

VOCATIONAL MANPOWER EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Vocational education is fundamental to solid economic development of any country. Vocational education is an education which primary aim is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupation. Today, Nigeria is facing the problem of trained vocational and middle-level technical manpower, it has become a very serious challenge to the development of third-world countries, including Nigeria. This paper, underlines and examines why foreign construction companies operating in Nigeria still source for artisans and other skilled workers from abroad. The paper also address the gap in vocational manpower development in contemporary Nigeria. The paper proffers solutions to these problems to fill the gap and to enhance the development of Nigeria to curb the problem of unemployment and the scourge of other social vices.

Key words: Vocational Education, Manpower Development, Review of Curriculum and Sustainable Economic Development.

Re-dressing the gap in vocational manpower development and education in the recent history of Nigeria is fundamental to the attainment of solid economic development of the country. Technical education experts define vocational education as any form of education which primary aim is to prepare learners for employment in recognized occupations. The deficiency and insufficiency of trained vocational and middle-level technical manpower represents a very serious challenge in the development of third world countries, including Nigeria. It is

unfortunate that foreign construction companies operating in Nigeria still source for artisans and other skilled workers from abroad.

According to *Independences Newspaper on Monday, April 25, 2016*, President Buhari of Nigeria sought the explanations during a meeting with the Board of Directors of Julius Berger Nigeria Plc. The company told the President that most of the foreign construction companies operating in the country sourced their artisan manpower equipments from aboard because of a shortage of competent construction workers and artisans in Nigeria. The practice is detrimental to Nigerian government commitment to boast employment opportunities for willing and capable youths.

This study seeks to address the shortage of skilled workers in the country. In the light of this, the paper recommends a plan of action for the speedy revitalization and expansion of the nation's vocational training centre's and how to improve on the of existing vocational training centers established by the Government across the country.

The study also recommend the rapid reposition of vocational training centers as efficient producers of skilled workers for Nigeria's building and construction industry.

An Overview of Vocational Manpower Development in Contemporary Nigeria

According to the *Independent Newspaper, April 25, 2016*, Mr. Afolabi Imoukwhuede, the senior special assistant to President Buhari on Job Creation and Youth

Employment, announced plans by the federal government to train 370,000 artisans. At the inauguration of the construction skills training and empowerment programme (C-STEMP), Imoukhuede said the plan would generate employment. C-STEMP, an initiative of J. Hausen Ltd and a construction management consultancy firm, is an accelerated skills development project to prepare eligible beneficiaries for employment as artisans in construction industry, Imoukhuede also said, the federal government also planned to employ 500,000 graduates as teachers to improve the educational system to boost skills for vocational manpower development in Nigeria. Functional education is the key to enhance job creation for artisans. The collaboration of the relevant government agencies and public participation to train more Nigerian in skill development is essential.

Commenting on the issue of job creation, Rev. Ugochukwu Chime aptly pointed out that “C-STEMP would break the paradox of high unemployment and poverty. This will be done through a fast track intensive skills acquisition programme, using a combination of classroom, indoor and outdoor practical and a programmed apprenticeship period. It will equip beneficiaries with sufficient skills, certification and reference to enable them to gain employment in housing and construction industries.

The struggle for economic inclusiveness and self reliance by the masses over the years in Nigeria was worsened by lack of functional education and competence in chosen profession, supported by U.K Aid. Under the construction idea fund of the growth and employment in states (G EMS) project. Chime said that the programme would enable the under employed persons to fend for themselves and rise above their limited circumstances.

Chime, who is the president, Real Estate Developers Associations of Nigeria, noted that, curriculum, manuals and other vocational

teaching resources would be used for the training. He listed the courses to include concreting block laying and plastering, general construction, carpentry, steel fabrication, plumbing, installation, and maintenance, electrical installation and maintenance. Others are tiling and decoration and site orientation and practice for building and engineering graduates. Furthermore, Prof. Anondover Trahule, in *Independence Newspaper* explained that, “the need for the Federal Government to initiate steps that would elevate the standards of technical and vocational education in the country is very important. Government should establish many functional technical and vocational institutions across the federation to boost access to skill acquisition. The government should also combine classic liberal education and entrepreneurship studies and development to create jobs for our university graduates. We should not only focus too much on the classic liberal education; where everybody goes to university and then they have no job on graduation. This was the danger of the then colonial education which offer only how to read and write and becomes interpreter and seeker of white-collar job without vocational skills for manpower development.

