CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN VOCATIONAL AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract
Vocational and Entrepreneurship education as integral part of total educational system is the type of education that involves the acquisition of skills and ideals and management abilities necessary for job creation. They involve practical skill training that will encourage competence, productivity, dexterity and appreciation of human skills and knowledge. It is an education that prepares one for the world of work with which the individual becomes self reliant and can make contributions to the development of the society. It is therefore imperative that this type of education be the foundation stone for any nation and should be given a boost because of its importance and increasing demand on a global scale. This paper therefore, x-rays some of the contemporary issues in vocational and entrepreneurship education in Nigeria and the way forward. Also, it examines the concept of vocational and technical education, entrepreneurship education and current issues in vocational and entrepreneurship education in Nigeria were also discussed. Finally, suggestions were put forward on how to avert the issues which includes proper planning, efficient implementation, adequate funding and motivation.

Keywords: Contemporary Issues, Vocational Technical Education (VTE), Entrepreneurship Education.

Time and space have compelled man to always search for new things. Man by nature is not only a curious but a researching animal. The art of inquisition and acquisition compel man to do away with old things and introduce new ones. This is also true about vocational and entrepreneurship education. Beyond the fundamental education, there is a need for change because the whole world is changing. Everything in this world is changing in one form or the other. Nuru (2007) indicated that changes in a country’s economy is required to prepare young people for the jobs of the future and vocational and technical education have important roles to play in this process. Vocational education has been an integral part of national development and it facilitates the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge, it is therefore a planned program of courses and learning experiences that begins with exploration of career options, supports basic academic and life skills, and enables achievement of high academic standards, leadership, preparation for industry-defined work, advanced and continuing education (CTE, 2009) cited in Okafor, (2011).

Vocational/entrepreneurship education is “education and training for work; it is an education where skills are taught for the purpose of gaining employment through exposure to practical experience for self-actualization. Vocational/entrepreneurship education prepares one for the world of work with which the individual becomes self reliant and can make contributions to the development of the society. As employers look for new talents every year from new graduates, it is important to not only have a solid education but graduates that have features that stand out from the rest of the
graduating students. According to UNESCO (1973) as cited in Okorie (2001), it’s an education designed to prepare skilled workers for industries, Agriculture, Commerce etc. Vocational/entrepreneurship education can be regarded as experience gained directly or indirectly that enables one to participate in a socially useful occupation either in or out of school, at various levels and to be sufficiently equipped to become an intelligent creator of goods and services. The continued deterioration of the national economy is a clear signal to every Nigerian to try hard for a reliable and independent means of survival. This can only be realized through improved vocational/entrepreneurship training programmes.

Conceptual Framework

Vocational and Technical Education

Vocational and technical education could be described as that aspect of education which provides the recipients with the basic knowledge and practical skills necessary for entry into the world of work as employees or as self-employed. Oni (2007) defined VTE as that type of education which fits the individual for gainful employment in recognized career as semi-skilled workers or technicians or sub-professionals. According to Maclean & Wilson (2009) VTE is concerned with the acquisition of skills and knowledge for employment and sustainable livelihood. Abassah (2011) expressed that technical education involves training in the process of relating both science and technical education to practical problems right from primary to higher level of education; this is because it aims at developing practical skills as well as the creative and innovative abilities and enable decision making skills and problem solving abilities. The major objective of all VTE is the acquisition of skills and attitudes for gainful employment in a particular occupation or professional area. The need to relate training to employment either self or paid employment is at the base of all the best practices and approaches observed throughout the world. One of the most important aspects of VTE is its inclination towards the world of work and the emphasis of the curriculum on the acquisition of employable skills. VTE delivery systems are therefore; well placed to train the skilled workforces that the nation needs to create wealth and come out of poverty.

Vocational and Technical education (VTE) has been an integral part of national development strategies in many societies because of its impact on productivity and economic development. In other words, it is an “education designed to develop occupational skills.” Vocational and technical education gives individuals the skills to “live, learn and work as a productive citizen in a global society.” It has an important role to play for economic development, industrial growth, employment generation, poverty alleviation and national integration.

