Vocational Education as a Veritable Tool for Economic Challenges of the 21st Century

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Abstract

Vocational and technical education is a veritable instrument for nation building and economic empowerment. It has great potential rate in reducing unemployment by giving people useful skills which will enhance their living. It can greatly improve many industries and can lead to innovation. In fact, it is a great catalyst. This paper therefore, explores the concept of vocational education, types of vocational education, the economic challenges in the 21st century, and the roles of vocational education in the economic sector. Finally, recommendations were made and conclusion drawn.

The standard of living of a country cannot be adequately assessed without considering its technological independence. There is no doubt that this has effects on the country’s economic development. Effectively embarking on vocational and technical education will surely boost the technological development of a country and her economy.

Vocational education is designed to be functional, practical and quantitative. It is an integral part of the total education which embodies such principles as, preparation for life and integration of education with actual social progress. It emphasizes the importance of habit formation in skill development. In order to acquire such skills, it is important that the learner sees things for himself, practice them, repeat them and is exposed it to the environment that is replica to the work place. Technological development of Nigeria has been rather slow because of the system of education adopted in the past by the colonial masters.

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Fafunwa (2004) observed that one of the major defects of the Nigerian educational system is low priority accorded to technical and vocational education. Vocational education anywhere has been described as a viable industry and a *sine-qua-non* to new world technological order which requires adequate support of human and material resources.

Vocational technical education in Nigeria suffered from a prejudice which dates back into history. The term “vocational/technical” is popularly used as reminiscent of the low status which has its lot down to ages and it is thought-provoking, therefore, that its study in schools is beginning to gain recognition (Ipaya, 2006). As a phenomenon in the education system, its nature, scope, potentials and benefits appear to be misunderstood or even underscored by general public. Prior to the 6-3-3-4 system of education, there was little vocational technical education programme in the schools and the little that was provided was limited in scope, in quantity and in effectiveness.

Low economy, low technology, low inventions and low manufacturing of goods and services are the daily experiences of everybody in Nigeria. Foreign investors, on the other hand, are hard to find because there are few important events to attract them. As a result of these low developments, the national revenue is scanty. The overall effect of these is the suffering of the masses.

Taiwo (2004) argued that since Nigeria is a developing industrial country, emphasizing vocational technical education in the elementary education level is reinforcing a social foundation. In effect, training for vocation is a life-long process and must be made part of Nigerian culture, if the much-desired technological and economic growth can be realized.

**The Overview of Vocational Education**

The National Policy on Education (1981) uses the term “vocational education” to refer to formal instruction at the secondary school level that prepares students to work in specific vocations. It also states that vocational education is that aspect of education which heads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge.

Akonni (2002) identified vocational education as programme of education which equips the student with marketable skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for initial employment and advancement in business occupation.

Neboh (2002) opined that vocational education is that aspect of education that is necessary to train a large number in shorter periods of time for entry level jobs in order to meet the increasing demand for trained workmen. It is also needed to development in the student economic understanding, proper attitude to work, grammatical and oral expressions.
National Policy on Education (2004) also defined vocational education as that type of education which gives an individual general education, acquisition of practical skills, attitude, understanding and knowledge related to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life and also equips them with necessity for self reliance.

According to Osuala (2004), vocational education is conducted as part of a program designed to prepare individual for gainful employment as semi-skilled or skilled workers or technicians, or sub professionals in recognized occupations or to prepare individual for enrolment in advanced technical education.

Ohanisi (2007), defined vocational education 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. It is an education that prepares trainees for jobs or careers at various levels from a trade to a craft or a position in engineering, accounting, nursing, medicine and other learning arts, architecture, pharmacy, law, etc. Vocational education nurtures skills that are necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development. Therefore, it prepares students for jobs and careers that are based on mostly manual or practical activities.

Fafunwa (1992), also defined vocational education as a series of experiences with regards to preparing a person for a particular occupation or trade. It can be seen as education that deals with the knowledge, skills and attitude which fits an individual wholly or partly, or for a definite occupation.

Vocational education means vocational or technical training or retraining which is given in schools or classes under public supervision and control. It refers to the systematic training/learning experiences which are designed to fit individuals for gainful employment in recognized occupations as semi-skilled workers or technical professionals. It includes guidance and counselling in connection with training and other instruction directly related to an occupation.

According to Encyclopedia Americana, vocational education is described as instruction in skills that the learner must use on specific jobs. It goes further to emphasize that vocational education provides technical background that increases the students understanding for a field of work.

