VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION: PROMOTING EFFICIENT SKILL ACQUISITION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The most critical factor in the sustainable development matrix of any nation is the availability of adequately qualified skilledlabour. This holds true particularly for developing nations like Nigeriaas it grapples with unemployment, under-employment, poverty and insecurity which have kept the nation in perpetual economic frustration. Efficient skill labour is required to promotethe technology that will improve and sustain the economy. This can only be achieved under the auspices of vocational and technical education. This paper examines the significance of vocational and technical education with regards to efficient skill acquisition for sustainable development in Nigeria. It also highlights challenges confronting vocational and technical education and recommends among other things, that government at all levels should as a matter of urgency ensure functional vocational and technical education programmes at different levels of the educational system for the benefits of the nation and oncoming generations.

Keywords*:* Vocational and technical education, efficient skill acquisition, sustainable development.

Skill is a priceless weapon for sustainable technological and economic development of any nation of the world. Nigeria as a nation has come to realize this fact. The high level of insecurity, under-employment, unemployment, deprivation and poverty leave much to be desired, hence, the call on all her citizens to acquire productive and efficient skills is on the increase.

Skill has been defined as the ability to perform expertly, facility in performance, dexterity and tract (Hans, 2014). Hull (2015) defined skill as manual dexterity through the repetitive performance of an operation. Okerie and Ezeji (1988) defined skill as a well established habit of doing something involving the acquisition of performance capabilities in the most economic way. Hence skill is a well rehearsed method or technique of carrying out an economic function which is repeated with predictable regularity. Consequently, transfer of skill leads to skills acquisition.

Skill acquisition is the act of obtaining new knowledge through experience (Nwakanma, 2013). It can also be obtained through education, training or experience (Osawuru, 2014). Efficient skill acquisition is the act of obtaining new knowledge, experience and training for competent and proficient job performance (Okon, 2013). Efficient skill acquisition promotes competence, interest, job satisfaction and higher productivity. Application of efficient skill acquired promotes lifelong opportunities for self-development. Efficient skill acquisition is therefore important for a country to experience growth and for sustaining development.

In Nigeria, skill acquisition can be categorized into two types, namely the formal and non-formal types. In this paper only the formal type of skill acquisition will be discussed.

One of the most viable and efficient channels of formal skill acquisition known to man in modern time is through Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) (Ewuga, 2011). This is found to be the case with many industrialized nations of the world which have achieved technological greatness and prowess and have become economically self-reliant. As Nigeria races to meet up with the rest of the world in technological development, Ewuga observed that, it is glaring that the old tradition of skill acquisition (non-formal) can no longer meet the yearning of the Nigerian nation and hence the need for VTE.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2014) in the National Policy on Education (NPE) defines technical education as the aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. From national goals as stated in the NPE, it can be seen that the Federal Government attached much value to VTE.

The UNESCO (1978) defines VTE as a comprehensive term referring to the educational process when it involves, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skill and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. In line with the UNESCO definition of VTE, the NPE stated that VTE remains as an instrument for

promoting environmentally sound and sustainable development and method of alleviating poverty (FRN, 2014).

VTE provides employable skills to reduce poverty, help to apply acquired knowledge and skills for scientific and technological development and advancement of the nation (Ijebu, 2016). VTE is the best way for fighting poverty (Nwakanma, 2014). Smith (2015) states that VTE in its broad sense refers to the training that enable one to carry on successfully a socially useful occupation. Impliedly VTE provides trained manpower in applied science, industrial, agriculture, business and home making among others.

The VTE programmes offer arrays of skills needed for gainful employment in various fields of human endeavours. These skills which are sometimes manipulative in nature make one more employable in one sector of the economy or the other. Okon (2009) in Nwakanma (2015) stated that those in Business education could acquire managerial skills, information communication technology skill, human relation skill, job survival skill and accounting skills. Adeola (2008) observed that those in Home Economics education can acquire effective skills in food and nutrition, home management, textile and clothing, family and child care and hospitality. Alio (2011) stated that those in Technical education could obtain skills in design, construction, operation, maintenance and trouble-shooting while in Agricultural education, it provides individuals with skills in crop production, animal husbandry, pest control, weed management, and disease control and management. These skills acquired through VTE prepare and open large range of doors of either paid or self-employment opportunities and over 1,200 careers in different sectors of the economy (Nwakanma, 2015).

VTE is also intended to provide the skills and manpower for industrial and other engineering services required by the society for sustainable development. Manpower on the hand according to Okolie (2014) could be seen as the total supply of persons available and fitted for service. VTE is a process of getting people ready and keeping them ready for the types of services we need (Olaitan, 2015).

Presently, the use of information communication and technology (ICT) in skill acquisition has made VTE to go nuclear and global. The use of I.C.T in VTE has not only removed distance to skill acquisition, but has also simplified methods, training and procedures for skill acquisition. With the use of I.C.T, VTE skills can be acquired anywhere and anytime in an accelerated manner (Nwakanma, 2017).

VTE is not only a springboard for efficient acquisition of relevant skills but is also a sine-qua-non for manpower capacity building for sustainable development.

VTE and Sustainable Development

The importance of VTE as a reliable means of national development has been vigorously supported by observers of the technological and development of Nigeria. Abolade (1987) in Ewuga (2011) emphasized that for economic and technological

growth of any nation to be realized, functional education in terms of VTE is a necessity. He traced the successes of many nations in terms of economic power and self-reliance to their wisdom in investing heavily in VTE.

