

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION: VERITABLE TOOL FOR EMPLOYMENT GENERATION AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

N. I. LAWAL

ABSTRACT

Vocational and technical education was designed to serve as a functional education in which practical and qualitative education is enhanced. It is an integral part of total education which embodies such principles of practical doing, preparing an individual for self-reliance and integrated education to enhance economic and social progress. For any nation to develop, it requires appropriate education for its economic growth. Thus, this paper examines the implication of vocational and technical education in general; its involvement in the production of manpower with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes to harness resources which will yield the goods and services required by the general populace. The paper also examines the meaning, objectives, role, and problems of vocational and technical education with a view to improving the economic status and literacy of the average Nigerians as well as improving their living standard. Some recommendations such as provision of an enabling environment for preparation of students who intrinsically wish to follow careers in science and science related subjects as well as cultural imitation should be imbibed to speed up the level technological advancement were also proposed.

Introduction

Vocational education in the former 7-5-4 educational system of the pre and post-colonial government has been perceived as worthwhile technique in confidence building in the society human resources development and utilization. This view harmonizes with the National Policy on Education (2004) which describes vocational and technical education as a means of preparing an individual for work in occupational fields and for effective participation in the society's world of work.

Vocational and technical education in Nigeria, as elsewhere suffered from a prejudice which traces back to the history of education. The term vocational/technical popularly used as reminiscent of the low status had its lot down the ages. It is thought provoking, therefore its study in schools is beginning to gain recognition as a new phenomenon in Nigerian educational system, its scope potential and benefits seem to be misunderstood by the general public.

Lack of technical knowledge and inventions, low economic growth and slow manufacturing of goods are the daily experience of everybody in Nigeria. Dependence on foreign investors to take charge of the manufacturing sector, who are not willing to invest their resources due to corruption and insecurity, has worsened the problem. As result, there is low phase of national development and mass unemployment. A country depending on foreign nations for modern technology can hardly achieve development. A country should endeavor to learn to do everything technologically without depending and reduce over dependence on others.

Vocational Education

Vocational education (also known as Vocational Education and Training VET) is a form of education that prepares people for specific trade, craft and career at various levels from a trade, crafts technicians to professional position in engineering, accountancy, nursing medicine and other healing arts, architecture, pharmacy, law etc. Craft vocations are usually based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic related, as a specific trade occupation or vocation. It is sometime referred to as technical education as the trainee directly develops expertise in a particular group of techniques (Kaka 2011).

Technical Education

The National Policy on Education NPE (2004) defines technical education as that aspect of education leading to the acquisition of practical knowledge. Technology is the practical use of scientific knowledge and techniques to produce goods and services to meet human needs. According to UNESCO (2001), technology uses knowledge, tools and skills to increase human potential to solve practical problems and to modify the world. Technology gives people the capacity to control both the man-made and natural environments, create jobs, create health and sustain socio-economic and cultural development of a society. Students of technology education learn to adjust to change, deal with forces that influence their future and wellbeing, control the forces of the environment and thus control their own future.

Poverty

Poverty is a concept that can best be described than defined. This is true because poverty has physical manifestations. For instance, the acute and permanent shortage of sufficient and good food, water, shelter and clothing (basic needs) afflicting majority of the citizens can be identified from the physical appearance of the people, as well as, their proneness to disease and other afflictions. In most cases, many citizens walk bare-footed; many cannot afford the cost of medical care and the minimum education of their wards. In most cases, the poverty condition of the citizens is explained in terms of primitive techniques of production and distribution, primitive mentality and primitive tools. Hence, the natural condition of backwardness and scarcity of basic needs.

Wasagu (2005) observed that there is pandemic poverty afflicting a great number of citizens of nations of the world. The explanation of this situation could, however, be made not in terms of primitive ideas and tools, but through an organized system of production and distribution of available goods and services. The production and distribution network is controlled and directed by a class of elite citizens that possess selfish and greedy tendencies. The main issue of politics under these conditions is said to be the allocation of scarce resources between various ethnic and regional groups in the country.

In the light of the above situation, there arises a competition among the educated elites, representing various ethnic and regional groups for the scarce resources for the country. The technique of production and distribution can certainly be improved, but what the local farmers produce for local consumption is exported by the colonial and

post-colonial agents and their collaborators in the developing countries. In other words, the reason for the poverty is exploitation that requires the elimination of the structures that hold it and the creation of new ones that genuinely serve the interest and are under the control of the people (Wasagu, 2005).

To illustrate the seriousness of the situation, Usman (1979) reported that between 1954 and 1961, wealth amounting to well over \$2 million was taken away from Nigerian farmers. This action negated the effort of the farmers to produce enough to considerably mitigate their conditions of poverty and improve their productive capacities. This dubious act was executed through annual direct means and through unequal exchange.

