

TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IDEALS: THE MISSING LINK

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Abstract

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have been identified as the bedrock of any meaningful economic development as they ensure increased entrepreneurial activities, employment generation, poverty reduction and enhanced standard of living for the people. Successive administrations in Nigeria have made consistent investments in support of the growth of SMEs. The Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions that prepare the manpower which is used to ensure the development and growth of SMEs is one of such efforts. Despite these facts, Nigeria is still gripped by widespread unemployment, poverty, underemployment and generally poor economic performance. This paper sought to determine the missing link between TVET and SMEs ideals under the following subheads: Introduction, the characteristics and economic importance of SMEs, government contributions to the growth of SMEs, the goals of TVET and the strategies for achieving them, the relationship between TVET and SMEs, the challenges/missing link and the way forward. After a critical review of the growth of SMEs in Nigeria in relationship to TVET programmes, it was found that TVET institutions are beset with numerous challenges which are affecting the quality and quantity of graduates they turn out for the operation of SMEs. The challenges include poor funding, poor image of TVET programmes and their graduates among Nigerians, dearth of qualified and competent TVET teachers and lack of relevant training equipment and many others. The following recommendations among others, aimed at repositioning TVET to play its vital roles effectively were therefore advanced. They include: the agencies and operators of SMEs should meaningfully collaborate with TVET institutions in the training of TVET students, continuous and mandatory professional and entrepreneurial development should be instituted for TVET teachers while their welfare should be reviewed and made more attractive, and innovative instructional and evaluation techniques should be adopted by TVET teachers.

Key words: SMEs, TVET, Challenges, Way Forward.

Introduction

A vibrant SME subsector is the cornerstone of any successful economy. Generally, successful economies are usually characterized by a high level of industrialization, a low rate of unemployment and under-employment, high income per capita, a low rate of poverty-induced crimes, and a high Gross Domestic Product (GDP). SMEs are operated by individuals equipped with the right skills. In Nigeria, the platform for equipping people with the skills

required for the successful operation of SMEs is through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). It develops the capacity of individuals through the acquisition of skills thus enabling them to explore their environment and harness the resources within it for poverty reduction.

Therefore, TVET and SMEs are related in that one prepares the manpower that drives the other. There is also abundant evidence of the

government's contributions to the growth of SMEs through different interventions (Abbalin, 2020). However, despite these interventions Nigeria is still grappling with acute poverty, widespread unemployment and underemployment, including several other poor economic indices. Of course, this is not without the attendant social vices such as kidnapping, armed robbery, banditry, internet fraud, gambling, car snatching and human trafficking. This paper focused on the following outlines: The characteristics and economic importance of SMEs, government contributions to the growth of SMEs, the goals of TVET and the strategies for achieving them, the relationship between TVET and SMEs, the challenges/missing link and the way out.

The Characteristics of SMEs

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) sometimes called Small Scale Enterprises (SSEs) have elicited a wide range of definitions from diverse quarters. According to Onyinlana, Agu and Aderoju (2018), SMEs are business outfits that employ few number of workers and do not require high capital to start. According to the authors, SMEs exist in almost every industry and are usually privately-owned with staff strength ranging from one to twenty employees. Agganwal (2011) sees SMEs as businesses with a maximum asset base of N20m excluding land and working capital, and staff strength of between ten and three hundred employees. Further, the European Union (EU) (2015) defined SMEs as enterprises that employ fewer than two hundred and fifty (250) persons and which have an annual turnover not exceeding fifty (50) million euro, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding 43 million euro. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) (2003) defines SMEs as

industries **Igboko, K. O., Ozoagu, F. O., Wogu, S. N.**
~~300 workers or a total cost of not more than~~
N200 million, including working capital but excluding the cost of land. Therefore, SMEs are business ventures characterized by low numbers of workers, modest asset base and lean capital. SMEs play vital roles in the economic development of a country.

The Economic Importance of SMEs.

