

## Revitalization of Technical and Vocational Education for Youth Employment and Poverty Alleviation

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**KEYWORDS** Education. Employability. Empowerment. Skill. Unemployment

**ABSTRACT** Active involvement of youths contributes greatly to the development of a nation's economy which leads to empowerment to overcome many of the emerging economic challenges. The paper examined the persistent existence of youth unemployment in Nigeria over the years which has rendered majority of the youths victims of poverty. Out of the different dimensions of poverty, absolute poverty takes preeminence in this situation. Thus, poverty unnecessarily hinders socio-economic development and exposes the youths to various vices. The paper is of the opinion that the present teaching and learning conditions of Technical and Vocational Education characterized by shortage of necessary teaching and learning facilities, irregular and irrelevant re-training programmes for the teaching personnel, societal wrong attitude are the major factors that hinder the beneficiaries' opportunity of acquiring necessary job skills that further expose them to unemployment challenges. The paper, therefore, recommends that overhauling and reactivation of TVE is urgently required.

### INTRODUCTION

Series of challenges facing technical and vocational education (TVE) in Nigeria in the last few decades apparently have made it less effective in the area of providing the beneficiaries, most of whom are youths, the necessary employability skills. They appear to seek government jobs after graduation instead of creating jobs or at least remain self-employed. Incontrovertibly, youth unemployment, high rate of poverty have for long time constituted hindrances to development in Nigeria. Oduwole (2015), laid credence to this that fundamentally, there is a close bond between unemployment and poverty with direct bearings on the important section of the society, particularly the youths. Youth unemployment, unequivocally, paves way for poverty. According to Umaru et al. (2013), there is a link among unemployment, poverty and crime level. To Ahmadu and Ali (2014) conflicts in the Northern Nigeria have association with poverty. Youth unemployment and poverty constitute serious threat to economic development of a nation. In the opinion of Ozoemena (2014) attempts to be free from the issues of unemployment and poverty, more often than not, lead the victims to involvement in dangerous criminal activities.

To this extent, concerted efforts are required to ensure functional TVE capable of nipping in the bud youth unemployment and poverty. Olo-

runtegebe et al. (2010) laid credence to this that the global economy depression which on the average led to 50 percent of the population living on less than US\$2 per day that became obvious in the mid 1980s calls for increasing needs for the establishment of TVE in the African nations; to enable the region overcome many of the emerging economic challenges. TVE paves way for abundance of opportunities for human resource capital and rich economies. Thus, it becomes necessary for any country that is ready to take part in the scheme of worldwide economic development to be prepared to provide every requirement necessary for functional TVE, advancement of science and technology and the assurance of knowledge economy. Oguntuyi (2013) investigated a viable TVE curriculum: a tool for economic and technology development in Nigeria. He reported that TVE systems play a crucial role in the socio and economic development of a nation. In other words, economic survival and vibrancy of a country's economy largely determine the development of that nation. He also maintains that, a recent awareness of the important role of TVE in economic growth and national development has been realized by policy makers in many African countries, particularly in Nigeria; and among the international donor communities.

Lama (2012) refers to vocational education as any form of education for the purpose of making an individual fit effectively for a recog-

nized profitable employment, either for earning wages or achieving other motives. According to Nwogu and Nwanoruo (2011), technical education and training is the type of education that leads to acquisition of practical skills, which will enable an individual to be generally employed in a chosen occupation to become self-reliant, in order to contribute to overall national development. Thus, TVE can be described as the type of education pursued purposely for the acquisition of necessary skills required for self-employment, job creation and general work-place in order to be relevant to the current economic dictate of any country, particularly developing nations. To this extent, effective TVE remains about the only type of education that plays significant role in the area of youth employment generation and poverty reduction.