The perpetuation of this poverty situation in post-colonial Nigeria is attributed to “intellectual laziness” of the educated middle class to rationalize popular action and national consciousness.

In spite of the various poverty alleviation programmes launched by various governments in Nigeria like “Operation Feed the National (OFN),” the Green Revolution”, “the Directorate for Food, Roads, and rural Infrastructures (DFRRI)”, “Better Life for Rural Women”, “Family Support Programme” and recently, “the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP)”, the issue of poverty among citizens has remained unresolved. There is no doubt that an inspiring leadership that will promote the characteristics of democracy is urgently required. A leader that has an attitude of the country, equity and fairness to everyone.

Objectives of Vocational and Technical Education

The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) in its National Policy on Science and Technology (1986) gives the following as the main objectives of technical and vocational education in Nigeria;

1. To provide trained technical manpower in applied science and technology particularly at sub professional grades
2. To provide technical knowledge and skills necessary for agricultural, industrial and economic development.
3. To provide people who can apply scientific knowledge for the improvement in technology and provide solution to the environmental problems.
4. To give introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies
5. To give training and impart the necessary skills leading to the production of craftsmen who will be enterprising and self- reliant.
6. To enable our young stars, men and women to have an intelligent understandings of the increasing complexity of technology

The Nigerians philosophy of technical education is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen as well as providing them with educational opportunities at all levels.

The aim and objectives of the national policy on technical education if properly implemented would definitely lead Nigerians to revolt against the colonial heritage in our educational system of producing office assistants.

Unemployment

There is no specific or accurate data regarding the rate of unemployment in Nigeria. All data given are based on assumptions as observed by (Kaka 2011). He stressed that the data presented by Ministry of Labour and Productivity, National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and National Population Commission (NPC) (2006) are full of errors and misrepresentations, hence most of the states of Nigeria rejected the result of 2006 census and also the inability of these agencies to reach the rural communities that are parked with teeming unemployed youths. This may be due to the fact that people do not have the knowledge and skills that will enable them take up jobs for the highly skilled. Wasagu (2005) opined that Nigerian development depends on its technical personnel. A systematic programme of vocational education will enable persons to obtain the skills they need in order to fill the vacancies that exist at various ministries, parastatals and manufacturing industries. It will also reduce the level of unemployment in the country.

Unemployment is particularly acute among the graduates of universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and monotechnics due to lack of skills, as emphasis is mostly laid on the theoretical part of the courses offered at higher institutions (Danladi, 1999).

Marketers should be encouraged to fund good firms by providing conducive atmosphere for foreign partnership in funding. Now, when the confidence of the people has been shattered there must be concerted effort to attract investors from outside the country. This may be in form of foreign partnership. According to UNESCO (2001), "collaboration in regional 'creative clusters' is a strategy that will enable synergies between such countries and cities to promote the creative sector of development, able to penetrate even the most entrenched pockets of poverty. At the same time, a clustering strategy can serve to leverage the competitive edge of regional product in the global marketplace." Unfortunately, the downturn in the security situation in Nigeria has further aggravated the skepticism of investors. While they are enticed by the potentials in the business, they are scared about their safety. Thus, to bring the enthusiasm of foreign investors, we must find solution to the precarious security situation in the country and a deliberate policy of partnering should be in place.

Vocational and Technical Education and Skills Development

UNESCO (2001) stated that vocational and technical education is that aspect of educational process involved in the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitude understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. Kaka (2011) added that vocational and technical education is a service for advancing morale and intelligence. He observed that discovery and invention are changing the demands of workers, so new skills are continually created. The implication of this is that not only the acquisition of new skills and new technical information but also the acquisition of

new kind of jobs and occupational intelligence. Efficiency in making modifications in the job are some of the values needed in technical fields.

Vocational and technical education has a vital role to play in technology development of any nation. It is a known fact that acquisition and utilization of relevant skills by the people, is indispensable for economic growth and natural development. Due to shortage of skilled manpower in Nigeria, it is imperative that the nation should invest adequately in vocational and technical education so as to produce skilled manpower and develop the human and material resources that will enable subsequent employment. The relevance of vocational and technical education has become more prominent especially with the wind of change blowing across the globe through globalization and information technology. These explain why outfits such as small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) come into existence.

