Building Entrepreneurs through Technical Education in Rivers State

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship goes beyond opening a business. Entrepreneurship covers innovative and inventive business establishment. In this era of dwindling economic indices in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular it has become very urgent for our education managers to reappraise the technical education in scaling up viable economic engagements among the students and graduates. This paper therefore has examined the various areas technical institutions of training, especially the Polytechnic system can through technical training enhance graduates business ownership. Emphasis is laid on the point that people should attach business essence to whatever course they study in the school in addition to the academic garnishing. A situation where Polytechnic graduates or other school leavers from similar institutions roam the street after their training leaves a lot to be desired. This paper has identified that students should start their own businesses while in still in school, in line with what that are studying. Recommendations were made on how Polytechnic institutions can operate this phenomenon seamlessly without the usual financial alibi.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Technical education, Polytechnic, institutions.

Introduction

The Long Man Dictionary of Contemporary usage defines “technical”, “as related to detailed knowledge of something involving science, technology, or machines, especially in industrial or scientific work”. The same dictionary defines “education”, as the “the process by which your mind develops through learning at a school, college or university, knowledge or skill you gain from being taught”. Coining from above definitions, technical education can therefore be defined as the knowledge, skill learnt for the purpose of self-actualization.

It is on this regard that the Rivers State Government over the years has supported the Federal Government of Nigeria in recognizing technical education as forming the basis for Nigeria’s technological development, and the need for adequate provisions to develop the necessary technical/vocational skills. However, the success for any educational programme hinges on the availability of adequate number of professionally trained, committed, motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers, as no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers.

In spite of government’s numerous efforts like establishment of more technical teachers colleges, encouragement of universities to mount technical teacher education programmes and even training of technical teachers abroad through bi-lateral co-operation agreements with countries like Italy, U.S.A. and Canada, the problem of lack of adequate technical teachers still persists. This is important because it is through the improvement of technical or vocational trainers that the role of technical education as a tool for self-employment in Rivers State can be actualized.
In this era of massive un-employment technical education has come to play a more conspicuous role. As people who are trained can now practice on their own respective fields of specialization. There are opportunities for training in technical education institutions in Rivers State. The basic courses considered as technical/vocational courses in this study are Agric and allied studies, Business, Home Economics, Engineering Sciences, Office Technology and Management, etc. Out of one of the Federal Government Technical, the state university, federal university in the state (Uni Port), Ken Saro Wiwa Polytechnic, Rivers State College of Arts & Science, Rumuola, Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas, Bonny Island offer various technical courses in the areas mentioned [1].

Technical Education Historical Perspective

The history of technical education dates back to 1865 in Britain where Quinn Hogg began a local effort at training artisans in specific skills. The term Polytechnic was applied to a building in Regent Street London to elucidate the various ‘technical skills’ which quickly grew into an educational institution providing knowledge and instruction in many technical subjects [2]. It is pertinent to mention at this point that Nigeria as a government has not done enough in improving technical education in Nigeria. This charge is laid based on their lackadaisical attitude to Polytechnic education in Nigeria. Polytechnics are the backbone institutions that train technicians and technologists.

The concept of Polytechnics as distinct types of educational institutions in the United Kingdom (UK) further grew out of the report of the Lord Robbins Committee on Higher Education submitted to the Government in 1963. The Policy for these institutions were outlined in a white paper entitled ‘plan for the Polytechnics and other colleges” released in 1966. The Polytechnics were to offer their traditional courses at the Diploma and HND/HNC levels as well as degree programmes. Initially, the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) awarded the degrees centrally for all Polytechnics. As the Polytechnics matured, the Government further reviewed their mission and an Act Parliament granted them charters to award their individual degrees, thus abolishing the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). This is a lesson the Nigerian Government is yet to learn and adopt.

