

WINNING THE WAR AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA: IS THERE A ROLE FOR TVET-PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIP?

BY

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Abstract

Today, studies have shown that unemployment has become rampant, and poverty tends to have engulfed most TVET graduates in particular and Nigerian youths in general. However, the quest for technological progress, industrialization and economic development is found to be rather slow and unimpressive. Based on these unpleasant circumstances, the authors decided to embark on this paper titled: 'winning the war against unemployment and poverty in Nigeria: Is there a role for TVET-private sector partnership?' In the paper, the meaning of TVET-private sector partnership was highlighted in detail with particular attention to conceptual clarifications and issues. The need for TVET-private sector partnership is also reviewed in the paper. The role of TVET-private sector partnership for the alleviation of unemployment and poverty was further looked at. One of the recommendations, among others, advanced in the paper is that TVET and the private sectors should build organic relationship among themselves with a long-term strategic intent that would contribute to the realization of the mission and goal of both sectors.

Key Words: TVET-Private Sector Partnership, Unemployment, Poverty and National Development

Introduction

It is generally agreed that the progress of any country and the development of manpower is the primary aim of education. Through education, people are able to develop their knowledge and skills and be better able to survive. This implies that any nation such as Nigeria cannot progress as expected without a good and effective education that is planned to provide the necessary competencies and skills to its citizens for national development. In this sense, national development can be seen as the attainment of economic growth leading to economic competitiveness, high standard of living and self-reliance. This may possibly account for why Aribasoye (2008) remarked that one thing that is certain about national development is that, it brings about change, and

such change in most cases can be achieved through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is an aspect of education that has long been introduced into the mainstream of Nigeria education system. Its frequent usage by a number of countries around the world, including the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is synonymous with the term Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) as used in the education policy document of Nigeria. Consequently, the definition of VTE is similar to the definition of TVET as used in a joint publication by the

UNESCO and ILO (2002) which refers to ‘... those aspects of 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.’ The UNESCO (2005) stated that the aspect that differentiates TVET from other forms of education and training are its emphasis on work productivity. No wonder, Awotunde (2000) viewed TVET as an integral part of national development strategies in many societies, because of the impact on human resource development and work productivity. From these stand-points, TVET worldwide aims at training and mobilizing competent and skilled workforce for technological progress, industrialization and national development, because of its emphasis on work productivity.

Drawing from the experience of industrialized nations, the Nigerian government recently established a number of vocationally-oriented training institutions to launch the country steadily on the path of technological progress and national development in furtherance of its commitment to TVET (Besmart-Digbori, 2011). What is worrisome is that, in spite of the continued efforts of governments on TVET, it has been observed that the programme has not had its desired effect on the Nigerian economy. An investigation into the current state of Nigeria’s economy has indicated that the pace of technological progress, industrialization and economic development is still slow and unimpressive as evidenced by the rising rate of unemployment and poverty in the country (Ladipo, Akhuemonkhan & Raimi, 2013). This seems to also affect other countries around the world, because unemployment far out-weighs gainful employment opportunities. Many youths in these countries seem unable to find jobs, while those who seem to be working are not gainfully employed; in order words they are under-employed. Unemployment, therefore, can be seen as a socio-economic problem of which, people whether trained or untrained, are

willing *Lawrence. E. E. & James E. E.*
employment (Ekpou, 2011). This situation has contributed largely to the problem of poverty among the populace. Poverty on the other hand can be defined as the scarcity of human basic needs or the inability of an individual or a society to acquire basic human needs for survival (Abdullahi, 2011). In support of this fact, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2011) shows that more than 70% of people in Nigeria live under abject poverty, that is to say they are living below the poverty line, while one-third are said to survive on less than US \$1 dollar a day, part of the condition of absolute poverty. This figure includes an army of youths in the urban centres who struggle to make a living by hawking chewing sticks, handkerchiefs, sachet and bottled water, compact disks, among other goods along the streets. The sales-per-day and the profit margin on such goods are so small that they can hardly live above poverty line.

The high rate of unemployment in the country has been alerted further by some statistical reports. For instance, the number of unemployed youths despite numerous TVET courses offered at the tertiary level is put at 68 million (Ministry of Youth Development, 2012). The NBS (2011) points out that 50% of Nigerians between the ages of 15 and 24 and living in urban areas were unemployed in 2009, about 17.3% of those in the age group of 25 to 44 were unemployed in the same year, while 10% of Nigerians in the age group of 45 to 59 and living in urban areas were unemployed in the same year. A careful look at this report reveals that unemployment rates are higher among young youths. Furthermore, the national unemployment rate which was 13.1% in 2000, moved to about 15% in 2008, jumped to 20% in 2009, moved to about 21.1% in 2010, and moved to 23.9% in 2011. Based on this trend, higher rates are projected for the coming years.

Looking at the above unemployment rate closely, one would observe that most graduates of TVET and other academic disciplines find themselves at a cross roads after the completion

of their education. Hence, the quest to attain technological progress, industrialization and economic development seems far from being actualized, because the Nigerian successive governments do not appear to give this aspect of education the required attention. It is a known fact that TVET is starved with financial resources, which has led to poor manpower, laboratories, workshops and instructional facilities. This situation has consequently affected the production of competent and skilled graduates useful for employment generation, poverty reduction and national development.

