

## THE ROLE OF TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper focuses on ways in which Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) can empower youths and alleviate poverty in Nigeria. One of the current issues that is receiving wide attention is education for self-reliance. TVE entails development of manpower skills needed for self-reliance by availing trainees the opportunity of acquiring appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical as equipment for the recipient to live and contribute to the development of the society. It will contribute to poverty alleviation and the sustainability of the social and economic development of Nigeria through job creation by requiring government attention to further enhance training opportunities. The paper also examined some challenges facing TVE in Nigeria, amongst which include: inadequate supply of technical teachers, inadequate funding, etc. it is recommended among others that to enhance the success of TVE programmes: instructional facilities needed for effective teaching of should be adequately provided, TVE educators should be retrained on a continuous basis.*

### Introduction

Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) is the education given to people to prepare them for the world of work, make them to be self-reliant, enviable and viable economic entities in the society. TVE is that form of education which emphasizes the development of occupational skills needed as preparation for work. It is a form of education which promotes the dignity of labour by entrenching work as the goal of education. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2004) defined TVE as that form

of education which equips individuals with appropriate skills, abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to development of the society. TVE does the following: helps to create wealth; bring about industrial and technological development as well as economic empowerment; encourages the consumption of locally produced goods and reduces importation; make people to be self-reliant and to be more employable in the workplace. For instance computer literacy is yardstick for employment opportunities in both public and private sectors of the economy. TVE is the most potent instrument for youth empowerment and poverty alleviation.

Nwogwugu (1991) in Ekpenyong (1999) quoted the former President of the United States of America to have stated that:

*“the war on poverty and ignorance is not simply struggle for opportunity. The fight against poverty and ignorance will be an investment in the most valuable of our resources, skills, knowledge, and strengths of our people. And in future, as in the past, this investment will return its cost many fold to our entire economy giving new opportunities to those who have little or nothing”. Such investments to alleviate poverty and empower Nigerian youths can only be made possible through TVE (p. 6).*

### **Concept of Technical and Vocational Education and Poverty**

Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) is the education that makes both individual and nation to be self-reliant. Through TVE, resources (human and material) have been redirected for industrial and technological growth and development as well as economic and social empowerment. Toby (2000) defined TVE as that part of education which makes an individual more employable in one group of occupation than another. Toby further highlighted the objectives of TVE as follows: (i) meeting the society's needs for workers; (ii) increasing individual career options; (iii) lending intelligibility to general education; and (iv) serving as a motivation force to enhance all types of learning. FRN stated the following objectives of TVE as:

1. to provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man;
2. to give an introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies;

3. to enable our young men and women to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology (1998) ;
4. to provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce particularly at sub-professional grades;
5. to provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development; and
6. to give training and impart the necessary skills leading to the production of craftsmen, technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant (2004).

TVE is the education given to people to make them special in their God's given talents to earn a living. It refers to the systematic learning experiences which are designed to fit individuals for gainful employment in recognized occupations. It is the type of education that provides a wide range of skills (from basic entry level skills to very technical skills) requiring a high degree of specialization and competence. The FRN (2004) defined TVE as that aspect of education which in addition to general education. The place of TVE is very vital for survival of man though very expensive to provide. According to Osuala (1981), TVE includes agriculture education, industrial/technical education business education, health occupation education, home economics education and continuing education. It is activity-oriented; various interesting activities are learned and centre on acquisition of knowledge and skills that can be applied to our lives for survival (Mshelia, 1997 in Osuala, 2004). The epoch of TVE heralded great opportunities for all sundry. According to Osuala, the basic aim of TVE is the preparation of the learner for entry into employment and advancement in his/her chosen career, meeting the manpower needs of society, increasing the options available to students and adults and enable learners to wisely select a career. Olaitan (1997) stated that the vision for TVE is education for work because it is meant for those who can profit by it; who hope to sell the skills acquired through occupations and make a living. Therefore, TVE exposes learners to learning in job related situations using functional teaching models in an environment that depicts real work situations. The mission is the development of the ability to think because thinking is a central purpose to which an institution or organization must be well committed and must be one of the most ultimate goals of education.

