

Skill Acquisition Policy and Human Capital Development: Case of Federal Science and Technical College, Uromi, Edo State

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the relevance of skill acquisition to human capital development. The impact the skill acquisition policy has made on the target beneficiaries in particular and the society in general was critically assessed. How skill acquisition can bring about improvement in the wellbeing of individuals in societies was also brought to the front burner. Developmental state theory was used to buttress the study. The Federal Science and Technical College, Uromi, Edo State, was used as case study. Personal interview method was applied for the study. Relevant staffs such as the principal, coordinator, and technical teachers who head the technical sections in the College were interviewed. Findings show that the policy failed to make meaningful impact on the target beneficiaries due to poor implementation of the policy. The reasons responsible for the poor implementation were identified. For example, there was total lack of equipment for practical training and teaching in most of the departments/units; those available were totally outdated and inadequate while practical sessions were conducted only once a week and mere two hours were devoted to practical sessions. Some recommendations were put forward such as the need for government to equip the workshops with necessary tools and equipment; and the need to devote at least three days, instead of two hours a week, for practical sessions, and technical teachers or principals should head technical colleges.

KEY WORDS: Development, Policy, Skill Acquisition, Skill, Vocational and Technical Education

INTRODUCTION

Human capital is one of the pillars of societies, be it old or modern. It is the human capital that galvanizes the wheels of all the segments and sectors of societies. As a result, modern nations do not toy with it, especially the quality. The development and prosperity of modern nations, especially in the economic and social spheres, are hugely hinged on human capital. This is because, human capital remains the productive investment embodied in human persons, including skills, abilities, ideals, health, and locations, which often results from expenditures on education,

on-the-job training programmes and medical care (Todaro and Smith, 2011). Also, human capital is considered as a conglomeration of features, life trade, knowledge, creativity, innovation, and energy, which people invest in their individual work and activities (Weatherly, 2003). Then in order for human capital to be able to shoulder the exigencies of societies, especially in a developing country and economy such as Nigeria, the human capital need to be properly developed or formed so as to reduce to the barest minimum the vicissitudes of the people, that is, the human population. In doing this, the human capital needs to be acquitted with the requisite skills, especially those at the middle and lower levels of economic and social ladders. It is this group of people that stabilizes and creates much of the wealth of a society, especially a nation like Nigeria. The failure of any government or leadership of a nation to focus on equipping these people, then such government amounts to courting the upheavals which are the manifestations and consequences of the 'neglect' of the middle and lower human capital. Among the consequences of the neglect is poverty and mass unemployment.

The middle and lower level of human capital are the fulcrum and nucleus of industrialization, especially in modern countries. For any country or society searching for middle and high levels of industrialization to succeed, serious attention must be paid to the provision of necessary skills. Major part of the relevant elements required for adequate national development, and the capacity for improvement and sustenance of the social and economic development should be hinged on the development of relevant and competent skills (I.T.F., 2014). Also, there is need to upgrade the skill. However, it seems the case study college is underperforming as regards the objective for which it was established by government as the plethora of its graduates lack the requisite skills to drive their individual and societal development agenda.

Skill acquisition helps a person to adjust to life (Adeyemo, 2010). Skill acquisition is required in the life of every serious minded person because it can perform a lot of great work in the life of every living person (Okwuagbala, 2019). The relevance of skill acquisition cannot be overstressed. This includes employment generation and crime reduction. Skill acquisition and entrepreneurship is the appropriate route to go in a country where getting a job is like rocket science; and one way of dealing with unemployment in Nigeria is embracing vocational and technical skills.

However, where the requisite skills, knowledge and training are imparted in the youth and other citizens who are the vital human capital in the country, the scourge of poverty and the associated

upheavals will drastically reduce in the country; and the technical colleges are statutorily saddled with the responsibility of doing this. The past two decades have witnessed mass unemployment, poverty, and increase crime rate due to these social problems. Partly responsible for these problems is lack of the requisite skills on the part of the youths and others. Similarly, some of those who acquired the requisite skills are unable to utilize them for their livelihood and development of the society.

NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION AND SKILL ACQUISITION

The Nigerian National Policy on Education take into cognizance the importance of skill acquisition, hence it places emphasis on Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in the country. According to the policy (2013), technical and vocational education and training is used as a comprehensive term to refer to those aspects of the educational process involving the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. In the policy, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) cover the following areas: Technical Education, Vocational Enterprise Institutions and National Vocational Qualifications Framework. The goals of TVET are to:

- Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business especially at craft, advance craft, and technical levels.
- Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development, and
- Give training and impart the requisite skills to individual for self-reliance economically.

The policy, through the curricula provided under TVET, urged technical colleges to cover five main areas in their training programmes. These areas are:

- General education
- Theory and related courses
- Workshop practice
- Industrial training/production work
- Entrepreneurial training

The policy also provides that, trainees competing technical colleges programmes shall have three main options. These are:

- Secure employment either at the end of the entire programme or after competing one or more modules of employable skills.
- Set up their own businesses and become self-employed and be able to employ others.
- Pursue further education in advance craft/technical programmes and in post-secondary (tertiary) technical institutions like polytechnic or colleges of education (technical) and universities.

FEDERAL SCIENCE AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE, UROMI

The Federal Science and Technical College, Uromi, is one of the Unity Colleges set up by the federal government to train young Nigerians to produce the required human capital for the country especially in the areas of technical and vocational skills, and science and technology. The school is a three-in-one college as it offers courses in three main areas - Basic Education, that is Junior Secondary School, Senior Secondary School (Technical and Vocational), and Senior Secondary School (Science). Students spend a minimum of three years after which they are awarded Basic Education Certificate; National Business Certificate (NBC) or National Technical Certificate (NTC); West African Senior Secondary Certificate. This is awarded to science students; and National Examination Council (NECO) Certificate. This is awarded to both technical and science students (College Prospectus, n.d.).

The Federal Science and Technical College, Uromi, was established in 1999 along side two other colleges in Tungba, Bayelsa State and Ikare-Akoko, Ondo State. The College was the brainchild of Mr. Ibebunjo, an Igbo philanthropist, who established a Skills Acquisition/Trade Centre in 1963 and handed it over to his church, the Baptist Church, before he left Uromi for his home town at the outset of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967 – 1970. Thereafter, the church renamed the Centre Esan Baptist Trade Centre (College Prospectus, n.d.).

However, few years later, the then Bendel State government took over the Centre from the Church and renamed it Uromi Technical College. In 1999, the College became one of the federal government unity colleges and took over the facilities of the Technical College, but the real take off of the college was Sunday, 5th November, 2000. The College took off as Federal Technical College with eight (8) departments thus: (a) Bricklaying, block-laying and concreting (BBC); (b) Book-keeping and Secretarial studies; (c) Catering craft practice; (d) Electrical Installation and maintenance work; (e) Radio, Television and electronic work; (f) Furniture making; (g) General studies; and (h) Motor Vehicle mechanics.

At the inception of the 2002/2003 session, the College was once again renamed Federal Science and Technical College, Uromi. This was in conformity with other colleges owned by the Federal Ministry of Education. The new nomenclature brought the expansion of the college to include the Basic School, Technical and Senior Secondary (science) schools thereby making it three schools in one. Welding and Fabrication and Computer Craft studies have since been added to the Trade Courses which is offered by the College (College prospectus, n.d.).

Table 4: STATISTICS OF STUDENTS WHO GRADUATED FROM THE VARIOUS TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL AREAS FROM 2003 TO 2019*

Subject/Technical Areas	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Motor Vehicle Maintenance (MVM)	14	15	9	8	12	7	10	13	9	7	8	3	10	20	16	10	30
Radio, Television & Electronic Works (RTV)	8	9	7	4	3	4	4	7	4	4	6	5	5	10	8	4	4
Electrical Installation & Maintenance (EIM)	12	24	17	9	12	18	24	19	15	11	17	21	14	20	12	9	11
Brick, Block & Concreting (BBC)	14	19	11	10	8	7	4	8	7	7	18	17	8	17	18	12	5
Furniture Making (FM)	7	2	1	3	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	2	-
Welding & Fabrication (WF)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	9	3	2	3	-
Computer Craft Studies (CCS)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	17	7	9	28	19	15	27
Catering & Craft Practice (CCP)	4	6	3	-	2	1	2	-	-	-	2	5	16	16	17	28	25
Book-keeping & Business Practice (BBP)	35	31	8	7	8	6	12	7	10	8	12	6	12	4	14	11	6
Total	94	106	56	41	45	43	57	55	45	45	82	65	84	118	108	94	108

Source: Federal Science and Technical College, Uromi.

