

REPOSITIONING VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

¹NOMOR BLESSING IVEREN PHD; ²YANGE CLEMENT TERLUMUN & ³UGBUDU DONALD

¹Federal Polytechnic Wanune

^{2,3}Department of Political Science, College of Education, Katsina-ala

E-mail: ¹nomorblessingiveren@gmail.com & ²yangeordue@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper has examined how the re-positioning of vocational and technical education can be a catalyst for national development. Using the Marxist theory as a framework of analysis, the paper argued among other things that vocational and technical education have not been given the desired attention and hence it faces challenges of inadequate funding, infrastructural deficit, problem of perception, curricula suitability and problem of manpower. The repositioning should begin with the breeding of local technology, imitation and modification of improved technology, increased funding by the public and private sectors, enriched laboratories/infrastructure, review of the curricula, manpower development, teacher motivation through improved salaries, constant supervision and value re-orientation of the people. The paper concludes that the key to national development and industrialization in Nigeria lies with the ability of the country to evolve indigenous technology that is anchored on the values, norms and peculiarity of our society.

Keywords:

Introduction

Before the advent of western education in Nigeria, a system of non-formal Technical, Vocational Education existed in all the geographical areas that constituted the present day Nigeria. It was the heritage of some family vocations like wood carving, fishing, drumming, weaving, and blacksmithing among others (Bala, 2013). However, the advent of colonialism affected the development of vocational and technical education in Nigeria. This was partly due to the fact that the voluntary agencies that pioneered western education in Nigeria were unable to popularize vocational and technical education on the same scale as the literary education. In any case, the Christian Missions were more interested in the natives' ability to read the Bible and literary subjects than in their ability to turn 'screws and prime water pumps (Otaigbe, 2015). Similarly, the colonialists were more interested in the training of interpreters, clerical officers, messengers etc. whom they considered would facilitate colonial exploitation than skills acquisition.

At independence, the problem of quality manpower became a problem as the number of unemployed youths increased. In a swift reaction to these great abnormalities the Federal government set up various commissions, for example, Dike commission 1959, Banjo and Ashby commission 1960. These commissions were mandated to review aspects of the existing educational system. The report of these commissions stressed the fact that to meet the challenge of technological change, to support economic growth and national development, vocational and technical education must be available to a substantially greater proportion of young people and adults alike. The commission's report further emphasized that industrial and technological development is hinged on the quality of vocational and

technical institutions and training received by trainees. The works of this committee ushered in what is term new National Policy on Education which gave a greater emphasis to vocational and technical. This policy gave birth to the establishment of several Federal Universities of Technology, Federal Polytechnics, Federal Colleges of Education, Technical and Vocational Schools and Colleges.

Atsumbe (2012) observed that despite this concerted effort, Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria has remained inadequate, unplanned, uncoordinated and to a considerable extent irrelevant to the societal needs as graduates roam the streets without employment as a result of lack of skills. The nation has also been unable to have a sound industrial take off as the level of national development is tied to the level of technology that exists therein. There is no doubt that the nations of the world that are technologically and economically strong have the story of their success rooted directly to investment in vocational and technical education. In Nigeria today, the rising unemployment, poverty, insecurity, and general socio-economic stagnation are tied to our neglect of vocational and technical education. Therefore, for Nigeria to overcome poverty, unemployment and attain national development, vocational and technical education must have to be repositioned, the objective of this paper therefore is to suggest the repositioning of vocational and technical education for national development.

Conceptual Issues

Vocational and Technical Education

According to National Policy on Education (2004), Technical and Vocational Education is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving in addition to general education the study of technology and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitude, understanding and knowledge related science and the acquisition of practical skills, attitude, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of the economic and social life of Nigerians. It further expatiated the concept of vocational and technical education to include: an integral part of general education, a means of preparing for participation in world of work, an aspect of lifelong learning and a preparation for responsible citizenships, and an instrument for promoting environmentally healthy sustainable development.

