

PARTNERSHIPS FOR KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION: A PANACEA FOR SKILLS ACQUISITION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This paper focused on partnerships for knowledge production as a panacea for skills acquisition for sustainable development through Vocational Education in Nigeria. Although the government of Nigeria is emphasizing Entrepreneurial Education to promote skills acquisition for economic growth, the government has failed to match it plans with concrete actions by way of financial support and provision of facilities to enhance proper preparation of the learners for skills acquisition at graduation. Skill acquisition is the sole aim of Vocational Education. A survey of some programmes in the Universities has shown that this programme (Vocational Education) is organized without practicals due to lack of facilities such as workshops and laboratories with modern equipments. Students who offer computer education in most cases are not exposed to practical experience. This is applicable to other areas of Vocational Education as well. This paper highlighted other challenges such as lack of implementation of research results in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET), lack of students exchange and linkage programmes in some Universities. Finally, among other recommendations, the paper raised the need for Federal and State governments to allocate a substantial amount of funds in their yearly budgets for proper implementation of Vocational Education programme in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: partnerships, knowledge production, skills acquisition, sustainable development, vocational education, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian government today lays emphasis on entrepreneurial education for skills promotion in different fields for economic growth, reduction in unemployment problem and for sustainable development. This goal can be achieved when Universities and Private sectors begin to engage in partnership for knowledge production. Partnership is an association of two or more persons or organization who agreed to come together for a common interest or for a common economic benefit. According to the partnership Acts of 1890, a partnership is defined as a relation which subsist between persons carrying on a business in common with a view to making profit (Igben, 2004). In the same view, Anyanwuocha (2011) defined partnership as an unincorporated business organization formed by association of two or more persons having similar economic interest who by an agreement, decide to run a business together and share the risks and profit of the business. Following these definitions two or more Universities can decide to go into partnerships or Universities can engage in partnerships with the private sector for academic benefits such as knowledge production,

promotion of Vocational Education Programmes, Capacity Building, Exchange Programmes and Utilization of facilities and entrepreneurial education. The introduction of Entrepreneurial education is timely. Since the white collar jobs are limited, the citizens need to be trained in specific occupations so as to promote self-reliance or be gainfully employed. Entrepreneurial education is the tool for preparing the learner to acquire saleable and life-coping skills that will make the students at graduation to be employable or be gainfully self-employed, also be employers of labour for economic benefits. Skill is the ability to perform a task effectively. Ohanu and Orji (2013) described skill as the ability to do something well and expertly.

Hence, skill acquisition is paramount among Vocational Education graduates. Skill acquisition is the sole aim of vocational education (Usoro, 2016). Skill acquisition as maintained by Udofia, Akpan and Udo (2016) is a process of equipping the recipient with efficient work performance. Vocational education involves the preparation of the students through theory and practical to acquire skills at graduation so as to become self-reliance and saleable in the world of work. Fafunwa (1974) as reported in Akpan and Okirie (2015) noted that Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Nigeria is as old as the geographical entity itself and it was largely run on the apprenticeship system and this was a time honoured device for millions of African youths and adults. On another premise, Joshua (2002) defined Vocational education as a type of education made up of theoretical and practical instructions. The author maintained that beneficiaries are those who wish to be employed in commerce and industry or any type of enterprise that require the use of tools and machinery for the production, preservation and distribution of goods and services. This definition, informs that vocational education can lead to economic growth and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Sustainable development is the persistent qualitative improvement in economic and social life. Usen, Udofia and Offiong (2012) looked at sustainable development as the utilization of available skills to effectively and efficiently manage the resources at our disposal for economic improvement that brings about a lasting solution to human problems such as unemployment. According to Offiong, Usoro and Akpanobong (2014), Vocational education in Nigeria is facing many challenges. Such challenges include; poor funding of the programme, non availability of modern instructional materials, lack of modern equipment and laboratories, e-libraries, clash of Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SWIES) with lecture periods, lack of exchange programmes and negative social attitude to TVET. These challenges have created a chasm between products of TVET and their ability to be involved in vocational education programmes after graduation, for economic growth and sustainable development. This calls for immediate attention and redemption through Universities and private sector partnership if sustainable development is to be achieved in Nigeria.

