Repositioning Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education for Youth Empowerment and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract
Vocational and entrepreneurship education has been an integral part of national economic empowerment and development strategies in industrialized and developed nations globally, due to its impact on productivity, sustainability and economic development. Any society that efficiently and effectively harnesses their youth’s potentials through vocational and entrepreneurship education will accelerate her pace of economic development through self-reliance. Youth entrepreneurship although yet to be embraced by Nigerian government and other stakeholders, honestly provides solution to the alarming problems threatening national security including unemployment, kidnapping, boko-haram, internet crimes, examination mal-practices,
Vocational and Technical Education have been integral parts of National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in industrialized and developed nations globally due to its impact on productivity, sustainability and economic development. It has long been recognized as a positive indicator in growing economies by improving human resources development and its utilization which Nigeria has not fully adopted. Vocational and entrepreneurial education is capable of providing the necessary tools for wealth creation in emerging societies like Nigeria. This is because of its dynamic nature in the provision of small and medium enterprises. Ajeyalemi (2006). Entrepreneurship has been seen as an actor, innovator and a developer of products and services.

Youth entrepreneurship has an impact on social as well as cultural and economic progress of the society. One of the major challenges faced by most of the countries in the world today is youth unemployment. Young people particularly secondary school leavers in industrialized nations undergo vocational and entrepreneurial education training that prepare them for the world of work and thus remain the greatest investment and treasure for sustainable economic development according to (Balogun 2012). Therefore, any society that can efficiently and effectively harness the potentials of the youths and positively orientate them on vocational and entrepreneurial education is most likely to accelerate the pace of her economic development through self-reliance.

According to Kalu, Nkume and Eneremadu in Ibe (2011), the objective of vocational and entrepreneurial education is to prepare individuals for entry into employment with skills and competences which will enable them advance in their chosen occupation. This goal according to Abokede in Balogun (2012) is of great importance, especially now that emphasis is placed on lifelong learning, which is expected to provide learners with new opportunities, responsibilities and challenges to spot and exploit for survival.

Entrepreneurial education is required to provide solution to the alarming problems that threaten national security of Nigeria and other developing nations of the world. Some of these challenges include unemployment and under-employment,
kidnapping, militancy, Boko-Haram, examination mal-practice, internet crimes, indecent dressing and prostitution, bullying and other acts of violence. (Eneremadu, Onwuagboke and Nnennaya, 2012). In democratic and economic reforms era, vocational and entrepreneurial education is the major way forward to sustainable development. Most of these vices that are associated with poverty will be creased out if the youths are equipped with relevant creative skills for empowerment, self-reliance and sustainability. If the youths are gainfully employed in productivity ventures, the tendency to fall prey to such vices will be minimal and thus they will contribute to socio-economic development of the nation (Balogun, 2012).

Frank Uzoma Olua in the weekend file of February 23, 2013 of the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) as anchored by Kyrian Umeayo which focused on the state of affairs of the Nigerian Technical and Vocational Education opined that skills appear to be the next global currency. Nigeria as a nation is therefore expected to key-in to the realities of his opinion. According to (Balogun2012), considering the vast contribution of vocational and entrepreneurial skills to national development in most developed countries, the Nigerian Government is yet to give this sector of education the adequate attention it deserves. The nonchalant attitude of Government and stakeholders to education sector has invariably affected both the vocational and entrepreneurial education and youths. Because the motivational and enabling environment are not provided for them to obtain saleable/marketable skills and knowledge, which will enable the youths have a competitive edge over others in the already congested labour market, resulting in social vices as they roam around towns and villages. This implies that on the basis of the continuous changes in the new global economy, the Nigerian nation may not be relevant in the labour market in time to come if her citizens are unable to attain a certain level of entrepreneurial skills.

This paper hopes that the objectives of vocational and entrepreneurial education will bring about saner and implementable perspective so that entrepreneurial education will be repositioned. This paper hopes that the objective of vocational and entrepreneurial education will be effectively repositioned to prepare the youths and change their minds to aspire to acquire creative marketable skills and support the stakeholders to begin to embrace it wholeheartedly as the only way to empower the youth via self-reliance and sustainable economic growth/development of Nigeria.

Concept of Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education, Youth Empowerment and Sustainable Development

Vocational and technical education prepares one for the world of work with which the individual will become self-reliant, which can sustain and enable him contribute to the nation development. It refers to that aspect of the educational process in addition to general education, the study of technology and related science, together
with skills acquisition that are practical to economic and social life. Balogun in Katsina and Daudawa (2007).

