

# EDUCATION AND TRAINING AS TOOLS FOR ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY AND PRODUCTIVITY: STRATEGIES FOR RESTRUCTURING AND EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION

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## **Abstract**

Education and training as acknowledged world over play major roles in increasing employability and productivity both in the individual and in the nation. Global trends in recent years especially with respect to social and economic activities portend a shift towards education and training that is responsive to economic demands and social needs of both the individual and the society. Considering the crisis which has bedeviled the country's education, there is the need to reengineer the education system to meet both the personal and national demands for employment and productivity. This paper therefore, looks at Education, Training, Employability and Productivity; answers questions on what roles education and training play to ensure and enhance employability and productivity as well as strategies for restructuring them and their effective utilization for employability and productivity.

The fact that educational system in Nigeria is dwindling and indeed, sinking to the lowest ebb is no longer news. The crisis in education sector is enormous. These range from poor budgetary allocations by government to the sector which has not allowed meaningful developments in nation's institutions; non provision of educational resources, rapid expansion in student enrolment especially in higher institutions, incessant strikes by workers in the sector, low quality of instruction and teaching as a result of inadequate training of teachers which in turn, contributes to poorly trained graduates entering the labour market each year: examination malpractice, cultism and a host of other problems.

Indeed, the crisis in education has been of great concern to many who daily call for reform in the sector especially to meet the present challenges facing the world in social, political and economic ramifications as a result of globalization which requires greater productivity. The implication of this is that new knowledge, new skills and new competencies must be built in the human resource and this is expected to come in form of education and training. Education becomes important when considering that people's ability to absorb and adjust to new and advanced technology is determined by level of education. Educated people are more responsive to receiving and understanding of instruction.

In the same vein, training improves the prospects of finding and retaining jobs, improves productivity at work especially by developing skills and competencies and right attitudes and tolerance needed for economic, social and political participation in an increasing integrated and mobile world (International Labour Organization 2000). Therefore, giving the right education, the right training to the citizenry remains the better option for catching up with the changing world. Many countries according to ILO (2000), have been attempting recently to reform through education and training to meet the demands for skills and competencies. Policies are now being introduced to reform education and initial training provisions, and to establish systems of continuous and life -long learning.

The ILO (2000) further stressed that the difference between demand for skills and competencies and those available in the workforce has been widening recently. The content and quality coverage of education and training in many parts of the world have been insufficient to help workers adapt to the changing world of work so as to maintain employability throughout their working lives. Workers often lack the literacy skills necessary to learn professional skills.

It was equally argued that in the developing countries (such as Nigeria), wide spread child labour prevent adequate schooling and that young people who drop out of school are ill-prepared for labour market; enterprise training often excludes unskilled and semi-skilled workers, groups with special needs and workers with disabilities. Training is often limited to particular production process and working places thereby, reducing the potentiality of skills in the labour market. This argument becomes plausible when one considers the type of education system we have in Nigeria especially one that has been bedeviled with a lot of crisis.

Given the present circumstances, it is pertinent to establish an enabling and sustainable environment for education in Nigeria. In order to achieve the desired national transformation and human development objectives, there is need to reform and restructure the education sector to empower and develop the citizenry to acquire skills and knowledge that would prepare them for the world of work.

### **Education**

Education has remained the instrument par excellence for individual and social development. It is viewed as a good investment in nation's development (FRN, 2004). It is believed that quantity and quality of education given to any nation's citizenry determines to a large extent, the quality of output expected of them. What this means according to Durasaro (2010), is that the educational system should produce quality and quantity of human resources required for the economy's growth using the right mix of inputs.

### **Training**

Training in itself, is the aspect of education which lays emphasis on acquisition of practical skills for job i.e. equipping individuals with the necessary skills for job performance. Most academic programmes encourage training before job (Industrial Training) or on-job-training to get the employer-to be or the employee acquainted with job performance. It is equally believed that training improves the individual's prospects of finding and retaining jobs as well as productivity at work education.

### **Employability**

This includes the individual's ability to secure and retain employment and improve his or her productivity and income-earning prospects; compete effectively in the labour market and be occupationally mobile, learning to learn for new labour markets, job opportunities, integrate fully into economic and social life, and generally work and live well in an advanced knowledge, communication and technological society (ILO, 2000).

In order words, an individual is employable when he or she is able secure to job, retain it, progress at work and cope with change, secure another job if so desired, move flexibly in and out of labour force at different periods of life cycle. These no doubt, lead to productivity.

