

VOCATIONAL - TECHNICAL EDUCATION (VTE) SKILLS ACQUISITION FOR JOB CREATION IN NIGERIA: THE NEED FOR COMPETENCY BASED PROGRAMME

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Abstract

In a contemporary world faced with global economic meltdown people and nations cannot but sit tight by going back to the drawing board. This becomes necessary because as it were, the planned direction of development, progress and/or advancement, in general of every nation has become infested by the lingering world wide economic crises. A proper redress which is inevitable would involve addressing pockets of set backs that would threaten or mar a future rise and recovery from this anomaly. This paper is opinion based. It introduces competency based Vocational-Technical Education (VTE) skills acquisition programme as a meaningful alternative to the more conventional forms of education. The paper highlights Vocational Technical Education goals and objectives for economic growth and prosperity, as enshrined in the National Policy on Education. Finally, the paper made recommendations on the way forward.

In developing countries like Nigeria, government is handicapped as the sole provider of employment. Providing employment for the teeming population of graduating students at all levels of education is a herculean task for government alone to shoulder. Unemployment is anti economic growth and anti development for the developing economies. Competency in skills acquisition for the self-reliance of VTE graduating students is highly needed so as to enhance their entrepreneurship ability for self-employment.

Webster (2004) defined unemployment as the state of being unable to secure paid employment. It also defines competency as having the necessary qualities or skills, or

showing adequate skills. This is to say that VTE students who possess competency skills will attract modest income, enough to live on without being on a paid employment, invariably, being self-employed. Vocational Technical Education (VTE) graduating students are considered to be at a level of manpower Development which is greatly required to generate economic activities which constitute the essential ingredients for economic growth in developing countries. The central tenets of Vocational-Technical Skills Acquisition therefore is often expressed by the phrase “to fit for useful employment” which will certainly remove VTE graduating students from the rank of unemployment members of the society who are depending on government for paid employment, and who are not being used and thereby not invested for a return.

In this era of high rate of unemployment, coupled with increasing wave of youth restiveness, Vocational-Technical Skills Acquisition alongside entrepreneurial ability for economic self-reliance comes to the rescue as at a desirable occupational and rehabilitative outlet for youths. Vocational-Technical Skills Acquisitions are therefore relatively important to occupation and rehabilitation development in the world of work. For a developing economy like Nigeria, competent VTE skills acquisition for economic self-reliance not only reduces dependence on government as the sole provider of the means of production. It also reduces the rate of unemployment in the country.

Animoro and Onaolapo (1996) pointed out that one of the major parameters for

measuring a country's economic growth and development is the extent of the country's use of VTE acquired skills competences and entrepreneurial skills for the individual's economic self-reliance.

This all important concept of unemployment in favour of self reliance of graduating students have become popular in talks about the rate of development in developing countries, in the sense that self reliance greatly rely on people and their hard work. It does not entirely depends on foreign assistance which may detract the country's freedom to determine the direction of her development. The implication is that the development of man, as of a nation can only be done by man himself and cannot be done for him. Therefore the acquisition of competent and relevant VTE skills would go a long way inculcating in man the spirit of self-dependence instead of government dependence.

Vocational-Technical Education invariably, must prepare its students for work; hence development largely depends upon the efforts of the people. This would make the acquired skills competence, viz-a-viz entrepreneurial skills, for the students to cope with in a developing and changing state.

The Content/Aim of Vocational Technical Skills Acquisition Programme

Vocational Technical Education (VTE) according to Toby (2000) is fundamentally concerned with imparting the knowledge of skills acquisition, and offers every individual the opportunity of developing those skills and abilities. Kenedy (1983), once said that "we must educate people today for a future in which the choices to be faced cannot be anticipated by the wisest among us". This is to say that in developing today's curriculum for competency in VTE skills acquisition one cannot rely on the stability and predictability of the traditional job market of the past.

Vocational-Technical Education (VTE) offers every individuals the opportunity to develop those skills, ability and understanding that will enable them to handle competently, their personal affairs to develop an understanding of vocational opportunities available in the broad field of human endeavour, Vocational-Technical Skills Acquisition programme offers students who wish to pursue a career in any of the VTE component areas an opportunity to develop those skills, abilities and understanding that will enable them to fit into, and find job satisfaction in the labour force of complex and dynamic economy. In other words, VTE competency skills acquisition will equip students to become producers of goods and services useful to the society rather than becoming consumers.