Oni (2000) opined that vocational education includes technical education that provides both practical and theoretical instruction. Such instruction is usually given to those who need employment in commerce and industry or in any type of enterprise which involves the use of tools and other machinery. Vocational education is a specialised preparation for entry into employment or advancement on
the job. It is also defined as an aspect of educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life.

Brickman (2006) stated that vocational education is quite broad in scope and ranges from occupations requiring little skills to those requiring high degree of skills and scientific knowledge. He also stated that programmes include numerous occupational areas such as agriculture, various industrial trades, health services and technical training.

UNESCO and ILO (2002), are of the opinion that vocational education can be provided in educational institutions or through co-operative programmes organised jointly by educational institutions, on one hand, and industrial, agricultural, commercial or any other undertaking related to the world of work on the other.

It is important to state that vocational education is a veritable tool for socio-economic and technological development. It has fuelled economic growth and development all over the world (Sangeata and Retcha, 2005). Our country, Nigeria, has long neglected this very important source of workforce preparation for development. This apparent neglect of vocational education is a constituting factor to the high unemployment, the rising restiveness and poverty amongst youths (Dike, 2005).

Vocational education is related to the age-old apprenticeship system of learning. Today, vocational education can be at the secondary or post-secondary level and can make appreciable use of apprenticeship or mentorship. Apprenticeships are designed for many levels of work from manual trades to high knowledge work. However, as the labour market becomes more specialised and economic demand higher levels of skills, government and businesses are increasingly investing in the future of vocational education through public funded training organisations and traineeship initiatives for businesses. At the post-secondary level, vocational education is typically provided by an institute of technology, or by local community colleges. It focuses on specific trades such as automobile repairs or mechanic, welding, plumbing, electrical craftsmanship or electrician, hair dressing, tailoring and barbing, etc and has until recently been associated with the activities of lower social class of people. As a result, it attracted a level of stigma in the past.

Types of Vocational Education

Nduka (2000), suggested that vocational and technical education is any education that provides experiences, visual stimuli, affective awareness, cognitive information or psychomotor skills that enhances the vocational development process
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of exploring, establishing and maintaining on skills in the world of work. The types of vocational education are as follows:

1. **Agricultural Education**
   This area is responsible for preparing students or individuals in various agricultural occupations such as those concerned with growing crops, rearing animals, providing ornamental horticulture, managing farm business and managing farm resources.

2. **Distributive Education**
   This area is responsible for preparing students in those occupations that are concerned with marketing of goods and services. It includes all careers concerned with making goods and services available to consumers. Some of the occupations include retailing, wholesaling, advertising, transportation, finance and credit.

3. **Home Economic Education**
   This type of vocational education helps the student for home and family life. It also provides knowledge and skills in handling matters on food and nutrition, clothing and textile, child-care and home making.

4. **Health Occupation Education**
   This occupation is responsible for preparing individuals in those occupations that are involved in paramedics such as nursing, community health work, etc.

5. **Trade and Industrial Education**
   This vocation helps in preparing students in those occupations that are concerned with the production of art works, crafts and other non-agricultural products.

6. **Business and Office Education**
   This area of the vocational education helps the students to know the range from typing and filling to business management and computer programming.

7. **Technical Education**
   Technical education prepares students both men and women to work as expert assistants to professionals in many fields. The work of technicians multiples the effectiveness of professionals and managerial experts.

The Economic Challenges of the 21st Century

Nwokolo (2002) opined that vocational education in the 21st century faces many challenges which include:
1) **Poor Funding**
Vocational technical education in the country has not been accorded its rightful position especially in the area of funding. This situation is as a result of the manner in which vocational education has been administered and managed by the people involved. This situation has adversely affected the quality of the type of education in Nigeria. The poor funding syndrome manifests itself in poor infrastructure, ill-equipped and generally poor condition of service for the staff in most of the vocational institutions.

2) **Dearth of Well Qualified Technical personnel**
The supply of this cadre of manpower is grossly inadequate in most of the country’s vocational institutions. This situation has adversely affected the enrolment level and the quality of output in terms of academic standard and excellence.

3) **Wrong Attitude towards Vocational Technical Education**
There is generally very poor attitude by the society at large towards vocational technical education in Nigeria. It is generally down-graded and perceived as education for the handicapped, low placed people in the society, dropouts and delinquents.

4) **Competition between Vocational Education and General Education**
Vocational education has always existed side by side with general education. The latter has always suppressed, over-shadowed and swallowed up the former. This competition has affected areas such as curriculum, laboratory facilities and amount of time allotted to vocational subjects.

