

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

(Mrs.) Chidimma Winy Nwokonkwo

Abstract

Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) is important for economic growth. Issues relating to VTE are not merely curriculum or economic questions but issues intricately linked to social, cultural, technical, economic and political development. Despite its key role in technological, economic and political growth, VTE is not given its right place in Nigeria as is the case in developed and other developing nation. This paper reviews the status of VTE in some countries and highlights the problems of VTE in Nigeria. It is recommended among other things that VTE should not promote inequalities within the Nigerian education system.

Introduction

Nigerian human and national resources give her the potential to become Africa's largest economy. However, despite the abundance of these resources in terms of human, fossil fuel, agricultural, ferrous and non-ferrous minerals, the development difficulties and challenges remain undaunting. The nation is characterized by monoculture economic pattern with oil as the main focus, an industrial sector highly dependent on importation of machinery, raw-materials and finished good, underutilization of an increasingly low quality of trained manpower.

The very slow rate of development and modernization of Nigerian economy and society associated with abundance of unskilled labour, acute shortage of employment for available skills as well as shortage of certain categories of skills for available employment, irrelevance of certain forms of education for development needs resulting in unsuitable output or the employment market, improper use and wastage of limited budget resources for education-presents a great problem and challenge to educators and policy makers.

This problem was further emphasized in UNESCO report (2007) that:

"Nigeria's education system is dysfunctional as graduates of many institutions cannot meet the development needs of the country. The unemployment and underemployment rate is estimated at more than 15% of the labour force with a very high rate of unemployment among university graduates"

Despite the professed need for technical education in Nigeria since her independence, the Nigerian society exhibits a very poor attitude towards it in favour of general education, as was the case in the colonial era. Vocational and technical schooling at all levels rather creates a sense of second-class citizenship in the society, which militates against its usefulness.

Technical education and technological development are indispensable components of national development process. The classification of nations into "developing" the "developed" is determined by the rate of technological development. According to Uthman (1998), the western nations were able to gain a substantial lead over the rest of the world because of the speed with which technological education was disseminated and proliferated. Seetheramu and Sudha (2006), noted that technological development is synonymous with national development in the following statement.

"When national development is defined in non-monetary and non institutional terms, it is essentially a human development process and implies the provision and augmentation of skills and capabilities of the people of the country. This is made possible through a well designed and efficiently executed programme of vocational and technical education".

Over the years, Nigeria has introduced vocational and technical education at various levels of the education system. The reason behind the development of vocational and technical education noted in NPE (2004) has been to:

- ✓ **provide trained manpower in applied sciences, technology and business,**
- ✓ provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.
- ✓ give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals to be self-reliant economically.

Important as these goal sounds, a marked distinction skill exists in the status of general and technical education in Nigerian. While the former is being regarded as education for elites, the latter is

regarded as education meant for the mentally dull individuals who are being prepared for a life to work as laborers in manual occupations'. As a consequence, it attracts a level of stigma.

In the Nigerian policy of education (2004), vocational and technical educations are not limited to inculcation of vocational skills relevant for specific occupations. It is an integral part of, and also broader than general education. Article 40 of NPE (2004), states that, "technical and vocational education is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technological and related science and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life".

.Many developing nations have set ambitious goals for vocational and technical education. For instance, China has a goal of expanding VTE so that 5% of the enrolment in secondary education would be in VTE. India has a target of reaching 25% and Bangladesh 20% (Tilak, 2007). As a vital aspect of the new global order, it is fundamental that Nigeria should pursue and support VTE, to enhance development, production, agriculture and self-reliant economy.

This paper attempts to showcase the status of VTE in some developing and developed countries, examine the problems of VTE in Nigeria and proffer useful suggestions for improving the status of VTE in Nigeria.

Importance of Vocational and Technical Education

The importance of vocational educational can be clearly seen in the aims of VTE stated in NPE (2004) as follows:

1. To train manpower in applied science, technology and commerce.
2. To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills needed for agriculture, industrial, commercial and economic development.
3. To provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for use and conveniences of man.
4. To introduce professional studies in engineering and other technologies
5. To give training and impart the necessary skills leading to the production of craftsmen.
6. To enable our young men and women to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology.

