

ATTAINING SELF EMPLOYMENT THROUGH TECHNICAL/VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

All sectors of an economy of a Nation be it Governmental or private, seek to develop and operate in an environment with incentives that stimulate growth and national economic development and as such encourage governmental and private firms aimed at improving the economy. One of the greatest problems encountered by a developing country like Nigeria is making job available for the growing population. The provision of job by the government can be enhanced through vocational/technical education. This paper looks at the possibilities of attaining self employment in Nigeria through vocational/technical education. In actualizing this, the possible ways vocational and technical education can lead to employment will be examined and in conclusion, possible recommendations will be made to help attain a sustainable economic growth in Nigeria by providing employments through vocational education.

Vocational education is a form of education in which people are provided with practical skills which will allow them to engage in careers which involve manual or practical abilities. Some examples of careers for which people can receive vocational education training include: aviation mechanics, hotel management, hairstyling, plumbing, air conditioner installation, cab driving, carpentry, building, welding, weaving, mechanic, hair dressing, tailoring, barbing, just to mention a few. Vocational Education is sometimes referred to as Technical Education, since the student directly develops expertise in a particular technology or group of techniques that are connected with the skills/knowledge that one acquired in order to get the

vocational qualification and that qualification is designed to prepare people for work or enhance their performance in the work (Adeogun, 2007).

The educational system of Nigeria has been influenced by the British system of education. This type of education neglects the cultural and vocational interest of the nation. The apprenticeship system was the earliest type of vocational education practiced in Nigeria and it provided employment for youth as they learnt how to use their hands in specific trade (vocation). Extensive development of vocational education started in Russia in 1888 with the introduction of shop classes in addition to the existing apprenticeship system. Shop classes involved the development of a problem and specially prepared drawings made to tackle the problem (Akoroda, 2002). Then the students were made to perform the same exercise individually, until they were proficient in that skill, while in the United States of America, vocational and technical education is organized through agencies which include public high schools, public and private junior colleges, technical institute, extension services, labour unions and the armed forces. Vocational education and job training program have been integral parts of national development strategies in many societies because of the impact on human resource development, productivity, and economic growth. Despite its proven contribution Nigeria does not seem to give vocational education the attention it deserves; and that appears one of the reasons for the rising unemployment and poverty in the society (Akoroda, 2002).

While vocational education has continued to thrive in many societies Nigeria is not taking it seriously. Although vocational and technical education seem deficient in 'citizenship or leadership training they could provide students the skills to become productive entrepreneurs and engender creative and innovative ideas that would enlarge the nation's economic pie, and increase personal freedom. Thus the neglect of vocational education is socially injurious as it is robbing the nation of the contribution the graduates would make on national development.

Youth unemployment appears to be shooting up the sky because many of them lack "employability" skills that are often acquired from vocational schools. As the vanguard of Dec 23, 2004 noted youth unemployment moved from 4.3% in 1985 to 5.3% in 1986, to 7.0% in 1987 and jumped to 60% in 1997. The report shows that in 2003 primary school accounted for 14.7% unemployment, secondary school 53.6%, and tertiary schools constituted 12.4%. The nation's poverty level was put at 70% and more than 91 million Nigerians are said to live on less than one dollar per day. Also it has been well documented that Nigeria's higher institutions lack the tools to give students the skill employers need. There should therefore be some form of school-work-based learning incorporated in studies in higher institutions across the land as an integral part of national development strategy as this could reduce the burden of unemployment and poverty on the people (Fafunwa, 1974). This paper looks at the possibilities of attaining self employment in Nigeria through vocational/technical education.

Acquiring Vocational Education

Vocational education can be acquired at the secondary (high school) level or postsecondary (after high school) level and can interact with the apprenticeship system. At the postsecondary level, vocational education is typically provided by an institute of technology, a local community college, a career training college, or a trade school. Increasingly, vocational education is recognized in terms of prior learning and partial academic credit towards an associate's degree; however, vocational education alone does not generally require a bachelor's degree and is not usually considered to fall under the traditional definition of an academic higher education. Until the end of the 20th century, vocational education focused on specific trades such as automobile mechanics, plumbing, welding, or carpentry. However, as the 21st-century labor market becomes more specialized and economies demand higher levels of skill, governments and businesses are investing in the future of vocational education through publicly funded training organizations and subsidized apprenticeship or trainee programs (Fafunwa, 1974). Vocational education has diversified and now exists in industries such as retail, tourism, information technology, funeral services, and cosmetics, as well as in the traditional crafts and cottage industries.