### **Productivity**

Productivity is an efficient measurement of resources used (human resource or others in the production process). Obadan and Odusola (2011) posited that it measures relationship between quantity and quality of goods and services produced and quantity of resources used to produce them such as labour, capital and technology. Going by the explanation above, productivity is an instrument for continuous progress and constant improvement of activities. Productivity is subject to use of better methods or improvements in labour which incidentally, comes through education and training.

### **The Role of Education in Ensuring Employability and Productivity**

Education has been described as a significant determinant in boosting employment and productivity. Ability of an individual to perform a job depends on education received. Lau, Jamison and Luat (1991) posited that education increases an individual's ability to do common jobs, to understand instructions and apply them to a new task, receive and coordinate with others; evaluate and adjust to a changing work environment, help reduce subjective uncertainty and doubt, and increase ability to adapt to new technology which in turn increases the individual's ability to motivate and improve productivity. Employers of labour are aware of this co-relationship between education,

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employment and productivity and therefore, recruit and pay higher salaries and wages to better educated employees. The implication of this is that higher productivity is as a result of employee's education.

This assertion is in line with the findings of studies on "Schooling, Technology and Productivity cited in Soesilowati and Salim (2009), where it was argued that if most of the workers with more skills are those who have higher education, then education could be seen as a signal of greater ability or skill.

Education functions as a screening device in selecting employees and a human capital device that may induce greater productivity. Bedard (1998) in Soesilowati and Salim explained that in terms of human capital, education could enrich the national ability of workers and give them advantage in labour market. The implication of this is that an educated person with respect to employment has advantage over one who did not acquire any form of education.

According to ILO (2000), basic education determines an individual's ability to find and retain job. The less educated one is, the more likely he or she is to be unemployed. It is expected that education should provide an individual with the minimum requirements such as literacy and numeracy to function productively in the work place.

Education is important when considering peoples' ability to absorb or adjust to new or advanced technology. This is determined by the level of their education because educated workers are more responsive in receiving and understanding instruction.

In this regard then, education remains one of the effective tools for enhancing knowledge and abilities necessary for work.

#### **The Role of Training in Enhancing Employment and Productivity**

Training which has to do acquisition of practical knowledge, skills and competencies for job performance is essential for employment and productivity. In the International Labour Organization Report (2000), it was pointed out that training helps in developing multiple skills and competencies that will help countries, enterprises and individuals in order to be able to export the productivity potentials of advanced technologies such as Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Training enables the employee to adjust as markets, technology, work organization and opportunities change.

For the unemployed, there is need for training in new skills and competencies that will enhance their chances of entering or re-entering stable employment. Training is not limited to workforce; young people need broad training on specific skills and exposure to the world of work that will ease the transition from school to work.

According to E-how.com (2012), for the employed, training ensures that workers remain up-to-date in knowledge and skills prerequisite for optimal performance at job. Again when workers are fully trained on safety procedures, they are less likely to suffer on-the-job injuries, thereby maintaining employability and productivity at work. With respect to training, the better the employee knows his job, the more quickly and effectively he can complete the job thereby, boosting productivity.

Generally speaking, in developing countries such as Nigeria, education and training should be indispensable tools for improving productivity and living conditions among the large sections as the population. ILO (2000), emphasized that the proactive function of education and training is to develop, and harness the knowledge and abilities of individuals and enterprises, and the capacity of entire economies so as to seize the opportunities of globalization and more open markets potentially offer. How can education and training be re-engineered to promote employability and productivity in Nigeria?

## **Strategies for Restructuring and Effective Utilization of Training and Education for Employment and Productivity**

### **1. Restructure the Curriculum to Focus on Provision of Basic Skills**

Skills are at the core of improving the individual's employment outcomes as well as increasing productivity and growth in a nation. To re-engineer education and training to cater for employment and productivity, first the curriculum should be restructured to emphasize acquisition of basic skills. These should equally include ability of the learner to identify, analyze and solve problems; capacity to learn new skills in order to adapt to the work tasks. The restructured curriculum should also emphasize acquisition of communicative skills to enable the individual or worker to communicate with others and use information independently. Such a curriculum should include methods of planning acquisition of skills.

In this ICT age, it is expected that such a curriculum should emphasize computer literacy at all levels of education. To meet the challenges of globalization also it is expected that learners grasp simple scientific knowledge and technology. These no doubt should enhance an individual's ability to gain employment and equally be productive.

### **2. Develop the Right Skills Early In Children Through Education**

Whenever we want to get things done rightly in a society we must start off early in life to inculcate the right knowledge, attitudes, ideal skills etc. in children. Enhancing employability and productivity would require development of technical cognitive and behavioural skills conducive for high productivity and flexibility in the work environment. According to World Bank (2011), researches have shown that handicaps built early in life are difficult if not impossible to remedy later in life.

