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Promoting Quality Apprenticeship and Skills Acquisition for Sustainable National Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this Study was to investigate the apprenticeship and skills acquisition programmes for sustainable national development in Nigeria and how they can be promoted. To facilitate generation of data, the Study explored the following: Vocational skills obtainable at the Skills Acquisition Centers, availability of equipment and facilities, the impact of skills acquisition on national development and the operational challenges of skills acquisition in Nigeria. This study is a descriptive survey. For the purpose of this study, six skills acquisition centers in Benin City, Edo State were used. Target population of the Study consisted of all the apprentices at skills acquisition centers in Edo State while 60 respondents were randomly selected from the skill acquisition centers. Four research questions were formulated to guide the study. The main instrument used was the questionnaire. The instrument was designed, developed and validated. Data gathered were analyzed using the mean statistics. Findings showed that prominent skills are being acquired by the youths which have significantly helped them in reducing poverty and therefore reduce some societal vices; making the youths self-employed and self-reliant. The study also revealed that the facilities and equipment needed for effective and efficient training at the centers are not adequate while skills acquisition has been found to have significant role in national development which includes job creation, wealth creation, and reduction in human trafficking, youth empowerment, amongst others. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that more skills acquisition centers be opened to accommodate more trainees, stipends should be given to trainees as motivation; government should provide equipment and facilities for the training centers amongst others.

INTRODUCTION

Skills and knowledge are driving forces of economic growth and national development for any country. Countries with higher levels and better standards of skills adjust more effectively to the challenges and opportunities in domestic and international job markets (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneur, India, 2015). Lack of acquisition of vocational skills on the part of youths has been a bone of contention in the socio-economic/national development of many African countries, including Nigeria. Economy has to do with what and how to produce, and who to produce; who to produce typically involves the skills acquired by the individual which can either be acquired in a formal or informal settings (Adavbiele, 2010).

In Nigeria, the school has become the primary means of preparing the young people for skills acquisition and for the future. As noted by Chigunta (2002), most institutions of learning are currently going through crisis in Africa, including Nigeria. Here, the term institutions of learning refer to the educational system in all its forms and levels, especially from primary up to senior secondary school level. The educational system that operates since independence in Nigeria places much emphasis on theoretical knowledge rather than acquisition of vocational skills which prepares the individuals to be

skillful and productive in the society. Nigeria experience has revealed that there is over-production of persons with little or no relevant vocational and sellable skills (Oli, 2000). A good number of students who have completed their secondary education, but failed to secure admission into institutions of higher learning are in dilemma. This is because they are not equipped with the necessary skills for self or paid employment (Opuwill, 2003).

In the frantic effort to seek a way out of the problem of skill shortages in Nigeria in 2008, the Federal Government constituted a committee known as the "Chukwuma Committee" to consider appropriate strategies for dealing with the mass unemployment problem in the country under the auspices of the Ministry of Employment, Labour and Productivity (Akpan, 2008). Implementation of the Committee's report was to bridge the gap between theoretical and vocational skills for educated and semi-illiterate personnel. This eventually led to the institution of the national employment and vocational skill training and development programme and the establishment of skills acquisition centers. The scheme was specifically designed to promote acquisition of vocational skills and facilitate the spirit of creativity, self-relevance and independence to promote gainful self - employment. Vocational skills training and acquisition have continued to receive greater attention though with some constraints.

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In spite of the efforts by the federal and state governments in ensuring that individuals possess skills for employment, it is not quite certain whether the programme has adequately promoted the skills desired for the Nigerian youths. The symbiotic relationship between industrial development and availability of relevant skilled individuals emphasizes the need for possession of relevant skills. Coupled with advancement in technology and the knowledge-based economy which has brought in its stride globally, new geopolitical relationships, increased market competition and a flurry of activities, the demand for highly skilled workforce has become acute. Consequently, acquisition of relevant skills by citizens of nations is stressed as one of the critical factors for industrial and by extension, economic development. For any nation in search of high level of industrialization to succeed, provision of relevant skills must be given serious consideration (Adavbiele, 2010).

