



## PROJECTING GHANA INTO THE REAL MIDDLE INCOME ECONOMY: THE ROLE OF TECHNICAL, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TRAINING.

*Summary of a paper by  
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### Introduction

Education is not only a cog in the wheel of personal growth but also a major tool for national progress. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Article 26, clause (1) provides that individuals shall have inalienable right to free and compulsory schooling at the foundation stages of one's life. It continues that technical and professional education shall be made generally available and that higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

In recognition of the important role learning plays in the life of nationals, Ghana's 1992 constitution in Article 25 clause (1) also states that all persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities with a view to achieving the full realisation of that right. It continues from clause (1b) that secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular, by the progressive introduction of free education.

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. Despite the high premium placed on academic work by the above mentioned institutions, a number of economists, including Pritchett (1996), suggest that though many countries have a large educated population, they remain unable to make significant progress. Again, it is widely claimed that third world development is sluggish.

The above should question why countries such as Ghana fail to make the necessary progress, regardless of the surge in educational opportunities. A major area of concern is the type and quality of education available; this in the view of some experts raise more questions than answers. Other scholars argue that countries need well-diversified educational systems as part of measures to promote sustainable development. This is because; a well-diversified educational system produces not just qualified but skilled workers.

<sup>1</sup> The 1992 Constitution of Ghana

<sup>2</sup> Trained in 350 professions

Given that a skilled workforce is a precondition for economic growth, Ghana needs to strive to amend the current economic structure that hinges on exporting natural resources in their raw state to value addition. Massive industrialisation engendered by varied processing effort will create a spiral effect in various sectors thereby leading to a transformation making Ghana achieve its middle income status.

However, considering that the country's current educational system trains young minds to engage in white collar jobs other than skilled manpower; the perception is that being employed in a job where one wears a suit is high-status whilst TVET is shunned because it leads to blue-collar jobs, which are seen as less prestigious. For instance in 2009, Germany had 53.2% of upper secondary students enrolled in TVET, Finland 55.1%, Ireland 33.9%, and Korea 24.4%. From the above figures, it is evident that these countries have all developed a strong manufacturing base and remain competitive partly because they were able to steer a large share of their secondary and higher education students into technical fields of study. This compared to 20.9% for Burkina Faso, 22.4 % for Cameroon, 13.2% for Ghana, 10% for Kenya, and 9.7% for South Africa. These African countries fall short of TVET enrolment rates reached by some of the most competitive economies in the world, and the results are evident as Korea, and Taiwan show us why we should demystify the suit and de-stigmatise TVET (Maiga, 2013).

The analysis so far shows that, Ghana's TVET system is confronted with myriad challenges. This paper therefore explores the situation in Ghana regarding its development by providing technical and vocational education and how this impacted on Ghana's attempt at achieving true middle income status.

### **The Role of Technical and Vocational Education in National Development**

In his analysis of the impact of human capital on the labour market, Alam (2007) noted that investment in education and training benefits not just the individual but society as a whole. He continues that returns on investment for society will include skilled workforce, a prerequisite for global competitiveness and economic growth. For the individual, a better career path increased earning and a better quality of life will be the ultimate benefit. Again, Fagerlind and Shah (1989) consider 'human capital' as education and training among other things that raise the productivity of workers, and increase their lifetime earning capacity.

However, Alam further suggests that governments only concentrate on ensuring Technical and Vocational education receives boost when there is increased demand for skills, when labour supply shows rapid growth, when employment grows quickly, or when employment increases significantly. In his view, the TVET only receives governmental attention because it provides both unemployed young people and older people jobs, reduces the burden on higher education, attracts foreign investment, ensures rapid growth of earnings and employment, as well as reduces the inequity of earnings between the rich and the poor.

Colin (1999) also in support of that position indicated that not only does TVET prepare skilled labour but it also provides general education to the students. In his somewhat aggressive criticism, Foster (1965) points to Technical Vocational Education as a fallacy in development planning, referring to it being effective only if the acquired skills are utilized properly. Colin shares that view but adds that TVET can play a vital role in development planning, but warns that if the policy makers do not make it up-to-date and TVET schools do not have enough qualified teaching faculty and sufficient facilities to offer quality TVET, it will not be useful. He also claims that these are not limitations of TVET per se, but limitations of the educational policy of a country. In his counsel for balance, Bennell (1996) insists that though TVET has been a powerful influence in development planning; indiscriminately offering TVET may have negative impact on a nation's development.

Arriagada and Ziderman (1992) differ from that position, saying TVET does not play an appropriate role in development, claiming that the higher investment needed for TVET does not seem to be compensated for by high returns. However, his definition of TVET can explain a good significant role of TVET in development: "Vocationalisation refers to efforts by schools to include in their curricula those practical subjects which are likely to generate among the students some basic knowledge, skills and dispositions that prepare them to think of becoming skilled workers or to enter other manual occupations"

The World Bank Policy Paper on TVET (1991) indicates that to get the maximum benefit of TVET for national development, the following factors must be considered:

- Well-timed modern courses linked to local and global demand;
- Relevant and up-to-date TVET courses need to be developed;

- Proper justification in respect of individual country as to the best level to introduce TVET courses; and
- Wider range of TVET courses need to be developed taking into account demand and cost effectiveness.(not only for offering various courses but also for duration of the courses, for students' classification in terms of their merit, ages, job market, etc.)