It is also pertinent that at this early level, education and training to be provided should convey social skills and understanding of citizenship and culture of work. It is believed that these would help them understand their social rights and claims as well as social obligations and responsibilities. For instance, in Nigeria today, many young people do not understand or rather think they need not acquire work skills especially where an empire has been built for them by their technocrat, economic guru and political high -and -mighty parents.

### **3. Build a Good and Clear Education Standard**

Employability and productivity are subject to the type of operational standard of education in a nation. In Nigeria, we are faced with the problem of fall in standard of education. A situation where teachers are not teaching well, learners have refused to learn and authorities have failed to provide a good environment for education.

To ensure that standard of education remains high, a stronger education system with clear learning standards must be put in place. The system must recruit only good and well qualified teachers and also make adequate provisions for their training and retraining for effective delivery of instruction. There must be adequate resources for learning as well as provision of a proper regulatory environment. Above all, the system must ensure that all students learn what they are supposed to learn.

### **4. Developing Job-Relevant Skills in Students**

Job opportunities are usually open to individuals who have through education and training acquired the prerequisite job- relevant skills. To achieve this, education in Nigeria must be re-engineered to develop the right incentive and the right framework for both pre-employment and on-job training programs in institutions especially in higher educational institutions. Development of job-relevant skills should be through direct teaching in classrooms, through association with customized training programs or working directly with employers of labour and industries. Also accumulating public and private efforts can be combined to achieve more relevant and responsive training system.

### **5. Encourage Entrepreneurship and Innovations in Education**

It is true that entrepreneurship education is emphasized in the National Policy on Education (2004), but implementation of this policy in Nigeria's education system appears to be more of a

theoretical thing than practical. In order to utilize the gains of education and training for employability and productivity, Nigeria's education system must be restructured to achieve the objectives of entrepreneurship education by creating an enabling environment for investments in knowledge and creativity. For instance, build working areas in nearly all departments in the schools where students can practice skills. Time is allotted in time-table for this.

According to ILO (2000), education should prepare young people for non-linear career changes during the working life. It should convey positive image of enterprise and entrepreneurship. It should also develop in students the capacity to improvise and be creative. Therefore, to ensure employability and productivity, our education and training must encourage entrepreneurship and utilization of innovative skills in the learner.

#### **6. Develop a Flexible Workforce through Education**

In view of the present economic crisis experienced world over, any education and training system that do not equip the citizenry of a nation to adapt and deal with the complexities of rapidly changing world especially with respect to being employed, staying employed and being productive is not a viable system. Is it possible to vouch for Nigeria's education system in this regard? If the answer is 'NO', then education and training systems in Nigeria must be restructured to reflect a more flexible, efficient and secure workforce. This could be achieved by supporting the development and adoption of a more active learning –to- do approach as well as spirit of team working right from the primary, through to the secondary to tertiary levels of education. This system as is practiced in Australia, Germany, United Kingdom and United States of America according ILO (2000) exposes students to the world of work. In the higher institutions, education and training to be given must be restructured to become flexible, responsive and timely to meet with the demands of labour market changes. With these strategies education and training could be reformed and tailored towards enhancing employability and productivity in Nigeria.

#### **The Way Forward**

In order to get our education and training systems re-engineered to ensure employability and productivity, the following suggestions could be useful:

1. Educational planners must begin with an assessment of education and training needs of the citizenry for the enhancement of employment and productivity.
2. A new and workable education policy must be fashioned out in order to achieve the above strategy.
3. Society must be sensitized on the need to restructure the education system in order to meet the challenges of this globalized age.
4. Government should ensure that physical facilities e.g. workshops for training, conducive classrooms for learning are built in our institutions; teachers should be properly trained, and funds must be made readily available for running training programmes.
5. Above all, the new system must de-emphasize acquisition of terminal certificates and rely more on practical experiences in order to coerce learners to learn what they are supposed to learn and for the purpose of using such learning to increase their chances of employment and productivity.

#### **Conclusion**

Education and Training are the main instruments available to prepare individuals for the rapidly changing and increasingly demanding worlds of work in order to improve their employability and enhance productivity at work.

As efforts are geared towards transformation of societies through reforms in education in many countries of the world, Nigeria should take a cue from there and plan strategies for restructuring her education system to cater for employment and productivity of her workforce: The gains of education and training must be harnessed in order to re-engineer education to meet the economic political and social challenges posed by globalization.

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