

Repositioning Technical and Vocational Education and Diversification of Nigerian Economy: Nexus for Wealth Creation and Employment Generation

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Abstract

Employability of individual does not depend on academic qualifications but rather the level of skills acquired and the ability to apply these skills in productive activities. There is disconnect between the skills demanded in labour market of 21st Century and skills generated in Nigeria education institutions. The new labour market demands have caused many graduates with various certificates to be unemployed. Unemployment and the demands of labour market in the 21st Century have force many nations of the world to lay much emphasis on Vocational and Technical education (VTE) geared towards helping the youths and adults to be self-dependent, job creators and employer's of labour. By virtue of Nigeria mono-economy, Nigeria is yet to develop industrially and must focus on wealth creation through diversification of productive base via reposition of technical and vocational education. This paper examined the nature and character of Nigeria Political Economy that is extractive in nature and that also hinders development of productive base and repositioning of technical and vocational education in Nigeria. The paper relied on secondary data sourced from textbooks, journals and periodicals and employed descriptive analysis to establish the trends. The paper recommends among others that Nigeria economy be diversified to lay the foundation of industrialisation and a shift from national cake sharing to development of the productive forces.

Keywords: Political Economy, Economic Diversification, Productive Base, Employment, Technical and Vocational Education

Introduction

The British colonialist deliberately did not introduce technical and technology education because they felt such education would lead to technological breakthrough for Nigeria. Also, at post independent era neither European nations nor United States of America were ready to sell their technology at any marketable price. In spite of import substitution industrialisation policy as a means of technology transfer, not much technology has been transferred. Unfortunately, post independent education system still heavily relies on colonial education devoid of technical education until recent past. In fact, there is misconception that technical and vocational education is meant for less intelligent students and this has discouraged many students going for such education. Also, the government has not shown political will in developing technical and vocational education as demonstrated in weak government policies and poor implementation of such policies, inadequate funding of the programme, lack of basic facilities and workshops, poor power supply in the existing workshops which limit the conduct of practicals, problems related to curriculum of the programme, inadequate qualified personnel, leaders, and administrators.

Nigerian economy is mono-economy, depending on oil. One reason why tens of millions of Nigerians still live in poverty and unemployed is that growth has been concentrated on sectors that are less labour-intensive, such as oil, telecommunications, and banking. Unfortunately, the growth particularly in oil industry has not significantly led to expansion of employment generation because it can only generate employment of about 1% of the population. Apart the observation above, Bamidaro (2003) pointed out that about 49.9 per cent of workers in the oil and gas, telecommunication and cement manufacturing companies are on casual employment. Development of technical and vocational skills that would help in creating entrepreneurs has not being given priority. With Nigeria large reserves of human and material resources technical and vocational education would have created relevant skills to generate employment and reduce unemployment significantly.

Unfortunately, the perception of policy makers and the youth themselves about employment is another factor. To the policy makers and the youth, employment means a job with salary and working

for someone else. Based on this, curricula and training programmes are generally tailored towards preparing young people for formal sector jobs. Since these jobs do not exist, there is often a mismatch between the skills possessed by the job seekers and the available jobs in the private sectors. In this regard, evidence shows that Nigeria must be committed to education reforms.

As a matter of priority, government must encourage the diversification of Nigeria's economy. It is the only viable way to survive the current environment of global economic uncertainty with the volatility of oil price. It is also crucial that government diversify the economy to open all sectors of the economy for entrepreneurs to take advantage of setting up enterprises and creating jobs. Establishment of micro, small and medium industries and employability of individual does not depend on academic qualification but rather the level and type of skills acquired and the ability to apply these skills in productive activities. There seems to be disconnection between the skills demanded in labour market of 21st Century and skills generated in Nigeria education institutions. The new labour market demands have caused many graduates with various certificates to be unemployed. The rapidity of technological changes in the 21st century has made skills from Nigeria education institution less relevant. Unemployment and the demands of labour market in the 21st Century have force many nations of the world to lay much emphasis on Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) geared towards helping the youths and adults to be self-dependent, job creators and employer's of labour. Thus, this paper explored the nexus between technical and vocational education and diversification of the economy in job and employment generation in Nigeria.

