

QUALITY TVET INTERNSHIP: A VERITABLE TOOL TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

BY

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Abstract

TVET internship is the position whereby TVET student or TVET institution's graduate undergoes supervised practical training. Internships cover a limited set of skills relevant for an occupation. TVET interns usually acquire their main knowledge and skills at a training centre or a university, and only learn supplementary skills through an internship. Significantly, for the purposes of realizing the whole essence and objectives of technical education and human resource development in Nigeria, it is imperative for students and senior members to acquire both theoretical, practical knowledge and technical skills. This can be accomplished through institutional support and collaboration as well as TVET institution-industry linkage. The three types of TVET internship are work experience internship, research internship and virtual internship. Industrial internship gives competitive edge over graduate with no work experience, broadens students understanding of concepts and exposes them to real life working environment and experience. Also, the effective steps to bridge the gap between education and industry is to invite successful TVET graduate to come and share with on-going students their own experience on their work, arrange visits with industry so that students can get to the peak at the world of work. Conclusively, there are many challenges hindering the attainment of the goals of industrial internship which must be curbed by concerned institutions to make TVET educational goals attainable. It was recommended that Industries should be encouraged to always allow interns to have access to equipment and practice the various skills so as to become fully developed technicians.

Keywords: Quality TVET internship, TVET institution-industrial linkage

Introduction

TVET internship programme prepares students for labor markets. It has become an innovative phenomenon in human resources development and training in Nigeria. It has been a situation where the TVET students have the opportunity to be exposed to experiences beyond the classroom environment. Not that alone, the students also have the privilege to have access to machineries, up-to-date skills as required in the industry and various methods of carrying out operations as done in his field of specialization. Adequate internship training makes the learner/student to become professional in his chosen career. Lawal (2002), quoting Francis Bacon, describes a professional as one who has mastered certain

specialized intellectual techniques, and adds that it was the intellectual content which came to distinguish the profession from the medieval craft. According to him, increased specialization of skills means that the term "profession" is now used for certain occupations which enjoy prestige and gives esoteric service.

Every year, about 150,000 students obtain their university degree and other tertiary education certificates ready for employment (Okoye and Okwelle, 2014). In most cases these graduates believe that the only reliable employer of labour is the government. This thought was further strengthened in 2012 when the federal government improved on the welfare package of Nigerian workers. Little effort is thus put

forth by graduates to venture into any self-paid engagement.

However, what appears to form a limiting factor to self-paid engagement among Nigerian graduates is the curriculum of activities of Nigerian educational system. The curriculum appears to be of liberal bias since independence. The curriculum placed emphasis on academic excellence rather than skills acquisition that would duly and truly prepare the graduates for paid or self-employment; realistically more useful and fulfilling (Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010).

TVET internship is the position whereby TVET students or TVET institution's graduate undergoes supervised practical training. Internships cover a limited set of skills relevant for an occupation. TVET interns usually acquire their main knowledge and skills at a training centre or a university, and only learn supplementary skills through an internship. Internships for job re-entrants at mid-career level provide practical experience to re-enter the labour market, prior experience in the trade is required.

Significantly, for the purposes of realizing the whole essence and objectives of technical education and human resource development in Nigeria, it is imperative for students and senior members to acquire both theoretical, practical knowledge and technical skills. This can be accomplished through institutional support and collaboration as well as TVET institution-industry linkage. With regard to institutional support and collaboration, a number of key institutions including the Federal Ministry of Education, National Board for Technical Education, Industrial Training Fund, has been set up to coordinate the activities of technical institutions. This is to ensure quality of programmes and award of degrees and diploma certificates to students and to ensure good governance. Similarly, competency-based training and industrial attachment have been introduced and instituted in the institutions as a significant step of enhancing students'

technical knowledge, productive skills, competencies, attitudes and abilities essential for the world of work.

Industrial attachment is a practical skill training enterprise designed to bridge the gap between the theoretical world of academic enterprise and the world of work of professional practice (Lauber, Ruth, Theuri & Woodlock, 2004). It is a process of anticipatory socialization where participants engage with industry to observe, learn, experiment and put theory into practice in order to acquire technical knowledge, productive and innovative skills, competencies, attitudes and abilities necessary for the world of work. The industrial attachment programme based on experiential learning approach has been perceived by stakeholders as a catalyst to human resource development in Nigerian institution. Ayarkwa, Adinyira & Osei-Asibey (2012) stated that it serves as a means of transition from the classroom to the world of work by developing students' job related skills, and enhancing job placement opportunities, as well as developing the problem solving, communication and human relations skills of students.

It also enhances school-industry relationship, integrates practical experience with theory, builds students' professional confidence level, and bridges the gap between classroom and world of work. Similarly, it serves as a source of recruiting and selecting new employees, injecting new ideas into an organisation, and developing industry support for TVET programmes (Adjei, Nyarko & Nunfam, 2014).

Quality TVET internship

Quality TVET internship in Nigeria is to afford students the opportunity to gather some work experience relevant to their studies and career prospects. Carlson and Halbrooks (2003) summarized that TVET internship can be characterized to be qualitative if the below stated conditions are met:

- i. The experience must be an extension of the classroom: a learning experience that

- provides the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom.
- ii. The skill learned must be transferrable to other employment setting.
 - iii. The experience has a defined beginning and end as a job description with desired qualifications.
 - iv. There are clearly defined learning objectives/duties outlined by the employer prior to the intern beginning the internship
 - v. There is supervision by a professional with expertise and background in the field of the internship.
 - vi. There is routine feedback by the experience supervisor.
 - vii. There are resources, equipment and facilities provided by the host employer that support learning objectives.

