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Imperatives of Vocational Education and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Education is seen as one of the most powerful instrument man has devised so far to shape his own fortune. Vocational education in particular is the cornerstone for any sustainable technological development. Its relevant practical training components hold the key to Nigeria becoming technologically developed. The foundation necessary to develop science and technology in Nigeria is obviously the right type of education. Science and technology has to be taught and studied systematically at all levels of education. Evidently, technological transfer is dependent on science and technology education, because scientist and technologists are key tools required in industrial, infrastructural and economic development. The roles vocational education play in contributing to sustainable development is the focal point of this paper. This paper also tries to present an over-view of the various special skill areas of vocational education for

promoting sustainable development and employability in the light of the present political and social realities in Nigeria.

Key words: Vocational, Sustainability, Technology, Special Skill.

Introduction

Unemployment and political instability in Nigeria is currently a national concern. Youths and graduates from various institutions looking for employment opportunity increase day by day. Nigeria's educational practices were tailored towards acquisition of the so-called "white collar" job after graduation. These so called jobs are no longer there and have not also led us anywhere in the development of our nation.

It is important to note that vocational education can be a means to an end. It can be a tool for securing employment and sustainable development in Nigeria. Vocational education is designed to offer training to improve individual's general proficiency especially in relation to their present or future occupation. This training will lead to self-reliance and sustainable development.

The present preoccupation with university education in Nigeria reduces socio-economic opportunities of those who are more oriented towards work than academics. Not everyone needs a university education; if everyone becomes a university graduate, who will employ them?

One of the goals of vocational education as stated in the National Policy on Education (2004) is to give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self reliant. If this goal is adequately achieved, it would lead to a sustainable technological development.

This paper therefore reviews the conceptual clarifications of vocational education and sustainable development. It presents the aims and objectives of vocational education and examines vocational education and sustainable development in Nigeria. The processes

through which sustainable development could be achieved through vocational education form the recommendations of this work.

Conceptual clarifications

Concept of vocational education: Education in general is an exercise that engages everyone. An individual either goes through liberal, general or vocational education (Osuala, 2004).

Vocational education is defined as any form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupations (Okoro, 1993). Some authors always refer to the twin concepts “Vocational-technical education” in reference to education of skills or skill acquisition.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) defines technical and vocational education as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related science and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupation in various sectors of economic and social life.

Immaculate (2005) opined that vocational and technical education are leaving experience meant to be impacted to an individual systematically in order to get him/her adequately equipped for a good employment in a recognized occupation. Ojimba (2012) posited that vocational education encompasses fields of study such as agricultural education, fine and applied arts education, business education and vocational trades in soap making, hair dressing, computer training etc.

Based on the above definitions, vocational education is defined in this work as an educational training, which has been designed systematically to enable an individual acquire the basic knowledge, skills, abilities, and understanding needed for ones efficient performance in his/her chosen occupational carrier for self-reliance. Education is recognized as the bedrock of any meaningful development while vocational education in particular is the

cornerstone for any sustainable technological development programme.

Concept of sustainable development: Sustainable development has been defined by many in various ways. Adebola (2007) defines sustainable development as a kind of development that can be initiated and managed properly in such a way as to give attention to continuity and preservation as people explore an explicit available resources for the enlargement of their existence.

Kundan in (Ugoh, 2008) describes sustainable development as a construct, which envision development as meeting the need of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generation.

Okeke in Osuafor (2010) posited that for development to be sustained, there must be human development. According to Arogundade (2011) the major essential tool for achieving sustainable development should include,

- (1) Improving the quality of basic education
- (2) Reorienting existing education programme to address sustainable development.
- (3) Developing public awareness and understanding, and
- (4) Providing training for all sectors of private and civil society.

Kundan further argues that continued sustainable development is only possible or assured when concrete steps are taken to make the youth acquire skills that will enable them to be self-reliant and therefore become the tools for achieving development and its sustainability.

Aims and objective of vocational and technical education

The aims and objective of vocational and technical education as contained in the National Policy of Education revised in 2004 includes:

- To provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels.
- To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.
- To give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically.
- To form a practical segment of education concern or targeted at skill acquisition.

Vocational education and sustainable development

Vocational education has been an integral part of national development strategies in many societies because of the impact on human resource development, productivity and economic growth. To achieve sustainable development, attention should be paid to strengthening the bridge between education and schooling and preparation for the world of work with attention paid to improving vocational education and training in Nigeria.

