

Experts Urge Stronger Academia-Industry Collaboration for Growth of Automotive Engineering

Facilitators at the Knowledge Sharing Workshop on Automotive Engineering Curriculum Development recently hosted by Covenant University have encouraged institutions of higher learning and industrial organisations to place a priority on collaboration for their mutual benefits.

The workshop with the theme, 'Toward Excellence in Engineering Training and Professional Practice in Sub-Saharan Africa', was organised under the auspices of the Higher Education Partnership in Sub-Saharan Africa (HEPSSA), a body saddled with the responsibility of developing an automotive engineering curriculum with industry collaborations.



Coordinator of HEPSSA, Dr Ojapah Moore, making his remarks

Making a presentation titled, 'HEPSSA Project Experience' at the event, Dr. Ojapah Moore of the University of Port Harcourt, the hub of HEPSSA, said that studies had shown that companies that collaborated with universities typically had higher productivity rates than companies that did not have such collaboration. He added that companies that collaborated also enjoyed greater benefits in terms of Research and Development (R&D) and were able to produce quality products at a competitive cost.

According to Dr. Moore, who is the Coordinator of HEPSSA, the twin objective of HEPSSA was to see to the creation of a better educated and a more highly skilled population to spearhead much of Nigeria's transformation agendas as the nation moved towards becoming a developed nation by the year 2020; and to ensure that the industries had highly employable graduates at their disposal for them to make superior quality products using high quality input resources and latest technology for sustenance in the globally competitive environment.

"The development of automotive engineering curriculum was our key project in this HEPSSA. The original curriculum as submitted to the universities for adoption by NADDC through NUC has been reviewed and updated to capture the current development in automotive engineering. The UK partner, Brunel University of London, the NADDC (National Automotive Design and Development Council) and PAN (Peugeot Automobile Nigeria) have reviewed the curriculum and in the final stage of submission for program implementation," said Dr. Moore.

He posited that the full implementation of the HEPSSA Project and Automotive Programme had however not been without some challenges. These included delay in fund release due to TSA (Treasury Single Account), collaborating with industries, inadequate funding of Engineering Programmes, non-availability of research facilities in automotive engineering, and shortage of manpower in automotive and mechatronic engineering.

The collaborating universities on the HEPSSA Project are University of Port Harcourt, Covenant University, Ota, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, University of Lagos, Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Warri, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Bayero University, Kano, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Federal University of Technology, Minna, and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana.

A faculty at the Department of Mechanical Engineering, Covenant, Dr. Abiodun Abioye, had in another presentation at the workshop averred that information technology had played significant role in influencing the automobile industry,

however, much more could be achieved if there was a meaningful collaboration between the government, industries and tertiary institutions.

Delivering a paper titled, 'Impact of Information Technology Development in Automobile Industries', Dr. Abioye said that the auto industry was synonymous to industrial development in many aspects, adding that less than 7 companies had started to assemble vehicles in Nigeria. "The total vehicles capacity in Nigeria as of 2014 was 78,000. This just accounted for 8.7% of the vehicles produced on the continent and 0.078 % of global production in 2015," he asserted.

While positing that the Universities/Researchers, Government and Companies had crucial roles to play concerning future Information Technology trends in automobiles, Dr. Abioye said that universities would provide methods, technologies and skilled workers to make meaningful impact on automobile industries.

Another faculty in Covenant's Department of Mechanical Engineering, Dr. Celestine Ebieto, who made a presentation titled, 'Knowledge Gained from the Engineering Education Systems that are Fit for the Future Conference UK', averred that to produce innovators universities must change who they teach, what they teach and how they teach. He said that there was the need to create a balance between knowledge, skills and mindsets, as three of them were important to be a successful engineer.

Earlier in his remarks, the Dean, College of Engineering, Professor David Omole, representing the Vice-Chancellor, Covenant, Professor AAA. Atayero, said that the University was always willing to partner with the Industry as Covenant did not believe in training students in theoretical terms but in industry-ready graduates.

Professor Omole described the workshop as a business that would enhance knowledge, adding that whatever happened at the event would further the University's vision of becoming one of the top 10 universities in the world.

In his welcome remarks, the Ag. Registrar, Dr. Lanre Amodu, posited that the academia was in no way the only repository of knowledge as the Industry also cherished the value of academics. He said that the workshop was a special programme to foster interaction between higher education and the Industry, and a cross-pollination of ideas that all sides could benefit from.

The workshop featured participants both from within and outside Covenant.

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