Vocational and Technical Education for National Development

Every society needs efficient and well trained workers. Poorly trained personnel are costly to manage in terms of time and equipment. A well-trained motor mechanic person who will be able to easily diagnose and repair auto-mobile faults quickly and accurately is preferable to poorly trained person. On the other hand, a person who could not get adequate training will spend much longer time to diagnose and may not be able to transfer other vital parts of the machine, rendering it in-operative. The inefficiency of poorly trained mechanic may result to costly enterprise, waste of human and material resources. Forest (1981), opined that the state of technological and agricultural development of a nation determines its rate of development. All the developed countries are said to be developed because of their technological and agricultural modernization. He maintained that imitation of this approach could be a wise step towards self-reliance and could equally lead to technological independence. Countries like Japan, China and Taiwan developed their technology through imitation. They acquired up-to-date foreign technology and modified the same to suit the local environment.

Real development involves the capacity and creative capability of a people to effectively transform effectively natural resources of environment into goods and services through the imaginative and practical application of their creative talents and productive labour force.

Conclusion

The adoption of vocational and technical education will not only foster fast educational development but enhance rapid economic development and technical know-how. It reduces over dependence on government for job and encourages self-reliance as functional education is the main target of the Nigeria education curriculum.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed in order to make the educational system of Nigeria functional and solve the national educational and economic problems and also develop technically,

1. The Nigerian institutions must be repositioned in such a way that they can produce sufficiently skilled, competent and resourceful graduates of vocational and technical education who are expected to be job creators and instead job seekers.
2. Nigeria must be willing to invest in this important spare to ensure economic prosperity. It should also be known that sustainable economic growth can only be overcome on a solid base. There must therefore be more commitment in increasing the allocation for research in science, vocational and technical education.
3. The aim of establishing ministry of science and technology is not to carve some schools and tagged them as science or technical schools, but let the objective of federal ministry of science and technology be achieved by embarking on research in the field of science and technology.
4. Imitation culture should be imbibed which will speed up the level technological advancement.
5. Nigeria should therefore provide an enabling environment for preparation of students who intrinsically wish to follow careers in science and science related subjects. Revolution in science, vocational and technology education.

References

- Bagin, D. Grazian A. & Harrison C.H. (1972). *School Communication Idea that work. A school relations. Handbook for school Officials.* Chicago: Nation School Press.
- Ballstone, I.G. (1975). *Science in a social context. Inaugural lecture delivered at University of Ibadan, Thursday, 27th November,*
- Bardowell, M.E (1999). *Educational technology. Commonwealth Association of Science, Technology and Mathematics Educators (CASTME) Journal.* 19 (1): 15-23.
- Baumeister, R.F. & Vohs, K.D. (2004). *Handbook of Self-Regulation: Research Theory and Applications.* New York Guilford Press.
- Danladi, E.N. (1999). "National Unity in Nigeria: Facts, Fallacies and Social Implication" in *Social Science Teachers Association of Nigeria (SOSTAN) Journal.* Uturu. Abia State University. 11 (2): 35-43.
- Durrant J.P (1993). "What is scientific literacy"? *Science and Culture in Europe.* London: Macmillan
- Fanon, F. (1966). *The Wretched for the Earth.* New York Grove Press Inc.
- FGN (1986). *National Policy on Science and Technology.* Lagos: Federal Ministry of Science and Technology.
- FGN (2004). *National Policy on Education.* Abuja: Federal Ministry of Education.
- Forest T. (1981), *Agricultural Policies in Nigeria; 1900-1979* in Hayer J. (1978) *Rural Development in Tropical Africa,* London; Macmillan.
- Kaka H.J (2011). *Human Resources Development Utilization, The role of Vocational and Technical Education with reference to Home Economics.* Lead paper presented

- at the 4th National Conference of Vocational and Technical Education, Federal College of Education, Zaria 23rd -26th September, 2011.
- Laughsch, R.C (2000). Scientific Literacy. A conceptual overview. *Science education Journal*, 84 (1): 72-95
- Okebukola P.A. O (2000). Beyond the stereotype to new instructors in science teaching a special lecture delivered at the 43th annual conference of the science teachers association of Nigeria (STAN) and common wealth association of science technology and mathematics education, August, 19-23
- Rodney, W. (1972). How Europe Under-developed Africa. London: Venture Publications.
- Turaki R.A (2005). Economy as it relates to science. *Daily Trust* 10 (71): 34. February. 23rd
- UNDP (1992). The situation of unemployment in Developing countries. New York: Oxford university press.
- UNESCO/FGN (2001). Situation. Assessment and Analysis. London: UNESCO. Oxford University press.
- UNESCO (2001). Technical and Vocational Education for the twenty first century. London UNESCO. Oxford university press
- Usman, Y.B. (1979). For the Liberation of Nigeria. London: New Beacon Books Ltd.
- Wasagu M.A (2005). Solving national problem through science, technology and mathematics education. A lead paper at 3rd national conference organized by school of science, Federal College of Education, Kontagora Niger state.