Some Implications of Vocational Education in Nigeria

The reliance of vocational education in Nigeria as well as its proper handling will have a lot of implications in the development of the economy of the Nation. With numerous technical colleges in Nigeria as well as the increasing number of graduates from these colleges, the level of unemployment has continually increased. Some of the implications the economy might face include

Sociological Implication

Occasional education is a social safety measure to many social problems. Unemployment is a serious social ill, with its numerous remote consequences like hooliganism, kidnapping, stealing, unstable homes and other anti social vices. Vocational and technical education helps to eliminate all these through the production of students that are easily employable and as well can set up their own entrepreneurship business. When business is booming for an individual or a group of individuals, there is a lot of contribution to the social economic growth of the nation (Fafunwa, 1974).

Self-employment

Today in Nigeria, the high incidence of school dropout among secondary school students clearly highlights the importance of career development, which is achievable through vocational and technical education. These students who could not fit into the academic oriented curriculum would need practical skill to enable them function profitably in the society. Secondly, the graduates from these existing school system invariably enter the job market seeking employment that does hardly exist in this country today. To draw the majority of these job seekers out of the unemployment market, vocational and technical training in secondary schools become

the most potent elixir. This again requires the training of the teachers that would impart these skills to students in the primary, post primary and tertiary education levels.

Economic Implication

Vocational education is designed to meet the employment needs of particular areas of the economy. The training provided is closely matched with specific job requirements so as to foster immediate production performance by the trainees. Trainees can become wage earners, thereby becoming more useful and productive citizens who will be assets to the society and not liabilities. In a society where we have more earners, the return of funds to the nation in form of tax payments will also help bring about the needed economic growth of the nation

Technological Improvement

In the future, it is hoped that vocational and technical education will adequately equip students to be more effective in this age of science and technology and to raise a generation of people who can think for themselves and respect the dignity of labour and propel its citizenry into a blossoming economy. What is needed today and tomorrow are workers with good technical skill background, rugged enough to transform Nigeria into a positive technological breakthrough with the ability to meet its immediate demand. A bright future is possible if we are willing and able to re-examine the vocational program and its value in our educational system.

Factors Affecting Vocational Education in Nigeria

Low Quality

In general, the quality of training is low, with undue emphasis on theory and certification rather than on skills acquisition and proficiency testing. Most Nigerians now visit technical colleges for the purpose of obtaining a degree certificate without actually passing through the standard of technical training that will help prepare them for the future. Inadequate instructor training, obsolete training equipment, and lack of instructional materials are some of the factors that combine to reduce the effectiveness of training in meeting the required knowledge and skills objectives. High quality skills training requires appropriate workshop equipment, adequate supply of training materials, and practice by learners which are not really available in our vocational colleges today (Okoro, 2004).

Geographical, Gender and Economic Inequities

Although access and participation in technical vocational education training in Africa reflects the gender-biased division of labour (justifying therefore the current efforts of gender mainstreaming in vocational education and training), we should not lose sight of economic and geographical inequities in designing technical vocational education training strategies for poverty eradication. Economic inequity is a greater barrier to participation in technical and vocational education than gender. In many African countries, children of poor parents are unable to afford the fees charged by

training institutions (Okoro, 2004). Invariably, the good technical and vocational schools are located in the big towns and cities, thereby limiting access to rural folks. We see therefore a paradox of potentially crowding out of technical and vocational training those who need it most who are the rural and economically disadvantaged population.

Poor Public Perception

For many years, technical and vocational education in Africa has been considered as a career path for the less academically endowed. This perception has been fuelled by the low academic requirements for admission into technical vocational education training programmes and the limited prospects for further education and professional development. Worse, the impression is sometimes created by governments that the primary objective of the vocational education track is to keep dropouts (i.e. students who are unable to move up the educational ladder, not because of poor grades but because of lack of places at the higher level) from the basic and secondary school system off the streets, rather than project this type of training as an effective strategy to train skilled workers for the employment market and for sustainable livelihoods (Ipaye, 1986).

Weak Monitoring and Evaluation

Current training programmes in many countries are supply-driven. Technical/vocational training programmes are very often not designed to meet observed or projected labour market demands. The emphasis appears to be on helping the unemployed to find jobs, without any critical attempt to match training to available jobs. This situation has resulted in many vocational school graduates not finding jobs or finding themselves in jobs for which they have had no previous training. Training institutions also do not track the employment destination of their graduates. Consequently, valuable feedback from past trainees on the quality of the training they have received and the opportunity for their experience-based inputs to be factored into the review of curricula and training packages are lost. In other words, the implementation of tracer studies that can improve the market responsiveness of training programmes is currently absent in many countries.

Inadequate Financing

Only a few governments in Africa are able to finance technical vocational education training with abandoned structures and non availability of the equipments needed. In Nigeria today, quite a reasonable amount of money is voted into the technical educational system but politicians usually stock this funds into their pockets. As a result of this bottleneck, there is a continual inadequate financing of technical education and the emergence of private universities and colleges in Nigeria today with high cost has also reduced the interest of the less privileged from participating in technical education.

