

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF IMPLEMENTING VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract:

The importance of education in the overall development of a nation cannot be over-emphasized. This is more pronounced in the Technical and Vocational Education sub-sector of the educational enterprise. Vocational Technical Education Programme (VTE) provides theory and practical skills needed in present day technology society, necessary for paid and unpaid employment in our society. It remains the bedrock of national development in the area of Science and Technology. It is also an essential component of all round technology development in the developing economy such as Nigeria. This paper therefore explains the meaning and principles of Vocational Technical Education. It also attempts to highlight some of the problems bedeviling the progress of Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria and possible solutions to these problems.

Introduction:

Vocational-technical education traditionally was poorly given the recognition it deserves. It was informal in outlook. The kind of training was father to son and mother to daughter. However, this traditional way of training started to fade away when the Missionaries introduced Western Education to Nigeria. All the key positions of the administration were dominated by the Europeans because there was shortage of skill personnel in public offices of the Nigerians. When the Nigerians realized that they were at disadvantage, government corporations and Ministries/Departments introduced opened some training schools to train the youths on specific skills. Some of these training schools include:

- (i) Railway School at Lagos, established 1901
- (ii) Marine Training School at Lagos, established 1928
- (iii) Public Works Department Training School at Kaduna, established 1931; and
- (iv) Department of Agriculture Training School, established 1938 at Samaru and Vom in the North and Kaduna in the West (Email, 1993).

In an attempt to give vocational-technical education a proper place Nigerian educational system, committees such as Dike Committee, Banjo and Oldman Commissions were set-up and they recommended the establishment of technical institutions for the training of technical and commercial subject teachers and also the establishment of pre-vocational agricultural courses in secondary schools (Emah, 1993). As a result of these committees' recommendations, government created trade schools, polytechnics and universities in both State and Federal for the growth and expansion of vocational-technical education in Nigeria.

Meaning of Vocational-Technical Education:

Vocational education is a generic term embracing all the experiences an individual needs to prepare for some useful occupation. Giashino and Gallinto (1997) defined it as a "training or retraining" which is given in schools or classes under public supervision and control and is conducted as part of a programme designed to prepare individual for gainful employment as semi-skilled or skilled workers, technicians, or sub-professionals in recognized occupations and in a new and emerging occupations or to prepare individuals for enrolment in advanced technical education programmes.

Akpan (1997) believed that any education which has to do with the development of skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary for gainful employment is vocational education. TVE is referred to as the education received in areas of agriculture, technical, business, home economics and industry.

National Policy on Education (2004) defined Technical Education as education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skill as well as basic scientific knowledge. It includes general education, scientific, technical studies and related skilled training. The component of technical education may vary considerably and depending on the type of personnel to be prepared and the education level.

Objectives of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria:

- (a) To provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce.
- (b) To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, industrial, commercial and economic development.
- (c) To provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man.
- (d) To give an introductory professional studies in engineering and other technologies.
- (e) To enable the youths to have intelligent understanding of the increased complexity of technology (NPE, 2004),

Education Policy and TVE Implementation:

Policy is a planned or agreed course of action usually based on particular principles. Policies could represent values, practices and ways of acting that shapes the consciousness of the people and produce social identities (Lipman, 2004). Education policy therefore is a system of administrative guidelines, rules and regulations put in place to direct employees towards the achievement of the national goals of education (Anikwezem, 2004). The 1981, 1995 and 1998 policy on education was the policy that gave visibility to Vocational and Technical Education within 6-3-3-4 system on education (Okebukola, 2000). Both the NPE and National Policy on Science and Technology (NPST) make statements about policy thrust for vocational-technical education (VTE). within 6-3-3-4 system on education (Okebukola, 2000).

Since the introduction of 6-3-3-4 system of education, successive government of Nigeria has not only acknowledged but has also developed awareness of the importance of Vocational-Technical education to a developing economy. The importance of equipping the youths with employable skills to minimize the problem of unemployment, shortage of needed manpower for technological development, and social ills created by the "bookish system" of education being embarked in the country as provided in the National Policy on Education (NPE) was its major concern.

The latest system on education in Nigeria is the 9-3-4 system which is still on the pipeline yet to be implemented fully. TVE is now receiving recognition as most of the institutions offering Vocational-Technical education programmes awards Bachelor of Science degree to their graduates. Many universities also admit students with NABTEB results as against the practice many years ago. In spite of these achievements and acceptability given to Vocational and Technical education, there are still some problems bedeviling the progress of this programme.

