

REVITALIZING TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

The most important feature of technology education is its orientation towards the world of work and the emphasis of the curriculum on the acquisition of employable skills for empowering the youth for sustainable livelihoods and national development. Revitalizing technology can help drive innovation, youth employment and human capacity development in Nigeria. Without proper and adequate technology education, economic and social wellbeing of the citizen suffers. The paper further explored strategies for revitalizing technology education to overcome some of the challenges hindering the programme from adequately empowering the youth for sustainable development. It recommended amongst others programme relevance to the labour market needs, enhanced awareness, improved image of technology education career and effective partnership between technology education institutions and the industrial sector.

Introduction

Since education is considered the key to effective development strategies, technology education must be the master key that can alleviate poverty, empower the youth, improve the quality of life for all and help attain sustainable development. Without proper and adequate technology education, economic and social wellbeing of the citizen suffers. High unemployment has been leading to increasing poverty and social problems in Nigeria. Coincidentally, there has been a decline in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) enrolments. Infact, less than 1% of secondary education was oriented towards technical and vocational skills (UNESCO 2000)

Youth remain the catalysts for sustainable national development. With the level of unemployment in the country today, the government cannot afford to leave the youth without empowering them in one way or the other. Such empowerment will imbue in them a sense of belonging and inspire them towards engaging in skills or business that will showcase their talents.

Igwe (2008) stated that in a rapid developing and changing world of technology, the quest for technological advancement in present world of work cannot be overemphasized. Every nation therefore, seeks a new conception model of technology education to sustain her economy through youth empowerment. No nation can rise beyond her productive capacity which is a function of the quality and quantity of her workforce. Furthermore, repositioning of technology education will safe guard them against engaging in illegal armed robbery, hired assassination, kidnapping political thuggery and militancy activities among others.

Technology education help to prepare young Nigerians to lead productive and peaceful lives while contributing to the economic growth of their country. Furthermore, World Bank (2002) noted that apart from Botswana, Ivory Coast, Ghana and South Africa, the industrial labour force is less than 10% in most African countries. It is against this background that this paper reviews the concept of youth empowerment and technology education in Nigeria. Also, explores strategies for revitalizing technology education for youth empowerment and sustainable national development.

The Concept of Youth Empowerment

Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people, including youth and adults (Vartus & Fletcher 2006). Youths are between 17 to 30 years in developing countries such as Nigeria. These youths may or may not be educated and lack relevant training for occupations among other constraints. Many of these youths lack money and materials to sustain themselves and this condition often compel them to adopt criminal strategies to get these needs for existence (Olaitan, Ali, Onyemachi and Nwachukwu, 2000).

According to Sowande and Olaitan (2000), Youth have some distinct characteristics, which should be exhibited for skill acquisition. The characteristics according to them are:

1. Youths have less fear of failure; as such they can venture into any vocation that is of interest to them, as long as it looks feasible.
2. They are stronger and generally healthier than the aged.
3. They are less conservative as such they can welcome innovations faster than adults.
4. Youths are very conscious of their personal, occupational and community development as such they can endure more hardship than adults when it comes to developmental aspect.
5. They have a sound memory.

Empowerment according to Oxford Advanced learner's dictionary (2005) means to give somebody power or authority to do something. For instance, we can say that the courts were empowered to impose death sentence for certain crimes. Youth empowerment, therefore, explains a situation whereby the young and active age bracket of a community or country are given the power or authority to improve their socio - economic conditions and those of the entire community through exposure to acquisition of necessary knowledge and skills both in the theoretical and practical terms. Empowering the youth means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own rather than at the discretion of others.

The term "youth empowerment" according to Omotere (2011) combines two important words "youth" and "empowerment" which must be defined differently. The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines 'youth', as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. While the Webster Dictionary (1998), defines empowerment in three ways "(1) to give official authority or legal power to; (2) enable; (3) to promote the self actualization or influence." The strategy prescribed by the first definition can be quite effective provided that the party being empowered (that is, the "empoweree") already has the competencies needed to achieve the desired outcome. The strategy does not work well when it is plugged into a framework of youth development in which empowerment itself is being used as a strategy for developing competencies in youth. For youth development, the third definition is more suitable. Youth empowerment therefore refers to a process through which adults begin to share responsibility and power with young people.

However, it must be noted that youth empowerment in itself has been in practice in pre colonial Nigeria. The trans-Atlantic slave trade and the colonization of African states eventually led to the impoverishment of African youths. The post independent African countries inherited the problem of youth unemployment and other social problems. Within the African context, youth empowerment is a means of encouraging young people to gain the skills and knowledge that will allow them to overcome obstacles in life. In this sense, youth empowerment does the following for African youths:

- Ability to make decisions about personal/collective circumstances
- Ability to access information and resources for decision making
- Ability to consider a range of options from which to choose
- Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making
- Having positive-thinking about the ability to make change
- Ability to learn and access skills for improving personal/collective circumstance.
- Ability to inform others' perceptions though exchange, education and engagement.
- Involving in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated
- Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma
- Increasing one's ability in discreet thinking to sort out right and wrong.

Sustainable Development and Youth Empowerment

Sustainability is perceived to be paradigm for thinking about a future in which environmental, societal and economic consideration are balanced in the pursuit of development and improved quality of life. It is a process which tells of a development of all aspects of human life affecting sustenance. It involves resolving the conflict between the various competing goals; it also involves the simultaneous pursuit of economic prosperity, environmental quality and social equity. Its destination is not a fixed place; it is a wishful characteristic of a future system (Kafka 2008).

Sustainable development means new technology and new ways of doing business which allow a nation to improve the quality of life today in all economic, environmental and social dimensions without comprising the ability of future generations to also enjoy good life and opportunities. It is therefore, a pattern of resource use that aims at meeting human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present but in the infinite future.