### **Objective**

The objective of this paper is to demonstrate the connectivity that exists among functional TVE, youth employment and poverty alleviation. Thus, the primary thrust of this paper is to call the attention of the government, parents and other stakeholders to the need to reinvigorate the present learning environment of TVE in Oyo State to make it more functional.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This paper used a review of literature from journals, books, conference reports, and internet sources. The researchers' experience and knowledge in technical education and World Bank publications to discuss on issues pertaining to revitalization of technical and vocational education for youth employment and poverty alleviation in Nigeria

### **OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Issue of Youth Unemployment**

Unemployment in Nigeria has been described in different forms, depending on how an individual perceives it. However, its existence and strong negative influence in the society over the years are issues that are not debatable. To Eme and Ibietan (2014) unemployment rate has risen to frightening level of 23.9 percent. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2015) explained

that, generally, the unemployment rate in the Q1 2015 was 7.5 percent from 6.4 percent in Q4 2014 while underemployment reduced to 16.6 percent in Q1 2015 from 17.9 percent in Q4 2014. Specifically, the unemployment rate for the youths within the age range of 15-24 rose to 13.7 percent in Q1 2015 from 11.7 percent in Q4 2014 while the underemployment rate for this group of people was 30.6 percent. For youths between the age range of 25-34, unemployment rose to 8.2 percent in Q1 2015 from 6.9 percent in Q4 2014 while the underemployment stood at 17.7 percent in Q1 2015 from 19.0 percent in Q4 2014. As Akeju and Olanipekun (2014) put it, the unemployment situation in Nigeria is rapid population growth with low level of employment. According to Salami (2011), youth unemployment is one of the major problems facing Nigeria. Unemployment in Nigeria, especially among youths has been traced to a mismatch between inadequate educational outcomes and skills demand. The issue of unemployment is so grave that graduates of every level of education appear to be victims of unemployment. It is therefore exigency that students, at any level of education must be provided with skills necessary in the world of work. There have been cases of job availability, but lack of acquisition of appropriate skills by job seekers. Sarka (2007) laid credence to this that demand for skilled workers in the knowledge economy has created hindrance for a large population of the world youths, especially in developing countries where higher education system has not been able to realise sufficient value addition in terms of enhancing the job performance in the new age labour market.

In the opinion of Oguntuyi (2013), unemployment and underemployment are important factors that have largely kept the nation in the perpetual bondage of economic frustration. Akwara et al. (2013) corroborated this assertion that unemployment leads to poverty while poverty breeds criminality. Asaju et al. (2014) were concerned with the rising rate of unemployment in Nigeria: the socio-economic and political implications. The study revealed that corruption in both public and private or individual levels, industrial decay and neglect of agricultural sector are among many other factors responsible for the unpleasant development. Also, wide spread of poverty, youth restiveness, high rate of displeasing social vices and criminal activities are occurring frequently owing to lack of job, espe-

cially among the youths. Umaru et al (2013) emphasized this that there is a link between unemployment, poverty and criminal level.

According to Furlong (2012), youth unemployment is described as people within the age range of 14-28 who are without employment, willing and able to work and actively searching for a position. Although different types of unemployment: cyclical or Keynesian, frictional, structural and classical exist, the one that affects the youths most is structural unemployment; because a good number of them lack necessary skills needed for the available jobs.

### Issue of Poverty

Over the last few decades, prevalence of poverty in Nigeria has been on a continuous basis. According to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2012), 112 million Nigerians (67.1 per cent of the country's total population of 167 million live below poverty level. This set of people were described as those that live below US\$1.25 per day. The NBS (2010) has earlier demonstrated that the proportion of Nigerians living below the poverty line increased significantly from 1980 to 2010 as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Relative poverty headcount from 1980 – 2010**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Poverty incidence</i>	<i>Estimated population (million)</i>	<i>Population in poverty</i>
1980	27.2	65	17.1
1985	46.3	75	34.7
1992	42.7	91.5	39.2
1996	65.6	102.3	67.1
2004	54.4	126.3	68.7
2010	69.0	163	112.47

