CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION: MOST IMPORTANT TOOL FOR ENHANCEMENT AND INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Technical/Vocational Education has emerged as one of the most effective human resources development strategy that need to be embraced for rapid industrialization. A review of related literature in Technical/Vocational Education reveals a catalogue of indicators which threaten to hinder Vocational Education from meaningfully with the Nigerians’ value aspiration and full exploitation of the material resources at their disposal (NATT, 2011). This paper discusses the relevance and challenges facing Technical/Vocational Education in Africa, Nigeria in particular. It also highlights the implications of these challenges and recommended some of the reforms that need to be embraced so that the impact of globalization on Vocational Education can enhance industrialization, economic growth, wealth creation and poverty eradication in Africa.

Despite considerable agricultural and mineral resources, Africa is ranked by World Bank as a low income continent on the basis of per capital income. Education has always been a vital tool for achieving individual and national development. Without the development of human potentials of any society, it will be impossible to fully tap and harness other resources for proper utilization in the process of national development. The development of any nation depends largely on the kind of education that is available to its citizens. What we are talking about is not education for the sake of it but functional education that propels a nation on the path of development, progress and greatness. This brings Technical and Vocational Education to focus as an instrument for scientific, technological and economic development (Ethel, 2007).

Technical/Vocational Education, also called career or technical education teaches skills which are directly related to a specific profession, as opposed to academic education which looks at a subject in a more abstract way. It is a training for specific occupation in agriculture, trade or industry through a combination of theoretical teaching and practical experience provided by many high schools in their commercial and technical divisions, and by special institutions of collegiate standing (as a College of Agriculture, School of Engineering or Technical Institute). This prepares learners for jobs that are based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic and totally related to specific trade, occupation or vocation hence the term, in which the learner participates. It is sometimes referred to as technical education as the learner directly develops expertise in a particular group of techniques or technology.
Technical/Vocational Education can also be described as the aspect of education which is concerned with the preparation of skilled manpower. It is a form of education, training or retraining which is directed towards developing the learner to become productive in a paid employment or in a self-employment. This type of education has the economic role of providing qualified manpower demanded by changing the individual and in enabling him to use complex technology. Technical Education is aimed at developing not only practical skills but also attitudes and habits that make the recipient a creative, innovative and resourceful person that will be useful for industrial development. Technical Education is designed to prepare skilled personnel at lower, middle and higher levels of qualification for one or group of occupations, trades or jobs. The proportions of the components may vary considerably but the emphasis is usually on practical training within the framework of lifelong education. This is evident in agriculture, manufacturing, energy, communications, transportation, construction and bio-technology (Wikipedia, 2013).

Technical/Vocational Education is a form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupation. It has been explained as the sum total of all educational experiences systematically organized and presented by an institution to enable the learner acquire basic productive and practical skills (Oharisi, 2007). Therefore, vocational education also called career or technical education prepares students for jobs and careers that are based on mostly manual or practical activities. Vocational education is low on theoretical or academic activity. It is a procedural knowledge for acquiring skills or trade.

Osioma (2005) defined vocational education as that aspect of education which is concerned with the preparation of individuals for suited performances on tasks. According to him the central objective of vocational education revolves on the achievement of socio-economic, industrial and technological objectives. Okorie and Ezeji (2008) advocate for vocational type of education which is mainly concerned with the development of skill, knowledge and attitude needed for success in any given occupation. One of the most important features of Technical Education is its orientation towards the world of work and emphasis of the curriculum on the acquisition of employable skills and entrepreneurial workforce for gainful employment and sustainable livelihood.

Relevance of Technical and Vocational Education

African states are aware of the need for promoting self-employment as the key to solving some of the social, economic and political problems in the continent and also the need for education to be geared towards self-employment and high level productivity through a system development and self-sufficiency. Thus, government established institutions where Technical/vocational education could be acquired to boost manpower development for the African states industrialization in order to enhance productivity.

The definition of Technical and vocational education is changing, it is not the apprenticeship programme of the past. With the development of economies world wide, the labour market becomes more specialized and versatile. Demand for higher level of skills both in government and business sectors started increasing. This leads to the further development of vocational education through publicly funded training organizations and subsidized traineeship initiatives for business. Demand for
Technical and vocational professional is required more than ever in various industries as well as the traditional crafts and cottage industries. Technical and Vocational Education helps people in better performance of their jobs as they acquire great learning experiences. Working professionals get the chance to hone their skills while making money. It makes an individual responsible and independent whereas those who study regular courses lack in this sphere. Career of one’s choice is one of the major benefits of this education.

