

RE-ENGINEERING TECHNICAL EDUCATION: A CATALYST TO PROVIDE SPECIALIZED OCCUPATIONAL PREPARATION FOR SELF-RELIANCE AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

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Abstract

There is need to develop an elaborate mechanism, designed to bring about the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence, both mental and physical as equipment for individuals to live and contribute to the development of their society. These skills, individual abilities and competence must be valuable and desirable. Hence technical education is a strategic effort to prevent human labor waste by way of unemployment or improper training or acquisitive employment. Technical education also provides increased productive power to supplement remedial or rudimentary apprenticeship in any given community. Technical education is the training of skilled labour force for the public service, business, industrial development and self employment. To this end, it is a strategy to meet the increased demand for better trained workmen who will be in the position to be employed or provide employment, and to improve the quality and quantity of goods and services available to the community.

There is an obvious need for sustainable technical education in Nigeria. The implication of our system of education, as it concerns functional education, is to emphasize those areas of education which will help an individual to be more self-reliant or self-employed, and help the country attain higher national productivity .Eze (1985).

Therefore, the relevance of technical education hinges on the tenets of democracy and a common deep appreciation of the value and dignity of labor. Example, the preparation of the learner for entry into the world of work and advancement in his chose career, to manpower needs of the society, to enhance the option available to each student, to serve as a motivating force to enhance all types to learning, and to enable the learner to wisely select a career are some of the major goals of technical education. According to Okafor (1992), the process of industrialization in developing countries,

such as Nigeria, is ever-increasing, and education must keep in step and in tune with this demand.

It is known that education provides lasting solution to social problem (unemployment and unemployability) and ensures the fullest realization of the potentialities and aspirations of a nation. Education, in this context, is an investment by the society to make itself a place to live in and a better place to make of living. As a developing nation, Nigeria certainly needs to develop an organized system of education for the effective and adequate realization of these potentialities. There is the need to develop an elaborate mechanism designed to bring about the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence, both mental and physical, as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of his society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). These skills, abilities and competencies must be valuable and desirable. This paper therefore discusses the misconception in definition of technical education, and highlights the concepts of re-engineering technical education for self-reliance and national development.

Misconception in Definition of Technical Education

In Nigeria, technical education has been so misconceived that one can hardly get a general acceptable definition from the plethora of indigenous literature, except to fall back on American books on the discipline (Toby, 2000). According to Olaitan (1985) Technical Education in Nigeria has been taken to mean education for the mentally retarded, physically challenged, handicapped, and socially maladjusted students. In some instances, technical education has been referred to as education which can easily be acquired by under-achievers, those with low intelligence and drop-outs from formal school system. As a result of this misconception in this definition, it has been extremely difficult from management perspective (that is, government and stake-holders) to organize technical education programmes to meet the changing needs of the Nigeria economy. Another misconception has been that vocational does not require much academic work, which gives the impression that its programmes are exclusively meant for the handicapped and those who are unable to continue with normal academic programmes of the school system. Unless the meaning of technical is agree upon, stake-holders and those charged with this responsibility of planning education for Nigeria youth will find it extremely difficult to organize and manage truly technical education programmes, while enrolment figures in the programmes may continues to remain unimpressive and digression (Olaitian,2000)

Concepts of Technical Education

It has become the norm to pair technical and vocational education when referring to that segment of education, which goes beyond general education to prepare the individual for the acquisition of practical and applied skills, and basic scientific

knowledge as well as attitudes and values relating to different occupation. Used as a twin term, both are geared towards occupation requiring manipulative and technical skills and application. But Adinoyi (2002) noted that a definite distinction between vocational and technical education. Vocational education, he argues, focuses on manipulative skills in non-technical occupation as reflected in field, such as agriculture, business, home economics, painting and decoration. Technical education, on the other hand, is more science-oriented with emphasis on the application of scientific and mathematics principle as applied in such fields as engineering. Both vocational and technical education aim at manufacturing and production.

