Chapter 7

Integration of Work-Based Learning Into Higher Education for Economic Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Work-based learning (WBL) has a long history in higher education in Nigeria. The current WBL programs are the Students’ Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) and the Graduate Internship (GI). They are sponsored by the federal government with the aim to improve employment outcomes. However, there is still a gross mismatch between the skills of graduates and the demands of employers. This chapter analyzes why the WBL programs in Nigeria have yet not been successful, and suggests alternatives. The analysis reveals a dysfunctional job placement process as a primary barrier and suggests consolidating the SIWES and GI into one school-to-work program, based upon the Graduate Employability Skill Development (GESD) model, along with strategies to improve the development, management, and quality assurance of placement. The chapter concludes by underscoring the integration and effective management of WBL at all levels of education, including continuing education as an important and realistic approach that Nigeria should strive for to attain economic development.

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Higher education (HE) in Nigeria as in other places, has been receiving extraordinary attention since the beginning of the 21st century. Much of the global attention to HE (a.k.a., tertiary education) is because the growth and development of nations are hinged on the level of education and knowledge of its citizens. With knowledge production, dissemination, and consumption at the core of economic transformation, HE institutions are envisioned as strategic players in developing human resources (Sall, Lebeau, & Kassimir, 2003). Likewise, work-based learning (WBL) has become a vital element of the educational system around the globe with the recognition of the importance for facilitating economic development (Raelin, 2008; Solomon, Boud, & Society for Research into Higher Education [SRHE], 2001). Therefore, countries with HE systems that integrate WBL are positioned to make the transition to a knowledge economy.

In Nigeria, what is today known as WBL began as vocational and technical training. To fully discern the former, you need to briefly recast the latter. Vocational education (VocEd) or Technical education (TechEd) is the educational process that focuses on individuals’ preparation for entrance and progress in occupations or careers. It can take place at the secondary school or higher education (Uwaifo, 2010).

Strikingly, VocEd/TechEd in Nigeria dates to 1885 when the colonial Hope Waddell Institute was established in Calabar. However, the real planning of the system was in 1946 when it was given a place in the Ten-Year Plan for Development and Welfare. Before this date, the colonial government’s attitude was that the provision of technical education for Nigerians (beyond very limited artisan training for governmental departments) was not important. Up until the early 1940s, technocrats were unable to recommend the establishment of a single training institution. They believed that big trade school or a technical college was not necessary. They reasoned that such school would be expensive to build and equip and require many European and African staff (Osuala, 1976). But eventually, it took root in 1947 when the first indigenous HE institution and Polytechnic, the Yaba Technical Institute (now Yaba College of Technology) was founded. Later on, Nigerian trade schools and polytechnics started developing an array of skill-sets that were responsible for a reasonable portion of the workforce up to a point. For a while, the Nigerian workforce was viewed as a promising lot comparable to its counterparts in Asia and elsewhere.

But with time, employers observed that graduates were lacking practical skills and concluded that the education being received in the institutions was not responsive to the needs for employment (Uvah, 2004). The dependence of industry on technical competencies for operation and maintenance of its resources required a cadre of workers who possessed knowledge of the new technologies prevalent at the time in the workplace.
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