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EMPOWERING OF STUDENTS IN TECHNICAL COLLEGES IN NIGERIA WITH TRADE SKILLS FOR SELF RELIANCE TO ENHANCE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT: *The study x-rayed the empowering of technical college students in Nigeria with trade skills for self-reliance to enhance sustainable development. Three research questions guided the study and Ex-Post-Facto Design was utilized. The area of the study was Government Technical College, Abakaliki in Ebonyi State of Nigeria established in 1966 and with a population of 862 students. Unstructured interview with the principal/records were the instruments for data collection and the obtained data were descriptively analyzed with the help of tables. The findings showed that efforts are made in the teaching of 21 trade skills in the college and that there are available qualified teachers that need updatement of the special skills they teach to be relevant. Obvious challenges were highlighted. Implications of the study were drawn and recommendations made like: the re-training of teachers, proper funding and up-datement/maintenance of facilities in the colleges among others.*

KEYWORDS: Empowering; Trade skills; Students; Sustainable Development; Self-Reliance

INTRODUCTION

Education is a vital instrument par excellence for sound national development. Quality education empowers its recipients with the appropriate skills, knowledge and values to adapt and contribute effectively in national development (FRN, 2013:13). Accordingly, education is a basic force for the socio-economic and political transformation of any society. Imogie (2010) reiterates that no nation can develop to its fullest and keep pace with modern societal trends in science and technology without an effective educational system. This yearning was re-echoed in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013:14, sub-section 6e) thus: that education should empower its recipients with the develop`ent of appropriate skills, physical and social abilities and competences to live in and contribute positively to the society; hence the need for functional education for sustainable development.

The need for functional curriculum that will prepare the Nigerian Youths to be self-dependent is an urgent one for the promotion of a progressive united Nigeria. In essence, school programmes should be relevant which made Esu (2010) to state that functional curriculum is designed to teach students skills which will allow them to function as competent and accepted adults. These skills should emphasize independence, vocational, living and social skills for survival. According to the author, functional skills are those core elements of subjects that provide individuals with skills and abilities they need to operate confidently and effectively in individual life, their community and work.

This implies the training of the youths to be independent and to contribute their quota in sustainable national development. This urgent yearning has led Nigeria to key into the United Nation's strides launched in 2005 tagged "United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable

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Development (ESD) covering 2005-2014. Following this declaration, UNESCO launched the Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD. The overall goal of the GAP was to generate and scale up actions in all levels and areas of education. Five priority areas to enhance ESD were identified thus: Policy support, whole institution approaches, educators; youth and local communities. Sustainable development according to Essien (2004) involves meeting the needs of the present generation without denying future generation access to the same resources. It also refers to the mode of human development in which resource use aim to meet human needs while preserving the environment in order to meet those needs not only in the present, but also for generations to come. Sustainability requires that human activities only use natural resources at a rate which they can be replenished naturally; here education plays key role.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has 17 goals and their targets of which the present study is interested in Goal 4 which reads "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all". The life-long learning here refers to life-based skill acquisition which is the thrust of the present paper on empowering students of technical colleges in Nigeria with these basic skills for sustainable development. Technical education according the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013:33-34) is an academic vocational preparation of students for jobs in specific industrial skills, involving application of scientific and modern technology in areas like: Automobile Technology, Electrical-Electronics; Building Technology; Plastic Technology among others. The Policy further emphasizes that technical education is an aspect of education that leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills, as well as basic scientific knowledge primarily concerned with specific skills necessary for self-sufficiency and other industrial skills like auto building, drafting technology, etc. This calls for effective teacher training in these specialist areas to impart same knowledge to the learners.

The teacher holds the key to nation building; this is because the aspiration of any nation to transform into a great economy can only be possible if there are competent and dedicated teachers to impart the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes. To impart technical skills, capacities of teachers need to be properly built up. In the opinion of Adegoke (2015), sustainable development can be maintained if attention is given to transformation requirements and occurrence, which include updating of the capacities of the transformation agents- the teachers. It then means that there is the need to develop teachers with initiatives, selfless service and mastery of the technical skills content. Chickering and Gamson (2005) emphasize seven good educational principles in preparing teachers for the task ahead thus: encouraging contact between teacher and student; giving prompt feedback; emphasizing time on tasks, communicating high expectation; respecting diverse talents and ways of learning.