### **Present Situation of Technical and Vocational Education in Ghana**

The discussion above indicates that offering different TVET programmes may have a significant role to play in achieving national development. Technical and Vocational training is dogged with many challenges ranging from equipping trainees with needed skills to placing them where those acquired skills can be put to optimal use.

Per their curricular, TVET training institutions in Ghana are expected to focus 30 percent of their instructions on theory, committing the remaining 70 percent to practical hands-on training that caters for the requirements of one's chosen profession, depending on the level at which the training is acquired. However, in view of the limitations of the training facilities, the jury is still out on whether the above prescription is being administered.

Experts postulate that before joining the labour force, workers need to be trained to ensure higher productivity in the performance of their tasks. Atcharena and Caillods (1999) propose that workers are adequately trained before joining the labour force. They further make a strong case for in-service training to maintain up-to-date skills.

Unlike its counterpart, the informal sector (85% of the workforce) is also challenged in many respects due to ineffective monitoring and lack of appropriate structures, the typical wayside artisans' trainees (apprentices) can hardly boast of any theoretical instruction, as their trainers (master) may themselves have barely the minimum education to allow for passing the gained knowledge on to the trainee at the workplace

On the other hand, the formal TVET sub sector in Ghana does not alley the fears of Foster and Colin who are opposed to the whole concept of technical and vocational education, because the skills acquired are

hardly well utilised or up-to-date, as TVET schools do not have enough qualified teaching faculty and sufficient facilities to offer quality TVET training. The current implementation in the country suffers many other weaknesses and constraints, ranging from low public image; to running courses that fail to make students highly employable. This tells heavily on the confidence of bright students, who may be considering TVET as major option in their choice of second cycle education. This ultimately affects the quality of students admitted every year.

Additionally to these setbacks, the quality of staff, inadequate training equipment and facilities have to be mentioned. Again, the obsolete machines and sometimes ill-equipped teaching staff and obsolete teaching aids cannot be glossed over. The quality of teaching and learning given the limited facilitator preparation coupled with the 'disorganized' instructional materials also require serious attention.

Another major missing link in the formal TVET system is the absence of a direct linkage to industry's need, resulting in serious mismatch between supply and demand for skills. Any serious observer must also worry over the absence of grading for the few, who take the trouble to sign up for practical attachment. Leaving that at the discretion of students must not be the option.

There is no gain saying that the supply-driven training mode adopted by the formal training institutions leaves products from such institutions with limited options as emerging industries, especially communications and oil and gas are yet to show any greater interest in such graduates because their expertise do not match what is required in these sectors.

Again, Ghana has taken the decision to build more secondary educational institutions focused on the teaching of the liberal studies and sciences rather than TVET institutions, which has resulted in producing graduates rather than skilled manpower. TVET is inherently multidisciplinary in nature, and depends to a significant extent on specialists from relevant disciplines in the country as well as those in developed countries where multidisciplinary approach has been the nature of their training (Watts, 1985). In those multidisciplinary environments where the needs of various sectors are factored into the training, graduates will find it easy fitting into existing employment structures.

Furthermore, although higher skill levels are required to boost productivity, underpin economic growth and create opportunities, technical and vocational education and training is poorly perceived and often considered the option for those unable to attain the required grades to enter regular high schools. Unless TVET begins to gain traction as an important component in the socio-economic development of Ghana, it will ultimately have serious consequences for the country's economy in the near future. It is therefore important to harp on the prospects of the sector, taking into account the challenges and fashion out ways to improve TVET in Ghana generally.

### **Prospects of Vocational and Technical Education**

The establishment of the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET) coupled with the resultant coherent national policy for technical and vocational education training, points to the country's perceived value for human capital development. Therefore, to give true meaning to this productive segment of our national life, it is instructive that implementation of the policies on TVET supports this key driver with the potential of spurring Ghana's economic growth not only to train to meet industrial needs but also equip brighter young hands with skills to start their own businesses.

Our global competitiveness as a country hinges on our ability to adapt the TVET system and innovate it; therefore, effort must be made to galvanize support at both national and international levels to assist in improving the employability of products from such institutions, with the view to making it attractive because; it will offer ready jobs as well as structured support for start-ups.

With the advent of countries recruiting expertise for new found wealth, if Ghana focuses its TVET training in such areas, it may be an important source of foreign exchange for both graduates and the country at large, as the potential for bringing in experts from such countries to enable students gain deeper insight into what expectations their country and institutions will have of such 'imported' labour.

The role of industrial linkages cannot be over emphasized as this will not only afford industries the opportunity to observe fresh minds at work, but can also pick those with natural talents in their chosen fields who deliver results with passion, since this will be evident during the industrial attachment.

