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Workplace education and the attainment of Vision 20:2020 in Nigeria

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Abstract

Examined in this paper was the importance of workplace education to the attainment of Vision 20:2020 in Nigeria. With the population of over 160 million people, Nigeria is classified as the giant of Africa, with abundant human and material resources and being the largest oil producer in the continent and the seventh largest in the world. With all these potentials, Nigeria is naturally positioned to be among the developed/industrialized economies in the world. Unfortunately, the country is far from reaching this position despite the huge human and material deposit in her space. With the aim of bringing socio-economic change to the entire nation, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the Vision 20:2020 in 2009, the plan to articulate Nigeria's economic growth and development and place her among the top 20 economies in the world by the year 2020. Although several efforts have been made by the government to improve the operations of both public and private sectors in the country towards realizing this vision, this study identified workplace education as one of the essential tools to achieving this lofty plan. This paper, therefore, discusses the inherent potential of workplace education in achieving the goals and objectives of corporate organizations and Nigeria's Vision 20:2020. The paper concludes by making some suggestions which one of them is the onward review of the training programmes in public and private organizations in Nigeria so as to accommodate the changes and dynamic nature of the 21st Century knowledge economy.

Keywords: Workplace Education; Vision 20:2020; economic transformation; Nigeria

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1. Introduction

Workplace education is recognized globally as an essential tool for developing the employee's knowledge and skills for optimum realization of the organizational goals and objectives. Apart from the fact that it helps organizations realizing their vision, economic analysts have also view workplace education as the only avenue through which the 21st Century employees can stay relevant in this ever-changing knowledge economy. According to Krebill-Prather (2009),

...the focus of Workplace education is on the literacy and basic skills training that workers need to gain new employment, retain present jobs, advance in their careers, or increase productivity. Curricula are developed by educators working with employers and employee groups to determine what reading, computation, speaking and reasoning skills are required to perform job tasks effectively and deliver the target set by the organization.

Apart from meeting the set goals and objectives, organizations, either public or private are also expected to be working in line with the aspirations and development plans set by their societies and nation. The Vision 20:2020 was designed by Nigerian government in order to achieve the desired socio-economic and political developments that are visible, sustainable and virile. Recognizing the abundant human and material resources of the nation, the Vision 20:2020 framework is an expression of Nigeria's intent to improve the living standards of her citizens and place the country among the best 20 economies in the world by the year 2020. Without doubt, realizing this vision requires the painstaking efforts of public and private sectors, as well as individual citizens of the nation. Since the prosperity of any organization or sector within a nation is the prosperity of that nation, it is expedient for the stakeholders in Nigerian economy to take painstaking efforts towards ensuring better and conducive atmosphere for the nation's public and private organization. The reason is not far-fetched, successful efforts towards transforming a nation's economy require strong partnerships between government, public and private organizations, employers, and employees. This is important if achieving Vision 20:2020 and other development plans of the Nigerian government will see the light of the day. The focus of this paper is on workplace education and it can be used to harness the economic potential of the most populous black nation called Nigeria.

2. Workplace education

Work place education, according to Walmsley (2009), is learning organized in or by the workplace, and that supports employment role and progression. Reeve & Gallacher (1999) asserts that Workplace education or learning is seen as

..A flexible form of learning which enables employees to engage in the regular processes of up-dating and continuing professional development which have been increasingly emphasized. Moreover, insofar as the learning is work-based it is also seen as facilitating forms of learning,

and types of knowledge which are of particular relevance to the work in which the learners are engaged.

Hassan (2013) referred to workplace education to be the same thing as workplace training and company based training. Hassan viewed workplace education as 'a systematic approach towards learning and human resource development in order to improve individual, team, or organizational effectiveness'. Workplace learning is thus often characterized, conceptualized and promoted as advantageous for both employers and employees and the nation. Within the literature, workplace education is understood by many, for example, as a process to: promise improvements in performance and productivity (Ashton & Sung, 2002); to potentially create opportunities for personal and professional development and promise job satisfaction and self-fulfillment (Matthews, 1999); and to potentially facilitate a movement towards an equal and socially inclusive society where there will be better jobs and more skilled, knowledgeable and flexible workers to occupy them (Senge, 1991).