Oni, (2007) also said that it is a specialized education designed to empower learners through the development of their technical skills, human abilities, cognitive understanding, attitudes and work habits in order to prepare learners adequately for the world of work or position them practically for self-employment after graduation (Oni, 2007). However, Badawi (2013) cited in Awotoye (2014) noted that UNESCO and International Labour Organization unanimously defined VTE as: “A comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life”. Furthermore, Maclean, (2011) in Awotoye, (2014) asserts that VTE if well positioned could play multidimensional roles of stimulating economic growth, social development, improving
conventional education, empowerment, wealth creation, poverty reduction and skills enhancement. In a nation with recurring incidences of youth restiveness, VTE is well suited to help youths and adults become self-dependent and self-reliant, while for those working in the industry, VTE is helpful in the areas of skills enhancement, mitigation of high job turnover and risks of obsolescence Okolocha, (2012) cited in Pattarawat J. (2013).

Status of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria

VTE in Nigeria has gone through a series of problems from the humble beginning, it was perceived wrongly as the education for the drop-outs or those who could not cope with academic rigor in the formal schools setting but had to be sent to trade centres. This has led to the slow progress from the earliest times till date. VTE has been neglected over the years until recent time when the national policy on education (FRN, 2004) in Pattarawat J. (2013) gave some clarifications on its objectives with respect to entire education system. The specific goals of VTE are stated as:

- To provide trained manpower in the applied sciences technology and business and particularly in the arts and crafts.
- To provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development and
- To give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically, (FRN, 2004).

In view of this, the VTE curricula indicated that pre-vocational subjects at the Junior Secondary School level would include, agriculture, business studies, home economics, local craft and computer education and for the senior secondary schools, agriculture, electricity, auto mechanic, book keeping, accounting, commerce, computer education, electronics, clothing and textile, food and nutrition, home management, metal work, technical drawing, wood work, short hand, type writing, fine arts and music would be the vocational subjects. As laudable as these policies seem, they are yet to adequately fulfill the original goals of VTE in Nigeria. The consequences are steering at nation take more than ever before particularly with regards to youth employment and its implications on our national security. A lot of problems are facing VTE as such as continuing misperception of the VTE programme especially by the policy makers and the generality of Nigerians, improperly planned government policies on VTE as well as lack of follow – up of implemented policies, inadequate funding, poor incentives for VTE teachers at all levels, inadequate and obsolete training facilities, inadequate skilled manpower, irrelevant or inappropriate curricular of VTE and inadequate training institutions as well as non-vocation approach of available institution offering vocational courses. In view of these identified problems, there is an urgent need to tackle the contemporary issues in vocational and technical education in Nigeria.

Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria

Entrepreneurship education in Nigeria is as old as the historical origin of vocational education but entrepreneurship education was not known and was not formalized as at the time vocational education was formalized and got full recognition. However, there is no clear cut distinction between vocational education and entrepreneurship education. It depends on how one looks at it. They are either inter-twined or one is sub-summed into the other. Entrepreneurship education is specifically that art of starting an enterprise, improving or promoting an existing one. One can note that

