Building A Safer World of Work Through Entry-level Workers' Education On Occupational Health and Safety

Olajide, O. E. (PhD)* and Oludeyi, O. S.**
Department of Adult Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria*
ephraim0307@gmail.com
Department of Adult Education, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ogun State, Nigeria*
oludeyios@tasued.edu.ng

Abstract
This paper takes a cursory at student's acquisition of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) skills to prepare them for the transition from school to work. Issues concerning sustainable OHS have been well researched and articulated by scholars and professionals interested in organisational studies, environmental studies and health. Prominent among areas of interests include employers' obligations, readiness and legal issues relating to creating a safe and conducive work environment. However, this generalisation of workers leaves young and inexperienced workers vulnerable. Young graduates experiencing the transition from schooling to working constitute a large portion of the number of people injured or killed at work. This is because entry-level workers are more vulnerable to workplace and occupational hazards than their older or senior colleagues. The problem is not unattributed to entry-level workers' unfamiliarity with workplace environmental risks, their infinitesimal occupational maturity and awareness of sustainable OHS. The paper therefore, discusses a '3-phase-didactic pathway' in preparing final-year students and entry-level graduates to acquire skills and competencies enabling them to cope with risks and hazards in the world of work.

Keywords: Entry-level workers, occupational health and safety, workers' education, world of work, 3-phase didactic pathways

Introduction
Man's socio-economic activities and biological lives depend on a safe and healthy ecosystem. These activities often disobey and violate the law of nature while putting human beings themselves at enormous risks. This is why it is widely accepted that people's success, peaceful coexistence and progress on the earth are a function of cooperation between man and the natural environment. However, contemporary discourse and scholarships addressing issues relating to building and keeping a safe world through peaceful coexistence among individual groups, households, firms and industries concentrate more on such issues as the physical and geographic environment and the hazardous consequences of how humans manage or pollute it (Babayemi, Ogundiran & Osibanjo, 2016; Ityavyar & Thomas, 2012); others raise concern about how people can safely live and/or work together on earth by advocating peace with regards to the recurring ethnic clashes, religious intolerance and the resultant terrorism (Nwankwo, 2015; Awoniyi, 2013); certain others would be conscious of the life-threatening risks (of different sexually transmitted diseases) involved in human cohabitation (Svodziwa & Kurete, 2017; Oluyemi, Yinusa, Abdullahi, Sunday & Kehinde, 2015); while the military men's perception about world safety may be that of how proactively nations are able to develop and manage Weapons of Mass Destruction, which have moved from atomic or nuclear to biological weapons, first by using these to defend nation's sovereignties as well as territories; and second, by preventing these from falling into wrong hands.

However, since organisations are microcosms of the larger society, building a safer world is not disconnected to building and keeping a safe world of work. In other words, as the world crave sustainable and safe environment, seeking sustainable and hazard-free work environment is not out of place. Thus, world safety may, in a way, begin with living and working pattern of people at home and at work. While others may be concerned with safety from other aforementioned areas of the society, this paper concentrates on building a safe and sustainable world of work through entry-level worker's education and training.

Emphasising the essence of world safety from contexts within workplaces and work communities, Alli (2008) described it as an unacceptable situation where...
occupational accidents, injuries and industrial diseases have increased dramatically across all existing national fortunates of human, social and economic resources. The socio-economic burdens which unsafe world of work brings to individual workers, employers, industries and national economies cannot be overestimated and the rate at which these accidents and industrial diseases, fatal and non-fatal, is estimated at 270 million (Alli, 2008). Thus, issues of OHS have long been a matter of serious concern to firms, industries and governments both at local and on global platforms.

