
VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION: A WEAPON FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

A sustainable development is desirable to every society irrespective of its size and level of development. This is because it caters for the interests of both the present and future generations. To achieve this, Nigeria desires to be among the top twenty world economies by the year 2020. Nigeria is also described as the giant of Africa but still wallows in developmental challenges such as poverty, unemployment, squalor, inadequacy of portable water, epileptic power supply, etc which all tend toward unsustainable development. This paper therefore sees Vocational and technical education as a weapon for sustainable development in Nigeria in the sense that it has the prospect of leading to socio-economic development, entrepreneurship development, production of competent manpower, rural transformation, provision of relative security, etc. The paper also identified public perception on Vocational and technical education, poor funding, obsolete curriculum, acute shortage of vocational and technical education teachers, etc as the constraints facing the programme in Nigeria. Finally, as a way forward, the paper recommends that vocational and technical education should be well funded; there should be societal re-orientation on the relevance of the programme, the curriculum of vocational and technical education should be improved in line with the current and global best practices, the available teachers should be well motivated and there should be improvement in the provision of electricity and telecommunication services.

A sustainable level of development is what is desired by every society irrespective of its size and stage of development. This is because any society that is not conscious of the welfare of its future generations is bound to perish. Sustainable

development is therefore better achieved through education. It is in line with this that education is seen as the greatest investment that should be made by a country so as to record a quick and effective national development in the areas of economic, political and human resources. Education also moves a society forward and makes continuity possible from one generation to another. Finally, education leads to positive changes in behaviour and attitude and also equips people with skills for bringing about sustainable development.

Nigeria is faced with a lot of challenges such as poverty, squalor, environmental degradation, epileptic power supply, inadequate potable water, low productivity, unemployment, etc, all of which tend towards unsustainable development. Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) is seen as a tool for ameliorating these challenges and bringing about sustainable development in Nigeria. This is because Danko (2006) saw Vocational and technical education as the core of both individual's and society's economy in the sense that it equips the recipients with skills with which they could explore their environments and harness the available resources which could serve them and the society. Furthermore, Dike (2009) highlighted that Vocational and technical education constitutes an important proportion of national development strategies in many countries of the world. Similarly, Aina (2009) in a bid to stress the importance of Vocational and technical education stated that the role of technology in the transformation of economies and improvement in people's standard of living cannot be ignored. This is because technology is a dominant factor for initiating and accelerating human progress and development. Finally, Aina (2009) reported that because of the relevance of the practical training of Vocational and technical education, it would make Nigeria become relevant technologically and competitive in the world market.

A sustainable development is described as a form of development which does not compromise the benefits of the future generation for the present generation. This implies that it permits the future generations to live at least, like the present generation or even better thereby making the present generation to have the interest of the future generation in mind. Through this process, a foundation that would lead to improvement in their standard of living and environmental friendliness would be laid. It is expected that this would pave way for the betterment of the lives of the generations to come.

From the foregoing, it could be observed that Vocational and Technical Education has the potential of bringing about sustainable development in Nigeria. This is because the areas it covers include; Agricultural Education, Business Education, Fine And Applied Arts Education, Home Economics Education and Technical Education which on the basis of their natures, aims and objectives can all lead to sustainable

development. It is thus against this background that this paper looks at Vocational and technical education as a weapon for sustainable development in Nigeria.

The Concept of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE)

The term vocational and technical education is viewed differently by scholars and institutions based on their notions and orientations. Osuala (2004) posited that an attempt to define it often posed a problem because lack of commonly accepted terminology is a great problem to international communication.

As stated in the National Policy on Education (NPE) (2004), Vocational and technical education (VTE) is a comprehensive term which has to do with all the educational processes that in addition to the general education, also studies technologies and other related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitude, understanding and occupation related knowledge in different sectors of economic and social life. This implies that VTE has two basic components namely; general education which gives the recipients a broad based knowledge that would make them to be functional members of the society and technical and occupational skills that would prepare them for the world of work.