*Source:* National Bureau of Statistics. HNLSS 2010

As Nwagwu (2014) maintained, poverty in Nigeria remains significant notwithstanding the high economic growth it experienced before independence and abundant natural resources the country is endowed with. Usman (2015) laid credence to this that the level of poverty in Nigeria has shot up. A good number of Nigerian populations, the poor people in affluence society, is enmershed in the net of poverty (Nwagwu 2014). Poverty is an unhealthy phenomenon to the individual, society and nation at large. It results in a number of issues like frustration, loss of hope,

loss of prospect or value for life, disillusionment and purposeless life. The low income level of a good number of Nigerians is an evidence of the existence of poverty. It affects various aspects of an individual such as physical, morality, knowledge, character, among others (Omadjohwoefe 2011). Nwagwu (2014), describes poverty as a product of unemployment, inequality, economic marginalisation, uneducated and so on. To this extent, the jobless youths are frustrated due to inequality and economic deprivation that have resulted in unemployment. Low development of science and technology, high rate of unemployment and poverty constitute major factors that hinder development in Nigeria (Asaju and Albert 2012).

Poverty refers to the state of being extremely poor. It means a state of being inferior in quality and insufficient in quantity. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1997) refers to poverty as that income level below which a minimal nutritional adequate diet together with essential non-food requirements are not affordable. To Aiyedogbon and Ohwofasa (2012) poverty is a sense of helplessness, dependence and lack of opportunities, self-confidence and self-respect on the part of the poor. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2006) describes poverty as inter-linked forms of deprivation in the economic, human, political, socio-cultural and protective spheres.

Dimensions of poverty include inadequate access to government utilities and services, environmental issues, poor infrastructure, illiteracy and ignorance, poor health, insecurity, social and political exclusion. There are also four major measures of poverty: relative measure, absolute (subjective) measure, dollar per day measure and subjective measure.

Relative poverty views poverty as socially defined and dependent on social context, hence relative poverty is a measure of income inequality. Usually, relative poverty is measured as the percentage of population with income less than some fixed proportion of median income. Absolute (objective) poverty also known as extreme or abject poverty refers to a condition characterised by severe deprivation of basic human needs such as food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. The World Bank (2010) describes it as a condition so limited in malnutrition, illitera-

cy, disease, squalid surroundings, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency. Dollar per day measure of poverty is the adoption of purchasing power of naira in relation to dollar. Under this measure, a person who earns income less than the prevalent exchange rate of naira to one dollar per day is poor. In 2009/2010 when the exchange rate was N150 to US\$1, the poverty incidence in Nigeria was 56.6 percent. Subjective measure of poverty is based on the self-assessment of individuals in relation to other people in the society.

Apparently, previous policies: National Accelerated Food Production Programme, establishment of Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank, Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution Programme, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, Structural Adjustment Programme, Better Life for Rural Women, National Directorate of Employment, Peoples' Bank of Nigeria, Community Banks, Family Support Programme, Family Economic Advancement Programme, National Agricultural Land Development Authority, Poverty Alleviation Programmes, National Poverty Eradication Programme, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agencies of Nigeria, National Economic Empowerment and Development, State Economic Empowerment and Development, Local Economic Empowerment and Development, Subsidy Re-Investment and Empowerment Programme formulated by the successive governments to reduce the frequency of poverty have not been able to resolve the issue of poverty in Nigeria.

Anumudu et al. (2013) were concerned with review of poverty reduction policies: myth and reality. They posited that the high level of prevalence of poverty in Nigeria, which has attained an endemic nature, is becoming worrisome. Dawudu (2014) focused accountability and good governance at the grassroots level in Nigeria: option for rural poverty alleviation. He observed that notwithstanding the abundant mineral resources with which Nigeria is endowed, most Nigerians remain poor to the extent that most of the citizens live on less than a U.S. dollar in a day. Chilaka and Odoh (2014) concentrated on the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and challenges of poverty alleviation in Nigeria. Using qualitative descriptive data analysis and logical induction, the study revealed that at present, NEPAD target on poverty

in Nigeria is unlikely to be met. Also, market-driven policies avoid analysis of power relations, which ultimately determines inequality and poverty. Further to this, poverty alleviation using the instrumentality of NEPAD is not tenable under a neo-liberal economic framework. Edoumiekumo et al. (2014) paid attention to income poverty in Nigeria: incidence, gap, severity and correlates in Bayelsa State. Using the FGT decomposable class of poverty measures and logic regression model as analytical tools on the 2009-10 NLSS data, they reported that about 25 percent of the households are income poor. Also, it was revealed that agriculture and household size increase the probability that a household will be poor. Aidelunuoghene (2014) focused the paradox of poverty in Nigeria: what an irony. He reported that, past governments' policies and programmes failed because the financial resources set aside for such policies/programmes went into wrong hands. Akinmulegun (2014) concentrated on government and poverty alleviation in Ondo State, Nigeria. He posited that though poverty is a household name especially in the developing nations, it is a plague that has negative impacts on everybody worldwide. As Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Walter (2014) noted, poverty and insecurity have constituted nasty hindrances to development in Nigeria. The poverty level is such that many people live below poverty line. They concluded that insecurity is the bane of poverty.