Poor Management

One of the greatest limitations of technical education in Nigeria is the poor management of facilities. Corruption has eaten very deep into our society that money meant for the management of certain organizations like the technical and vocational colleges are siphoned into individual pockets hence using sub-standard equipments and trainees. With poor management and dilapidated laboratories, students are not encouraged to learn and as such bringing about a poor standard in technical/vocational studies

Ill-adapted Organizational Structures

Usually there is a poor organizational structure in the vocational educational system. The curriculum as specified is not properly followed and the staff on their own, may be politically employed without having core knowledge of any vocational skill. In some cases, starting from the head of the institution or college down to the lowest staff may not be well structurally organized. This will hinder the organizational flow of information from the staff down to the students

Problem of Staffing

Currently, vocational-technical education faces some staffing problems. As in science, vocational-technical teachers are few compared to teachers in traditional secondary schools. In the past, the Nigerian government gave financial incentives to science teachers to encourage students to study science and to retain those already in the profession. Today, these teachers no longer receive such allowances and where they do receive them they are irregularly paid because of the current socioeconomic crisis in our country. In addition, majority of the teachers are discouraged because of the inability of our government to provide science laboratories and equipment in our institutions. Certainly, vocational-technical education is expensive to run because it requires large amount to build workshops, classrooms and to maintain competent staff as well as provide adequate equipment and facilities (Onwueme, 1995).

How to Attain Self Employment through Vocational Education

As earlier mentioned, vocational education can be acquired at the secondary (high school) level or postsecondary (after high school) level and can interact with the apprenticeship system. It involves the learning of related trades like aviation mechanics, hotel management, hairstyling, plumbing, air conditioner installation, cab driving, carpentry, building, welding, weaving, mechanic, hair dressing, tailoring, barbing, etc and on completion, a degree certificate is awarded. With a practical experience in any of these trades, one can be well assured that he or she can set up a business on his or her own and become an employer of labour.

Hairdressing

Practically, an average Nigerian woman or even men visits hair stylist once or twice every month. The hair stylist who is regarded as a professional, helps to add beauty to his or her customer to ensure that they are attractive. Furthermore, the

customer relates his or her practical experience to other customers hence increasing the patronage enjoyed by the hair stylist. This self job creation which is today practiced by both male and female helps in eradicating social vices in Nigeria and creating employment.

Carpentry

This involves joinery of wood members in-form of frames to form designs suitable for a particular use. They have the practical skills of constructing chairs, beds, tables, houses and office furniture, etc. like other trades practiced in vocational and technical colleges, one can decide to be self employed as a carpenter or can as well work in an organization.

Conclusion

It has been noted that vocational education is designed to offer training to improve individuals' general proficiency, especially in relation to their present or future occupations. Evidently, Nigeria is lagging behind in preparing her workforce for the challenges of the rapidly changing global economy. For that, the nation must invest copiously in education with particular attention given to vocational and technical education. No nation would make any meaningful socioeconomic stride without viable educational institutions. The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and teachers in this area should take up the campaign for more funds for vocational education and to launder its image in the society. In tackling the mass unemployment situation in Nigeria today, vocational/technical education can act as a catalyst to solving the problem

The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the affiliated unions could also help in this regard by setting up vocational training centers in local government areas from where the people could acquire some job skills. Upgrading the workers' skills would improve their productivity and advance their values (wages/salaries and benefits) and voices on the job; calling out the workers for strike actions is not the only way to fight for their welfare. The education ministry in Nigeria should include vocational education and job training program in its economic growth and development strategies as part of poverty alleviation and assist the unemployed in job search. This is the way things are set up in many societies, and Nigeria should adopt and adapt the system if she wants to move forward. Political rhetoric without action will not solve Nigeria's problems. The progress of Nigeria and the tackling of youth social vices through provision of jobs lie in the productivity of its citizens and quality education and genuine vocational programs hold the key.

Recommendation

- i.) The guiding principles to the success of vocational and technical education should be making the best use of all available materials, tools, equipment as well as human resources at all times

- ii.) Vocational and technical education as a matter of urgency should through a comprehensive retraining in services program and research work improve their quality.
- iii.) The products of vocational and technical education program (public, employers of labour) should serve as a source of determining the efficacy, efficiency and the effectiveness of vocational and technical education based program.
- iv.) There should be continual workshop and seminars organized by individuals, government, vocational and technical educators, schools, accrediting bodies and industries regularly to enlighten the people about the importance of vocational studies.
- v.) Industries, communities, religious organizations, labour unions and wealthy individuals in the society should be encouraged to contribute in cash and kind to the growth and development of vocational and technical education at all levels.
- vi.) Funds meant for vocational educational development and training should not be channeled through politicians. The funds should be invested directly on the colleges and anyone found wanting of misappropriation should be sanctioned.
- vii.) Vocational training should be encouraged in youths from kindergarten and as such parents should allow kids to choose their own profession.

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