PLANNING TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper presents views on the state of Technical and Vocational Education in Nigeria and how this aspect of education has affected national development in terms of Youth empowerment. The indices used are discussed along the key parameters such as the nature of technical education in Nigeria, vocational education, technical/vocational education and youth empowerment as well as youth empowerment versus employment. The challenges facing technical and vocational education in Nigeria are also discussed. Attempts are made to critically assess, though not into details, technical and vocational education policies and practices as well as the ground impacts on the national economic, political, social and cultural development of Nigeria. The purpose of the aforementioned is to establish a basis for some reforms in the ways and manners technical/vocational education is handled in the country. Conclusion and recommendations are also made.

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When Nigeria attained her independence in 1960, it became obvious that the education programme in Nigeria lacked vocational values and did not address the manpower needs of an independent Nigeria. Technical education and vocational training have been seriously neglected in Nigeria, and as a result, Nigeria society has become completely unbalanced. It has unskilled labour and some semi-skilled operatives. It also has professional men and clerks, but it lacks the intermediate category of self-respecting artisans which is to be found in every highly developed country (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1946:86).

Evidence from published reports, theoretical and empirical papers indicate that investment in vocational education will provide a more direct and useful training that will stimulate and encourage creativity and equip school leavers with practical skills for earning a living as well as contribute to national economic development (Ozoro, 1972; Evans, 1982; Olotu, 1987 and Zuofa, 2004).

The above understanding provided the impetus for the curriculum innovation and policy directive which made vocational education compulsory at the junior secondary school level under the 6-3-3-4 arrangement. Thus, within the framework of the National Policy on Education, Vocational/Technical Education is seen as an integral part of general education, and a means of preparing the citizens for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work.

In the last decade, research evidence on the attitudes of the general public towards vocational education have shown that vocational/technical education has suffered enormous setback in Nigeria due to the low status accorded to it in general (Moja, 2000 and Olumese, 2004). This paper examines the image of, and access to technical and vocational education (TVE) and its implications for meeting national demands for skill-oriented education as a means of empowering the youth to face life's future challenges.

The National Policy on Education, NPE (2004) states that the goals of science and technology is to train the mind in the understanding of the world around and acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence both metal and physical to equip the individual for life and to face the challenges of the society where he belongs.

Abubakar (1996) noted that technological education aims at producing individuals who has the ability to apply acquired knowledge to new situation, the competency to get things done, the curiosity to discover and understand the world. Ikeobi (1992) pointed out that technological education is the purposeful use of all provinces of human knowledge and sensibilities about materials, sources of energy and material phenomena, for the production of gadgets and artifacts for the satisfaction of human needs and curiosity.

National development according to Eneasalor (1990) is the extent to which a society is able to overcome complex social, economic, political and cultural problems in a manner that will make life more meaningful to her citizens. Nwosu (1990) supported Eneasalor when he pointed out that national development is a continuous improvement of material and human resources of a nation in order to maximize and manipulate the physical environment for the benefit of her citizens. National development can be seen as growth, changes and improvement that occur in any given society which aims at enhancing the quality of life of the citizens. It is the effort towards modernization and improvement through the application of knowledge, skills, attitude and values gained from learning. Technical education is therefore, the bedrock of any developmental process.

Technical Education

Technical education is a special type of vocational education in which access is dependent mostly on technical information and understanding of the laws of mathematics, science and principles of technology as applied to modern design, production, distribution and service (Osuala, 1995). It is a post-secondary vocational training programme, and graduates of technical education programmes usually bridge the gap between the professional Engineer and the Craftsmen.

Olaitan (1996) said that Technical / Vocational education is that form of education which emphasis the development of occupational skills. It is a form of education which promotes dignity of labour by entrenching work as the goal of education. Technical education has also been defined in the National Policy on Education (revised, 2004) as that aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. In other words, technical-vocational education prepares people for occupations that require manipulative skills. It is also expected to develop skills, knowledge, abilities and self-relevance.

The aims of Technical education according to the National Policy on education are:

- i. To provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce particularly at sub-professional grades.
- ii. To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for Agricultural, Industrial, Commercial and Economic Development.
- iii. To provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for use and convenience of man.
- iv. To given an introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies.
- v. To give training and impact necessary skills leading to the production of craftsmen, technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant.
- vi. To enable our young men and women to have intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology

If the above objectives are effectively implemented, Nigeria will certainly make strides in youth's employment, educational and national development.

Vocational Education

Vocational education is a form of education that prepares persons for gainful employment in a chosen occupation or prepares individuals for enrolment in advanced technical education programmes (Okoro, 1993). It provides knowledge, develops skills and also

inculcates the attitudes that are necessary for entry and progress in an occupation.

Osuala (1995) defined vocational education as an education designed to prepare skilled personnel at lower levels of qualification for one or a group of occupations, trades or

and national development.

Given the fact that technological education has brought changes that have touched all spheres of human endeavour, and given the fact that man's activities have become the function of science and technology, it becomes imperative that any nation who does not ensure technological knowledge, innovation and techniques must be left out and here lies the message of this paper. The general problems of technical/vocational education in Nigeria include: limited resources for expansion, exclusion of technical and vocational education from the main stream curriculum, lack of guidance services, inadequate training of vocational teachers, and the lack of teaching resources (Moja. 2000; Olumese, 2002 and Nwokomah, 2005).

