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## TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR EFFECTIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA.

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### **Abstract**

*Literature revealed that Technical and Vocational Education facilitated the rapid development and growth of the western countries to what is today known as the first world. It is no gain saying that no sane country can afford to play around with her youths. This paper supports the view that when the youths are fully developed, the tendency to depend on the government will be broken and the community, the society, and the nation at large becomes more enjoyable in terms of employment opportunities, food production, etc. This is the goal of Technical and Vocational Education as outlined in the National Policy on Education (2004). Though the policy emphasized creativity and self reliance, its aims and objectives were defeated as none of its provisions were implemented in practical terms (Okala 2004). This paper therefore examines attempts by the Nigerian governments at the state and federal levels to develop her crop of young manpower. It assesses the challenges and problems of Technical and Vocational Education, and suggests a way forward if Nigeria is to develop her youths effectively.*

Youths have unfortunately been called all sorts of names, blamed for all sorts of ills in the society and have been used from time to time by greedy and unpatriotic politicians. Sometimes they have been incorrectly presented as individuals incapable of taking decisions. It must however be understood that the human relationship created by government organizational attitude towards policies already put in place make such negative human behavior inevitable.

It cannot be overemphasized that technical education is the engine for economic growth. No nation can fight a war without an army. In the same token Nigeria cannot develop without well-equipped technical and vocational institutions. According to Dike (2005), the progress and development of any society lies in the productivity of its citizens. Higher productivity gives a nation advantage of economies of scale and lowers the costs of production and prices of goods and services. Nigeria should begin now to take very seriously investment in education and skill training as no nation can compete effectively in the emerging global market place with poorly educated and unskilled

workers. The leading factors of production in the emerging global economy are said to be technology, knowledge, creativity and innovation (Eze, 2012).

The rapid technological changes in the 21st century poses challenges to education and employment sectors. The new labor market demands have caused many graduates with various certificates to be unemployed. The massive rate of unemployment and the changing face of the economic, social, political, labor market worldwide have led to new education reforms/policies with emphasis on vocational technical education (VTE) geared towards helping the youths and adults to be self-dependent. Cinterfor (2006) stated that Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) is a tool to counteract at least in part, the harmful effect of unemployment by promoting greater job turnover and guarding against the risks of obsolescence.

Education is a means through which youths are developed. According to Manila 2003, there is no doubt whatsoever that an undeveloped youth is a dangerous octopus whose tentacles are gradually poisoning the different areas of the society. It was on this revelation that Nigeria as a nation came up with well articulated policies and made frantic efforts towards revamping and repositioning Vocational and Technical Education in the country geared towards youth development, but the situation is still far from expected reality. Much is still needed to be done to translate such policies into reality. Stressing the importance of VTE, Okafor in Okala (2005) noted that Nigeria is a member of the committee of nations in a world characterized by technological revolution and unless she wakes up and acts in consent contextually, she may be left standing in the platform while the world revolves round the orbit. If Nigeria must grow into a developed society, then the training of the youths to acquire relevant skills must be given proper attention. For this development, Technical and Vocational Education is a sine qua non. To Dike (2010), the long neglect of the youth development sector has resulted in youth restiveness, militancy, unemployment, and national insecurity.

### **Government's Attempt towards Youth Development**

The belief that youths are the leaders of tomorrow is a universal concept and the belief propels countries across the world to pay serious attention to youth development programmes, while funding them appropriately. The Federal Government has demonstrated this conviction in the last 50 years by recognising the pivotal role of youths in nation-building process. It had also implemented youth development programmes via a multi-sectoral approach. Analysts have commended the government for establishing the Federal Ministry of Youth Development, which initiates, coordinates and implements youth development policies and schemes in the country.

