

THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN SKILL ACQUISITION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper discussed the role played by vocational and technical education in relation to skill acquisition. It clearly described it as education that emphasised the acquisition of practical and manipulative skills in addition to moral training for building a useful citizen. It continued with a step backward to the development of vocational education during the colonial and pre-colonial era. During that time, the type of skills acquired was not as systematic as that of today but was effective because it served the purpose it was meant for. Our formal system of skill acquisition today is criticised for ineffectiveness. And was among the factors that were responsible for the failure of most government programmes aimed at poverty reduction, job creation, and wealth and employment generation. Lastly the paper discussed the problems that lead to the ineffectiveness of the skills acquired, that was tied around poor funding, and finally possible solutions to the problems was also discussed.

Key words: skill acquisition, vocational and technical education.

1. Introduction

Skill acquisition is the process of obtaining necessary knowledge and ability in order to function in a

particular occupation. Babalola, (2007) explained that vocational education and training provides skills, knowledge and attitude required for work. These are the

attitude to survive (heart), skill for self-reliance (hands) and knowledge to subdue (head). He further explained that, skills provide an individual with the necessary knowledge; knowledge lead to attitudinal change and the desire to produce more, to produce better products and to be useful to oneself. Ahukannah and Nyanabu, (2007) describe Vocational technical education as formal and informal education that leads to acquisition of practical and manipulative skills designed to produce manpower at the craftsman and artisan level, while the combination of vocational and technical education can lead to acquisition of practical, applied skills and basic scientific knowledge, that is technical education is a higher level of education than vocation education.

Therefore, vocational and technical education is an instrument that can be used for national development, especially youth empowerment programmes. Furthermore, it is an education that is very much suitable to each and every individual either educated or not. The negligence of both formal and informal vocational and technical education institutions in Nigeria has raised a lot of social and economic problems in various societies and the nation at large. For instance, the level of youth restiveness that has gone beyond controlled levels – quite a number of school dropouts with no defined skills or occupation to enable them earn their living. They were rendered helpless and have to sought for themselves means of earning a living even in

illegal ways; for instance they were used by political leaders to create problems in the communities, others were being used by bad citizens to achieve their goals such as the rampant cases of robbery in the Banks, youths residing and on the high ways, and above all the issue of bomb blast that is on the increased in Nigeria today.

The solutions to these problems could be by means of functional vocational and technical education right from the secondary school. UNESCO (2002) defines vocational and technical education as an educational process which involved in addition to general education the study of technical and related sciences and acquisition of practical skills and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of the economy and social life.

The National policy on education (2004) has the following as goals of vocational and technical education:

- provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at the craft, advanced craft and technical levels;
- provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development;
- give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically.

Vocational and technical education is the sector of education that is charged with the responsibility of providing the basis for development of self-competency, employability skill and entrepreneurial culture. It deals with skills development for labour market. It is geared towards building of career; the type of career that will save a country from unemployment and other social problems. It is the pathway to any vocational, technological, commercial, agricultural as well as scientific success. That is why any country with appropriate technical know-how is bound to have less educational, technological and social problems.

This came into existence as a result of the National curriculum conference of 1969 which defined vocational and technical education as those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and acquisition of practical skills, attitude, understanding and knowledge occupation in various sectors of the economy and social life.

Government initiatives on skill acquisition

Nigerian government had realised the fact that no nation will develop socially and economically without its citizens being stocked with vast vocational and technical skills. The only way to achieve that is through effective policies and programmes on the issue. Those programmes cannot be feasible without skill acquisition and job creation.

Achieving that can lead a country to attain industrial development, wealth creation, poverty reduction and above all improved standard of living. Among the policies and programmes formulated are those that can be achieved through co-opting and enhancing vocational and technical education into formal educational system and those that can be achieved through development of government agencies.

Osuala, quoting Aina (2009) explains that, during the colonial regime, the first institution initiated by the government concerning vocational technical education was the Nassarawa Government School, it was followed by Yaba Technical College in 1948 providing vocation and technical education in different areas including technical teacher training. Between 1956 and 1960, several vocational and technical schools were opened in various parts of the country. Another initiative was the coming up of 6-3-3-4 system of education that leads to the establishment of more technical schools. Colleges of technologies (polytechnics, monotchnics and colleges of education technical) and universities of technologies were at the increase. Others include the incorporating of vocational technical education into curriculum of engineering, medicine, environmental sciences and business management. Entrepreneurial skill was introduced in all advanced level students curriculum to inculcate the spirit of self-employment to our youth. Students industrial works scheme (SIWES) is another effort to make students bridge the gap between

theories taught at school and the practical in the world of work.

