



REVAMPING NIGERIA'S RECEDING ECONOMY THROUGH SKILL ACQUISITION IN OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

The Nigerian economy has been hit hard by recession, caused by excessive imports, plunging oil revenue and sharply low investment inflows. This study focused on ways to revamp the Nigerian economy through skill acquisition in Office Technology and Management (OTM). This is in response to the realization of the strategic role of the OTM programme in socio-economic and national development as evidenced in its capacity for job creation, self-reliance and poverty alleviation. The study discussed the meaning of economic recession, skill acquisition, meaning and objectives of OTM, brief overview of Nigeria's recession, strategies for economic rejuvenation through skill acquisition in OTM and the challenges to skill acquisition in OTM. The paper concluded that economic recession has serious negative impacts on government revenue, employment, income vulnerability, inflation, human health, infrastructural supply, poverty and natural resource management in Nigeria. Recovery and sustained economic development are dependent on effective skill acquisition. The paper recommended the development of strong political will and commitment towards adequate funding and massive investment in OTM for effective skill acquisition.

Keywords: Nigeria; Receding Economy; Skill acquisition; Office Technology and Management.

Introduction

Nigeria has been an economically slavish neocolonial state with a long history of criminal mis-management of the national economy by public office holders. From the colonial period up to the oil boom era, there was erosion of core values in most public and private organizations. Bribery, corruption, lack of transparency, inefficient service delivery, lack of due process and integrity, indiscipline, wasteful spending etc became rampant (Anyim, Ikemefuna & Oluseyi, 2012).

The present economic recession in Nigeria is a manifestation of long-term ills in the structure of the economy that became full-blown under the present government. The recession brought about an undeniable feeling of disappointment in the economy. The result is that many firms are folding up due to dramatic decline in domestic industrial production as a result of insufficient raw materials and spare parts. The exchange rate of the naira kept deteriorating against the dollar. There is high rate of inflation, falling wages, rising taxes, high cost of goods and services, rising cost of petrol due to subsidy removal. There are wide-spread manpower contractions (redundancies) both in private and public sectors of the economy. The federal and some state government cannot meet their financial obligations. The high rate of unemployment is one of the most serious



consequences of the economic recession in Nigeria which now cuts across graduates of tertiary institutions and professional managers.

This therefore informs the need for the Nigerian Government to break away from the vicious cycle of poverty, unemployment and other socio-economic problems by investing in functional education that will enhance the self-reliance of its citizens. Some of the developed countries of Europe, America and the emerging nations of Asia have all obtained this through functional education. Education is meant to inculcate adequate skills, values and attitude to the learners to enable them function effectively in a dynamic society. In the educational institutions, the process of acquisition of these attributes is teaching and learning. Every educational institution obviously cannot impart skills to learners without the teaching-learning process. The Office Technology and Management (OTM) programme is one of those educational programmes that emphasize the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of the mental, physical and social abilities and competencies for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society (National Policy on Education, 2013).

Akhigbe, Ogiagah and Ogunmilade (2013) observed that Nigeria is at the lowest ebb in human capital development because of the inadequate course contents in its educational system which tends to produce more of those who lack job skills for self and paid employment than those the economy requires to remain vibrant. It follows therefore, that every citizen in Nigeria should be equipped with the necessary skills to contribute effectively to the economic development of the country. In view of this, the necessity of preparing each individual for some occupation through skill acquisition is a fact that even the most primitive society has recognized. The OTM programme in most Nigerian Polytechnics has suffered the problem of inadequate provision of infrastructure and perhaps non-functional infrastructure and less competent human resources to impart the necessary skills to the learners. The insufficient supply, non-functional and/or lack of infrastructure has also limited the extend of skill acquisition in OTM programmes and as such, has led to the failure of the programme to produce the much needed skilled manpower that will contribute positively to national development. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines strategies for revamping Nigeria's receding economy through skill acquisition in OTM.

Meaning of Economic Recession

Recession refers to a period when the economy of a nation begins to experience a down-ward trend. In the United States, a 'recession' is officially defined by the National Bureau of Economic Research (a committee comprised largely of academic economists) as "a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in real GDP, real income, employment, industrial production, and wholesale-retail sales" (Saul, 2008). Recession is a backward march, or reversal, of the economy over a relatively long term, believed by some economists to be part of a regular cyclical phenomenon of decline which must inevitably follow some



periods of sustained growth or “over-heating” (Igwe, in Dode, 2012). Economic recession can also be defined as a negative GDP growth rate for two consecutive quarters (say first and second quarters). Judging by this definition of recession, Nigeria stated experiencing economic recession in the second quarter of 2016, since the first and second quarter growth in 2016 are -0.36 and -1.5% respectively (Noko, 2016).