5) Finally, Okafor (2005) pointed out that the industrial training programme which is a mandatory aspect of vocational technical education has a lot of weaknesses which includes, inadequate duration, hostile attitude and conflicts arising from what was taught at school and how it is actually done on the jobs. The schools cannot effectively prepare young workers without a thorough understanding of current industrial trends. On the other hand, industry cannot continue to plan effectively without an equally thorough understanding of the content, methods and goals of the training which its next generation of workers is receiving.

Other challenges faced by vocational technical education in this 21st century may also include: unemployment, poverty, quest for white-collar jobs, the problems of brain-drain, etc.

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The Role of Vocational Education in the Economic Sector

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Okorie (2001) opined that the goals of vocational education as represented by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) commitment by the government worldwide is based on the reduction of poverty and enhancing economic sector. The most important roles are categorised under:

1. Educational Roles
2. Social Roles
3. Economic Roles

**Educational Roles**

Education has been commonly defined as a continuous process of change or a dynamic process. It is a powerful instrument of transformation which is capable of bringing about cultural changes and promotion, social integration, rural regeneration, economic efficiency and the creation of modern man, the development of individual excellence and the development of manpower resources.

Vocational education serves a major educational role of preparing the individual for work of life. The work that one does influences where he will live, how and with whom he will associate, his status and most importantly, his identity. It prepares the youths for vocational skills. They learn by doing; through vocational education, definite training in the techniques of the occupation are taught. Programmes of vocational education are needed by youths and adults attending schools or technical institutions, where they secure education or training for highly skilled trade and technical position.

**Social Roles**

There are many social vices and crimes the society. These include adult and juvenile delinquency, crime, victimization, disobedience, unemployment, robbery, etc. Through vocational education, these evils will be minimized, if not eradicated. This will happen when everyone is gainfully employed and realizes that there is dignity in labour and that honest work deserves honest pay. The consequences of lack of vocational training are anti-social behaviours such as adult delinquents, armed robbery, youth maladjustment, unstable homes, etc.

Unemployment brings about defeatism in the youths. They get easily frustrated and consequently, resort to crimes. It is also important to note that the cause of delinquency and criminality among youths is the fact that they have never learned how to work so as to be able to make money legitimately and sufficiently to meet their real needs. Vocational education is needed to give the youths who are not vocationally talented a sense of social achievement and belonging.

**Economic Roles**

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*Economic Roles*
Economy is one of the mainstay of any nation. Vocational education provides economic gratifications, and the participants enjoyed considerable economic satisfaction. The national endowment of the land is a huge asset to the farmers and through that farmers can have enough to eat and sell. Through this, most people are self-employed and independent of their own. Thus Braden (2007) asserted that vocational education plays a significant role in the nation’s economic development in terms of its capacity to make individuals more employable. It can respond to specific regional needs by producing the skilled workers for rapidly growing industries. Though this nation can move from the state of under-developing nation to developed nation.

Summary and Conclusion
A nation enjoys economic stability if it is industrially buoyant: To attain such economic and socio-political height, there is the need for proper human development through training in vocational education. Suffice it to say that Nigeria as a nation is technologically and industrially backward and this calls for a serious effort in harnessing both the human and material resources in the area of vocational and technical education. This strategy if judiciously pursued, will guarantee enhanced food production, political emancipation, social and economic growth. A rich society is the one which is capable of meeting her economic, social, moral and political needs.

Recommendations
The following recommendations are made from the study:

i. The federal government should embark on massive training of the vocational educators to handle competently the teaching of these vocational courses.

ii. Seminars, workshops and orientation courses should be organised from time to time for the teachers to discuss trend in their area and also in vocational guidance.

iii. Teachers should be encouraged to lay more emphasis on the acquisition of skills because it plays vital roles in making an individual to be self-employed after school.

iv. Adequate funding should be made available to schools for the provision of infrastructural equipments and carrying of essential services. This will give rise to viable library with recent books, equipped laboratory such as technical laboratory, Home Economics and Art Studies laboratory.

v. The negative attitude towards vocational education should change, and also mad rush to white collar job. This will help in encouraging the masses to participate in vocational venture with its attendant gains.

vi. More vocational courses like computer education, typewriting and shorthand should be introduced in vocational education department. Needed tools and equipment should be procured immediately for institutions and allocations of more periods in the secondary schools.
vii. The federal government should make vocational education among the G.S. courses in tertiary institution to orient student on the rudiments of vocational and technical education.

**References**


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