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entrepreneurship skill is needed in vocational education; they are just like father and child or brother
to brother. It is the same blood flowing in two different persons.
The concept of entrepreneurship evokes several meanings. This is a creative process of organizing,
managing an enterprise and assuming the risk involved in the enterprise. In a similar vein, Hisrich and
Peter (2002) see entrepreneurship as a “process of creating something new and assuming the risks and
rewards.” This definition stresses four important aspects of entrepreneurship;
1. Creation process – creating something new of value to the entrepreneur and customers;
2. Entrepreneurship requires the duration of the necessary time and effort;
3. Risk taking is involved – financial, psychological and social; and
4. The reward needed in the form of profit, personal satisfaction, independence, etc.
Awodun (2005) adopts the same process approach to define entrepreneurship as an act of:
• Recognizing opportunities in your environment;
• Mobilizing resources to take advantage of such opportunities,
• Ensuring the provision of new or improved goods and services to customers; and
• Obtaining profit in return for the risk taken.
Some authors see the entrepreneur as an individual who pioneers change, responds to it, and exploits
is an agent who champions a novel combination of productive resources as the means of achieving or
attaining an economic end. He further stated that the entrepreneur: re – allocates and re – combines
the inputs of production, articulates the commercial goals of the projects, identifies and solicits the
necessary recourses, coordinates their use and assumes responsibility for the ultimate success of the
project.
Entrepreneurship is therefore “about learning the skills needed to assume the risk of executing
a business, developing the winning strategies and establishing and executing them with all the vigour,
persistence and passion needed to win any game” (Inegbenbor, 2006). Aruwa (2006) sees
entrepreneurship as “The willingness and ability of an individual to seek investment opportunities, to
establish and run an enterprise successfully.” Entrepreneurship is therefore, linked to entrepreneurial
opportunities, the compelling force enabling entrepreneur to introduce or develop new products or
services.
Entrepreneurship education is a specialized training given to students of vocational and technical
education to acquire the skills, ideals and managerial abilities and capacities for self-employment
rather than being employed. Osuala (2010) defines entrepreneurship education as a programme or part
of a programme that prepares individuals to undertake the formation and or operation of small
business enterprises which also includes franchise operations for the purpose of performing all
business functions relating to a product or service with emphasis on social responsibilities, legal
requirement and risks for the sake of profit involved in the conduct of private business enterprises.
Entrepreneurship education seeks to prepare people particularly the youths to be responsible,
enterprising individuals who become entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial thinkers by immersing them in
real life learning experience whereby they can take risks, manage result and learn from the outcome
(Suleiman, 2010).
Features of Entrepreneurship Education include the following:

- It orientates towards the world of work and the emphasis of the curriculum on the acquisition of employable skills.
- Its delivery systems are well placed to train the skilled and entrepreneurial workforce that will create wealth and make people to emerge out of poverty.
- It can respond not only to the needs of different types of industries but also to the different training needs of learners from different socio-economic and background and prepare them for gainful employment and sustainable livelihoods.

Current Issues in Vocational and Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria

Vocational and entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria has encountered a lot of problems during its developmental stage. Amongst these is the problem of inadequate provision of instructional materials, tools and equipment. Specialists in the field of VE have expressed the need for adequate physical, human and financial resources to effectively implement a VE based curriculum. Akaninworo (2001) in his study traced the technological backwardness in the country to insufficient infrastructure and equipment for technical and vocational education. Originally the aim of vocational education is to fill the gap created by mere literary education. In short it was planned in such a form as to give a balanced system of education to a developing nation like Nigeria. Unfortunately, this was highly misconceived; the society began to see vocational education as an area meant for those who could not cope with formal education. This is totally wrong; a sound vocational education requires both academic and practical ability to achieve the desired goal. The major problem is what Mkpa (1987) cited in Osuala, (2010) pointed out that, the problem of educational planning and policy implementation in Nigeria lies on what is to be done in education and the value attached to it. The problem is not that the vocational education is not very important, but the values attached. A typical Nigeria prefers long degrees, titles and honours and not performance. A Nigerian manager may not ask you in an interview whether you know how to do the job, but how many certificates do you have for the job. In Japan, China, America and some other Western nations, the first and major concern is on ability to perform what is expected of one (productivity). Vocational education is highly promoted in such countries and this leads to speedy industrial progress, Osuala, 2010.