In fact, there is no official or even widely-accepted criterion for distinguishing between a ‘recession’ and a ‘depression’. But most analysts consider a depression to be an extremely severe recession in which the decline in GDP exceeds 10 percent (Claessens, Ayhan, & Terrones, (2008). It is a deep and long-lasting recession. While no specific criteria exist to declare a depression, unique features of the last U.S. depression, included a GDP decline in excess of 10% and an unemployment rate that briefly touched 25%. Saul, (2008) opined that the difference between a ‘recession’ and a ‘depression’ is more than simply one of magnitude or duration - that is, it's not simply a matter of saying that if a recession lasts more than, say, four or six quarters, or involves a decline in real GDP of more than, say, 4 or 5%, then it thereby becomes a ‘depression’. Rather, the distinction hangs on the causes and other characteristics of the downturn. In particular, a recession is nearly always the result of a period of tight monetary policy; while a depression entails a significant and protracted asset price cycle; it involves a contraction in credit or debt (thus potentially rendering monetary policy impotent); and it is characterized by a decline in the general price level as well as in economic activity.

In recession, there is usually a decline in certain macroeconomic indicators such as GDP, employment, investment spending, capacity utilization, household income, business income, and inflation, with the attendant increase in the rate of unemployment (Agri, Mailafia, & Umejiaku, 2017). It causes extreme poverty and suffering of the masses, children’s right to quality education, affordable inclusive healthcare are deprived, there is adverse demand and supply shocks. It has contractionary effects on aggregate demand and supply resulting in volatile shocks in economic activities. There is scarcity of foreign exchange, few money, reduced income, decreased finances available to households and businesses. There is also weak purchasing power, reduced consumer spending and decrease in sales of goods and services. The purchase of goods and services by individuals, households and firms has drastically reduced as a result of the economic recession.

Skill Acquisition

Skill is the ability to do something well, usually gained through training or experience that is needed, while acquisition is the act of getting new knowledge, skill, etc. This skill can be obtained through education, training or experience that will inculcate into the individual how to carry out or discharge his / her responsibilities very well with the new knowledge. Fadere (2004) in Inalegwu, (2016) saw skill as “expertness, aptitude and competences appropriate for a particular job, it has to do with expert knowledge and creative reasoning to a level of mastery”. In order to attain these skills, the individual needs to acquire basic training or knowledge levels related to the



task to be performed whether through formal, informal or combination of the two. Boytziz (2010) defined skill as the ability to demonstrate a system and sequence of behavior that is functionally related to attaining a goal.

Skill acquisition is one among other policies embarked upon in Nigeria with the sole aim to alleviate poverty, youth restiveness, sophisticated crimes and corruption rates, rural-urban drift, unemployment and other social vices by providing technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development (NPE, 2013). With the inclusion of ICT into the OTM Curriculum for implementation in the Nigerian Polytechnics, acquisition of OTM competencies and abilities by students became imperative. Therefore, if the OTM programme is to graduate students that would be relevant in the secretarial world of work, they must possess and utilize these skills effectively.

Meaning and Purpose of Office Technology and Management

Office technology and Management is a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related science and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (Baba & Akarahu, 2012). The programme is designed to equip students with the competencies required to work in a modern office environment. The broad objectives of OTM programme, according to NBTE (2004), are:

1. Acquisition of Secretarial skills
2. Ability to write shorthand for three minutes in varied materials at 1.3 syllabic intensity dictated at 80 Words Per Minute (WPM) and 1.4 syllabic intensity of 100 wpm and transcribe on the computer with a minimum of 95% accuracy for both ND and HND respectively.
3. Typing effectively various office jobs and acquiring a copying rate of 40wpm and 50wpm for ND and HND respectively on passages not below 1.3 syllabic intensity with 98% accuracy.
4. Acquisition of general education.
5. Laying the foundation for advanced studies.

Brief Overview of Nigeria's Recession

Nigeria's economy today has declined to its lowest for the first time since 1987. In the 1st quarter of 2016, the National Bureau of Statistics reported that the economy shrank by 0.36% to hit its lowest point in the last 30 years. According to the World Bank data, the last time the country had such instance of drastic economic decline was under the regime of Ibrahim Babangida (Obasanho, 2017). At that time the Nigerian economy recorded consecutive decline of 0.51% and 0.82% in first and second quarters of 1987. However, world economists see light at the end of the tunnel as IMF predicts that the economy of Nigeria will grow by 0.8% by the end of 2017. In a similar vein, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported that Nigeria's GDP increased from -0.91% in the first



quarter of 2017 to 0.55% in the 2nd quarter of 2017, thereby officially declaring Nigeria out of recession (Vanguard News, 2017).