Although, Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) became a critical issue of concern to managers, worker’s union and scholars in Organisational Studies and Public Health during the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain (Ohsbi, 1996: 197). This concern, especially on environmental sustainability, still trends in today’s globalised world. The importance of improving working conditions and safety measures for employees across the globe has thus been perceived as essential attribute of a sustainable and good quality job (European Communities, 2000). In addition, the concerns about keeping workplaces safe and clean have well been addressed in scholarly articles, government policies and research reports. For instance, the studies of Umeskafor, Isaac, Jones and Umeadi (2014) and studies of Idubor and Osimajo (2014) have addressed legal issues, implementations, and compliance with OHS laws in Nigeria. Other researchers examined the benefits or effects of good implementations of OHS principles in the workplace in relation to individual employee job performance (Iheanacho, & Ebitu, 2016; Ochetunjii, 2014), productivity, organisational effectiveness, amongst others. When scholars and policy makers in Nigeria address issues of workplace environment and safety measures as well as how important they are in hazard prevention at work, they seem to dwell in the category of those who are aware of the status and years of experience of both new recruits and their senior colleagues.

Unfortunately, this generalisation of workers leaves young and inexperienced entry-level workers vulnerable. It has been demonstrated in the study of Laberge, MacEachen, and Calvet (2014) that entry-level workers’ unfamiliarity with workplace environmental risks, their infinitesimal occupational maturity and the value of some of the reasons they have been most vulnerable than their senior colleagues. Unfortunately, one cannot point to a tangible direction in university curriculum or any form of education which is targeted at the rate at which OHS is provided. There have been a gradual neglect in scholarly discourse and research endeavours on how to prepare final-year students and entry-level workers to develop skills and competencies capable of enabling them to recognise, prevent and manage hazards at work. In addition, the issue about education is echoed in sustainable development agenda of the United Nations. Goal 4.4 of the SDG states that “by 2030, there would have been a substantial increase in the number of young and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (United Nation, 2016). This is why this paper emphasises OHS education and training for young workers as catalyst to achieving sustainable work environment and worker's well being.

Occupational health and safety education

At the front burner of government across continents and countries is the pursuit of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals whereas obtaining quality education (British government, 2005: 20) for sustainable development (United Nation, 2016). The relevance of education to national development continues to re-emphasise itself incrementally. Education is the systematic process through which necessary individuals acquire worthwhile and desirable knowledge, skills and competencies that enable them to be fit and useful for themselves and to the society (Abraham, 2006). Occupational health and safety education is, therefore, defined as planned efforts to facilitate the learning of specific OHS competencies in detecting, preventing and managing hazards as well as occupational diseases at work. The definition proposed by O'Connor, Flynn, Weinstock, and Zanoni (2015) goes beyond the attempt at transmitting knowledge but recognises the range of efforts designed to engage employees in improving workplace safety. The most effective way of achieving the purpose of improving workers’ health and safety on the job. To buttress this position, Weinstock and Slatin (2012) submit that workers’ training for developing OHS skills should not be seen as means or control for performance (Iheanacho, & Ebitu, 2016; Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), OHS education helps to optimise the protection potentials of the PPE being used. Weinstock and Slatin (2012) submitted that education is a catalyst to prepare workers on the transition from school to work. Education is therefore a strategy which is more attributable to a sustainable and good quality job (European Communities, 2000). In addition, the concerns about keeping workplaces safe and clean have well been addressed in scholarly articles, government policies and research reports. For instance, the studies of Umeskafor, Isaac, Jones and Umeadi (2014) and studies of Idubor and Osimajo (2014) have addressed legal issues, implementations, and compliance with OHS laws in Nigeria. Other researchers examined the benefits or effects of good implementations of OHS principles

...
It is expedient to state that designing a curriculum should not solely be done by the universities. A collaborative effort between the universities and industries will aid development of effective curriculum. This is because it is the team of the employers that understands better, safety and health areas where OHS training are needed. With regards to the areas where training programmes may be directed, the British Safety Council (2010) identified certain key areas to be put into consideration when developing the curriculum. These include:

a. The training itself: both induction and on-going training exercise should ensure that young workers are familiar with hazards, control measures and procedures;

b. Supervision: since there is a world of difference between a classroom and a workplace, there is need for supervision and monitoring;

c. Communication: this emphasises the importance of a two-way dialogue to ensure young workers' voices are heard and taken note of; and

d. Empowerment: young workers need to be given the confidence to challenge older workers and managers, and also recognise that they have responsibilities as well as rights (British Safety Council, 2010).