Challenges of Developing Technical and Vocational Education and Revamping the Economy

Lack of investable enable environment has been a major challenge to development of Technical and Vocational Education in Nigeria. Even, those who have already acquired various relevant skills under this type of education cannot take advantages of investable business opportunities and are helpless in the face of the following hindrances.

a) Extractive Nature of Political and Economic Institutions in Nigeria

Nigeria political and economic institutions are extractive in nature. Rather than been extractive, economic and political institutions should be inclusive, providing incentives for investment, innovation and a level playing field so that the majority of the nation's population can deploy their talents to productive enterprises. Extractive institutions ensure that the fruits of political and economic activity are shared with the few not by many. However, without political institutions that are themselves extractive, concentrating power into the hands of the elite and putting less constraints on their exercise, extractive economic institutions would not survive. Extractive institution allows the elite to extract resources from the rest of their society. This development discourages innovation and technology development as majority are denied level playing field. The political class creates a much tilted playing field advantaging a small segment of the society, and sometimes even coercing people to work at low wages in occupations they shouldn't be in.

Extractive political and economic institutions do not create incentive for the citizens to save, invest, and innovate. Instead of developing the productive base, political class has restored to extractive economic policies (especially during recession period) of sharp increases in taxation, petroleum price, instead of establishing refineries they restored to importation of petrol products, instead of developing agro-allied industries, raw agriculture products are exported or imported, high interest rate regime, withdrawal of subsidies, diversion of needed funds from productive forces to individuals through political corruption etc. When power and wealth are concentrated in the hands of those controlling state apparatus only those in control of or connected to those in political power benefit from the system. Also, when leaders establish extractive institutions and policies that redistribute wealth from efficient producers to a narrow group, they do not create enable environment for investment, incentive to innovate and level ground for entrepreneurs. Political corruption diverts resources from development of infrastructure that could have been used to develop productive base for economic diversification and development of micro, small scale and medium enterprises via technical and vocational skills acquired.

In 2014 Nigeria was declared the fastest growing economy in Africa and twenty-third in the world. Paradoxically, the economy was growing but unemployment and poverty were increasing. Also, it has been observed that the recent economy growth has no trickle effect on poverty reduction and generation of employment. Arguably, unemployment and poverty seem to be a global trend. However, Nigeria's unemployment situation has deteriorated in spite of economic growth. Economic growth was not inclusive; the economy has grown but development has not taken place (development is measured by standard of living). Kale (2011:9) of National Bureau of Statistics noted that:

the Nigerian Economy performed well between 2006 and 2010 despite the negative effects of the global economic crisis which started in 2007 and continued throughout the period under review. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP), at 1990 constant prices, grew consistently between 2006 and 2010, except for 2008 when a slight decrease occurred. The GDP growth rate increased from 6.03% in 2006 to 6.60% in 2007 and fell slightly to 5.98% in 2008. The GDP grew by 6.96% and 7.87% in 2009 and 2010 respectively. The fall of GDP growth in 2008 was due to the global economic crisis which resulted in a decline of demand for Nigeria's crude oil abroad. This also affected the flow of credit into the country, triggering a crash in the stock market as well as a decline in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

Similarly, he noted that agriculture sector had the biggest share of overall real GDP with 41.72, 42.01, 42.13, 41.70 and 40.84 % in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 respectively and annual growth rates of 7.40, 7.19, 6.27, 5.88 and 5.64 % respectively. Also, communication sector grew by 33.66, 33.84, 34.02, 34.18 and 34.47 % in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 respectively. Its contribution to GDP has remained positive, grew from 1.83 % in 2006 to 4.56 % in 2010. However, he noted that manufacturing sector grew slightly from 9.39 % in 2006 to 9.57% in 2007 % and dropped to 8.89, 7.85 and 7.64 % in 2008, 2009 and 2010 respectively. From statistic above, clearly, there is no interface or nexus between the rate of economic growth and industrialisation, unemployment and poverty reduction in Nigeria.

Beetseh (2012) pointed out that in a recent past revelation by former Central Bank of Nigeria Governor Sanusi Lamido confirms that 25% of the Nations budget was spent on the national Assembly. The big question is how has legislative functions impacted on development of productive base or forces, creation of critical infrastructure, and generation of employment to justify this huge expenses amounting to a quarter of Nigeria's annual budget. This demonstrate that the Political and economic institutions are extractive because economic growth benefited only the political class who are less than 5% of total population of Nigeria.