The inception of TVE into Nigerian school curriculum became necessary when the literal education bequeathed on Nigeria by the British could no longer meet the needs and aspirations of the nation. TVE in Nigerian education system was emphasized with the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education. The first of junior secondary



school (JSS) was mainly for pre-vocational studies where the potentials of the students are detected, monitored and directed by the educators to make the individuals useful to themselves and the society. The pre-vocational subjects include introductory technology, business studies, home economics, practical agriculture, local crafts, computer education fine arts and music. Pre-vocational subjects provide students with a process of orientation in production and consumption through experiences in planning, producing, testing, servicing and evaluating types of consumer and industrial goods (Uwameiye, 1993). The exposure of students to pre-vocational subjects enables them to develop desirable traits and attitudes, such as pride in productive work, and respect for authority through such exposure (Uwameiye and Oviawe, 2006). The philosophy of pre-vocationalism presupposes that the products of should be equipped with the capacity to be familiar with the world of work, career options and choices. The choice of any vocation dependent on several factors which include: personal abilities, relevant knowledge, mental and physical resources, knowledge and experiences, personal interest, the need of the society, and help from siblings (Anagbogu, 2002). If individuals make wise choice of vocation, poverty will not have any effect on the larger society.

Poverty is said to be involuntary deprivation of basic needs and necessities of life either as an individual, community or society. Poverty ridden nations are referred to as developing, underdeveloped or third world countries. The causes of poverty include high rate of illiteracy, unemployment, social class domination, uneven distribution of natural resources and wealth exploitation, mis-management and mis-direction of colonialism as well as corruption. Nigeria as a developing nation is faced with myriad of problems among which include high rate of illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and corruption. Olomola and Ajakaye (1999) defined poverty as a living condition in which an entity is faced with economic, social, political, cultural and environmental deprivations. It is a state of involuntary deprivation to which a person, household, community or nation can be subjected. To Oladunni (1999) , poverty is a situation of not having enough to eat, poor drinking water, poor sanitation, poor nutrition, unfit shelter, high infant mortality rate, low life expectancy, poor environmental condition, low level of energy consumption, low educational opportunity, poor health status due to health care, lack of production assets, general lack of economic infrastructure and lack of active participation in the decision-making process either as it affects the individual or society. The poverty level of an individual can be measured by the standard of living in regards to the level of per capital income and consumption rate, compared to other necessities. Poverty can be classified as absolute, relative, chronic or structural and conjectural or transitory. The poverty level in Nigeria was recently measured by head count index (census). There

are however other means to measure poverty and they include: distribution cluster, poverty gap index, sex poverty index, human development index (HDI), etc. Judging by the aforementioned definitions of poverty, Nigeria is structurally poor and something must be done to alleviate her citizenry from this adverse state, one sure option is TVE.

### **Technical and Vocational Education: Antidote for Youths Empowerment**

In the past, cultural heritage was transmitted from generation to generation in an informal setting. Youths were apprenticed to their parents, relations, or friends to learn a specific trade or skill for a living. Some of them were taken to areas where they had no keen interest. They ended up gaining little or nothing. So TVE for youth empowerment is not new in our society. Fafunwa (1980) cited in Urevbu (2001) posited that young men and women were trained in traditional vocation such as weaving, carving, pottery, mat-making, blacksmithing, gold-smiting, bronze casting, traditional medicine, and numerous other skills. Urevbu asserted that guilds of craftsmen had a vast apprenticeship training system in which vocational skills were learnt in less formal ways.

To make TVE more meaningful and relevant, its inception into the formal school curriculum accelerated youth empowerment. Youth are equipped with competent vocational and technical skills too be self-reliant. Their natural talents are detected, monitored and channeled in the right direction by educators. They are guided to make wise choice of career from the multiple career opportunities available to them. Youths are the engine house of any nation; when the youths are adequately empowered, the nation is empowered as well. Based on this, the 6-3-3-4 system of education which was vocationally and technically oriented was introduced to equip the youths. Due to educational evaluation and reform, the 9-3-4 system has been introduced to consolidate its success. its aim is to create a positive attitude towards self-reliance in Nigerian youths. The idea of white collar jobs and rural-urban migration was highly discouraged with early exposure to craftsmanship and technical skills in schools, youths develop a mind set for creating job for themselves instead of roaming the streets seeking for white-collar jobs as equipped by liberal education. The liberal education equipped youths for white-collar jobs only, which led many to be unemployed. So many were frustrated into cultism, armed robbery, advance fee fraud popularly referred to as 419, smuggling, drug trafficking, prostitution, rural to urban drift, etc.



