

EMERGING ISSUES IN VOCATION AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (VTE) FOR SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Vocation and technical education (VTE) is an area in Education that delivers knowledge, skills and competences required in specific occupations. VTE education brings development necessary to increase skilled workforce for modernization, human capacity development and empowerment. The need for VTE is of great importance to any society, as it provides entrepreneurial skills, improving competences necessary in a competitive knowledge-based society, and making people self-reliant. However, VTE in Nigeria is currently bedevilled with a number of issues which ranges from poor funding, lack of awareness and Government policy. Nigeria with a population of over 200 million, has a relatively large workforce with lack of “employability” skills needed for the growing economy. These skills and knowledge are often acquired from vocational and technical schools. This paper however examined the concept of VTE and its role in nation building and development. It also presents insights into the current state of VTE in Nigeria, policies, challenges, as well as the future of VTE in providing needed sustainable development in Nigeria workforce. The paper therefore concludes that if VTE is given proper attention and funding, it can provide the necessary succour to a growing number of unemployed youths, and youth restiveness, as they can be gainfully engaged and have no time for idleness and restiveness.

Introduction

For any nation or region to develop and thrive economically or socially, the need for education is of great importance and plays a key factor by way of human capacity development so as to increase skilled workforce for modernization, developing capacity, empowerment, and social integration (Ubom et al, 2013). However, the level of economic development of a nation especially a developing nation like Nigeria depends on the type of education provided to its growing population given the need for a balanced development through all of the education sectors so as to make significant progress towards national and economic development.

Education that provides skilled workforce which tends to transform to employment opportunities and resourcefulness is required to build a thriving workforce for any nation. Nigerians over the years have focused more on acquiring degree, or diploma certificates in various fields so as to enable them get white collar jobs, without learning any corresponding technical or vocational skills to complement their knowledge (Olaleye, 2023). Nigeria is terribly lagging behind in preparing its workforce for the 21st century development. No nation would make any meaningful socioeconomic stride without well-equipped technical and vocational and technical training. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2019 has noted that revitalizing this important sector is among the ways to improve economic opportunities for the youths. The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and teachers in this area should take up the campaign for more funds for technical and vocational education and to launder its image.

Vocational and technical education (VTE) is an aspect or type of education that encompasses the preparation and training of students or participants with necessary technical skills, knowledge, and competences required in specific occupations or generally the labour market. Abdulahi,

(2014) described VTE as a type of education that involves the acquisition of techniques and application of the knowledge of science and technical skills for the development and improvement of man's immediate environment. Technical and vocational education prepares an individual for the task ahead in the real world so as to make them self-reliant and can contribute to the economic and social development of the society.

Okwelle and Ayonmike (2014) observed that technical and vocational education plays an important role in a country's human resource development through the creation of skilled manpower, improving the quality of life and enhancing the country's industrial productivity.

Neglect in vocation and technical education (VTE) is one of the challenges we are having today as a nation, and as a developing nation especially in areas of job creation, industrialization, as well as economic development as a whole are all due to lack of policies and funding for technical education. VTE is an area in educational system, and acts as the pivot for technological and economic growth. The importance of VTE cannot be overemphasized as it develops a person's practical skills, and knowledge, as well as affords them the training (on-the-job, out-of-school, artisans) to advance their proficiency in preparation for a present or future job, and for career development that enable them to be self-reliant through employment creation, and capacity development.

Concept of VTE

Vocational and technical Education (VTE) is an integral part of education that allows the individuals or learners to obtain skills that can be translated into economic opportunities (Akerle, 2017). Dike (2013) defined VTE as type of education that is geared towards the development and acquisition of technical skills and basic scientific knowledge. A planned program of courses and learning activities begins with exploring potential job possibilities and social integration. Vocational Education "prepares learners for careers that are based in manual or practical activities. In other words, it is an "education designed to develop occupational skills." Vocational and technical education gives individuals the skills to "live, learn and work as a productive citizen in a global society."

VTE is simply an aspect of education designed to teach and prepare learners physically, practically and psychologically for career and skills needed to become self-reliant. These skills are aimed at producing individuals who are resourceful, functional and can contribute immensely towards the development of the society, hence improving the workforce of the nation. The objective of Vocational Education in Nigeria as stated in the "National Policy on Education Revised" (2004:4) is the inculcation of practical learning and skills as well as basic scientific knowledge in students. The specific policy objectives are: preparation for useful living within the society; and preparation for higher education ("National Policy on Education", 2004, p.30).

Impact of VTE on workforce development in Nigeria

Technical and vocation education in Nigeria is an area in Education that has been neglected and have not been given the much necessary attention. Vocational and technical education plays an important role in driving the necessary development or growth in workforce development in any society. As the country strives to meet the demands of a saturated job market, it is essential to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in various industries. Research has shown that employers of labour today demand more of skills than they did in the past. Oranu (2019) observed that one of the many factors that have contributed to the ever-rising demand for skills in the labour market include the technological and organizational change, and too much dependence and emphasis on university Education in Nigeria which reduces the economic opportunities of those who are less skilled or just academics oriented leading to an

increase in job scarcity and unemployment, with hundreds of thousands of graduate churned out every quarter of the year (Ojimba, 2019).