The government also needs to promote small scale industries to curb the problem of unemployment, poverty and under development in Nigeria. It is important to note that the Babangida regime on March 26, 1986 introduced the National Directorate for Employment (NDE), the NDE was aimed to fight poverty and unemployment among Nigerian youths. Some of the programmes of NDE include:

1. The National Youth Employment and Vocational Skills Development Programme (NYEVSDP).

2. The Small Scale Industries and Graduate Employment Programme (SSIGEP).
3. Agriculture Sector Employment Programme (ASEP)
4. The Special Public Programme (SPP) (Ngozi Ojiakor: 119-125)

It is also important to note that with the second coming to power of Obasanjo in 1999, witnessed the introduction of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). The cardinal objective of NAPEP according to Professor Ngozi Ojiako, a renowned historian, was to help and monitor government agencies to eradicate poverty to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of reducing the proportion of people living in poverty by the year 2020. Thus NAPEP intervention schemes include:

1. Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES); industrial training centre were build to empower youths, graduates and militants with innovative skills to curb youths restiveness, especially in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.
2. Rural infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS) was initiated.
3. Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWSS) was initiated.
4. National Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS) was initiated.

NAPEP intervention schemes as the name implied were a national drive towards a successful entrepreneurial society and economic self reliance in Nigeria to build vocational manpower development. For example, the Obasanjo regime encouraged the growth of indigenous entrepreneurs when he banned the importation of second hand clothes, textiles, hot drinks and many others not mentioned here.

This encourages vocational manpower development and Small Medium Scale Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria

(SMEDAN) to grant loans to prospective entrepreneurs.

Challenges and Hindrances to Vocational Manpower Development in Nigeria

1. Absence of Infrastructural Facilities:

Lack of communication and transportation network hinders vocational manpower development in Nigeria as there is absence of effective access to information and communication technology and other tools of trade. Business is almost grounded due to constant power failure from Power Holding Company of Nigeria and lack of petrol and gas to power generators. Thus, creating gaps in vocational manpower development and education.

2. Low Standard of Function Education:

The key to knowledge that enhance vocational manpower development in Nigeria is weak and porous to meet up with the contemporary global village and trend. The quality of education in Nigeria educational institutions has gradually declined; this factor has also affected entrepreneurship education and vocational manpower development. The schools and industrial training centers are not well funded; equipment and management are lacking. The problem of half-backed workforce hinders ideas, thinking culture and innovation. Moreso, the private schools lack funding to develop vocational manpower centers.

3. Lack of Adequate Training:

The education curriculum of Nigeria focuses more on theoretical aspect without a corresponding practical approach. This result to lack of basic work ideas and vocational man power development. For example, lack of skills of the latest technology like the use of computer and

other technological discoveries such as the internet. It affects the entrepreneur's outlook to business life and world. Moreover, the internet and other ICT are not available in the rural areas of Nigeria. This factor hinders vocational manpower development. Acquiring the modern basic skills is expensive for poor Nigerian; these also affect vocational manpower development and education in Nigeria. Lack of skilled technical labour force is absence. Technical colleges and institutions are few and expensive to manage.

4. Other Economic, Social and Political Factors:

Economic factors such as policy reversal, high and double taxation, difficulties in procuring business approvals, high inflation, and unstable exchange rates are some of the problems that affect vocational manpower development in Nigeria.

Furthermore, corruption and fraud also hinders vocational manpower development in Nigeria. This problem makes many youths to lack moral and confidence to acquires adequate vocational manpower development.

Sometimes, the government lacks clarification to address skills acquisition programmes and policies. They do not target the youths most often; as awareness about vocational manpower development is lacking; the youth most often do not derive full benefit from them.

Prospects and Strategies to Enhance Vocational Manpower Development in Nigeria

1. Vocational manpower development and education should be included in our educational syllabus and curriculum from primary school to the tertiary level.
2. The culture of vocational manpower development and entrepreneurship education

should be inculcated in the youths early in life.

3. The present school curriculum requires a total overhaul because it does not stress more on training for entrepreneurship and vocational manpower development purpose.
4. Youths should be given chance and opportunity for leadership, entrepreneurship and vocational manpower development to enhance on job training and experience.
5. Young men and women harbor fresh ideas and ingenuity that will enhance vocational manpower development, innovation and growth.
6. Young people should have access to finance, education, industrial training centers and employment opportunities.
7. Government should revitalize, expand, upgrade and adequately fund the nation's vocational training centers.
8. Government should also support private vocational manpower development centers with funding. For example, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that are into job creation.
9. Government should establish more industrial training centers in all the states and local government in Nigeria.
10. Government should promote functional education, economic self reliance, viable agriculture programmes and policies, encourage medium and small industries, community development to ensure vocational manpower development and job creation. These will curb foreign companies to source for their artisan manpower recruitment from abroad because of the shortage of competent work force.
11. Government should also promote entrepreneurship study and development in schools from primary, secondary to tertiary