Youth development is the training of the mind and body of the youths for proper integration into the society and for positive societal development. It involves the provision of infrastructure, creation of institution, and processes that will enhance development. Governments have over the years strived to create favorable condition for youth development but efforts put in place are not commensurate with the enormous problems confronting the youths. The situation at the moment is that in each State Government, there are adhoc programmes in skills acquisition run by the government,

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Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and tertiary institutions in the attempt to provide some skills to the youths so that they can be in a better position to be useful to themselves and to the society.

From independence in 1960 till now there have been some continuous attempts by government to put into place some policies on youth development through education. At independence the report of three studies on the state of education in Nigeria were released. The first report of the commission on post School Certificate and Higher Education in Nigeria popularly called the Ashby Report, which surveyed the manpower requirement of Nigeria up to 1980 called for a threefold expansion in secondary education intake to meet the forecasted senior and intermediated level manpower requirements of Nigeria. Professor Frederick Harbison's conclusion derived from his analysis of Nigeria's manpower requirement was that "technical and vocational education both at the University and intermediate levels needs to be given the highest priority. The outcome of the three studies mentioned earlier on, led to the idea of a "practical school". The school was to be termed Demonstration comprehensive school for the then Western Region. The curricula were structured to include core subjects, vocational, and technical subjects.

There has been continual review of the education system by various Nigerian governments since education is a tool through which youths are developed. But as Okala (2008) noted, not much has been done towards implementation of the nation's education policy document on Vocational and Technical Education in practical terms. Much has been done on developing well articulated policy towards having a better Technical and vocational Education in the country but translating such policies into action has been a major problem.

### **Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria**

The National Policy on Education NPE (2004) considered Technical and Vocational Education as an important integral part of education in Nigeria. Precisely, it defined technical and vocational education in the following words:

*Technical and Vocational Education is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspect of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technological related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupation in various sectors of economic and social life p.29.*

Vocational technical education can be defined as an educational training which encompasses knowledge, skills, competencies, structural activities, abilities, capabilities and all other structural experiences acquired through formal, on-the-job or off-the job which is capable of enhancing recipients opportunity for securing jobs in various sector of the economy or even enabling the person to be self-dependent by being a job creator. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) opined that vocational technical education is an aspect of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes,

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understanding and knowledge relative to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. Manfred and Jennifer (2004) advocated that vocational technical education comprises all more or less organized or structured activities that aim at providing people with the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to perform a job or a set of jobs whether or not they lead to a formal qualification. These definitions show that the relationship between VTE and employments is undeniable.

Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) is the preparation of individuals to acquire practical skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. It provides a pool of skilled persons for industrial establishments the world over to draw from. It does this by providing specialized skills that enables the individuals to fit in to production or service lines of all production facilities. Individuals with specialized skills are the products of technical and vocational education as they are equipped with sound practical skills, knowledge and aptitude for employment in specific occupation where tools and machines are part of production inputs.

Individuals with requisite practical skills are among the highest paid people in industrial settings and are center piece and corner stone of industrial manufacturing activities. Okala (2007) stressed that they are always on their job no matter the level of unemployment of the very economy; they are highly priced and kept very jealously by their employers, else they migrate at terrible cost to their establishment. Perhaps, it is on this premise that Dike (2010) stressed that the wealth or poverty of any nation depends on the quality of higher education. Certainly those with a repertoire of skills and a greater capacity for leaning can look forward to life time of unprecedented economic fulfillment. But those poorly educated or not having skills the industries want “will face little better than dreary prospects of life of quiet desperation”.

The importance of TVE was stressed in every development plan that Nigeria has adopted, beginning from the First National Development Plan of 1962. It was not missed out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), neither was it missed out in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (Manilla 2003). This is because, TVE is an important practical skills development programme designed to equip persons of trainable qualities with skills that employers of labor wants in the industries (Obioma, 2010). In the view of Fafunwa in Okala (2004), Technical and Vocational Education is considered as the launching-pad for technological development, yet it had a very slow take-off in the history of education in Nigeria. Evidence abounds that technical and vocational education was the earliest form of education. Though unstructured, parents taught their children and family members the rudiment of their skills and occupations. Reviewing the history of TVE in Nigeria, Okala (2004) observed that parents taught their children skills in farming, tools development through blacksmithing techniques, carving, lumbering, catering and many more before the advent of formal school system. Yet, when Western education came to Nigeria through the missionaries in 1842, technical and vocational education suffered a miss-match with the realities of the time.