### **Profile of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria**

Since 1960 when Nigeria became independent, several projects designed for poverty alleviation have been taken up by various Nigerian Governments and Non-governmental Organizations. None of these has succeeded in exterminating poverty. Several attempts have been made in Nigeria towards curbing, reducing or alleviating the ugly trend of poverty. It is on this note that the Federal Government of Nigeria designed many programmes. The efforts made by the leaders failed woefully as a result of unstable government, mismanagement and above all corruption. The programmes engaged by the past governments to reduce or eradicate poverty in Nigeria include:

- National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP): This programme was set up by General Yakubu Gowon (rtd) in 1972. Later on the programme turned out to be a huge loss as nothing was achieved at the end of the regime in 1975.
- Operation Feed the Nation (OFN): This was established by General Olusegun Obasanjo (rtd) during the military regime of 1976. This programme was designed for the rural farmers. It spent much money and efforts in getting ill-prepared university undergraduates to go to the rural areas and teach the peasant farmers about modern farming.
- Green Revolution Programme: This was set up by Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1979 with the aim of curtailing food importation while boosting crop and fibre production. The programme crumbled as a result of the new breed farmers which included many senior civil servants. Military officers were interested only in getting certificate of occupancy for large hectares of land.
- Go Back to Land: This was established by General. Buhari (rtd) with variations such as the "former Rivers State Governor Fidelis Oyakhilpme's School of Land Programme and his Lagos State counterpart Gbolahan Mudashiru's Graduates farming Scheme. But like everything, it fizzled out and died a natural death.
- Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI): This programme was established by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida in 1986 and was designed to provide infrastructural facilities for the rural dwellers. The programme failed after squashing millions of naira.
- Better Life Programme: This was an off-shoot of DFRRI. It was established by Miriam Babangida to help rural women out of poverty. The programme

equally failed because, instead of catering for the interest and welfare of rural women, it turned round and became better life for rich and urban women.

- National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP): This was established under the civilian administration in 1999. At its conception *ab initio*, the pursuit of poverty reduction was given a better concern. A poverty reduction fund was established with an initial sum of N10 billion for the creation of 200, 000 jobs in the 2000 fiscal year. The poverty Alleviation Programme is being implemented as a multi-faceted programme involving many ministries with cooperation and commitment of the three tiers of the Government.

Other frantic efforts government has made to empower youths include programmes like the national directorate of employment (NDE), Idia Renaissance, Petroleum Trust fund (PTF), etc. recently, government has established NAPEP and NEEDS programmes throughout the federation for poverty reduction. Some youths are also making personal efforts to explore, enquire, innovate and make changes using local materials around them. Sometime in 2007, NTA News line broadcast featured a young talented boy from the northern part of Nigeria who designed an Aeroplane with local materials, which could fly to a certain height. If such a boy is encouraged, he will do well in the Aviation industry.

Acquisition of skills for self-reliance and national development is the mission of TVE as stated (FRN, 2004). So youths should be adequately empowered through TVE programmes, seminars, workshops, conferences, symposia, etc for individuals and national survival.

### **The Role of Technical and Vocational Education in Poverty Alleviation**

In a bid to alleviate poverty in Nigeria, TVE serves as a panacea. TVE is beneficial to the individual, their families, the society and government of the nation at large (Amiaya, 2006). TVE helps in the acquisition of practical skills needed for self-reliance and national development. The aim of TVE is to make people to be creative and productive for a better living. The beneficiaries of TVE have the comparative advantage of being employable and employers of labour. Numerous small-scale businesses across the nation are products of TVE either as a distributive/service trade or manufacturing industries where entrepreneur can perceive opportunities other business executives do not see or do not care about. TVE graduates have 3-tiers advantage; they can become educationists or industrialists or proprietors. Every individual is called to this challenge to be creative. They should use their talents and

abilities to explore various career opportunities using available local resources irrespective of social, economic, political and religious status. Just as a young graduate explore to be self-reliant, so also a lecturer should explore available resources to create wealth. The roles of TVE in poverty alleviation are as follows:

- TVE provides the required skills for self-employment. That is, it helps to reduce unemployment and its associated vices.
- The acquired skills make the individual to be self-satisfied and independent.
- The acquired skills enable the individual to work for and enjoy business profit.
- It enables the individual to take decisions devoid of procrastination.
- It enables the individual to relate to customers and its employees satisfactorily.
- It teaches recipient how to enjoy the secrets of business.
- It teacher recipient when to change or improve his/her business.
- Through TVE, recipients learn the legal requirements of starting a business.
- TVE exposes its recipient to know how, when and where to obtain capital to float a business.
- TVE increases the standard of living of its recipient.
- It improves creativity, innovative and ingenious tendency of the people.

To the society and nation in general, TVE does the following:

- TVE helps to increase the production and supply of goods and services.
- Create job opportunities.
- It provides ground for manpower training and development.
- It improves the nation's economy when there is less dependency on foreign training and development.
- Improved technology and bring about innovation and change.
- Reverse unemployment and moderate rural-urban drift.
- Enlargement of local markets and increase competition.
- Reduction in importation of foreign goods and concentration on the consumption of local goods.
- Enhance the growth and development of small and medium scale enterprises.
- It aids industrial growth.