Lawal (2010) describe vocational and technical education as that types of education that prepare people who could apply relevant practical skill to make positive changes within their society and afford a self-dependent life. This form of education has been attest severally as an education that provides self-employment, enhance productivity and self-reliance. It seduces the over dependence of school graduates on government own jobs. Vocational and technical education gives individual the skills to live learn and work as productive citizen in a global society. Bala, (2013) refers to vocational and technical education as the kind of education and training that are given in formal and non-formal school systems relating to the manufacture or production of goods and services.

This paper sees vocational and technical education as skill based programmes which are designed for skill acquisition, the training of technically oriented personnel who are to be the initiators, facilitators and implementers of technologically oriented development of a nation. This training of its citizens on the need to be technologically literate would eventually lead to self-reliance and sustainability. Technical education more than any other profession has direct impact on the development of the country, as it has programme with various branches that can transform Nigeria into a producer/manufactures nation from its present status of a consumer /importer nation. Its various courses are career oriented and thus arms graduates with skills to work in the choose trade or profession. For a country to advance both socially economically and technologically, its citizens must be productive

and creative. It must have a productive citizen majority of which can be job creators rather than job seekers.

National Development

Since the concept of national development is a derivative of the term development, we shall attempt its definition first. The concept of development defies a universally acceptable definition; this is due to the multiplicity of meanings underpinning the conceptualization of the concept. Offiong (1980), defined development as a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into the social system in order to produce high per capital income and levels of living through more modern production methods and improved social organization. From this perspective a developed society is one in which the Gross National Product experiences sustained growth.

To Seer (1969), an analysis of development is important in its emphasis on quality as well as growth; development can be assessed by asking what has happened to unemployment, what has happened to inequality, and what has happened to poverty. Seer emphasized the existence of social justice and equitable distribution of resources as indicators of development.

Iyoha (1996), conceptualized development as a programme which has the objective and strategy which are aimed at transforming the citizens in rural areas from the victims of poverty ignorance and disease into a contented human being able to bear an income capable of sustaining a reasonable standard of living for him and family. The above view of development places emphasis on the transformation of the rural areas through the provision of the basic necessities of life such as food, affordable and accessible health care, welfare, electricity and education for the people within a free and a conducive environment.

Drawing from all the definitions, we can summarily define development as a total and general transformation of the economic, social, political and cultural spheres of a society through conscious efforts resulting into enriched productivity with a correspondent improvement in the lives of citizens.

National development from the foregoing, is the ability of a nation to give its citizen a new lease of life. This encompasses the significant improvement in the indices of development mentioned earlier. Perhaps this is better explained by Ake (1981) as a multidimensional process involving re-organization of entire economic and social system, addition to improvement in incomes and output. It typically involves radical changes in institutional, social, and administrative structures as well as popular attitude and in many cases even customs and beliefs.

Theoretical Framework.

The paper finds its expedient to carry out this survey within a theoretical base, and the Marxist theory of the state has been adopted as a framework of analysis. Marxism is a philosophy of knowledge and an approach of understanding and explaining society through dialectical and historical materialism. The central thrust of the Marxist theory of the state, is that the state is nothing but an executive committee for managing the affair of the bourgeoisie (Lenin 1985). That the state is an instrument of the ruling class, according to the Marxist lexicon, there are two major classes in the society, these classes are; the bourgeoisie who own and control the means of production and the proletariat who have labour power. Marx argues that the state exists to safeguard only the interest of the ruling bourgeoisie who are the ruling elites (leadership).

Reduced to the fundamentals of this work, the Nigerian state is functioning only in the interest of the ruling elites (leadership) and not for the good of the people. This explains why vocational and technical education is in a poor state because the various programmes and funds designed for the development of the subsector have been attuned only to benefit the political leadership and not realistically aimed at revamping vocation and technical education in Nigeria, as Beckman, observes;

The Nigerian leadership inherited the colonial state, a state imposed by imperialism...the contemporary Nigerian state can therefore be describing as a comprador state; state institutions and state officials operate as agents of imperialism, and are not concerned on issues of the development of vocation and technical education but rather have continued to primitively accumulate resources meant to the development of education (Beckman, 2002, p.39).