### **The Role of TVE on Youth Employment and Poverty Alleviation**

The skill acquisition nature of TVE makes it relevant to self-reliance, job creation, wealth creation, effective functioning in work places more than other forms of education. To Olaitan (1996), the major focus of vocational education remains as skill development. All over the world, TVE is the only form of education that is reputed for unyielding emphasis on skill acquisition and development. As Osita (2013) observed, the major purpose of TVE in Nigeria is to resolve the issues of self-reliance, job creation, youth unemployment, poverty reduction and enhance international competitiveness among youths. The advancement in technology, involvement of improved equipment and tools in carrying out the assigned duties of workers, more than before, means that TVE is, on daily basis assuming

greater relevance to overcoming the challenges of both unemployment, under employment and shortage of skilled human resources, particularly in Nigeria. This view is in line with Adebisi and Ayeni (2013) that the on-going changes at workplace, the work itself and the development of advanced technology will definitely require advance knowledge in the area of work, high skills, vocational mindset, broad initiatives for the development of workforce skills as well as improved TVE skills capable of enhancing life-long learning and encouraging entrepreneurship in the creative industries. They also noted that, all over the world, educational institutions are working in different ways to realize the potential of TVE to prepare youths for better future. According to Oguntuyi (2013) the most important feature of TVE is its orientation towards the world of work while the major contents of the curriculum cover the acquisition of employable skills. The national policy on education (FGN 2004) Section 7, No. 40 states that the goals of TVE are to:

- a) provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business, particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels;
- b) provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development;
- c) give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically.

TVE contributes positively to the enhancement of skills necessary for employment, job mobility, labour efficiency as well as making the beneficiaries financial independent (Salami 2011). Those who did not receive formal training on TVE can also gain the experience through the teaching imparted on them by those who were taught in the four walls of classroom. The skills and manpower produced by TVE are of immense benefit in industries, agricultural sector, commerce, and engineering. Therefore, the role of TVE in meeting the needs of the society could be described as the one that is assuming greater relevance and importance (Adepoju and Famade 2010). To Orah (2002) TVE helps to resolve the problem of inadequate manpower that has constituted nuisance to genuine economic development in Nigeria. Both the private and the public sectors require skilled workforce with appropriate knowledge in the chosen field. As

Lama (2012) maintained, vocational education and training have the capacity for generating employment and producing skilled technicians and workers required by the global market. Several other studies and policy documents have shown that there is a serious mismatch between the workforce requirements and the availability of skilled workers to sustain the economic growth rate. Therefore, the gap created by the shortage of workforce equipped with appropriate skills, uncontrovertibly necessitates that the youths entering the workforce must be equipped appropriately with the right skills required by any employer of labour.

TVE provides varieties of career or occupational choices by providing the necessary skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habits, competencies and effectiveness (Orah 2002). In addition to the development of the practical skills, it makes the beneficiary creative and successful (Uwaifo 2009). In the opinion of Wenrich (1974), the discovery and development of individual potentials that the world of work requires constitute the major roles of TVE. TVE skill acquisition makes it possible for the recipient to enjoy mobility of labour and relevance to the chosen career. For instance, factors such as poor economic and financial conditions, organisational policies, conflict, poor working conditions, job insecurity, changes within organisation and poor skill acquisition are inimical to the employees' adherence to the job requirements.