Another problem of Vocational Education in Nigeria is that of public perception as education for the low status and the unintelligent (Nwokoham, 2005). Prior and after independence, the Nigerian education system prepared students for basic ‘white collar’ jobs. Over time, the scarcity of jobs led to high unemployment rate and also a high level of poverty in the country that proved to be expensive for the nation (Moja, 2000; Ebong & Leigha, 2006). The Nigerian society erroneously believes that those who are not academically inclined study Vocational and Technical Education subjects. It is for this reason that most parents are not willing to encourage their wards to study VTE subjects. The fact remains that most parents are apt to want an academic education for their children, whether or not the graduates increasingly find it difficult to get jobs or not. They do not want their children to go to schools for the purpose of becoming bricklayers, carpenters, mechanics to mention but a few (Nwokomah, 2005). The urge for certificates and degrees in preference to technical vocational skills stems from the fact that when it comes to political appointments, leadership positions and decision making, degree holders in different fields are favored more than their counterparts with technical vocational skills so every parent wants his child to make it to the university. This is in line with the advice of an Indian school principal to parents captured in the small write up below:
Dear Parents,
The exams of your children are to start soon. I know you are all really anxious for your child to do well. But, please do remember amongst the students, who will be sitting for the exams, there is an artist, who doesn’t need to understand Mathematics. There is an entrepreneur, who doesn’t care about History or English literature. There’s a sportsperson, whose physical fitness is more important than physics. If your child does get top marks, that’s great! But, if he or she doesn’t, please don’t take away their confidence and dignity from them. Tell them no matter what they score, you love them and will not judge them. And please, do not think that doctors and engineers are the only happy people in the world.

Vocational /Entrepreneurship education also requires finance and technical know-how. There is arising consciousness from both government and philanthropic organizations on the need to support and promote vocational education. There is the need for government to place greater emphasis on Vocational/Entrepreneurship education for youths to acquire skills and be gainfully employed in industries or other related organizations or become self-employed, so that they become productive which will drastically reduce the level of unemployment as well as poverty in the country.

Conclusion
Vocational and entrepreneurship education are inter-twined. They are for practical skill training that will encourage competence, productivity, dexterity and appreciation of human skills and knowledge. They are two widely discussed concepts in specialized skill-focused education. It has emerged as one of the most effective human resource development strategies that African countries need to embrace in order to train and modernize their technical workforce for rapid industrialization and national development. The successes of Vocational and entrepreneurship programme in Nigeria hinges on proper planning, efficient implementation, adequate funding and motivation. There are issues affecting the value of this education but if the societal perception of vocational entrepreneurship education is modified, the role of vocational/entrepreneurship education can be harnessed.

The Way Forward
To overcome the contemporary issues plaguing vocational/entrepreneurship education in Nigeria; the following steps should be taken.

• Educational institutions should develop and adopt applied and integrated curriculum which is capable of strengthening vocational, academic and workplace skills that will facilitate self actualization, sustainability, employment generation and employer of labor.
• Policy makers in vocational/entrepreneurship education need to expand the curriculum in this area to accommodate information and communication technology issues and prospects. This lies on restructuring the training course contents and curriculum of both informal and formal educational programmes.
• Adequate and quality infrastructures should be provided in view of the increasing numbers of intakes into vocational education programmes in Nigeria tertiary institutions. In addition there should be no short or absence of supply of teaching materials, tools and equipment which ensures efficiency and effectiveness in teaching and learning processes.
• Instructional media both old and the new generation should be procured, made accessible for use by lecturers, instructors and technologists who should be trained on their usage for effective and
efficient instruction, learning so as to infuse in the teaching-learning process, unique, motivational and pleasurable outcome.

- For Vocational/Entrepreneurship education to stimulate employability and national development there is need for proper sensitization of the general public including the policymakers on its real essence.
- Government should invest massively in routine and periodic capacity-building training programmes for teachers/lecturers/instructors. This effort would keep trainers informed of best practices and methodological changes in the field.
- The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the supervisory agencies should embark on sensitization campaign though the mass media to enrich public understanding and perception on the socio-economic benefits of this education.
- Lastly, issues relating to vocational/entrepreneurship education are not just curriculum questions, nor are they just economic. They are intricately linked with social, cultural, historical, economic, technical, and political parameters. Hence formulation of sound and effective policies and plans of VE requires an inter-disciplinary development approach, treating VE as an integral part of overall educational planning.

References