Aims and Objectives of Vocational Education in Nigeria

The National Policy on Education (2004) gave the followings as aims and objectives of vocational education in Nigeria:

- Provision of technical knowledge and vocational skill necessary for agriculture, industrial, commercial and economic development.
- To give an introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies.
- To give room for young men and women to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexion of technology.
- Training and impacting of necessary skills leading to the production of craft man, technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant.
- Provision of trained manpower in applied sciences, technology and commerce, particularly at sub-professional levels.
- To provide people who apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man.
- restructuring the educational system at all levels to respond effectively to the challenges and managing the impact of the information age, and in particular the allocation of development fund to education at all levels

The Role of Vocational and Technical Education in National Development

As earlier highlighted, the primary purpose of technology education is useful employment for adults and young who are preparing to enter occupations in agriculture, business, home-making, industrial and technical fields. Lawal (2010), Atsumbe (2012), Bala (2013), Otaigbe (2015) have all agreed that vocational and technical education played a vital role in national development, especially in areas which include the following:

Generation of Employment/creation of job opportunities: Vocational and technical education helps to reduce the rate of drop outs or unemployment in the society. Vocational and technical education could be used to developed marketable skills in students/youths so that they can become easily employable. It makes an individual to become an asset to him and the nation and also prevent him from being a liability to the society.

Industrial Development: Vocational and technical education helps a nation develop technologically and industrially by producing people competent and capable of developing and utilizing technologies for industrial and economic development. It is a tool that can be used to develop and sustain the manpower needs of any nation.

Entrepreneurship strategy: Vocational and technical education offers the beneficiary the ability to be self-reliant, to be job creators and employers of labour.

Poverty Alleviation: Many who are fortunate to graduate in a regular school system and excel in various fields of leaning fall back to the skills acquired in technical and vocational institutions in time of employment crisis. This has been proven right in recent time when workers of various categories were retrenched in both public and private sectors due to the deteriorating state of our economy. Such workers who possessed skills other than that for which they were previously em-

ployed had something else to fall back on and better off financially than those who had no other skills.

Promotion of the Nigerian Economy: It promotes the national economy through foreign exchange by exporting our products. The knowledge of technical and vocational education helps in the conversion of local raw materials, this reduces the importation of foreign goods which lessen our import dependency and encourage exportation of our local products.

Promotion of Nigerian Culture and Value: Technical and vocational education helps to promote the Nigerian culture and cause us to value what we have. This can be seen in the national and international appreciation of “Aso-Oke” work in Okene and other South Western part of Nigeria.

Problems of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria

- 1. Inadequate funding of Technical and Vocational Education:** No doubt, vocational technical education has made some notable impacts on the Nigerian society, especially in respect to the products of the training programme who are contributing their quota to the economic growth and development of the nation through various industrial establishments (Odu, 2013). Inadequate funding of vocational institutions has caused the turning out of half-baked graduates because there is no fund to build and maintain workshops, laboratories or even purchase modern equipment (Aghenta, 2015). Staffing of Vocational technical education is generally inadequate because of poor funding. Experienced and skillful teachers may not be employed. Those that are employed, because of poor remuneration do not stay long in the teaching profession, but drift to some other more lucrative jobs especially in the industries and abroad. Consequently, inexperienced and unqualified technical teachers are employed thereby lowering academic standard, resulting to wastage in the achievement of technical education goals (Agbionu, 2003). Inadequate funding of Vocational technical institutions has often caused a lot of difficulties in the payment of staff salaries. It has also resulted to the retrenchment of teachers or retirement of teachers at early age.

Furthermore, Momoh (2012) and Okoye (2016) observed that government lack of commitment to technical education and inadequate funding has weakened technical education in Nigeria. A direct consequence of this is that while the number of technical education institution is dwindling that of general education is growing in bounds.