However, we need to understand the fact that these potentials are not simply met by the recognition that learning occurs at work alone, it requires both the understanding and development. A common theme in the definitions of Work Place Education highlighted is that they describe a situation where "learning tasks are influenced by the nature of work". Fuller (2003) noted that 'workplace education places the workplace in the driving seat, 'flanking the central position of providers'. The industry or organization, as the hub of activity, draws in the programmes and the providers as required. Work Place Education can combine both traditional learning, as stated in a curriculum provided by a formal education provider, and also non-formal 'on the job' learning. It helps tremendously in providing solid foundation for lifelong learning as people and businesses grow together. The centre-point of workplace education are literacies and essential skills. A careful plan to improve workers' skills while on the job creates a more productive workforce, a more competitive economy, and an improved bottom line. Furthermore, by providing education in the workplace the intention is to create a path of economic mobility for low-wage/lower skilled workers, which in turn should lead to higher retention and increased productivity for employers.

3. Benefits of workplace education to organizations and Nations

The benefits of workplace education are enormous to the realization of the potentials of organizations and nations at large. The benefits of workplace education or training, as identified by Krebill-Prather (2009) are discussed below.

3.1. Improved quality of work

One of the clearest signs that Workplace Education Programmes are having impact is that employees improve the quality of their work. The fact that many employers of labour identified such improvements vividly demonstrates how improved basic skills enhance workplace performance. The reason is not far-fetched, employees take more pride, ownership and control in their jobs. Improved attitudes enable them to

be more responsible and responsive to customers' needs. In addition, better listening and language skills allow them to understand sophisticated instructions at work place and better communications skills breed more confident workers who are willing to get involved in continuous improvement.

3.2. Improved team-work

Workplace education helps employees to be more committed to team-building which is also going to help them appreciate the value of investing time and energy in continuous or lifelong learning and in understanding their colleagues and supervisors in order to work together as a team toward achieving the set goals. We need to understand that sometimes the course content of training is less important than the experience they are going to gain while undergoing the training. The act of attending a class and meeting colleagues in itself improves the ability of employees to work in a team. Another interesting exercise is to match the employees and managers together in classroom training sessions which can lead to improved team performance later in the workplace. The result is greater responsiveness, flexibility, and reduced requirements for close supervision.

3.3. Ability to cope with change in the workplace

Workplace education will equip the employees with the basic skills to cope with change. With new knowledge and skills, they can respond more quickly and confidently to new conditions and take on leadership roles. The fear or anxiety that change will spell personal misfortune will also disappear with the help of proper training. The more employees learn, the better they become at acquiring new information to handle more change.

3.4. Improved capacity to use new technology

Employees who receive basic skills training increase their technological proficiency. With the advancement in information and communication technology (ICT) and its usage, workplace education remain the only tool to update employees' knowledge and skills on the operation and maintenance of workplace tools and machine for effective service delivery. For many, Workplace Education Programmes provide their first exposure to technology and give them the skills to develop some comfort with new technology.

3.5. Increased output of products and services

Skills gained through Workers education or training often enable employees to work more efficiently and with greater accuracy. In the case of service delivery, improved skills combined with a more positive attitude toward customers can lead to increased output. It also gives workforce's skills which allowed the company to produce more technical equipment and sell complete systems rather than only rudimentary parts.

3.6. Reduced time per task

Lack of basic skills inhibits employees from performing tasks quickly or learning new ones. Better reading, communications, language comprehension, and speaking skills are important sources of time gains. A well informed and trained employee will deliver the desired on-the-job result without wasting the time and other precious resources of the organization.

3.7. Reduced error rate

Employees with better basic skills make fewer errors, which means less repetition of tasks, thus cutting costs and improving the quality of products and services. The rate of industrial hazards will be minimized while high cautions will also be placed on after-use maintenance of tools and equipment used.

3.8. Better health and safety record

Training gives employees a better grasp of workplace dangers and safety issues and a better understanding of safety processes, and helps them to make fewer errors in following safety instructions. The results are fewer accidents, less lost work time due to injuries, reduced workers' compensation payments, and better compliance with Occupational Safety and Health Administration requirements.

