Using labour market information for vocational education programmes in Nigerian Colleges of Education

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Abstract

The paper examines the extent to which Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs in Nigerian Colleges of Education utilize Labour Market Information (LMI) in developing and implementing TVET programs and contends that the current labour market perceives fresh graduates from the colleges as not possessing the requisite knowledge and skills for employment in their areas of training and holds pre-service training responsible. Specifically, the paper alludes to the fact that employers of TVET graduates from Nigerian Colleges of Education (just like their counterparts in other subsectors of education) report that available graduates do not have adequate skills and hands-on exposure in what is required by the labour market in their chosen areas of specialization. The paper believes that the situation has not only reduced the efficiency of the school system to produce the needed generation of workers for the country’s industries but has also reduced Nigeria’s ability to generate employment, create wealth and reduce poverty. The paper concludes that for Nigerian Colleges of Education to meet the manpower requirements of the nation, they would require a paradigm shift that would place LMI management and utilization in the forefront of the burner. The paper contends that such an approach should be based on empirical data on skill gaps in industries that employ TVET graduates and provides strategies for utilizing LMI in the colleges of education. It recommends that NCCE should develop the skills needed to recognize and use LMI in TVET programs, and use demographic data and labour market trends to make decisions about TVET program improvement in the colleges of education.

Introduction

For a little over two decades, Nigerian labour market has been showing deep concern over the quality and number of employable graduates from its Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs (Abelega, 1996). The trust of the concern is that the labour market perceives fresh graduates as not possessing the requisite knowledge and skills for employment in their areas of training and holds pre-service training responsible. Specifically, employers of TVET graduates from Nigerian institutions of higher learning (just like their counterparts at the lower levels of education) report that available graduates do not have adequate skills and hands-on exposure in what is required by the labour market in their chosen vocations (Eze, 1990).

There is also another worry by the labour market; and that is that graduates of TVET produced in Nigerian educational institutions do not demonstrate sufficient entrepreneurship spirit required for success in their trades let alone self-employment! This absence of entrepreneurial skills among school graduates is blamed on the inability of the Nigerian educational system to fathom and include entrepreneurial skills and knowledge in the school
curricula (Abelega, 1996). This situation has not only reduced the efficiency of the school system to produce the needed generation of workers for the country’s industries but has also reduced Nigeria’s ability to generate employment, create wealth and reduce poverty.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE, Rev.2004) posited that the goals of wealth creation, employment generation, poverty reduction, and value re-orientation can be effectively pursued, attained, and sustained through an efficient, relevant and functional education system that has TVET in its proper place and shape. However, the delivery of TVET in Nigeria has suffered from many years of neglect, especially under the military rule. This is compounded by the inadequate attention paid to sustainable policy that will futuristically match manpower production to the emerging needs of the Nigerian economy. As a result, emphasis in education programs and training was placed on theoretical knowledge at the expense of technical, vocational and entrepreneurial education.

The Nigerian government, having realised this obvious flaw, has commenced working on ways to improve the productive capacity of Nigerian graduates through skills acquisition, entrepreneurship development, establishment of career and innovation centres and knowledge based enterprises development. The objectives are to foster an increasing entrepreneurial culture that helps students and teachers understand the fundamentals and feasibility of forming enterprises, to educate, encourage and support Nigerian graduates in their quest to establish and manage sustainable business ventures, including but not restricted to those arising from research.

Even with the current shift in emphasis, very little is down to match TVET to labour needs of society! There is, therefore, a lacuna in the placement of graduates into well-paying jobs that offer opportunity for continued employment and growth.

Labour market information (LMI) is one of the essential ingredients ensuring that TVET programs are targeting viable occupations. Labour market information is data, statistics and research about the world of work and the job market (Alberta, 2009). It tells one about:

- where the jobs are - places, industries and occupations;
- what types of jobs are available - full or part-time, permanent, temporary or seasonal;
- the skills and qualifications people need to do these jobs;
- the number of people looking for work;
- how the job market is likely to change in the next few years; and
- The skills and qualifications that people will need to get and keep a job in the future.
Labour market information summarizes employment supply and demand, wage data, education and training requirements, and other career-related information. Data such as these are valuable for analysing the economy of a geographical area, determining future workforce needs, designing effective programs of study and providing career guidance to students and job seekers. LMI is often the starting point for more detailed occupational analysis and standards development, which in turn are the basis for developing curricula and corresponding assessments.