At the agencies level (non-formal education level), there were programmes like Operation Feed the Nation and Green Revolution programmes with the aim of job creation providing food security through enlightenment on the use of mechanised farming. Trade centres were established at various local government headquarters and special vocational and cottage industries for training youths in various trades. Better Life for Rural Women and Family Economic Advancement Programmes were initiated at different times for improving the economic activities of women at the grass root level. Others include National Directorate for employment (NDE), with programmes like National Open Apprentice Scheme (NOAS) under it. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) seven points agenda, Vision 20 2020 and Millennium Development Goal (MDG). Not long ago, the Director General of the NYSC, Brigadier General Maharazo Tsiga announced the enrolment of 70 serving corps members on skill acquisition training in Germany and USA respectively, (June 2011).

Development of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria

Vocational and technical education and training has been in existence in Nigeria since 14th century, during the pre-colonial era. That time, skill acquisition in vocational and technical

education was in an informal way. Fafunwa (1974), explains that the aim of vocational education in traditional society is character training, job training and job-orientation. Traditional vocational education was divided into three: agricultural education, trade craft and professions. There were no specific institutions for learning, curriculum or period of training. The learner lived with his master throughout the period of training. The usual way of training was that children were not trained by their parents but by relatives, master craftsmen in a particular field to ensure concentration and install discipline. The instructional method was through observation and imitation of the master.

Our traditional vocational education was not welcomed by the colonial masters. Their educational system was non-vocational oriented in the place. Perhaps it was due to the expensive nature of it. Organised technical and vocational education in Nigeria was started by non-indigenous companies like Shell BP and UAC to train artisans among their employees. Aliyu and Dabban, (2009) explained that government establishments like Nigeria Railway, marine, public works, etc., embarked on training their employees only. The training acquired was to serve the skills needed by that particular company at that particular time. There was no arrangement for examination neither issuances of any certificate or any means to improve the learners ability to accomplish more complex task.

The first technical institute established in Nigeria was the Hope Waddell institute Calabar in (1885) with the aim of providing education in rudiments training in the technical trades and teacher education. The first vocational and technical institute to be established in Nigeria was the Yaba Higher College (1948) as seen in Aina (2009), with the motive of training Artisans, Craftsmen and Technicians, together with teachers of technical education to teach in the trade centres. Skills acquired during the pre-independent period should have gone beyond technicians' level.

According to Nyanabu and Ahukannah (2008), in Nigeria today, we have over 40 federal and state technical colleges, federal colleges of education, state colleges of education, federal polytechnics, state polytechnics, federal and state Universities of technology and a number of colleges of Agriculture and forestry. Various skills have been acquired at various levels and in various fields from these institutions. Thousand of students graduate annually with vast technical knowledge as to man different sectors of our economy.

Therefore what happens to the skills acquired previously that is termed as unsystematic but seems to be more effective and efficient, since during the pre-colonial era, vocational and technical education skills hold the axis of the country's economy which cut across the extractive, manufacturing and commercial sectors of the economy (Nyanabo and Ahukannah, 2008).

Why did the present systematised type of skills acquisitions a point on the list of major contributors of the country's depressed economy? Why do people assumed that the skills acquired informally (in the previous years) is more functional than the ones acquired presently in our institutions?

Problems of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria

The issue of Vocational and technical education has not been considered in Nigeria today, it has not been given the attention it deserves unlike the other sectors of the economy, for example health, this negligence of this sector by the Nigerian government leads to some obstacles in national development.

Emphasis in Nigerian educational institutions has been on academic qualification instead of skill acquisition and problem solving activities. According to Aworonti (2007), there is a wide gap between the curriculum content being taught in the tertiary institutions, that is, the theoretical aspect and the practical skills needed by the employees of labour and the world of work.

Lack of resources, poor funding of vocational and technical education which resulted in the problems such as inadequate teachers, low quality of students, epileptic power supply as observed by Aina (2009) lead to short supply of knowledgeable and competitive workforce, In the same vein, Adesina in (2006), highlights on the quantity and quality of teacher. UNESCO

as reported by Aina (2009), concludes that the aims of various government to combat poverty through the establishment of different programme aimed at job creation and poverty reduction have failed and many have continue to fail because graduates of our various higher institutions lack the necessary practical skills. Value re-orientation, poverty reduction, wealth creation and employment generation commonly known in Nigeria as NEEDS (National Economic Empowerment and Developments Strategy) can hardly be accomplished without developing Technical and Vocational education.

