

Vocationalisation of Secondary Education in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

It is highly indisputable that, the ever-escalating level of chronic unemployment among youths in many countries across the globe coupled with the resulting high level of social unrest among the youth's accounts for the increased emphasis on acquisition of vocational skills for self-reliance. The paper discusses vocationalisation of secondary education in Nigeria and also examined Nigeria's policy initiatives at vocationalisation of secondary education. It also discusses the fundamental issues in vocationalisation of secondary education, as well as some of the pressing challenges hampering effective vocationalisation of education in Nigeria. The paper suggests, among others, that a model secondary school should be established in each local government area in the country. Such schools should be fully equipped with the necessary facilities, equipment and staff for effective training of students in vocational areas. In addition, provision of infrastructures such as classrooms and workshops across all levels would ease overcrowding, increase access and reduce student/teacher ratio.

Keywords: Vocationalisation, secondary education, issues, challenges and prospects

1. Introduction

There has been a growing awareness of the significant role that acquisition of vocational skills can play in both personal and national development. This is in response to the ever-escalating level of chronic youth unemployment experienced in many countries across the globe coupled with the resulting high level of social unrest. Ayonmike (2010) posited that empowering youths with appropriate practical skills is very imperative in view of the increasing rate of social ills and other negative consequences associated with joblessness.

Indeed, according to Odu (2010), it is generally believed that the acquisition of the requisite skills is a means of increasing the productive power of a nation hence; every citizen should be equipped with practical skills to contribute effectively to the economic growth of the country. This, according to UNESCO-UNEVOC (2006) is because the development of relevant skills can open doors to economically and socially rewarding jobs and can help the development of small informal-sector businesses, allow the re-insertion of displaced workers and migrants, and support the transition from school to work for school drop-outs and graduates. It added that developing job-related competencies among the poor, the youth and the vulnerable is recognised as crucial to progress in reducing poverty. This explains why the development of job-related skills is, therefore, not only part of many countries' human resource strategies but also of their economic-growth and poverty-reduction strategies. Agreeably, the increasing importance that is now being attached to acquisition of vocational and entrepreneurial skills is reflected in the increasing trend in vocationalisation of all levels of education. This paper therefore examined the vocationalisation of secondary education in Nigeria as well as its fundamental issues, challenges and prospects.

2. The Concept of Vocationalisation of Education

Vocationalisation of secondary education can be seen as the diversification of a previously liberal arts or general academic curriculum of the secondary schools to include an increased amount of vocational and technical areas that aim at improving learners' capacity for employment in the formal and informal sectors (Ikeoji and Agwubike, 2006). According to Akram (2012), it is the process of increasing the vocational oriented skills and components of education for all students in secondary schools. Vocationalisation of secondary education thus refers to the introduction of vocational subjects and practical skills into the secondary school curriculum (Lauglo, Akyeamong, Mwiria and Weeks, 2003). Lauglo, et al, Meyer (2009) and Akram (2012) contended that vocationalisation of education has received considerable emphasis in many countries such as Botswana, Australia, Germany and Switzerland, among several others. The aim of vocationalisation of secondary education is to develop in the students the skills and confidence to construct, produce, and carry out certain practical tasks base on their own ideas and acquire more abilities through their own effort (Akram, 2012).

Vocationalisation of secondary education is not synonymous with vocational education, hence, the need to distinguish them. Vocational education, according to Osuala (2004) refers to vocational or technical training or retraining, which is given in schools or classes under public supervision and control or under contract with a state board or local education agency. Osuala maintained that it is conducted as part of a programme designed to prepare individuals for gainful employment as semi-skilled workers or technicians or sub-professionals in recognised occupations and new and emerging occupations or to prepare individuals for enrolment in advanced technical education programmes. In a nutshell, vocational education simply refers to any

form of education whose major purpose is to prepare individuals for gainful employment in any occupation (Okoro, 1993).