### **Challenges Facing Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria**

Despite the importance attached to VTE and the well-documented efforts of government and schools towards the improvement of VTE in Nigeria, some researchers, including Achuonye (2005), Oguntoye (2001) and Oranu (2014), have observed that the quality of VTE in Nigeria is still far from the expected reality. Some of the major contributory constraints as reported by Okolocha (2012) were: irregular and gross under-funding; government's sudden negative attitude towards VTE; lack of political will to address the various compelling needs of VTE including curriculum reforms; the problem of infrastructure, low student enrolment and achievements; academic corruption; societal consumptive rather than productive attitude, among others. These problems have persisted over the last two or three decades and perhaps in an attempt to address them, Nigeria in late 2006 adopted a far-reaching educational reforms initiative in line with Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed upon at the World Education Forum, New York in 2000. The attainment of MDGs requires tremendous changes in the structure and process of education.

It is possible to agree that some benchmarks have been achieved in the development of VTE in the country, but the situation is not near perfect. The following situations still militate against Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in Nigeria.

1. **Very lower student's enrolment in VTE programmes:** An analysis by Yakubu according to Okala (2008), shows that less than 3% of the country's yearly total enrolments to tertiary institutions are for VTE programmes. Whereas, most countries seeking to have a rapid socio-economic development, target about 50 percent enrolment. This is an indication of poor image the Nigeria public hold for VTE.
2. **Poor teaching and learning environment:** Infrastructural development do not meet standard for developing education system. The situation on ground reflects poor classroom structures, libraries and laboratories. Workshop tools, machines and their consumables are not adequate for the standard targeted.
3. **Inadequate funding:** This has affected all aspects of VTE programmes as most institutions are strangled because of very severe oversight or near unwillingness of government to fund the system adequately.
4. **Quality and strength of Academic Staff:** The infiltration of quarks and non professionals into the teaching profession to teach vocational and technical subjects is a bane to the development of VTE in the country. This is normally aided by government influence on employment. Khan (2012) opined that the quality of VTE products is a direct result of the quality of the academic staff. Moreover, embargo on employment even when the system is under staffed and the stringent measure in the condition of service for teachers have made improving the quality of academic staff more difficult.
5. **Low Societal Estimation and Understanding of VTE:** The Public's attitude to VTE remains very poor. They still consider VTE as much inferior to other branches of education. The public preferred education that leads to white collar jobs as against blue-collar jobs, even when the former is not readily available. This perhaps is a direct result of government's valuation of VTE products and certificates.

6. Ineffective Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES). Because school systems could not provide all the necessary practical training needed towards attaining the minimum competency of the skills in view, government introduced SIWES as a supplement. This well articulated idea under the supervision of Industrial Training Fund (ITF) according to Okala (2004) has failed to meet the yearning aspiration for practical skills acquisition it aimed at achieving.

7. Dearth of Manufacturing and Engineering Infrastructures and Practice: Many governments and entrepreneurs embarked on project that do not require special skills nor generate employment, rather, they gave self contracts and building of hotels which offer very little employment opportunities.

8. Obsolete curricular: There are new and emerging skills as a result of advancement in technology. This area has remained unexplored, rather the VTE system still sticks to offering only the basic curricula that is now obsolete in tools, machines and operational techniques.

Other statistics on VTE programme nationwide did not speak positive of the image of VTE in Nigeria. For example, the 2005 accreditation report of National Board for Technical Education, (NBTE) was nothing to celebrate about. Reason: Inadequate staffing and equipment in all cases (Okala 2008).

