

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATIONAL SKILLS IN NIGERIA; TO WHOSE BENEFIT

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Abstract

Vocational Education is the education that prepares students for jobs and careers that are based on mostly manual or practical activities. Sometimes also referred to as technical education, vocational education promotes self-employment and is considered a vital requirement for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals by Nigeria and other third world countries. Third world governments, particularly Nigeria, need to urgently address the imbalance between the number of vocational schools and university degree awarding institutions. This paper looks at the role of vocational education in economic growth and who stands to benefit. In conclusion, possible recommendations will be made on how to enhance vocational education towards social/economic growth

Due to the growing importance of small enterprises there is a need to create a widespread enterprise culture in developing countries and in actualizing this, vocational education has a vital role to play in every societal growth of any nation. Vocational technical institutions (VTIs) can play a role in creating this enterprise culture by integrating more business, self-employment and entrepreneurship concepts into vocational and technical training programmes. The development of proper attitudes toward self-employment can complement instruction in vocational and technical skills. Vocational Education is any form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupations (Okoro, 1993).

Therefore, Vocational Education, also called *Career and Technical Education*, prepares students for jobs and careers that are based on mostly manual or practical activities. The term does not apply to the development of professions acquired via tertiary institutions. Vocational education is low on theoretical or academic activity and is generally related to learning a specific trade or occupation. It is sometimes referred to as *technical education*, as the learner directly develops skills in a particular trade that promotes considerable self-employment (Onwueme, 1995). Vocational education teaches procedural knowledge for acquiring a skill or trade contrast with tertiary education that concentrates on research, theory and abstract knowledge. Vocational education provides instruction that is usually given to those who need employment in commerce and industry or in any type of enterprise that involves the use of tools and other machinery (Calhoun, & Finch, 1982). Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the apprenticeship system and the home were the principal sources of vocational education and training.

Today, vocational education can be at the secondary or post-secondary level and can make appreciable use of apprenticeship or mentorship. Under the British colonial government, vocational education in Nigeria initially developed independently of the state, with bodies such as the City & Guilds setting examinations and offering certificates in vocational technical subjects. Vocational education 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 (Onwueme, 1995).

As a result, it attracted a level of stigma in the past. However, with economic advancement and the demand for higher levels of productivity and efficiency, the place of vocational education has become better appreciated. The labour market has become more specialized and nations are demanding higher levels of skill at different levels. Governments and businesses are increasingly investing in the future of vocational education through publicly funded training organizations and subsidized apprenticeship (Ndagana, 1995). At the post-secondary level, vocational education is

typically provided by polytechnics, institutes of technology or trade schools. Vocational education has diversified over the 20th century and now exists in industries, manufacturing, retail, tourism, information technology, agriculture, cosmetics and cottage industries, etc (Ndagana, 1995).

Achieving Vocational Skills

Vocational skills can be obtained from primary and post primary level. In some countries, vocational training institutes are created to help train youth in obtaining vocational skills that can enhance self employment

Vocational Training Institutions (VTIs)

Although literacy rates are improving in most countries, the absolute numbers of illiterate young people are still increasing. Many young people are not qualified to enroll in vocational programmes. On the other hand, vocational training programmes are under attack because of their inability to produce skilled reliable workers, and their lack of responsiveness to the increasing need for self-employment. In most countries there are weak links among vocational training institutes (VTIs), government and the private sector. In-plant training, on-the-job training, and apprenticeship training in industries are often rudimentary or absent altogether. Efforts to capture the benefits of small enterprise development have been less than satisfactory (Ajayi, 2009).

One of the reasons for the modest level of success is that few training institutions in developing countries have the manpower, operational authority, and financial resources for small enterprise and self-employment promotion. The admission criteria used by most VTIs often exclude those who are good candidates for self-employment. Selection systems typically favor the better educated by placing more weight on interviews and tests. Programmes which favor experience tend to discourage young people, including most trainees in VTI programmes. Programmes which seek 'economies of scale' often fail to take advantage of the tendency for smaller programmes to be more successful than mass programmes.

