith and Spurling (1999) stated that Lifelong learning is associated with consistent learning by people throughout their lifespan and covering all of life from the cradle to the grave. This

implies that lifelong learning is associated with purposeful activities that aim to improve knowledge, skills and competencies of individuals. According to ILO (2000), lifelong learning ensures that the individual's skills and competencies are maintained and improved as work, technology and skills requirements changes, ensures the personal and career development of workers, result in increases in aggregate productivity and income, and improves social equity. Describing lifelong learning, Andrea (2009) noted that this type of learning is not much concerned with climbing higher up the qualification ladder but is more to do with initiatives that broaden understanding across a range of different interest and issues in the society. It includes all formal learning (schools, training institutions, and universities), non-formal learning (on-the-job training) and informal learning (skills learned from family members or people in the community). Simons-McDonald (2009) noted the following essential points about lifelong learning: (a) that learning can take place throughout ones life and that an individual can continue to develop skills and competencies and refine behavior as a result of that learning. (b) That educational system can play an important role in the learning and development of individuals and influence their response and actions throughout life. ©

continue to develop skills and competencies and refine behavior as a result of that learning. (b) That educational system can play an important role in the learning and development of individuals and influence their response and actions throughout life. © That as a result of learning, individuals can adapt to changing circumstances and contexts in such a way that they can be productive in and derive satisfaction from the different circumstances and situations in which they find themselves. From the

foregoing, it can be noted that lifelong learning is very important and has become more critical as it influences employability of individuals. The fast changing knowledge-based economy has created unprecedented challenges for employers and employees alike. Employers increasingly need workers with a broad range of skills and competencies. A skill denotes expertise or ability developed in the course of training and experience (Kayode, 2009). Kayode added that skills includes not only trade crafts skills but also other relevant skills necessary for survival. Robinson (2001) described work skills as the fundamental capabilities needed by a workforce for reliable job performance. On the other hand, competency as explained by Birkett (1993) is related to the manner in which an individual's attributes, such as knowledge, skills and attitudes are drawn on in performing tasks in specific work contexts, resulting in overall job performance. Spencer and Spencer (1993) define competency as an underlying personal characteristics of an individual that facilitate superior performance in a given situation. ILO (2003) noted that the term "competencies" covers the knowledge, skills and know-how applied and mastered in a specific context. By implication, it means that competency has to do with individual's ability to deal with problems successfully. It is worrisome to note however that many students graduating from schools including technical colleges do not have the needed skills and competencies and the result is a growing rate of unemployment and underemployment in Nigeria (Kayode, 2009). In the face of this challenge, schools need to help students acquire lifelong learning skills necessary for survival in the workplace. Lifelong learning skills refer

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not only to the specific information that students acquire during their formal education, but also to how successful they can continue to acquire information after their formal education has ended (Dong, 2004). According to Dong, lifelong learning skills include but not limited to the following: (a) self-directed learning skills (b) ability to seek out and assess information (c) critical thinking skills (d) lateral thinking skills (e) communication skills (f) interpersonal skills (g) problem-solving skills (h) ability do project planning (i) ability to evaluate alternatives (j) ability to work in teams and (k) ability to use information and communication technologies. Lifelong learning skills are highly related with workplace skills as such they are sometime used interchangeably. For instance, Robinson (2001) notes that besides the trade skills, general workplace skills needed by today's workers include ability to; (a) utilize resources prudently (b) work well with others (c) acquire and use information (d) understand systems and (e) work with technology. In lifelong learning, certain generic skills are valued and practiced. Exploration of issues is seen as an exercise in problem-solving. This includes issues involving information literacy, which is how to find out about something and where to find the source. Problem-solving in lifelong learning is not necessarily of a convergen nature where students need to find a correct answer. Creativity and experimentation are encouraged. The problems themselves are often conceived by the students – this is one way in which students can learn to take control of their own learning and develop research skills. long learning. Much learning arises from interaction with others. In such situation, students work

collaboratively, expressing themselves clearly in both formal and informal situations, listening to others and making appropriate contributions, asserting their own opinions as well as challenging those of others (Splitter & Sharp, 1995). The importance of these interactions however, does not mean that students do not need to work alone. Lifelong learners need plenty of time to reflect. This is a crucial time to make links and connections between issues discussed. Considering the importance of these skills, inculcating them into our students in other for. Communication skills are other valued skills in lifelong learning. Much learning arises from interaction with others. In such situation, students work collaboratively, expressing themselves clearly in both formal and informal situations, listening to others and making appropriate contributions, asserting their own opinions as well as challenging those of others (Splitter & Sharp, 1995). The importance of these interactions however, does not mean that students do not need to work alone. Lifelong learners need plenty of time to reflect. This is a crucial time to make links and connections between issues discussed. Considering the importance of these skills, inculcating them into our students in other for them to function effectively in the workplace after graduation therefore becomes necessary

Lifelong Learning Need of Technical College Students The fact that learning has become critical to human survival in this complex environment can no longer be contested. In the same vein, lifelong learning has become crucial to preparing technical college students who are prospective workers to compete favourably in the global economy. Commenting on the need for lifelong learning by students who

learning outcomes. In helping students to be lifelong learners, teachers acts as mentors and facilitators rather than dispensers of knowledge. They value all students as learners, not just those who show academic potential, they should also have high expectations of all students. This means taking interest in each student as an individual rather than categorizing some students, and also taking interest in how each student is learning rather than only evaluating the end products. This includes helping students with their planning and goal setting and also helping them to construct their identities as learners and aim for every student to have a positive picture of themselves as learners because the cultivation of positive self concepts in all students is important in developing lifelong learners. With these pointers, teachers need to really help students to learn well on their own and not to fill them with contents. Students will learn well if they see their teacher as a model learner, they will learn well if the classroom is conducive, they will learn well if they have opportunities to construct their own knowledge and set their own learning goals. Students need to be curious and develop a need to learn and teachers need to teach by example, that is, be lifelong learners. These are very important in transforming students into lifelong learners.

Conclusion

As the workplace continues to change due to changes in technology, there is need for technical college graduates and workers alike to continue to develop their knowledge and skills towards improving their personal development and increased productivity. In this regard, it has been shown that lifelong learning is crucial in enhancing work skills and competencies of technical college students. It has also been

noted that the need to learn rest on the students who, with assistance set and evaluate their own learning goals. However, teachers need to play their parts by being models of lifelong learning and assisting students to be lifelong learners.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested as the way forward

1. A learning culture that envisages continuous learning as a worthwhile activity in technical college student's everyday life should be encouraged by teachers
2. Technical college teachers should make efforts to become lifelong learners themselves as well as adopting lifelong learning methods in instructional delivery.
3. Formal technical education institutions in Nigeria should be more flexible by offering programmes and courses that promote lifelong learning.
4. Government should sponsor research into lifelong learning cultures that will provide information that will promote lifelong learning in technical college students.
5. Resources and facilities like well in technical colleges as these will help in changing student's attitudes towards lifelong learning. equipped libraries and adequate internet services should be provided by government and the private sector in technical colleges as these will help in changing student's attitudes towards lifelong learning.
6. Policy makers should formulate policies that promote lifelong learning, for instance, focus could be on human development through education that

gives technical students opportunity to be creative and continuous learning in order to be ready to face the challenges posed by the dynamic environment.

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