Sustainable development for the citizenry not only generates economic growth but distributes its benefits equitably, regenerates the environment rather than destroying it, it empowers people rather than marginalizing them. It is development that gives priority to the poor, enlarging their choices and opportunities and providing for their participation in decisions that affect their lives. It is development that is geared towards enhancing the citizens, job creation, nature preservation and technological advancement.

According to Shama (2010), Notwithstanding various government policies geared towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in the country, unless critical issues of youth empowerment which remains the nation's biggest challenge are addressed, efforts to reduce poverty will continue to elude Nigeria in the developed economies, they did not grow because everybody had government jobs, but through deliberate policies formulated towards addressing youth empowerment, that is our biggest challenge for now, until we make effort to create a training programme that corps members will depend on for self - reliance during their exit. Adding that "we must refocus our policies by training our youth and building cottage industries that the

youth can rely upon, the scheme should key into this policy as National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) remain a veritable tool for growth and development of the country.

According to Abhuere (2000), Nigeria has more than 60% youths in the demographic distribution on its population. A reasonable number of this age group is presently in various training programme in tertiary institutions in different areas of academic endeavours. It is aspiration of all nations to have qualitative and efficient work force that must have qualitative and efficient work force that must have acquired experience that could be translated into service as a pre requisite for socio - political technological and economic development.

Strategies for Revitalizing Technology Education for Youth Empowerment

As technology changes and advance rapidly, it necessitates corresponding rapid changes in the strategies for technology education delivery for training and empowering the youths. The prevailing human and societal need at any time determines the curriculum content of the educational programme. Technology education programme should be developed to emphasize critical thinking knowledge discovery, hands on training and entrepreneurial skills to effectively manage and market produced items.

Revitalizing technology education became expedient because a large number of youths graduating from the technical institutions go jobless over a prolonged period of time, while the labour market complain of lack of skilled workers with the required competence to fit in the available job opportunities.

According to Federal Ministry of Education FME (2006), there is a:

1. Mismatch between the curriculum taught at the institution of learning and the needs of the labour market.
2. Majority of the students learn through lectures and academic textbooks and are academically sound but they have limited opportunities of acquiring practical experience by using machinery, equipment and practical techniques associated with the professions.
3. There is lack of qualified teachers to teach vocational, innovative, entrepreneurship and job skills.

On a global scope Joel & Kathryn (2010) reported on a framework for revitalizing manufacturing education captured it as presented below:

We will have to improve our education quality to meet employer needs, that means building programs that:

1. Encourage partnership with business and other education institutions.
2. Modernize technical school's facilities.
3. Expand high quality on - line course offerings.
4. Focus on technical retraining in order to smooth the transition of employees from one manufacturing industry to another.
5. Promote in house manufacturing workers training and broaden opportunities for career advancement.
6. Make college more affordable for unemployed workers to pursue educational opportunities that will lead to good jobs and career pathways.
7. Improve early childhood education that nurtures math and science proficiency.

An education programme that fits nicely into this framework is the "Haas Technical Education Centre" concept from www.HTECnetwork.eu. It is set up as a long - term partnership programme between education and manufacturing industry. Finally, there is lack of consultation with private sector which has led to teaching of outdated curriculum, outdated resources and teaching methods.

The findings of Federal Ministry of Education confirms the earlier assertion by World Bank (2002) that the growing unemployment among recent graduates, especially at the tertiary level, stems in part from the mismatch between educational output and requirements of labour market. There is a high level demand for skilled workers in oil, industrial and service sectors, yet the supply is far below expectation.

United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1999) observed that the mismatch of curriculum in technical education with the needs of the industry is a key issue in the co-operation between school and industry, not only in African countries but, also worldwide. Hence, UNESCO suggested the setting up of mixed curricular review in technology education.

The objective of technology education programme is to provide business and industry with a pool of adequate and well trained technical manpower, the co-operation of industry is therefore essential for the attainment of programme objective. The school industrial linkage through training programme emerged in the school curriculum as an instructional strategy for solving the problems of inadequate facilities, personnel, infrastructure and other constraints which impose severe limitations on the capacity of schools to achieve their mandate. According to Industrial Training Fund (2000), the scheme was designed to provide on the job practical experience for the students undergoing all courses that demand exposure in industrial activities during their college programme. One of the major problems associated with school industry relationship is lack of commitment on the part of the industry. Ogalanya (2000) noted that although the bulk of the trained employees of the industry were products of technical institutions, most employees were yet to show greater commitment and involvement. Effective partnership between the labour market and technology education institutions remains a key strategy in revitalizing the programme for youth empowerment essential for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Technology education is at the heart of sustainable national development and only those nations that continue to invest in empowering their youth and talented workforce will stay competitive in the long run. A country without quality technology education is synonymous to a system without driving force. Revitalizing technology education for youth empowerment will enhance job creation, poverty reduction and self reliance.

Revitalizing technology education through quality delivery, enhancing effective partnership between technology education institutions and labour market. Also, improving content and delivery methods will go a long way in reducing unemployment and increase national productivity for sustainable development.

Recommendations

The following recommendations if well articulated and implemented will revitalize technology education for youth empowerment and sustainable development of our nation Nigeria;

- Enhance awareness, motivation and improve the image of technology education careers.
- Ensure programme relevance to labour market needs
- Develop strategies to address technology education teacher currency and shortage issues.
- Effective partnership between technology education institutions and the industrial sector
- Membership of professional bodies like Nigerian Association of Teachers of Technology (NATT) and attendance of conferences and workshop
- Increase funding to support technology education infrastructure and equipment upgrade.

- Improving the quality of technology education programme through the diversification of contents and delivery.

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