Again, considering the important role of this sector, commitment to see Africa, and Ghana in particular; rise should concentrate some energy and resources in this area. This paper proposes the development of community supports interventions for skill development; using the TVET sector as a means to reduce poverty in local communities and transforming cottage industries for women, youth and other identifiable groups.

The regulation of this sector coupled with standardising outputs as provided for under the COTVET Act 718, (2006) will lead to accreditation by institutions both local and international to make the expertise acquired by the trainees useful, not only in their home country but also across borders.

From all indications, there is goodwill on the part of both government and the development partners, because the Ministry of Education and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) have set up policy guidelines with the attendant committees to focus on both the formal and informal aspect of the TVET Process, as far back as 2009 to formulate policies on training standards, assessment, guidelines, regulations, accreditation and awarding of certification to both public and private institutions across the country. However, the document is yet to see the 'light of day'. Even though the paper considers this very essential, it is recommending that civil society groups, like the Centre for Development Research and Advocacy (CeDRA) with interest in the sector; must track the processes and embark on campaigns to sustain the interest in the sector for the needed attention basically because of the potential it possesses for wealth creation.

### **What is the way forward?**

In order to attract more young people into the TVET sector, a number of approaches need to be employed, top among them being financing through means other than the usual Ministry of Education allocation that hinges mainly on government's ability to raise revenue within a reasonable time-frame. It is important for the Ghana Educational Trust Fund (GETFund) to consider formal TVET institutions as a priority sub sector for funding over a considerable period of time, rather than sending students abroad on scholarships.

Again, the various indices provided for under the law, COTVET Act 781, (2006) as well as the Legislative Instrument (LI) should be fully operationalized. This will



allow for the needed adjustment to meet industrial needs. This can help establish whether the training processes have ensured that graduates from the training institutions are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills for the emerging sectors of the economy to contribute to growth. In line with this paper, it is recommended that a task force of all partners be set up and given clear guidelines and clear deadlines with the view to streamlining the implementation to meet the set targets..

Cooperation and collaboration between training institutions and industry becomes mutually beneficial, where the TVET institutions provide demand-driven training for factory hands to compensate for the services rendered through the work-based learning. These will help prepare students and apprentices for the world of work, be it as an entrepreneur or employee.

Entrepreneurship as a compulsory course for all TVET institutions, regardless of the level, should be introduced to prepare the trainees on how to start up one's own business. This should also include linking them to sources of support that will help them start and build sustainable businesses.

This paper will add to the various recommendations to government to consider converting the COTVET to an Authority. This will empower COVET with the financial muscle as well as provide quality human resources to take concrete initiatives and decisions bordering on the growth of the sector and also to meet its set objectives.

It is also recommending for a research that takes into accounts the skill-set needed, particularly in the growing and emerging sectors, including ICT, oil and gas, mining, farming and agro processing among others; as well as the skills required to maintain machines and equipment, including vehicles used in the country.

One effective way of resourcing the vocational and technical institutions to raise revenue for their activities would be to offer them minor jobs, such as producing school furniture, maintaining machines and equipment of local government administrations on one hand and on the other, catering for functions of the local assemblies. This will among other things expose

trainees to professional ways of executing such contracts and on meeting deadlines.

Stakeholders must work to improve the image of Technical and Vocational Education. This will happen through a sustained campaign, road shows targeted at basic schools to attract prospective students with tangible opportunities that undergoing TVET training offers students. It will also be essential to run programmes in the media showing the gap that exists and how students can take advantage of those opportunities by undergoing TVET training.

The paper is recommending an open day for school children to visit training institutions and workshops to familiarize themselves with the sort of training offered in those institutions as well as the opportunities for people with such trainings. This in my view will enhance the outlook of TVET institutions in the minds of younger people who may eventually become trainees of such institutions.

COTVET must make guidance and counseling compulsory in both formal and informal training systems. It will also be essential to develop a framework that improves transferability between different learning pathways. This must enhance teachers' skills to ensure that they are able to understand and communicate the different choices available to trainees as well as the options available, using information on the labour market as the yardstick to tailor their trainings to meet labour Market needs.

Finally, TVET must be treated as an integral part of overall educational planning. To do this effectively, the entire planning of the sector must involve industry right from curricular development to absorption of graduates into industry. These will help address the intricate social, cultural, historical, economic, technical, and political parameters through formulation of sound and effective policies using an inter-disciplinary development approach.

## **Conclusion**

Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) has always been an important catalyst for economic transformation in many countries. At the second cycle and the polytechnic levels, it prepares middle-level

personnel and at the university level, engineers and technologists for higher management positions. Trainees of vocational and technical education are equipped with competencies for specific occupations or productive activities in the various sectors of social and economic life, notably agriculture, industry and commerce. These sectors are not only crucial pillars of wealth creation but what Ghana needs to achieve real middle-income status. To do this, well-timed modern courses linked to local and global demand in addition to relevant and up-to-date TVET courses need to be developed.

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ISBN: 9988-572-50-6

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