Despite the obvious role that LMI can and do perform, there is little evidence to demonstrate the use of strategic labour market information in the planning and curriculum development of TVET programs in the country. This situation is true not only for TVET skill development programs but also TVET teacher pre-service production programs in colleges of education.

It is pertinent to note that the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) has the mandate to develop curricula, lay standards, and accredit TVET programs that produce teachers for basic education. Since learners at the basic education level require more of the knowledge, skills and competencies that can reduce poverty among the majority of the country’s populace, NCCE should be first in catalysing the process of change that puts LMI in the forefront of curriculum development for TVET programs. Unfortunately, that is not the case for now. Therefore, it is the focus of this paper to demonstrate how using labour market information, the NCCE can improve TVET programs offered in the colleges of education.

**Current Procedure for LMI Generation and Utilization in the NCCE**

The traditional mandate of the NCCE is to lay down standards and accredit educational programs leading to the award of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) which is the minimum qualification to enter into and progress in the teaching profession. For now, these standards to be met by NCE graduates are encapsulated in a document called NCCE Minimum Standards. Since inception of the commission in 1989, there have been four editions of the standards published by NCCE, in addition to the current edition in press.

Generally, the procedure for curriculum review is the same for all programs offered in the Colleges of education. It consists of a call circular to all NCE awarding institutions, employers of labour, professional associations and ministries of education to submit observed lapses in the existing NCE curricula. Once the datelines expire, relevant program officers synthesize the salient issues in the received submissions to produce highlights of matters
requiring attention in the curriculum to be reviewed. (NCCE Minimum Standards, 2004). The documents so produced become the working paper for critique workshops that follow. The challenge here is that the quality of the working paper is dependent on the quality of the submissions received and the program officer that synthesized the submissions to the commission. Of course, one cannot compare the outcome of such a procedure of curriculum development with one that is anchored on research that revealed the existing LMI.

At the workshops held in 2009 in each of the six geo-political zones, experts, employers of labour and the academia thoroughly examine the issues before resolving on the mode and items of review in the existing curricula. Irrespective of the decisions reached, the outcome of the first series of critique workshops is subjected to further critique made up of experts from universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and captains of industry. The problem with this approach is that the quality of the outcome from the workshop depends on the quality of the attendees, LMI available to them and their experiences on the job.

For now, too few industries exist with some major of success in technical vocational education in the country. This means that the amounts of relevant world-class hand-on skills are also limited. The effect of the ugly situation on the TVET programs offered in the Colleges of education is that, employers of labour perceive that, there is low depth in the variety and value of practical skills in TVET programs currently run in the Nigerian colleges of education.

**Current Strategies for Generating LMI Used in Colleges of Education Curricula**

The major challenge facing Nigeria as a nation has been on getting quality teachers (Afe, 2001). Furthermore, of all the educational challenges that beset the nation, none is as compelling as the one relating to the training of competent TVET teachers who directly or indirectly influence the quality and quantity of services provided to industries. As Fafunwa, (1991) argued, poor teachers tend to produce their own kind; thus, a need for effective teacher training curricula to ensure the production of high quality teachers and educational services in this 21st century.

Since its establishment, the NCCE has been doing all within her capacity to see that the nation gets the best quality of teachers she deserves (generally in all fields of education and particularly in TVET). In carrying out this noble mandate, the commission has been in the forefront in the promotion of teacher education at the sub-degree level in the country. In the matters of admission policy, for example, the commission structured her policy on admission into colleges of education in favour of TVET, science and technology. In addition to the statutory roles of NCCE, the commission holds tenaciously to the philosophy that the strength of any durable system lies in solid and firm foundation in teacher education. The philosophy
motivates the commission to prepare academic programmes that ensure a smooth transition from basic education to post–basic education in teacher education. The commission perceives post–basic education as a means to improving the quality, quantity and equitable access to TVET, science and technology education as a means to enhancing the country’s competitiveness in the emerging global economy (Abelega, 2010) The commission’s perception underlying the post-basic education is to support the emergence of teachers who are capable of producing graduates in TVET, science and technology that can competently work to ensure science and technology – driven economic growth that is sustainable through quality TVET.

