

The Readiness of Young Persons for the World of Work

Over the years the issue of high unemployment has been plaguing developing countries. The severity of it has been exasperated as a consequence of the fallout from the global economic and fiscal crisis which has been with us and in full effect from the start of the 21st Century. The negative impact of this development has been the damper imposed on the recruitment and hiring of workers. Instead of moving to hire workers, layoffs and retrenchments have become the norm.

The demands of today's labour market, which is primarily driven by technological changes, have seen a shift from the emphasis being placed largely on academic qualifications to incorporating both skills and competencies. With the changing demands of the labour market, this has triggered the need for educational reform. While academic qualifications remain important, there is now a heightened need to ensure that students graduating from the school system have the minimum level of basic skills required to be gainfully employed.

In the Caribbean region, governments are known to place a high value on education. The region with its limited natural resources is challenged to compete favourably with the industrialized societies and global corporate entities. In addressing this, the most viable option left is to invest in the human resource, so that it becomes marketable.

If this is the thinking of policy makers, it means that they must be conscious of and be prepared to respond to the fact that too many students are exiting the school system without the minimum level of basic skills which are needed in order to be gainfully employed. As long as this remains the case, a high rate of unemployment amongst the youth is to be expected. This translates in a loss to any nation, as the capacity of its young workers remain untapped or underutilized.

Where job opportunities present themselves, it means that those who are academically endowed are better positioned to gain employment. The real issue that presents itself is the readiness of all young groups for work. Experts have diagnosed a deficiency in skills gaps. It is felt that young persons entering the job market are lacking in soft skills such as communication, problem solving, and conflict resolution.

The Readiness of Young Persons for the World of Work, Dennis de Peiza, Labour Relations Consultant, Regional Management Services Inc., 7 September, 2018

Inasmuch that this problem is recognized, employers are unlikely to see a change unless there is a total commitment to do something about it. It is more than likely where young persons are exposed to the work environment as part of the school work training experience, that a positive change can be realized. The emphasis is then placed on the willingness of employers to participate in job attachment and mentorship programmes, which are designed to help the students develop the skills and competencies required, and understand the culture of the workplace. Businesses ought to give serious consideration to developing a targeted programme aimed at getting young persons' job ready.

Towards ensuring their readiness for the world of work, the responsibility falls to each and every student to come to grips with the fact that they must prepare themselves for the job market. In doing so, emphasis must not only be placed academic qualifications but having the correct skills and competencies to compliment the job requirements.

Schools should move to place more emphasis on developing skills sets and competencies which particular jobs require. If this is not done, it can be concluded that the authorities and the system are failing our students in their quest to meet the requirements of the job market, thus reducing their chances of access to quality and sustainable employment.

In getting young persons ready for the world of work, it is advocated that a connection is established between job readinesses and life skills training. They ought to be encouraged to model workplace norms in your job readiness programme or class and are introduced to the expectations of the workplace.