Strategies for Skill Acquisition in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

1. Establishment of more skill acquisition centres, where by primary school leavers and secondary school drop-outs should acquire skills like carpentry, fashion design, beauty saloon, cleaning ventures, laundry services, photography services, soap making. Others are engineering workshops, motor mechanic workshop, shoe manufacturing, panel beating, book binding, welding, etc. Should all be included at the various skill acquisition centres?
2. All facilities required for the trades are to be put in place in order to enhance training in all trades in the skill acquisition centres.
3. Guidance and counselling units should be put in place in all the skill

acquisition centres and technical colleges so as to create career awareness to the trainees.

4. Teachers at all levels of learning in vocational and technical education institutes should be retrained so that they will update their knowledge to fill the gap between school training and the industries.
5. Establishment of functional skill acquisition centres at all institutions of learning (from primary schools to higher institutions) so that each and every student will learn at least a trade before graduation.
6. Establishment of a special scheme whereby interested graduates will be supplied with take up equipment on non-interest basis.

Recommendations

As elaborated by Aliyu (2006), one of the qualities of good leadership in a nation is to ensure that its citizens acquire quality education, since the productivity of a nation depends on the citizens' level of education and their involvement in productive activities. Education improves understanding and inculcates respect for others. It brings socio-cultural changes and creates awareness of their environment. Democracy and equality investment in education does not end as a means for earning alone, it helps the overall societal development, therefore human development should be enhanced through sound education. According to Oliver in Aliyu (2006), there are three (3)

major components in any curriculum in vocational and technical education which are classified as follows:

- The programme of study; at any school level include the subject as reflected in the school syllabus.
- Programme of activities; this entitles all the activities capable of enhancing the academic experience of the students.
- Programme of guidance; which assist the students to acquire the capability for self-direction and self-guidance.

As we can see on point two (2) above, it shows that in vocational and technical education, the issue of skill acquisition has been in existence but the problems lie with its implementation due to lack of training facilities (Aina, 2009). Equal emphases should be laid both on education as well as on skill acquisition activities, laboratories and workshops should be well equipped to train the students on what they have learned theoretically and translate them to practical aspects. All these problems were encountered as a result of inadequate funding. In reality vocational and technical education is an expensive project that receive funds only from the government through external aid, special funds and internally generated revenue which is highly insufficient. There is a great need for the involvement of individual and organisation, (Ahukannah and Nyanabo, 2008).

This issue of inadequate funding leads to low quality of students, unprepared teachers leads to short supply of required knowledge and competitive skill force. Aina (2009) highlights the following recommendation based on the laid down problem of vocational and technical education; thus there should be:

- a sustainable technical teacher formation scheme, so as to ensure the availability of good quantity and specialise staff in the institutions.
- practical allowance known as technical teacher allowance (TTA) of at least 10% of basic salary to be introduced as incentive for technical teachers.

The former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo (2000) as reported by Aina (2009) states that technical and vocational education with its relevant practical training component holds the key in the society which is becoming technologically relevant and internationally competitive in the world market. The acquisition of relevant and appropriate technology accomplished by a well-trained manpower is the most effective means of empowerment to the citizens to stimulate and sustain national development, enhance employment, improve the quality of life, reduce poverty, limit incidences of social vices due to joblessness and promote a culture of peace, freedom and democracy. Technical and vocational education will be popularised, embraced and elevated above the present mediocre

level if we are to experience genuine development. Nigeria should as a matter of genuine attempt to achieve a sustainable development, achieve the UNESCO (2002) recommended 5% enrolment into technical education.

Conclusion

Improving skill acquisition in vocational and technical education will no doubt solve Nigerians' tripartite problems. That is the educational, social as well as economic problems. It

is obvious that no nation will achieve any meaningful development with larger percentage of its youth rendered unemployed. That's why today all developing nations were striving hard to overcome problems of unemployment, especially among its youth and Nigeria is not in isolation. A lot of programmes were introduced to tackle the issues (unemployment), and the easiest way to achieve that goal is by improving skill acquisition through vocational and technical education.

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