It follows therefore, that as part of the key indices necessary for adequate national development, ability for improvement and sustenance of socio-economic development must be predicated on development of competent skills. This should be followed by establishment of structures and processes for transferring such skills and competencies from one group of workers to another and from one generation to another, through a process known as apprenticeship (Adavbiele, 2010).

An 'apprentice' is a person being trained or working on the job while learning a trade and has an apprenticeship contract with an employer while 'apprenticeship' is a system of training a new generation of practitioners of a trade or profession with on-the-job training and often some accompanying study either in the classroom work or reading (Gwengwe and Mutenga, 2015). Apprenticeship also enables practitioners to gain a license to practice in a regulated profession. The authors further stated that 'formal apprenticeship' is a formal training arrangement between an employer and an apprentice that allows for a combination of paid work and structured training with a registered training board with training contracts signed by both apprentice and employer. The apprentice is paid according to the agreed salary/wage and must be at or above 18 years of age. Training contracts can only be terminated or suspended with the approval of the accreditation board. 'Informal apprenticeship' is seen as informal system of skills transfer from a master craftsman to a young apprentice who acquires skills by way of observation, imitation and repetition while working with the master craftsman. The apprentice and master craftsman conclude a training agreement that is established by the trade association. 'Master crafts persons' are highly skilled workers who can work independently without guidance and who are formally or informally trained. They are often the owner of the enterprise and are responsible for training of apprentices, who in the process acquires skills for paid and self-employment.

According to Okoro in Hime (2003) and Kpanja (2003),

it was confirmed that apprenticeship was the method of vocational skills acquisition and training before establishment of vocational and technical schools. Hime further maintained that due to inadequate vocational and technical schools, apprenticeship system still supplies the bulk of Nigeria's skilled and semi-skilled workers, a situation which has necessitated acquisition of skills.

Skill acquisition has been defined by Idoko (2014) as the form of training by individuals or group of individuals which leads to acquisition of knowledge for self-sustenance. It involves the training of people in different fields of trade under a legal agreement between the trainers and the trainees for certain duration and under certain conditions. Ochiagha in Idoko (2014) defined skill acquisition as the process of demonstrating the habit of active thinking or behaviour in a specific activity. The author further stated that skill acquisition is seen as the ability to do or perform an activity that is related to some meaningful exercise, work or job and maintained that for skills to be acquired, appropriate knowledge, attitudes, habits of thought and qualities of character are learnt to enable the acquirer develop intellectual, emotional and moral character which prepare him or her for a brighter future. Skills acquisition has become so much relevant for the development of any nation.

According to Okorie and Ezeji in Magnus (2015), the acquisition of the requisite skills is a means of increasing the productive power of any nations. Consequently, the authors added that the Nigerian society should recognize the fact that every citizen should be equipped to contribute effectively to the welfare of the country. The acquisition of such practical skills is important because when efficient and skillful individuals are employed in any fields of human endeavours, high productivity is usually achieved. Economically, maximum skills acquisition by students and others will help to enrich the Nigerian society and in this way, tend to make possible sustainable national development. Nigeria as a nation will enjoy sustainable development if students in particular and all others acquire maximum skills and competencies in their respective specialties.

Furthermore, politically, practical skills acquisition tends to promote personal and national greatness. Okorie and Ezeji in Magnus (2015) pointed out that the behaviour of an individual in a society or the behaviour of a nation in a community of nations may be influenced by the skills and competencies possessed by that individual or nation. Socially, the acquisition of maximum skills helps a person to provide amusement, happiness, love, affection and enjoyment to other individuals as well as the entire nation at large. It also helps to reduce criminal activities such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and other social vices among the youths. To the students, maximum skills acquisition helps them to be engaged in productive work either for themselves or for employers of labour. This enables students to qualify for and hold productive employment as well as increases their productivity and earns more remuneration. Other importance of acquiring maximum

skills and competencies includes: it reduces the drop-out rates among the Nigerian youths.