Despite the prediction by the IMF and the declaration by the NBS that Nigeria is out of recession, the poverty rate in Nigeria is still very high. There is high inflation rate, a general rise in prices of goods and services, leading to low purchasing power. Accumulation of debt services especially foreign debts is on the high side. There is equally high interest rate in the economy thereby discouraging investors. Fall in aggregate demand, fall in wages and income is now the order of the day. The economy is witnessing mass unemployment and general loss of confidence on the government due to the economic indicators and indices. Government is also grappling with separatist agitation in the country's southeast, farmer-herders clashes in the central, Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast and kidnappings and militancy in the south.

These challenges to economic and national development are as a result of some factors which impede sustainable growth of the Nigerian economy. These factors include:

Poor economic planning: Poor economic planning and lack of concrete implementation of economic planning is the major cause of Nigeria's recession. Key issues include budget delays exchange rate policy.

High inflation rate: Government banning the importation of certain essential agricultural products like rice without gestation period, this is an error. Removal of fuel subsidy should not be simultaneous with the banning of these agricultural products. The major cause of the inflation include: speculation in stock market due to budget delay, rise in domestic oil price, deteriorating exchange rate, etc. As at September, 2016 inflation rate stands at 18.63%

High interest rates: Interest rate is between 26.77 - 27% as at September, 2016. This is extremely high for investors. Poor investments culminate in high rate of unemployment in the country, reduction in aggregate demand by households.

High taxation: It is only in Nigeria that government is charging high tax rates during economic recession. Small businesses are slaughtered with high interest rates. Both high interest rates and tax rates have lowered Nigerian aggregate demand.

Policy conflict: The economic policies appear conflicting. High interest rates, high tax rates, tight monetary policies instead of the expansionary policies proclaimed by the government.

It should be noted that the severity of the Great Depression owed rather more to calamitous monetary policy mistakes by the US Federal Reserve between 1929 and 1932, misguided attempts by governments to balance their budgets in the face of shrinking economic activity by raising taxes and cutting spending (thereby inadvertently making the downturn worse) and the huge tariff increases enacted by the US Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930 and the retaliatory measures which it provoked from other countries (Saul, 2008).



There is therefore the need for the Nigerian government and its economic team to re-assess its monetary policies with the view of adopting flexible (expansionary) economic policies that will take this country 'out of the woods'. The government should equally remain dogged and resolute in the implementation of the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) as it is a masterpiece blueprint for any economy that is serious about diversifying away from oil.

Ways through which Skill acquisition in OTM will revamp the Nigerian Economy

Effective skill acquisition in OTM will bring about improvement in Nigeria's gross domestic product in the following areas:

1. Employment generation and poverty reduction: Skill acquisition in OTM will create job opportunities to individuals thereby reducing or even eliminating the high rate of unemployment and poverty currently witnessed in the Nigeria.
2. Resource mobilization: Skill acquisition in OTM encourages and enhances effective resource mobilization of skills, knowledge and machines which might otherwise remain unutilized and idle.
3. Wealth creation and Increased GDP: Skill acquisition in OTM leads to development of entrepreneurs and as a result serves as a source of income to the nation through the payment of taxes generated from their businesses. These taxes are in turn used by the government for the uplifting and development of the nation. In addition, the value of output of goods and services realized from the activities of entrepreneurs will enormously contribute to the GDP of the nation.
4. Technological Development through Office Technology: Office Technology facilities are playing a vital role in developing and transforming the economy and also strengthening government and private sector collaboration for the attainment of sustainable national development through increase in the capability, flexibility and efficiency of channels of communication (Ikelegbe, 2016).
5. Improves the standard of living: Being self-employed serves as a major source of income to the individual, which leads to continuous increase in income and standard of living. There are many intelligent, creative and motivated self-employed individuals who made it in business and are now more comfortable than many civil servants.
6. Reduces urban drift and enhances social status of the citizenry: There is no doubt that increase in business activities in the rural areas reduces rural-urban migration and enhances the social status and confidence of the citizenry.
7. Source of government revenue: OTM practitioners involved in self-employment or paid employment pay government revenue in the form of tax permit, licenses or personal income tax. These will be used by government to provide different social services and amenities to the society.
8. Industrial development: Skill acquisition in OTM leads to gradual but smooth transition from traditional to a modern industrial economy through its information and communication technology component.



Challenges to Skill Acquisition in OTM

Lack of Political will and interest towards investment in vocational and technical education: The government of Nigeria has not shown serious political will towards investing in vocational and technical education in which OTM is a part. According to Asonibare (2016), vocational and technical education is not well established in Nigeria as a result of poor infrastructure and government support in terms of finance. This affects skills acquisition in OTM and the quality of graduates produced.

