



Illuminative Perspectives on the Nexus between Mobility of Labour, Vocational Technical Education and Skills Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Employment related mobility is fast gaining attention both in integrated economies like Europe and for growing economies in Africa battling with migrant workers. It encompasses occupational mobility as well as geographical mobility. Mobility of labour has taken on a global dimension. This paper explores mobility of labour, its concept, classification and characteristics. The paper also reviews the nexus between labour mobility, skills development and technical, vocational education and training (TVET). The policy implications for TVET with respect to mobility of labour is discussed. Not all occupations being created by technology requires a degree. Formal training in the form of vocational technical training is enough to qualify one for job placement. This places great emphasis on vocational technical education as an integral programme for lifelong learning. Profound changes are occurring in technology, work tasks and work organisation, with equally profound implications for the future role of vocational education and training (VET) in Nigeria. The paper concludes that labour mobility in Nigeria is greatly influenced by the quality of skills possessed and the quality of training in TVET institutions influences occupational mobility. The paper recommends among others that Vocational technical administrators in Nigeria should work closely with industries in identifying skills trend and develop competency based curriculum to reflect industry skills demand.

Key words: Occupational mobility, Geographical mobility, Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Skills, Policy implication

Introduction

Employment related mobility is fast gaining attention both in integrated economies like Europe and for growing economies in Africa battling with migrant workers. It encompasses

occupational mobility, labour market and school-to-work transitions as well as geographical mobility. Mobility of labour has taken on a global dimension. Labour mobility according to Brent (2015) refers to the ease with which labourers are able to move around within an economy and between different economies. More and more people are changing locations, switching jobs and moving abroad in some cases in search of work, higher wages and greener pastures as it is often said in Nigeria. The globalisation and flow of capital, production, services and trade is also encouraging labour mobility and the development of global labour markets. The Nigerian labour market is not excluded. The labour market changes has seen Togolese come to Nigeria and engage in house tiling. The sector is also seeing multinationals employing foreigners from their home countries and elsewhere to work in Nigeria. Nigerians are travelling abroad in search of opportunities, while others are moving from city to city in search for new job opportunities. The world is now an increasingly interconnected global village, where one can apply to work in any country of his/her choice and also compete for job openings in their home countries by workers from other countries. The work of governments and stakeholders is to introduce sustainable economic development processes and encouraging profitable labour mobility through technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and labour market services. This paper explores the issue of mobility of labour and the linkages to Technical Vocational Education And Training (TVET).

Mobility of Labour: Concept, Classification and Characteristics

The past three decades has seen the opening-up of economic borders as well as country borders to both goods and individuals. The implementation of free trade agreements has increased the mobility of labour and capital as well. Mobility of labour refers to how easily workers can move to different jobs within the economy. Labour mobility has been experienced by

both skilled and unskilled workers. In the growing industrialising cities, unskilled workers are also on the move as they leave their rural areas for jobs in the cities and within cities, people are moving from informal work to formal work. At the same time, manufacturing and service industries in advanced economies have shifted operations offshore to take advantage of the low-wage structures of developing countries.

Mobility of labour consists of changes in the location of workers both across physical space (geographic mobility) and across a set of jobs (occupational mobility). At the aggregate level, Jason and Joseph (n.d) averred that labour mobility conveys important economic benefits. The reallocation of workers across regions permits the exploitation of complementary resources as they are discovered in new places, while reallocation across sectors makes possible the use of new technologies and the growth of new industries. At the individual level, mobility allows for improvements in the economic circumstances of those whose skills or aspirations are a poor match for the job or location in which they find themselves. The impact of labour mobility extends well beyond these economic considerations.

Mobility can be considered as geographical, occupational and situational:

Geographical Mobility- this is labour mobility between or within national borders. Geographical mobility is the actual physical movement of labour from one place to another. Geographical labour mobility indicates the level of freedom that workers have to relocate in order to find gainful employment that reflects their training and occupational interests. Root factors such as standards of living and other government-related policies are the main determinants in fluidity of geographic labour mobility. At the economic level, these determinants are specific to a region's size, distance and aggregate job opportunities. At the personal level,

these determinants are specific to personal circumstances, such as family situations, housing issues, local infrastructure and individual education.

Specific key factors determine the ease of geographic labour mobility. First, the mobility of the labour force depends on the aggregate level of education. A higher level of education results in a greater ability to move and find employment. Industrialization is another key determinant of geographic labour mobility. Highly industrialized States like Lagos, Kano and Rivers States that provide more blue collar job opportunities, increase the labour mobility of the economy. Further, industrialization helps workers move from rural locations to larger cities where there are more job opportunities.

