



VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper focused on vocational and technical education as a tool for sustainable development in Nigeria. Vocational education in particular is the cornerstone for any sustainable technological development. Its relevant practical training components hold the key to Nigeria becoming technologically developed. However, despite its contributions to societal and economic development, Nigerian leaders have not given this aspect of education the attention it deserves. This could be one of the reasons for the nation's underdevelopment. This paper attempts to examine the concept of vocational and technical education in Nigeria, the concept of sustainable development, the roles of vocational and technical education, the importance and challenges of vocational and technical education in Nigeria. The paper concluded that vocational and technical education plays an important role in the sustainable development of any nation.

Keywords: Vocational education, technical education, sustainable development

Introduction

The development of any nation hinges on the social and economic contributions of her citizens. Educational, vocational and technical training plays a major role at promoting community and national development. This is because the youth and graduates from tertiary institutions seems not equipped with adequate skills that will enable them exploiting the natural resources that abound in Nigeria. Abdullahi (1994) maintained that vocational and technical education involves the acquisition of techniques and the application of the knowledge of the science for the improvement of man's surrounding. This includes dealing with manpower training in professional areas such as engineering, agriculture, business, home economics, among others. The skills involve practical works and application that lead to particular occupation. Olaitan (1996) posited that unemployment leads to frustration and disillusionment which may result in crime or drug abuse in a futile attempt to escape from and forget the pains and humiliation associated with poverty and lack. The problem of unemployment, Olaitan further stated, has worsened as millions of school leavers and graduates of tertiary institutions are not gainfully employed. The reason is that they lack the necessary occupational skills that would enable them to be self-employed and effectively function in today's world of work. It is against this backdrop that this paper is looking at vocational and technical education as an imperative for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Concept of Vocational and Technical Education

Education in general is an exercise that engages everyone. In other words, it is the only means through which a society can become better. The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) defined vocational and technical education as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related science and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to



occupation in various sectors of economic and social life. Vocational and technical education according to Oguntuyi (2013) is an educational training which encompasses knowledge, skills, competencies, structural activities, abilities, capacities and all other structural experiences for securing jobs in various sectors of the economy or even enabling one to be self-dependent by being a job creator. The International Labour Organization in Oluwale, Jegede and Olamide (2013) opined that vocational and technical education can be seen as a vehicle for the development of marketable entrepreneurial skills.

Ojimba (2012) asserted that VTE is a form of education whose primary aim is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupations and this encompasses such fields of study as (agricultural education, fine and applied arts education, business education and vocational trade in soap making, hairdressing, computer training among others. Amoor (2009) saw VTE as the core of both individuals and society's economy. The author further stressed that through the acquisition of skills, individuals could explore their environment and harness the resources within it, which could serve them and the society since the wealth of any nation determines its development. Based on the above definitions, vocational and technical education is defined in this work as a systematic training designed to enable learners acquire basic knowledge, skills and capacities needed for efficient performance in a chosen occupations.

Concept of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development has been defined by many scholars in various ways. According to Nwogu (2009), the well-being of any nation largely depends on its sustainable economic development. Usoro, Usoro, Akpan and Otu (2010), defined sustainable development in terms of reduction in the levels of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and income inequality.

Kundan in Ugoh, (2008) described sustainable development as a construct, which envision development as meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generations. However, Okala (2008) defined sustainable development as the attainment of a number of ideas of modernization such as a rise in productivity, social and economic equity, improve institutions and values. In the view of Arogundade (2011) the major essential tool for achieving sustainable development should include:

- 1) Improving the quality of basic education.
- 2) Reorienting existing education programmes to address sustainable development.
- 3) Developing public awareness and understanding, and
- 4) Providing training for all sectors of private and civil society.

Kundan in Ugoh, (2008) further argued that continued sustainable development is only possible or assured when concrete steps are taken to make the youth acquire skills that will enable them to be self-reliant and therefore become the tools for achieving development and its sustainability.



Vocational Education and Sustainable Development

To achieve sustainable development, attention should be paid to strengthening the bridge between education and preparation for the world of work with attention paid to improving vocational education and training in Nigeria. It is clear that the current university curriculum in Nigeria reduces socio-economic opportunities of those who are more oriented towards work than academics. Graduates of vocational and technical institutions are highly skilled entrepreneurs. They rely on their effort and abilities. Nigerians hire foreign experts who are paid huge sums of money to build roads, bridges and provide other infrastructural facilities. These people are graduates of vocational colleges. Unemployment is everywhere in Nigeria because most of youths lack employability skills that are often acquired from vocational schools.

Vocational education entails the enrichment of the capabilities that influence the effective psychomotor or cognitive domain of individuals in readiness for entry into the world of work in order to satisfy their intrinsic and extrinsic values, work and aspirations such that local and national needs would be met. In the view of Enahoro (2008), vocational education training is utilitarianism and it is a concept of reorganizing the importance of labour. In addition, the scholar asserted that vocational and technical education is the type of education Nigeria needs presently to reshape her crumbling socio-economic status because it is the type of education directed towards the preparation for occupational type since its recipients are equipped to face the challenges of the world of work.

Roles of Vocational and Technical Education

The development of a nation's economy is contingent on the quality of skilled human capital. Vocational and technical education provides students with life skills that will make them to be productive entrepreneurs as it engenders creative and innovative ideas; enlarges the economic pie and increases personal freedom. The business environment is changing at a fast pace due to the rapid emergence of technology and globalization. This has added to the increase in demand of valuable human skills necessary to respond to such drastic changes for economic progress. As a channel for entrepreneurial skill acquisition, VTE plays the role of improving the economic situation of Nigeria through the training of the students in different specialized fields.