These aims reveal that VTE is necessary for the production of skilled manpower, for agricultural and economic development, for industrialization, reduction stable nation. It will help a nation to be economically sufficient, technologically up-to-date and able to maintain balance of trade within and outside its boundaries. A close consideration of the status of industrialized nation such as United State of America, Germany, France, China and Japan shows the relationship between technology and national development. These nations became very powerful because they adopted and emphasized technical education from the onset and developed their citizens in skills which made them self sufficient in food, materials for shelter, transportation, communication, information and military technology.

Tilak (2007), noted that VTE is a purposive factor for national socio-economic prosperity. He noted that leading social scientist in India suggested that even elementary education must impact technical education to youths in an eminently practical way. VTE is seen as a solution to educational problems in developing nations.

Educational problems could be solved by diversifying the secondary education curriculum. The unbridled demand for higher education could be controlled, the financial crises in education would be eased by reducing pressures on higher education budgets; and unemployment among college and secondary school graduates would be reduced. Olaitan (1996), also noted that in Nigeria, the 3-3 system of secondary education provide opportunity for students who drop out from junior secondary level to go for further vocational training and work through apprenticeship while those who complete the senior secondary school but cannot go further will be mainstreamed into the world of work. This is possible because of vocationalization of Nigerian secondary schools.

Some specific benefits of VTE outlined by Tilak (2007) include:

- > Vocational education in secondary schools can produce low level manpower in varied skills to fit in to the emerging occupations in developing economies. Because of changes in production processes resulting from technological advances, the nature of the demand for skills both in terms of quantity and quality changes. Modern technology requires highly qualified middle and lower level skilled personnel.

- > Vocational education contributes to progress by reducing unemployment through creating employment in the field of pre-vocational specialization and self-employment and a higher propensity for labour force participation after secondary schooling. It also improves productivity resulting in higher graduate earning.
- > VTE can be seen as an equity measure. As an antidote to urban-biased general education, VTE will promote equity with rural bias and serve the needs of rural people.

According to Grub (1985), vocational education is the answer to school enrolment problem, or otherwise tendency of some students to drop out of schools without occupational skills. VTE helps to resolve this problem by providing a more interesting and job relevant curriculum. It helps to halt urban migration, to transmit skills and attitudes useful in all kinds of employment, and serves as an important measure of development for disadvantaged youths in rural and urban areas. ^ VTE is helpful in developing "skills-culture" in contrast to pure academic culture and preference for white collar jobs.

Due to the numerous benefits of VTE, UNESCO (2007), recommended the provision of VTE as an integral part of general education, as an instrument to reduce the mismatches between education and employment and between school and society at large. World Bank (1973), suggested increasing vocationalization of the curricular of academic schools. The provisions the National policies on education have so far taken care of these recommendations.

Status of Vocational and Technical Education in Selected Countries

Many countries have placed much emphasis on vocational and technical education for fairly a long period. Tilak (2007), reported that Indonesia, Israel, Japan, South Korea, New Guinea, Thailand and Turkey had maintained the enrolment in secondary education at above 10% level during the last three decades. He noted that in Israel, the enrolment formed more than 50% in upper secondary school. Other countries like China, Iraq, Jordan and Syria have made special effort to expand VTE rapidly. Tilak, reported that, China made significant improvement in VTE between 1970 and 1977 and also experienced very rapid economic growth during this period.

Wikipedia (2007), recorded the status of VTE internationally by focusing on a few countries. In German Language areas such as Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein and Switzerland (including the French speaking parts, Vocational Education is an important part of the education system. In Germany, a law was passed in 1969, which regulated and unified the vocational training system and codified the shared responsibility of the state, the unions associations and chambers of trade and industry. In 2000, two third of young people aged under 22 began a vocational apprenticeship programme in Germany. Seventy eight percent (78%), of them completed it, meaning that approximately 51% of all young people aged under 22 have completed vocational education. In 2004, the government signed a pledge with industrial unions that alt companies except very small ones must take on industrial trainees. Additionally, there is the "Fachhoch chulen" (PH) since the 1970s in West Germany, and since the 1990s in Austria, Liechtenstein and **Switzerland**.

