

Vocational and Technical Education: A Reflection on Formal and Non Formal Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

The size of labor force in Nigeria is at a continuous increase day by day. The pre and post independent Nigerian governments have continuously drawn out policies of Vocational and Technical education to satisfy the ever changing needs. These policies and role of Millennium Development Goals (M.D.G.) with the non-formal training in vocational areas have been appraised to determine their realization and functionality of an active private sector economy. Though the non-formal training lacks the privilege of government policies, it has however, made contributions in terms of service delivery and entrepreneurship. The formal training approach in Vocational and Technical Education in schools and colleges are constrained by several impediments towards the realization of national policies. Major among the identified constraints are inadequate funding, poorly trained teachers, decaying infrastructure and poor technological environments. This paper examines possible areas of cooperation between formal and informal training with a view to providing the needed panacea for renewed vigor in Vocational and Technical education in Nigeria.

Introduction

Many nations the world over have for long realized the importance of vocational and technical education in manpower development, and nation building. Indeed, the rapid advances made in all technical and industrial fields in recent decades have determined the directions of contemporary civilization. It is therefore “no longer news to state that Vocational and Technical Education is a valued sub-sector of the system. As a matter of fact it has its roots and values in our traditional systems. Before the Industrial Revolution (between 1750 ad 1830) and the arrival of the colonialists, our fore fathers have used Vocational and Technical Education to prepare the young ones under the apprenticeship system for the vocation of the family and thus provided a means of living for the members of that family and even beyond” (Kire and Kwairanga,(2006). With the full realization of this fact, Nigeria as an independent nation has made several attempts at providing considered vocational and technical training at various points in time. Several National policies on education attest to these conscious attempts. Oranu (1999) reviewed these efforts thus:

The Ashby Commission (1960:63) constituted by the Federal Ministry of Education was assigned to investigate Nigeria’s needs in the post-secondary certificate and of Technical and Vocational education needed by Nigeria to sustain its economy in the 1980’s..... The Ashby report gave birth to many other reports such as Skapski (1960), Dike (1962), Comparative Technical Education; Seminar Abroad (1966).

In keeping with the pace of changing needs, the National Policy on Education (NPE), first published in 1977, revised in 1981 and 2004 (Kire 2010) summed up Vocational and Technical Education as ‘an aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge.’ In the same vein, Oranu (1999) highlighted the education Decree 16 of 1985 as cited by Towe (1982) in respect of Technical and Vocational training as:

“Education given in institutions other than the universities, that is, polytechnics, technical colleges and other technological institutions providing both scientific knowledge and practical skills required for a specific trade, employment or profession as craftsmen, technician, technologist, engineer, scientist or similar level in business in the fields of engineering, applied science, agriculture or business”.

The disturbing aspects of Technical and Vocational Education in the preceding years evolve on the lofty ideas of the citizenry concerning this aspect of the nation’s educational aspirations being realizable. If realizable, then have much been realized? If not, what are the impediment variables? This and other issues, call for refocusing of technical education to meet the demands of the fast evolving world as a global village.

The Objectives of Non-Formal Technical/Vocational Institutions

The United Nations Millennium Declaration, according to Otiye Igbuzor (2006), was adopted in 2000 to:

- (a) Eradicate poverty
- (b) Promote human dignity and equality
- (c) Achieve peace
- (d) Democracy and environmental sustainability and stability
- (e) Achieve universal primary education
- (f) Promote gender equality and empowering women

- (g) Reduce child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

Non formal education: entrepreneurial skills acquisition

In West African countries especially Nigeria, technical and vocational skill acquisition is more visible at the secondary and tertiary levels of education. MDG is limited in scope and targets. For instance, the MDG target on education restricts itself only to the full course of primary schooling with no reference to secondary and tertiary education. In 2005, the MDGN Report as in Otiye (2006) further confirmed its inadequacy on Vocational and Technical education by dwelling solely on its quest for the attainment of some of its targets on Universal Primary education.

Until recently when the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) was reported to have indicated its desire to institute a directorate to be charged with the responsibility of coordinating non formal education, the federal government of Nigeria is not known to have any pragmatic policy in the non-formal sector of Vocational/Technical training. Yet myriad technical artisan establishments exist that train “road side” artisans in the fields of auto mechanic, smelting, electrical, electronics, sign writing, sculpture, carpentry, brick laying, welding, painting, tailoring, typing, commerce and other numerous areas of entrepreneurship which in the views of Nwaokolo (2000) is the form of education that deals with the skills of business ownership and management. This form of education has largely been left unplanned and uncared for, to the extent that it is viewed as a form of non formal education targeted at preparing an apprentice for self reliance. This approach has remained with Nigeria since pre and post colonial era. Olakunle (1999) conceptualized the traditional approach to Vocational/Technical education in the following words.