The authors reiterate that these principles are workable and suggest six powerful tools that can enhance their achievement in teacher training; they are: activity; expectations; cooperation, interaction, diversity and responsibility. Proper utilization of the psychomotor domain of the objectives becomes imperative as this makes it possible for learners to acquire skills and apply them in their everyday life. Chauhan (2013) makes it clear that proper learning by students will bring about behavioural changes and experiences for proper acquisition of new ideas, skills, values and knowledge; hence this paper is x-raying the acquisition of life based-skills by students in technical colleges in Nigeria for sustainable development of individuals and the nation.

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Statement of the Problem

In this era of sustainable development, the nation of Nigeria yearns for the production of viable youths who will be functional and self-reliant after training. In essence, the changing world of ours requires dynamic and functional curriculum to empower its teaming youths with life-based skills for survival. The Nigerian Policy on Education reiterates the gearing of instruction at all levels of education towards the inculcating among others, the acquisition of functional skills and competences necessary for self-reliance. This will help students to apply their acquired academic skills and knowledge to address real life needs and challenges. These sincere yearnings have necessitated the present study which thus asks; how are the students in Technical Colleges in Nigeria empowered with life-based skills for self-reliance to enhance sustainable development?

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the empowering process of students in Technical Colleges with life-based skills for self-reliance in order to enhance sustainable development. Specifically, the study was designed to ascertain:

1. The trade/life- based skills students are exposed to in the technical colleges in Nigeria.
2. Availability and the capacity building procedures of the technical teachers.
3. The envisaged challenges in students' acquisition of trade/life based skills in technical colleges.

Research Questions: To guide the study, the following research questions are posed:

1. What are the trades/life based skills that students are exposed to in technical colleges in Nigeria?
2. In what ways are the capacity buildings of the available technical teachers done?
3. What are the obvious challenges students in the technical colleges face in the acquisition of the trade/life-based skills?

METHODS

Design of the Study

The study design adopted was Ex Post Facto type. This method was deemed appropriate as it had to deal with documented records/data and skeletal interviews with the authorities the of technical college used for the study.

Area of the Study

The study area was Government Technical College, Abakaliki in Ebonyi State of Nigeria established in 1966 with students' population of 867 as at the time of the study. The choice was based on the long standing record of the college as the oldest in the state with outstanding records of successes. There are three technical colleges in the state namely: Government Technical College, Abakaliki; Ehugbo Technical College, Afikpo and Government Girls

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Technical College, Agba-Ishielu –a new introduction to balance the gender disparity, as the first two colleges are for boys only.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher was guided by the Principal of the college through unstructured interviews and record presentation based on the research questions guiding the study.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected from the college were descriptively interpreted and presented based on the records given and the opinions of the principal who was the chief respondent.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1presents the data that answered research question 1.

Table 1: Trade/skills students are exposed to in Technical Colleges in Nigeria

S/N	Trade/skills for technical education	Taught (T)	Not Taught(NT)
1	Auto Body repairs and Spray painting	-	NT
2	Auto Mechanical/Electrical works	T	-
3	Air Conditioning and Refrigeration	-	T
4	Welding and Fabrication and Engineering craft	T	-
5	Electrical installation and maintenance works	T	-
6	Radio, Television and Electronic servicing	-	NT
7	Block-laying, Brick-laying and Concrete work	-	NT
8	Painting and Decorating	T	-
9	Plumbing & Pipe fitting	-	NT
10	Machine /Wood working	T	-
11	Carpentry making	T	-
12	Furniture making	T	-
13	Upholstery	T	-
14	Catering craft practice	T	-
15	Garment making	T	-
16	Clothing and textile	T	-
17	Dyeing and Bleaching	T	-
18	Printing craft practice	-	NT
19	Cosmetology	-	NT
20	Photography	-	NT
21	Mining	-	NT
22	Tourism	-	NT
23	Leather goods manufacturing and repairs	-	NT
24	Stenography	T	-
25	Data processing	T	-
26	Store keeping	T	-
27	Book keeping	T	-
28	GSM maintenance and repairs	T	-
29	Animal husbandry	T	-
30	Fishery	T	-
31	Marketing	T	-
32	Salesmanship	T	-

(Source: FRN, 2013: 32-35; Field Work Data, 2016)

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Table 1 presents the trade skills students in Government Technical College, Abakaliki are exposed to as stipulated in the Nigerian National Policy on Education, (2013). Out of the 32 trade skills, 21 of them are taught to the students, while 11 of them are not taught as seen in

Table 1. On the whole, efforts are made to inculcate right skills and values to the students for self-reliance and sustainable development.