This policy provides VTE as an alternative to the classic academic career path from school to university. Until recent, the *Fachhoch chulen* (FH) offered diploma in engineering, architecture etc in programmes which stretched over 7 or 8 semester plus one semester of industrial internship. At present, many FH do offer Bachelors and master' degrees.

In United State of America, most of (he technical and vocational courses are offered by community colleges. Several states have their own institutes of technology which is on an equal accreditational footing with other stale universities. Their junior high schools and high school offering vocational courses have put more emphasis academics because of standard-based education reform. School-to-Work is a series of federal and state initiatives to link academics to work. The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTEJ is the largest private association dedicated to the advancement of vocational education in U.S. its members includes VTE teachers, administrators and researchers.

In India VTE is provided on a full times as well as part time basis. Full time programmes are generally offered through industrial training institutes. Part time programmes are offered through state technical and education boards or universities who also offered full time courses. Generally in Asia, most countries have expanded their VTE systems considerably.

In Nigeria, the reason behind (he development of VTE has been the need to diversify education and to meet the demands from industries and government. VTE was only offered in commercial schools, technical school and comprehensive secondary schools. Today some vocational subjects are offered in all secondary schools. Polytechnics and monotchnics prepare students for higher National Diploma. Currently, universities offer diplomas and degrees in engineering, and various other courses.

Problems of VTE in Nigeria

Despite the recent emphasis by government on functional vocational and technical education, many problems militate against its development. "These include;

1. Social Factors

Social attitudes to VTE are not encouraging in Nigeria. Negative attitudes severely dampen the desire and demand for vocational education VTE is conceived by the society as education for the poor and educationally backward people who are not eligible for admission into universities. This perpetuates inequalities in the education system.

* Financing: - Vocational Education is by definition costlier than general education. It was estimated in South Korea that secondary technical education cost more than ten times the general secondary education per student. (Tidak, 2007).

* Status: - There is much confusion with regards to the status of VTE in Nigeria. The federal governments have severally made statements concerning the equal status of B.Sc and HND graduates in Nigeria but have not been true in terms of employment, remunerations and upward mobility. There is no integrated policy as related to the status of VTE in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations are hereby put forward:

1. Since VTE is a requisite for economic growth, the provision for vocational & technical education must be directly related to the field where demand for skill is needed. Plan for VTE should be preceded by detailed manpower analyses and forecast.
2. VTE at any level need not be purely vocational and technical. It should include general skills and attributes that are useful across a wide variety of occupations. This is important in a rapidly changing economic system.
3. Vocational education should not promote inequalities within the educational system. It should not be perceived as a dead-end, with limited opportunities for upward mobility. Since the provision of VTE in higher institution is comparable, even higher than general education should be used for graduates of both types of education.
4. Since VTE is necessarily expensive, the government should make adequate allocation of resources for it. Poor investments cannot yield attractive results.
5. Issues related to VTE are not just curriculum, academic or economic issues, but intricately linked to social, economic, technical and political growth. There should be sound and effective policies regarding the status of VTE graduates. Government should implement the harmonization of the status of HND and B.Sc holder in absolute terms and white paper not in news only. This will help to remove differential treatment of VTE graduates in Nigerian institutions and industries.

Conclusion

Vocational/Technical education is important for economic growth. Despite this fact, low prestige and inherent inequalities are attached to this type of education in Nigeria the negative attitudes of the Nigerian society and government tends to dampen the demand and enrolment for this type of education. Government should take adequate steps to elevate the status of Vocational/Technical Education in Nigeria. Periodical plans for VTE should be based on detailed manpower analysis and the developmental needs of the country.

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