Abstract
The paper examined the poverty situation in Nigeria and how youth empowerment through vocational education can help alleviate poverty. It also advocates for well-articulated, implemented and supervised vocational Education policy and programmes which can assist in employment generations and poverty reduction in Nigeria. Nigeria has other socio-economic peculiarities such as inflation and corruption. These have worsened the incidence and level of poverty in Nigeria. Vocational education even though it prepares individuals for gainful employment, has had little or no positive impact on the poverty status of Nigerians. Graduates of vocational schools undergo further training before they are employed in industries or companies because of insufficient practical exposure. Those who open their own businesses make meager income; because they compete with large scale entrepreneurs’ as such they have not been able to raise their living standards.

Introduction
Vocational Education or Vocational Education and Training (V.E.T) also called Career and Technical Education (CTE), prepares learners for jobs that are based on manual or practical activities. It is traditionally non-academic and totally related to a specific trade occupation or vocation, hence the term. And the learner directly develops expertise in a particular group of techniques or technology.

Vocational and Technical Education may mean different things to different people. The committee on research and publications of the American Vocational Association as cited in Joshua (2002) defines Vocational and Technical Education as education designed to develop skills, abilities, understandings, attitudes, work habits and appreciation encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to enter or make progress in employment of a useful and productive basis. Joshua (2002) also saw Vocational and Technical Education as a type of education made up of theoretical and practical instruction given to those who wish to be employed in commerce and industry or any type of enterprise that require the use of tools and machinery for the operation, production, preservation and distribution of goods and services. In the same vein, Aghenta (1982) sees Vocation and Technical Education as a form of education designed to prepare the learners to enter occupations requiring technical information and an understanding of the laws of science and technology as applied to the modern designed production. Babaji (2004) distinguished Vocational Education from Technical Education. He asserted that Vocational Education is occupation related training whereas Technical Education is more based on theory and practice.

Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people, including youth and adults.

From the definitions and explanations given above, it is obvious that Vocational and Technical Education is that aspect of Education which equips individuals with necessary skills, knowledge and
attitudes needed for a purposeful employment to earn a living. Vocational and Technical Education does not only equip individuals with basic scientific knowledge and practical skills for self-reliance, but also help in making an individual to be productive members of the society giving the enabling environment. Vocational and Technical Education therefore is a functional education.

**Poverty Alleviation**

The mainstay of Nigeria`s economy is crude oil and agriculture. Nigeria is also blessed with other mineral Resources like clay, salt deposits, natural gas, lead, zinc, etc. Nigeria is the 6th oil producing country in the world yet poverty is persistent in the country.

Mike (2006), asserted that growth is useless without poverty reduction. Poverty is raging African continent when compared to other continents, poverty in Africa is frightening. According to the African Development Bank (ADB), 40 to 45 percent of Africa`s population live in absolute poverty and 30 percent belong to the extreme poor. These statistics are worrisome and frightening with a destabilizing influence that may exacerbate conflicts, environmental degradation, crime and violence (Ovia, 2003).

The socio-economic conditions prevalent in Nigeria is worth mentioning. They include inflation and unemployment. Unemployed adults cannot maintain a family, Children in such situations are often forced to drop out of school and join the Army of street traders to provide whatever income they can for the family. These economic conditions have made meeting the demands for food, education, health and shelter a herculean task (The Progress of Nigerian children, 1997).

Also, corruption is the bane of Nigerian society. Corruption puts the economy in parlous state. Money disappears into private accounts thereby, making some individuals billionaires while many remain in destitution and penury. Many people are dehumanized and debased as a result of poverty. One possible avenue to poverty reduction is through Vocational Education.

Ojo and Vincent (2000), asserted that `education is many things to man, a visa to success, a passport to the unknown, a catalyst to great heights. Education empowers, emboldens, refines, civilizes, enlightens, enriches and gives confidence to man``.

All education systems in the world give priority to Vocational Education because it is the fulcrum of technological development. Gone are the days when people who attended commercial or technical schools were looked upon as intellectual inferiors.

