

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Vocational Technical Education Programme (VTE) provides theory and practical skills needed in present day technology society, necessary for paid and unpaid employment in our society. VTE is an essential component of all round technological development in a developing economy such as Nigeria. Vocational Technical Education remains the bedrock of national development in the area of science and technology. This paper reviews the past and present challenges threatening the effectiveness of VTE programme in Nigeria since its inception and proffers solution which will help refocus the vision and with contingency plan and diverse sources of funding to ensure sustainability.

Introduction

Right down the memory lane, there is a long history of the introduction of Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria Educational programme, right from our Colonial Masters (Great Britain) in 1887, (Taiwo, 1981). Prior to Nigeria independence in 1960, the colonial Government trained only artesian and middle level technicians at craft centers which was later developed into technical and vocational schools in early seventies?

Generally, policy is a power-producing and reproducing social practice that operates on multiple levels and dimensions. In a sense, policies could represent values, practices and ways of acting that shapes the consciousness of the people and produce social identities (Lipman 2004). Specifically, education policy could be defined as a system of administrative guidelines, rules and regulation put in place to direct employees towards the achievement of the national goals of education (Anikweze 2004).

For this reason, Nigeria adopted education as an instrument par excellence for National development (FRN, 1998). Education policy is the translation of services of policy intentions (Sousa 2000).

The landmark policy is the education policy of 1979, revised in 1981, 1995 and 1998, which gave visibility to Vocational Technical Education (VTE) within 6-3-34 system on education (Okebukola 2000). Both the National Policy on Education and the National Policy on Science and Technology make statements about policy thrust for Vocational Technical Education. However, at the close of the 20th Century, there still existed a huge gap between policy and practice (Aina, 2000).

Since 2006, through the undoubted effort of Dr. Mrs. Obiageli Ezekwesili, the former minister for Education, there has been another dimension in policy on education geared towards equalization of Vocational and Technical school to grammar school education. This has finally removed the stigma on VTE and repositions it at its rightful position. Gradual migration of Nigeria education system from 6-6-4, 6-3-3-4 to 9-3-4 are attempts to update the value of VTE in the scheme of things. Failure of earlier educational policies depended on the marginalization of VTE. Little or no remarkable progress is on ground to show for the past five decades of VTE presence in Nigeria.

According to (Idialu 1989), since the establishment of 6-3-3-4 system, successive government of Nigeria have not only acknowledged but have also developed awareness of the importance of Vocational Technical Education to a developing economy. The importance of equipping the youths with employable skills to minimize the problem of

unemployment, shortage of needed manpower for technological development, and social ills created by the "bookish system" of education being embarked in the country as provided in the National Policy on Education was its major concern.

The latest policy on education in Nigeria is still on the pipeline, trying to get legislative backing that will ensure its enforcement, quite unlike other policies before it. It is popularly known as (9-3-4 system) another reform in Education sector. Much recognition is presently given to Vocational Technical Education, as all the institution offering VTE programmes also award Bachelor of Science degree as against National Diploma and Higher National Diploma, making its graduates appear inferior to B.Sc holders. NABTEB is presently being used for University Admission as against the practice many years ago. Despite these remarkable achievements and its acceptability, there are still a list of impending problems militating against, its success.

Challenges

As it is generally applicable in most other laudable programmes in Nigeria, many good policies working elsewhere have been swept under the carpet due to lack of proper implementation. There is no laid down principle on how best the VTE programme should be financed that will ensure sustainability. Government alone cannot shoulder the financing of VTE. It has been widely acknowledged that VTE is the bedrock of national development technological wise. It is also evident that VTE is a very expensive programme.

Already, Federal and State government are saddled with funding of all other forms of education to certain levels. Unsteady state of the economy usually affects the education programmes. Any shake-up in oil revenue (petroleum price) from international market affects virtually everything in Nigeria. Finance ranked first among other factors which pose as major challenges to growth and development of

VTE. Therefore, all stakeholders should be co-financier of VTE programme so as to sustain its progress. All the beneficiaries of VTE like the Industries, Companies, Missions, Clubs, NGO, Communities, Federal, State and Local Governments should send subventions to ensure proper funding.

Challenges Facing Vocational Technical Education Programme in Nigeria

a. Very low esteem of Vocational Technical Education (As Preference is Still in Favour of Grammar School Type of Education): Hardly would you find the wards or children of rich Nigerian studying courses offered under VTE programme. Majority of Nigerian youths still opt for grammar related education in preference to VTE due to the treatment of the society to the graduates of VTE. The society sees the VTE programme as manipulative in nature, merely designed for those students which are not science inclined and generally poor academically. Doctors and Engineer are given more recognition in the society than VTE graduates who are equipped with adequate skills needed in industry and commerce.

b. Lack of Respect for Dignity of Labour in the Society: Which is the benefit of Vocational Technical Education is not appreciated; instead get rich quick syndrome is the order of the day.

c. Weak Policy Support for VTE Implementation: (Sousa 2000), posited that education policy is always in evolution and may often be backed by legislation thereby providing it with the teeth to bite where necessary. For instance, in South Africa, most of the education policies are linked to relevant Acts of parliament (Tirisano 2000). In our country Nigeria, policy decisions on education are yet to be backed by any Act. Its implementation couldn't be enforced, and defaulters are never punished.