All agricultural training were done through various farming activities and the concentration on special areas depended on the predominant agricultural Activities peculiar to the community. Crafts with artistic activities such as weaving, pottery, bead making, wood carving and dyeing were done first with functional intent, and flourished all over Nigeria. Catering/Home management including cooking, sewing, washing, child care and general housekeeping in the traditional setting was very useful and challenging. It provided adequate employment for individuals and allowed for the smooth running of the community by providing services for social needs.

Appraisal of Formal and Non-Formal Education in Nigeria

The provision of vocational and technical education has a long history. Prior to the development of institutions of vocational education by societies, the home and the “apprenticeship system” were principal sources of vocational education (Duffy 1967). In trying to realize the set objectives in the National Policies in Education (1977, 1981 and 2004 revised) several formal schools and colleges were established by governments at various levels. These establishments are in continuous growth to keep pace with increasing educational demands and technological advancement. For this reason, Akinboye (2006) states that the current trend stands as;

- (a) a university in all states except Jigawa and Yobe (FCT) (Akinboye 2006)
- (b) a polytechnic save Federal Capital Territory (FCT)
- (c) One to two Colleges of Education in all states and FCT
- (d) One to four technical colleges and vocational training centers;
- (e) A college of agriculture except in Adamawa, Ogun, Osun, Rivers and Yobe states (Towe 1999)

All these notwithstanding, the qualities of the graduates from these institutions in terms of practical skills leave much to be desired. The former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, as cited in an address by the former Governor of Delta State, Chief Ibori (2001) lamented that “Nigerian students were among the best in the world but now, they have been relegated to the background and rejected in the world”. Also the Institute of Corporate Administrators (2009) while stressing the value of technical and vocational education noted with regret that in spite of their proliferation, Nigerian educational institutions “do not produce trained manpower but retrain able manpower”. The above views reflect the sad situation that confronts the educational system in the country. This is majorly due to inadequate funding, poor teaching/instructional materials and decaying infrastructure. Conversely, the non-formal apprenticeship entrepreneurship appears to be flourishing due to influx of school drop outs and increased attractive confidence in its job security.

Intermediate between these training approaches is some of the organized private industrial sectors that confer apprenticeship training to some of the artisan staffers. These on-the-job training which is aimed at improving competence and efficiency in job executions may not be certificated. Such organizations like Brewery, Textile industries, Confectionaries, non-alcoholic beverage firms, cement industries, mining companies and other manufacturing conglomerates have contributed immensely by giving vocational and technical training to teaming potential entrepreneurs. The beneficiaries of the trainings have often either been re-engaged in public sectors or become self-employed and retraining other apprentices via the non-formal approach.

Since the National Policies on Education (1977, 1981, and 2004 revised) are not directly focused on the latter (non-formal and industrial based training) forms of training in Vocational/Technical education, their appraisals are difficult to follow empirical approach. The artisan trainings via the roadside specialists in particular are only popular and heavily patronized because they provide the highly desired readily available job opportunities. In addition, they are forms of cheap training for drop outs and indigent apprentices. Save these, the form of vocational/technical education lacks organized curricula; devoid of structured schemes of training; highly dependent on untested folk ways; stereotypic in acquisition of skills and knowledge. Furthermore, the traditional training lack innovations that are backed by scientific principles. This is understandable due to the deficient level of formal education background of the participants. The ‘graduates’ of these schemes are not validly tested to ascertain their levels of acquisition of vocational/entrepreneurship skills and knowledge except to be crudely evaluated by the number of months or years spent as an apprentice in addition to the level of display of dexterity in operations.

Problems Confronting Vocational Education

Funding

Vocational/Technical education is a capital intensive expedition in terms of equipment, tools, laboratory, workshop and manpower training and retraining. It however, appears that most Nigerian governments at all levels do not realize this but rather take a wide deep into Vocational/Technical education ventures only to be financial stricken midway. For this singular reason, most of the objectives of National Policy on Vocation/Technical education are hardly realized.

Use of Obsolete Equipment

Nearly all the tools and equipment used for research, training, teaching and instructions are imported. Most often due to administrative fraud, lack of knowledge coupled with inadequate purchasing power, only outdated tools are made available.

Inadequate and Deteriorating Facilities:

As one of the developing nations of the world, Nigeria lacks the capacities to manufacture and maintain highly technical working materials. In most cases, existing infrastructure are irregularly and poorly maintained due to lack of technical ability and mediocrity. Therefore, Vocational-Technical education is done under un conducive environments.

Inadequate and Poorly Trained Personnel

The trainers/instructors in most of the nation’s Vocational/Technical institutions are either inadequate in terms of number and/or ill-trained for the expected job performance. Retraining of these teachers is either not done at all or inadequately carried out.

