

Vocational and Technical Education: A Tool for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the importance of vocational and technical education towards enhancing sustainable development in Nigeria. The concepts of sustainable development, challenges, strategies and the role of vocational and technical education as appropriate tools towards development of both individuals and the nation at large are discussed in this paper. This is more so as problems facing the country among others, range from unemployment, high rate of poverty and insecurity of lives and property. The strategies for re-designing vocational and technical education are also discussed. Recommendations were made that would make for sustainable human and national development.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, human capital, vocational education.

Introduction

The development of any nation hinges on the social and economic contributions of her citizens. Educational, vocational and technical training plays a major role at promoting community and national development (Oguntuyi, 2013). Vocational and technical education facilitates the acquisition of applied skills and basic scientific knowledge. It is a planned programme of course and learning experiences that begin with the exploration of career options, supports basic, academic and life skills, and enables the achievement of high academic standards, leadership, preparation for industry and continuing education (CTE, 2009). Unfortunately, Nigeria does not seem to give vocational and technical education the attention it deserves. This appears to be one of the reasons for rising rate of unemployment and poverty in the society. The growing problem of unemployment in the country has contributed largely to the worsening problem of poverty among the populace. This is because the youth and graduates from tertiary institutions are not equipped with adequate skills that will enable them exploit the natural resources that abound in Nigeria.

Olaitan (1996) posits that unemployment leads to frustration and disillusionment which may result in crime or drug abuse in a futile attempt to escape from and forget the pains and humiliation associated with poverty and lack. The problem of unemployment, he further stated, has worsened as millions of school leavers and graduates of tertiary institutions are not gainfully employed. The reason is that they lack the necessary occupational skills that would enable them to be self employed and effectively function in today's world of work. Occupational skills can be achieved through vocational and technical education. Okorie (2001) asserts that vocational education can be conceived as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of educational process involving the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. Abdullahi (1994) maintains that vocational and technical education involves the acquisition of techniques and the application of the knowledge of the science for the improvement of man's surrounding. This includes dealing with manpower training in professional areas as engineering, agriculture, business, home economics, etc. The skills involve practical works and application that lead to particular occupation.

May (2007) says that the neglect of technical education in the area of adequate personnel, financial support and facilities to encourage vocational and technical education is robbing the nation of some contributions their graduates would have made to the economy. Ayodele (2006) identified the problem of irrelevant education that is bookish, theoretical and 'white collar job' oriented. In addition, government programmes are not designed to promote vocational and technical education. The level of infrastructural development and facilities provided by the government are affecting, to a very large extent, the level of skill acquisition in the country. The high rate of insecurity as exemplified in kidnapping, prostitution, arm robbery has relationship with unemployment and poverty. It is against this back drop that this paper is looking at vocational and technical education as an imperative for sustainable national development in Nigeria.

The Concept of Vocational and Technical Education

Education is said to be the common property of everyone, the prime creator and conveyor of knowledge and in a facet, the most complex human endeavour (Galadima, 2003; Ammani & Ogunyinka, 2011). In other words, it is the only means through which a society can become better. Olaitan (1996) defines vocational and technical education as the form of education which emphasises the development of occupational skills needed for preparation of work. It is a form of education which promotes dignity of labour by entrenching work as goal of

education. To Okoro (1993), vocational and technical education is “any form of education which primary purpose is to improve persons for employment in recognised occupations”. This is to say vocational education provides skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for effective employment in specific occupations.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) stipulated aspects of vocational education as:

- i) An integral part of general education;
- ii) A means of preparing for occupational fields and effective participation in the world of work;
- iii) An aspect of lifelong learning and preparation for responsible citizenship;
- iv) A method of facilitating poverty alleviation. These are consistent with those found in UNESCO (2002) reports.

Vocational and technical education, therefore, gives individuals the skills to “live, learn and work” as a productive citizen in a global society.

Vocational and technical education system plays a crucial role in the social and economic development of a nation (Nwogu, 2009). Owing to their dynamic nature, vocational and technical education is continuously subjected to forces that drive change in schools, industries and society. It has an important role to play in economic and industrial growth, employment generation and, by implication, poverty alleviation.