Technological development of a nation depends on the available technical know-how, the rudiment of which is a function of the quantity and quality of available vocational and technical training. It is a clear view that current preoccupation with university education in Nigeria reduces socio-economic opportunities of those who are more oriented towards work than academics. Graduates of vocational and technical institutions are highly skilled entrepreneurs. They rely on their effort and abilities. Nigerians hire engineers who are being paid huge sum of money to build roads and bridges. These people are graduates of vocational colleges. Unemployment is everywhere in Nigeria because most of our youths lack employability skills that are often acquired from vocational schools.

The society needs competent auto mechanics and truck drivers, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, electronics and computer operators, database, web and network technicians (and other personnel in this category) to function well. These are some of the skill in short supply in Nigeria.

According to Enahoro (2008), vocational education training is utilitarianism and it is a concept of reorganizing the importance of labour. Vocational technical education is the type of education Nigeria needs presently to reshape her crumbling socio-economic status because it is the type of education directed towards the preparation for occupational type since its recipients are equipped to face the challenges of the world of work.

Vocational education entails the enrichment of the capabilities that influence the effective psychomotor or cognitive domains of individual in readiness for entry into the world of work in order to satisfy their intrinsic and extrinsic values, work, and aspirations such that local and national needs would be met. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004) through its National Policy on Education requires primary school pupils to acquire manipulative skills through some planned practical work taught by the teachers or through resource persons from the town where the school is located as earlier stated. At the secondary school level, effective teaching through practical work is also emphasized.

Challenges facing vocational education in achieving sustainable development in Nigeria

There are numerous challenges facing vocational technical education and training which has affected negatively our national life and national development. Among the numerous challenges are:

- **Lack of adequate training facilities and equipment:** Most vocational education departments in Nigeria universities do not have laboratory or workshop space let alone usable facilities and where they exist, they are grossly inadequate.

Oduma, (2007) posited that what is seen and referred to as vocational education laboratories in various institutions today is an eye-sore.

- **Acute shortage of vocational technical teachers:** Acquisition of skills requires that strict attention and supervision must be given to every student. With the overwhelming population of students in Nigeria schools, individualized instruction becomes very difficult especially during practicals due to shortage of vocational education teachers. So many studies (e.g Osuafor 2008) have revealed shortage of vocational technical teachers in our schools.
- **Poor funding of vocational education:** Universities in Nigeria are owned and funded by the Federal Government, state government and private individual. In Nigeria, the allocation to education as a share of the GDP is quite minimal. Okeke and Eze (2010), reported that sufficient fund has not been channeled to vocational education which is a major problem plaguing the system. Similarly, Ugiagbe in Okeke (2010) observed that poor funding causes acute shortage of the necessary facilities needed for effective implementation of the programme.
- **Poor remuneration of vocational teachers:** Many universities across the country are inadequately staffed because of poor remuneration of vocational teachers. Uwaifo, (2005) opined that academics is not as attractive and commensurate to the effort, commitment and finances put in to acquire it; whereas a first “degree graduate” can function well in the industry and politics etc and earn good money.
- **Poor public impression and apathy to vocational education:** Vocational education in Nigeria has suffered a serious “lookdown” and obscurity in the past. Olufunke, (2003) observed that parents prefer their children to study

courses like pharmacy, medicine, law, accounting etc because they regard vocational education as a course for “Never-dowells” who could not secure admission into other disciplines.

- **Poor emphasis on the practical aspect of vocational education:** Most tertiary institutions charged with the responsibility to teach vocational education subjects in Nigeria today are poorly equipped with machines and relevant tools / equipment. Isyaku (2003) noted that vocational education in Nigeria has been bedeviled by inadequate supply of facilities and equipment necessary for acquiring skills and competencies for self-employment.

Conclusion and recommendations

From the fore-going statements, it is concluded that sustainable technological development in Nigeria depends on a strong vocational education. It is against this background that the following recommendations are proffered for effective vocational education in Nigeria.

- Government should provide adequate fund to support polytechnic and technical colleges to ensure that facilities are provided and maintained.
- The government in partnership with the vocational educators should create awareness on the relevance of vocational education to individuals through workshops, seminars and conferences.
- Government should provide enough funds by increasing allocation. Proprietors of private institutions should also seek for alternative means of fund through sponsorship and partnership with industries, NGOs and Philanthropists.
- To ensure sustainable development through vocational education, teachers preparation programmes should be

supported and serving teachers adequately remunerated by the government.

- To combat the poor public perception and misconceptions about vocational education, vocational educators and other stakeholders should embark on aggressive public education and career guidance programmes right from the secondary school level. The education must be geared towards improving the image of vocational education for the public to appreciate.
- There should be adequate emphasis on practical aspect of vocational education to enable the recipients acquire skills and reduce the over dependence on government paid jobs.

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