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Journey to the Depth of Treasure

IIT is a technical school of promise, writes Sonnie Ekwowusi in THISDAY on October 21, 2021.

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My journey last week to the Institute for Industrial Technology (IIT) (www.iit.edu.ng), Isheri-North Residential Scheme, Kosofe Government Area, off the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, seemed like a journey to the depths of treasure. At a time when four out of every five

young Nigerians you meet in the street have perfected plans to flee Nigeria to Canada, United States or United Kingdom in search of gainful employment and a new lease of life, journeying to the poor neighbourhood of Isheri-North Residential Scheme, Lagos last week and discovering IIT provided some relief. I remember visiting the IIT in company with a friend a couple of years ago when the institution was about taking off. But it was only last week that I came to appreciate the revolution ignited by IIT in the sphere of vocational training and technical education in Nigeria.

Succinctly put, IIT provides the most sought-after high quality vocational training and requisite technical education to the Nigerian young in order to empower them and make them competent and employable in industries, company and society at large. IIT also offers multi-skilling

technical programs to graduates of OND, HND, or BSc science and graduates of Engineering of our universities in order to impart relevant technical skills in a flexible and intense manner. This would enable them to improve their work productivity and in turn become relevant to the industries and companies in Nigeria. The wind blows where it wills and we can hardly tell where and when the wind will blow on us. Oftentimes most Nigerian young go abroad hunting for treasures unmindful that the most precious treasure can be found here in Nigeria. IIT stands in a world of its own at the desolate Isheri-North Residential Scheme. Most students of IIT, I gather, come from poor backgrounds. The school even offers scholarships to some deserving indigent students who cannot afford to pay the fees paid in the institution. IIT aims to empower these indigent young students, who

are mostly in the age bracket of 17-21, with world class vocational training and technical education skills in order to make them employable in companies such as Nestle, Guinness, Cadbury, Nigerian Breweries, Tetra-Pak, and others. In fact, some companies partner with IIT in order to employ their students after graduation. This is not surprising. IIT is well-equipped with the latest technology and equipment for imparting technical education and vocational skills. I understand that the three-year Electro-mechanics program which IIT offers is modeled after the world renowned German Dual Training System that uses both the schools and the factory as avenues for learning. This ensures that the students appreciate the practical relevance of the concept being taught. Essentially IIT students are exposed to mechanical, electrical, electronics and automation technologies to equip them with

relevant technical skills that the various industries need and crave for.

Unarguably there is a paucity of competent and honest electricians, welders, vehicle mechanics, plumbers, tilers and others in this category in Nigeria. I don't know about you but I must confess that several vehicle mechanics and electricians have defrauded me. For example, five years ago, an electrician I hired to repair my inverter ended up not only damaging the inverter but stealing all the batteries. Till date I am yet to encounter an honest vehicle mechanic who can competently repair my car. Most of the vehicle mechanics I come across are incompetent and dishonest. This is where IIT makes the difference. I gather that many Nigerian companies in Ikeja, Lagos compete among themselves in poaching IIT

graduates. Why? Because IIT graduates can be trusted to perform their duties well, at least to a reasonable extent. IIT graduates are well remunerated. Some earn more than university graduates in industries where they are employed. The IIT Director-General was kind enough to take me round the school premises. He showed me the school's well-equipped welding-instruction room. He explained that unlike the poor idea of welding which the average Nigerian has, IIT offers a uniquely professional welding course that actually equips the students after graduation to carry out professional welding work in any part of the world.

Before departure, the Director-General explained that, aside from technical competence and prowess, what makes IIT graduates excel in industries is their ability to put into practice the work ethics inculcated in

them. IIT was inspired by Saint Josemaria, the founder of Opus Dei, a personal prelature of the Catholic Church. Saint Josemaria, who was greatly concerned about helping the less privileged members of society, encouraged many people to set up institutions like the IIT in order to directly or indirectly improve the well-being of the poor as well as contribute to the manpower needs of society. Little wonder he penned in one of his best-selling books, *Christ is Passing By*, “A man or a society that does not react to suffering and injustice and makes no effort to alleviate them is still distant from the love of Christ’s heart. While Christians enjoy the fullest freedom in finding and applying various solutions to these problems, they should be united in having one and the same desire to serve mankind otherwise their Christianity will not be the word and life of Jesus: it will

be a fraud, a deception of God and man”

I left the premises of IIT feeling elated as if I had visited the depths of hidden treasure. We must invest in vocational training and technical education in Nigeria. If countries such as Italy, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines and others have invested in technical and vocational education are now reaping enormous fruits from their investments, what stops Nigeria from following suit? Here in Nigeria we still lack the technical know-how to operate new equipment imported for our manufacturing industries because they are highly-automated and contain complex technologies ranging from mechanical to electrical/electronics and information technology. A country that cannot produce competent artisans, technicians, motor mechanics, plumbers, electricians,

bricklayers, welders, etc., cannot claim to be making progress. So we have no choice but to start training good technicians, electricians, artisans, electrical engineers and good motor mechanics too. Our cultural bias for white-collar and paper qualification has become a formidable obstacle to tackling the shortage of skillful manpower in Nigeria. Our 6-3-3-4 educational system originally designed to promote technical and vocational education has been perverted. Our idea of a University is completely flawed. Many of our tertiary institutions are busy churning out certificate-carrying graduates and nothing more. Our growing dependence on technology must be matched by a proportionate increase in the number of properly-trained, competent and highly-motivated technicians and engineers in order to design, install, maintain and adapt to the new technologies.

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