According to Kalu et al in Ehow (2011), any education that is based on occupation or employment is usually regarded as vocational education. “Vocational” is defined as the education designed to develop skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habits and appreciations that make progress in occupation on a useful and productive basis (Aboje 2007). The scope of vocational and technical education includes: Agriculture, Business Education, Home Economics, Fine and Applied Arts, Technical Education, Accounting and Entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is the willingness and ability to spot out business opportunities and organize other factors of production to run the enterprise. The entrepreneurs are confident in themselves and their abilities. According to Osuala (2008), entrepreneurship education is a specialized training given to students of vocational and technical education to acquire skills, ideas and the managerial abilities and capabilities for self-employment rather than being employed for pay. The entrepreneurs like to challenge themselves and search for opportunities. They are less risk averse than many but they do not take foolish risks, rather they calculate the risks of a given situation and will take the risk if they think they can beat the odds. (Nwaiwu 2013).

Youth development and employment are important stages in life, and they determine to a large extent long term growth that a nation can invest on. (Uchegbu, Chukwu and Okoro 2012). Therefore, for poverty reduction and economic growth in Nigeria, it is necessary to see that youths are very well prepared for the future. This calls for sustainable entrepreneurship through providing an appropriate balance and critical mass of human resource base for all individuals to be fully engaged and contribute their quota to the development of the nation, Nigeria.

Who are the Nigerian Youths?

One is presented with unsolicited comic relief when confirmed “old cargoes” hide under youth wing of one political party or another to agitate for one thing or another or even issue ultimatum or communiqué that can only be admired by hirelings or rented mob. The real youth according to Diabuah (2012) are usually the group between 14 to 35 years, who are expected to contribute much in the social, economic, political and cultural development of their country. The youths are a vital group or population in any nation. Youths are vulnerable and are expected to be adequately taken care of by way of vocational and entrepreneurial education and should be economically empowered to enable them be useful to themselves, their families and for sustainable development of the Nigerian nation. Through vocational and entrepreneurial empowerment, they are able to develop their potentials fully, acquire requisite and marketable skills which will enable them to be gainfully self-employed.
and employers of labour. Economic empowerment therefore refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities according to Wikipedia free encyclopedia. Through entrepreneurship education, youths are empowered in a specialized training in vocation and technical education to acquire skills, ideas and managerial abilities and capabilities for self-employment rather than being employed for pay.

For Nigeria to eradicate poverty and reposition vocational and entrepreneurship education, there would be need to transform youths into aggressive, purposeful and confident individuals and entrepreneurs for sustainable development. Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs according to Uchegbu et al (1987) in World Commission on Environment and Development. Moreover, if we are to achieve sustainable world (Vision 20-20), all institutions, government and individuals have a role to play, especially in vocational and entrepreneurial education because it controls most of the world’s resources and technology.

**Vocational and Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition**

Vocational skill acquisition can be defined as in institution and guide provided through technology education to individuals, aimed at equipping them with various marketable/saleable skills for sustainable empowerment in the world of work (Onazi, 2007). Skills acquisition can be accomplished through work experience, education, workshops, seminars, laboratories, apprenticeships, among others. According to Ihebereme (2008), skills acquisition education in the Nigerian educational system acts as a rehabilitation, motivation and empowerment to the under-privileged (children of poor parents). In recognition of the huge contribution skilled workers make towards organizational growth and development, organizations (like the Tetfund) in development-conscious nations of the world, spend huge sums of money on employees’ skills upgrading and re-training programmes.

**Neglect of Vocational and Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria**

The educational transformations that have occurred in the Nigerian educational system have not been able to effectively address the challenges related to economic development and social emancipation of her citizens, job/wealth creation as well as equipping the youth with marketable skills. The policy makers in Nigeria have not been able to handle Nigerian’s quest for development and industrialization adequately since they have failed to accord vocational and entrepreneurial (skills acquisition) and human capacity development the desired attention (Balogun 2012). In the same vein, Dike (2009) stated that the nation’s theory based curricula has greatly contributed to the failure of the tertiary institutions in the area of meeting up with the national
Development needs since the students are often given few or no general education to enhance their skills in preferred trades. He further stated that most technical and entrepreneurship education is academic as students are exposed to mostly theory with rudimentary practical application in formal education setting.