The National Policy on Education (2004) defined Technical Education as "that aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge". As an aspect of technology education, VTE is concerned with primary purpose of equipping the learner with skills knowledge and attitude for employment in specific recognized occupation which are found in Industrial Education, Technical Education, Agricultural Education, Business Education and Home Economic Education. Arising from these are many jobs/vocational for which skills could be acquired through (VTE) Vocational Technical Skills Training, These includes, but not limited to the following:-

- Clothing and Textile: (catering, baking, Confectionery etc)
- Home Management: (Institutional housekeeping, auxiliary nursing, nursery/day care jobs. Interior decoration etc)
- Agricultural related jobs: (food production, food processing, food distribution etc)
- Business and computers (typing and word processing, printing and

publishing, computer services, business management etc)

- Industrial Technical: (jobs related to metal, wood and electrical, electronics technologies, auto mechanics, welding/fondry, metal fabrication, plumbing works, carpentry and joinery, photography, architecture, draughtmanship, used product recycling, plastic technology, timber marketing, furniture/cabinet works refrigerator and air conditioning services, block and concrete making etc (Anyakoha 2001, P. 19)

The above job/vocations skill competency will give students the opportunity to be competent and self reliance and self sustainable.

Consequently, the quality of instructions must be geared towards inculcating competence and enhanced skills acquisition. In the opinion of Ige (2001), the concept of “Do it your self Introduced in advanced countries is a concept that has its focus on vocational training because it introduces man to the realm of self reliance and dynamic being.

Going by the goals of Vocational Technical Education as stipulated in the National Policy on the Education (2004), and this includes giving training and imparting necessary skills to individuals who shall be self reliant. VTE students, upon graduating from school should therefore possess the relevant and competent skills necessary for self employment. However, the attainment of these goals can only be actualized, firstly by X-raying the inherent obstacles toward the attainment. These obstacles often relate to the factors which determine the quality of learning: namely,

- The curriculum content of Vocational Technical Education
- The instructional process
- The competence of teachers
- Availability of instructional materials

Other obstacles, Anyakoha (2001), referred to include the lack of awareness by policy makers and administrators and the heavy emphasis on passing examinations.

Competency Based VTE Skills Acquisition Programme

In the opinion of Olaitan (1996) VTE skills acquisition is that form of education in which the development of occupational skills are needed in preparation for work so as to enable students to be able to earn a living after graduating from school. Competency based VTE skills acquisition programme present a meaningful alternative to the conventional forms of education. Basically competency reflects the ability to do something in contrast with the more traditional ability to demonstrate knowledge.

Competency based skills acquisition therefore will focus on several key areas which include the following:

- The nature of competencies
- The criteria used to assess the competencies
- The ways that students' competencies are assessed
- The students' progress through the programme
- The program instructional intent

Specifically, competencies for VTE skills acquisition are those tasks, skills, attitudes, values, and appreciation that are deemed critical to success in life and or in earning a living. The criteria associated with each competence have to reflect with the level of acceptable performance and the conditions associated with this performance (Ekpenyong, 2006). As with competencies, criteria should also be made available to each students, so that there will be no questions to what constitute mastery. When the students competence is being assessed, primary consideration should be given to application.

Each student should be evaluated as objectively as possible using the most realistic applied standard available. Unlike some traditional instructional mode, students' competence not grading, provide the primary evidence of achievement. Consequently instructional staffs are required to move beyond the traditional knowledge type measure, such as multiple choice and essay examinations, and focus on the assessment that aligns with worker competence in the real world (Butter, 1982).

In contrast with time based mode, competency based VTE acquisition of skills uses demonstrated competence as a determiner of students progress towards a programme completion. This enables students to proceed through a programme at their own particular rates based upon their individual abilities and therefore master specified competences in shorter (or longer) time period.

The instructor is also obligated to make available to students those experience that facilitate the development of skills. This might include the use of role playing and other simulation activities, outside resource persons, and other techniques that enhance and aid each students attainment of competencies in both skills acquisition and entrepreneurship drive for participation in entrepreneurship (Finch. 1984).

Rationale for Competence and Enhanced VTE Programme Curriculum

The competence of VTE skills acquisition programme will guarantee a higher level of preparedness and for students participation in entrepreneurship after graduating from school. Consequently the rationale for competency will embrace the following issues of discuss.

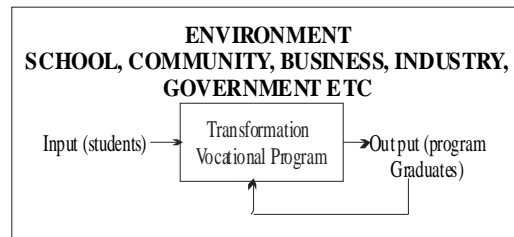
- VTE curriculum and instructional system
- Entrepreneurship education

VTE curriculum and system: - in a basic sense, much of what happens in education is tied

to various system. The system approach to education deals with variety of areas such as the following.

- ❖ Planning System
- ❖ Instructional Implementation
- ❖ Curriculum and Evaluation System

However, regardless of the system, basic system concept should prevail. A typical program system is illustrated in the diagram below



The advocacy for VTE students competency in the acquisition of skills is reinforced by the quality of training received in the programme. It should be observed that students entering the programme represent input to a means of transformation i.e. (a vocational programme and curricular activities), while the input from the transformation is in the form of programme graduates who are competent enough to engage in self employment and be able to participate in entrepreneurship and earn a living.