Vocational education is the total of those organized and purposeful experiences essential to the career development in a trade, industrial or technical occupation. The programme enables individuals to learn about, explore and prepare for a trade. These occupations are found in any of the career clusters (manufacturing, construction, communication and transportation) and identifiable in the dictionary of occupations which functions in the designing, producing, processing, fabricating, assembling, testing, modifying, maintaining, servicing or repairing of any product or commodity.

These colleges and schools impact marketable skills to unemployed youths, school leavers, drop outs, women and others. The vocational skills learnt will lead to the production of skilled personnel who will be self reliant and enterprising. This caliber of manpower is also required for the development of any nation. The questions that quickly come to mind are; to what extent are the vocational skills so acquired relevant for rebuilding our economy and for bringing prosperity to graduate of such schools.
Vocational Education Problems

There are so many problems that have hindered the realization of the objectives of vocational education. These problems revolve around the human and material resources required for vocational training. Specialist teachers are generally in short supply especially in areas like woodwork, auto-mechanics, metal work and their likes. Igwe (2000) “any science teacher is co-opted to teach or handled such core subjects like integrated science, introductory technology. In a school where there is only one science teacher, the teacher is made to teach other science subjects, thereby making him a jack of all trade.

Most of the technical workshops especially in the rural schools are lying waste, abandoned and rusting away in the bush. In some communities, they have been vandalized, where they are intact, there is no electricity to operate these Workshops, and the required manpower to handle the equipment.

In the area of the quality of the products, most of the products are considered as half-baked, unusable by users of the products, most of the Graduate of vocational schools who read business courses become road-side typists. Those who did home economics establish fast food centres. Some of the graduates who read pure technical subjects enter into apprenticeship training with a master craftsman. This is the case with graduates of mechanics, metal work, wood work. Even after completion of apprenticeship there is usually no fund to establish their own workshop or trade. Thus they end up as wasted effort/unemployed.

The curriculum is not related to the needs of employers. Most of the graduates of vocational schools undergo another period of training before they are accepted as company workers.

Ajayi (1977) noted that many accuse the institutions of pursing irrelevances. Others say they imitate what is done in advanced countries without adaptation. Another problem of the vocational schools is finding a way of updating graduates of such schools to avoid obsolesce and inefficiency at a future time.

Many institutions cannot follow up their graduands to know the level of impact there trained persons are making in the society. This can help to reshape curriculum and technology to reflect the need of the society from time to time.

The assistance from government is usually very rare even after budgeting for huge sum of money for youth empowerment. When such assistance is available, the beneficiaries cannot have access to the fund because of banks demand for collaterals.

In some case, materials for construction are too expensive especially it concerns welding and fabrication works. This is traceable to our steel industries which cannot meet up to the market demands.

Conclusion

Vocational Education is very important aspect of technological development. To achieve this objective, it must be made to provide training for youths in business and technicians activities. Vocational Education should be the type that will help to impart the necessary skills, leading to production of craftsmen, technicians and others skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant. By this, a frame work for poverty reduction is being laid down. The case experienced in Nigeria is not only disencouraging but worrisome. The attention Technical Education deserves is not given to it.

Recommendations

1. In schools apprenticeship training should be encouraged among our youths.
2. Manpower needs of vocational schools should be by employing people who have the basic human capacity, and knowledge of vocational courses.
3. Enough funds should also be earmarked for the development of human and material resources for vocational education.
4. Curriculum should be upgraded regularly to suit the need of the society.
5. Graduates of Vocational Technical Education (V.T.E) should be assisted to establish their own enterprises by the provision of interest free loans that are easily assessable without collaterals.
6. Government should be encouraged to establish a database of all Vocation Technical Education (V.T.E) graduate with feedback on Career development after training.
7. Steel industry should be developed; this will has much positive impact on local content development.

References


Ovia, J. (2003). How to lift Africa out of poverty, This Day Newspaper December 14th