Poor Library and Research Facilities

Vocational/Technical education is a special education demanding special attention in terms of reading and learning materials. The library is the main focal point in the provision of varied learning text-books, journals, periodicals and other research findings. Most technical institutions especially at secondary school level do not own well stocked libraries. The situation may not be different in some polytechnics, vocational colleges or universities where outdated textbooks and journals may be the only stock in display. Painfully enough, indigenous texts are not sufficiently available in most of the fields.

Poor Job Opportunities

Most graduates from the vocational/technical institutions in the country find it hard to obtain job placement either in public or private establishments. or to become self reliant as entrepreneurs. Reasons are partly due to un-expanding labour market for these professionals and poor training received to equip them for self employment as opposed to the situation of artisan apprentices.

Suggested Solutions for Re-focusing Technical and Education in Nigeria

Vocational and Technical Education remains a pre-requisite for a successful formal and non formal entrepreneurship skills acquisition, a backbone for national development and can emerge only through concrete rededication and implementation of educational objectives that embraces both formal and informal training. One essential ingredient of vocational and technical education must be concerned with changing attributes of professional educators towards technical and vocational education.

The following are further suggestions for renewed vigor in vocational and technical education in Nigeria.

1. The National Policy on Vocational-Technical education should be revised to incorporate the good aspects of the traditional practices to create room for monitoring and regulating the holistic technological advancement of the nation.
2. The UN Millennium Development Goal should further domesticate its targets on education in Nigeria to incorporate more psychomotor subjects at the UBE level and Vocational and Technical subjects at the tertiary levels.

3. Areas of cooperation should be identified whereby the formal technological students can gain from the road side artisans and vice-versa. The students' industrial work experience scheme (SIWES) may serve as one of the areas.
4. It should not be considered too late to indigenize vocational/technical education to result in entrepreneurship skills attainment. This may be the desired tonic to enhance our technological advancement adaptively and functionally.
5. Elaborate program should be mounted to ensure the general awareness of technological education to the citizenry. Impressive statistics and numerous qualitative studies of the sources of economic growth of the West is more paraded to demonstrate that it was not the growth of physical but that of human capital which was the principal sources of economic program of the developed nations. Lepsy (1963) stressed that;
Productivity has positive relationship with the level of literacy and generally, the longer a person has been educated the more acceptable he is to new challenges and thus, in the long run the more productive.
6. This aspect of education should be declared a disaster project that needs urgent revival and rehabilitation.
7. Vocational-Technical education should be made tuition-free at all levels and in addition. Industrial Training Fund (ITF) should continue its program in supervision, regulatory and payment of increased students' stipends.
8. As a follow up, governments at all levels should be made to contribute at least 10% of their annual budgets to technological education.
9. When funds are adequately available, proper stocking of technological libraries, provision of modern laboratories and instructional materials; and provision of conducive technological environment become imperative to the desired functional technical education.
10. The goal of the government should be to drive for well qualified professionals as teachers of vocational-technical education. The National Policy on Education (1981) recognizes the critical importance of teachers in the process of education as it states that, 'no education system can rise above the level of its teachers'. Their training and retraining to ensure efficiency and improved output should be non-negotiable. These professionals should be jealously remunerated to keep them attracted and committed to their jobs.
11. The organized private sectors particularly the manufacturing firms should be directed that in addition to their program of on-the-job training, a defined percentage of their recruitments for low and middle level manpower should be from the pool of graduates of formal vocational-technical institutions. This measure will forestall the present rush for cheap labor at the expense of swelling unemployed skillful labor force.
12. Governments at different levels should create many well equipped entrepreneurship skills acquisition centers for the training and retraining of the teeming graduates of all levels from our educational institutions. This gesture will improve the private sector economy.

CONCLUSION

Since independence (51 years ago), the pace of technological advancement can be described as slow. If speedy recovery must be made, considering the size of labor force in the Nigerian population figure, then there is the need to re-focus the forms of national vocational-technical education approaches. Myriad substantial entrepreneurs will emerge in the Economy. The present status which is a product of numerous revised efforts to keep in tune with the nation's advancement and demands can be taken as not being perfect and therefore calls for more rigorous and doubled efforts to make Nigeria one of the technologically advanced nations of the world. By her human and natural endowment, only little requirements in areas of discipline, astute resource management and stamping out of corruption and fraud in our daily lives are needed to make the nation great technologically.

Teachers, as hob or pivot, on which any successful education programme revolve, (Oranu, 1999), should be given the desired prime position in technological development. Vocational/Technical instructional areas are highly hazardous and therefore the instructors should be regarded as endangered species which require special attention in terms of remuneration and other good conditions of service.

Nigerian politicians and policy makers will do the nation a great favour if the quest for sound technological education is entrenched in electioneering campaigns and consequently to be adjudged as one of dividends of the nation's democracy.

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