Scholars have observed that nations will rise when they design and implement pro-growth political institutions that share power (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012), train, educate, and produce productive workers. But they fail when the institutions fail to adapt to the environment or when the powerful political elites benefiting from the *status quo* prevent the institutions from being effective. So, to move forward, the leaders should create inclusive progressive institutions and adopt methods that have been tested by successful countries and adapt them to fit into Nigeria's environment.

b) Non-Diversification of Nigeria Economy

Nigeria is one of the most resource-rich countries in Africa, and its oil reserve is the world's eighth largest, and natural gas reserve is the world's seventh largest. On the other hand, its dependence on export earnings makes Nigerian economic structure vulnerable. While exporting crude oil and natural gas bring in to the Nigerian government over 80% of government revenues and 90% of foreign earnings, only about 1% of total workforce is employed in those sectors and its effect on economic growth seems limited because it has no forward and backward linkage effects.

In spite of above observations, the Nigerian economy has for decades precariously leaned on the fragile leg of crude oil. Consequently, it has had a chequered growth trajectory driven by the vicissitudes of oil prices. An emerging trend suggests that in the last seven years the economy was

growing without job creation and poverty reduction. Garcia, Kohl, Ruengsorn and Zislin (2006), noted that Nigeria's main challenge is diversifying its economy from oil and gas sector towards more labour intensive sectors. Given the low employment capacity in the oil sector, economic diversification is important for sustainable economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction. Diversification does not occur in a vacuum. Mono-economy needs to give way to the productive development of various sectors of the economy. The share of non-oil export in the country's total export earnings has remained very low and it was 1% in 2008 (CBN, 2008), and up 4.8% in 2013 (CBN, 2013). Thus, Edordu and Oramah (1997) maintained that the negative effects from such shocks can be minimized by diversifying export markets.

Developing technical and vocational education is possible way of diversifying the productive base of the Nigerian economy and diversification of export markets. Nwidobie (2014) posited that non-oil exports can contribute to export diversification and serve as a channel for poverty reduction. Repositioning of technical and vocational education means investment in and improving the productive capacity of the economy and its people. Nigeria needs to develop home grown technology as against importation of foreign technology. No developed nation is ready to sell her technology at any marketable price. Dependent economy without solid industrial base cannot create jobs neither can it increases productivity of the poor to generate high income to break out of poverty.

By virtue of Nigeria's mono-economy, she is yet to develop industrially and must focus on wealth creation through diversification of productive base via reposition of technical and vocational education. There is no gainsaying that the productive base capacity of the Nigerian economy is highly under-utilized. The micro, small and medium scale industries especially in agro-based and non agro-based industries that would have led to huge employment and income generation among school graduates and poor urban- rural dwellers have been neglected.

Dependency on natural resources is often referred to as "Dutch disease", whereby natural resources make a country less competitive. Egwu (2016) stated that, what has come to pass for Nigeria is what is known for all oil producing countries: the Dutch disease or what some people call the resource curse. This is also known as the paradox of plenty, the paradox that countries with an abundant natural resources, such as oil, tend to have worse development outcome than countries not so well endowed. In this scenario taste of elites grow and imports overtake export leading to permanent balance of payment deficit and today scarcity of foreign exchange. Again, Egwu pointed out that the whole notion of resource curse is that such nations abandon all other avenues of building a strong economy, for example agriculture, effective tax system, manufacturing, etc. According to him it is not possible for a dependent economy to survive solely on the basis of oil revenue without strong industrial base. He insisted that agriculture must be connected to industry and where there is no strong manufacturing section, such country virtually become a consumption nation. He asserted that manufacturing is a key to economic diversification because manufacturing has huge capacity to put lots of people in employment, raise earning power, stimulates domestic economic growth. Also, there is gradual paradigm shift from cars empowered by petrol to car engines powered by electricity or solar energy. This is compelling reason for economic diversification.

c) Unemployment

Unemployment or joblessness as defined by the International Labour Organisation (1982) occurs when people are without jobs and they have sought work within the past five weeks. The unemployment rate is a measure of the prevalence of unemployment and it is calculated as a percentage by dividing the number of unemployed individuals by all individuals currently in the labour force. Unemployment in Nigeria is defined as the proportion of labour force that was available for work but did not work in the week proceeding the survey period for at least 39 hours. Official figures from Bureau of Statistics puts the figure of unemployed at 19.70 percent, about 30 million, but this figure still did not include about 40 million other Nigerian youths captured in World Bank Statistics in 2010. By implication, it means that if Nigeria's population is 160 million plus, then 50 percent or more of Nigerians are unemployed, Njoku and Okezie (2011) asserted.