The assessment of adequacy of the VTE skills acquisition programme manifesting itself in the form of the programme graduates attainment of competences, self employment and contributions to society, will then serve as feedback for the system adjustment. For example, the inability of a graduate to participate in entrepreneurship for economic self reliance, perhaps due to lack of competency of skills necessitates the adjustment of the learning experiences of a revision of the curricular. It is of paramount importance to keep in mind that the

input, output and the feedback can have a major impact on the VTE skills acquisition system.

Moreover, the environment within which the VTE educational system operates must also be taken into account. Business industry and the government are among the many factors external to a VTE skills acquisition curricular programme which can influence the input, the system operations and the output.

In the opinion of Beauchamp (1981) a curricular system provides a framework for deciding what ought to be taught in the schools and employing those decisions as points of departure for developing instructional strategies. He goes on to say that such a system has three primary functions.

- ✚ To produce a curricular
- ✚ To implement the curricular
- ✚ To appraise the effectiveness of the curriculum and the curriculum system.

In contrast to the curriculum system which produces the frame for a decision on what ought to be taught in the educational system, the instructional system on the other hand, uses the curriculum which is the primary output of the curricular system as the input. These inputs includes the teacher, community, students' characteristics, available materials and resources while the transformation components of the instructional system emphasized teaching strategy development. Instructional resources from the system should basically consists of student learning and competence, alongside feedback coming in the form of an expressed or change in instructional practices.

In a broad sense, any mode of instruction should aim at the competency of students, which is an important factor in the process of realizing and achieving the goals of Vocational Technical Skills Acquisition as enshrined in the National policy on Education. An ideal vocational curriculum can be determined using the following approaches including but not limited to the following:-

- ✓ Introspection
- ✓ Dacum Approach

Introspection: This is a process where several VTE teachers develop their individual thoughts regarding curriculum contents and than meet to decide collectively what form the curriculum should take. This procedure has the advantage of providing a variety of inputs from persons with differing background and experiences. Teachers who have had different exposure to an occupational area will most likely be in a better passion than one individual to determine which content, is more relevant to particular occupation or occupational area.

Dacum: - The Dacum (Developing a Curriculum) approach is a single sheet profile that serve both as a curriculum plan and evaluating instruction for occupational training programme. Dacum relies on experts employ in the occupation areas to determine curriculum content and allow them to be guided through a systematic content determination process. The skills profile is to present the skills of an entire occupation, thus reducing the chances of treating an element of the occupation separately from others. The development of Dacum profile involves using a committee of ten to twelve resources person who are experts in a particular occupation.

Entrepreneurship in VTE Skills Acquisition Programmed

All over the world, there is a paradigm shift from the government ownership of enterprises to individual ownership in the from of entrepreneurship is not new in Nigeria. Entrepreneurship existed before the coming of the colonial maters and is associated with different kinds of activities that have to do with the establishment and operations of business enterprises.

Afenyadu (2001) observed that education in the past prepared students for white-collar jobs, which are non-existent, while self-employment is perceived as a preserve for the illiterates and semiliterates. The National policy on Education (FRN 2004) assuages these anomalies in the education system, through the goals and objectives of VTE skills acquisition, so as to give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically. By giving students the much-needed training and entrepreneurial skills, they will be motivated to establish and manage their own business and thereby consider self-employment as a career option.

To support this laudable objective, VTE students must be adequately trained to enable them realize their talent potentials and develop their capabilities to meet the challenges ahead. Entrepreneurship training as part of competence-based VTE skills acquisition programme can be designed to provide opportunities to nurture a spirit of innovation in students. Consequently, students can then be actively involved with opportunities to develop their visions, initiatives and skills that entrepreneurial activity requires.

Conclusion

It is necessary to point out that students of VTE skills acquisition programme can only be effective for self-employment and entrepreneurship toward unemployment reduction, to the extent that they are able to utilize and demonstrate mastery of skills so acquired. This will reduce the problem plaguing graduating students who have no recourse but to rely on the government for jobs which is not readily available.

UNESCO (1999) summed it all when it stated that "Technical and Vocational Education graduates often remain jobless despite the immense possibilities for employment in the sector". There is need to promote competency-based VTE skill acquisition programme,

alongside entrepreneurship spirit and incorporate adequate relevant training for student participation in self-employment after graduating from school.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:-

- ♣ Students should be exposed to competent skills training in the form of on-the-job-experience. Such training should focus on well-structured VTE curriculum that is competency-based, emphasis should not be on education for business, but also about business
- ♣ Up-to-date industrial tools and equipment is of paramount importance for student's hands-on-experience in the process of acquiring competent skills
- ♣ Teachers should be flexible and organized in their training, and different teaching methods relevant to entrepreneurship should be adopted to introduce variety and increase interest.
- ♣ Government should ensure the provision of adequate infrastructural facilities which will greatly enhance the development of a culture of self-reliance of student after graduating from school
- ♣ Government must align with the goals and objectives of the national policy of education as it concerns VTE, through the proper founding of policies implementation.

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