*The School graduated its first set in 2003

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In a research of this nature, several theories can suit it and be framed into it and at the end link it to a particular theory to throw light and bring to the front burner the main focus of the study. This is mainly influenced by the plethora and gamut of theories propounded by many scholars in academics and those in similar fields to explain and drive home studies of this nature which touches on the social and economic development of the fulcrum of a society. The Theory adopted for this study is the Developmental State Theory which was propounded by Johnson in 1982. The theory states that the State is the major catalyst of development especially in the emerging and developing economies of the world. The theory focuses on the functions of shifting the line of industrialization as perching heavily on the State. As a result, the leadership and guided control of the economy by the State is very important.

The theory is seamless web of political, bureaucratic, and moneyed influences which structures economic life in capitalist North-East Asia (Johnson, 1982). The theory is also stationed and sandwiched between a free market capitalist economic system and a centrally planned economic system. It conjoins private ownership with state guidance (Woo-Cumings, 1999). Developmental State theory is neither capitalist nor socialist. It is based on the combinations of positive advantages of private business and the positive role of the state (government). The theory is also drawn from that of mercantilism which preaches the intervention of the state in an economy. Economic advancement needs a state or government which can create and regulate appropriate environment and conditions for development. Successful conditions require a state which has the necessary tools to deal with such burdens (Bolesta, 2007).

A developmental state is a combination of a normative or moral ambition to apply the interventionist power of the state to guide and regulate investment in such a manner which enhances and encourage certain solidaristic vision of national economy (Lariaux, 1999). Chang (1999) also stressed that economic development needs a state or government which can create and regulate the political relationships that can encourage sustained industrialization.

Johnson (1999), further stressed that the relevant factor of the developmental state from a microeconomic viewpoint, that is, the cooperation between the private sector and government, or the private sector and the public sector is that both private business and government become partner in the development process. However, it seems very difficult to achieve extensive developmental targets in an atmosphere where legitimate authorities have or lack very limited

power in directing or regulating investments, regulating its intensity and influencing the institutions, organizations and communities in order for them to adhere to certain overall development strategies (Bolesta, 2007).

Therefore as this study seeks to establish the importance of skill acquisition and entrepreneurship in the development of the Nigerian state or society in general and Edo state in particular, the Developmental State Theory presents an appropriate framework upon which the study is anchored. In addition, this research work is anchored on the theory because skill acquisition would be imparted in the youths and other members of the populace with the combination of both the State (government) and the private sector. The policy would be more effective in combating poverty, developing the human capital and entrepreneurship through skill acquisition programmes with the full assistance of the people and members of the public because the Nigerian government lacks the full capacity to execute the policy to the full benefit and wellbeing of the people. For instance, the National Directorate of Employment partners with the private sector in imparting skills in the youths and at the same time creating employment opportunities for them.

By the enunciation of the skill acquisition policy, the state (government) has taken the lead in the social and economic development of the country through human capital development, which is the epic centre of development of any society. Consequently, the people and the private sector of the economy will be brought in to help in driving the general development of the society and government alone cannot always be at the driving seat of the wellbeing of the people.

RESEARCH METHOD

In order to unravel the impact of skill acquisition policy on human capital development in Edo state by the College, the study was focused on 16 years, that is, between 2003 and 2019. Personal interviews were conducted on nine technical and vocational staff (teachers) of the College were interviewed. These included the General Coordinator of the Technical Department (also a trained vocational and technical teacher) and all the heads (teachers) of the various vocational and technical departments of the college.