Many economic growth indices are attributed to SMEs. According to Onyinlana, Agu and Aderoju (2018) and Rajesh, Sureh and Deshmukh (2008), SMEs are regarded as the backbone of any economy. Rogers (2002) had observed that SMEs enhance capacity building through entrepreneurial training and the creation of more employment opportunities per unit of investment. Udensi and Ugwuode (2018) stated that SMEs bring about national economic growth through employment generation and poverty reduction, and the development of entrepreneurial capabilities using indigenous technology and at low investment costs. Onugu (2005) identified the benefits of SMEs to include: stimulation of economic activities, stemming of rural-urban migration and enhancement of the standard of living of the people. The CBN (2003) identifies the economic importance of SMEs to include: mobilization of domestic savings for investment, appreciable contribution to gross domestic product (GDP), increased harnessing of local raw materials, employment generation, poverty reduction through enhancement of personnel income and sustainable livelihoods, technological development and export diversification. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2007), SMEs play important roles in Nigeria's economic growth as they constitute

97.2% of the companies in Nigeria. In this wise, ~~the United Nations Industrial Development~~ Organization (UNIDO) (2011), opined that the Nigerian economy needs vibrant small and medium scale industries to overcome poverty, unemployment and to experience real economic growth. Corroborating this view, Ariyo, in Ikeh, Onyeka and Okanazu (2018) opine that with 97.2% of Nigerian businesses being controlled by SMEs and about 50% of employment nationwide coming from that sector, it has the potential to make the economy great.

Even the developed nations of the world rely on SMEs for their economic growth. Little wonder they are highly industrialized and respected! Audretsch (2010) revealed that in the United States of America (USA), SMEs employ 50% of their workforce and accounts for more than half of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In the European Union, Gunter (2005) reported that SMEs provide 75 million jobs and represent 99% of all enterprises in the area. In South Africa, World Bank (2018), reports that Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are productive drivers of inclusive economic growth and development in the country. MSMEs constitute over 90 percent of formalized businesses in South Africa, provide employment to between 50 percent and 60 percent of the country's work force and contribute about 34 percent to the country's Gross Domestic Product.

Therefore, it can be concluded that SMEs are a key driving force for economic development and employment generation which any nation that means well for its citizens cannot ignore. Perhaps, it was in realization of this that the federal government of Nigeria has been

consistent ~~growth of SMEs in the country.~~ Igboko, K. O., Ozoagu, F. O., Wogu, S. N.

Government's Contributions to the Growth of SMEs in Nigeria

The Nigerian government's contributions to the growth of SMEs have been varied but steady. Foremost is the Babangida administration (1985-1993) which initiated the Mass Mobilization for Economic Recovery (MAMSER) (Adokuru, 2006), and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) (Azihs & Samuel, 2016). The Obasanjo administration (1999-2007) instituted the National Accelerated Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) (Ebenechi et al, 2012) as well as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (Olusoji and Oloba, 2014).. President Goodluck Jonathan whose administration lasted from 2009 to 2015 initiated several interventions such as Youth Enterprise with innovation (YOU-WIN) (McKenzie and World Bank, 2019).

Perhaps, the administration of Muhammadu Buhari has contributed more to the growth of SMEs than any other administration in the country. All the administration's interventions in the area of economic empowerment and Job creation are subsumed under the brand-National Social Investment Programme (NSIP). According to the National Social Investment Office (NSIO, 2016), the components of the NSIP include: Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), with variants such as Marketmoni and TraderMoni; N-POWER, which variants include: N-POWER AGRO, N-POWER Build, N-POWER Tech Hardware, and N-POWER Tech software. This is according to the National Social Investment Office (NSIO, 2016). The N-Power Build, for

instance, is designed to equip young Nigerians with saleable skills in the areas of building services, construction, built environment services, utilities, automotive and aluminum and gas. N-power Agro, on the other hand, include the following components: farming co-operative management and Agro-Entrepreneurship. Enrollees in each programme are trained, and after the training, are given starter packs to start their own businesses. The Buhari administration has also gone a step further to create a ministry called Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development to oversee the workings of the various interventions. This is unprecedented and shows the level of commitment of the administration to the growth of SMEs. There are also several other programmes initiated by different state governments, private sector players and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) aimed at growing the SME sub-sector (Udoeyo, 2021). It does not stop at that. The Nigerian government has also established financial institutions to provide the needed financial support to SMEs. They include: People's Bank and later Community Bank established by the Babangida administration (Ayadi, Hyman and Williams, 2008) and Micro Finance Bank established by the Obasanjo administration (Acha, 2012).. Others, according to CBN (2003), include: Small Scale Industries Scheme (1971); Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (1973); Nigeria Bank for Commerce and Industry (1973); Small and Medium Scale Enterprises Loan Scheme (1992); National Economic Reconstruction Fund (1994); and Family Economic Advancement Programme (1997).

