
VOCATIONAL/TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY AGE: CHALLENGES AND ENHANCEMENT STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

By

James Adinoyi Joshua

*Department of Technical Education,
Kogi State College of Education (Technical),
Kabba.*

Abstract

It is a truism that Technical/Vocational Education is the corner stone upon which subsequent levels of technology education and industrial development are built. To ensure a very solid foundation at this level, there should be quality preparation and readiness of those to be admitted and trained in Technical/Vocational courses. The paper posits that for the idea of technological development to be effective, meaningful and realistic. It should be total and comprehensive with provisions for research and innovation for sustainable future of education and development in Nigeria. It identifies application of some means and packages that would enhance achievement of Vocational Education beyond 2020 in Nigeria to include policies, programmes and projects that would improve education and the experts involvements in the development process. It was recommended among others that there should be review of curriculum and active involvement of the students, parents, teachers, shareholders and all those that are interested in the growth of technology education so as to benefit maximally in terms of productivity, reduce unemployment, dignity of labour and socio-cultural integration.

Every Nigerian has come to accept the fact that Vocational/Technical Education is the key to national development. The crucial agent in national development of a country is the wealth and human development of the country. A nation that is desirous of achieving greater technological heights should give adequate attention to Vocational/Technical Education. Okpanachi (2005).

The most salient indicators of socio-economic development are creative individuals, new technology and new services. The gap between Nigeria and other developed countries is based on social-economic development which rests solely on Vocational/Technical Education. Vocational and Technical Education, Science and Technology Education are foundation of economic development and self reliance of any society. The former orientation of secondary school leavers, colleges of education,

polytechnic and university graduates had been education for white collar jobs, but the geometrical progression of the students' enrolment and the arithmetic progression of job opportunities have made it impossible for the white collar jobs to come by. There is therefore an urgent need to reansider and make functional vocational/technical education for growth, self-employment and economic reliance of the army of school, college and university graduates.

In spite of all efforts to improve the vocational and technical education, especially in this 21st century, there has been persistent hue and cry over the poor attitude toward establishment and enrollment in technical colleges in the country. One may pause to ponder on the following questions (I) What are the underlying factors behind the cry for the vocational/technical education not taken place the way it should (II) What can be done to improve and bring to desired level the vocational/technical education in Nigeria?

Vocational/Technical Education for Development and Self Reliance

The National policy on Education (2008) places much emphasis on achieving Vocational/technical education for self-reliance which brings about growth and economic reliance. Nigeria as a country has realized the place of vocational/technical education in nation building. Reliance is a state of being provident and meeting one legitimate need at each point in time without dependence on anyone else (Adinoyi 2005). Self reliance can be seen as being economically buoyant and depending on the quality of vocational/technical training and organizational ability of the individual. A nation can be self reliant when individual that constitute it can attain some level of skills and meet their basic needs without waiting for others or the nation.

A self-reliant nation is the one whose most of her citizenry have realized their creativity, abilities and potentials which are used to develop indigenous technologies for producing the goods and services for the consumption of other fellow citizens. The creativity of the individual can be developed and enhanced with the execution of qualitative vocational/technical education for economic reliance and national development and growth.

The Concept and Objective of Vocational/ Technical Education

Before the advent of western education in Nigeria home training relating to vocational and technical skills existed as apprenticeship system in a variety of craft like wood work, carving, painting, weaving, farming, pottery, dyeing blacksmith and other local handicrafts.

The national policy on education (2008) defined vocational/technical education as the aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. The America Industries Arts Association (1960) defined

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vocational/technical education as a comprehensive action based education programme that is concerned with technical means, its evolution, utilization, and significance with industrial organizations, personnel's system techniques, resources and products and their social/cultural impact. (Okegbemiro & Mustapha 2012) In the concept of self and economic reliance, vocational/technical education can be seen as the art of training a person intellectually, morally, technically and physically. Vocational/technical education comprises of agricultural trades, business trades, fine and applied arts, home economics, building and woodwork trades, mechanical engineering, electrical/electronic trades, metal work trades and mechanical trades. From the trades enumerated above, vocational/technical education is designed to teach the skills involved in the trades, develop attitudes, knowledge and competence that are requisite to success in the trades.