To achieve this orientation in TVET teacher education, several strategies for generating LMI are adopted by the commission to engender sustainable quality TVET in colleges of education across the nation. These strategies include:

1. **Collaborative efforts in lying down and Reviewing Minimum Standards for all Colleges of Education.**

   For purposes of laying down minimum standards, the commission adopts a collaborative approach for the generating of LMI whereby universities which make varying scholastic demands on the NCE programme are involved. Similarly, due recognition is also given to academic and professional expertise that exists in the colleges of education, polytechnics and other NCE awarding institutions. Experts from these institutions, industries that utilize TVET graduates and other stakeholders form the majority of the participants that serve in the panels that draws up the draft documents, as well as those who participate in the NCCE minimum standards workshops that are hosted in different colleges across the country by the commission.

   The evolution of NCCE Minimum Standards in TVET programs begins with a call by the National Commission for colleges of education to stakeholders to submit proposals in the areas requiring change or deficiencies in the existing NCE - TVET curriculum. These submissions are then collated by the academic programs department and used as working papers for NCCE Minimum Standards Review workshops at different levels. At first level, the outcome of the workshop produces drafts minimum standards document from subject panels. These drafts are subjected to a critique in a second stage review workshop attended by resource persons from industries, the universities, polytechnics and Colleges of Education.

   Deliberations at the workshop could result in a modification of the draft NCCE Minimum Standards in terms of contents and course description. At this workshop also, attention of participants could be drawn to the aspects of teacher education which need urgent evaluation. From these efforts, it is possible to evolve a curriculum that will not only guarantee parity among colleges of education but also meet the yearnings and aspirations of the wider Nigeria society. Additionally, the approach is a veritable strategy in assisting NCE graduates in transiting into B.Ed. degree programs in the university without problems.
2 Accreditation of Academic Programs in the College Of Education.

As intended for all tertiary institutions in Nigeria, accreditation of NCE TVET programs in the Colleges of education by the NCCE is for quality improvement and to ensure that there is parity in all NCE programs in accordance with the set standards. As a LMI strategy, the focus of accreditation is to:

a. guarantee that the specific NCCE Minimum Standards for the award of NCE TVET is not only attained but it is enhanced and sustained by all NCE awarding institutions;
b. validate the quality of NCE graduates with respect to their areas of specialization as perceived by experts and captains of industries; and
c. Certify to the employer and community that TVET programs in the Colleges of education are of desirable standards and their graduates are adequate for employment and further studies.

3. Monitoring of Academic of Programs and Infrastructure

This is a strategy by the Commission to ensure that the guidelines specified in the NCCE Minimum Standards documents are closely followed. During the monitoring exercise, the Commission determines whether and how the educational objectives of the institution are achieved in line with the published NCCE guidelines. At site visits by program officers, judgment is made about the objectives of the program, admission requirement and their implementation, physical facilities, personnel, mode of teaching, as well as the application of graduation requirements in the institution. Decisions about the above parameters inform the commission on the desirable academic status in between the accreditation exercise of the institution.

4. Ranking of the NCE Awarding Institution on the Aggregate Quality of TVET Program

Another strategy introduced by the commission to bring about quality assurance in NCE Teacher Education and encourage healthy competition among the colleges is the ranking of Colleges of Education on the basis of aggregate quality of their TVET programs. Following this strategy, a total of aggregate scores of TVET programs offered by each NCE awarding institution is compiled and computed as the sum of the individual scores in each of the assessed program. The product of this computation yields mean quality index score which provides a conglomerate quality measure of the general strength of the NCE TVET programs offered by the institution. The result of this analysis and standing of each NCE awarding institution is then publicized.

As expected, this approach to quality assurance has introduced the spirit of competition that has encouraged the colleges to compete for enviable positions in the ranking which is not only necessary for quality improvement but it is also a balm for quality assurance to the Nigerian public. At least for now, parents, students, proprietors and other stakeholders have a ready document to consult for their quality assurance needs in NCETVET Teacher Programs in the country.
5 External Moderation System
A major consideration in any quality assurance process in education, globally, is the issue of parity. Parity in educational programs is essential because stakeholders in the educational enterprise wish to be assured that a given level of education under one setting is the same as that which is undertaken in another setting provided it is the same level of education.

One way the commission is able to achieve this; in the colleges of education system is to institute a veritable External Examination system. Under the arrangement, experienced and professionally qualified senior academic staff is made to moderate examination of all NCE awarding institutions across the nation. Thereafter, reports on the moderated papers are sent to the commission (and the respective institutions) which guides decisions about quality and the certification of the affected schools.