From the data made available to the researcher (see table), the college has trained a total of 1,246 students since its inception in 2003. The table shows that the number of graduates trained in every skill area which ranged from motor vehicle maintenance to book-keeping and business

practice. As regards the staff, each department or section has a head, while the entire vocational and technical department has a coordinator to whom all the heads of the nine sections/units report. The coordinator reports to the principal of the College who superintend over the entire College. Out of the ten heads, seven were interviewed, including the general coordinator. In order to get the true picture of the situation, the researcher met one-on-one with each of the head of departments.

QUESTIONS FOR THE PERSONAL INTERVIEW THAT WERE PUT TO THE RESPONDENTS

- Are you aware of government policy on skill acquisition?
- How long have you been teaching students on vocational and technical skills?
- How many students have you trained?
- Is there any mechanism you put in place to monitor them if they are doing well or not?
- Is there any way you or the college assists the graduates to set up their own ventures?
- To the best of your knowledge, how many of them have been able to set up their own ventures?
- During their (students) training, what were the challenges you experienced or still experiencing?

- In spite of the knowledge (training and teaching) you imparted in the students while they were in school, there seems no impact on the students and the society, why?
- Suggest measures you think can be put in place to improve on skill acquisition (vocational and technical education).

INTERVIEW FOCUS

The heads of sections/units/departments interviewed were the head/coordinator of Technical Department, the head of Carpentry and Furniture Making; Brick, Block and Concreting; Welding and Fabrication; Computer Craft studies; Book-Keeping and Business Practice, and Catering and Craft Practice.

SUMMARY/OUTCOME OF THE INTERVIEWS

The respondents have between 15 and 30 years teaching experiences. The respondents said they have taught between 100 and 500 students on vocational and technical education, though it depends on their years of teaching. Regarding awareness of skill acquisition policy, all the respondents agreed that they were quite aware, but they averred that the policy suffers improper implementation.

The respondents said that the College has no mechanism in monitoring and evaluating their products' (graduates') performance after they left the College. However, only the head of Brick, Block and Concreting section said he knew of about five of his former students who are doing well in their skill area. On assistance given to graduates (students) to enable them establish their own ventures, they said the College has no assistance, except those who chose to come to them for technical advice regarding their skill areas.

On the challenges experience during teaching and training, the respondents asserted the following as their challenges:

- Lack of tools and equipment for practical training
- Lack of funds to buy consumables like electrode, sand, cement, gas, and so forth.
- The available equipment and tools are outdated.
- Bad and inadequate infrastructure.
- Inadequate time for practical teaching and training.
- Lack of encouragement and motivation of the students to acquire tools. They attributed this to insufficient time allotted to practical sessions. The respondents said only two hours per week are allocated for practical teaching and training.
- They said it is wrong to combine science and vocational and technical skills together in one school.
- They also said that due to the headship of technical colleges by science-oriented personnel, vocational and technical skills are not given the attention it deserves.
- Lack of technical students. Most of the respondents averred that most students do not embrace technical and vocational education, but prefer science subjects hence they have very few students they teach and train in the college.
- They also said that the students prefer to go tertiary institutions to further their education after which they get white collar jobs.

- Lack of craftsmen for practicals. The respondents complained that craftsmen who ought to teach and impact the practical training in the students are not employed by the college mainly due to paucity of funds.

FINDINGS

From the reactions of the respondents, it has been discovered that the following factors are militating against the policy:

- **Round peg in square hole:** it is very wrong and an aberration for non-technical and vocational personnel to head an institution that is meant to implement a policy of such importance and relevance to the nation's development.

- **Lack of Time for Practical Training Sessions:** Another major challenge in the technical college is lack of practical training sessions. More time is devoted to teaching of theory in the classrooms, especially science subjects. Most of the teaching periods are devoted to teaching theories and science subjects in classrooms. In skill acquisition training, practical is very essential than theory. It supposed to form major part of the training sessions while the students/trainees are in school. This corroborates the notion that graduates of conventional institutions/schools lack practical knowledge of the skills they acquired/learnt. This is at variance with the apprenticeship system which places much emphasis on practical training from the time they commence apprenticeship training. The graduates of technical schools cannot become competent human capital without the requisite practical knowledge because it is the foundation of skill acquisition. This challenge is a stumbling block to the policy and its wrong approach to its implementation. The required impact of the policy will not be felt in the society and the target beneficiaries will not also benefit maximally from the policy and training without practicals.