Similarly, Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013:288) asserted that National Bureau of Statistics report (2009) reveals that the national unemployment rates for Nigeria between 2000 and 2009 showed that the number of unemployed persons constituted 31.1% in 2000; 31.6% in 2001; 12.6% in 2002; 14.8% in 2003; 13.4% in 2004; 11.9% in 2005; also in 2006 it was 13.7%; in 2007 14.6%; in 2008 14.9%; in 2009 19.7%” (National Bureau of Statistics 2009:238). Also National Bureau of Statistics (2010) noted that the national unemployment rate was 23.9 percent in 2011 compared to 21.1% in 2010 and 19.7% in 2009. The rate is higher in the rural area (25.6%) than in the urban area (17.1%).

In addition, lack of employable skills due to inappropriate school curricula is another factor contributing to the rising youth unemployment. Analysts have argued that in Nigeria generally the skills that job seekers possess do not match the needs and demands of employers (Mcgrath, 1999; Kent and Mushi, 1995). The trio affirmed that the education system in Nigeria has its liberal bias which indeed over supplies the labour market with graduates who do not possess the skills required by employers. Many graduates in Nigeria lack entrepreneurial skills to facilitate self-employment (Oladele, Akeke and Oladunjoye, 2011).

d) The Nature and Character of Political Economy of Nigeria and Development of Productive Base and Diversification of the Economy

Growth and development of a nation is determined by the extent of her productivity and exportation of her goods and services. In productive and progressive societies, creativity is alive in everything they do. The extent of economic diversification would depend on political leaders’ investment of national resources in infrastructure development that lay the foundation of productive base, technological development and innovation. Many Nigerians appear to have entrepreneurial skills; they are very creative and innovative. But the unpredictable and un-conducive extractive political institutions and unfriendly business environment have stunted their zeal. Thus, the challenge of repositioning Technical and Vocational education has been affected by the nature and character of Nigeria political economy.

Nigeria essentially is a consuming nation and not a productive nation. The political economy of Nigeria is characterised by distribution of the nation’s wealth rather than developing the productive forces to create wealth and generate employment. Thus, the control of mode of production is not a factor among the political class but instead distribution of state resources has become the contentious issue. Thus, competition for political power and struggle over distribution of the wealth of the nation rather than development of the productive forces are the main pre-occupation of the political class in Nigeria. Consequently, the politics of distribution of Nigeria resources with little emphasis on wealth creation and non development of productive forces that can generate employment bred serious intra-class conflicts through manipulation of ethnic, religion, regional identities and playing of identity politics. Again this backdrop, the Nigeria state has becomes central means to primitive accumulation and ownership of means of production. In essence, the use of the state for acquisition of private wealth has assumed a great significance because of the tendency of the African state to be partial to those who controlled it. The Nigeria ruling class has practically ignored the development of productive forces and the relations of production of who get what, when and how.

Technical and Vocational Education and Development of Productive Base

Leadership is not about revenue sharing but about moving people to action to create wealth. These actions are possible with leaders who are committed to improving the living conditions of the people. For Burns (1978), transformative leaders have a vision to organize and mobilize people to action. Without retooling the education system and arming the workers with appropriate skills and knowledge, provision of enable environment and without abolishing anti-productive policies and politics that are inimical to economic development and prosperity, Nigeria cannot be transformed into a productive society. Provision for practical application of technical skills acquired from education institutions is the best way for any society to become innovative and creative entrepreneurs (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). It has been observed that the ultimate goal of teaching is to ensure that students

develop a deep understanding of the subject matter and interconnected knowledge and skills they can draw upon when needed (Banks, 2008).

To build a healthy economy, the political leaders must shift their mind-sets from cake sharing to development of productive base by repositioning Technical and Vocational education. That is developing the productive forces by investing in the infrastructure and inclusive institutions that drive the economy and enhance individual and national productivity. Also, the society must empower the youth with the skills and knowledge to take initiatives, conduct independent inquiry, and compete effectively in the global economy. When this done, it would reduce cost of doing business in Nigeria.