### **Hindrances to Effective Technical and Vocational Education**

The myriad of challenges facing TVE for the past few decades have constituted concerns for all and sundry. TVE, particularly vocational education seemed to have suffered some setback after the medieval renaissance because of the emergence of the concept of humanism in education between 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries when emphasis was placed on the study of human nature and cultural heritage (Ekpenyong 1999). Though debatable, the hindrances that limit TVE skill acquisition in the recent time are factors that reduce its quality, effectiveness and relevance. The major hindrance to efficiency of TVE is shortage of funds. The practical oriented nature of TVE makes it a bit capital intensive because of the machines, equipment, tools, laboratories and workshops necessary for effective



teaching and learning. Apparently, the fund allocation for education in Nigeria is generally low. When it gets to the percentage of the entire education allocation earmarked for TVE, it is another bored game. The low priority attached to TVE by the government, parents, students and the society at large is always reflected in the fund allocation to it. Apparently, the development has negatively affected the availability of material resources like workshops, equipment, tools, consumables items, furniture and library facilities. A good number of technical colleges are without students' hostel facilities. Overcrowding of students in classrooms also constitutes another threat. The students' population compared to teachers available is always too far from the 20 students to a teacher for practical classes that the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) recommends.

In the opinion of Tukur et al. (2014) the prevalence of poor instructional facilities and inefficient management of the materials for TVE are capable of leading to a decline in the standard of performance of students in vocational or technical colleges. The existence of such problems could be affirmed by what Adepoju and Famade (2010) referred to as the inherent weakness of TVE. A few of such problems are identified as: low staff and faculty morale, poor building structure, sub-standard laboratory and workshop facilities, scarce instructional resources and wrong location of some technical schools. Okoh et al. (2011) observed that TVE is facing problems of training that borders on acquisition of knowledge and skills in wood works, metal works, electrical/electronic, welding and fabrication, building, auto mechanics etc as well as problem of workshop organisation and management.

The unfriendly environments created by the lack or shortage of the necessary resources make teaching and learning of TVE unenjoyable by both the teachers and learners. Teachers hardly go for training and development programmes to refresh their knowledge. Nwogu and Nwanoruo (2011) examined vocational technical education and training for self-reliance: towards national development. They found that lack of skilled manpower, inadequate training facilities and equipment, lack of follow up and continuity in government policies, poor remuneration of teachers of TVE, lack of entrepreneurship in TVE programmes and poor emphasis on the practical make TVE less effective in the area of self-reliance.

Odunaike et al. (2012) also reported that acute shortage of business education teachers, poor funding of the programme are responsible for the poor state of infrastructural facilities for business education.

The most unfortunate story about TVE is, presumably, the establishment of private technical schools and the seemingly poor attitude of National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB) in the supervision of such schools or centres. Without doubt, little or no effort has been made by the Board in terms of proper assessment of the available facilities in the affected schools especially for the science subjects and workshop practicals. It is also unfortunate that even with the high demand for technical and technological education and competencies across the world, many of the stories about the learning environments for TVE are not encouraging in Nigeria. Incontrovertibly, the challenges of TVE identified so far have crippled the acquisition of skills necessary for employment opportunities; especially among the youths. Pertinent questions therefore include: what are the effects of these challenges on youth employment? Does this have anything to do with the present emerging challenge of poverty in Nigeria? What are the activities required for the reduction of the identified challenges?

### **The Need for Reinvigorating TVE**

Given the enormous strength of TVE in the creation of employment opportunities for the youths that ultimately leads to reduction of poverty, it is imperative to strengthen this level of education for effective functioning. Ultimately, this calls for replacement of old equipment and tools with new and modern ones. Olajide (2015) laid credence to this that the original intention of TVE has been distorted, hence the need for sincere repositioning in the area of adequate funding, infrastructural development, human capital development, educational policy restructuring towards skill acquisition, research development and the need to reposition the regulatory body, National Board For Technical Education (NBTE). Expecting TVE to thrive with the present situation characterized by acute shortage of consumable materials, non-standard workshops, unsuitable libraries, science laboratories, ICT rooms, students' hostels, comfortable accommodation for the staff, insufficient

teaching and non-teaching personnel can be described as uncommon miracle. For TVE to function as a bedrock for building solid foundation for technological advancement requires genuine intention of the government and other stakeholders. Insufficient teaching staff in nearly all the technical colleges has created a major challenge in meeting the NBTE requirement that stipulates student-teacher ratio of 20:1 for practical classes.

