
Curbing Youth Unemployment through the Sustenance of Vocational/Technical Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Since the start of last year, 2011, the reality in many parts of the globe, especially in the Arab or Maghred region, remains a poignant reminder since most of the factors that have triggered their current upheavals resonate in Nigeria on daily basis. Without doubt, the issue of youth unemployment is seen as proximate factor precipitating the crisis; thus startling youth unemployment has negative implications for a country's stability. For Nigeria, the challenge of unemployment facing the Nigerian youth at the moment constitutes a very serious concern for both the political stability and socio – economic development of the country. The paper stresses that vocational education should be improved and pursued with all determination so as to develop both the individuals and the society. It is recommended among others that government should provide enabling environment for self- reliance by ensuring stable water and power supply across the nation.

There is no gain saying the fact that education is an instrument par excellence that is universally used for the development of any civilized society. However, education may be used for domestic liberation of the society. The shortcomings of literacy education have led many people to advocate for the establishment of more vocational and technical institutions and improvement on the existing ones. The over – emphasis on literary education is doing Nigeria no good. Today many private, state and federal universities in Nigeria turning out graduates every year into the labour market. Most of these graduates do not possess the necessary skills for certain jobs. They only know (if at all) theories of their profession.

What Nigeria needs now are practically minded graduates for self employment.

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In this vein, vocational and technical skills developed in the individual will enable him to be engaged in productive work either for himself or for an employer. Thus, a nation that promotes vocational and technical education promotes the ability of its citizens to qualify for and hold productive employment. Ochiagha (1995) stressed that although all forms of education prepare individuals (directly or indirectly) for productive work, vocational education is reputed for being the best form of education that prepares individuals for a special and specific type of work and not for the world of work assumptions. Olaitan (1992) highlighted that other benefits of vocational education to the individual include increased employability and higher job mobility in the economy. People who have been trained for special jobs in the world of work are highly employable and less likely to suffer severe unemployment than those who lack specific skills.

From the above discussion, it could be understood that vocational education, if properly planned and implemented, will promote self-reliance in Nigeria, especially in these days that employment has become very elusive and has created a social problem. The products of our schools will no longer fold their arms to wait for white – collar jobs that are not forthcoming.

The Concepts of Vocational and Technical Education

According to Bala (1995), vocational education is a term that is very often misunderstood. Olaitan (1986) defined vocational education broadly as ‘that part of the total experience of the individual whereby he learns successfully to carry on a gainful occupation.

Okorie and Ezeji (1988) defined vocational education as “the education designed to prepare skilled workers for industries, agriculture, commerce etc; which is usually provided at the upper secondary level”. In the same vein, Osuala (1987) saw vocational education “as designed to prepare individuals for gainful employment as semi-skilled or skilled workers or technicians or sub-professionals in recognised occupations or to prepare individuals for employment in advanced technical education programme”.

Okoro (1993) defined education as “any form of education vocational whose primary purpose is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupations”. He went on to say that vocational education provides the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for effective employment in specific occupation. It develops occupational competence and teaches those skills which will enable an individual to earn a living.

From the above definitions, therefore, vocational education could simply mean any gainful occupation engaged by the individual which makes him utilize both brain

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and hand for the production of goods and services which in a way, enables the individual to earn a living.

Technical education as defined by the National policy on education (2004) means that “aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic knowledge e.g polytechnic and montechnic education”. In this case, the individuals acquire skills to produce goods and services and by so doing become useful to themselves and the society at large. They become occupied and self – employable too.

Ochiagha (1995) and Baba (1999) defined vocational/technical education in terms of:

- a. Training designed to advance an individual’s proficiency in relation to his or her present or future occupation.
- b. Training or retraining which is given in schools or classes under public supervision
- c. Provision of systematic training experiences which are designed to fit individuals in recognized occupation.

Additionally, vocational education apart from being designed to develop skills, helps to develop abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habits and appreciations encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to enter and progress in employment on a useful and productive bases. Vocational education is an integral part of the total education programme. It contributes towards the development of good citizenry as individuals develop their physical, social, civic, cultural and economic competencies (Baba, 1999).

The central theme of vocational education is usually expressed as: “to fit into the world of work or useful employment”. According to Olaitan (1996), vocational/technical education is the core of both the individual’s and society’s economy. Through acquisition of skills, individuals could explore their environment and harness the resources within it which could serve him and the society.