- **Lack of Tools and Equipment:** The study revealed that the students lacked the basic and necessary tools required for practical training and learning. The students also failed to acquire tools. The policy does not encourage them to acquire tools neither do the school authority permit the teachers to enforce the acquisition of tools by the students. The same applies to consumables which are used for practicals. Tools, like equipment (machines), are the main elements which enable students/trainees get the impact of the skills they choose to acquire. The tools go a long way to help in impacting on their practical knowledge and competence on the skills. At the end, it dovetails into competent human capital. This corroborates the assertions that in order for trainees

to develop interest in skill acquisition training programmes, trainees should be motivated. This can equally impact negatively on human capital development (Agu and Kaduhur, 2016).

- **Infrastructural Deficit:** The study also revealed that infrastructure remains a big challenge and stumbling block in the technical college. This is another impediment and obstacle to the policy. Infrastructural facilities, especially workshops need to be in proper conditions as they are part of the environment where the target beneficiaries (students) acquire skills of their choice. It also negates the required criteria needed for skill acquisition as asserted by Agu and Kaduhur (2016), that the environment and atmosphere of skill acquisition training must be habitable and conducive for the people.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Consequent on the analysis and findings from the study, the following can be deduced as implications of the skill acquisition policy thus:

- The policy has failed to live up to its statutory mandates and objectives as it has not impacted on the production and development of human capital. It has not also impacted the provision of trained manpower in applied science, technology, commerce, at sub-professional levels; or provides technical skills necessary for industrial and economic development; the policy is deficient in providing training and improving the necessary skills leading to production of craftsmen, technical and other skilled human capital which will be enterprising and self-reliant thereby create employment, as enunciated in the policy document.
- There is lack of close monitoring and evaluation of the policy by the appropriate regulatory agency such as the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). Usually, regulatory agencies would want to know how public policies and programmes are performing and where necessary what needs to be done to improve on the performance (Anderson, 1997). In this regard, the Board has failed in its responsibility. Regular and close monitoring and evaluation of the policy, programmes and projects of the science and technical colleges could have revealed that the colleges are not implementing their set objectives neither are they impacting on the target beneficiaries in particular and the society in general.
- From the approach and model of the implementation, which is mainly based on top-down, the policy has been disconnected from the people in general and target beneficiaries in particular.

Necessary resources are not pumped into the implementation and necessary awareness is not created for the policy to thrive.

- Due to the shoddy implementation of the policy, technical education, which is a good base, foundation, and route to technological development, is fast eroding from the map of technological development of the country; this is because square pegs are put in round holes for its implementation.

Critically viewed from the foregoing fall out of the implementation, the study has shown that the policy has failed to meet its objectives and live up to the expectations of Nigerians.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the research, it was discovered that the policy was not properly implemented hence the target beneficiaries and the society in general could not derive the expected benefits. The appropriate mechanisms were not put in place by the federal government to ensure proper implementation of the policy. The technical colleges which ought to be the bastion of skill acquisition lack the basic equipment to train their students while the students, on their part, lack the basic tools which can enable them learn and acquire the skills. Due to these lacuna and other challenges associated with the skill acquisition policy, the technical school teachers are demotivated to carry out their functions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the policy to have positive impact on human capital development in Edo State, the following recommendations are put forward for implementation by the governments. For the policy to see to the light of day at the technical colleges, the following should be implemented:

- At least three days a week must be set aside for practical and training sessions for the students to learn the skills of their choice.
- Science and technical education must be separated in order for the students of technical and skills acquisition to benefit from the objectives of the policy. Science and technical skills cannot co-habit.
- All the teachers in technical colleges must be technically-oriented and specialists in technical and vocational areas.

- Technical teachers should be appointed to superintend over technical schools. A situation where science teachers head technical colleges should be jettisoned.

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