In the view of Ekong (2006), VTE is a specialized training organized either in a formal or informal setting for the purpose of imparting occupational skills to individuals or groups of individuals. This is aimed at enabling them to acquire skills that would make them render specialized services or become creative which at the end, would make them to be self employed and consequently, employers of labour. From this definition, it could be deduced that Ekong (2006) likened VTE to the acquisition of occupational skills and that it is an umbrella for employment generating courses like Business Education, Agricultural Education, Home Economics, etc which can greatly reduce the current level of unemployment in Nigeria.

The National Policy on Education (2004) highlights the following as the goals of vocational and technical education:

- i. To provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at crafts, advance crafts and technical level.
- ii. To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.
- iii. To give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically.

From the above, it is obvious that the government hopes that through VTE competent manpower that will turn the country for better would be produced. These people are also expected to be self-reliant thereby reducing the socio-economic

problem of the society. In addition to the provisions of the National Policy on Education (2004), Danko (2005), is of the conviction that VTE has an objective of making a lot of options available to people. This gives them the opportunity to opt for employment generating courses as opposed to the literary education which in Nigeria of today, cannot guarantee any employment. Finally, he sees it as a motivational force that would enhance all forms of learning. This implies that it will stimulate the recipients to be industrious. This is owing to the fact that they would be made to know that their life long success is a function of hard work.

Constraints Militating Against Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in Nigeria

Vocational and technical education, just like any other forms of education in Nigeria is faced with a lot of problems. These pose as constraints to the success of the programme. This was justified by Usman (2009) who pointed out that the educational sector in general started experiencing neglect since the 1980s which led to the gradual erosion of the system. Among these constraints are:

The Societal Perception of Vocation and Technical Education

Based on observation and experience, the society sees vocational and technical education as an education of less reputation. Salau (1998) specifically pointed out that people are of the notion that it aims at preparing youths for low status jobs and it is a dumping ground for the less able students (dropout, unintelligent and under achievers). He further stressed that this conception was confirmed by the government's acceptance of the Blueprint of the implementation committee on the 1979 National Policy on Education which recommended that vocational centres should be established in all the Local Governments across the country. To them, these centres will equip those that will not be admitted into Junior Secondary Schools with skills that will make them to be self employed or at least, get a lower level paid employment.

In the same vein, Mamukuyomi (2006) is of the conviction that the coming of western education was not favourable to the vocational and technical education. This is because the products of literary education had prospects for "white collar jobs" while for those of vocational and technical education, it is "blue collar jobs". This made people to think of it as being an inferior type of education. This does not augur well for the country because as Iheanacho (2006) puts it, it is only technical education that will change wood pulp into paper, crude oil into varieties of petroleum products, hides and skin into shoes, cotton into clothes, etc. Finally, Amoor (2010), revealed that based on the wrong perception on vocational and technical education and the fact that parents want their children to be prestigious, they discourage them from taking up careers in this field. Therefore, efforts should be intensified to put an end to such misconceptions

so as to make people to be positively disposed to the programme. Failure to this may be detrimental to people as Gardener in Aina (2009), stated:

The society that scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity, and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor philosophies. Neither its pipe nor its theories will hold water!

Poor Funding

This is the biggest problem confronting the vocational and technical education programme in Nigeria. As a skill based course, it requires a lot of funds which is not made available by the government. UNESCO recommends that a country should devote at least 26% of its annual budget to education, but available records show that Nigeria spends a negligible proportion of its budget on education. According to Aina (2009), “if education in general has fared poorly in funding, vocational and technical education has fared worst”. Furthermore, he revealed that the total budgetary allocations to vocational and technical education in the first, second and third National Development Plans were 0.10%, 0.36%, and 0.84% respectively. In line with these, Amoor (2010) is of the opinion that the government pays little attention to improve the teaching and learning of vocational and technical education. In same vein, Aturu (2011) holds the view that Nigerian politicians are insincere in their approaches to education and recommends that governments at all levels should strive to devote the UNESCO recommended 26% budgetary allocation to education. Finally he also suggests that 50% of the money should be devoted to vocational and technical education.