Ochiagha (1995) has identified the following goals of vocational/technical education:

1. *It prepares the learner into the chosen field of occupation and enables him or her to progress and persevere in it.*
2. *It opens up a wide range of options or job openings for all citizens in the labour market.*
3. *It services the supply and demand of job trend in the labour force.*
4. *It ensures that each trainee attains the objective, distributive and motivational qualities that are relevant to career development and work behaviour.*

5. *It equips individuals in training or in the work setting with the relevant skills, work habits, attitudes, knowledge and information such that their input can aid the expected efficiency.*

Major Aims of Technical Education

Baba (1999) highlighted the following reasons as major aims of technical education in Nigeria:

1. To alleviate unemployment
2. To re-orientate students' attitudes towards rural society
3. To transmit skills and attitudes towards gainful employment
4. To halt urban migration

The Role of Government in the Sustenance of Vocational/Technical Education

Even though government had formulated and implemented the policy on vocational /technical education in this country, its sustenance is the bone of contention. It is like other policy schemes introduced by government over two decades aimed at poverty alleviation and self reliance such as National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (NOAS), youth empowerment scheme (YES) etc which lacked focus and yielded very little result. To train students in this direction, the National Policy on Education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004) stipulates that government shall fund tertiary education including vocational/technical education. This implies the provision of physical facilities and other forms of workshops and laboratory materials for students practical work.

Unfortunately, however “the Nigerian vocational/technical education teacher has not been able to accomplish the expectations put on him because of inadequate funding “ (Danladi 2003). Professionals in this type of education are not motivated with adequate equipment, classrooms, laboratories and libraries. This explains why graduates of vocational/technical institutions are ill – equipped for the job market. It is not surprising to find little or nothing (equipment, materials, specimen/consumables) in the laboratories of these institution.

Even when government makes fund available, prudent financial management by stakeholders becomes another problem. This is why tackling corruption at all levels becomes absolutely necessary at this time. In this regard, there is need for proper supervision. Government should sincerely rise up to the challenges posed by youth unemployment in this country and stop formulating and implementing laudable policies on paper alone.

Until of late, entrepreneurship education found no strong hold in government policy on education. Even with the introduction of entrepreneurial courses in Nigerian

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tertiary education since 1991, the programme does not seem to be achieving the objective of self employment because graduates that took the course (entrepreneurship) in schools showed very little interest as a result of the way and manner they were taught with little or no practical exposure due to lack of equipment.

Baba (1999), Lillis and Hogan (2010) identified the following ways by which some developing countries should try to pursue the goal of vocational/technical education. They are:

- a. Diversifying education through integrating it with productive labour and policy of work study as in Cuba, China and Tanzania (Nyerere's education for self – reliance).
- b. Sincere pursuance of this goal through adequate funding and proper supervision of the programme.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From what has been discussed so far, it is obvious that there is the need to make individuals to be useful to themselves and the society by engaging in gainful employment. Certainly, vocational/technical education skills acquisition is already on hand and should be sustained to stimulate self reliance opportunities as a viable means to take over unemployment in Nigeria.

In order to beef up the teaching and learning of vocational/technical education in our schools so as to achieve the exposition of graduates to self – reliance and gainful employment opportunities in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

- 1 There should be adequate funding of vocational/technical education course in schools.
This will encourage the purchase of the right tools, equipment or machines for effective teaching and learning
- 2 Government should improve on the existing loan scheme meant to finance this programme. Adequate funds in form of loans should equally be provided to beneficiaries of vocational/technical education. This will enable them to set up their own business because of its equipment capital – base. The agency for the disbursement of fund should be monitored and their list of beneficiaries published periodically for public consumption. A team of the agency is expected to visit the beneficiaries to assess progress and to ensure proper utilization of the fund.
- 3 There should be good welfare programme for vocational/technical education teachers including prompt payment of salaries and other allowances. Kudos to the federal government for her recent (January 2012) directives that all civil servants' salaries should be paid on 20th of every month. We hope that it is not on paper and media houses only. If it is implemented, they would certainly serve as a means of motivating the teachers.

- 4 Apprenticeship Scheme as organized as practiced by the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) have to be reworked to include both urban and rural areas. In addition, better allowances should be introduced in order to motivate both the trainee and the trainers; and
 - 5 It is not enough to add to the curriculum of vocational/technical education entrepreneurship and leadership skills in tertiary institutions without proper funding and provision of equipment. This may lead to literary education which is at variance with the goals of this policy which is creative intelligence for small – scale business management.
- The emphasis of this paper is on the sustenance and adequate funding of vocational/technical education as a veritable tool for curbing youth unemployment in Nigeria.

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