

GRADUATES' SKILLS ACQUISITION AND ITS ROLE IN FOSTERING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

The authors of this paper critically ex-ray the role of graduates' skills acquisition in fostering social and economic transformation of Nigeria. The first discourse centred on the concept of skill acquisition. The second discourse centred on the importance of skill acquisition. The third discourse centred on the meaning of social transformation and the individual. Finally, logical conclusion where reached. Based on the discussions, it was recommended, among others, that governments at various levels should endeavour to encourage and support the higher education institution graduates with reasonable financial resources as this will provide opportunity for them to effectively utilize the entrepreneurial skills acquired to launch new business or entrepreneurial ventures.

Introduction

Today, the world is mounting serious pressure on the need to implement quality education, practical training as well as skill acquisition. Therefore, the role and impact of the skills acquired by young graduates in fostering social and economic transformation of Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. The alarming incidence of unemployment and underemployment among graduates from higher education institutions has been a disaster due to the premature or low level of skills acquired by these graduates. For instance, Ekure (2015) pointed out that the reality of life experienced by Nigerians suggest nothing but the fact that being a graduate is a good thing but the University does not teach graduates how to succeed after school. In other words, the University degree is no longer an instant or automatic ticket to succeed in life. With the advancement in technology and societal development in a sustainable manner, the world today is fast changing and dynamic to the extent that the University degree is no longer enough for success in life. After obtaining the degrees, the University graduates still need to acquire significant skills to succeed in life.

Educational system in Nigeria ought to be structured along with what happens in developed countries where educational programmes are structured in such a way that every child acquires a particular skill with a passion at their formative stage of life. They give priority attention to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) at the primary school level of their educational system. As the child grows, he/she pursues training in line with his passion and possibly builds a career round it. The formation of our educational value system in Nigeria is faulty and, as such, the bane of the issues and challenges University graduates in Nigeria are facing in the area of unemployment and underemployment. Educational system in Nigeria is based on theory, by relegating practical skill acquisition to the background. The number of unskilled graduates turned

out into the labour market yearly by tertiary institutions in Nigeria is alarming and should be an issue of concern to any government or nation that wishes to succeed.

At this present time, the importance of education has not been defined to the University undergraduates and by extension graduates. An average Nigerian child sees education as a means for getting white collar jobs for self-reliance and better living. Equally, an average Nigerian parent believes in the child becoming somebody in life with University education, not caring the course the child is reading at the University level. According to Ekure (2015), no parent tells his child to go for skills or TVET-oriented courses in school. With this consciousness, the child becomes a robot hovering in a psychic prison which must be actualized in order to achieve fulfillment in life. The recklessness of Nigerian leaders, at various levels, now and in the past has pushed away the technical aspect of Nigerian educational system which is even more important than what is in vogue, that is, educational system that is not leading us to anywhere in terms of production of quality graduates and youths' employment.

The tragedy is that Nigeria's educational system has succeeded in breeding a large army of dependent persons whose survival instinct is based on government sustenance because they are trained to expect from the society but were never taught to give to the society. Until the issue of skill acquisition is addressed in the educational system of Nigeria, the challenges of the role of graduates' skills acquisition in fostering social and economic transformation of Nigeria would be difficult to overcome.