The development of the Polytechnic system in South Africa followed the same evolutionary trend. For example, the Cape Technical College was established in 1920 and officially opened in 1923. In 1967, it was upgraded through the Technikon Act to College of Advanced Technical Education to offer tertiary education in stated field of studies. By 1993 after 26 years, the Technikon Act of 1993 empowered the Technikons (Polytechnics) to offer degrees in Technology (B. Tech, M-Tech and D-Tech) [1].

Importance of Technical Education

Every entrepreneurial venture is geared towards a certain human behavior [3]. Technical Education prepares a person for a specific job. It equips a person with skills and qualities required to do a particular job, such as fashion designing, interior decoration, computer networking, auto repairing, etc. Since local employers are sometimes brought to enlighten the students on the subject, the students gain more practical experience. Technical education promotes self-employment thereby encouraging entrepreneurship [4]. The individual is equipped adequately with the required skills thereby providing the liberty to establish self-owned business. Since there are little or no jobs in the country, vocational education provides employment to people with this knowledge. Technical educational reduces the rate of unemployment in a country. Individuals with technical skills can establish firms where they can engage their acquired skills. With this they can employ people to work with them as well as train them in the same trade.

Technology Education

Technology education is to be considered as the key agent of technology development, either as a way of developing human capacity, increasing the shield work force for modernization, industrialization, environmental development or as a matter
of personnel freedom, developing capability and empowerment. Technology education is increasingly recognized to be central to both the origins of technological development and challenges and to the prospects for successfully dealing with them.

Decision makers at all levels, need timely, reliable access to knowledge generated by technology and technical education to introduce rational policies that reflect a better global understanding of complex technical, economic, social, cultural and article issues concerning the society, and our environment. Technical decision making and priority setting is an integral part of overall development planning and formation of technology development strategies.

Above all, technology education is a human right and, as such, should receive priority in the allocation of national resources. It has become very necessary not to only keep technology education bound to the role of manufacturing skilled manpower but also to economic development and global economy.

In Nigeria, technology education was previously not seen as fundamental for national development, or for the economic development, but for the school dropouts, and other social and political development within the nation and for individuals.

Technology education is also linked to human resources development and that this has an impact on more than just economic growth, but also an impact on the wider development of individuals and societies. According to him, it contributes to:

- Individual creativity, improved participation in the economic, social and cultural roles in society.
- Improved understanding of an individual and heir respect for others, thus promoting social cohesion and material understanding.
- Improvement in health and nutrition.
- Improved chances of economic development.
- Improved technological development.
- Socio-cultural change.
- Democracy and equality.
- Ecological development/quality of life (increasing people's awareness of their environments). From our analysis so far, it is clear that modernization and economic development, depends on investment and appreciation of modern trends in technology education. Adamu [5] investment in technological education and training produces benefits for the individual and for society as whole.

The Use of Technical Education in Enhancing Entrepreneurial Skills

Using information and communication technology is very important in training for self-employment, self-reliance and skills acquisition now that government cannot employ every graduate. This could be achieved through the development of entrepreneurial skills in technology and vocational education through information and communication technology.

Technology and vocational education programme of our tertiary institutions should be directed to focus on enhancing the training for entrepreneurship in ICT so as to be functional in today's world of work and the global economy. In this period of mass unemployment and global economic fortunes, only the best can survive by being self-employed.

The tertiary institutions where technology and vocational education programme is offered should encourage and enhance entrepreneurial skills of students through constant review of the curriculum to reflect the technological changes and emerging technology in today's ICT driven technical environment. Technical educators should involve technological, technical, and business organization, government, NGOs and even successful industrialists in their service delivery to the students.

How to Start a Business

Technical education institutions in Rivers State ensure that technical subjects taught are geared towards curbing unemployment in the state. Actually, the sense behind introducing such technical courses in higher
Technical education grooms an individual in a way that he or she is not threatened by economic depression [6]. For example, when an employee that is technically inclined is sacked out of job with his knowledge or skill can engage in little consultancy.

Vogt and Ajibew [7] said that the best way to test if one can really succeed alone is to consult for people or organizations. If the employee manages to succeed or achieve a good percentage of success, it means he can succeed alone. Consulting for people will enable him to draw a chart for himself. Vogt [7] enumerates that:

- Develop an alternative plan for job or career that will be able to turn to if you leave your current job and.

