

Practical Education In A Depressed Economy: The Polytechnic As A Way Out

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Abstract: *Education of today has continued to display educational character that negates the laid down educational philosophies as enshrined in our National Policy on Education. Practical education has continued to play an essential role in the social economic development of any nation and study has shown that 65million Nigerian today are unemployed this is a time bomb waiting to explode and over 75 percentage of this number are without Polytechnic/Practical Education. Nigeria being a consuming nation depends on more than 85percent on foreign/imported goods and pays less attention to creating the enabling environment for her local industries to grow. Fundamentally, the essence of polytechnic education is to run career-centred and more practically oriented programmes significantly, for the purposes of realising the whole essence and objective of polytechnic education in human resource development, it is imperative for students to acquire both theoretical and practical knowledge and technical skills. This can be accomplished through institutional support and collaboration as well as polytechnic-industry linkage. The study examine some factors that could led to economy depression; over-dependence on importation, shortage of gas supply to manufacturing companies and gas based industries, infrastructures decade among other which will bring about product quality compromise, failure in financial market, social, business, unemployment. The practical nature of Polytechnic/Technical Education (PTE) makes it unique in content and approach thereby requiring special care and attention. The inputs of PTE are so visible to the extent that even an illiterate could see when “failures” occur. Products of PTE are solving social problems in sustainable ways. For them to do so, they need to be sufficiently informed in technical education concepts and the application of its theoretical principles to solve practical problems. The study concludes that the magic of liberating the nation from technological backwardness and over dependence on foreign products and manpower aids. Therefore, efforts to achieve the goal should be directed towards PTE, through the reform of policies, with conscious efforts directed toward developing the full potentials and capacities of the human resources to move along with the tide of change across the world. If all the way forward options are implemented fully, the imbalance between the products of education and the labour market needs would have been substantially reduced in the nation. Therefore, adequate financing Polytechnic/Technical Education effectively becomes a determinant factor for moving out of a depressed economy.*

Keywords: *practical education, depressed economy, unemployment*

Introduction

Practical education has continued to play its essential role in the social economic development of any nation. This all important role however, is predicated on the fact that the beneficiaries of the educational system must have acquired sufficient skill relevant to positively impact on all productive sectors especially in a depressed economy. The pursuit of acquisition of relevant skill needed to foster any economic development will underscore the role of technical, vocational and practical education. We have continued to display educational character that negates the laid down educational philosophies as enshrined in our National Policy on Education. It has become very clear that our educational institutions have devised the easy approach to educational delivery by carefully avoiding practical technical aspects because of its cost intensiveness. The consequence of this is the ever increasing number of products of our higher institution who are unable to find relevance in the economic reality of our nation.

It will interest you to know that 65million Nigerian today are unemployed this is a time bomb waiting to explode and over 75 percentage of this number are without Polytechnic/Practical Education. Nigeria being a consuming nation depends on more than 85percent on foreign/imported

goods and pays less attention to creating the enabling environment for her local industries to grow.

Polytechnic/Practical Education in Nigeria evolved in response to technical and industrial needs of the people. It is the training of technically oriented personnel who are to be initiators, facilitators and implementers of technological development of a Nation by adequately training its citizenry on the need to be technically literate, leading to self-reliance and compelling sustainability. Polytechnic/Technical Education has more direct impact on national welfare and their contributions are widespread and visible ranging from metalwork technology, mechanical/automobile technology, electrical/electronics technology, building and woodwork technology.

Polytechnic/Technical education is multifaceted, multi disciplinary and a pragmatic field, which is aimed at equipping the individual with requisite vocational, functional technical education and literacy skills that will enhance their relevance and functionality in the society. As a result it plays a vital and indispensable role in the development of the society (Uwaifo, 2008).

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and objective of polytechnic education in human resource development, it is imperative for students to acquire both theoretical and practical knowledge and technical skills. This can be accomplished through institutional support and collaboration as well as polytechnic-industry linkage

DEPRESSED ECONOMY

The history of economic depression is as old as the history of humanity itself, dating back to the 3rd Century. Economic depression simply means challenged or miserable economic experience during which every aspect of the economy witness down times in patronage and revenue generation. Economic depression is often interwoven with economic regression or economic crisis. According to (Wikipedia, 2019). Economic crisis is experienced by several factors such as when there is widespread drop in spending as a result of financial crisis, external trade shock, adverse supply shock and decline consumption, investment, government spending and net export activities. In such period, intended investments in all aspects of the economy are compelled to shrink. This is partly because revenue generation sources are jeopardized.