In line with the view of Lawal (2014) posited that for a country to advance socially, economically and technologically, its citizen must be creative and productive with a majority becoming job creators rather than seekers". The author further emphasized that optimum attention and recognition is to be giving to the promotion of VTE in Nigeria if the country wants to attain great achievement of productivity and sustainable economic environment and natural development.

Therefore, vocational education practitioners have a role to play in terms of observing and monitoring students' behavior, attitudes and actions within the environment for proper skill alignment. The behavior observed will help vocational and technical education practitioners to counsel, guide and advice students on their



choice of skills. This will help to ensure that students enrolled in appropriate VTE discipline for effective performance and sustainability of the skills learnt.

Importance of Vocational and Technical Education for Sustainable Development

The importance of vocational and technical education for sustainable development cannot be over-emphasized. Some of its importance are enumerated as follows:

- a) Through vocational and technical education, local technology can be developed by indigenous technicians and technologists. It can be emphasized that every society has its own peculiar problems. Therefore, it will take the ingenuity of local artisans, craftsmen, technicians and technologists to design and fabricate tools, equipment and simple or complex machines to solve local problems. This eventually will save the nations billions of Naira or Dollars in foreign currency that would have been used in importing machines, most of which break down shortly on arrival in the country because they were not designed for our peculiar environment.
- b) Vocational and technical education is always serving as a motivating force in individuals to work for the nation because it stimulates technological and industrial development through the production of competent and honest workers who are capable of utilizing the abundant natural and human resources available in a country for economy and industrial growth and development.
- c) It helps to bring about rapid economic development. The survival of individuals will ensure the survival of the country as a nation. To continually meet the needs of the present generation means there must be continued economic growth.
- d) Vocational and technical education helps to solve the problems of unemployment and reduces the number of people who depends on government for job. When the youths and adults are trained vocationally or technically, it would enable them to be self-reliant in different areas such as electrical, plumbing, automobile, vulcanizing, computer engineering, GSM repair, cloth weaving and so on.
- e) Vocational and technical education is needed in every aspect of our natural life. The problem of juvenile delinquency and crime can be reduced if the youths are given the necessary vocational training that will keep them busy.
- f) Vocational and technical education is also needed to prevent waste of human resources. So far Nigeria has given very little attention to conservation of human resources. It is obvious that the waste of labour by improper employment can be largely avoided through vocational and technical training. Such training is the most potent remedy for unemployment.

Challenges of Vocational and Technical Education

There are many challenges facing the effective programme of Vocational and Technical education in the country. They include:



- a) Inadequate workshops/laboratories for training: Laboratories/workshops, which house the tools, machines and equipment for the training of students, are hardly available and the available ones are obsolete. This is why many vocational and technical education teachers resort to theoretical teaching. Where few functioning equipment or machines are available, students are divided into groups. This system is not effective, as many students do not have access to such equipment for practice as much as they want.
- b) Consumption of foreign products in preference to home made products: Many Nigerians still prefer the consumption of foreign products to that of Nigeria made ones. This is invariably killing our infant industries by making such industries to close down while employees become jobless.
- c) Lack of economic self-reliance awareness: many youths and adults do not know that vocational and technical education is the only branch of education that can provide gainful and immediate employment to graduates, and that liberal arts education only makes graduates to be job seekers. This is due to erroneous belief that the course is offered to the never-do-well members of the society and it has greatly affected the interest of students in both secondary and tertiary schools towards vocational and technical education.
- d) Power Supply: There is problem of power supply in virtually all parts of the country which made it impossible for small and medium scale business to function effectively.
- e) Lack of Mobilization: There is also inadequate mass mobilization by way of publicity campaigns to raise awareness in vocational skill acquisition. This lack of mobilization and advocacy campaigns has tended to stunt the growth of vocational training education.
- f) Policy and legislative inadequacies contribute to poor performance of vocational and technical education in Nigeria. Some policy provisions like amorphous merger of science and technology education; where science overshadow and stamped most considerations disregarding occupational orientations of vocational and technical education subject area.

Conclusion

Technical education is a vital tool through which any nation can experience growth and development. This is why nations are striving to overcome the problem of unemployment especially among its youth and Nigeria is not left out. Job creation is only vital if vocational and technical education is carefully conducted in schools. Occupational skills enable one to overcome the problem of unemployment. Therefore, it can be asserted that vocational and technical education plays an important role in the sustainable development of any nation.

Recommendations

For the success and survival of vocational and technical education as a tool for sustainable development in Nigeria, the following recommendations are offered:

- a) Government should increase the budgetary allocation to vocational and technical education. Since the government cannot do it alone, corporate



- organizations, parents and alumni associations should assist in providing some of the equipment needed in the training of vocation students.
- b) Government should organized a team of inspectors from Ministry of Education or set up a Committee that will advise government on better ways of monitoring, controlling and implementing the affairs of vocational and technical education as it relates to the nation's immediate situation.
 - c) Government should provide fund to enable the principals and teachers install the machines and equipment in different technical colleges and also to provide other facilities for effective implementation of the vocational and technical education curriculum.
 - d) Accreditation should be carried out on regular basis in vocational colleges to check the dwindling situation in Nigeria vocational colleges.
 - e) Seminars and Workshops should be organized to enlighten the public about the importance of vocational and technical education.

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