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RESEARCH ARTICLE

CHALLENGES OF TECHNICAL VOCATION EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET) IN THE ERA OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

The paper focused on challenges of TVET in the era of covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria and the way forward. The authors identified some of the challenges to include impact of the pandemic on education, mode of conduct of TVET examination and certification, loss of jobs resulting from the lockdown, health challenges leading to loss of thousands of lives, time lost in financial institutions as a result of long queues and maintaining of social distancing, negative impact on women and youths were also taken into consideration as measures to address the global pandemic and recession occasioned by the lock down in Nigeria. In response to the aforementioned covid -19 crisis, TVET came up with new and expanded on-line distance learning programmes and technologies to promote technical education and training. TVET further proffer solutions to skills shortages as the pandemic unfold through the year.

INTRODUCTION

The term Covid -19 is generally referred to as corona virus disease or pandemic whose origin is traced to Wuhan in China while TVET is defined by world bank (2020) as technical, vocation, orientation with secondary education, post-secondary, non-tertiary education and also youth and adult skill training programme on the job training. The covid – 19 pandemic has affected societies around the world and also caused an unprecedented fall in economic activities, loss of working hours, income and a sharp rise in unemployment and underemployment. International Labour Office- Geneva (2021) key findings reported that the situation jeopardizes the accomplishment of sustainable development goals (SDGS). It posits that the pandemic has disrupted education and training institutions in the vast majority countries stressing that TVET programmes have being particularly hard hit given their unique focus on work- based learning and the acquisition of practical skills. The covid-19 pandemic has also caused major disruptions in technical, vocation, education and training. In a joint survey conducted by International Labour Organization and United Nations, Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization and World Bank (2021) revealed that 98 percent of participants confirmed the closure of technical, vocation, education and training centres across the globe. The closure has caused significant shift to distance learning with half of the centres currently providing online training.

However, there are major inequalities in terms of access to online education and training by vulnerable groups like Africa and Nigeria in particular where the requisite information and communication technology infrastructure and literacy are lagging. Aniah (2021) observed that covid-19 lead to lock down of some states and cities in Nigeria such as Kaduna, Lagos and Abuja among others with exception of Calabar, Cross River State, the governor explained that the daily survival of citizens was a problem however, urged citizens in the state to adhered to covid-19 protocol such as wearing of face mask and observing social distancing in worship centres, markets and hospitals. In some states, markets and schools were lock down with guide lines of operation while hospitals offer skeletal services. The resultant effects of such lock down was distress and hunger, it was however disclosed that Federal Government gave palliatives to reduce the impact of the pandemic on its citizens. Despite government effort to reduce the negative impacts, it was learnt that in Lagos food items of different kinds were under key and lock in ware houses. Another worrisome and frustrating situation was long lines in banks with people wearing face masks, sitting and waiting to be attended to as a measure to curtail the spread of the disease while unemployment was on the increase followed by partial reduction of lockdown in phases. The hall mark of TVET is focused on “practical skills and work-readiness”, it makes remote learning particularly challenging. Most educational institutions including TVET have closed due to covid-19 measures, teaching and learning has moved from classroom to remote means facilitated by internet, television, radio or print materials but the degree to which learning can still take place

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outside the classroom is constrained by many factors which can be most binding on low income contexts and vulnerable students. Remote learning approaches are a weak substitute for practical exercises, when these exercises require the use of equipment or materials that are usually not found inside the home except where such exercises can be stimulated remotely for example, virtual or augmented reality experiences. On the other hand, secondary training programme on automobile mechanics requires substantial hands-on practice and will be much more difficult to provide remotely. Furthermore, whether a switch to remote learning can materialize at all also depends substantially on whether there is connectivity and a platform.

Another obstacle faced by TVET is lack of general and technological infrastructure i.e electricity, internet connectivity devices. The urgent need to shift to distance learning modalities is constrained by lack adequate infrastructure. Nigeria as a country is challenged with the issue of supply of electricity, online connectivity, low bandwidth and lack of network capacity to cope with increase data usage, this seem to add to the difficulty of switching to remote learning modalities. The additional data usage cost to be incurred for distance learning are borne by students and teachers. The digital divide between urban and rural areas is another serious obstacle.