Several other agencies are also providing support to the growth of SMEs in Nigeria. Abbakin

(2020) identified other government agencies that give support to SMEs: Igboko, K. O., Ozoagu, F. O., Wogu, S. N. Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDEN); the Nigerian Export Promotion Council; Federal Institute of Industrial Research, Oshodi; the Nigerian Bank of Industry Limited; the Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON); Raw Materials Research and Development Council; the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC); the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment; National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC); and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).

Currently, the federal government is not adamant to the affairs of SMEs as the nation-wide downturn on economic activities occasioned by the Corona Virus pandemic persists. To support the SMEs and ensure their quick recovery from the COVID-19 shock, the federal government of Nigeria and its agencies such as the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) have rolled out palliatives in different forms including soft credits or interest free loans and equipment/materials for SMEs operators. This shows the importance government and its agencies attach to SMEs.

Despite the visible commitment of successive administrations in Nigeria towards ensuring a sound footing for SMEs, there is still widespread poverty, unemployment, underemployment and a steady decline of the economy. This situation has given rise to diverse social problems among the youths including, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, suicide, banditry, internet fraud and gambling. This has painted a very ugly picture of the country before the international community. However, the United Nations Educational,

Scientific and Cultural Organization/International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, UNESCO/INEVOC, cited in Ukoha (2018), had pointed out that since Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is oriented towards the world of work and acquisition of employability skills, it is well positioned to address the issues of unemployment and skills mismatch that have been the bane of young people in making smooth transitions from school to the work place. Arising from this, it becomes imperative to look at the philosophy and goals of TVET.

The Meaning and Goals of TVET

TVET is one of the programmes highlighted in the National Policy on Education. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013), TVET is 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 various sectors of economic and social life. Inyagu (2014) defines TVET as a range of learning experiences delivered to individuals with a view to equipping them with employable skills for the world of work. Moustafa (2010) sees TVET as that part of the educational system that provides courses and training programmes related to employment with a view to enabling the transition from secondary education to work for young trainees/students and supplying the labour market with competent workers. Further, Ayuba (2011) maintained that TVET refers to education and training that prepares persons for gainful employment. Thus, TVET is the education system designed to equip individuals with skills that will enable them

secure or create employment in different sectors of the economy. Igboko, K. O., Ozoagu, F. O., Wogu, S. N.

TVET has several goals designed to focus it on its core mandate. According to Baqadir in Attah, Ohanu and Nwahunanya (2018), TVET aims to meet the educational needs of learners who seek to earn a living through skill-oriented enterprises. For Malhorta (2004), it serves as the key pillar of any successful economy as it boosts the value of a nation and its Gross Domestic product (GDP). Lawani and Lawani (2018) maintains that TVET develops the capacity of an individual through the acquisition of skills thus enabling them to explore their environment and harness the resources within the environment. This way, poverty and the attendant social vices are drastically reduced. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the goals of TVET are to:

1. Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels;
2. Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development; and
3. Give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically (FRN, 2013). TVET pursues its goals through well-defined strategies.

Strategies for Achieving TVET Goals

TVET goals are achieved through key areas. The three key areas among others focused in this paper and covered by TVET according to FRN (2013), are technical colleges, Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs) and National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF).

Every technical college according to the FRN shall establish and operate a production unit for ~~on the job training of students and for~~ commercial activities to sustain college operations. This is in addition to the normal training activities which are structured in foundation and trade modules. Therefore, upon completion of any technical college programme, a trainee shall have three options two of which are; to secure employment either at the end of the whole course or after completing one or more modules of employable skills; or to set up his/her own business and become self-employed and be able to employ others.

The Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs), are proposed to educate trainees to think creatively and transform knowledge through technological processes into wealth and a broader economic base. The VEIs are designed to benefit a variety of end users including senior secondary graduates. The aims which among other things, is to provide training that enables enrollees acquire continuous education that makes them self-reliant, wealth creators and providers of employment. Areas to be covered by VEIs include: Adire, ASO-Oke, Akwaete, and other indigenous fabrics and products; welding and sheet metal work; motor vehicle repairs (auto-mechanical, panel beating, auto electrical, vulcanizing etc); electrical wiring- domestic and industrial, construction (plumbing, painting, brick/block laying, tiling, screeding etc); catering; performing arts; hairdressing and beauty; art; agriculture and all its variants; fashion design; and other vocational skill areas (FRN, 2013)

Lastly, the NVQF according to the FRN (2013), is a system for the development, classification

and recognition of skills, knowledge and competences. ~~Igboko, K. O., Ozoagu, F. O., Wogu, S. N. irrespective of where and how the training or~~

skill was acquired. The system is designed to give a clear statement of what the learner must know or be able to do whether the learning took place in a classroom, on-the-Job, or non-formal. Therefore, the National Policy on Education is a very Comprehensive document with sweeping guidelines on how to position TVET to achieve its mandate, even though implementation is another matter altogether. However, some strands of relationship can be clearly observed between TVET and SMEs.

Relationship between TVET and SMEs

The areas covered by SMEs according to Onyinlana, Agu and Aderoju (2018) include: catering services, livestock/poultry farming, building/furniture businesses, animal feed production, automobile repairs, sachet and bottle water production, and many more. Therefore, there is a deep relationship between TVET and SMEs in the area of operations, and the human capital dimension. According to Attah, Ohanu and Nwahunanya (2018), TVET institutions have as their primary business the interpretation of market demand signals and preparation of human resources to satisfy the manpower needs of industry. The authors further stated that industries set occupational and competency standards while TVET institutions prepare human capital to meet those standards. Therefore, TVET is tailor-made for industries such as SMEs. The former trains the manpower that drives the latter. This is evident in the philosophy and operations of the duo. TVET is to SMEs what medical schools are to hospitals. It is the training platform for the operators of SMEs.

Therefore, whatever happens to TVET will definitely affect the SMEs.

Thus, SMEs are the key drivers of the economy while TVET prepares the manpower for their operations. There is also abundant evidence of government investment in support of the growth of SMEs in Nigeria. Equally evident is the existence of the policy framework that vests TVET with the responsibility of equipping individuals with the skills needed for successful operation of SMEs. But what is puzzling is the fact that despite these realities on ground, Nigeria is still battling with unbearable poverty, joblessness and poor economic performance. This has been a source of worry to all well-meaning Nigerians and friends of Nigeria alike.

The Challenges of TVET

The irony described above has attracted many comments from different quarters. The CBN (2003) identified the reasons Nigerian SMEs could not play their role adequately to include: lack of appropriate management skills and ignorance of technological advances, arising from inadequate educational and technical background on the part of the operators of SMEs. According to the CBN, such entrepreneurs purchase obsolete and inefficient equipment thereby setting the stage for lower level of productivity and poor product quality. The natural consequence of this has been reduction in their scale of operation and in many cases, outright closure of such enterprises. Therefore, the problem of Nigerian SMEs can be traced to an ineffective training platform to which the operators are exposed. The training platform in this case is TVET. Duodu cited in Inyiagu (2014), summarized the challenges confronting TVET delivery in Nigeria as follows: low quality and numbers of students in TVET institutions,

low image of TVET, low quality and numbers of TVET institutions, gender imbalance in TVET, dearth of

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teachers, and lack of an industry-driven

curriculum. Similarly, after a review of several analyses of the status and challenges of TVET in Nigeria, Ukoha (2018) concluded that TVET in the country is characterized by: inadequate financing, lack of qualified and competent teachers, lack of equipment and physical facilities, low quality training, poor access and equity, weak quality assurance mechanisms and processes, and weak employers' involvement in TVET.

Low Numbers of Students in TVET Institutions

There has been a significant decline in students' enrollment in TVET Programmes in Nigeria. According to African Economic Outlook (AEO) (2008) and Kazaure (2009), TVET's share in the overall education enrollment in Nigeria is hardly up to one percent. AEO also observed that female participation in the total TVET enrollment is just about a third. This trend poses grave challenge to the production of the required quantity and quality of manpower needed to drive the SMEs and the entire industrial value chain. Inyiagu (2014) observes that the situation has led to the labour market losing valuable manpower with practical technical skills.