Types of TVET Internship

Internship exists in a wide variety of ways in TVET and its industries. Steven (2010) identifies three types of internship TVET which include:

- Work experience internship: most often, this will be in the second or third year of the school period. The placement can be from 2 months to one full school year. During this period, the student is expected to use the things he/she has learned in school and put them into practice. This way the students gain work experience in their field of study. The gained experience will be helpful to finish the final year of study.
- Research internship: this is mostly done by students who are in their final year. With this kind of internship a student does research for a particular company. The company can have something that they feel like they need to improve or the student can choose a topic within the company themselves. The result of the research study will be put in a report and often will have to be presented.
- Virtual internship: the intern works remotely and is not physically present at the job location. It provides the capacity to gain

job experience without conventional requirement of being physically present in an office. The internship is conducted via virtual means such as phone, email and web communication. Virtual interns generally have the opportunity to work at their own pace.

Industrial Internship: the Nigerian Experience

An internship in Nigeria is called a “Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme” (SIWES) or “industrial training”. Students usually spend six months in their third year for four year course or fourth year for five year courses. Students usually use their semester break period for industrial training. In the medical field, students undergo a one-year government paid internship after graduation from school.

In Nigeria, the federal government through the ministry of industry, trade and investment saddled the responsibility to train and re-train youths, higher institution students and worker alike for industrial competence with appropriate funding (Chukkas-onaeko, 2014). The fund was established by Decree No. 47 of October 8, 1971 (now an Act of the National Assembly, amended in 2011) with the mandate to provide, promote, and encourage the acquisition of skills in industry and commerce with a view to generating a pool of indigenous trained manpower sufficient to meet the needs of the national economy.

Education and industrial collaboration in TVET: the Effective Steps

There is only one successful way forward in TVET and that is the partnership of institutions and industry. There is a huge potential in this collaboration and the benefit cut both ways. These steps include:

1. Invite successful TVET graduates to come and share with on-going students their own experiences on their work.
2. Find one or two really effective partnership models in the country and get the lead TVET managers into them for a visit

3. Invite employers to speak to students at certain events and share what industry expects of graduates
4. Arrange visits with industry so that students can get to the peak in the world of work
5. Organize on the job training for students in businesses. If possible organize the same experience for the teachers
6. Get feedback from employers on the strengths and weaknesses of graduates employed
7. Ask employers for recommendations on competencies they need.
8. Organize job fairs for students inviting employers to participate and talk with students.
9. Ask industry leaders to be part of the institution's advisory councils.
10. Involve industry in creating performance standard and competency assessment of students.
11. Engage private sector in collaborative projects which will benefit both industry and institution.

School-Industry Collaboration Models

TVET internship is a great means to which the gap between theory and practice are bridged and also, an important way to which TVET institutions and industries partner to resolve the emanating challenges in TVET curriculum, mode of teaching and developing adequate course contents to be taught in schools to meet the industrial demands. Learners' internship programme is also a "work-based familiarity plan" providing a real-life organizational background for students to build explicit or basic skills, necessary to their specialized development.

Paryono (2013) identify 3 models of school-industry collaborations which include:

- i. Small to large scale collaborations: it can be in the form of short visits, short term attachment and a limited resource sharing.
- ii. Mid-scale collaborations: this includes participation in parts of TVET planning and implementation processes such as in curriculum development, longer-term

student and teacher attachment/training in industry and industry involvement in graduate certification.

- iii. Large-scale collaborations: this covers industry participation in the whole process of TVET planning and implementation in which case industry can be a member of the school governing board, assist in curriculum development and evaluation, participate in teaching-learning process either by sending industry experts to teach in school or by training students in industry and involve in assessing and certifying graduates. Close collaboration provides TVET teachers with the opportunity to access information concerning the latest technologies used within industry which can form the basis of suitable teaching modules.

Conclusion

TVET internship involves TVET student or TVET institution's graduate going through supervised practical training. It covers a limited set of skills relevant for an occupation. TVET work experience is very important for a fresh graduate and enacts competitive edge over graduate with no work experience; exposes one to real life working environment and hands-on experience and broadens your understanding of many concepts. In conclusion, adequate TVET internship programmes upgrades the students, improves the teaching-learning activities in the TVET institutions and transfers industrial experience to build school curriculum and assists the TVET policy makers to make appropriate policies that will enhance the execution of TVET programmes. In lieu of the goals of TVET internship, there are very many challenges hindering the attainment of these goals which must be curbed by concerned institutions to make TVET educational goals attainable.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made for quality TVET internship as a veritable tool to

bridge the gap between theory and practice. It includes:

1. Industries and institutions should ensure that students participate internship in their areas of specialization i.e TVET students should not be seen in the banking industries or other industries but should carry out trainings in the industry where they can learn more about their trade.
2. Effort must be made by teachers of technology to link technology theory and mathematical principles to real life activity and associated to the learner's environment. In this way, learning environment will be friendlier and acquisition of skills will be more spontaneous than scientific and learning activities felt than being abstract.
3. Also, TVET institutions should ensure that funds allotted by the government through the ITF should be disbursed to participants of TVET internship to encourage them and others who intend to participate in the internship programme.
4. Industries should be encouraged to always allow interns to have access to equipment and practice the various skills so as to become fully developed technicians.
5. Industries should be encouraged to support students' participation with some token at the end of the month to complement their cost on transportation and some other things as the need may arise.

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