d. Lack of Continuity in Policies/Practices: This is caused by instability in governance, unsteady budgetary provision for the programme resulting from unsteady economy. Frequent unplanned changing of leadership by military coup and impeachment by civilian government. Also our national revenue depends very much on oil revenue alone. Its floatation affects the budgetary provision of all programmes greatly.

e. Deteriorating Infrastructures in Institutions for Effective Delivery of VTE Programme: There is no proper maintenance programme to service the existing infrastructures, let alone provision of new ones. A lot of money is needed for proper implementation of VTE world over. However, no amount of money from the government alone would be enough for this exercise. We have realized that VTE programme is the country's only hope for technological advancement. (Olaitan 1996) opined that adequate funding of VTE would require the full participation of communities, industries, 'organizations and agencies outside the government. Even some enterprising educational institutions can supplement government budget by embarking on self-help ventures so as to generate revenue. College Alumni should contribute in providing fund for their alma mata.

f. Lack of Current Database on VTE for Effective Curriculum Planning: The country education system is about a decade behind that of other developed countries in this era of globalization where science has turned the earth to global village. The database of VTE should be provided by the government agencies (supervisory and regulatory) through the ICT programme to enhance easy access for research and development. Through internet provision, all stakeholders should be able to know the level of VTE implementation in Nigeria.

The Outcome of Past Policies, Actions and Programmes that Serves as Reflection Point for Future Policy Thrust

- i. A widening gap exists between intended, achieved plans and policies.
- ii. Un-strategic financing Planning devoid of any alternatives. If government alone is the sponsor, when it fails to provides the programme suffers great setback. But when many are involved in funding it will hardly fail.
- iii. No "provision of alternative power supply source for VTE programme/projects. In schools as public power supply is not available most times. VTE practical projects are not done in schools as expected due to constant power failure, making the programme ineffective.
- iv. Lack of plan in updating the skill of teacher through capacity building. Retraining of teachers enables them to be current with recent finding and improvement in ever increasing scientific discoveries. No body can give what he/she does not have. Over the years our students keep learning old knowledge and skills making them to lack behind their contemporaries, in other nations of the globe.

Recent Issues

It is imperative at this juncture to¹ respond quickly to the push and pull 'of two dominant forces in wheel of progress. These forces are democracy and globalization. More than 30 years of military rule in Nigeria brought about the loss of leadership position in African continent, and dislike from other nations of the globe. Education generally, suffered very much from military rule, more especially the vocational Technical Education which the military know nothing about.

Democratic rule usually attracts favour from abroad in many areas, education especially. Both human, materials and financial support are received to improve social services etc. Within education sector; Vocational Technical

Education is given top priority as exemplified by the UNESCO-Nigeria bi-lateral agreement, which came out of the liaison between the Director-general of UNESCO and former President Olusegun Obasanjo. Some international agencies still render support to VTE in form of grants for a specified period of time.

Likewise, globalization has in the other hand stimulated a new thrust in our vision and action as it brings us into active competition with other nations of the globe. The world is now a global village. However, VTE remains the area of high impact of globalization. The economic and technical/technology dimensions of globalization are driven largely by VTE. Also, without technical education, the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) hub around which globalization is built will be difficult to sustain.

Recommendations

The New Policy Thrust for 21st Century should include

- 1. More Forward-looking Policy in Vocational Technical Education:**
The existing policy on VTE as found in the National Policy on Education and the National Policy on Science and Technology is stretching and weak. It is toothless bulldog, being unable to respond to the dynamics of 21st century. A more forward-looking and comprehensive policy is therefore imperative.
- 2. Enhancing Access:** The thrust should be based on the critical importance of VTE for national development and the need for many more than are presently enrolled to benefit. In the pursuit, the stigma of VTE being for the less academically able should be removed.
- 3. Promoting Equity:** Gender imbalance in technical education in favour of male has been well reported (Aina 2000), despite this, significant narrowing of the gender gap

should be a new thrust. Effort should be made in the direction of ensuring equal access to VTE for girls and women, and to eliminate the very strong historic general bias against women, which has for too long, characterized VTE policy and practice. Making VTE programme, formal and informal, available to the unemployed and various marginalized groups including early school leavers, the disabled and the rural poor should be a major thrust.

- 4. Contingency Planning:** In the event of failure of any or all of the assumptions, contingency plan should be made within policy and practice prescription in the Action Plan to accommodate such failure.
- 5.** The new blue print should also have contingency plans embedded in it, without which it means we have not learnt lesson from the past mistakes.
- 6. Alternative Funding Sources for Effective Programme Implementation:** The sources of funds for implementing vocational technical education programmes and projects are identified as supports from all stakeholders such as:
Government sources: Federal, State and Local Development partners' example UNDP, UNESCO, ADBIDRC, Japan foundation, USAID and DFID. Private Sector Educational Tax Fund Revenue from Patent Services and products from technical colleges and Polytechnics.

Conclusion

This paper provided brief review of the introduction of Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria right from inception. Past and present challenges were examined and suggestions made, for the brighter future of VTE programme in Nigeria based on the findings and present realities.

A number of recommendations were made for new thrust on the future of Vocational Technical Education programme policy in Nigeria. Introduction of the use of contingency plan was recommended as an essential feature of National policy on Vocation Technical Education.

Experience has shown that government alone cannot fund Vocational Technical education because of its expensive nature. Therefore, the stakeholders should jointly co-sponsor the Vocational Technical Education Programme for efficiency and effectiveness. The future success of Vocational Technical education programme in Nigeria still depends very much on effective implementation of these recommendations.

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