Kazeem and Ige (2010) emphasised that all the conditions necessary for the accreditation of courses as stipulated by the relevant agencies must be met if the policy formulation and implementation for the Nigeria education system is to achieve goodness for all and sundry. Suffice to say that government should make available all the resources required by NBTE for teaching and learning effectiveness for TVE to enhance the opportunity of the beneficiaries to create job instead of falling victims of poverty. It is then that youth involvement in criminal activities can be reduced to a minimum level. Abdullahi et al. (2012) laid credence to this that Nigerians must be re-orientated through the internal process of re-branding the educational system for national economic development. Odiya and Omofonmwa (2007) emphasised that TVE institutions must be reactivated and funded effectively if the nation must move out of the present technological and scientific dependence. In the opinion of Ejikeme (2014) radical reform in the area of skill acquisition centres and agricultural schemes are necessary for the creation of employment opportunities for the teeming youth population. Equally, the re-training of teachers of TVE that has been neglected by the government over the years is a factor that requires prompt and appropriate attention. Provision of modern equipment and tools may not enhance the skill acquisition of students unless the trainers' knowledge is updated to support the effective use of such facilities as well as having capacity for the use of recent pedagogical approaches. Gone are the days when teaching was all comers' affairs, teachers of today cannot afford to remain static and expect good academic performance from students. Enu (2012) emphasised that youths of today can function effectively and productively in workplaces only with the acquisition of certain basic skills and capacities much of which TVE provides. Resuscitating TVE may not be possible with the present

funding of technical and technological education in Nigeria. The government is yet to meet the UNESCO recommendation of allocating 26 percent of the total budget to education. Insufficient fund allocation to education is a major factor that has limited effective teaching and learning of TVE to the extent that students' capacity for job creation after graduation may not be guaranteed. Implementation of education policies is constantly hindered owing to shortage of all categories of resources. Observing that, presently, the implementation of TVE programme is apparently poor to the extent that it has negative effect on national growth and development, Lawal (2013) opined that re-branding of TVE programme from the basic education level is imperative.

The belief of parents and students that TVE is meant for students who cannot pursue serious academic rigours is worrisome and unfortunate. The good experiences of Japan, Korea, Singapore and Thailand that have recorded enormous economic development through the use of their skilled human resources should serve as an encouragement to both parents and students. This development necessarily requires government to pursue sound public enlightenment campaign programmes on the benefits of TVE and seek the participation of individuals and the organised private sector.

## CONCLUSION

Acute shortage of resources necessary for the teaching and learning of TVE, irregular and irrelevant re-training of teachers, societal wrong attitude among others make it challenging for TVE to provide the youths with essential skills required by the world of work. Thus, the beneficiaries, majority of whom are youths apparently lack skills necessary for either gainful employment, self-reliance or job creation. Further effects of this development turn a good number of the youths to job seekers instead of job creators or employers of labour, a situation that over the years has created high level of youth unemployment or underemployment in some cases. Youth unemployment is a major factor that breeds poverty that together undermines the nation's socio-economic development. Undoubtedly, any efforts towards the creation of employment opportunities for the youths and reduction of poverty must necessarily be rooted through the vi-

ability of TVE to enable it prepare the beneficiaries appropriately for the world of work generally, and, particularly for job creation. Ultimately, this calls for urgent revitalization of TVE to make it effective in equipping the teaming beneficiaries, most of whom are youths, with appropriate skills so that they may either be gainfully employed or effectively self-reliant, a situation that will make them less vulnerable to poverty.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that less attention given to technical and vocational education by the government and poor funding among others. Therefore, Government, stakeholders and policy makers should be encouraged to generate funds towards the growth and development of technical and vocational education. Priority should be given to the advancement of Technical and vocational education via comprehensive retraining in services programme and research work to improve their quality. Government, colleges, industries, accrediting bodies, technical and vocational educators should jointly organize workshop and seminars regularly.

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**Paper received for publication on January 2016**  
**Paper accepted for publication on June 2016**