Concept of Skill Acquisition

Business Dictionary (2015) defined a skill as an ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic and sustained effort smoothly and adaptively to carry out complex activities of job functions. A skill involves ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical skills) and/or people (interpersonal skills). Ogundele, Feyisetan and Shaaba (2013) defined a skill as the ability to do something well, usually gained through training or experience that is needed while acquisition is the act of getting new knowledge and skill that can be transferable to the job. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2009) also defined a skill as the ability to perform tasks and solve problems. For instance, the Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative (2013) conceptualized the term '21st century skills' as a set of cognitive, non-cognitive, and technical skills. Cognitive skills are basic abilities that people use to think, study, and learn, for example, literacy, numeracy, and the use of theory, concepts, or tacit knowledge, non-cognitive skills refer to socio-emotional personality traits, behaviours, and attitudes (also called 'soft' skills), while technical skills include business, ICT, and specialized skills. Edwards (2008) and Prospects (2010) opined that technical skills are also regarded as industry-specific skills required for the production of goods and services. Edokpolor (2020) opined that 21st century skills can be measured through the skills such as communication, creativity and innovation, teamwork and collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, desirability and feasibility, ICT literacy, social and cross-cultural, learning and self-direction, management and leadership, as well as flexibility and adaptability. The author further added that acquiring 21st century skills would provide opportunity for university undergraduates to generate the financial resources to secure life-sustaining essentials, be a person, and make right choices. Okoye and Edokpolor (2021) further pointed out that skills such as ability to generate new and worthwhile thoughts and implement them into existing products or services; ability to work with teams on business projects; ability to communicate effectively with others; ability to think critically and solve problems; ability to adapt to a constantly changing environment; and many others are required by university undergraduates to be gainfully employed immediately after graduation. The authors also reported that these type of skills can be represented as creativity and innovation skills,

teamwork and collaboration skills, communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, flexibility and adaptability skills, to list but a few.

In view of the above clarification of concepts, it is clear that graduates for the numerous tertiary institutions in Nigeria can create their own jobs or become self-employed by equipping them with the aforementioned skills which can be acquired through higher education programmes. Therefore, skills, such as, those exemplified above can be obtained through education, training or practical experience that will inculcate into the individual how to carry out or discharge effective responsibilities very well with the new knowledge. This is because any work carried out by skilled persons cannot be compared with those tasks performed by unskilled persons. When a skill is acquired in any discipline, it is assumed that the future gains that would result from it are of greater importance in terms of productivity. Accordingly, skill acquisition refers to the process of learning a task or set of tasks with increasing facility. It can be seen as the formation of procedural, as distinct from semantic or episodic memories. Taie (2014) opined that skill acquisition theory is not just a theory of the development of language, rather it is a theory of learning, ranging from, cognitive to psychomotor skills. This skill acquisition theory according to Taie (2014) is based on Adaptive Control of Thought model (ACT). The author further claim that adults start learning something via mainly explicit processes and through subsequent practice and exposure and later proceed to implicit processes.

Conscious Competence Model of Skill Acquisition

Worthington (2001) put forward four stages of skill acquisition in which he referred to as the Conscious Competence Model. This model helps to explain the process by which individuals or learners move through these four stages to acquire a skill and awareness of the different levels of skill acquisition. The four stages are as follows:

Unconscious Incompetence

This is the first stage in the Conscious Competence Model. In this stage the individuals do not know much about the skill they are expected to acquire and they do not know how much they do not know. In other words, the individuals have only a very rudimentary understanding of what mastery of the skill might entail. The individuals will eventually find out that understanding is inadequate. The individuals are likely unconsciously incompetent in any area where they have no experience or whatsoever.

Conscious Incompetence

This is the second stage in the Conscious Competence Model. In this stage the individuals have learned enough about the skill to realize how little they know. However, their sophistication has increased somewhat, so also is their awareness of what it would take to get to a level of real sophistication. This stage can be uncomfortable to enter because they realize how little they know in the previous stage and how much work it will take to progress to the next stage.

Conscious Competence

This is the third stage in the Conscious Competence Model. In this stage, the individuals themselves are able to perform the skill increasingly well but it takes lots of concentration and hard work to do so. The individuals have a better appreciation of what it would take to become an expert and while their performance relative to the skill continues to improve. The individuals are also aware of the need to work at the skill, as well as the fact that they are doing things differently from the way they used to do them.

Unconscious Competence

This is the final stage in the Conscious Competence Model where individuals' ability to perform the skill has become almost second nature. The individuals improve still further at their execution of the acquired skill and have to use less conscious effort to do so. Each of the individual can probably identify multiple domains in which they are in each of these stages. Being in the conscious stages can be a bit uncomfortable but that also provides an opportunity for them to improve on the skill.