Problems Facing Vocational and Technical Education

*** Attitude of the General Public towards Vocational and Technical Education:**

In Nigeria, preference is still in favour of Grammar School. Hardly would you find the wards of rich Nigerians studying courses offered under vocational and technical education programme. The society see vocational and technical education programme as education designed for those students which are not science-oriented and generally poor academically. Recognition is given to doctors and engineers in the society than vocational and technical graduates. Moreover, poor salaries are usually paid to Vocational and Technical workers.

*** Poor Students Enrolment:**

The number of technical institutions in the nation is less than that of the grammar schools, and this leads to the present enrolment ratio of 1:102 in favour of general education (Nwaokolo, 2003). South Korea was in this situation until 1990-1995 when the government adopted the policy of increasing enrolment into vocational and technical school. Their enrolment ratio clocked 50:50 by the end of 1995.

*** Lack of Professional Continuity:**

Vocational and technical giants have failed to handover the baton to their younger ones, unlike their colleagues in the professions like lawyers, engineers, medical doctors, etc. who usually ensure that at least, one of their children or close relations specialized in the same fields as to keep the profession.

*** Non-Involvement of other Agencies outside Government:**

No amount of money from the government alone would be enough for the proper implementation of vocational and technical education programme world over. We realize that vocational and technical education programme is the country's only hope for technological

advancement. Olaitan (1996) opined that adequate funding of vocational and technical education would require the full participation of communities, industries, organizations and agencies outside the government.

* **Lack of Human and Physical Resources:**

Akamobi (2002) stated that, vocational and technical education cannot achieve much in producing qualified skilled manpower when human and physical facilities necessary for the training are inadequate. Such facilities are in the areas of infrastructure, number of qualified technical teachers, funding, remuneration/conditions of service, equipment and consumable materials, etc.

* **Weak Policy Support for Vocational and Technical Education Implementation:**

In Nigeria, policy decisions on education are yet to be backed by legislation. The country always has good/laudable programmes on Vocational and Technical Education but the implementation has always been a failure e.g. the failure of 6-3-3-4 system.

* **Lack of Teaching Equipment/Facilities:**

Absence or lack of adequate equipment/facilities has been a serious hindrance to vocational and technical education. Where the equipment/facilities are available, maintenance culture is lacking,

hence their usual premature failure. Workshop and laboratories are not well-equipped for the students' practicals, thereby making the students lack the hand on experience.

* **Lack of Proper Curriculum for Vocational and Technical Education:**

The curriculum in our technical schools and colleges do not embrace certain basic fields which are relevant to our present and future needs. The courses designed for our technical institutions do not always have enough practical relevance with regard to industry and government which lead to unemployment of products turn out. Uzoka and Okafor (2003). as cited by Umoru (2004), recognized that our Vocational and Technical Education "curricula" are rather deficient of technology for the transformation of rural life.

* **Absence of Alternative Power Supply Source for Vocational and Technical Education Programme/Projects:**

In schools, public power supply is not always available most times. Vocational and technical education practical projects are not done in schools as expected due to constant power failure, making the programme ineffective.

Recommendations:

The government should adopt the policy of increasing enrolment into vocational/technical schools in order to reposition vocational and technical education, hence reduced unemployment rate in the country.

There should be proper funding in order to provide equipment, workshops and laboratories as well as adequate training needs for teaching personnel. Equipment and facilities for vocational and technical education programmes need adequate maintenance to avert premature failure or unavailability.

* The audience or personnel that usually respond to academic conferences, seminars and workshops on the vocational and technical education should campaign for continuity in the profession by inviting top-class politicians like Mr. President, Governors, Ministers, etc. and not academic talking to themselves every time. Also, the formation of an umbrella organization, like National Association of Technology and Technical Educators of Nigeria (NATEN) for all cadres of technical educators, can be used to campaign for continuity in the profession.

* The stakeholders and the community should jointly sponsor the vocational and technical education programmes with the government in order to provide the necessary tools and machines so that the teaching and learning process of vocational and technical education becomes reality.

- * There is need to review our vocational and technical education curriculum in consultation with the industry and government with a view to giving such courses offered greater practical relevance. The NCCE should organize and sponsor workshop in which experts in technical education, computer and curriculum engineers will meet to fashion out a curriculum that will satisfy the need of the society.

Conclusion:

Interest in vocational education has been low in recent times because of the shallow knowledge and understanding of the concepts of vocational and technical education. It is common knowledge that many Nigerians including parents and students consider vocational and technical education as the least desirable in the society. This concept is very much apparent in affluent families. In the views of Okeke (1998), we have approached a period in which our modern schools and the government will find it necessary to focus on the preparation of students in the vocational education areas to meet their manpower requirement. Therefore, there is need to implement the current vocational and technical education curriculum if the programme must survive the on-going technological revolution. Vocational and technical education practitioners must accept a serious leadership role and provide more programmes of higher quality in business and industry today and in the future.

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