To address this ugly tide, there is need for Nigerian government to knock on the doors of private sector organizations in an effort to put all hands on deck for the tasks of TVET delivery so as to redeem the country from technological backwardness, industrial shrinkage and economic degradation; on the other hand to win the fight against unemployment and poverty and save our children from a bleak future. Collaboration between TVET and private sector can be seen as an effective strategy to ensure that government remains responsive to national and global economic challenges of the 21st Century. TVET-private sector partnership would represent a powerful tool for pooling core capabilities, competencies and resources in achieving TVET goals on the bases of mutually agreed division of labour. It is basically seen as a contractual arrangement between TVET and private sector that would allow the private organizations to participate in the delivery of capital projects of a defined quality and quantity at agreed price for a specified period of time.

The purpose of this paper is to assess the role of TVET-private sector partnership on the alleviation of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria. It is the researchers' contention that TVET-private partnership would help to mobilize financial resources for the provision of adequate numbers of teaching and non-teaching personnel; curricula that would reflect

private sector technology, standard and practices; a wide range of modern facilities such as the state-of-the-art lecture halls, libraries, laboratories, workshops and information technology services to ensure that students are provided with an environment in which they can learn successfully. Putting all these instructional resources in place would help to fulfill the goals of TVET; that is producing high-caliber graduates, which would further contribute to well-being or betterment of the society.

Concept of TVET-Private Sector Partnership

TVET-private sector partnership is synonymous to, or a subset of Public-Private Sector Partnership. It is clearly distinguished from TVET-industry interaction which involves Students Industrial Work Experience, work visits, teaching practice, or internship programme. Although, TVET-industry interaction sets the momentum for engaging into Public-Private Partnership (PPP) to map out strategies and initiate an integrated approach to TVET for economic development.

The term TVET is seen as human and economic development strategy that inculcate practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge on students for useful living within and outside Nigeria. The private sector is that part of the economy controlled and managed by non-government organizations. The organized corporate entities like Oil companies, communication service providers, financial institutions, hospitality industries, NGOs, faith-based organizations, all falls into this category. Partnership can be described as a relationship between two or more groups. It is understood to be a voluntary alliance that enables the delivery of services and products and within the partnership there is a sharing of resources to add value to the product or service of suppliers and customers. Ideally, it implies a joint problem-solving through sharing of risks, responsibilities, resources and competences for the mutual benefit of all collaborating parties.

The Merriam-Webster (2012) defines partnership as a relationship resembling legal partnership and usually involve close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities. Elaborating on this definition, Abdullah (2012) explains that the key words in the aforementioned definition are 'cooperation' and 'joint rights and responsibilities'. However, for a partnership to be successful both parties have to cooperate with one another and they have to share the successes and challenges that occur over the course of partnership.

By implication, TVET-private sector partnership can be describe as a strategic cooperation in which public TVET agencies and private sector actors pool together core complimentary capabilities, competencies and resources to achieve the set goals of TVET. It is basically referred to as a contractual agreement between TVET and private sector that allows private companies to participate in the delivery of capital projects of a defined nature and quality at an agreed price for a specified period of time. It entails the pooling and combination of resources and expertise from TVET and private sector to achieve goals that add value beyond what either sector could achieve alone. This approach is hinged on the idea that TVET and the private sectors have different potentially core complementary capabilities, competencies and resources, if properly harnessed, can help in the effective and efficient delivery of TVET.

The authors of the 'Hidden Privatization in Public Education' report, Ball and Youdell (2007) see PPP as a term involving the opening up of public education services to private sector participation and then using the private sector to design, manage or deliver aspects of public education. They argued that this idea can help to share and transfer capital costs and some risks to private sector. They asserted that a resolution was reached at the Education International World Congress held at Porto Alegre, Brazil 2004 on 'Education: Public Service or Commodity'. The resolution

reached at that meeting recalled that education is not a commodity, for that reason should not be privatized. Today, PPP in education is treated as privatization. Responding to this wrong conception, Latham (2009) states that PPP in education is not privatization that involves the permanent transfer of control from education sector to private sector. Rather, the aim of PPP in education is to promote the delivery of services without altering the role of one over the other. It can also improve existing services provided by the education sector with an emphasis directed on system efficiency, quality and equity. This assertion seems to be based on the notion that PPP fills a space between traditional method of managing and financing TVET and full privatization.

Why do TVET Need to Partner with Private Sector?

It is a known fact that TVET is a capital-intensive academic venture in terms of human and material resources. By virtue of this nature, Nigerian successive governments have not been funding TVET properly, which have led to poor or lack of manpower, facilities, laboratories and workshops. Governments often claim that it cannot fund education alone especially TVET due to it expensive nature (Adeyanju, Odekunle & Osifila, 2007). This situation has consequently affected graduates of TVET programme as they may not be eligible to take up a good job, due to lack of skills required by employers, nor be able to pursue further studies due to lack of interests.