Importance of Skill Acquisition

Before Nigeria gained independence in the year 1960, opportunities were available for the Nigerian graduates to become employable. Every graduate had at least three jobs from which to choose. The movement from school to job was automatic. Ogundele, Feyisetan and Shaaba (2013) asserted that it is very pathetic that the story line has changed as there is a disconnection between the world of learning and the world of work. According to these authors, each job that appears in the labour market is now pursued by many old and new unemployed individuals because of the growing population. Datol and Padung (2002) opined that there are increasing fewer occupational opportunities for the unfortunate youths who lack the basic skills and knowledge. By implication, according to these authors, unemployment rate will increase which will be a menace to the society. This will slow down the pace of development because of untapped potentials or talents that are lying idle. Therefore, there is the need for the unemployed individuals to continually learn and/or acquire new skills which would make them to become self-employed by setting up their own businesses and create jobs for others. In some cases, where the few individuals get a job, they are trained to acquire special skills before they can go ahead with the new job. Ogundele (2010) stated that skill acquisition is also helpful for people already on a job or intending to work in any of the varieties of occupations needed by the society. There is no job that does not require its own skill for manpower development. The importance of skill acquisition to tertiary institutions' graduates, therefore, cannot be over stressed. Taie (2014) pointed out that many of the construction companies, manufacturing industries and production industries and so on, are in dire need of trained personnel, technicians, technologists, engineers, as well as other skilled workers. Okoro (1993) stated that many industries need skilled and well-trained workers to ensure that goods manufactured in Nigeria are as good as those manufactured in other parts of the world. All these assertions by scholars implied that fundamental skill acquired by individuals can open many doors for their greatness. A skilled person speaks with confidence, while an unskilled person speaks with fear.

Concept of Social Transformation

Social transformation may be defined as the process by which individuals alter the socially ascribed social status of their parents into a socially achieved status for themselves. It may also refer to large scale social change as in cultural reforms or transformations. The former occurs with the individual and the later occurs with the social system.

The Individual

In relation to the individual, social transformation is considered an interpersonal negotiation because it requires that individuals will have their social position validated by others for transformation. It is a reciprocal relationship in which people have to be embraced and correctly identified with the cultural expectations of the particular class membership. This may also be seen as the only way the persons involved can move from their own ascribed status to a new achieved status.

Skill Acquisition and Economic Transformation

A skill is like a key used to open a door of economic fortune. In other words, a skill is needed in the life of every serious minded person. Skills can do a lot of great work in the life of every person. Skill acquisition therefore can lead to economic transformation just like self-employment can lead to diverse job opportunities and employment generation. Skill acquisition and self-employment can also leads to effective function and crime reduction. Below are some of the economic transformation elements:

Self-Employment

A skilled person is a self-employed person. A self-employed person can never go hungry because the skill he/she has acquired can provide food for him/her on a daily basis. Therefore, self-employment can be defined as using one's acquired skills to startup a new business venture (Igbinedion, Edokpolor & Oyenuga, 2015; Ekpenyong & Edokpolor, 2016). However, anyone who lack skills or possesses low level of skills will find it difficult to become self-employed because they have nothing to offer. Apart from known skills, there are skills like freelance writing, and website designing. People in the two categories use earnings from such skills for their daily bread, instead of indulging in cyber crime. They are self-employed due to the technical skill they have acquired. People are usually hired by many companies on daily basis because the skills they have acquired keep them surviving economically. They are simply bosses of their own. A skilled person can survive in any environments because the major causes of unemployment among Nigerian graduates and vibrant youths is the lack of skills to back up what they learnt in school. When these graduates where still in school, they do not know that they have to learn at least one single or specific skill. A skill like computer card designing, typing, plumbing, electrical maintenance, hair dressing barbing, auto-mechanic, auto-electrical maintenance among others. If they have learnt any skill at all, the rate of unemployment and underemployment will be reduced drastically while self-employment will increase dramatically. By so doing they will succeed in achieving economic transformation for themselves.