Taking a critical look at the presentation above, one would conclude that poor funding is responsible for the shortage of materials in vocational and technical schools. It also led to the continuous use of obsolete materials. Therefore to provide for the required technology needed for economic transformation of the Nigeria, there is the need for improved funding for the programme.

Acute Shortage of Vocational and Technical Teachers

Teaching is generally described as a “poor man’s job”. This discourages some people from taking up career in the profession. According to Nwachokor (2002), those who choose to teach are not well paid and motivated. To her, this led to mass exodus of teachers to other sectors of the economy. Based on this, a vacuum due to shortage of teachers has been created. Furthermore, Igweh and Ariba (2010) reported that the shortage is based on the fact that only a handful of institutions train vocational and technical education teachers in Nigeria. Government should therefore ensure that more institutions are training manpower in the field of VTE.

Obsolete Curriculum

Curriculum gives a sense of direction to teachers and takes cognisance of what the society needs to inculcate in the learners. According to Aina (2009), the curriculum in schools is outdated, and is not regularly revised in line with current practices. He thus, concluded that they are not functional to produce graduates with employable skills.

Lack of Candidates' Interest

Interest plays an important role in career choice. According to Amoor (2010), many people do not want to study vocational and technical education simply because of the nomenclature -Bachelor of Education (B.ED) which the degree carries. To him, this arises because most of them do not want to end up as teachers. Therefore, there should be societal re-orientation on the career opportunities in vocational and technical education. He also suggests that the nomenclature should be changed from B.Ed to Bachelor of Science Education (B. Sc.Ed). It should however be noted that some Nigerian universities are already using the suggested title. What is required more is societal re-orientation that all fields of study are useful to the society, teaching is a noble profession and there are many career opportunities in VTE.

An Overview of Concept of Sustainable Development in Nigeria

As put forward by Morris in ogbodo (2010), the concept of sustainable development is not a new one. This is because as early as the sixth century BC; Plato raised issues on unsustainable development in relation to the farming practices of his people. Morris in ogbodo (2010) also cited Tertullian as lamenting in AD 200 that

“... We men have actually become a burden to the earth; the fruits of nature hardly suffice to sustain us. There is a general pressure of scarcity giving rise to complaints, since the earth can no longer support us, need we be astonished that plague and famine, warfare and earthquake come to be regarded as remedies, serving, as if it were, to trim and prune the superfluity of population.”

The concept of sustainable development was however popularized as a result of the need to protect the environment which led to the Earth Summit of 1992 in Rio de Janeiro.

There are many authoritative definitions of sustainable development. According to Todaro and Smith (2006) it is defined as a “pattern of development that permits the future generations to live at least as well as the current generation.” They however, stated that from the economists' point of view, a path of development is said to be sustainable only if the overall stock of capital remains constant or rises over time. They also report that the implication of these is the fact that future growth and overall

quality of life to a greater extent depend on the quality of the environment. They further state that the natural resources of a country is a common heritage for all generations and in pursuance of short-term economic goals, the present and particularly the future generations are being penalized. Finally, they recommend that development policy makers should adopt the concept of *environmental accounting* which deals with the incorporation of the costs and benefits of the environment into qualitative analysis of economic activities. In the same vein, Lele in Oyeshola (2008) described sustainable development as “a new way of life and approach to social and economic activities for all societies, rich and poor which is compatible with the preservation of the environment.”

