

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

By

Raymond, E; Maigida, J. F & Saba, T. M
Industrial and Technology Education Department,
Federal University of Technology, Minna. Niger State

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

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

study skill-related courses, Schuler (1999) opined that people who seek technical jobs must also seek lifelong learning. UNESCO and ILO (2002) also recommended lifelong learning for all those involved in technical and vocational education. In this regard, lifelong learning orientation is vital if students are to thrive in the knowledge rich, constantly changing world of work. Lifelong learning orientation in students is concerned with keeping students engaged in learning, and developing in these students the characteristics that will make learning an integral and valued part of their lives when they leave school (Jennifer & Graeme, 2003). For technical college students to become lifelong learners, they need to be willing to adapt and be prepared to be flexible. Curiosity is an important attribute for the lifelong learner, which is a disposition where one uses initiative to explore avenues regardless of traditional subject boundaries. For the individual, lifelong learning emphasizes creativity, initiative and responsiveness. These are attributes which influences the employability of individuals. The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004) realizing the need for lifelong learning stated that the federal government will make lifelong learning education the basis for the nation's educational policy. Field (2004) argues that preparation for life in today's world cannot be satisfied by a once - and -for -all acquisition of knowledge and skills. Lifelong learning and continuous training therefore becomes imperative. It is worthy of note that advancement in technology and global economy has made the labour market to place increasing demands on individuals to acquire more relevant skills and knowledge to be able to function in today's workplace. In this regard, individuals must engage in lifelong

learning to promote sustained employability. For schools including technical colleges in Nigeria to equip students to meet with these demands requires that the exam-driven, teacher-directed rote learning provided within the formal education system be replaced with a new type of learning that emphasis creating, applying, analyzing and synthesizing knowledge and engaging in collaborative learning throughout life time (Dong,2004). Surprisingly, the traditional teaching methods that are being continually employed by teachers are inadequate in providing students with the skills they need to be successful in the workplace. The World Bank (2003) observed that the traditional teaching methods that still underpin the education system differ from lifelong learning methods in many ways as shown in the table below.

TRADITIONAL LEARNING METHOD	LIFELONG LEARNING METHOD
The teacher is the source of knowledge	Educators are guides to source of knowledge
Learners receive knowledge from the teacher	People learn by doing
Learners work by themselves	People learn in groups and from each other
Tests are given to prevent progress until students have completely mastered a set of skills and to ration access to further learning	Assessment is used to guide learning strategies and identify pathways for future learning
All learners do the same thing	Educators develop individualized learning plans
Teachers receive initial training plus ad hoc in-service training	Educators are lifelong learners. Initial training and on-going professional development are linked
Good learners are identified and permitted to continue their education	People have access to learning opportunities over a lifetime

(Source: World Bank, 2003). These lifelong learning contexts imply a different role for teachers and trainers. Teachers need to learn new skills and become lifelong learners themselves to keep up to date with new knowledge, pedagogical ideas and technology. As learning becomes more collaborative, so too must teachers' professional development, which needs to promote professional networks and learning organization within schools and institutions (World Bank, 2003). Bryce, Frigo, McKenzie and Withers (2000) remarks that teachers need to teach students how to learn in order to become lifelong learners. Bryce et al added that teachers should note that lifelong learners need to: cherish the habit of learning; know their own learning styles; be open to

how to learn in order to become lifelong learners. Bryce et al added that teachers should note that lifelong learners need to: cherish the habit of learning; know their own learning styles; be open to new learning techniques and new knowledge; want to learn with self confidence; set realistic personal targets for their learning and recognize the gap between the current status of their learning and the target, and understand how to fill it. Lifelong learning (Jennifer & Greame 2003) is a self-directed learning and self-directed learners are those individuals who take the initiative, with or without the help of others in: (i) diagnosing their learning needs, (ii) formulating learning goals, (iii) identifying human and material resources for learning, (iv) choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and (v) evaluating

learning outcomes. In helping students to be lifelong learners, teachers act 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.

References

- Andrea, P. (2009). Self-learning and Lifelong Learning of Students and Teachers in the OER World. Retrieved on 8th June 2010 from: [www. Edu.org](http://www.Edu.org).
- Birkett, W.P. (1993). Competency Based Standards for Professional Accountants. *Journal of Certified practicing accountants*, 2 (1) 1-7.
- Bryce, J; Frigo, T; Mckenzie, P & Withers, G. (2000). *Developing Lifelong Learners Through Undergraduate Education*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing service.
- Dong, W. (2004). Improving Students Lifelong Learning Skills in Circuit Analysis. *The China Papers*, 3 (2) 75-78.
- Federal Government of Nigeria. (FGN) (2004). *National Policy on Education* (4th Ed). Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Field, J. (2004). Lifelong Learning and Cultural change: A European Perspective. A Paper Presented at the conference on Lifelong Learning and Learning Culture, Held at National Chung- Cheng University, Chia-yi, Taiwan. From 1st-2nd October, 2004.
- ILO. (2000). Conclusions concerning human resources training and development, International Labour Conference, 88th session, Geneva.
- ILO. (2003). Human Resources Development and Training, Report 92 IV (1), Geneva.
- Jennifer, B & Graeme, W. (2003). *Engaging Secondary School Students in Lifelong Learning*. Australia: Australian Council for Education Research Limited.
- Kayode, P. A. (2009). Bridging the Skills Gap in Nigeria: Framework for Dialogue Between Universities and Employers of Labor. A key note address presented at the 24th conference of the Association of Vice Chancellors of Nigeria Universities Held at University of Ilorin. From 2 – 3rd June 2009.
- note address presented at the 24th conference of the Association of Vice Chancellors of Nigeria Universities Held at University of Ilorin. From 2 – 3rd June 2009.
- Longworth, N. & Davies, W.K. (1996). *Lifelong Learning*. London: Kogan page.
- Robinson, J.P. (2001). the work place skills needed by today's workers. Retrieved on 8/6/2010
- From: www.aces.edu/crd/.
- Simons – Mc Donald, H. (2009). Employability and Lifelong Learning. ICDE Standing Conference, on Quality in the context of the financial crisis. Held in Barcelona, Spain from 19 – 21 November 2009.
- Schuler A.C. (1999). *Electronics: Principles and Applications* (5th Ed). New York: McGraw – Hill.
- Smith, M & Spurling, P. (1999). *Lifelong Learning* Retrieved on 8/6/10 from

www.lifelonglearning.org

Spencer, L.M & Spencer, S.M. (1993).
Competency at Work. New York:
Wiley.

Taylor, B. (2001). Lifelong in higher
education in Western Europe:
myth or reality. *Adult Education*

and Development 56, 127 – 146.

UNESCO & ILO. (2002). Technical and
vocational education and training

for the twenty-first century:
UNESCO and ILO
recommendations: New York:
Author.

World Bank. (2003). Lifelong Learning
in the Global Knowledge
Economy: Challenges for
Developing Countries. Retrieved
on 8th June 2010 from:
[http://www.1.worldbank.org/edu
cation/](http://www1.worldbank.org/education/)