Geographic mobility has various dimensions. When it takes place internationally, it is termed “migration”. When it takes place at a local level, people moving within local labour market, it is viewed in terms of commuting/relocation. Also, geographic mobility can take place at regional level, when people move from a region to another within the same country; this is referred to as internal migration (Zimmerman, 2005). In the case of movement between countries such West Africa, it is termed regional migration.

Vocational/Occupational Mobility-This refers to the ease with which workers can switch career fields to find gainful employment or meet labour needs. Higher levels of occupational labour mobility help to maintain strong employment and productivity levels. Individuals might switch occupations for reasons such as working in an occupation which suffers from a low productivity or demand realization, or having a low occupational match quality, or having little occupation-specific human capital. Other reasons for switching occupations could be changing skills set and technological advancements that create new occupations.

Occupational mobility may be vertical or horizontal perspectives, between and within one vocational specialisation, within or between one/more skill levels.

Horizontal Mobility: The movement of labour from one occupation to another in the same grade or level is called horizontal mobility, for example, a driver in a company who soon becomes a technical staff in the same company.

(b) Vertical Mobility: When a worker of a lower grade and status in an occupation moves to another occupation in a higher grade and status, it is vertical mobility. This is typified by a technical college teacher who soon becomes a university don.

(c) interzone- between the informal/non-formal sector and the formal education and training sector. This happens when a self employed technician joins a company to offer his services.

The major element that aids occupational mobility is skills development.

Mobility of Labour, Skills Development, Technical Vocational Education and Training: The Nexus

Mobility of labour is not only essential to promote national economic integration and integration of other measures, but also to enhance personal well being as well as transnational exchange of experience. As national economies become inter-related through trade and globalization, so also do the labour market. What creates the level playing field for the global labour market entrants are the global skills acquired by the participants. It does not matter if one is a Nigerian or not, one has to prepare self for competition in the labour market with foreigners. Failure to do this, has led to juicy job positions in multinational companies being taken over by migrant workers (foreigners). When it comes to mobility of labour, TVET can and should play a central role. Mobility of labour is easier when workers possess skills. The challenge is not that

there are not enough skilled individuals in Nigeria, but that there are more unskilled individuals in the Nigerian society today. This in effect is affecting labour mobility.

The Education system is often seen as a channel for upward social mobility. Mobility may be classified as moving from one place to another, from one function to another or from one specialty to another. All of these types of mobility are interrelated and they are all related to vocational technical education. Vocational education has always been used as a source of labour supply. Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been known to bridge the gap between technology and the society. According to Uwaifo (2009), TVET aims at helping the society maintain its material civilization, by enabling the individual to keep pace with the myriad of changes in industries and occupation, technological trends and social developments. Afeti (2010) documents that TVET is the key for development of the skilled manpower that are needed to meet the challenges of the rapid changing in technological advancement. Accordingly, TVET is the learning process linking in addition to common education, the study of technologies and the attainment of practical skill relevant to occupations. Mclean and David (2009) refers to TVET as the attainment of knowledge and skills to enhance opportunities for socio-economic development in consonance with rapidly changing work environment. The goal of TVET is quite plausible, in the sense that, it equips people not only with technical and vocational skills, but with a wide range of awareness that are obligatory for meaningful participation in working place and daily life. Therefore, TVET serves as the intermediary between technology and occupations on the one hand and societies on the other. TVET can adequately equip its graduates to be more effective in this age of science and technology, global fluidity and labour mobility.

For new occupations springing up today, particularly in technology, science and related fields, or even in old occupations where automation and technology (new machines and

equipments) is changing the skills set, training and retraining will need to be offered. Technology has made it compulsory for workers to learn new skills to perform their old jobs. Take for instance, car/motor repairs, for the auto-mechanic to be able to work on new cars these days, they need the help of the car diagnostics. This indicates that they will need to learn again after initial training, how to use the new technology to repair cars. The effect is seen in all sectors of the economy. Thus, workers, particularly, technologists and crafts men, who do not possess these skills, will find it difficult to migrate. Nigerians today are relying on Togolese to do their house tiling jobs, insinuating that the Togolese are better at tiling. The Togolese has become an occupationally migrant worker in Nigeria, doing jobs that Nigerians would have done, because they are better skilled. The same goes for most sectors of the economy. The challenge in the Nigerian workforce is that of obsolete skills for the few skilled people. The situation becomes more dire as one tries to imagine the number of unskilled young men in Nigeria today, unable to find jobs because they are not skilled, worse still, cannot migrate because they do not have the skills for occupational mobility.