- institutions. The government should also establish building craft training schools and skill improvement centers across the states, they should be staffed and equipped to produce more skilled electricians, brick and block layers, carpenters, painters, welders, fabricators, plumbers and other artisans.
12. Today in Nigeria, we need a skilled technical labour force; as such, the government ought to put up in every state many technical colleges and institutions as the universities we have. Many tailors, builders, caterers, restaurant attendants, hotelians and electricians in Nigeria do not provide efficient services because people are not patient to learn the skills. This is because we do not have an organized society and we do not have enough vocational institutions where people get certification and proper training. If there were as many technical and vocational institutions as there were universities in the country, not everybody would like to go to the university. There is the need, therefore, to elevate the standard so that the people can tap from the gains that accrue from it, in this direction, we will be reducing congestion in the universities and strengthen the service aspect of our industry; thereby, elevating the quality of service and the quality of life for everybody.
 13. Nigerian youths should begin to embrace this very important task of vocational manpower development, because there is a lot that should be done and can be done on multiple fronts to strengthen technical and vocational education in the country. They should identify vocational education as key to job creation and poverty alleviation.
 14. Government should also support private vocational centers in the federation to help them address problems of inadequate equipment and poor funding as some of the challenges of the private initiative to make youth self-reliance.
 15. The Federal government and states should upgrade their vocational centers to the status of technical colleges to boost vocational and technical education. The Executive secretary of state's science and technical school Board have a role to boost the awareness of vocational manpower development.
 16. As Ezinwa Vincent put it, strategies to boost skills for vocational power development in Nigeria can also enhance economic self reliance, self development and self sufficiency. Some of the factors to boost these skills include, functional education, promoting small scale industries initiative, promoting agricultural programmes and policies and enhancing community development for vocational manpower development.
 17. In this direction, functional education is the training and education that will enable a learner to fit himself for a living in a society to meet urgent human and literacy in manpower development is the formation for a nation's development plan to strengthen productivity and growth and to enable youths develop their potentials, to produce high level and inter-mediate manpower available. To direct a nation's labour force in productivity. To promote self-reliance and vocational manpower development the government introduced the 6,3,3,4, system with some vocational subjects like Introductory Technology and their mission should be geared towards making the Nigerian graduate at any level to get himself self reliance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined the contribution of vocational education to manpower development in Nigeria. The study revealed that there is a very low percentage of vocational

education graduates employed by the construction industries in Nigeria. The study therefore concluded among others that the nation's universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, even secondary and primary schools should be up and doing in exposing learners and trainees to vocational education, new ideas and technologies, so as to be relevant in the world of work and integrate Nigerian youths quickly into global economy best practices as businesses all over the world are constantly restructuring their supply chain and operations to gain from nations and regional comparative advantages.

In Nigeria, the aim of establishing technical and vocational education through Act No 9 of 11th January 1977 is to promote production of skilled and semi skilled technical and professional manpower, to revitalize and sustain the national economy, to reduced unemployment and poverty. This system of education has been an integral part of national development strategies in our society because of its impact on productivity and economic development. To be honest, the level of manpower production by technical and vocational education compared with the need of our society for technical development has never been encouraging in Nigeria. Recently, the Presidency and Minister of Education has identified poor public perception of technical and vocational education, as part of the constraints hindering Nigerians from fully embracing the concept. Hence the government is creating serious awareness to make youths to recognize the crucial role of entrepreneurship development skills acquisitions centers and technical and vocational education as a key player to poverty eradication and creating jobs for sustainable national development. The government is everyday widening access to vocational manpower development through the establishment of Vocational Enterprise Institutes (VEIs) and Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs). The government should support these

institutes and institutions with adequate funding and proper utilization of the fund to purchase world standard equipments to enhance capable manpower development and education in Nigeria.

This study recommends that teachers of technical and vocational education must be well grounded and possess the relevant skills that need to be impacted into those they teach.

The numbers of universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and industrial training centers that are running technical and vocational education are few. The numbers and qualities of such institutions should be expanded and increased.

Universities should be encouraged to run technical and vocational education as a course up to Ph.D level so as to encourage candidates to choose the course.

This is because very few universities in Nigeria have it as a course either at undergraduate or postgraduate schools. The government should also be encourage our institutions of higher learning to teach entrepreneurship education, technical and vocational manpower development in our Schools of General Studies, so that before every student graduate from tertiary institutions they must have acquired relevant and basic skills to earn a living.

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