Nigeria like every other nation of the world has at one time or the other surfer economy depression. The most famous depression in modern times in the world of course, was the one that began in a typical financial panic in 1929 and lasted until the advent of World War II. After the disaster of 1929, economists and politicians resolved that this must never happen again. The easiest way of succeeding at this was to determine, simply to define “depressions” out of existence. From that point on, America was to suffer no further depressions. For when the next sharp depression came along, in 1937–38, the economists simply refused to use the dread name, and came up with a new, much softer-sounding word: “recession.” from that point on, America have been through quite a few recessions.

Once the depression arrives? What is the governmental role in the cure of depression? In the first place, government must cease inflating as soon as possible.

It is true that this will, inevitably, bring the inflationary boom unexpectedly to an end, and commence the foreseeable recession or depression.

The government must not try to inflate again, in order to get out of the depression. Even if this reflation succeeds, it will only sow greater trouble later on. The government must do everything to discourage consumption, and it must not increase its own expenditures, for this will further increase the social consumption/ investment ratio. In fact, cutting the government budget will improve the ratio.

What the economy needs is not more consumption spending but more saving, in order to validate some of the excessive investments of the boom?

The government must never try to prop up unsound business situations; it must never bail out or lend money to business firms in trouble. Doing this will simply prolong the agony and convert a sharp and quick depression phase into a lingering

and chronic disease. The government must never try to prop up wage rates or prices of producers’ goods; doing so will prolong and delay indefinitely the completion of the depression- adjustment process; it will cause indefinite and prolonged depression and mass unemployment in the vital capital goods industries

FACTORS THAT LED TO THE ECONOMIC DEPRESSION

i. Irregular Power Supply

In Nigeria, households and businesses generate their daily requirements of electricity using PMS and diesel-powered generators. This is done in order to augment the little electricity from the national grid. The increase in the price of PMS led to an increase in the cost of transportation and cost of production.

ii. Over-dependence on Importation

The country depends heavily on importation of goods and services. As a result of this, a fall in foreign exchange earnings led to an increase in the gap between the demand and supply of foreign exchange, thereby leading to a fall in the value of Naira. Nigeria, that was practicing a fixed exchange rate regime, had to devalue her currency, which led to the adoption of a floating exchange rate regime in June 2016. This action was taken in order to forestall the complete depletion of the country’s foreign exchange reserves.

iii. Shortage of Gas Supply to Manufacturing Companies and Gas Based Industries

Vandalism of gas pipelines by the Niger Delta militants also affected manufacturing companies that utilize natural gas either as feedstock or as a source of energy. This led to an increase in the cost of production, because some of these companies resorted to alternative means of transporting gas (virtual pipeline); while others turned to diesel as their alternative source of energy. In addition to this, the rise in exchange rate led to an increase in the cost of importing raw materials. These alternative sources to pipeline gas, coupled with high cost of importing raw materials, led to an increase in the cost of production thereby contributing to the hike in prices of finished goods.

EFFECT OF DEPRESSION

Several reasons have being attributed as effects of depression among which are;

Product Quality Compromise

Depression affects the revenue of firms, and by extension, profitability. In an effort to cut costs and improve its bottom line, the company could compromise product quality, and in the process lose its market share. A baker could offer the same loaf of bread at the same price but reduce major ingredients such as milk, butter, etc. so as to cut cost and improve bottom line during recession. Depression could force airlines to lower

their maintenance standards in order to cut cost and break even. They may cut flight to routes that are not profitable and frequently cancel flights when there are insufficient passengers for a particular flight. This could cause some inconveniences to passengers, leading to economic loss.

Unemployment

the world Depression has a devastating impact on employment worldwide. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), at least 20 million jobs will be lost by the end of 2019 due to the impact of the depression, mostly in construction, real estate, financial services, and the auto sector, bringing unemployment above 200 million for the first time

Business

When household incomes are cut as a result of economic slowdown, they reduce their demand for goods and services. As a result of low demand from households, firms reduce their production of such goods and services in order to cut cost and profit will decline. As a consequence of production fall, workers would be laid off, there will be no buying of new equipment, no funding for research and development, no new product rollouts and general business activities would also fall. The experience of the recent depression showed that many businesses such as banks in Nigeria were affected. Depression affects both small and large business. Specifically, depression results in one or more of the following consequences on businesses

Financial Markets

The other sector that usually takes the heat during depression is the financial markets. Depression will lead to general fall in interest rate, crash of stock prices and rise in prices of some commodities (precious metal). Regulators usually lower interest rate in order to stimulate borrowing for investment that would lead to economic activities and growth. Most of the advanced economies of the world brought their interest rate to near zero during depression in order to stimulate economic activities through borrowing.