VTE also plays a major role in assisting nations to adjust to and adopt changes in technology. In view of the rapid technological revolution experienced all over the world, Nigeria cannot be left out of the race. The good result that developing countries such as Angola, Yemen, Ethiopia, India, Laos and Zimbabwe have reaped due to the introduction of VTE into their educational system speaks volume. It is pertinent, therefore to recognize that, if Nigeria is to achieve sustainable development, she must prioritize VTE as the most viable means of skill acquisition.

Evans (2014) reiterated that employable skills are essential for sustainable development. He stressed that if education is a means of preparing for life and if practically everyone's life and opportunities for self expression and self-fulfillment include work, then only the successfully employable are successfully educated. For Nigeria as a nation to reduce unemployment and its associated problems, our system of occupational preparation must ensure a constant supply of saleable skills to all her youths and no door should be closed to their future progress and development (Ewuga, 2011).

In their quest to achieving sustainable development through skill acquisition, the Federal and State governments established technical/technological institutions. These institutions are oriented toward the holistic development of man's three educational domains namely, the cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The implication is that vocational and technical institutions have higher probability of producing competent workers since their mental and manual skills, values and attitudes have been adequately developed as a result of training requirement. Steve (2012) observed that the provision of VTE through the auspices of these training institutions is not problem free.

VTE and Challenges

There are a number of factors which have in various proportions impeded the smooth operation and implementation of VTE. Ekpenyong (2011) noted that the outstanding ones include:

Inadequate Teacher Supply

The short supply of VTE teachers in their right specifications and numbers for the different vocational and technical programmes such as agriculture, home economics, technical and business studies at secondary, tertiary and teacher training levels has continued to standout as a major impediment to the smooth implementation of government policy on VTE. The implication of inadequate technical teacher supply is apparently lack of the will by the government to embark on a really ambitious technical-vocational teacher education programme within the country.

Lack of Instructional Facilities

VTE, as conceived in the policy document requires a generous outlay of instructional equipment. A walk around most Nigerian secondary schools and professional institutions show that these subjects are in most cases taught theoretically and in some cases are not taught at all for lack of necessary equipment. Lack of electricity or personnel; where the equipment broke down, to put them back to use has remained a problem due to lack of competent local maintenance personnel. This situation in schools and technical colleges in Nigeria has been blamed partly on government low interest in VTE and partly on the lean financial resources of government.

High Cost of Administration

The execution of VTE programme is highly capital intensive in relation to general education programme. While general education programme such as the humanities may only need the building of a lecture hall, technical programmes generally require in addition, the building and equipping of special workshops and laboratories. All these cost a large sum of money of which the government appears unable to meet adequately in view of other pressing national priorities. Now that it appears that the economy can no longer support most vital areas of development of which VTE is one, it is only reasonable to suggest recourse for assistance from national and multi-national donor agencies. Such assistance if properly used can go a long way in helping the government to finance most of her critical technical education projects.

Misinterpretation of VTE

Some of the clauses contained in the NPE appear to foster misinterpretation of the mission, scope and status of VTE in Nigeria. To state for instance, that VTE should aim at providing trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce "**particularly at sub-professional grades**" could be interpreted to mean that VTE is limited to preparation of low and middle-level manpower only (FRN, 2014). Also, if technical education is the form of remedial, vocational or apprenticeship training is the next fit place for school drop-outs and completers, who cannot for any reason, get into the mainstream of general education; it can only be regarded as a base or second-rate education in the public eyes.

Poor Condition of Service for Technical Teacher

In most state education system, the conditions under which Vocational/Technical teachers work appear somewhat appalling: essential instructional tools are hard to come by, incentive packages rank almost the lowest when compared with their contemporaries in other fields. This leads to job performance, dissatisfaction, low self-esteem and sometimes outright resignation from the service to more attractive sectors of the economy.

Prospect of VTE in Nigeria

It is hoped VTE will adequately equip students to be more effective in this age of science and technology and to raise a generation of people who can think for themselves and respect the dignity of labour and propel its citizenry into blossoming economic ender ado (Uwaifo, 2011). It will also produce workers with good technical skill background, rugged enough to transform Nigeria into a positive technological breakthrough with the ability to meet its immediate demands.

VTE aims at helping the society maintain its material civilization by enabling the individual to keep pace with the rapidly changing industrial and technological development. VTE must be seen as an instrument for transforming Nigeria's resources into finished goods and services that will promote higher standard of living (Uwaifo, 2011).

Conclusion

VTE in Nigeria is the pivot of any national development. It is when the individual in the micro setting are self-reliant that macro economy becomes buoyant and stable. VTE bridges the gap between people without job and without hope; it guarantees either self-or paid employment. VTE is designed to meet the employment needs of the particular areas of the economy. Trainees can become wage earners, becoming more useful and productive citizens who will be assets to the society rather than liabilities.

Therefore, VTE is the live wire of technology, economic growth and sustainable development. To plan and develop any economy in which VTE is not developed is a task in futility.

Recommendation

From the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. The public, employers of labour and the products of VTE programmes should serve as a source of determining the efficacy, efficiency and effectiveness of VTE based programme.
2. VTE as a matter of urgency should through a comprehensive retraining in service programme and research work improve their quality.
3. Technical education teachers should be encouraged to keep up to date in ICT knowledge in relation to their occupational skills.
4. Through seminars and workshops, government should deplore the general public attitude, which regards VTE as somewhat inferior to other types of education.
5. Government at all levels should ensure equitable distribution of technical teachers nationwide.
6. Improvement of career prospects of technical teachers should be addressed by the government.

7. Government should provide and maintain instructional facilities in all vocational and technical training institutions.

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