Concept of sustainable national development

According to Nwogu (2009), the well being of any nation largely depends on its sustainable economic development. The concept of sustainable development has become a global medium for expressing the need to depart from hitherto dominant models of development that apparently fail to balance the needs of people and the planet in the pursuit of peace and prosperity (Wals, 2009)

Usoro, Usoro, Akpan & Otu (2010), define development in terms of reduction in the levels of poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment and income inequality. However, Dike(2007) emphasizes that, “national development encompasses social and political development as well as economic development defined as the attainment of a number of ideas of modernization such as a rise in productivity, social and economic equity, improved institutions and values”. Economic development is thus an important part of general development in any society. The main objective of economic development is to raise the standard of living and the general wellbeing of the people in an economy where almost everybody can be self-reliant.

Problems of Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria

There are a number of challenges facing vocational and technical education which has impacted negatively on national development in Nigeria. Vocational and technical degrees are regarded as inferior to regular academic degrees hence acute shortage of vocational technical teachers.(Oguntuyi, 2013). Further, Ekpenyong (2008) identifies lack of adequate training facilities. He stressed that about 50% of the institutions running vocational and technical education in Nigeria are yet to meet approved national standards. In many of the schools, basic facilities such as furniture, laboratories, running water, electricity, machines, computers, etc. are missing.

Amoor (2008) also highlighted funding of vocational and technical education programme as inadequate. Financial sustainability facilitates the development of knowledge which requires innovative measures so as to ensure that public vocational and technical education institutions are not deprived of much needed resources for their future expansion.

Nwanaka & Amaehule (2011) also identify lack of awareness about vocational business education programmes at various levels of school curricula as other shortcomings. In their view, it has taken the educationist working for the government more than twenty years to develop the national policy and the curriculum, yet the general public do not seem to understand the implication of business education in the development of the economy.

Vocational and Technical Education: A Strategy for Sustainable National Development

Nation building or development has to be sustainable in practical terms. This, however, is dependent on available resources, the ability to optimize the application of these resources beneficially as well as keeping the physical environment safe, healthy, stable and highly conducive. Sustainability, according to the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising future generations’ opportunities to meet their own needs. Sustainability includes a just and peaceful society, gender equality, and intergenerational equity.

Vocational and technical education constitutes a vital engine for economic, social, practical and all round development of any nation. It has been identified as a tool for sustainable, virile and stable economy. In Nigeria, vocational and technical education was previously not seen as fundamental to national development or for the economic development, but for school dropouts and individuals. Hallak (1990) argues that vocational and technical education is also linked to human resource development and that it impacts on more than just economic growth. It also impacts on the overall development of the individual and society.

Akpmie (2009) asserts that no nation can move forward technologically, industrially and economically without developing a strong partner initiative in the creation of wealth, poverty reduction and employment generation with required skills. These skills include technical human and specific skills to cope with the challenges of the future since vocational and technical education is a vital tool for the sustainable advancement of any nation. Vocational and technical education thus:

1. Serve as learning and training centre for the translation of dreams and ideas into successful ventures.
2. Builds technical and conceptual skills in the individual that prepares him for today's world of work.
3. Leads to technological advancement.
4. Reduces poverty and idleness.
5. Directs towards self-reliant and sustainable means of livelihood.

If vocational and technical education is efficiently implemented, it could assist the nation to overcome poverty and its associated problems.

Conclusion

Education is a vital tool through which any nation can experience growth and development. Job creation is only vital if vocational and technical education is carefully conducted in our schools. Occupational skills enable one to overcome the problem of unemployment. Based on the foregoing, it is observed that vocational and technical education occupies an important position in the sustainable development of the nation. It is also found that the major problems militating against effective implementation of vocation training programmes in educational institutions across the country, include inadequate provision of necessary facilities and equipment, less emphasis on technical education and negative public attitude to vocational education.

Recommendations

In the light of the above, it is recommended that:

1. Both government and private sectors should provide equipment and facilities in vocational and technical school for the acquisition of skills.
2. Government and other education stakeholders should make sure that educational programmes at all levels of education are made relevant to provide youth and graduates' needed vocational and technical skills.
3. Technical educators should involve technological, technical and business organisations, the government, NGOs and successful industrialists in their service delivery to the students.
4. A training plan that states clearly what the student is expected to learn and what the employer is expected to provide, should be developed as an integral part of national strategy.
5. Regular seminars and workshops should be organised to keep teachers abreast of current development in the field of vocational and technical education and how best to impact them on their students.

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