Social

Depression affects social life in some respects, from tourism to certain consumption of household. In a recent survey carried out in US Records has it that thirty per cent (30%) of travelers surveyed stated that they travelled less for business today while only 21 per cent stated that they travelled more. Reasons for the decline in business travel include company travel policy changes, dwindled personal economic fortune, uncertainties and high airline prices. Hotels were responding to the downturn by dropping rates, ramping up promotions and negotiating deals for both business travelers and tourists

The Polytechnic Technical Education in Nigeria

African countries have realized that Polytechnic/Technical Education is essential in the development of manpower and human resources. Specifically speaking, the Nigerian government in realization of its importance established the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) which is a principal organ of the Federal Ministry of Education solely

created to handle all aspects of technical and vocational education falling outside university education. NBTE was established by Act No 9 of 11th January 1977 and has the vision and mission to uphold the ideas of a free, united and democratic society and promote good quality technical and vocational education; a system which is flexible and accessible to all for the purpose of producing competent and relevant technical manpower needed for sustainable national development. Again to promote the production of skilled and semi skilled and professional manpower, to revitalize, and sustain the national economy, reduce unemployment and poverty through the setting and maintenance of high standards, provision of current and reliable information for planning and decision making, sourcing and distribution of funds and adequate linkage with industry. In addition to providing standardized minimum guide curricula for technical and vocational education and training (TVET), the board supervises and regulates through an accreditation process, the programmes offered by polytechnics in Nigeria.

The old system was designed to service the formal sector particularly the mines and organizations that were at the start of the reforms non-functional. The mines had become less productive and the products of their training could not find jobs.

The system lack funds to equip the polytechnic/technical education and also to rehabilitate existing infrastructures became a major challenge. With few people accessing training and fewer people getting jobs, government saw the need to develop a training policy that will made training accessible to all. The policy provided training that was responsive to the needs of the individuals, organization and the country at large. Hence the governments' advocate to fund and carter for polytechnic/technical education became most privatized in her annual budgeting and planning.

Challenges to Polytechnic/Technical Education in Nigeria

The challenges and constraints militating against the Polytechnic/Technical Education in Nigeria are many but few of the major ones are heightened below:

1. **Inadequate supply of technical workshops:** most polytechnics/technical colleges lack functional workshops for effective inculcation of technical skills in students. This affects the effectiveness of PTE.
2. **Lack of sufficient fund:** government funding of polytechnic/technical education programs has not been impressive as this is a reflection of the nonchalant attitude of government towards the program. Most equipments, workshops, necessary technical/engineering books etc are not provided.
3. **Lack of adequate motivation:** PTE teachers are subjected to deplorable working conditions. Offices are not furnished and working environments are not conducive for technical learning situations.
4. **Lack of well equipped libraries for research work/project:** libraries are not well stocked with up-to-date

technical books and periodicals in various areas of specialization.

5. **Failed curriculum:** the current curriculum of the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) should be a total departure from the former imposed and imported British one which did not tailor Nigerian curriculum towards technical skills acquisition.

6. **Lack of information communication technology equipment:** ICT and technical skills acquisition work simultaneously. Therefore, polytechnic/technical colleges should be equipped with contemporary ICT equipments in order to promote human resource development.

7. **Political situation:** Polytechnic/technical education has been grossly neglected in Nigeria. Technical educators have the greatest challenges in convincing the law makers on why they should give priority to PTE in allocating resource to it. The government keeps paying lip service towards the proper development of the program in Nigeria. It should be made clear here that until they begin to change their attitude towards the PTE program, Nigeria will ever remain a technologically backward and dependent nation

Practical Polytechnic/Technical Education – A way out in a Depressed Economy

Polytechnic/Technical Education has served as a change agent not only for technical systems but also for many other societal changes. The practical nature of Polytechnic/Technical Education (PTE) makes it unique in content and approach thereby requiring special care and attention. The inputs of PTE are so visible to the extent that even an illiterate could see when “failures” occur. Products of PTE are solving social problems in sustainable ways. For them to do so, they need to be sufficiently informed in technical education concepts and the application of its theoretical principles to solve practical problems.