Various programs have been initiated in the past by both military and civilian administration and corporate bodies in Nigeria aimed at skills acquisition, self-reliance, job creation, poverty eradication, food security, wealth creation, youth empowerment and reduction of crimes in the society. The success rate of these programmes could be best imagined than discussed. The relevance of skills acquisition cannot be relegated in any nation. There is a great need to develop skilled personnel to update relevant skills to meet the requirements in the world of work. Looking at skills acquisition from industrial development, there is need for training programmes for persons of all working ages to help meet demands for new skills and adaptation to changes in industrial structure. The graduates of different fields are roaming the streets of Nigeria as a result of lack of entrepreneur, technical and vocational skills necessary for employment as skilled personnel. Okorie (2000) made it clear that the country's strive for industrial development also means that more well trained managers and technicians are needed to manage adequately the problems which are likely to arise mainly because of shortage of personnel with long industrial experience.

In recognition of the facts that skills acquisition is key to national development, Research and Curriculum Development Department (R & CDD) (2014) reported that successive Nigerian Governments have put in place several policies, strategies and programmes and also established many agencies aimed at assisting citizens to acquire employable skills to become economically stable. Among the agencies include the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). Many Schemes have also been initiated to reduce poverty rates and create wealth amongst which are National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (SEEDS), Local Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (LEEDS), New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and a host of others. Moreover, Private individuals and Faith Based Organizations have also been provided the enabling environment to establish Skills Acquisition Centers to assist individuals acquire relevant vocational and technical skills.

Unfortunately, it is upsetting to note that in spite of all the efforts, skill level has not been adequately enhanced; neither has Skill-Gaps been bridged nor expected jobs created as unemployment is still bedeviling the country.

In support of the view to obtain needed skills by individuals, one of the National Educational Objectives stated that the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical are important for all Nigerians to live and contribute to the development of the society (Federal Republic of Nigeria - FRN 2004). Consequently, the National Policy on Education (2004) states that the Nation's educational activity should be

centered on the students in order for them to acquire maximum skills for self-development and fulfillment in the labour market.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the quality of apprenticeship and skills acquisition programmes for sustainable national development. Specifically the study sought to:

1. Identify various skills obtainable at skills acquisition centers in Benin City
2. Investigate availability of equipment and facilities at skills acquisition centers in Benin City
3. Examine the impact of skills acquisition in national development
4. Identify the challenges of the operation of skills acquisition centers in Benin City

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to facilitate the study:

1. What are the various skills obtainable at skills acquisition centers in Benin City, Edo State?
2. How adequate are equipment and facilities at skills acquisition centers in Benin City?
3. How do skills acquired at the training centers impact on national development?
4. What are the operational challenges faced at skills acquisition centers in Benin City?

METHODOLOGY

The study was to elicit information on the policy initiatives in promoting quality apprenticeship and skills acquisition for sustainable national development, using descriptive survey design method. The main instrument used was the questionnaire which was developed and validated by two experts. The case study comprised six (6) skills acquisition centers across Benin City and this was obtained from the Ministry of Women Affairs, Youth and Social Development, Edo State. Through the use of random sampling technique, a population of 60 respondents was administered questionnaire. Responses were provided for the questionnaire in a four point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, and strongly disagreed). The detail, which includes their mean ratings are as follows: 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively and giving a mean benchmark of 2.50 on which decision was taken.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In analyzing the data collected from the 6 skills acquisition centers, the mean statistical technique was used because of the heterogeneous nature of skills acquisition centers in Benin City. The mean responses from each of the skills acquisition centers were rated. A mean response equal to or greater than 2.5 from the respondents was considered as agreed, while a mean rating less than 2.5 as disagreed. Tables 1 to 4 contained a summary of the results in line with the four questions raised for the study.

Research Question 1: What are the various skills obtainable at skills acquisition centers in Benin City? Table 1 clearly indicates all the skills that are obtainable by the respondents from the six (6) skills acquisition centers. Respondents agreed that the skills mentioned

above are available for learning at the acquisition centers. These are the 25 prominent skills that are currently on the programme in the six training centers in Benin City chosen for this study.

Research Question 2: How adequate are equipment and

Table 1: Mean Rating of Respondents on the Skills Obtainable at Skills Acquisition Centers in Benin City.