### Challenges of Technical and Vocational Education in Nigeria

In spite of the numerous advantages of TVE to poverty alleviation, there are series of factors hindering its successful implementation. These factors include:

- ***Inadequate supply of technical teachers:*** Poor teachers' population and competencies have been a hindrance to TVE in Nigeria educational system. For example, the National University Commission (NUC) recommended a ratio of 1:20 for teacher/ students to ensure effective teaching and learning. But today, teachers teach over 200 students in a given lesson due to explosion in students' enrolment. TVE programmes lack competent specialist staff and career officer for its proper implementation. Achievement level will not improve in the class unless the teachers are there to teach the students. Some teachers lack competent skills in handling TVE equipment for the purpose of instruction and maintenance (Uwameiye and Oviawe, 2006). Most teachers do not use innovative teaching techniques and continuous assessment. The teachers' role is vital in the successful implementation of TVE programme. No one can afford to gloss over the role of the teacher in the implementation process (Aigbomian and Iyamu, 2001). There are no competent technicians to maintain the machines when they break done.
- ***Inadequate funding:*** TVE is capital intensive. Under funding is the greatest single problem of most institutions in Nigeria. Funds are required for workshops, equipment, books, teaching aids and maintenance. The implementation of the national policy on TVE is suffering handicap because of the present economic crisis. Aigbomian and Iyamu (2001) asserted that today, the dwindling economy has made the nation policy on education's vocationalization provision illusionary. In addition, there is much political influence as successive political leaders suspend or under fund existing development plans.
- ***Inadequate supply of instructional facilities:*** There are inadequacies in the provision of tools, equipment and materials required for the successful implementation of TVE programme. This results in the teaching of TVE programmes theoretically without practical. So students lack exposure to practical activities. Most equipment that were supplied to Nigerian secondary schools wasted away under the rains and sun or vandalized. Ekpenyong (1999) asserted that only 42 per cent of the N218 million worth of equipment were installed towards the end of 1990. The others were either stolen or rusted away in open rains.

- **Curriculum content:** TVE curricula developed over the years are not reviewed regularly to meet the needs of the present day society. There is need for a string link between the school curriculum content and industrial needs.
- **Poor societal perception:** The misconceived notion that TVE is meant for the academic weaklings has influenced the societal perception of the programme. The average Nigerian parent will prefer profession like Medicine, Law, and Engineering, etc to TVE for their children and wards. This negative stigma which the society places on TVE has contributed in no small measure to the low intake of students' into the programme.
- There is the challenge of how to ensure that TVE enables the students to acquire the right competence that are relevant and transferable to the workplace in a real life situation and that learners' performance can be precisely evaluated.
- Another challenge is how the society can be made to appreciate and accept the fact that we can have competent skilled and trained technicians who can move the nation forward by their effort of innovation and production without depending on the foreign products and equipment. Again to be able to produce technical educators who will be vast in skills and knowledge of impacting in students the requirements needed for self-reliance in a technological changing society.

### **Conclusion**

The relevance of TVE in the development of any nation cannot be overemphasized. This is one sure way by which the problem of unemployment that is presently pervasive in Nigeria can be addressed. The recognition of the role of TVE in building the nation has been emphasized. In the era of few jobs in the formal sector and stiff competition for employment, emphasis therefore should be geared towards equipping Nigerian youths to be self-reliant. TVE is a field which equips its products with skills necessary to bring about self-employment that can lead Nigerian economy to grater heights.

### **Recommendations**

In a bid to ensure that TVE proffer a lasting solution to poverty in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

- TVE educators should be retrained on a continuous basis. This is because if education must be relevant to the needs and aspiration of the society, the teachers must possess the latest and relevant skills, attitudes, orientation and innovation in teaching. This would only be possible on a massive scale through the programme of training the trainer.
- There should be adequate funding of TVE programme and entrepreneurs should be encouraged with soft loans. The societal negative perception can be changed if only they are able to see the achievements of those who are already trained in the field.
- Instructional facilities needed for effective teaching of TVE programmes should be adequately provided. What an individual is able to see, touch, experience and finally put into practice is the best experience teacher than where dozens of buildings with artificial things are put in place. Experience gained in a real work environment provide actively upon which the individual minds operate and should be regarded in society of our time as the best teacher. Therefore, instructional materials, tools and equipment should be adequately provided for.
- There should be periodic review of the curriculum content of TVE. The review could be done every five years to ensure that TVE curriculum is relevant to the needs and aspirations of the nation.
- To arose the interest and perception of the society, Government should organize public enlightenment campaign to create the awareness of the importance of TVE in alleviating poverty. These awareness can be through seminars, conferences, workshops, adverts in media (television, radio, newspapers), etc

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