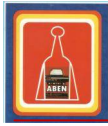
Inadequate funding: Inadequate funding of the OTM programme has been a problem in the implementation of quality teaching and learning in the programme. The strict implementation of this type of education will remain elusive without adequate provision of equipment and facilities. The situation has been further worsened by the current economic recession in the country. The state owned institutions are the most hit by this development.

Corruption and Mismanagement of funds: Corruption has become a common characteristic of the Nigerian state. Eze, (2013) opined that a key reason why society is unable to fund the provision of public goods such as the OTM programme is that public funds are looted heavily by corrupt officials. Similarly, school administrators and others responsible for managing educational funds mismanage these funds at the detriment of the students. Allocation to schools is often diverted for social activities and political reasons rather than educational purposes. This affects the provision of quality education and consequently the products of the system.

Inadequate and unqualified personnel: The OTM programme in most Polytechnics is bedeviled by inadequate and unqualified staff. The staff strength in most departments of OTM in Nigerian Polytechnics is undesirable and inadequate to maintain standard. The qualification a teacher has and the years of experience matters a lot in the field of academics, especially in OTM programmes (Bupo, 2016). An inexperienced teacher finds it difficult to carry the students along and this constitutes poor teacher quality thereby affecting skill acquisition

Inadequate facilities and equipment for skill acquisition: The state of physical facilities in many of the Nigerian Polytechnic is very deplorable. The shortage of equipment and facilities can affect skill acquisition. Quality diminishes when the facilities are inadequate or at times not available (Akpomudjere, 2014).

Inadequate electricity supply: Inadequate electricity supply is also a great challenge to skill acquisition in OTM. Where there is no power supply, it becomes difficult to effectively impart skills to students as frequent interruption of power will cause the equipment to go off and may even cause damage to the equipment. The issue of electricity supply has become a national emergency that needs to be addressed. Nigeria has been having difficulty providing stable and reliable electricity to every nook and cranny of the country. There have been cases whereby expensive school equipment and household appliances have been damaged by upsurge in electricity supply after a period of power outage. Most of the computer laboratories and ICT centres in OTM have been



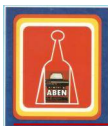
relying on generating plans to sustain the programme, as a result, the over-head cost is enormous to be sustained by the department.

Conclusion

In a declining economy, changes caused by the recession pose threat which the government must be aware both at home and globally. The changes in some respects present opportunities which the government must strategise to grab and make necessary adaptations. In equal vein, where the changes create unpalatable situations, means must be devised to combat same. This is because it is not abnormal for a market economy to go through a business cycle: boom, recession, and recovery. What matters is how long the phase of recession is managed to avoid a depression. The economic recession has serious negative impacts on government revenue, employment, income vulnerability, inflation, human health, infrastructural supply, poverty and natural resource management in Nigeria. Recovery and sustained economic development are desirable, but presently, Nigeria is a dependent capitalist economy. This therefore informs the need for effective skill acquisition in OTM. This will help in rejuvenating the economy through employment generation, resource generation, increased GDP, poverty reduction and wealth creation.

Recommendations

1. There is need for government to develop the political will towards improved infrastructure in the Nigeria Educational system and OTM in particular. This can be achieved by improve government funding and development of adequate school infrastructure.
2. Government should be committed towards improving funding for the Polytechnics. Management and Departments of OTM in particular should look beyond funding from government and engage in revenue generation through training, research and development, partnership with private organizations, alumni associations other stakeholders in OTM and public spirited individuals.
3. There is need for government to strengthen the anti-corruption agencies in the country. This can be achieved by way of special legislations, laws and special courts that will facilitate the prosecution of corrupt officials. The anti-corruption agencies should equally beam their search light on management of schools, school administrators, teachers and even students who are engaged in corrupt practices as this will help reduce the menace and improve the quality of education.
4. There is need for the recruitment of adequate and qualified personnel for OTM programmes. Mechanisms for updating the competence of these personnel to imbibe current knowledge and experiences should be formulated and adhered to, since the development of a competent, skilled workforce is recognized as vital to quality assurance system.
5. Provision of adequate and functional equipment and facilities is a necessity for the OTM programme. Skill acquisition in OTM requires adequate provision of facilities in terms of space and quality of equipment. The training environment should be like the



work environment. Teaching with real materials and real situation can help to encourage the students to learn and enhance skill acquisition.

6. There is need for improved public supply of electricity to schools and the Nigerian society at large. This can be achieved through improved power generation and the development of the necessary infrastructure for electricity supply.

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