Poor Image of TVET

TVET as observed by Aworanti (2011) and Inyiagu (2014) is perceived by the Nigerian Public as education for the never-do-well students. That is, only students who are academically less endowed go for TVET. This wrong perception has resulted to decline in the enrollment of students in TVET institutions thereby leading to the dearth of skilled technical

manpower required to run the industrial sector of the economy. This situation cannot be allowed to continue for as Aworanti (2011) pointed out, ~~TVET is always behind the success story of any~~ country that has evolved into a technologically and industrially advanced status. There is no gain saying the fact that the frontline beneficiaries of the contributions of TVET to the growth of the industrial sector are the SMEs. Therefore, if Nigeria is to reap the full benefits of SMEs, the image of TVET in the country must be improved upon.

Poor Funding

Funding has to do with financial investment in something. TVET is an expensive component of any education system and thus requires adequate financial investment. According to Ajibola and Jumoke cited in Ukoha (2018), factors such as low student-to-teacher ratio, and expensive training equipment and materials contribute to high unit costs in the delivery of TVET programmes. Unfortunately, the entire education system in Nigeria is poorly funded and TVET is not exempted. This situation has resulted in TVET institutions not having adequate resources to provide state-of-the-art facilities and cutting edge equipment needed to give students quality training as required by SMEs. According to Inyiagu (2014), 90% of all the skills training in the country come from the informal sector due to low level of training materials and competent teachers in the formal sector. This trend needs to be reversed if SMEs are to get the needed push from TVET. Poor funding may also be responsible for the slow implementation of the policy provision for the establishment and maintenance of production units in technical colleges for on-the-job training of students and the establishment of vocational enterprise

institutions. This situation really does not augur well for the manpower needs of SMEs.

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Lack of Qualified and Competent Teachers

Similar to funding is the issue of the qualification of the teachers handling TVET programmes in the country. If we are to have quality TVET programmes, and hence quality TVET graduates, adequate number of professionally and occupationally competent teachers must be made available. This is because the quality of the teacher is a measure of the quality of the educational programme dished out to the learners.

TVET institutions in Nigeria lack qualified teachers due mainly to the lack of political will by those in authority to train teachers, replace old and tired hands, and generally pay teachers very well. According to a World Bank report, cited in Ukoha (2018), most TVET teachers in Nigeria have received little pedagogical and competency-based training, have few practical skills, and possess little or no industrial experience. The authors of the present paper have also seen instances where physics graduates are made to teach TVET courses. The situation is made worse by limited opportunities available for re-training of teachers (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2014). Also visibly absent is a well-organized in-service training/re-training programme for TVET teachers where deficiencies can be remedied and skills sharpened. As a result, existing teachers continue to teach out-dated skills using obsolete methods and equipment and end up producing poor quality graduates whose skills do not usually match industry requirements (Ukoha, 2018). These scenarios posse great threats to

efforts aimed at producing quality manpower to run the SME sector of the economy.

Lack of Equipment and other Training Facilities

Quality TVET delivery is hinged on the availability and utilization of functional and state-of-the-art training equipment, facilities and techniques. These include: hand tools, machine tools, buildings and consumables. Inter-Agency Working Group on TVET (IAWG-TVET) in Ukoha (2018), agrees that the use of quality training facilities has the potential to motivate teachers to teach and encourage students to learn as such training facilities can enhance the students' cognitive capacity. It will also give students a competitive edge in the industry upon graduation especially if the facilities are the exact copies of the ones used in industries.

However, consequent upon poor funding that characterizes TVET delivery system in Nigeria, the provision and use of the needed facilities is extremely difficult. Occupational training is more of a theoretical exercise than practical in Nigeria. This is confirmed by Ajibola and Jumoke (2012), who noted that the quality of training in TVET institutions is low with undue emphasis on theory and certification rather than acquisition of skills. According to the authors, students mostly observe rather than engage in hands-on experiences. This trend does not lend itself to the production of quality TVET graduates who possess the skills needed to ensure value addition to the operations of SMEs.