In addition to the above problems, vocational education in Nigeria faces additional challenge. There is the problem of public perception of vocational/technical education as tow status (Nwokomah, 2005). This stems from the low image of 'blue-collar' jobs which vocational education offers. Prior to and after independence, the Nigerian education system prepared students for basic "white collar' jobs. Over time, scarcity of jobs led to high unemployment rate that proved to be expensive for the nation (Moja, 2000; Ebong and Leigha, 2006). It was for this reason that the new National Policy on Education proposed a system of education that would make students more marketable by equipping them with skills for a wide range of employment opportunities (FRN, 1998:2004).

The revised system of education placed emphasis on terminal objectives aimed at providing practical skills for those students who were adjudged to lack the ability to continue with an academic career in the higher institutions of teaming. Regrettably, the overall implementation of the terminal objective has not been successful. A major hindrance to the success has been that parents and students are not keen on blue-collar career in a society where social advancement depends much more on paper qualifications or academic careers.

The Nigerian society erroneously believes that those who are not academically inclined

study technical/vocational subjects. It is for this reason that most parents are not willing to encourage their children to study technical/vocational subjects. The simple fact remains that most parents are apt to want an academic education for their children, whether or not graduates increasingly find it difficult to gel job or not. They do not want their children to go to school for the purpose of becoming bricklayers, carpenters, mechanics and so on (Nwokomah, 2005).

It is the aspiration of every parent that his or her child makes it to the university. That does not mean that they have anything against carpenters and bricklayers. Far from that, but it is their intention that their own children get the higher certificates and degrees first, so that they too can be something when the opportunities arise (Nwokomah. 2005). The urge for certificates and degrees in preference to vocational skills stems from the fact that when it comes to political appointment, leadership positions and decision making, degree headtersaignathet different fields,

Employment is the act of engaging or hiring a person for work. It is the type of work in which a person is engaged as an occupation. A person is said to be employed if he is currently established, or if engaged in an outfit established and run by him. In this case, he is said to be self-employed. In economic parlance, a person who has a job but is not working due to ill-health, bad weather, labour dispute or is on vocation is also said to be employed.

The policy process points to the whole effect towards positioning technological and vocational development that could better the life of the majority of the under-privileged people of our society. The technical, technological and vocational education offered behind globalization has not only opened up modern channels of easy communication for the engagement of Nigeria youth, but has revolutionized education (that is knowledge) through the process of global integration and communication for the past few years. Frankly speaking, access to people, job security, global solidarity and information, practically anywhere in this century has become quicker, cheaper and easier.

The role of technical and vocational education in empowering the youth through the provision of education facilities such as: television, internet, telephone, GSM, microsoft wires and micro chip; technological instruments has not only advances the capability of Nigerian youth for self reliance but has brought cultural, environmental and economic advances to some.

Inspite of the acclaimed global benefits of this era, critically speaking, the distribution of global knowledge and wealth has never been fair. Economic empowerment and knowledge acquisition have however widened the chasm between the "haves" and the "haves-not' in the sense that since the integration of Nigeria into the global economy, (the global picture has not been all that favourable, while global wealth and knowledge has undoubtedly increased, it has become concentrated in few hands and fewer class of people.

To a large extent, the scientific and technological transformation of the society has

magnified the problems that already existed in our imperfect world. Rather than offering a solution to the nation's difficulties, globalization has engendered fears and hopes. People now fret about their jobs. Both jobs and income have become precarious as global mergers and intense competition pressures companies into streamlining their operations. Hiring and firing of workers according to the current needs of the global market makes sense for a company concerned with increasing its profits but it plays havoc with youth unemployment and lives.

The Challenges Facing Technical and Vocational Education in Nigeria

A number of challenges facing technical and vocational education have been identified in this paper as follows:

- 1. Low public esteem of technical and vocational education is in favour of grammar school type of education.
- The curriculum content should provide and state clearly the occupational areas in which practical skills will be provided, and generally correct the curriculum that is over-loaded.
- 3. There was a preponderance of those labeled to be academically less able in the technical and vocational schools.
- 4. Diminishing respect for the dignity of labour has been observed.
- 5. There was a weak policy support for technical and vocational implementation.
- 6. Lack of continuity in Policies and practices.
- 7. Deteriorating infrastructures in schools for effective delivery of technical and vocational education.
- 8. Weak (current) databases on technical and vocational education for effective planning.
- 9. Shortage of technical and vocational teachers in the National Education System. Aina (2000) reported that only about 40 candidates were qualified in 1999 to be trained as vocational and technical teachers. She conc

Conclusion/Recommendations

One of the tragedies of Nigerian education in the last decade is the near collapse of Technical/Vocation Education (TVF) which was caused by low image status and the over-emphasis on academic subjects. Nigeria has the potential for technological development and can become an educational reference point for many neighboring countries if major reforms are carried out in technical/vocational education.

The task of technical/vocational education provision cannot be tackled by government alone. The involvement of major Nigerian stakeholders, complemented by partnership with international agencies, NGOs, Foundations, (etc) will be essential if the goals and potentials of Nigerians are to be realized using vocational education.

All the variables for National development in the final analysis are traceable to knowledge, skills and competencies, hence the cardinal significance of science and technology in the nation are evidence that the people are thinking positively and working constructively about their health, wealth and all other aspects of life. The natural consequence is advantageous national development. The rate and level of national development depends directly on the degree of competence, effectiveness and efficiency in the application of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired from technological education.

Therefore, to achieve the necessary material growth to make people creative and constructive, to make them live better and fuller live, and to enable them grow to become all that modernity wants them to be, Nigeria must increase her effort at cultivating technical / vocational education at all levels of education.

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