No	Item	Mean	Decision
1	Building drawing skills (manual and computer)	3.431	Agreed
2	Barbing skills	3.765	Agreed
3	Domestic electric wiring	3.37	Agreed
4	Brick and block Laying skills	3.314	Agreed
5	Carving skills	3.324	Agreed
6	Food processing and packaging	2.5	Agreed
7	Bakery skills	3.431	Agreed
8	Carpentry and Joinery skills	3.11	Agreed
9	Hair dressing skills	3.039	Agreed
10	Tailoring skills	3.373	Agreed
11	Iron and welding skills	2.52	Agreed
12	Interior and exterior decoration skills	3.38	Agreed
13	Skills for poultry birds and eggs	3.231	Agreed
14	Tie and dye skills	3.51	Agreed
15	Painting skills	3.331	Agreed
16	Plumbing skills	2.622	Agreed
17	Skills for fixing tiles	2.884	Agreed
18	Skills for leather work	3.412	Agreed
19	Pomade making skills	3.223	Agreed
20	Perfume making skills	2.767	Agreed
21	Skills for book binding	3.556	Agreed
22	Photography skills	2.509	Agreed
23	Shoe making skills	3.689	Agreed
24	Soap making skills	3.721	Agreed
25	Skills for fish farming	2.510	Agreed
Criterion mean = 2.50 on a 4-point scale			

facilities at skills acquisition centers in Benin City? From Table 2, respondents agreed to four suggested variables on availability of Facilities and Equipment at the Skills Acquisition Centers and disagreed to four items as well. The

table shows that machines for practical, power supply, safety devices, and materials for practical are not adequate at Skills Acquisition Centers. Furthermore, availability of “Training Equipment” is the highest with mean score of 3.48 followed

Table 2: Mean Rating of Respondents on the Availability of Equipment and Facilities at Skills Acquisition Centers in Benin City

No	Item	Mean	Decision
1	Adequate training workshops	3.27	Agreed
2	Equipment for training available for use	3.48	Agreed
3	Machines for practical adequate	2.01	Disagreed
4	Tools for practical always available	3.15	Agreed
5	Power supply (BEDC and Generator) available for use	2.2	Disagreed
6	Personal protective equipment are available	2.71	Agreed
7	Safety devices such as fire extinguisher, etc are available	2.1	Disagreed
8	Materials for practical are always available	2.41	Disagreed

by availability of “Training Workshop” with mean score of 3.27. This indicates that the skills acquisition centers are not performing badly in these areas

Research question 3: How do skills acquired at the training

centers impact on national development?

Table 3 shows that out of 18 items, respondents agreed on 13 and disagreed on 5. This shows that skill acquisition has impacted on the nation’s development

Table 3: Mean Rating of Respondents on the Skills Acquisition Impact on National Development.

No	Item	Mean	Decision
1	Job creation	3.431	Agreed
2	Self -reliance and self -employment	3.765	Agreed
3	Income generation	3.37	Agreed
4	Contribute to tax accumulation	2.314	Disagreed
5	Existence of small scale business	3.324	Agreed
6	Crime reduction through job creation	2.2	Disagreed
7	Increase in productivity through small scale business	3.431	Agreed
8	Reduction in pressure for quest for payable jobs	2.11	Disagreed
9	Increase in Gross Domestic Product of the country	3.039	Agreed
10	Reduction in presence of street youths and bad gangs	2.373	Disagreed
11	Youth empowerment	2.52	Agreed
12	Preparation of the youths for their future	3.38	Agreed
13	Strong economy due to youth empowerment	3.231	Agreed
14	Improved standard of living due to income generation	3.51	Agreed
15	Reduction in importation.	3.331	Agreed
16	Export of products contributes to National earnings.	2.622	Agreed
17	Reduction in human trafficking	3.51	Agreed
18	Protection of national image	2.421	Disagreed

question 4: What are the operational challenges faced at skills acquisition centers in Benin City?