Gender Imbalance in TVET

TVET equips citizens with the knowledge, skills and attitude needed to secure or create employment. This is irrespective of class, age, or

gender. Unfortunately, Ukoha (2018) noted that due to cultural barriers and social stereotypes, female e

~~remained very low as it is mostly male~~

dominated. This is as unfair as it is counter-productive. Therefore, NCHE in Inyiagu (2014) is of the opinion that economic activities could be enhanced if TVET programmes are expanded to include those trades and entrepreneurial skills that are attractive to the female folk. This way, SMEs and the entire industrial sector of the economy are provided with varieties of skills.

Weak Linkage Programmes

It has been generally accepted that TVET is designed to prepare entrepreneurs for SMEs. If this is the case, it then becomes very natural that SMEs be involved in the training of TVET students to ensure that output meets skills requirements of the SMEs. This point is corroborated by (IAWG-TVET) Cited in Ukoha (2012) which noted, that countries desiring quality TVET usually involve employers in different ways to ensure training programmes are responsive to labour market demands. According to Asian Development Bank (ADB) (2014), areas of collaboration between TVET institutions and the ultimate employers of TVET graduates may include: governance, policy and planning processes; development of standards and curriculum; training delivery; finance and resources; assessment of students and job placement of graduates; to ensure programmes output closely match employers' skill demands. It is the belief of the bank that if the key stakeholders exploit those areas of possible collaboration, there will be a strong match between the skills possessed by TVET graduates and the labour market skills requirements. In Nigeria however, the widespread complaints of

mismatch between skills possessed by TVET graduates and labour market skills requirements (Osinem, 2018; Yalams, 2017; Ajibola & Imoh, 2013, and UNESCO/UNEVOC, 2013) is a clear indication of weak or complete absence of any form of partnership between TVET training institutions and the employers of their graduates. This is not helpful in the sustenance of a robust and vibrant SME sub-sector of the economy.

Use of Ineffective Instructional delivery and Evaluation Techniques

The mode or technique by which lessons are delivered is very important as it impacts on the quality of output. Unfortunately, TVET trades in Nigeria are delivered as individual entities rather than integrated entities (Yalams, 2017). The author maintains that TVET delivery system in Nigeria is predominantly teacher-centred and usually takes place in the four corners of a building characterized by the chalk and talk lecture methods. Further, the continuous use of content-based instructional objectives rather than performance or outcome-based objectives is another source of serious concern. These methods, according to Yalams, do not help learners to develop problem-solving skills in a broad and integrated form as is the case in real world situations.

According to Treadwell cited in Yalams (2017), TVET is facing numerous challenges which include imparting skills that can outlast the shifts in the world of work; the understanding of learning how to learn; and the ability for young people to build their own creativity as they learn. Certainly, these challenges cannot be tackled by the continuous use of ineffective instructional techniques. The current world of work (SMEs in

particular) requires creativity, innovativeness, flexibility and ability to work in groups. Therefore ~~techniques can instill such skills in learners such~~ as the use of digital and e-learning platforms and so on.

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Equally worthy of note are the evaluation techniques used in assessing students' learning outcomes. According to Yalams (2017), assessment in TVET is predominantly a paper and pencil exercise with heavy emphasis on the theoretical component rather than the practical performance of students. There is also over-emphasis on product evaluation only, as against the combination of process and product evaluation. What this means according to the author, is that assessment is usually not competency-based, even as students' projects are mostly teacher-designed or teacher influenced. This approach is very unproductive. It is unproductive because SMEs emphasize competency in all its ramifications.

The Way Forward

Since SMEs are the bedrock of any industrial/economic development effort, strategies should be devised to address the various concerns raised in the preceding sections of this paper. This is all the more important as the issues raised impact on the quality of TVET output and ultimately, on the sustainable growth of SMEs. The following strategies are being advanced.

Improving the Image of TVET

Government and other stakeholders owe it as a duty to embark on aggressive advocacy campaign to change the perception of the Nigerian Public (parents in particular) towards

TVET from that of education for the less academically endowed to that of education for work. People need to know that TVET is ~~essentially for everybody irrespective of their~~ academic endowment. At least, TVET remains a lifeline when one's main stream of income dries out. Again, the idea of TVET as a dead-end should be changed to that of a building block for higher academic pursuit. If this is done, TVET would have been on its way to attracting the needed level of patronage from the Nigerian public thereby leading to the production of more skilled manpower for the SMEs in the country.