**Implementing the OHS curriculum: the 3-phase didactic pathway**

In order to build a safe and sustainable work environment through entry-level OHS education, it is imperative to take a '3-phase didactic pathway' in helping young workers acquire skills and competencies that will enable them to cope with if not prevent, risks and hazards at work. The 3-phase didactic pathway' is presented in the table below:
At graduation, students should have been prepared with knowledge of issues, responsibilities and regulations that will help them for safe and healthy participation in the workplace. They would have been prepared for transition to the workplace with adequate skills, attitudes, values and behaviours that enable them to value safety, act safely, participate in workplace discussions and take appropriate action to protect themselves when necessary (Australian Safety and Compensation Council, 2007: 4). The employees would have developed understanding on being alert to potential risks and hazards (to others as well as oneself); knowing what to do in risky and hazardous situations, and having the self-confidence to do it, and; being able to minimise risks and hazards, and so make such situations unlikely.

Phase 2: Application of OHS skills: Apart from the fact that employers are mandated by the law to ensure a safe and conducive work environment for employees, it is important for employers to organise an appropriate OHS induction programme for new recruits or interns before the work placement commences. They should have been satisfactorily competent and able to work safely before employers expose them to work. As suggested by Australian Safety and Compensation Council (2007: 4), employers should ensure that new workers have an understanding of: 1. their role, rights and duties under OHS legislation, including the right to be consulted about OHS matters that directly affect them 2. the statutory obligation the employer has to ensure a healthy and safe workplace for the students and fellow workers, including providing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where appropriate 3. what to do in an emergency situation and evacuation 4. what a hazard is, and the potentialities of hazard to cause death, injury or disease 5. how the risks from workplace hazards are identified, assessed and controlled, and the role that young workers may play in identifying hazards 6. the procedures for new workers to follow if they become aware of any hazards 7. the reporting of OHS matters such as accidents, incidents and injuries 8. how to access first aid and how to complete hazard/incident report forms 9. the meaning of the colours and symbols of OHS signs and the importance of complying with them 10. what is appropriate behaviour for persons in the workplace and what is inappropriate behaviour, such as workplace violence and bullying

Phase 3: Inspection and Monitoring: Most often, the problems of education and skill acquisition in Nigeria are usually not lack of good policy or curriculum framework but lack of consistency in implementation and monitoring. This is why it is essential for government, through the Department of Inspectorate of the Ministry of Labour, to be up and doing in their periodic inspection, monitoring and enforcement of labour laws in Nigeria industries. Government needs to combat the bribery and corruption in the ministry (Idubor & Oisamoje, 2013; Weinstock & Slatin, 2012) which undermines good monitoring and enforcement practices. There is need for adequate funding, training and empowerment of inspectors in the enforcement agencies.

Towards a conclusion for safe and sustainable work environment

As education forms the bedrock of SDG, finding sustainable work environment is better sought through education. Using education as a magical tool for building and maintaining safe and sustainable global environment is, of course, not concerned with building a safe and sustainable work environment through education. This is based on the premise that the world of work is a subset of the world at large from within which whatever transpires (be it peace or violence) affects the larger society. Beyond the discourse about employers’ obligations, readiness and legal issues relating to creating a safe and conducive work environment, this paper addresses issues about OHS education for entry-level workers to acquire skills and competencies needed in them to work safely in the work environment. Since young inexperienced graduates transiting from schooling to working constitute a larger portion of the number of people injured or killed at work, this paper suggested OHS education, utilising a ‘3-phase-didactic pathway’ in preparing final-year students and entry-level graduates to acquire skills and competencies enabling them to cope with risks and hazards in the world of work and its various environments. Apart from the plan suggested in this paper is not intended as a product endorsement for educational practices because it has not been tested to ascertain its potency, it promises to be an eye-opener for government officials, planners, curriculum designers, employers of labour, and university administrators. It is suggested that this pathway, if adequately planned and implemented, will increase workplace environmental sustainability by curbing the increasing pace with which occupational accidents, injuries and industrial diseases is costing nation’s fortunes of human, social and economic resources. It will also cushion the socio-economic burdens which unsafe work environment brings to individual workers, employers, industries and national economies. Apart from that, building a safer sustainable work environment through entry-level workers’ education will also go a long way in boosting environmental sustainability of the nation and world at large.