Again, the development of a nation relies on the development and capability of the manpower of the nation. Therefore, the effort to push Nigeria forward to attain the optimum level of manpower development becomes consequential. The potentials of our Youths should be properly harnessed through PTE for various technical skills acquisition that will empower them technologically.

It aims to develop practical skills as well as the creative and innovative abilities and facilitates decision making skills and problem solving abilities. The Polytechnic/Technical Education (PTE) seeks to train students in the application of scientific knowledge to solving practical problems facing society, and not merely to train them in manual and technical education. In addition, the PTE should be seen as education for self reliance, which leads to national development. This is the right which provides the persons that have received it with self employment thereby contributing to the society in which he/she lives.

According to Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) stated that the Polytechnic/Technical Education (PTE) is the major way out in a Depressed Economy by;

- (a) Providing trained manpower in the applied sciences and business, particularly at craft, advanced and technical levels.
- (b) Providing the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, commercial and economic development.
- (c) Giving the necessary training and imparting skills to individuals who shall become self-reliant.
- (d) General education, theory and related courses; workshop practices, industrial training and small business management and entrepreneurial training.

Benefits of Polytechnic/Technical Education to the Development of Nigeria

- i. It provides students with “life skills” to become productive entrepreneurs as it engenders creative and innovative ideas enlarges the economic pie and increases personal freedom. Most of the so-called “expatriate engineers” who are being paid millions of dollars to build Nigeria’s roads and bridges are graduates of polytechnic/technical colleges. Yet our leaders do not take PTE institutions seriously.
- ii. Empowering the people with technical skills would enhance their productivity and national development.
- iii. Getting students motivated to learn the art of vocational and technical education in the most efficient and economical manner possible.
- iv. Teaching the skill of sound citizenship, in the art of vocational and technical education.
- v. PTE graduates are most likely to be employed and earn more than their non vocational counterparts, being practical oriented, they have the capacity to work part time even while still at high school. There is strong evidence that the generic technical skills and the occupational specific skills provided in PTE, will increase workers’ productivity, skills transfer, job access and job stability when her graduates find training related jobs.
- vi. Practical skills; it focuses on practical skills that students can put to use in a job immediately. Technical training programs typically focus on teaching students how to perform the task that would be required from them in the workforce in various fields such as auto maintenance, carpentry.
- vii. It prepares students to enter into the workforce more quickly than in any other academic program.
- viii. Marketable job skills; graduates of PTE are equipped to enter the job market armed with marketable career skills. These skills can lead to higher paying jobs and greater satisfaction.

The Way Forward

Consequent upon the points enumerated above, the following recommendations are proffered;

1. The Federal and State governments should make frantic efforts to provide functional technical/vocational workshops in Nigerian Polytechnics and technical colleges.
2. Governments at all levels should declare a national state of emergency on polytechnic/technical education by promoting it as the bedrock of national development.
3. The Federal and State governments and other managers of technical education should release funds for the procurement and distribution of training materials and equipments in technical institutions.
4. The teaching and learning of Mathematics, English and Technical Vocational studies for the mass production of efficient and relevant core sciences and technical/vocational teachers should be emphasized in our education curriculum.
5. The national education policy should at all times promote the respect for and importance of engineering, technical and vocational education and careers for our national planning and physical development.
6. Education administrators and policy implementers in Nigeria Should adopt a national virtue of performance and reward based on human resources training, recruitment, management and administration.
7. There should be a return to practical handcraft making as a compulsory subject in primary schools, the promotion of school farming clubs, science technology and innovation (STI) projects in secondary/technical schools. As a matter of national priority, Nigeria should include functional, vocational and entrepreneurial studies for all students in senior secondary and technical institutions.
8. Government as a matter of priority should continuously promote for the search, recruitment and pursuit of technical and vocational talents through research projects, scholarships and project sponsorships.
9. All the intervention agencies should be held accountable for all funds given to them to facilitate a “frog jump” from our poor state of capacity, development of skills and infrastructural base. This will provide support and lift the nation towards global competitiveness in human resource capacity, physical resources planning and management and mutual productive capacity.

Conclusion

Practical Polytechnic/Technical Education is the magic of liberating the nation from technological backwardness and over dependence on foreign products and manpower aids. Therefore, efforts to achieve the goal should be directed towards PTE, through the reform of policies, with conscious efforts directed toward developing the full potentials and capacities of the human resources to move along with the tide of change across the world. If all the way forward options are implemented fully, the imbalance between the products of education and the labour market needs would have been substantially reduced in the nation. Therefore, adequate financing Polytechnic/Technical Education effectively

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