Diverse Job Opportunities

People who have acquired variety of skills stand the chance of seizing job opportunities from organizations. Such people are looked for by many companies. They have many job opportunities which they can choose from. They are very mobile and earn a lot.

Employment Generation

Employment generation takes the form of someone who is well-equipped on a skill like electronics repairs who decides to train some apprentices. When these apprentices 'mature' in such a field, they will start earning from the skill they acquired from their master. This is how the newly trained in that field will train other person and employment generation keeps growing in such circle. Likewise, those who have acquired good skills in businesses can make good money on their businesses and generate employment for others by employing people to assist them in their nascent entrepreneurial businesses.

Effective Function

Organizations that employ or source for skilled and competent workers to assist in their organizational duties and responsibilities have many things to gain because the employees will perform their work functions effectively. This is due to the fact that the employees have acquired

necessary skills needed for them to perform the work as desired by the organization. The knowledge they have gained and the skills they have acquired from education and training on the various jobs make them to do the work as desired by the management of the organization. There is much difference between studying a particular ‘course in the university, polytechnic or college and going for training on that course the person studied in school. However, the former is theory and the latter is practical. Training on that course gives the fellow an insight on how to pilot the function whenever he is called upon to do so. With skill acquisition combined with the education attained by a person, effective function is offered to the company he/she works for or is going to work for, if employed peradventure.

Crime Reduction

Skill acquisition reduces crime rate in many nations. People start to think of many dirty activities they will do to make money when they are idle (that is, jobless or unemployed). Like the saying goes, “an idle mind is the devil’s workshop”. But when an individual acquires a skill, he/she works and makes money from his acquired skill. This will make him/her lives a comfortable life for himself and his family, and thereafter becomes self-reliant economically.

Conclusion

The theoretical instructional delivery in the educational system has brought about the alarming incidence of unemployment and underemployment among young youths, adults, and graduates from the numerous tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The need for the educational system to move from the theoretical-base instructional delivery to the practical-orientated instructional delivery has called for the need for young youths, adults, and undergraduates in tertiary institutions to acquire skills that will transform their lives socially and economically. The reality today is that university degrees do not give instant or automatic ticked to employment because there are thousands of graduates looking for the few vacancies available in the public and private sectors of the economy. For tertiary institutions graduates to acquire useful skills and for social and economic transformation of Nigeria to be achieved, there is a need to integrate TVET into the primary school curriculum. As the child transit to secondary school, he/she is able to hold on to a particular skill. At the tertiary level, he/she perfects whatever skills already acquired, in addition to his/her academic qualifications; he/she can then earn a living or a daily bread. At this present time, Nigerian educational system is faulty due to incapability of equipping recipients with the requisite skills to become employable immediately after graduation. This precarious situation has contributed to the alarming incidence of unemployment among young graduates in the country. This is why unemployment has become a ‘dreaded monster’ that needs to be surmounted at all cost.

Recommendations

Based on the review of pertinent literature, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government and all well-meaning stakeholders should endeavour to formulate the policies that would emphasize and support the acquisition of marketable skills from primary to tertiary levels of education in Nigeria.
2. Government and all well-meaning stakeholders should endeavour to formulate the policies that would de-emphasize the theoretical form of instructional delivery in place of practical form of instructional delivery in the Nigerian educational systems. At this present time, too much emphasis is placed on certification or credentialing processed document to the

detriment of TVET skills acquisition by the young graduates of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

3. Governments at various levels and all major stakeholders should endeavour to collaboratively invest financial resources that would help to avail other resources such as qualified teachers and state-of-the-art instructional materials to further equip recipients with the skills to launch their own entrepreneurial businesses immediately after graduation.
4. Government and all well-meaning stakeholders should endeavour to formulate the policies that would help to devise a strategic means of supervising teacher trainees in the industrial training programme because some students do not take the industrial training programme seriously.

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