Recently, the term Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is mostly used synonymously with vocational education. The Federal Republic of Nigeria, (FRN, 2013) defined TVET as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. FRN, (2013) maintained that TVET is further understood to be an integral part of general education; a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work; an aspect of lifelong learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship; an instrument for promoting environmentally-sound sustainable development; and a method of facilitating poverty alleviation.

The goals of technical and vocational education as contained in the National policy on Education (FRN, 2013) include, among others, provision of trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels as well as giving training and imparting the necessary skills to individuals for economic self reliance. Akram (2012) pointed out that although both 'vocational education' and vocationalisation of education' involve skills development, in vocationalisation, the skills development is intended to build the capability to act in a variety of real life situations whereas vocational education gives skills for a specific vocation under well-defined limitations. Akram posited that without the general skills development, the specific skill could not help the recipient to survive in the competition that goes on in life and therefore, concluded that vocational education can only be useful on a base of general skills development. In other words, vocationalisation of education provides pre-employment orientation to employable skills (Department For International Development, DFID, 2007).

The need for vocationalisation of secondary education is underscore by Akram (2012) who stated that education could only become the foundation stone of a sustainable society only if it succeeds in imparting necessary life skills. The author emphasised that education without such enabling features can get reduced to a mere ritual. He further pointed out that if skill development is separated from formal education; the later is only a means of cultural transmission and cultural reproduction. The authors are in agreement with Akram (2012) that vocationalisation encompasses programmes that provide participants with skills, knowledge and aptitudes that enable them to engage in productive work, adapt to rapidly changing labour markets and economies, and participate as responsible citizens in their respective societies. This position is shared by Odu (2010) who noted that vocationalisation of secondary education in Nigeria became necessary because the traditional academic education failed to meet the needs of a vastly increased youth population who require manual and technical skills for gainful employment. He noted that unfortunately Nigeria's secondary school leavers do not have such skills because of the poor implementation of technical and vocational programmes in the school, which left the students half-baked.

3. Nigeria's Policy Initiatives at Vocationalisation of Secondary Education

In the third edition of the national policy on education published in 1998, adequate provisions were equally made for vocationalisation of secondary education. In addition to the provisions made in the 1981 edition, the third edition stipulates that the purpose of pre-vocational subjects offered at the junior secondary school level were to enable students acquire technical skills; to expose them to career awareness by exploring usable options in the world of work and to enable them have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology.

In the fourth edition of the national policy on education published in 2004, vocationalisation of the secondary education system was adequately provided for in the policy. The same policy document introduced the Basic Education programme and the 9-3-4 system of education in Nigeria. Vocationalisation of education at the lower basic education level featured in form of handicraft or local craft, domestic science and agriculture. At the upper basic education level, vocationalisation took the form of pre-vocational integrated subjects, which includes Basic Technology, Business Studies, Practical Agriculture, Home Economics and Computer Studies. At the senior secondary school level, each of the integrated subjects was split into many distinct subjects such as agricultural science, Woodwork, metalwork, electricity/electronics, technical drawing, auto-mechanics, and building technology. Others are Bookkeeping, financial accounting, commerce, typewriting, shorthand, home management, food and nutrition, clothing and textile.

The greatest provision for vocationalisation of secondary education in Nigeria was made in the fifth edition of the national policy on education published in 2009 which featured the re-structuring of the curriculum of senior secondary education into five fields of studies namely Science studies, Technology studies, Humanities studies, Business studies and compulsory cross-cutting subjects. Adequate provisions were also made in the policy for skill development at the senior secondary education level with the introduction of 32 Trade Subjects which include among others, Auto Body Repair and Spraying, Auto Electrical Work, Auto Mechanical Work,

Auto Parts Merchandising, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration, Data Processing, Store Keeping, Book Keeping and GSM Maintenance.