A vast majority of people are caught in the wrong jobs because they were in it for the sake of job, money, lack of alternative and professional compromise whereas an individual pursuing technical and vocational education is already pursuing his dream job. This type of education is a great asset to the economy. Government needs not import foreign technicians on higher wages as our own can do the required work. Certain vocational and technical skills acquired from technical and vocational education teach the students the importance of manual work. The physical labour done under certain jobs makes them strong, healthy and active. Majority of technical skills are applicable all over the world and these create employment opportunities in foreign countries. It enables students to take marketable skills from the classroom directly into the working world. Better still, technical education attracts foreign investment and foreign exchange in form of foreign conglomerate and foreign students. School drop outs and adults can also receive this type of education as it provides opportunity to learn a skill or trade. Technical/vocational education provides stable jobs as these are the jobs whose demand is never fulfilled (Wikipedia, 2013).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that if the vocational education programme is effectively implemented, Nigeria would move in the right direction towards sustainable industrialization, self-employment of the youths, national technological improvement and create a national political stability.

Challenges facing Technical and Vocational Education in Africa

In recent times, numerous attempts have been made by individuals, philanthropists, NGOs and the government in contributing to the growth and development of technical and vocational education in Africa. These range from funding, donation of equipment/facilities, building of classrooms/library among others. In spite of these efforts, the quality of vocation and technical education in Africa has not yet reached the standard that could bring about economic transformation of the continent due to certain challenges explained here under.

Wrong Attitude and Misconceptions

All the while more respect had been paid to the intellectual activity than physical labour. Okola (2003) stated that technical education was stereo-typed, designed for preparing individuals for various occupations and craft men, technicians at sub-professional levels; and that in Africa individuals have held an equally false notion that technical education was for those who could not cope with academic pursuit; that doing work with one’s hand was less cognitive and therefore was meant for the less intelligent people.
Inadequate Funding and Poor Administration

Shortage of funds, equipment and facilities are significant problems affecting vocational and technical education. Without state of the arts equipment, workshops, training materials and fund for maintenance, the implementation of vocational and technical education programmes will remain a mirage. Again, there is absolute lack of co-ordination between the various Federal and State Agencies responsible for the administration and supervision of vocational and technical education programmes. This has resulted in costly duplication of efforts and brings about problems in the implementation of vocational and technical education policies.

Technical schools, institutions, College of education, polytechnics, and universities in Africa are poorly equipped to deliver quality teaching and learning. There appears to be a drive to increase students’ intake without a commensurate increase in quality of learning.

Dearth of Institutions and Manpower

Technical and Vocational Education institutions established in Africa after many years cannot be said to be adequate. Youths with aims of receiving vocational education can hope for a brighter future, but such institutions are very few in consideration to such a huge population.

Meritorious and able bodied persons having received vocational education are always after fat salaries and other influential gains. They are not after teachership. Besides, sufficient respect is not accorded to teachers in the society. Consequently such institutions are deprived of able and talented persons.

Lack of Indigenous Textbooks and Practical Equipment

Okoro (2009) observed that though the books may be available, they are mostly foreign in nature and the students find them difficult to interpret. In the developed world, most of the textbooks are accompanied by workbooks and these have helped in the teaching and learning of vocational and technical subjects. Though efforts are being made by African authors to write books in vocational areas, but it is difficult to publish due to inadequate finance and poor patronage.

On the other hand, more theoretical knowledge will not suffice for successful candidates to go for establishing small workshops and small industries. Charles Prosser’s theorem on principles of technical and vocational education as cited in Okoro (1999) indicated that efficient technical and vocational training can only be given when the training jobs are done in the same way with the same operation, using the same tools and equipment as will be found in the occupation itself. This denotes that it will be deceitful to train students using hand tools, while the actual job required the use of machine tools. Training using obsolete tools will certainly produce graduates who will not be relevant on the job unless given a new training to meet the desire of the employees.

Narrow Curriculum

Some vocational and technical colleges have provision for only few technical subjects. There is no place for liberal education. With their technical knowledge, the youths are not able to acquire knowledge of human relation and social objectives of production and thus make them to lack flexibility of mind.
Lack of Continuation Education
Graduates of vocational and technical education easily get employed. In the beginning they are with full knowledge and vibrant, but in course of time, they forget many things. This brings lack of efficiency and consistency on their work, performance and productivity. Now the challenge lies with the industry to attract their future manpower. If the industry wants specialized, trained, high quality graduates to maximum produce in their profession.