Table 2 presents the data that answered research question 2.

The data that answered research question 2 is presented below

Table 2: Available technical teachers and their capacity building procedures

S/N	Trade/skills for technical education	Available Teachers (AV)	Non Available Teachers (NAT)	Capacity Building Procedure
1	Auto body repairs and spray painting	-	N.A.T	Limited only to professional training for certification and general ICT training in the state
2	Auto mechanical/electrical works	A.T.	-	,,
3	Air conditioning and refrigeration	-	N.A.T.	,,
4	Welding, fabrication and engineering craft	A.T.	-	,,
5	Electrical installation and maintenance works	A.T	-	,,
6	Radio, television and electronic servicing	-	N.A.T.	,,
7	Block laying, bricklaying and concrete work	-	N.A.T.	,,
8	Painting and decorating	A.T	-	,,
9	Plumbing & pipe fitting	-	N.A.T	,,
10	Machine /wood working	A.T.	-	,,
11	Carpentry making	A.T	-	,,
12	Furniture making	A.T	-	,,
13	Upholstery	A.T	-	,,
14	Catering craft practice	A.T	-	,,
15	Garment making	A.T	-	,,
16	Clothing and textile	A.T.	-	,,
17	Dyeing and Bleaching	A.T	-	,,
18	Printing craft practice	-	N.A.T	,,
19	Cosmetology	-	N.A.T	,,
20	Photography	-	N.A.T.	,,
21	Mining	-	N.A.T.	,,
22	Tourism	-	N.A.T.	,,
23	Leather goods manufacturing and repairs	-	N.A.T	,,
24	Stenography	A.T	-	,,
25	Data processing	A.T	-	,,

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26	Store keeping	A.T	-	,,
27	Book keeping	A.T	-	,,
28	GSM maintenance and repairs	A.T	-	,,
29	Animal husbandry	A.T	-	,,
30	Fishery	A.T	-	
31	Marketing	A.T	-	,,
32	Salesmanship	A.T	-	,,

(Source: FRN, 2013: 32-33; Field work data, 2016)

Again, Table 2 is the presentation of the available technical teachers in the college and their capacity building status. The findings indicated that there were available teachers for the 21 trade skills the students were exposed to, while the ones they were not exposed to i.e., 11 of them had no teachers as at the time of the study. Interview report and records showed that the teachers were professionally trained in their areas of specialization with general ICT skills for garnishing. No other capacity building for the enhancement of their skills has been carried out by the state government as at the time of the study.

The data that answered research question 3 is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Obvious challenges in the trade skills' acquisition by students in Technical Colleges in Nigeria

S/n	Obvious challenges	Probable measures to be put in place
1	Non regular financial support.	Government expected to release enough funds for expansion.
2	Dearth/decay of infrastructures for training.	Need to repair/install basic training infrastructures
3	Lack of upgrading of training equipment to meet up with modern trends and globalization	Need to upgrade the equipment and routine maintenance for efficiency.
4	Lack of capacity building of technical teachers in specialist areas for updatement	Urgent need to enhance the capacities of the teachers for effectiveness and reliance.

(Source: Field work data, 2016)

Finally, Table 3 shows the obvious challenges in the acquisition of the trade skills by students for self-reliance. The challenges include: non-regular financial support; dearth/ decay of infrastructures for training; lack of upgrading of training facilities and lack of capacity building of technical teachers to upgrade their specialist knowledge. However, the Principal of the college is hopeful that the state government being is aware of these challenges and will come to support the college financial wise, repair and upgrade the facilities for training and put in place modalities for re-training of technical teachers in their specialist areas.