The National policy on Education (2008) listed the following among others as the objectives of vocational/technical education.

1. To provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and commerce.
2. To provide the technical knowledge and technology and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial, economic development and economic reliance of Nigeria.
3. To give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self reliant economically.
4. To give training and impart the necessary skills for the production of technicians, craftsmen, technologists and other skilled personnel who shall be enterprising and self reliant.
5. To train people who can apply scientific knowledge to solve environmental problem for the convenience of man.
6. To provide full-time or part time courses for instructors and trainee in engineering, other technologies, applied sciences, business and management leading to the production of trained manpower.

From the objectives of technological and vocational education, it is obvious to say that the goals are meant for two reasons; viz:

1. To fight unemployment as well as improve economic performance and economic reliance through the creation of trained and quality self-reliant manpower.
2. To provide self reliant manpower needed for the advancement of local technology and economic reliance in the country.

The Role of Vocational/Technical Education in Skills Acquisition Towards Sustainable Growth And Self Reliance

If there is any field of education that has served the nation well, then it has to be vocational/technical education. It provides beneficiaries with the right type of training which is tailored towards self-reliance and employment. According to Okorie (2006)

Vocational/Technical education is any form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare persons for employment in an organized occupation, it equips the learners with skill, knowledge and attitude that will enable the learners to earn a living in a specific occupational area. It is different from general education since graduates of vocational technical education technicians are prepared such that individual made a specific choice of career or vocation of his interest and aptitude to enable him actualize his desires. The national Policy on Education (FRN 2008) defined technical education as “that part of education which eventually leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge”. Technical and Vocational education streams beginners into job clusters and specific skills areas for which they are already trained. It has the advantage of providing opportunities for the youth to obtain employment after school because they are equipped with permanent skills, unlike graduates of general education.

Misconception of Technical and Vocational Education

Technical/vocational education is considered as education for dullards and not for the intelligent students while secondary schools and university education are meant for potential scholars. Even the early educated Nigerians within and outside the country during the colonial era because of their background of study, out rightly discouraged people’s interest in technical/vocational education.

For instance, Azikiwe (1945) said “no doubt the philanthropist missionaries and government officials are sincere in advocating industrial and agricultural education, but this notion is maliciously false and is retrograde tendency, and one is not opposed to agricultural or industrial education, but the basis of the theory for industrial and agricultural education of the Africans is fallacious. It conceives the Africans as better adapted to industrial and agricultural pursuits which is true”. These are the words of pioneer elite of the caliber of Dr. Azikiwe which was capable of dampening the interest of other educated elites in supporting the development of indigenous technologists through technical/vocational education. The pioneer elite’s objection against Technical and Vocational Education could also be seen towards the sharp criticisms that followed the establishment of Yaba College in 1932 which was to be the basis for technology development in the country (Okoro, 2005). This led to the premature death of Yaba College and the emergence of university college Ibadan in 1948 without any unit of the curriculum relating to local technological skill acquisition and development. This misconception has pervaded the Nigerian educational scene for centuries.

Challenges of Vocational and Technical Education

Vocational/Technical Education has come a long way in the history of education in the country. If the history of education is to be re-written in Nigeria, vocational/technical education must occupy a reasonable space because of its importance to national development. But how well has vocational/technical education

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fares in the delivery and achievement of these laudable objectives and roles at all levels. A lot of challenges have been facing vocational/technical education. Some of which are:

1. Technical/Vocational Education Curriculum In Nigeria Poses A Challenge.

Its deficiency was variously described by researchers as diffused and non-focused. Adinoyi (2004) pointed out the non-inclusion of panel-beating and assembling to the specific areas to be taught in technical education. He also affirmed the deficiency in the curricula in woodwork technology considering the advancement of knowledge innovations and new methods of production. These deficiencies are matters of concern for both teachers and students

2. The inordinate implementation of policies and financing of technical/vocational education policies may be well-formulated but if they are not properly implemented then their aims are not realized and other related ones forced many industries to close down thereby closing outlets for other students to be absorbed for industrial attachments and employment opportunities. Poor finance has accounted for the abandonment of equipment and facilities meant for the implementation of the system. Olaitan and Okorie (2007) affirmed that as a result of inadequate fund, Vocational/Technical Education has suffered through.