Due to the problem of poor funding, the nation’s vocational entrepreneurship institutions lack instruction facilities, workshop centres and skilled instructors for proper training. However, the inability of the policy makers to make useful decisions has been detrimental to the progress and stability of Nigeria’s development. Every facet of the Nigerian society has become affected by the scarcity of skilled technicians, thus the society lacks competent bricklayers, carpenters, painters, auto-mechanics, laboratory and electrical/electronic technicians, etc. which the nation needs to function efficiently Balogun in Dike (2009). He further indicated that most of the so-called “expatriate engineers” who are being paid millions of dollars to build Nigerian roads and bridges are graduates of vocational and entrepreneurial colleges. Yet, Nigeria does not take this sub-sector of its educational system seriously.

The provision of adequate training facilities has the potential of ensuring a higher degree of performance in the production of goods and services by the recipient of vocational and entrepreneurial programmes. According to Aboje (2007), the higher the number of well-trained skilled personal in various fields, the greater the prospects of establishing cottage industries and then further the economy diversify especially in self-reliance. Lack of appropriate skill acquisition led to shabby performance of Nigeria’s builders and building maintenance. This has often led to collapse of buildings and death of innocent citizens.

Agriculture is another area that government is paying lip service to and that lacks advanced technical manpower. Peasant farmers who are toiling all day in the field with knives, hoes and shovels are unable to feed the nation’s 160 million people. The society is unable to effectively process, preserve and store agriculture produce after harvest. This has resulted to food scarcity and high prices of basic food items with the attendant rising hunger and starvation and because of these deficiencies, Nigeria imports billions of naira worth of food annually leaving their youth to roam the streets looking for jobs instead of being empowered in these areas of economic development.

The neglect of vocational and entrepreneurship education did not spare the financial sector of Nigeria’s economy. The financial sector lacks competent technicians to establish database and credit bureaus to ascertain their customer worthiness and their true identity. They make available, huge loans to unqualified persons. The sector lacks technical expertise to regulate and supervise the banks and to develop financial software to properly tackle the rising fraudulent activities in the banking sector.
Youths themselves are no longer willing to go into vocational and entrepreneurial skills acquisition for the mere destructive notion that it does not attract quick money and status symbol. It is not of him that willeth or runneth in Nigeria, but the corrupt system will show mercy on whom it will show mercy. It maketh him rich overnight so that he begins to dine with governors and presidents and receive unmerited national honours. (Kalu et al 2013). Today, Nigerian youths are no longer willing to use their hands to raise their living standard, youths from Togo, Benin, Ghana and Sierra Leone are the available skilled workers in Nigeria while our youths look up to the looters of our common wealth, who pose as leaders, as their role models.

**Ways to Reposition Vocational and Entrepreneurship Education for the Nigerian Youths**

Kalu, Nkume and Eneremadu (2013) proffer solutions to the vocational and entrepreneurial education for the Nigerian youths in the following ways:

**Government Founded Vocational Centres**

The government should own and fund some vocational centres in Nigeria, at the national, state and local government levels. This will give the youths of Nigeria the opportunity to enroll in vocational and entrepreneurial training that will equip them with the required skills and knowledge that can make them to be self-employed and self-sustaining. At the end of the training period (4-5 years) a certificate will be issued to them which will be equivalent to Bachelor’s Degree or Higher National Diploma. This will enable them fit in where all other categories of graduates are, as they are graduates of vocational and entrepreneurial education.

**Non-Profitable Vocational Centres by Individuals and Groups (NGOs)**

Spirited individuals and groups should complement the efforts of the government in establishing and funding vocational and entrepreneurial education in Nigeria. Most privately owned vocational centres in Nigeria are established on political basis by politicians and lack the pre-requisite for imparting adequate entrepreneurial skills. For Nigeria to achieve vision 20-20, there is need for high spirited Nigerians to run vocational and entrepreneurial centres like private universities.

**Public Awareness**

The Nigerian youths need to be sensitized about the importance of entrepreneurship/vocational training. Most Nigerian youths are always dreaming of white-collar-jobs and are ignorant of the benefits of vocational skills. There is an over-dependency on white-collar-jobs and when the aspiration cannot be achieved, it usually leads to depression, disillusionment, frustration, kidnapping among others. All these have adverse effect on the individual and the society. It usually creates insecurity and undergrowth of the economy.
Provision of Equipment/Machines

Vocational and entrepreneurship education cannot be achieved without the use of current technology and innovations. There is need to change the outdated machines and equipment in most vocational and entrepreneurial centres in schools and villages in order to achieve the vocational goals.