Table 4 shows that out of 12 items listed, respondents disagreed on two and agreed on 10 items. This indicates

that skill acquisition programmes are faced with so many challenges that need immediate attention both from government and non-governmental organizations in Nigeria.

Table 4: Mean Rating of Respondents on the Availability of Equipment and Facilities at Skills Acquisition Centers in Benin City

No	Item	Mean	Decision
1	Poor funding affects the development of skills	3.131	Agreed
2	Inadequate motivation for the trainees	2.765	Agreed
3	Lack of machines and hand tools to practice the skills acquired	3.101	Agreed
4	Poor access of trainees to loan	2.514	Agreed
5	Illiteracy affects skill acquisition and development	3.324	Agreed
6	Inadequate human labour at the training centers (Instructors)	2.5	Agreed
7	Poverty in the society affects skills acquisition	2.631	Agreed
8	Individuals’ attitudes towards participation is poor	4.111	Agreed
9	Instructor at skills acquisition centers are not competent	4.039	Agreed
10	Location or proximity of the centers is a major problem	2.373	Disagreed
11	Lack of guidance on vocational and technical skills	3.73	Agreed
12	Stigma associated with low status	2.333	Disagreed

DISCUSSION

Table 1 showed that there are a number of skills available at skills acquisition centers in Benin City, Edo State. The respondents agreed that 25 prominent skills have been acquired by the youths which have significantly

helped them in reducing poverty and therefore some societal vices; making the youths self-employed and therefore, self-reliant; uplift their socioeconomic status, make them creative and help in the achievement of the millennium development goals (MDGs). These skills

include building drawing skills, domestic electric wiring, brick and block laying skills and carving skills. Others are food processing, packaging, ability to use bakery skills, carpentry and Joinery skills, hair dressing skills, tailoring, iron and welding skills, interior and exterior decoration skills, poultry farming amongst others. These findings confirmed that of earlier reports by (Chigunta, 2002 and Opuwill, 2003).

Table 2 shows that there are equipment and facilities at skills acquisition centers in Benin City, Edo State, but the findings revealed that the facilities and equipment needed for effective and efficient training at the centers are not adequate. In table 3, the findings are indication that skills acquisition has significant role to play in national development such as job creation, wealth creation, reduction in human trafficking, youth empowerment, amongst others.

In Table 4, the challenges facing skill acquisition in Nigeria were identified and responses sought. Respondents agreed that the following were the major challenges; poor funding; lack of machines and hand tools to put into practice the skills acquired, illiteracy, inadequate of competent instructors. Others are poverty in the society, attitude of individuals towards participation, lack of guidance on vocational and technical skills, proximity to the centers and stigma associated with low status.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that skills acquisition programme is beneficial in its entirety; there was significant correlation between the vocational training and employability. The skills acquisition programme makes the youth self-employed and therefore, self-reliant, uplift their socio-economic status, make them creative, capable of reducing some societal vices and help in the achievement of the MDGs. This implies that skills acquisition centres are capable of providing trainees with functional and desirable competencies that make them employable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Introduction of more skills acquisition centers. This change has to occur at all levels of learning, from primary school up to university. Since a number of university graduates have also been found not having any vocational skills to be self-reliant.
2. Partnership with the public, private and non-profit sectors in the country to create and sustain acquisition centers which would provide training, links to jobs, entrepreneurship opportunities, promotion of initiatives and contributions to training by funding.
3. The trainees should be encouraged by providing stipends or scholarships to acquire relevant and quality skills that can contribute to national development of the country.
4. Federal and State Governments should review, standardize and expand the Curricula of all Skills

Acquisition Centers in Nigeria.

5. Federal Ministries of Education and Information and Communication, in collaboration with Agencies and Professional Associations, should enlighten and sensitize the public on the importance of skills acquisition programmes as a veritable tool for National Development and the need for individuals to acquire employable skills.

6. ITF should collaborate with regulatory Agencies such as National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) to coordinate skills acquisition programmes in Nigeria with a view to making Certificates issued after the training recognized for career development.

7. Skills Acquisition Centers must be made to strictly adhere to safety policy as enshrined in some vocational professions.

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