According to Okafor (2003) technical education is that segment of education charged with preparing people for work. It also refer to education for self-reliance or employment. Adinoyi (2003) observed that technical education has potential role of transforming the nation economically and technologically. However, technical educators' ability to meet this challenging potential is frustrated by the public lack of awareness of the true value of technical education to the nation. To the average Nigerian, technical education is perceived as education for those unfortunate members of the populace who for one reason or the other, are mentally, physically, or socially handicapped. It is interesting to note that the new National Policy on Education (Federal Republic Nigeria, 2004) see technical education as that form of education with is obtainable at the technical colleges. This is equivalent to the senior secondary education, but designed to prepare individuals to acquire practical skills, basic and scientific knowledge, and attitude required as craftsmen and technicians at sub-professional level.

Considering that a majority of the Nigerian population can be safely classified as uneducated, Olaitan's (2003) study on the views of the educated, uneducated and Technical Education confirmed this general lack of public awareness of the potential of Technical Education.

Against this background, technical education may be seen as a work-oriented utilitarian education, designed to enable the individual function productively in his occupation, and be useful to himself and the society. It has to be in a trade needed by the society. While technical education is designed to develop skills, abilities, attitudes, work habits among others, emphasis should be placed on education for self-reliance or self-employment.

Technical Education and Self-Reliance: Implications for National Development.

One of the motivating factors for according education a high priority (especially technical education) in Nigeria's development objectives is its human resources development potentials. Education and training for self-reliance or self-employment

through integrated curriculum is required to reduce the high rate of unemployment and underemployment in the economy, which find expression in youth restiveness.

Unemployment brings about poverty and the saying that a hungry man is an angry man becomes true as the youth fight to see that unemployment which finds expression in hunger is eliminated. Unemployment is demoralizing. A feeling of dejection and insecurity trails the unemployed; his morale is low and the social relationship sagged. As noted by Steward and Samuel (2001) “of all evils, joblessness is the worst”. If the restive youths/area-boys are empowered through training on a work oriented utilitarian setting the youth will function productively in his chosen occupation, will not be maladjusted and will be useful to himself (self-reliant) and society, justifying, the need for technical education and self-reliance.

Challenges

The slow rate of developments in Nigeria with regard to situation whereby substantial section of the labour force is being retrenched seems to call for greater emphasis on technical education. The bulk of this labour force comes from the teaching profession, the manufacturing, business and construction sectors. Equally affected in this jobless pool are many petty traders who depend on imported materials for their businesses. There are also many civil servants who have either been declared redundant or forced out of job because of years of service or attainment of retiring age. Consequently, many of these jobless individuals are forced to return to their villages, while a negligible few who are able to fall back on their little savings still linger around in the towns.

A notable characteristic of this group of people is that most of them are unable to perform any skilled work of a diversified nature in the villages where most of them now reside. On the other hand, there are others in the towns and cities that have no defined mode of living. This group of people constitute at the moment, a threat to the society. Hence, there is an urgent need for a re-evaluation of the present situation toward, the enhancement of education for productive work. Technical Education is education for self-reliance or self-employment; it can lead to solutions to some of the nation's social ills.

Conclusion

Technical education, is a “wise and fruitful business” both for the nation and for the individual. It can ensure the development and conservation of natural resources. It is therefore imperative that there is greater emphasis on technical education for the purpose of among other benefits, developing a good society. We should not lose sight of the fact that the survival and technological advancement of a nation is largely based on two main ingredients, namely materials and manpower which are major concerns of

technical education. The way and manner in which a nation handles the essential element of education determines to a greater extent its ability to cater for its citizens. Thus, an effective administration and proper use of the nation's resources cannot be achieved without the implementation of job-oriented education programmes.

Recommendation

The following recommendations are therefore considered useful to improve the learning and understanding of technology education which if implemented by government at all levels will go a long way to enhance the proper coordination and utilization of research findings for self – reliance and technology advancement.

1. There is urgent need for the government to fully support and develop technical education programmes and empower the dispossessed adults.
2. The government, both at the state and federal levels, through the ministry of education in conjunction with other regulatory bodies / agencies in education should provide basic infrastructure, teaching learning equipment, material and other resources that are inadequate in the schools at every level.
3. There should be an opportunities to learn job skill to increase the youths and adults interest in the available job and help to prolong their life.

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