Assessment and examinations for certification requires skills. Conducting such assessments and examinations promotes the internal efficiency of TVET system. During times of lock down and schools closure, countries were forced to postpone theoretical and practical examination to rely on past results to determine grades or assume the assessment be placed after covid-19 measures are relaxed. In France, final TVET examinations previously scheduled for students in June were cancelled stressing that as much as possible students grades will be based on continuous assessment, where it was not possible, examination had to be postponed to September. Similarly, in Austria, apprentices in the third year who finished the last year on theoretical exams that year, possibly practical work will be done during the summer while some vocational exams may be postponed. Furthermore, in Israel, the TVET system has started preparing to conduct face to face assessment of post-secondary TVET students, which includes preparing for external practical examination by private sectors representatives as these are required for graduates to be licensed in their professions. ILO and World Bank (2021) stated that covid-19 crisis has shone light on the lack of adequate technological infrastructure, digital skills and pedagogical resources and demonstrated the negative consequences that such lack of preparedness can have in the short and long term, particularly on the most disadvantage groups. It further posits that the disruptive consequences of the pandemic may result in reduced access to affordability of TVET programmes, difficulties with TVET students' engagement and quality assurance, and increase in opportunity cost of completing TVET programmes and lack of motivation among teachers and students and rise in the dropout rate. The covid-19 pandemic has had negative effects on women and young entrepreneurs given their over representation in sectors particularly affected by lockdown and other systemic issues including lack of access to finance, technology, market, network and social protection. The covid-19 pandemic has caused a steep global economic pullback, without modern parallel. According to ILO (2020) between 5million and 25million jobs will be lost and there will be drop in labour

income, over 70 million people were expected to fall back to extreme poverty.

In addition, access to finance is expected to remain a severe challenge as capital flows out of financial sectors in developing countries like Nigeria will remain a source of concern.

The Way forward: Despite the many challenges of covid-19, the current situation offers potential opportunities to improve skills and skills development system to "rebuild back better".

In response to covid -19 on TVET, online solutions are highly utilized among United Nations entities to deliver training and advisory services to strengthen the capacity of entrepreneurs and the ability to reach international market. International Trade Centre and Webinar (2020) adopted several online tools to reach out to its emperic network of about 500,000 entrepreneur in more than forty countries (40) in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East.

New TVET training programmes, actions and resources in response to the pandemic include;

- Developing new and innovative training programmes and expanding the existing courses.
- Developing new training materials and resources, both online and off-line and converting the existing learning materials into an online format.
- Analysis of Training needs initiated by government and social partners.
- Support services to explain questions related to distance learning and assessment for parents, students. Teachers and frontline workers.
- Recruitment and training of additional teachers and trainers.
- Training subsidies and other forms direct support for affected sectors.
- Re-orientation of training centres towards the production of protective equipment.
- Developing workers, job seekers, migrant workers and refugees for sectors in need, including fast track licenses and formal and informal recognition of skills.
- Extra effort be made to ensure that TVET is included in the public response to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on education system curriculum.

On the issue of health, experience of 2014/2015 Ebola epidemic outbreak in Sierra Leone lead to the setting-up National Ebola Training Academy platform of clinical training modules for frontline Ebola health care workers. The intensive short-term training provided by the academy was found to have contributed to controlling the outbreak. Nigeria health sector with the support of the Federal government should set-up similar academy to guide against outbreak of any disease in future. World Economic Forum (2020) has call for rapid training of community health workers to contribute to covid-19 health response in USA and the UK to serve as example for other countries to follow. In Turkey, vocational schools were reported to have collaborated with private sectors on design and production of materials such as surgical masks and disinfectants. Thailand reported that TVET institutions produced and distributed hand sanitizers among local

communities While Malaysia had access to training materials on ventilators and machines, Indonesia made efforts to initiate training for medical equipment technicians, other health care workers as well as garment factory workers and call center workers.

Given the prevalence of practical skills training taking place in TVET workshops and labs, TVET institutions could transfer the supplies of equipment to hospitals and other institutions where such cases may arise. Nigeria universities like Federal University of Technology, Minna was not left out supporting government effort in terms of production hand sanitizers, face masks to fight the menace. Oriana and Bandiera (2020) posits that achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls is an end in itself that is deeply interlinked with the ability to realize all of goals. The empowerment and livelihood for adolescent's programme of BRAC International in Uganda has been offering life skills and vocational training to female youths at adolescent development clubs five afternoons in a week. An impact evaluation found that young female participants were more likely to be self-employed, had lower rate of teen pregnancy and entry into marriage or cohabitation and were less likely to be exposed to sexual violence.

Conclusion

The paper shares lessons learnt by TVET providers, government and social partners from covid-19 crisis and responses and further discusses how to strengthen TVET, develop greater resilience to future shocks. The paper also open up challenges and opportunities to build crisis proof TVET systems and ensure better preparedness to achieve agenda for sustainable development by 2030.

Suggestions

If the following suggestions are adhered to, it will strengthen preparedness for future crisis:

- Invest in the development of adequate crisis response plans for education sector from national down to the provider level.

- Develop and reinforce capacities of TVET teachers and learners, and management of TVET institutions to adjust to constantly evolving circumstances, weather those of covid-19 pandemic or any future crisis.
- Enhance access to education and training through improved internet infrastructure and ensure affordable connectivity.
- Develop and maintain easy access to distance learning platform, collaborate with private education technology sector and the National level.
- Deliver relevant training and skills to young people and adults to meet current and future needs, increase efforts to reskill and up-skill workers with a view to rebuilding back better and achieving full employment.

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