From the definitions above, it could be deduced that for development to be regarded as being sustainable, the present generation has to make provision for the generations to come. This implies that they should be good managers of the available resources and also be conscious of the environment. Sustainable development is thus a process of development which is equitable and sensitive to ecological and environmental issues. The ability of the society to record this type of development depends on the initiatives, resourcefulness, and discipline on the part of the human factor which is responsible for the management of the developmental programmes. On a final note, Aina (2009) pointed out that sustainable development is a new paradigm that establishes linkages across concepts like poverty alleviation, human rights, peace, and security, cultural diversity, biodiversity, food security, clean water and sanitation, renewable energy, preservation of the environment and sustainable use of the natural resources with the aim of ensuring a better quality of life for the present and the generations to come.

Vocational and Technical Education and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Nigeria is faced with a lot of developmental challenges. Technology is seen as an instrument for economic advancement of societies. This explains why the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Olateju (2010), promotes the adoption of vocational and technical education. The following explain how VTE can bring about sustainable development in Nigeria:

Socio-economic Development

It is the desire of every country to develop. To this, Nigeria is not an exception. It is however, the view of Iheanacho (2006) that Nigeria has not been able to progress like the Asian Tigers namely South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, etc and economic giants like Taiwan, China and Japan, because she is yet to adopt vocational and technical education as an instrument for socio-economic development. Furthermore, he stated that it (VTE) would transform Nigeria to become producer of secondary goods, producer rather than mere consumer nation, active exporter as

opposed to the present status of active importer as well as manufacturer and not an assembler of automobiles. All these, he believed would bring about an improved standard of living which is an indicator of national development. Similarly, Dike (2009), declared that “no nation can fight war without an army”. This implies that without well equipped vocational and technical institutions, Nigeria will not achieve its vision 20:20 20. In fact, it would end up as a mirage. Therefore, vocational and technical education should be given its rightful place in Nigeria’s educational system.

Entrepreneurial Development

Vocational and Technical Education equips and empowers entrepreneurs. According to Ojajuni (2010), this is possible because it equips its recipients with skills leading to environmental scanning which is among the characteristics of entrepreneurs. Furthermore, it stimulates people with the ability to bear risks as well as the acquisition of managerial skills which will lead to business success. These imply that it has the potentials of solving some of our developmental challenges such as unemployment and poverty. This follows that through the income which the employment opportunities will generate; people will be able to get income to be used in ameliorating their levels of poverty.

Production of Competent Manpower

Vocational and technical education can lead to the production of competent manpower needed for development. It was reported by Onwuchekwa (2010) that through its Employment and Training Act of 1973, Britain addressed its manpower needs with the use of technical vocational education and training (TVET). He also pointed out that developed countries lay emphasis on the need for skilled manpower necessary for economic securities. This, he said, is among the objectives of vocational and technical education. Vocational and technical education should therefore be highly encouraged through creating awareness on its relevance in bringing about sustainable development in Nigeria. Through this, it would help in addressing the problem of acute shortage of skilled manpower bedeviling the country. Furthermore, these people are expected to take the country to greater heights.

Skills for Utilization of Resources

Vocational and technical education equips the recipients with skills for utilizing the resources that are available in their environment. Through this, a sustainable development could be recorded in Nigeria. This is because development is made possible by an interaction between the human and the material resources in a society. Furthermore, Vocational and technical education gives the recipients the skills for reusing the discarded materials which could constitute nuisance in the environment for developmental purposes. For example, in the old Panteka market in Kaduna, North-West Nigeria, people that acquired Vocational and technical skills are using aluminum

materials to mould new things and also fabricate new things from discarded iron and steel materials. This reduces unemployment and also saves the environment from a lot of problems. The income they are generating is also having a multiplier effect in the sense that they are able to alleviate their levels of poverty and the taxes they pay to the government could be used in making provisions for the present and the generations to come.