Research studies in TVET have revealed that unemployment and under-employment have become rampant and poverty has engulfed most of its graduates, as a result finding it difficult to survive economically (Idialu, 2007). The rate of the hydra-monster unemployment in the country despite TVET is 23.9%, while the level of poverty is 72% (NBS, 2011; CBN, 2011). This is also affecting many young graduates of other disciplines because unemployment is far out-weighing gainful employment opportunities (Edokpolo-Nosayaba, 2009).

This situation tends to delimit the relevance of TVET in the competitive education and labour market, meaning that the country at large suffers economically, lacking the necessary skilled and competent manpower for employment and national development thereby creating more social problems for the country.

Today, skilled youths, even medical graduates need to know someone in order to get a job. Unemployment and underemployment situation in the country is not only disturbing but also becoming embarrassing and disgraceful. It has however become a national crisis, which has to be addressed if Nigeria is to enjoy social stability and sustainable development with relative peace and security. It is evident that unemployment is responsible for youth restiveness with disastrous consequence. Olaitan (1996) also reiterated that unemployment can lead to frustration as well as disillusionment which may result in crime or drug abuse in a futile attempt to escape from the pains and humiliation of poverty and lack. Ekpo (2011) further argued that the insecurity in the country: the spate of terrorist attacks, kidnappings, armed robbery, and break down of law and order is not unconnected with the high rate of unemployment, particularly among youths. He also lamented that, it is no humility to see graduates of science and technology selling recharge cards in streets. The problem of unemployment has become worsened as millions of secondary school leavers and graduates of tertiary institutions have not secured gainful employment over the years. Unemployment has posed a serious problem not only to the welfare of individuals but also to that of their families. Many able bodies and highly qualified persons who could not secure gainful employment have remained economically dependent on their parents. This is because they lack the necessary skills and competences to become self-employed and to effectively function in today's world of work. These occupational competencies and skills can only be provided through TVET. As such, the high rate of unemployment,

underemployment as well as poverty among various categories of school leavers has necessitated the need for partnership between TVET and private sector. The reason for this partnership is to overcome the fiscal barriers for procuring new and modern equipment, upgrading facilities and developing staff skills, and curricula that would help to prepare and mobilize graduates for gainful employment and national development.

Potential Benefits of TVET-Private Sector Partnership

Based on the conceptual clarification and the need of TVET-private sector partnership, it is clear that collaboration between TVET and private sector has an important role to play in the mobilization of resources for the effective delivery of TVET. TVET-private sector partnership is the most effective human and economic development strategy that Nigeria needs to embrace for the mobilization of technical workforce for industrialization and national development. In fact, studies by governments, private companies, NGOs and academicians have come to a consensus that achieving and maintaining economic competitiveness as well as winning the war against unemployment and poverty can only be realized, if a good and effective education is offered to all, not just to a selected few (Patrinos & Sosale, 2007). These analyses have helped to unlock the rationale behind the collaboration between TVET and the private sector which falls into three major categories: to mobilize private sector resources for TVET; to empower graduates with the relevant skills for gainful employment; and to generate income capacities for poverty alleviation.

It is hoped that partnership between TVET and the private sector will bring on board the management practices and resources of the private sector into the TVET sector so as to improve competitiveness and increase efficiency. The understanding is that this approach will make TVET expenditure more effective and in some cases will attract financial investment from the private sector.

TVET-private sector partnership can assist in the provision of more incentives that would help to source for the right-caliber of teaching and non-teaching staff and offer a wide range of modern facilities such as state-of-the-art lecture halls, laboratories, libraries, workshops, studios, and information technology services to ensure that students are provided with an environment in which they can learn both successfully and comfortably. Indeed it is in the interest of the country that human and material as well as instructional capacity is well developed on a sustainable basis to enhance labour market productivity as well as create an enabling environment for sustainable development through learning. This resource mobilization for TVET delivery will consequently help to inculcate a solid and lasting entrepreneurship skills and employable skills on students so as to be able to secure employment after the programme; start and grow their own businesses and become self-employed and employ others. Working as self-employed or paid employed persons would help to generate high income capacities for poverty reduction and high standard of living.

Conclusion

This paper has assessed some of the main reasons for TVET-private sector partnership in Nigeria. The meaning of TVET-private sector partnership in relation to conceptual clarifications and issues was investigated. The reasons why TVET need to partner with the private sector were also looked at. The benefits of TVET-private sector partnership were further looked at. Based on the literatures that have been reviewed in the paper, it is obvious that TVET-private sector partnership has a crucial role to play in the acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills for the alleviation of unemployment and poverty, thereby contributing to development of Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the major findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. TVET-private sector partnership should be encouraged so as to ensure effective skill development training programme in Nigeria
2. TVET-private sector partnership should be encouraged so as to provide the needed resources for the realization of the goals and objectives of TVET in Nigeria.
3. TVET-private sector partnership should be encouraged so as to address the rising rate of unemployment and poverty among young youths in the country.
4. TVET-private sector partnership should be encouraged so as to promote the development of Nigeria economic that is found to be very slow and unimpressive.
5. Collaboration between TVET and private sector should be encouraged so as to curb the issue of peace and security in the country.

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