- Obsolete and dysfunctional equipment in the workshop and laboratories.
- Inadequate or outright lack of basic tools and essential instructional materials.
- Lack of essential equipment and materials for trade practice and full cycle production.
- Inadequate and dilapidated infrastructure such as classroom building, workshops and laboratories.

3. **Corruption And Vandalization In Tertiary Institutions.** There is a wide scale of corruption in national life. Valuable machines have been stolen from laboratories while some other valuable parts have been removed. This is why many machines have become unserviceable, thereby hampering the students practical lessons.

4. **Neglect of Vocational/Technical Education.** The effectiveness of any educational system largely depends on the effectiveness of the teachers. Teachers can make or mar a programme and that is why the caliber of teachers manning a particular programme matters. There is no doubt that the image of teachers has fallen as a result of non motivation, lack of respect and listening ear and these situations have a very devastating effect on our educational system. James and Eneye (2010) citing Omeiza (2007) and Enebere (2008) stated that if teachers are apathetic, uncommitted and unmotivated then the whole nation is doomed.

There are more other factors initially against Technical/Vocational Education to fully meet its objectives and roles in terms of the provision of necessary skills and knowledge for job in a fast changing technological world in attaining self and economic reliance and sustainable national development and growth. Ozohu (2009) affirmed it as she listed the following:

- (a) The dearth of qualified manpower and teachers owing to poor remuneration and low status.
- (b) Poor public image accorded students or graduates of technical/vocational education.
- (c) The high cost of procuring technical/vocational equipment has not helped matter. Rather it makes it difficult for technical and vocational education programmes to be administered as it should to achieve its aims and objectives.
- (d) The technical and vocational schools in the country lack workshops and laboratory accommodation for practical works which are essential integrated part of the programme.

Conclusions

A nation's quest for economic and self reliance for her citizenry cannot be afforded by paying lip services to technical and vocational education. Any attempt not to remove the identified factors militating against technical/ vocational education will amount to total disaster for the country. Technical/ vocational education is the most valuable possession, priceless in nature, an instrument for development and a tool for achieving self and economic reliance that a country can possess.

It is therefore hoped that for stable economy, sustainable growth and self reliance of a nation, the recommendation above should be implemented by those in authority to bring about a turn around of the fortunes of technical/vocational education, the citizenry of great country and the world at large.

Recommendations

In view of the numerous challenges of Technical/Vocational education, the writer deemed it necessary to put forward the following recommendations:-

- The federal government should invest in the training of teachers and students in great number to acquire the skills required by technicians/technologists by expediting action on the implementation programme in all schools.
- The expansion of the curricula. The government through her agency should, endeavour to include more courses on vocational/technical education and make them compulsory at all levels. Government also should emphasize the importance of vocational education and to sensitize the public against their bias. These will make graduates self-reliant and employers of labour thereby eradicating poverty and unemployment which will eventually lead to national economic emancipation.

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- The federal and state government should continue to provide money to acquire and replace equipment, infrastructure, training materials, training and re-training of technical teachers. Policies should be reviewed periodically and properly evaluated and modified where need arises. This will go a long way to boost vocational/technical education in terms of research, workshops, seminars and conferences that will help in updating vocational/technical skills and knowledge of the manpower. It will also boost vocational/technical education in terms of procurement of technical equipment and building of quality workshop accommodation for practicals.
- The government at all levels must see teachers as partners in future. Training and retaining of technical teachers is of paramount importance for the growth of technical education.

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