

FUNCTIONAL VOCATIONAL/ TECHNICAL EDUCATION: A USEFUL TOOL FOR ENHANCING NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Abstract

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This issue of how Vocational Technical Education (V.T.E.) can be made functional and effective has been the concern of experts and citizenry for quite some time now. This seems to emanate from the general feeling of the public of the insignificant impact of vocational-technical education on the individuals and the society. This paper therefore examines the ways functional VTE programmes can enhance national development. It also recommended some guidelines on how to improve VTE in Nigeria.

Introduction

The role of vocational technical education in national development is not in doubt. This is because its main function is to fight unemployment, economic recession and shortage of skilled and semi-skilled manpower. Vocational technical education also relates education to job creation and self-employment through its self sustaining programmes that are centred on preparing community members for self-reliance (Olaitan, 1995 and Uzodinma, 1997).

Unfortunately, the products of vocational technical education programmes in Nigeria are among millions of unemployed youths and adults roaming about in the streets of towns and villages looking for jobs in government ministries and private establishments when in actual sense they are supposed to create jobs and employment others (Kazeem, 2002). He further stated that vocational technical education programmes in Nigeria have failed to provide the recipients with adequate practical skills, work habits and knowledge, and practical work experience to enable them to be useful to themselves and to the nation. He concluded by calling for a functional vocational technical education programme that will redirect the economic trend in this country. This paper discusses the functions of functional vocational technical education in national development.

Conceptual Clarification

A review of literature on vocational technical education indicates variations in the meaning, concept and applications. Osuala (1995) defined technical education as a comprehensive term referring to education process when it involves, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and relating sciences and acquisition of practical skills and knowledge to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life.

In another definition, Olusegun (2001) referred to technical education as that phase of education, which seeks to help the students acquire specific mechanical or manipulative skills required to function adequately in a dynamic society. On the other hand, Olaitan (1998) defined vocational education as a designed field of study for the development of work skills, attitudes, and appreciations, creativity in the individuals as well as the creation of awareness of occupational entry and progression demands. According him, it is concerned with the development of capabilities for self or paid employment.

A close look at the above definitions of vocational and technical education reveal that the central theme is skill development, work habits formation and knowledge necessary for a given occupation. For the purpose of this paper, vocational-technical education may be perceived as education that is designed to equip individuals with practical skills, work habits, attitudes and knowledge that will enable them to be rational and functional members of the society.

Rationale and Impact of Functional Vocational-Technical Education on National Development

The current economic crisis in Nigeria has adversely affected all sectors of the nation's growth and development. These problems have been attributed to the uncoordinated, unplanned and inadequate vocational-technical education programmes and unequal opportunity for skill acquisition (Ogalanya, 1997). He further stated that unemployment, under achievement in academic work; low skill acquisition and poor job

performances have become common features among graduates of vocational-technical institutions.

To check these ugly trends, vocational-technical education programmes in Nigeria have to be made functional and effective. This will provide the recipients with the work characteristics necessary for securing gainful employment in an occupation or a cluster of occupations and ensure self-reliance (Igboamauchey, 1995). Functional vocational-technical education programmes encourage participation in useful work, self-employment and job creation. Fafunwa (1998) referred to education as the engine that drives the growth and development of a nation. According to him, a nation does not just need education but functional education that will meet the socio-economic, cultural and political needs of the individual and society.

Vocational-technical education can only achieve its objectives and play its rightful roles when the system is good and functional to do so. The extent of this goodness and functionality can be ascertained by the products of the programme. Sound and functional V.T.E. programmes lead to increased creativity, innovation and efficient and effective use of resource which improve capacity utilization of industries, consequently employment generation and capital accumulation (Anyakoha, 2001). All these are made possible by providing the learner with desirable traits of character, habits of work, technical skills and knowledge to enable them progress and succeed in their chosen occupations. We need a V.T.E. programme that will produce technicians and craftsmen who can fabricate machines that can produce simple products like detergents, toilet soaps, and so on, simple machines for processing of cassava, yams and other agricultural products.

In a country such as Nigeria where a high rate of unemployment and other forms of hardship are being experienced, we need functional and effective V.T.E. to produce such calibre of graduates who can fit into industries or set up their own businesses. Functional V.T.E. could be employed for national development in the following ways:

1. There will be available job opportunities for numerous school leavers at various levels.
2. Scarcity of goods and service as would be greatly reduced in this country.
3. Economic depression, which until now had not been a common feature in Nigerian history will be seriously addressed and curtailed.
4. The production level of goods will be greatly improved.
5. Nigerians would be encouraged to invest in agricultural production because the produce will be utilized by local industries.
6. Efforts would be made by industrialists to invest in meaningful and purposeful research for the preservation of our agricultural produce, for example yams, cassava and plantains (Nwabudike, 2001)

Recommendations and Implications

This write-up recommends the following to make vocational-technical education programmes functional in Nigeria. They will also make V.T.E. programme effective enough to meet the numerous challenges facing it.

1. Functional working curriculum that has mission and focus should be developed.
2. Adequate modern and functional training facilities, machines, equipment and tools should be provided.
3. Academically and technically qualified, as well as, practical- oriented, well-remunerated teachers should handle V.T.E. programmes.
4. Sufficient fund should always be made available for day-to-day running of programmes.
5. There should be training and re-training machinery for V.T.E. teachers to help keep them abreast of the latest developments in technology.
6. Industrial Training Fund (I.T.F.) should be reorganized to make it more functional and effective to provide the needed support for effective industrial training in work related skills.

The above recommendations would have the following implications:

1. Graduates of V. T. E. programmes would be capable of setting up their own businesses (self-employment) or fit in properly into paid employment.
2. Qualified and experienced craftsmen and technicians to fabricate simple machines will be available.
3. Qualified technicians and craftsmen to maintain and repair locally made and imported

- appliances and machines will be readily available.
4. Competent, skilled and functional manpower to harness Nigeria's abundant resources will be available.
 5. Qualified and experienced vocational technical teachers will be available to handle our V.T.E. institutions.

Conclusion

Without doubt, the contributions of V.T.E. to national development is unquantifiable. It is the solution to the economic crisis in Nigeria. But the present V.T.E. programmes in the country is not effective enough to achieve this difficult task. It is therefore imperative that the present V.T.E. in Nigeria should be made functional and effective. So that the recipients will acquire the necessary practical skills, work habits and knowledge required to enable them to be useful to themselves and bring about the needed development.

Vocational - technical education in Nigeria requires some reformation in order to make it functional and effective. V.T.E. curriculum would need to be innovated to make it responsive to the present challenges; teachers would need to be trained and re-trained at pre-service and in-service levels; efforts should be made to retain competent and experienced teachers; modern and functional training equipment should be prepared and teachers have to be well remunerated, among others. If all that are stated above are put in place, Nigeria may in no distant time begin to recover from the economic depression and experience an unprecedented technological and economic development.

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