3.9. Reduced waste in production of goods and services

As employees gain skills they can often spot ways to cut waste in production processes and work tasks. Half the employers experienced output gains of 10 percent to 25 percent, stemming from improvements such as using the right parts in manufacturing assembly and cutting wear and tear on production equipment by using it correctly.

3.10. Increased customer retention

Better customer-relationship and retention is another good outcome of an effective and efficient workplace education. It has been proven that employees with proper training have improved communications and problem-solving skills which helps in dealing with customers in a more friendly and rewarding manner. As the employees' communication skills improve, customer retention tends to rise. Improved quality of work is another important factor in helping retention rates

4. The place of workplace education in achieving the Nigeria's Vision 20:2020

The Vision 20:2020 is a framework of the long-term plan of the Federal Government of Nigeria to launch the country into a path of sustained social and economic progress and the emergence of a truly prosperous nation full of opportunities for the inhabitants (FGN Economic Transformation Blueprint, 2009). In recognition of the enormous human and natural endowments of the nation, the long term plan is to improve the living standards of Nigerians and place the country among the league of 20 largest economies in the

world with a minimum GDP of \$900 billion and a per capita income of not less than \$4000 per annum. The target for year 2020 was based on a dynamic comparative analysis of the country's potential growth rate and economic structure vis-à-vis those of other developed economies in the world. Achieving the Vision 20:2020 implies that the Nigerian economy must grow at an average of 13.5% over the years toward the year 2020. Agricultural and industrial sectors are expected to drive the growth at the earlier stage while service sector will take over at the latter stage. That is, the economy would transform from agro-allied industrialization to service-based economy in line with the theory of economic development. The plan is expected to achieve the vision that:

By the year 2020, Nigeria will have a large, strong, diversified, competitive, technologically enabled economy that effectively harnesses the talents and energy of its people and responsibly exploits its national endowments to guarantee a high standard of living and quality of life to its citizens.

The Vision 20:2020 is established on the recognition that the citizens are the most essential assets of any nation. With the population of over 160 million people, Nigeria is the most populous nation in the continent of Africa, endowed with mineral resources like crude oil, cocoa, rubber, among others. The Vision 20:2020 was designed by the government with the aim of using people as catalyst for growth, transformation and national development. With the nation's history of wide income inequality evident in large-scale poverty, unemployment and poor access to healthcare, the vision was conceived to address the disconnection between the economic growth and human development and to increase the well-being and ultimately labour productivity of Nigerian people. Looking at the vision and its components, it is not out of place to say that its achievement is hinged upon the survival of public and private organizations and other entities that formed Nigeria as a nation. Since workplace education is expected to boost the capacity of workers toward enhancing the output and productivity of any organization, it also implies that workplace education help organizations realizing their vision while also helping Nigeria realizing the economically-inclined Vision 20:2020.

5. Conclusion

Thus far, the importance of workplace education in achieving the Vision 20:2020 in Nigeria has been examined. To achieve the lofty idea of Vision 20:2020, two broad objectives are very fundamental. Maximizing the human and natural resources of the country to achieve rapid economic growth is one critical step that needs to be considered. Secondly, translating the successes recorded into equitable social development in order to improve the living standard of the entire citizenry is another right step in the right direction. For public and private organizations to find their rightful place in complementing the efforts of Nigerian government in realizing her Vision 20:2020, the following suggestions were made:

- Organizing periodic workplace education and training should be made compulsory for all employers of labour in the country, especially the private organizations who are found of recruiting cheap labours with littler attention to staff development.
- There should be onward review of curriculum and contents used for workplace training in all the staff development training schools in Nigeria. It has been discovered that many of the training institutes where organizations send their workers for training are still making use of the old methods and materials to train their participants. This, without doubt, will prevent the participants from becoming the 21st Century employees with capacity and capabilities to deliver the expected result of the present knowledge economy.
- There is need for educational planning and management that addresses educational infrastructure, capacity building for teachers and increase funding for the agricultural and manufacturing sectors in Nigeria. In addition to this, more attention should be given to the development of small and medium enterprises in the country.

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