Promoting Training Policies

It is important to identify criteria for relevant policy options for self-employment training within VTIs. Cost effective training policies for integrating self-employment programmes into VTIs should be designed to use existing institutions and programmes. Create approaches and criteria that are known to be successful and also learn from experience gained elsewhere. Institutions can also build upon relevant empirical research; recognize institutional, regional and cultural diversity, rather than seeking universally applicable models (Igwebuike, 2007). Little is known about the vocational and entrepreneurial skills which positively affect small enterprises. As a result, there is little linkage between educational research and small enterprise training policies. Governments should implement specific training policies for entrepreneurship and self-employment, rather than general policies targeting business growth and development (Igwebuike, 2007).

Re-orienting VTIs to Self-Employment

Staff Election and Staff Training

The degree of success achieved by VTI-based self-employment programmes is dependent to a great extent on the effectiveness of staff members with self-employment responsibilities. Most VTI personnel implementing self-employment programmes will be 'first generation'; they will have had little or no previous training or experience in enterprise development, or in working with entrepreneurs in small enterprises (Ajala, 2002).

Small Business Centers

Small Business Centers (SBCs), to support small enterprise development and self-employment, have been established in many developing countries. Some countries, including Kenya, have established SBCs within VTIs. However, because of their quite different characteristics, the effective operation of VTI-based SBCs requires a careful balance of authority and responsibility between the SBC and the VTI.

Establishing and Maintaining Institutional Linkages

VTIs should develop effective linkages with other institutions and agencies with self-employment programmes. VTIs must work within established institutional networks, and utilize existing institutions rather than create new ones. The most common barrier to effective linkage building is inadequate communication. Administrative complications can be a barrier when rules and regulations among network partners are complex, inconsistent or conflicting. Administration barriers can be reduced if rules and regulations are informal and non-binding. A major barrier to networking is inter-agency competition, and the tendency of individual agencies to protect their own authority and responsibility (Ajayi, 2009).

Self-employment Program Content

Once the VTI graduates have completed the intensive entrepreneurship skills program, many will be ready to implement their business plan and start an enterprise (Ajala, 2002). VTIs can facilitate this process by renting space to graduates in inexpensive sheds or 'incubators' owned by the institution. The purpose of this type of assistance is to offer new microenterprises a relatively safe environment at the outset. However, a strict limit should be placed on the length of time an embryonic enterprise can remain in a subsidized incubator (Ajayi, 2009).

Beneficiaries of Vocational Training

During training, teachers always see the students as the beneficiary of knowledge forgetting very easily that when once knowledge is not continually out into practice, it becomes a wasted knowledge. Also some individuals, firms, and even government may see the financial contributions to vocational training as a waste. Unfortunately it is not true as everyone tends to benefit through vocational training.

Governmental Benefit

The nation tends to benefit economically when its work force is high. Vocational training prepares students for jobs and careers that are based on mostly manual or practical activities and as such on graduation can be self employed. They generate income for themselves through their trade and as well generate income to the government through payment of taxes. Also, the government tends to spend less on insecurity and other social vices caused by unemployed youths and as such getting much national stability

Individual Benefit

Individuals who take part in vocational skills acquisition end up becoming craft men. They obtain the skills based on the trade of practice and they also obtain a certificate of graduation which makes them employable by any employer of labour needing an expert in their field of training. With the skills, the individual can fit into the economy by becoming an income earner either through self employment or through employment by other individuals, organization or firms

Conclusion

The knowledge attained through vocational training skills can in the long run help fight against social economic breakdown of a nation. Considering the enormous benefits the individual as well as the nation might benefit through effective contributions towards vocational training, it is necessary that competent trainers are employed to train students on vocational skills which will lead the student to a successful self-employment and as such government and individual agencies should take vocational training into outmost consideration.

There is need to prepare trainers for entrepreneurship training within VTIs. Most technical training institutions in developing countries have very little appropriate self-employment training materials. The development of training materials and methods for all levels of training is a fundamental need. Experience at work and in the home is an important ingredient of entrepreneurship training, particularly during the formative years. Apprenticeships, family contacts, business and

industry associations, and small enterprises can all be used by trainers to expose trainees to the realities and benefits of small enterprises.

Recommendations

It is recommended that

1. There should be mass awareness programs both at the local, state and federal levels on the importance of vocational training skills towards economic development
2. Both individuals and governmental agencies should financially support vocational training programs
3. Vocational training should be included in primary and post primary curriculum
4. Vocational training centers should be created in all villages by individuals or government and also made affordable and well equipped

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