Rural Transformation

Vocational and technical education has the potential of bringing about rural transformation. This is because it can lead to development of modern farming practices which if properly implemented would not put unnecessary pressure on the earth and also attract the rural areas to Nigerians. Similarly, if well motivated, the products of vocational and technical institutes can also contribute through providing some infrastructures in the rural communities just like what happened in Thailand immediately after the Tsunami of December 2004 as reported by Aina (2009) that “students from TVE institutions courageously abandoned their studies, mobilized their time and skills to assist in relief efforts as well as rebuilding activities” This can pave way for the rapid industrialization of the rural communities. With the presence of these, there would be growth of infrastructures in the rural communities and as such, it would help in curbing the menace of rural-urban drift which has led to population explosion in the urban centres as well as environmental problems and over utilization of resources in those areas.

Provision of Relative Security

Insecurity is a serious problem hindering sustainable development because it does a lot of harm to human societies. Unemployment and poverty are advanced as being among the causes of insecurity in the sense that an idle mind is said to be a devil’s workshop. Vocational and technical education is therefore seen as a tool for bringing about relative peace and security in Nigeria. This is based on the fact that it can equip the recipients with skills that would make them to be employable and self employed and anybody that engages in any economic activity would not have time for causing mayhem in the society.

Conclusion

Sustainable development is highly desirable to every society irrespective of its level of development. This is because it caters for both the present and the future generations in an environmental friendly manner. To achieve this, Nigeria aimed at being among the top twenty economies come year 2020 so as to lay a solid foundation for rapid and sustainable development. Based on the nature of Vocational and technical education, it is seen as a serious weapon for sustainable development in Nigeria in the sense that it can lead to socio-economic development in Nigeria, production of

competent manpower, entrepreneurial development, acquisition of skills for utilization of resources, rural transformation, etc. The implication of these is that education and especially the vocational and technical type should be given its rightful place in order to enable Nigeria benefit from the programme just as done by countries like England, United States of America, Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, etc and bring about quick and sustainable development that would take us out of our present predicaments.

Recommendations

In line with the points presented above and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations are suggested as the way forward:

There should be an Improved Funding for Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria

Funding is the life blood of any programme. Therefore, both the Federal and States governments should ensure that there is an improved funding for the vocational and technical education programmes in Nigeria. In line with this, they should strive to devote the UNESCO recommended 26% budgetary allocation to education. Furthermore, owing to the importance of vocational and technical education, recognition should be given to the recommendation of Aturu (2011) who suggested that 50% of the money (the 26% budgetary allocation) should be devoted to vocational and technical education. This is because it is a conglomerate of skill based courses that require a lot of equipments.

There Should be Societal Reorientation

Efforts should be geared toward changing people's perception on vocational and technical education. This can be done through public enlightenment through the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the mass media. It can also be done during career counseling in schools. Adopting these media would make the students and their parents/guardians to be sensitized and know that vocational and technical education is for all categories of students, a weapon that could bring about a rapid and sustainable development in Nigeria as well as having the potentials of making them to be job-creators/givers instead of being job seekers since it can make them to be self reliant. All things being equal, this process would stimulate youths' interests in vocational and technical education.

The Vocational and Technical Education Curriculum Should be Improved

The vocational and technical education curriculum should be subjected to periodical reviews that would pave way for updates in line with the current and global best practices. When this is done, it would make Nigeria to benefit immensely from the programme.

The Vocational and Technical Education Teachers Should be Motivated

The available manpower teaching vocational and technical education should be motivated to put in their best. This can be done through prompt payment of salaries, ensuring that they are promptly promoted, in-service trainings for updating their knowledge, etc. Finally, it should be noted that gone are the days when teachers were deceived that their rewards are in heaven. They should be allowed to start enjoying them now in this world!

There Should be Improvement in the Provision of Electricity Supply and Telecommunication Services

The current state of electricity supply in Nigeria is worrisome and no functional vocational and technical education can be possible without adequate power supply. Similarly, one cannot talk of sustainable development without regular power supply as well as effective telecommunication services.

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