Partnerships for Knowledge Production and Innovation

Universities partnerships will create an opportunity for generation of new knowledge. Knowledge production and innovation entails the ability to create new ideas or knowledge. It is a way of seeking new methods of preparing the students to acquire the needed skill or students being exposed to an environment where new knowledge can be discovered. Partnership with Universities that have e-libraries will give the students access to learning materials in different fields. E-libraries have become a necessity in this modern time. With

this, Usen, and Offiong (2016) wrote that e-libraries open the way for students to gain new and current knowledge hence it acts as a catalyst for learning. The authors maintained that a well stocked e-libraries must be provided by government and individual Nigerians even those outside the country. E-libraries will give students access to materials to do assignments both theories and practicals. Also it will ginger in students the urge to acquire reading skill for innovative ideas. For knowledge production and innovation, some mechanisms are necessary. These include the matter of shared facilities within the University particularly in cognate departments as well as the possibility of students taking some courses in such cognate departments. This again raises the need for internal readership of research works by cognate departments to ensure cross pollination of ideas.

Partnerships for Promotion of Vocational Education Programmes

Vocational education programmes are school programmes that prepare students for skill acquisition after graduation. It is a skill base type of education that will lead the students to ensure environmentally sound and economically prosperous future. Ajuluchukwu (2013) posited that vocational education programmes are programmes geared towards facilitating graduate employment. Vocational education is divided into seven major programmes which include; Agriculture education, Business education, Computer education, Distributive education, Health Occupation education, Home Economics education and Technical education. This means that each programme with her relevant trade areas will equip the students at graduation with diverse skills in these technical areas to be marketable in the world of work. For effectiveness however, there is therefore the need for proactive action to be taken by the Universities through partnership in order to contribute to proper implementation of vocational education programmes which aims at skill acquisition as confirmed by (Udofia, Akpan and Udo, 2016).

In this regards, certain partnership mechanisms are necessary to be implemented for effective knowledge production in vocational education. Such areas of synergy include Adjunct and Visiting Lecturers who will bring along their diversified talents and skills to enhance and improve students' ability to acquire basic productive and practical skills. These will ensure availability of lecturers for frequent practical activities to enable students be familiar with the tools and how to manipulate the tools for production of economic goods. Also, lecturers who are on sabbaticals will take up courses who otherwise would not have been taught due to lack of lecturers in that area. Equally, students will benefit by having the opportunity to cover all courses in the different areas of Vocational education. At the institutional level, there is the need for a University with wifi network to partner with similar tertiary institutions in a contiguous location for internet connectivity for research purposes. Again, the need for Public Private Partnership (PPP) to facilitate vocational education programme is crucial. This could come through the building of lecture theatres, laboratories and workshops by public spirited individuals, oil companies and co-operate bodies like Niger Delta Development Commission in Nigeria, as part of their social responsibility to the society. Other partnership mechanisms to promote Vocational education include co-supervision of student research works where two lecturers supervise a student's work to contribute their ideas to improve on its quality. The quality of researches again would improve greatly when emphasis is placed on co-authorship rather than sole authorship of research works based on the premise that two good heads are better than one. Another area is on capacity building.

Partnership for Capacity Building

Capacity building involves activities which strengthen the knowledge, abilities, skills and behavior of individuals. Capacity building as defined by Catholic Relief Services (2015) is a process through which individuals, groups, organizations and societies enhance their ability and meet development challenges. In the view of Ukonze, Eze and Olaitan (2009) as cited in Ukonze and Ejifor (2013), capacity building is the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities and resources that people need to survive, adapt and thrive in the fast changing world of technology. It can be the ability of the institutions (universities) to effectively prepare the students to acquire knowledge and skills that will help them to perform creditably in the industry and society after graduation. It can also be referred to the ability of the Universities to train the students to acquire the necessary skills that will enable them bring a positive change to a challenging society. Ajuluchukwu (2013) wrote that capacity building is about the future, a right step towards identifying more efficient use of technology and engaging in collaboration leading to sustainable development.

According to the World Customs Organisation (WCO) (2011) as cited by Ajuluchukwu (2013), capacity building is the activities that improve and enhance an organisation's ability to achieve its mission and sustain itself overtime. Therefore, when Universities are involved in partnerships, students will be properly prepared, their ability to perform will improve as a result of collaboration, contribution or collective knowledge from other Universities. In order to promote capacity building among lecturers, Universities can partner with the private sector for sponsorship of research, seminars, workshops, conferences and giving of staff development awards to lecturers. This will enable lecturers to become experts in the different areas and can help students to gain more knowledge that will make them masters and skillful at graduation. Skill acquisition facilitates increase productivity which will eventually lead to sustainable development. Also, this can be achieved through Universities exchange programme and utilization of facilities.