6. Guidelines for Establishment and Mounting New Programs

Another strategy for generating LMI by the commission is lying down of guidelines for establishing new institutions and mounting new TVET programs. Under normal situations, consideration of a new program comes after an accreditation exercise. In order to obtain approval for new programs or to establish a new institution, such institution must be able to:

(a) Provide a justification for the new program in line with the National Policy on education (NPE Rev 2004);
(b) Indicate sources and projection of students’ intakes;
(c) Provide the curriculum (if the program is not in the minimum standards);
(d) Show evidence that it possess the teaching personnel for the program; and
(e) Provide the requisite facilities for the program
(f) Show how the college has taken into account existing labour market information in conceptualizing and developing the program

Until these conditions are examined and found to exist in an institution, no new program or institution is approved to run an NCE TVET program.

How to Use Labour Market Information as a strategy to improve Vocational Education and Training

Labour market information can be overwhelming and confusing (Alberta, 2009), therefore, learning what it is and how to use it can help the trainer to train or educate for the existing jobs in society. Labour market information tells one about:

• What jobs and skills employers are looking for
• Which industries are hiring
• Where to find employers who are hiring
• What working conditions are like for specific industries
• What education and training are needed for specific jobs
• What factors can stop prospective employees from getting a job
Which job areas are growing in the future. Source?

Worthwhile strategies for LMI would require that a training regulatory agency like NCCE would:

- Establish systems to formulate, co-ordinate monitor and evaluate employment Policies being implemented in TVET;
- Establish Labour Market Information and Statistics System;
- Promotion capacity building in employment and development policy making and implementation for top officials; and
- Introduce data bases on job vacancies.

Harvesting Labour market information for improved TVET in colleges of education should, therefore, cover the principal elements of the labour market and its operations. The principal elements are the demand for labour and the supply of labour. Demand means the number of jobs available while supply tells one the number of people who are able to work. This information should be organized by time periods, sector, industries, geographic areas etc.

The labour force is the number of people available to work. These numbers should be broken down by, age, gender, ethnic background, education level and skills, etc. Unemployment happens when there are more people (who want to work) than jobs. It is, therefore, desirable for NCCE to base TVET training programs in the colleges of education on available and potential areas of need in the foreseeable future.

Generally in using LMI, NCCE should ask questions that clarify the direction of TVET skill needs in society. Asking question will often lead to other questions which would move one closer to desired objective. For example, if the LMI available in TVET discusses themes in a general way, ask questions like:

- How will this general trend impact the local economy?
- What opportunities might be created as a result?

If TVET skill need in an occupational area is going to be based on a prediction by an author, ask yourself:

- What are they basing their prediction on?
- Have they missed important information that would have changed their prediction?
- Is it clear how they moved from the present to the future?
- Are their predictions believable?
- Are there known interest that might have biased the prediction?

Look for facts in the cloud of LMI. Choose your sources carefully for up-to-date answers. Check the date for information and be sure it is very current. Consult many labour market information sources. Some sources may provide very general pieces of information; therefore you need to seek clarifications elsewhere. Generally, there are many LMI sources. They fit into three broad categories: verbal or networking, print and electronic, including the internet.
While several sources of LMI are available for a functional TVET program, curriculum experts agree that the ease with which a source opens itself to information gathering process, types of LMI required preference of the user, ease of understanding of LMI generated and reliability of the source of LMI play major roles in choosing the source of LMI to use.

Conclusion

The paper examined how NCCE uses labour market information to improve TVET in the colleges of education. It contends that despite the obvious role that LMI can and do perform, there is little evidence to demonstrate the use of strategic labour market information outside the traditional approach of inviting TVET experts and stakeholders to a curriculum review conference for the purpose of curriculum development of TVET programs in the Nigerian colleges of education. This situation is true not only for TVET skill development programs but also TVET teacher pre-service production programs in colleges of education. The paper believes that such an approach should be complemented with empirical data on skill gaps in industries that employ TVET graduates and provides strategies for utilizing LMI in the colleges of education. It recommends that NCCE should develop the skills needed to recognize and use LMI in TVET programs, and use demographic data and labour market trends to make decisions about TVET program improvement in the colleges of education.

References