The occupations that are expanding and offering the most prospects for growth and personal advancement require more education. People who are drawn to these prospects, need to be more educated. Education at higher levels qualifies individuals for high-training or highly capital intensive jobs. Thus, TVET can be used for training and retaining of people to enable them qualify for new jobs, acquire skills for new occupations being created, re-enter the job market as well as up-skilling individuals already practising. More so, TVET can help individuals change jobs through offering training in new occupations. In all, TVET can be supportive of labour mobility both geographic and occupational mobility by offering training and retraining of workers and people to help them qualify for new jobs in the labour market.

From a theoretical perspective, Grubb and Ryan (1999) classified TVET in the following categories

1. Pre-employment: TVET prepares individuals for the initial entry into employment. In Nigeria, this is offered at Technical Colleges and Polytechnics. Some universities also offer TVET programmes.
2. Upgrade training: provides additional training for individuals who are already employed, as their jobs change, as the technology and work environment become more complex, or as they advance within the company;
3. Retraining: provides training for individuals who have lost their jobs, so that they can find new ones, or to individuals who seek new careers to develop the necessary competences for employment; individuals in retraining programmes, by definition, have already had a labour-market experience; therefore, retraining may not have a direct connection with the occupation they already have;
4. Remedial TVET: provides education and training for individuals who are in some way marginal or out of the mainstream labour force; typically those who have not been employed for a long period of time or who do not have any labour-market experience.

Policy Implications for TVET in Nigeria

Not all occupations being created by technology requires a degree. Formal training in the form of vocational technical training is enough to qualify one for job placement. This places great emphasis on vocational technical education as an integral programme for lifelong learning. It also questions the long standing policy, whether written or unwritten of skewing vocational technical education for the under achiever, less privileged or education for the poor. True as it

may seem, that vocational technical education certification may be easy to acquire and less rigorous than engineering and sciences. It is no less inferior. It serves as the shortest route into the labour market, but also serves the function of helping even trained and employed workers sharpen their skills and acquire new skills as their occupations change with technology and new innovations. Worse still, trying to get everybody educated and possess skills, while it may be one of the functions of TVET is being miscued to mean general mass literacy. This has watered down the quality of training, support and proliferation of certificates. Technical training programmes in many countries, Nigeria inclusive are supply-driven and are very often not designed to meet observed or projected labour market demands. The emphasis appears to be on helping the unemployed to find jobs, without any critical attempt to match training to available jobs. This situation has resulted in many vocational school graduates not finding jobs or finding themselves in jobs for which they have had no previous training. Non-targeted skills development is one of the major weaknesses of the TVET system in many African countries.

Every vocational education and training (VET) system faces the challenge to keep up to date with accelerating changes in their markets and economies. Profound changes are occurring in technology, work and work organisation, with equally profound implications for the future role of vocational education and training (VET) in Nigeria. The changes in work and job descriptions today are created mainly through technology; globalization, international competition; organizational change and growing polarization in incomes. The future of work according to Simon (2000) will be largely shaped by technology, the capacity of labour and change management. Training, along with research and development, work organisation and capital raising, will determine whether an economy is a high-skill economy that provides for rising standards of living. The key elements in the future role of TVET will be its capacity to

integrate more closely with the workplace and its capacity to integrate into the innovation cycle. TVET and its practitioners will need to become more global, better networked and closer to the technological edge in every industry.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the issues relating mobility of labour to technical, vocational education and training (TVET). Although TVET implementation in Nigeria is still fragmented and supply driven, it still has the capacity to help individuals get trained and acquire skills, thereby positioning them for gainful employment. However, the challenge is not in training, but the quality of training it provides viz a viz industry demands. The paper concludes that labour mobility in Nigeria is greatly influenced by the quality of skills possessed and the quality of training in TVET institutions influences occupational mobility.

Recommendations

Based on the reviewed literature, the following recommendations are made

1. Policies related to Vocational Technical education in Nigeria should be reviewed to reflect training for all and not for the poor.
2. Vocational technical administrators in Nigeria should work closely with industries in identifying skills trend and develop competency based curriculum to reflect industry skills demand.
3. Special vocational training centres should be set up across the country to cater for retraining of workers and others in areas of need when new technologies call for new

skills set. This is necessary for times when reviewing the curriculum to take care of the new occupation is not possible immediately.

4. Efforts should be made by the federal, State and local governments to enhance vocational training to displaced youths with no skills across the country.
5. Vocational education should be adopted into the Nigerian university training system as it is in America, where students have a major and a minor course/degree. That is, a student studying electrical engineering as a major, takes on house tiling as a minor.
6. Finally, vocational education should be administered in Nigeria as an integral part of lifelong learning.

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