Partnership for Exchange Programme and Utilization of Facilities

In order to give holistic educational training to students, Universities can go into partnership with other Universities for exchange programme. Exchange programme involves the movement of students from one University to the other for a short period for studies. Exchange programme will grant students the opportunity to interact with students from other Universities to share knowledge, ideas and gain experience. It will also avail students the opportunity to utilize the available facilities for theoretical and practical studies especially where facilities like e-library, modern laboratories, equipment and instructional materials are not available. Usen and Offiong (2016) agreed that there is need to have modern laboratories, equipment and materials in schools. In line with this statement, Okon (2014) as cited in Usen and Offiong (2016) maintained that many educational institutions in Nigeria do not have science laboratories while a good number of those that have do not possess the basic tools and equipment such as microscopes, dissecting instruments and specimens. In addition, on the part of the students, the need to expose them to Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) programme across the Universities become imperative for effectiveness in knowledge production, vocational education programmes and increase competency. Equally, there is need to for Universities to partner with each other to promote entrepreneurial education.

Partnership for Promotion of Entrepreneurial Education

Entrepreneurial education is the tool for preparing the students to acquire skills in business and to utilize these skills for economic benefit and self-empowerment, thereby creating job for himself/herself and for others. Entrepreneurial education prepares the students to become think-tanks for knowledge innovation where after graduation they unfold their novel or creative ideas for economic activities. It can be seen as a type of education that is geared towards molding a person to become aggressive in business with the aim of making profit through skills utilization and employment generation. Jibril (2012) posited that Entrepreneurial education is a carefully planned process leading to the acquisition of entrepreneurial competencies for efficient and effective living. According to Okoli (2010), Entrepreneurial education seeks to provide students with knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings. Partnerships between Universities and private sectors (industries) can promote entrepreneurial education for the benefits of the students. This arrangement will grant the students opportunity to be exposed to new business techniques and even the practicals as it is obtainable in the business world. Students will acquire business skill after graduation and can open a consultancy outfit for self-reliance and job creation for others. In this way, sustainable development will be achieved in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Vocational Education aims at preparing students for entrepreneurial and life-coping skills acquisition. For the students to be well groomed in the different trade areas therefore, intra and inter Universities partnership as well as public private partnership with the Universities become a necessity. This is to promote Knowledge Production, Vocational Education programmes, Capacity Building, Exchange Programmes and Utilization of facilities and Entrepreneurial Education. Since white collar jobs are limited, the citizens need to be trained in specific occupations to promote self-reliance or be gainfully employed and, even provide job opportunities for others. Also, entrepreneurial education will be properly addressed for economic benefits of the citizens, reduction of unemployment problem and sustainable development in Nigeria.

This paper recommends that:

- Federal and State Governments of Nigeria should adequately fund education by raising their annual budgetary allocation to education to reflect the 26% budgetary allocation recommendation by UNESCO. This will help Universities to acquire facilities like e-libraries and laboratories for proper implementation of Vocational Education programmes.
- For knowledge production and innovation, Universities should be involved in internal partnership in readership of research works by cognate departments to facilitate cross pollination of ideas and innovation.
- Universities in Nigeria should go into partnerships with other Universities so as to enjoy diversified talents and skills from Adjunct and Visiting lecturers in an effort to improve students ability to acquire basic productive and practical skills.
- In order to promote capacity building among lecturers of Vocational Education, Universities should partner with the private sectors for sponsorship of research, seminars, workshops, conferences and staff development. This will help lecturers to become experts and transfer this expertise to students to become masters and skillful at graduation.
- Universities should go into partnership with other Universities for exchange programmes and utilization of facilities. This will give the students opportunity to interact in

a bid to share knowledge, ideas, and utilize the available facilities for theoretical and practical studies.

- To promote entrepreneurial education in Nigeria for sustainable development, partnerships between Universities and private sectors should be encouraged, where entrepreneurs are invited to give students lectures on entrepreneurial education. This will grant students the opportunity to be exposed to new business techniques as it is obtainable in the business world.

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