- 2. Lack of Adequate Equipment and Training Infrastructure:** Most vocational education departments in our higher institutions do not have well equipped laboratories, workshops and usable infrastructures. Where these exist, they are grossly inadequate, obsolete and in a dilapidated state. Oduma, (2007) posited that what is seen and referred to as vocational education laboratories in various institutions today are eye-sores as the laboratories only have items or equipment that were provided at the point the departments were established. It is however a statement of fact that most vocational education departments still depend on engineering workshops and lecturers to teach vocational and technical education courses. Opeoluwa in Dokubo and Dokubo (2013) indicated that only 40% of tertiary institutions in Nigeria have laboratories or workshop spaces for vocational education programmes. They further stated that 60% of other institutions do not have laboratories or workshop spaces and this affects the low quality of technology programmes in higher institutions. Opeoluwa, concluded that this situation is partly responsible for the reason why it has been increasingly difficult to run experiments effectively for students and thus making the teaching and research in vocational and technology difficult. However, the country turned into producing insufficient, unqualified and ill prepared vocational education graduates who ordinarily are supposed to be the driving force for the economic and industry transformation of the country as experienced

in developing countries like China and Turkey. This inadequacy in the field of teaching, laboratory and workshop facilities has contributed to poor performances on the part of students.

3. **Poor Public Perception and Apathy to Vocational Education:** According to Olaitan (1999) it is established that formal western education in Nigeria started with vocational education when the first Europeans that came to this country recruited our ancestors as gardeners, laundry men, carpenters, cooks, stewards, tailors and even house builders etc. Then these forms of skill training were given to handicapped, physically or mentally retarded people. The missionaries provided them with training in handicraft, shoe-repair, broom-making, etc. this was a critical land mark in the development of vocational education because those that were handicapped were trained in skills and gainful occupations, since then any such trainings given were associated with the handicapped; and hence vocational education was since then understood or recognized to be the education for the handicapped or mentally retarded individuals. As a result of this misconception, vocational and technical education in Nigeria has a very low image and there is need for a turn around on its perception for public acceptance. Observations have shown that many parents especially the elites, the rich and the political class do not encourage their wards to make Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) a career and those people who opt probably for VTE programme either by accident or chance are not motivated or encouraged because the society does not place any significant value or dignity on the programme. In Nigeria today, how many ministers, governors, local government chairmen, professors and even teachers of VTE do encourage their siblings to enlist for VTE certificates? Rather, they prefer them to study courses like pharmacy, medicine, law, accounting etc.
4. **Relevance of the Curricula.** The pertinent question on the nation's technical and vocational education curricula is how appropriate, relevant and up to date are these curricular? Do they meet needs of employers, industry and society at large in the age of convergence of information and communication technology? How well have the curricula been able to impart skills on the trainees? It is regrettable that the curricula of several vocational and technical programmes are out dated having been in use for over fifteen years now. The questions on the mind of employers of labour are genuine, because the world of work as we have it today is a world of technology. Various production tasks which were manually performed before this time, have become mechanized, digital and in some cases automated. In the face of all these changes, review and updating of the present curricula is inevitable.
5. **Academic Staff Recruitment / Development:** The academic staff situation in the vocational and technical education institutions is very unsatisfactory. There is no enough qualified, trained and experienced teaching staff responsible for teaching the students. According to Okolocha and Baba (2016), the recruitment of professionally and technically qualified teachers is one the gravest problems of vocational and technical education in Nigeria. As a result of this acute shortage, the few ones that agree to remain are hardly allowed to embark on any form of staff development. The reasons for acute shortage of technical teachers are not farfetched. While remunerations in the industries or private sector have remained partially satisfactory and are constantly improved on in the face of high inflationary rates, remunerations in education sector have remained static. Consequently, the rate of migration of competent technical teachers to the industries is really very high as many people who are qualified to teach VTE courses have always abandon teaching for other better jobs that have prestige and better remuneration. According to Okoye (2016), teaching is gradually becoming a profession for fresh graduates of universities and colleges of education who are ready to call it quit, without provocation, as soon as they find better job opportunity. It is an indisputable fact that without quality VTE teachers, practical works which is an essential component of VTE

programme will be difficult to implement. Acquisition of skills requires that strict attention and supervision should be given to every student. In other words, individualized instructions become very difficult during practicals due to shortage of qualified VTE teachers and this affects performance of both the teachers and students as teachers were made to teach many VTE courses.