The Place of Vocational and Technical Education in Economic Growth and Employment Generation in Nigeria

Technical and Vocational education prepares and develops occupational skills in learners for careers. Technical and vocational education has been an integral part of national development strategies in many societies because of its impact on productivity and economic development. Yakubu (2012), Akpan and Udo (2014) cited in Okwelle (2017) had identified lack of productive and marketable skills as the major causes of unemployment as many youths are not adequately prepared to fit into the productive sector of the economy. However, Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes are generally regarded as a potent force which could be utilized for the solution of unemployment and employability as well as the fullest realisation of the potentials and aspirations of a nation. Also, Inyiagu (2014) asserted that a well-structured TVET system will enable productivity, enhance competitiveness and promote entrepreneurial activity. As earlier stated there is nexus between growth and development of a nation and her productivity. For productivity measure the economic growth of a country. This can only be made possible through development of human capital with necessary skills demanded in the market place. The neglect of technical and vocational education over the years may have contributed to the high unemployment and rising poverty among the youth, because many of them lack the basic job skills. Thus, one way of reducing poverty according to Adegbenjo (2008) is to ensure sustainable job creation through TVET. Consequently, Abdulrahman (2013) noted that technical and vocational education helps to reduce the rate of drop outs or unemployment in the society. Every facet of the economy has been affected by lack of skilled technicians. One of Nigeria industrial policies is the development of local content through a deliberate policy of acquiring technical skills on the jobs under multinational companies. While this is commendable, there is urgent need to develop relevant local skills via technical and vocational education in areas the economy is been diversified.

To link agriculture with industrialisation mechanization of farming requires technical skills that could be obtained in technical and vocational schools. As noted earlier Egwu had insisted that agriculture must be connected to industry for industrialisation to take place and where there is no strong manufacturing section, such country virtually become a consumption nation. He also asserted that manufacturing is a key to economic diversification because manufacturing has huge capacity to put lots of people in employment, raise earning power, stimulates domestic economic growth. The focus of this paper is that there is dearth of skilled technical and vocational manpower in Nigeria and argued that technical and vocational education holds the key to national development. Inyiagu (2014) observed that the world's giant economies known as developed countries such as Canada, Australia, Germany, Singapore and Japan have cuddled TVET and reaped its benefit to become global leaders in all aspect of their enterprise in a very short space of time. Against this backdrop Abdulrahman (2013) pointed out that technical and vocational education helps a nation develop technologically and industrially by producing people competent and capable of developing and utilizing technologies for industrial and economic development. It is a tool that can be used to develop and sustain the manpower needs of any nation. Again, he further stated that the knowledge of technical and vocational education helps in the conversion of local raw materials; this reduces the importation of foreign goods which lessen import dependency and encourage exportation of local products. Also, he argued that higher productivity is a means to better levels of economic well-being and greater national strength. While Haq and Haq, (1998) observed that unemployment rates in the East Asian economies remained low essentially because the

population possessed employable vocational and technical skills. Thus, Nuru, (2007) cited in Magaji (2015) stated that changes in a country's economy is required to prepare young people for the jobs of the future and technical and vocational education have important roles to play in this process. JeanClaude, (2003) stated that there is ample evidence that better qualifications and skills protect individuals from unemployment while macro-economic perspectives show that higher skill level work force go hand in hand with better overall performances and also have positive impact on social capita. Technology unarguably emerged as the dominant factor in determining the wealth of a nation. Harnessing the potentials of TVET for socio-economic and technological emancipation has been in the front burner of many emerging nations. The Nigeria political class must recognize the relevance of technical and vocational education in national development and adopt what works in developed nations.

Conclusion

For Nigeria to be relevant in 21st Century there must be paradigm shift from colonial inherited type of education to technical and vocational education to fashion a local technology that would help in developing the productive forces. Technologically break-through is the foundation of economy growth and expansion of access to profitable employment. The irrelevancy of crude oil and its dwindling price in the world market and high unemployment rate have necessitated diversification of Nigeria economy and development of technical and vocational education to produce relevant skills that would be needed by entrepreneurs who would take advantages in diversified areas of the economy.

Recommendations

- Development of productive forces should be the major priority of the political class not distribution of nation's wealth. Revenue sharing should be based on derivation method.
- There must be political will of the political class to shift the paradigm from colonial education to technical and vocational education to build the foundation for local technology for takeoff of industrial revolution.
- Economic diversification must be taken serious to open up other sectors of the economy for entrepreneurs to advantage of investment opportunities that would be created.
- Political and economy institutions should be inclusive to provide level playing ground for all Nigeria.
- Productivity must be emphasised and measured in all productive activities. Also reward system must be based on productivity.

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