Upgrading the Competence of TVET Teachers

It is common knowledge that no education system can be better than the quality of its teachers. This point is put more succinctly by Uwaifo in Inyiagu (2014) who stated that teachers are the hub or pivot on which any successful educational programme revolves. Further, Yalams (2017) asserts that the future of our children lies with the quality of the teacher and his ability to deliver his lessons in line with the 21st century work place demands. Therefore, TVET teachers' pedagogical and occupational skills can be scaled up and maintained through regular training and retraining as well as sustained exposure to entrepreneurial and industrial techniques and practices. Government, in collaboration with other stakeholders, should also consider introducing a realistic in-service training programme for TVET teachers as a deliberate attempt to improve their pedagogical and technical competencies. Again, the government should muster the political will to employ new and well-trained TVET teachers to fill existing vacancies.

Funding

Prioritizing TVET in education funding may not be out of ~~resources needed to run a quality TVET delivery~~

system. Quality TVET requires cutting edge facilities and equipment as well as an assortment of consumables, all of which are very expensive. Therefore, while advocating increased funding for the education sector, greater percentage of the funds should be channeled to the TVET sub-sector. This approach will have a ripple effect on every aspect of TVET culminating on sustainable quality outputs. SMEs will be the better for it as a pool of well-trained manpower will be on ground to drive them.

Scaling up funding will also check cutting of corners that normally characterizes accreditation exercises in TVET institutions. Such sharp practices normally leave quality heavily compromised. One cannot but wonder as Ukoha (2018) did, whether the accreditation bodies are there to offer accreditation for a fee, with little attention given to quality, or they are there for some more noble objectives. This trend is not healthy for SMEs as they are supposed to be sustained by the graduates of TVET institutions. In this perspective therefore, one agrees with Yalams (2017) who opines that for TVET to be effective, it must be highly valued, well-funded and effectively implemented.

Involvement of SMEs and other Employers in TVET Delivery Systems

There should be strong collaboration between TVET institutions and SMEs in the areas of development of standards; curriculum design; training delivery, including equipment, facilities, materials and designing of techniques; management of funds; assessment of students;

and job placement of graduates. This will ensure that programme output satisfies the skills needs of SMEs.

Conclusion

Successful economies around the globe are tapping into the potentials of SMEs as they are the cornerstone of any meaningful industrial and economic development. Realizing this fact, successive administrations in Nigeria have enunciated policies and programmes aimed at supporting the growth of SMEs. Despite this, there is still poverty, unemployment and under-employment everywhere in the country even though TVET institutions that produce the operators of the SMEs abound. This paper has looked into the situation and discovered the missing link which is the inability of TVET institutions to play the role expected of them in the area of manpower production for the SMEs. Strategies were then proposed which, if implemented, will help turn the situation around by repositioning TVET institutions to produce the right quantity and quality of personnel to run the SMEs successfully.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing and the need to scale up the quality of skill training in TVET institutions to ensure the production of quality graduates who will contribute meaningfully towards making Nigerian SMEs very vibrant, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government, through the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and other agencies, should institute a mandatory and continuous professional and entrepreneurial development for TVET teachers. Such intervention should be at little or no cost on the teachers involved. Teachers' welfare

should also be enhanced and prioritized to enable them give their best.

2. Small ~~operators should be given greater task in~~ Igboko, K. O., Ozoagu, F. O., Wogu, S. N. preparing TVET graduates through efficient and effective school and industry partnership.
3. TVET quality assurance mechanisms and processes should be strengthened to ensure that standards are not compromised.
4. Gender balance should be vigorously pursued as it has the potential to generate a wide variety of skills which are necessary for a robust and boisterous SME sub-sector. Female access to TVET can be enhanced by floating more trades that appeal to girls and women. Generally, an affirmative action aimed at ensuring gender parity in TVET may not be out of place.
5. Innovative instructional and evaluation strategies should be adopted to enable students acquire the skills needed to run SMEs successfully in a constantly-changing work environment. Digital and e-learning platforms should be provided in TVET classroom instructional delivery systems.

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