Posting Professional/Skilled Teachers to Vocational/Entrepreneurial Training Centres, Primary & Post Primary Schools, Polytechnics, Mono-technics, Colleges of Education and Universities

One of the problems that have bedeviled our entrepreneurial and vocational training is inadequate or lack of professional vocational teachers in our institutions. The essence of education is to impact knowledge and have the desired change of behavior. Most of the teachers who teach the courses/subjects in these institutions are auxiliary teachers using outdated methods.

Re-Orientation of Parents, Guardians and Prospective Students to Embrace Vocational/Entrepreneurial Studies

To reposition entrepreneurial/vocational education, parents should change their minds and that of their children/wards towards vocational training. Children and wards should enroll in one form of vocational trade of their choice during holidays, vacation or while waiting for JAMB and O’level results. Even when they are lawyers, doctors, marketers, they can fix their cars; do some electrical and wood works/repairs in their surroundings. “Won’t it be a thing of joy seeing a medical doctor who is also an auto-mechanic”?

Youths Challenges to the National Development

Progress and challenges go hand in hand. One of the major challenges faced by most of the countries of the world today is youth unemployment. The overall unemployment rate is growing at an alarming speed. The world population is the total number of living humans on earth. As of today, it is estimated to number 7.145 billion by the United States Census Bureau (USCB). The USCB estimates that the world population exceeded 7 billion on March 12, 2012 and the current global youth population is estimated to be 1.5 billion of which 620 million are employable and 90% of this population live in developing countries like Nigeria. According to the InternationalLabour Organization’s prediction, approximately 660 million youths will be seeking employment by 2015. The above figures stand to reveal the fact that global youth unemployment could boomerang to become a global crisis causing social and economic impact on all countries including Nigeria where it has started manifesting in forms of kidnapping and Boko-Haram insurgency.
Youth Unemployment and Empowerment: The Way Out

Although every government frames policies and promotes schemes as well as funds to promote youth employment programmes, the quantum of such efforts is negligible when compared to the huge number of youths involved, because of not taking vocational and entrepreneurship education with the seriousness it deserves. There is an urgent need for the policy makers to look specifically at youth unemployment through youth entrepreneurship. In some of the countries, youth entrepreneurship is recognized as a promising alternative and is being actively promoted by various agencies and Nigeria should not be left out. If promoted actively, youth entrepreneurship will help to sustain the growing economy, integrate youths into the workforce besides leading to overall development of Nigeria. Active vocational and entrepreneurship education in any nation is a sign of economic growth and progress. The IT business in the US has been the bedrock for youth entrepreneurship and created stars and multi-millionaires in Bill Gates, given jobs to Google’s SergyBrin and Larry Page, Dangote, Adenuga and Frank Nneji.

However, the need of the day is to create many more stars and make available the opportunities for every youth to dream big and try their hands at imbibing entrepreneurship and vocational education. Youth entrepreneurship and vocational education has an impact on social as well as cultural and economic progress of a nation. Building an environment that promotes creativity and provides opportunities for entrepreneurship calls for multi-pronged strategies implementation and involvement at all levels including government, industry and political, social as well as educational sectors. Working towards youth empowerment/entrepreneurship programmes can help solve as well as avoid a lot of problems that are currently staring at Nigeria and pave the way for a better future and a progressive societal development. Societal entrepreneurship is about recognizing the social problems and achieving a social change by employing entrepreneurial/vocational principles, processes and operations.

In the same vein, Charles and Onuoha in Nwaiwu (2013) noted that entrepreneurship/vocational education commands great influence for the growth of any economy. Therefore, the need for entrepreneurship education in the national economy of any nation cannot be over-emphasized as it contributes in the

1. Creation of goods and services
2. Creation of wealth
3. Contribution to the growth of the gross national domestic products (GNNDP)
4. Reduction in the level of unemployment
5. Mobilization of rural savings
6. Utilization of local resources
7. Transformation of traditional industry

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**Conclusion**

Vocational and entrepreneurship education is an engine to the wealth and development of any country and a sure way of youth empowerment and economic sustainability. Essentially therefore, the policy makers, parents and the youth should reposition their mindset towards actively re-vitalizing entrepreneurship and vocational education in Nigeria for economic growth and sustainability.

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