By providing hands-on training and practical experience, vocational and technical education (VTE) helps in bridging the gap between education and employment. Modules in VTE not only prepare individuals for specific careers but also contribute to the overall economic growth of the nation by way of increased workforce and revenue generation. With a focus on practical skills and industry-standard training, VTE are essential components in the development of an effective workforce that can meet the 21st century demand in Nigeria.

VTE stimulates growth in the technological and industrial sector to meet with the growing workforce through the development of competent and skilled individuals who are capable of utilizing the abundant natural and human resources available in Nigeria for economy and industrial revolution and development. Through VTE local goods and technology are developed by indigenous technicians and technologists. It should be emphasized here that every society has its own peculiar problems. Therefore, it will take the ingenuity of local artisans, craftsmen, technicians and technologists to design and fabricate tools, equipment and simple or complex machines to solve local problems. This eventually will save the nation billions of Naira or Dollars in foreign currency that would have been used in importing machines, most of which break down shortly on arrival in the country because they were not designed for our peculiar environment (Ojimba, 2012).

Through Vocational and technical education, there is an increase in the training and development of local artisans, craftsmen, technicians and technologists with so much ingenuity and skills that will hence design and fabricate tools, equipment and simple or complex machines to solve local problems, and also advances the development of local technology which are developed by indigenous technicians and technologists. This therefore opens up more employment opportunities, and increasing the workforce. Vocational and technical education also It should be emphasized here that every society has its own peculiar problems.

Emerging issues and challenges in Vocation and technical education in Nigeria

A major antidote to the problem of unemployment in Nigeria and building a viable workforce is through the development and promotion of vocation and technical education in schools, which holds solution for youth restiveness and unemployment in the country through acquisition of skills and technical knowledge to produce individuals such as artisans, craftsmen, technicians and technologists. However, a number of challenges has limited VTE in schools in Nigeria.

Some of the problems are:

- One of the prevalent problems limiting vocational and technical education in Nigeria is lack of funding or inadequate funding. As a result of poor funding, lack of equipment, accommodation, workshops, training materials and money for maintenance of equipment, many of the institutions of higher learning producing vocational teachers, have been limited in delivering the course work (Etuk and Asukwo, 2015). This has therefore affected the implementation of quality teaching and learning of vocational and technical education in Nigeria.
- Lack of instructional materials and facilities is another factor limiting VTE in developing the workforce in the country. Apart from the shortage or lack of basic facilities, there are also cases of lack of teaching materials especially textbooks to aid the learning of students, tools and equipment, teaching aids, as well as qualified VTE teachers. The lack of materials has made teaching and learning VTE in schools has limited the study of VTE in schools.

- Political will and Government policies plays a key role in ensuring the study and effectiveness of VTE study in Nigeria. Worrying cases of deficient educational monitoring and evaluation procedures, inadequate funding, administrators' misconception of the nature of VTE, poor incentives for VTE teachers are some of the problems affecting
- Most parents especially the elite in the society prefers or pushes their children to obtain University degrees irrespective of the course of study, and even though they are not academically or intellectually capable of studying the course of study. They do not want their children to become labourers, or blue-collar jobs as they are commonly referred to as (Alam, 2017).

Conclusion

Vocational and technical education is also a form of education that promotes and encourages the acquisition of technical skills and the related competences. VTE has shown to be one of the most viable and reliable instruments for economy transformation. VTE places emphasis on the development of occupational and technical skills and training needed to work and earn a useful and lawful living as well as gain full employment. The application of the skills learnt in VTE will translate to gainful employment and hence improve the current declining workforce strength in Nigeria.

Recommendations

VTE has shown to be a major antidote to the problem of workforce development in Nigeria, hence effort should be put in the development and promotion of VTE education. Aside VTE the introduction of entrepreneurial skills study and acquisition should also be included into the curriculum of tertiary education. Other recommendations are given below.

- **Government funding or funding scheme for VTE:** To improve VTE in institutions, Government needs to increase or ensure continuous funding of VTE in institutions of learning. Special funds should be allocated yearly for the purpose of VTE in Nigeria. Also scheme such as financial aids in the form of grants, sponsorships and loans to students who are undergoing VTE training in any institution should be introduced to help indigent students.
- **Re-orientating Parent and student perception towards VTE:** Parent and students needs to be re-educated on their perception and believes on VTE and should be made to see the importance of VTE in achieving sustainable workforce development in Nigeria. To achieve this, successful entrepreneurs and role model should be invited for conferences and workshops to speak to student on the importance of VTE in curbing unemployment and improving the economy of the country.
- **Introducing recent and innovative technology into VTE:** With the advancement in technology and its adoption in every facet of our society, effort should be made to introduce trending innovative technologies such as state of the art computer lab, internet, AI or robotics learning studio, and other trending innovation in VTE training. Obsolete and old facilities or equipment should be discarded and made away it.
- **Integrating graduate training (GT) programmes and internship into VTE:** To ensure graduates become self-reliant, the need to introduce schemes or programs such as graduate training or internship to student after their successful VTE training is of great importance. This should span for a number of years e.g 2 to 4 years, so as to ensure they get in-dept knowledge of their craft and skills, and also master the salient aspect in the business that will guarantee their sustainability.

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