Suggestions

How to Reposition Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria

In Nigeria, vocational and technical education has long been perceived as critical to national development. Unfortunately, it has not been accorded the seriousness it deserves. The cumulative result is that today, vocational and technical education in Nigeria is in a terrible shape, crippled by a general, persistent and chronic crisis in terms of funding, staffing, curricula, infrastructure and facilities. Successive Nigerian governments have for long pursued poorly planned and disjointed educational policies with profound and devastating consequences on the development of the country. The following will help reposition vocational and technical education in Nigeria.

Improved Funding: Government has always tried to shy away from the responsibility of funding education and when they do, the timing is not always right. Today's global economy growth is based more heavily on scientific and technological knowledge. This is evident in the competitions between countries to acquire nuclear capability, space exploration, a vibrant technology and economy. Government should endeavour to fund VTE and other skill acquisition programmes very well, bearing in mind the capital intensive nature of the programmes a special fund to be tagged "Vocational and Technical Education Intervention Fund" should be created for the effective implementation of VTE programmes at all levels. This will help to equip the workshops and laboratories for effective skill acquisition. Multinational companies/public liabilities companies should support the learning of technical and vocational subjects by providing infrastructure and equipment to school and award scholarship to deserving students.

Enrich Laboratory/Workshop: Dramatic changes occasioned by globalization have shown that functional skill acquisitions are truly capable of improving one's economic destiny rather than mere acquisition of certificates. To acquire the right skills needed for wider choice of jobs and career paths, well equipped laboratory. Workshop becomes critical. Government should equip VTE workshops with modern equipment, tools and machines to enable teachers and students practice the skills using a replica of what should be obtained in the workplace and as well undertake socially relevant researches. Reprinting relevant books that are out of stock, encouraging new book projects and launching endowment funds for new libraries and book should also be undertaken by government. Nigerian institution should not relent from seeking assistance from foreign donors, NGOs, philanthropists and industrialists. Students can acquire the right skills only when they are taught with the right tools, equipment and machines in a good environment. This is why Gove (2014) stressed need to end the artificial division between the academics and the practical.

Value Re-Orientation about Vocational and Technical Education: It's a fact that there is poor perception about vocation and technical education in Nigeria owing to ignorance. The image VTE programmes should be boosted through adequate and proper sensitization of the general public and students in particular. Government should make VTE programmes more attractive by awarding scholarships to its students, making it compulsory for each student to acquire at least one vocational/technical skill irrespective of the area of specialization. The government, VTE professionals and institutions offering VTE should use persuasive advertising both print and electronic media, workshops, conferences, seminars, churches and other local means to create awareness of what VTE

is for, what it does, and its benefits in improving the political, social and economic status of individuals and the nation at large. Proper re-orientation will make the education stakeholders to begin to see the vocational and technical education with the seriousness that it requires. Students must be made to realize that certificates do not count again but the depth of knowledge and vocational skills which they have acquired and their ability to sustain the skill. Once there is improvement in the image of vocational training in Nigeria, young people will move into the programme because the quest for certificate has failed Nigerian youths and the nation at large. The government should urgently remove the dichotomy that exists between University and technical institution. Polytechnic institutions should be made to award degrees. This will not only attract more qualified students to vocational/technical education but will also encourage exchange of qualified lecturers/instructors between the two systems.

Review of Curriculum and Involvement of VTE Professionals: There is need to review the current curriculum in order to meet the current challenges in the areas of production, technology and industrialization. Closely related to this, is the use of non-professional in handling VTE matters. Ibememe (2007) noted that many administrators of VTE programme at policy making level are not vocationally trained persons and thus do not seem to understand the needs of the programme regarding content. For VTE to be successful, government must ensure that VTE professional are involved in VTE policy making decisions, planning and implementation. This is necessary because VTE professionals know the needs of the VTE programmes in terms of its content and deploying human and material resources for effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The professionals, according to Okolocha and Baba (2016), have all the necessary skills, abilities and capabilities for reviewing the curricula to meet up with emerging challenges.

Manpower Development: It is widely acknowledged that “no educational system or programme can rise above the quality of its teachers. The training of academic staff should be a continuous exercise to ensure consistent improvement in the quality of VTE teachers. The training should be in two folds: training to acquire qualifications required for teaching and continuing professional training. Both types of training can be acquired either locally or overseas. Government should adequately fund and support VTE programme through scholarships awards, funding/research grants, provide current books and journals in order to meet the needs required for staff good job performance.