Discussion

The study has been considering how technical college students are empowered to be self-sufficient to enhance sustainable development. The result in Table 1 shows that students in technical colleges are empowered based on 21 trade skills out the 32 stipulated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013). Interview conducted with the college authority indicated that students are empowered properly based on the skills they are exposed to as they have

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qualified teachers in these areas. This is in line with the yearning of the Federal Government of Nigeria to empower its youths with appropriate skills to be useful to themselves and the society (FRN, 2013:14). Buttressing this finding, Esu (2010) posited that functional curriculum is the one that empowers students to function as competent and acceptable adults. Technical education is aimed at preparing students for jobs in specific industrial skills as can be seen in Table 1. The authorities of the college affirmed that the courses are fully practicalized and that the college runs internal internship scheme, but students are taken out on field work to industrial and mechanical sites for on-the-spot practice. As a result, graduates from the college who persevere, normally establishes their own business and those who are lucky to be employed perform well as reported by their employers.

This development goes to confirm the view of Offorma, Egbe and Eze (2010) who stated that for the objective of entrepreneurship education to be achieved, students should be made to acquire practical skills which would differentiate them from people from other disciplines. It was observed that 11 skills were not taught; the principal explained that it was as a result of lack of human and material resources, but reiterated that if the students are up and doing in the 21 skills they are taught, can be self-sustained for life.

Table 2 answered research question 2 based on the availability and capacity building of the technical teachers. The findings revealed that there were qualified technical teachers handling the 21 trade skills who praticalize the course contents as much as they can in the face of obvious challenges. The college principal made it clear that the staff-student ratio for technical education was supposed to be 1:20, but they are having a ratio of 1:50 which weighs heavily on the staff. He also lamented that lack of classroom space is also affecting the effectiveness of the teaching staff. The finding confirmed the view of Azubuike (2013) who stated that conducive environment for teaching and learning entails provision of enough classrooms, good teaching aids and manageable number of students for proper control and effectiveness. Again, these findings is in consonance with the goals of teacher education in the National Policy on Education (2013:56) subsection b, item 93(d) that states that "efforts will be made in the provision of teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment". The policy emphasized the professional training of all teachers for the effective performance of their duties.

Finally, Table 3 examined the obvious challenges students face in the acquisition of trade skills for self-reliance in this era of sustainable development. The study findings portrayed that there were challenges which include: financial problems; dearth and decay of infrastructures; lack of upgrading of facilities and training for technical staff for updatement. These findings now negate the stipulations of the Federal Government of Nigeria that "Teachers shall be regularly exposed to innovations in the profession and opportunities created for unhindered professional growth. (FRN, 2013: 57). The Federal Government in its 4 year strategic plan for the development of the education sector (2011-2015) having envisaged the above enlisted problems in Table 3, decided to develop a proposal for funding and its sourcing and upgrading of physical infrastructures in Technical Colleges (FRN 2013:78). To successfully implement the curriculum for technical education, there should be proper implementation which can only be possible with infrastructural provision and enhancement of the capacities of the teachers. A study carried out by Ogah and Emesini (2013) buttressed this point when they revealed that lack of practical demonstration of the trade skills for the students will hinder its proper acquisition. The principal of the college is optimistic that if the measures suggested in Table 3 are given prior attention, that students would successfully acquire the skills for self-reliance.

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Educational Implications of the Study

- The study findings revealed that Technical Colleges in Nigeria are making giant strides to empower the youths to achieve self-reliance in this era of sustainable development.
- Another obvious implication of the study is that technical teachers are available and professionally trained but need constant updatement of their professional knowledge in order to be relevant in the sustainable development strides.
- Again, the findings of the study revealed the bottles necks to sustainable technical education that need to be quickly addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study and the implications drawn, the following recommendations are made:

- Federal and state governments in Nigeria should have a serious re-think in overhauling technical education for sustainable development.
- The concerned authorities should update technical equipment in the colleges to make technical skill acquisition relevant in the present dispensation.
- The Federal Government of Nigeria need to develop strategic capacity building plans for technical college teachers in order to make them relevant in this era of advance technological development.
- On a serious note, the federal and state governments in Nigeria should mount scholarship schemes for interested would–be-technical teachers, especially in the eleven enlisted areas that were not taught in the area of study to attract them.

CONCLUSION

The present study x-rayed the acquisition of trade skills by technical colleges' students for self-reliance in order to enhance sustainable development. The findings showed that giant strides are made to empower the students in twenty-one basic skills; that there are qualified teachers for these courses that just need constant updatement to be effective. Other obvious challenges like dearth of funds; outdated equipment; lack of facilities for expansion among others were highlighted; hence the need for concerned authorities to do something urgently for the achievement of sustainable educational development of the Nigerian youths.

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