### **Strategies for Revamping Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria**

The vision statement of NPE (2004) at secondary and tertiary levels is to provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels; provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development and to give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-dependent economically. At the tertiary level, graduates are expected to acquire both physical and intellectual skills, which will enable them to be self-dependent and useful members of the society. To meet the policy goals of NPE, and the challenges facing the VTE in Nigeria, this paper proposes the following as recommendations for a more result oriented youth development vis-à-vis technology and vocational education.

1. There is an urgent need for a functional evaluation of the educational system by the National Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) with a view to:-

- (i) Finding out the factors that led to the derailing of the system
- (ii) Having a situational analysis of the curriculum to make it more realistic in terms of the quality of the products expected.
- (iii) Making recommendation towards setting up a functional structure for Comprehensive Secondary Schools. These should be prototypes of what the secondary schools for youth development should be.

2. The primary schools if they are really to be in a position to provide the creative talents for the vocational and technical inputs into the secondary schools must actually be seen as the foundation for Nigeria education as stated in the National Policy on Education (NPE 2004) and therefore be managed as such. Funding, infrastructure, and good learning environment should be adequately provided. According to Okolocha

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(2012), the greatest weakness in the execution of vocational technical education is disjointed training and lack of continuity of the programme from primary school level to tertiary school level and on-the-job training. There is urgent need for continuity in any programme or training.

3. There is the need to institute flexible, workable and adaptable programme. For Nigeria to address the socio-economic changes currently taking place worldwide, the curricular of VTE must be amended and revised where necessary so as to effectively become a driving factor for the implementation of the adjusted socio-economic development strategies. In the view of Dike (2010), Nigeria policies on VTE must revolve around vocational technical education that is flexible and adaptable to capture the rapid changing demands on ICT and as well support tourism, hospitality, agro processing among others. Vocational technical education should be structured to adopt strategies to produce graduates who are innovative and adaptable to changes in the world of work.

4. For vocational technical education to meet the economic, social and political trends of the time, the nation must use qualify vocational training professionals/trainers in implementing vocational technical education programme. These professionals are pivotal in promoting vocational technical education polices/reforms and strategies in Nigeria. The professionals have all the necessary skills, abilities and capabilities (Manfred and Jennifer, 2004) for carrying out the programme since the quality of vocational technical education depends mainly on the quality of VTE teachers and trainers. The use of professionals helps in keeping pace with the rapid changes in the work environment and the content of the programme especially now that instruction is fast shifting from pure instruction to include learning facilitation and innovation.

5. As a matter of urgency, Nigeria needs to improve the status and attractiveness of vocational technical education by professionalizing it. Flexible and workable policies on VTE and proper recruitment pattern should be put in place, to increase skill levels, provide better access to and delivery of learning for all. Moreover, the salary scale for employees with technical skills and abilities should be reviewed up to make it attractive. The three tiers of the government (Federal, State, and Local government) should try to create an enabling environment for vocational technical education as an integral part of government policies on youths and adult self-dependence. Although, Nigerian education planners have initiated measure to promote vocational technical education as long life learning, but coherent structure seems to be lacking (Ghouri, 2010). There is still need for elements of quality in the programme.

6. There is the need for an adequate grass root enlightenment of Nigerians on the importance of Vocational and Technical Education of their youths or wards.

7. The alleged discrimination between HND, and B.sc holders in science, vocational and technological courses in terms of status, and salary should be looked into by the Federal Government as a matter of urgency.

### **Conclusion**

Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) has been an integral part of national development strategies in many societies because of its impact on productivity and economic development. Despite its contributions the leaders of Nigeria have not given this aspect of education the attention it deserves. And that is one of the reasons for the nation's underdevelopment. No matter the degree of importance verbally or otherwise attached to a programme or policy, it cannot come to the limelight and be useful to any society or country unless there is the conscious will to make such come to its conclusive end. It is hoped that if the recommendations of this paper are properly considered, Nigeria will be transformed into a developed nation.

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