Poor Power Supply
The greatest challenge facing vocational and technical education in Nigeria is the notorious and perennial lack of power supply. Nearly all known vocations required for national development rely on efficient and stable electricity supply. Many entrepreneurship have folded up for lack of power supply.

Corruption
Underlying all the challenges enumerated above is the cankerworm, which is the root cause of failure for all good initiatives in Africa. Corruption continues to degrade our national initiative and makes progress impossible. Until a drastic blow is dealt to corruption in the public and private sectors, nothing of great national value should be expected in Africa. This has denied many institutions in the continent the opportunity to grow and match their counterparts in other parts of the world. All these including distorted academic calendars have had negative effects on the delivery of technical and vocational education over the years (Ohasrisi, 2007).

Some identified implications of the challenges stated above on vocational education are:
1. Production of graduates who can neither get job in the industry nor create one as a result of haphazard education that lack appropriate manpower and equipment for acquisition of skills needed for sustainable industrialization.
2. Increase in crime rate due to lack of entrepreneurial skills for self-reliance and employment in the industries.
3. Increased hunger, starvation and disease epidemic occasioned by shortage of industrial goods and services.
4. Poor industrialization and over-dependence on foreign goods and services.
5. High dependence on expatriate man power Nigerian Association of Teacher of Technology (NATT, 2011).

Conclusion
Vocational and technical education is of great importance in improving the socio-economic status of people. Reduction of unemployment and poverty through vocational and technical education can only be possible when virtually almost all the challenges facing the area are addressed from the foundation. This is necessary because poor and hungry citizens no matter the large population cannot contribute effectively to the development of any nation rather they are more likely to destroy it. To abate poverty and hunger means reducing unemployment rate which requires acquisition of appropriate skills, attitudes and knowledge that are needed to be employed or to be self-reliant in the
world of work. Thus, government should put in place appropriate mechanisms for combating the challenges facing vocational and technical education for enhanced sustainable industrial development.

**Recommendation**

The cardinal policy objective of every government is the alleviation of the suffering of its citizens. Dividends of democracy in Nigeria are not about sharing money to individuals to feed their families but rather empowering them to make a living through their own efforts. It is important to empower the youths in vocational occupation, so that the necessary skills for independence could be acquired. In the light of the aforementioned challenges, the following counter-measures are suggested.

1. There should be an increasing public awareness of the importance of vocational education and the role it is expected to play in the sustainable industrial development of Nigeria. The perception of the public on vocational education as education track only fit for the academically less endowed has to change. Government should embark on a genuine advocacy for acceptance of technical and vocational education as education for work. Good earning potentiality of various vocations can also help in changing the attitude of the modern youths.

2. Technical and vocational education should be funded adequately to enable the programme achieve its aim of ensuring industrial sustainability. Technical and vocational education Trust Fund can be created to carter for vocational education in Nigeria. Student should be exposed to adequate theoretical and practical skills through adequate provision of laboratory, workshop and other instructional materials.

3. Inadequacy of manpower should be addressed through consistent training and re-training of people in their area of deficiencies.

4. The review of vocational education curriculum will also help to provide knowledge, skill and values that will help students to cope with and adapt to the changes in the society and the world of work. The curriculum of the technical/vocational schools and institutions should be tailored to the need of industries so that products of vocation training are employable. The vocational and technical education system as a whole needs to be overhauled as suggested by Awodi (1999) for adopting transfer of knowledge and creating new knowledge and skills to enhance sustainable industrialization.

5. Industries, companies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should be involved in the teaching and learning of vocational education through provision of facilities to enhance sustainable industrial development in Nigeria. Through public-private partnership.

6. To improve welfare, NLC and other affiliated unions should establish technical and vocational education training centres in the Local Government Areas where workers should acquire some practical skills.

7. Government should build firm foundation for the generation, transmission and distribution of reliable electricity across the country.
8. The level of computer-literacy must be improved by creating a computer-integrated vocational education curriculum in all institutions beginning at secondary school level.

9. Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) Programme which complements the classroom teaching should be improved upon. Industries that employ students should assist and pay particular attention to them, give proper supervision and training. Supervisors from institutions should do a commendable job during the exercise while the students who are recipients should take the exercise very seriously.

10. Government through EFCC and ICPC must show determination to stamp out corruption from public life. The time for lip services should be over, they must show courage and boldness in dealing with political patronage, the twin brother of corruption.

References


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