- Gain new entrepreneurial skills that can be brought to your current job.

These could include marketing skills, product-development skills, planning skills and financial and budgeting skills. An employee would find out that he would have already prepared for a job outside work as the employment world nowadays is insecure, thereby expanding the unemployment world. William Bridges noted in his book, “Creating You & Co., asserts, ‘you will be running your career as a business if you have imbibed the necessary skills’.

Rivers State as one of the major oil producing states in Nigeria has been forced to focus on one-sector economy syndrome. This no doubt has brought about unemployment in the state, as all the qualified people cannot be employed in the oil sector.

Wokocha [1] informs that Rivers State has other untapped resources such as mud, water, timber and it is only technical training in these areas that can help harness these latent resources.

The right business to venture into could be a source of worry to any young technical graduate, particularly in these days of uncertainty in the business environment. No matter how meager the initial capital maybe, the thought of throwing it away to uncertainty has been a major concern. This is the reason why technologist who wish to dabble into business for financial survival (self-employment) need to do a lot of research in their chosen area. It is necessary to approach those that have succeeded in the field for guidance [8].

In setting up a business at all, the first thing to consider is the life span of the business. Computer technologist advises beginners to ask the following questions before starting business:

- “Is it a business that can last for a very long time or that can be handed over to the children?”

- Will the patronage continue to increase or will it decrease by the day?

Patronage is a very vital factor because when a business that is set up with huge capital eventually attracts low returns for the owner as a result of low patronage, then one becomes frustrated which may lead to total business collapse. The question should therefore come to mind of any prospective technologist/technician who wants to go into self-employable business continued, People require the services or products of the company on a daily basis? The most rewarding of business is that it affords the people the opportunity of having what they cannot provide for themselves but cannot do without”.

**Raising Fund to start up a Business**

There is no denying the fact that raising funds to start a business has been a huge set back in boosting entrepreneurship. However there are a lot of ways students or graduates can generate funds to startup businesses.

Polytechnics and other tertiary institutions should set up commercial centers to showcase innovations/products/services to enable the public buy or assess the creations of students or graduates of their institutions [6]. Monies realized from this window should be shared among the initiating student or the institution officer in line with a stipulated percentage amount.
Debelak [9] highlights that people can source money to start business through the following:

- Supply Agreement: He argues that deals can be reached in which goods or services rendered or produced by an individual can be paid for before supply and the balance sum paid up upon consummation.

- Freelance Marketing: In which an interested entrepreneur can market product or service of an established company without being in the company payroll but get paid on commission basis as purchases are made.

- Joint Venture Agreements.

- Technical partner in similar lines of business.

There are other forms of generating funds to access funds which could come from family members and friends [10].

**Conclusion**

Technical education should be seen as the answer to unemployment in the country but only few individuals have taken it upon themselves to engage in entrepreneurial vocational trades. Developed countries like China, Korea and Japan have decided to pursue technical education rather than western education which has resulted in these countries leading in mechanized and electrical device production. While this paper does not suggest that western or grammar education should be discarded, it advocates that entrepreneurship gained through technical or vocational training should be encouraged to boost the economy and the individual earning power.

**Recommendations**

Having looked into the subject of self-employment through technical education or training, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- Rivers State government should not only organize trainings but also provide equipment and considerable take-off funds for these individuals to practice what they have learnt.

- Industries engaged in vocational trade should organize training for individuals to give them practical experience and also provide employment for these individuals after training.

- Lecturers with Technical and Theoretical background should be employed and encouraged to anchor technical courses in Polytechnics and other technical training centres.

- Nigerian Government should as a matter of urgency pay greater attention to Polytechnic and technical education in the country by evolving means of training progression beyond HND in the Polytechnics.

- Banks should be encouraged to play their intermediary role of providing funds to the real sector of entrepreneurship, manufacturing and agriculture.

**References**


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