Restoration of Craft Period in Primary and Post Primary Schools: Encouraging pupils and students to imbibe the culture of craftsmanship at a tender age will create a very conducive atmosphere for the sustainability of VTE in Nigeria. During the 1970s and 1980s for instance, primary schools’ pupils and secondary school students were encouraged through government policy to undertake handcraft and other skill acquisition tasks themselves as part of continuous assessment during prescribed periods of time. Today, handicrafts are not part of the school curriculum. Parents, especially the elite, rich and influential members of the society, do influence teachers and school management to accept finished (imported or locally) goods from their wards rather than making them learn how to acquire the skills and use same to produce goods. Most schools seem not to observe the craft period any longer. This attitude seems to demoralize the students who would have offered skill courses in higher institutions and even after graduation. There is an urgent need for government through various boards in charge of primary and secondary schools to reintroduce this in schools and ensure compliance.

Review of Teachers’ Salaries: A bold and courageous review of technical teacher’s remuneration should be undertaken to forestall further drift of the best of technical man power resources to the industrial and business sectors. According to Olaitan (2006) such a review should be encouraging enough to such an extent that technical teachers would feel a little bit satisfied to stay on the job

without migration or use teaching as a stepping stone for offers obtainable in industries. Until vocational teachers are induced through incentives the exodus of vocational teachers to industries will continue; the implication is that vocational education will persistently experience acute shortage of competent staff.

Supervision, Regulation and Coordination: Improvement in the organization of vocational and technical education will come with the establishment of a Board of vocational and technical education and not science and technical school board. This board should be established at the local, state and federal levels. Members of the board should be competent vocational and technical educators to the core with their own administrative inspectorate staff. This board will be responsible for among other duties ensuring that teachers with the right skills are posted to the correct schools. For example, a graduate in technical education will be posted to a vocational school or technical college where he could teach a technical skill rather than being posted to a grammar school as a physics or mathematics teacher. They are also to ensure that the needs of the programmes are well articulated. Monitoring, evaluation, supervision and accreditation of programmes are done regularly and by competent technical educators not those “looking for money” and could write anything even when infrastructures, equipment are in terrible and deplorable state.

Accreditation: Accreditation is designed to ensure relevance of curriculum by assessing the context, input, process and products periodically. It is one of the quality control strategies that have been in used in developed countries. Accreditation exercises in Nigeria in most cases are done to fulfill all righteousness; it is not intended to achieve any purpose. Major stake holders in a specialization, including lecturers, professional/regulatory bodies, employers etc should be the ones to participate in this crucial exercise. The reports of accreditation exercises should be supported and institutions lagging behind in standard and relevance should be helped by government to meet set standards. We strongly recommend the establishment of Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) units, with clearly defined roles. This is to maintain quality after accreditation exercise since these qualities decline immediately after the exercise.

Conclusion

We have examined the interface between vocational and technical education in Nigeria and national development and discovered among other things that the sector beginning from the colonial days has suffered neglect, the post-colonial leaders also did nothing tangible to improve the situation. Recognizing the fact that technical and vocational education is the bedrock of any national development, the problems of this form of education should be addressed and sees how it can be maximized towards productivity and sustainable development in Nigeria. It calls for repositioning of the technical and vocational education programme to optimally utilize the human and material resources.

On the basis of the foregoing therefore, we conclude that improving skill acquisition through vocational and technical education will no doubt solve Nigerian’s multiple problems regarding human capital development, empowerment, unemployment and economic instability. The world has recognized that meaningful social and economic development can only be recorded when majority of the populace are skilled. This is why nations are striving to overcome the problem of unemployment due to lack of skills especially among its youths and Nigeria is not left out. Since many programmes introduced to tackle the issue of unemployment and industrialization in Nigeria has failed the nation, it now becomes obvious that the easiest way to achieve the goal is by improving skill acquisition through vocational and technical education for national development. When all these strategies and solutions are adhered to, VTE in Nigeria will definitely take a new outlook in line with the trend in the global world.

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