In the current National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), vocationalisation of secondary education is given more prominence than in previous editions of the policy. Apart from the introduction of Innovative Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs) and National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF), the 2013 NPE made many far reaching provisions for promoting vocational skills development. This includes greater vocationalisation of secondary education with the inclusion of more trade/entrepreneurial subjects in the senior secondary schools curriculum. In addition to those listed in the 2009 policy document, the Trade/Entrepreneurship Subjects also include Animal Husbandry, Fishery, Marketing and Salesmanship. It stipulates further that each student is expected to take four compulsory crosscutting subjects and select one Trade/Entrepreneurship subject from the list of Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects.

4. Fundamental Issues Arising from Vocationalisation of Secondary Education as Practiced in Nigeria

For vocationalisation of secondary education to be effective to the extent of achieving its set goals, certain fundamental issues must be addressed. These issues are discussed in details below:

4.1 The Issue of Curriculum Content: The issue of curriculum content is a very important one for effective vocationalisation. Indeed, one of the principles of vocational education stipulates, "For every occupation, there is a body of content which is peculiar to that occupation and which practically has no functioning value in any other occupation." Another related principle states that "The only reliable source of content for specific training in an occupation is in the experiences of masters of the occupation" This implies that the curriculum content must be relevant to the needs of the occupation and the society in general.

It is however observed that vocationalisation of secondary education as practiced in many African countries, including Nigeria, is often ineffective in preparing for jobs. This is because the curriculum content is not rich enough. This position is shared by Castro (2003) who, while commenting on the adequacy of vocationalisation of secondary education in Botswana, Ghana and Kenya stated that there is enough evidence showing that it worries to do too much but ends up doing too little or doing the wrong thing. Besides, Lauglo, et al (2003) noted that the kind of secondary school vocationalisation which affects a minor proportion of the students total curriculum does not equip students fully for paid employment let alone self employment within the first year or first few years of leaving school. They maintained that exposure to vocational subjects may only enhance students interest in the type of work for which these subjects are broadly preparatory. DFID (2007) noted that acquisition of vocational skills could be more effective when located in separate secondary technical schools where the necessary equipment and adequate staffing are provided.

4.2. Issue of Teachers Competence: The African Union (2007) noted that the delivery of quality TVET is dependent on the competence of the teacher which could be measured in terms of theoretical knowledge, technical and pedagogical skills as well as being abreast with new technologies in the workplace. This position is shared by Okorie (2001) who noted that for effective vocationalisation, the only person who is competent to instruct or train is the individual who has himself cognate experiences and is a master of the craft having gone through the mill himself. This, in effect, is in compliance with one of the major principles of vocational education developed by Charles Prosser in 1949 which states that the teacher or instructor must have sufficient experience and exposure in the application of the skills and knowledge to the operations and processes he undertakes to teach (Okoro, 1993). It follows that if the instructor or teacher is not competent, it would be equivalent to a blind leading the blind and the outcome is very obvious. This is in line with Etuk's 2006 assertion that high quality teachers lead to high quality education.

4.3 Issue of Linkage to the Labour Market: The ultimate aim of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is employment hence, TVET programmes must be linked to the job market in order to enhance its socio-economic relevance (African Union, 2007). This position is shared by Okorie (2001), who noted that if an individual is trained for employment, such individual must be train to meet the labour market demands of the occupation. Okorie added that the individual must, in addition, be trained to attain minimum employment standard in his chosen occupation. He pointed out that these are expressed in two principles of vocational education developed by Charles Prosser, which states that:

(a) Vocational education must recognize conditions as they are and must train individuals to meet the demands of the "market" even though it may be true that more efficient ways of conducting the occupation may be known and those better working conditions are highly desirable.

(b) For every occupation there is a minimum of productive ability, which an individual must possess in order to secure or retain employment in that occupation. If vocational education is not carried to that point with that individual, it is neither personally nor socially effective. This implies that if the students are not properly trained

to perform up to that minimum standard, all the training they undergo is personally, socially and economically wasted. This brings to the forefront the issue of facilities and the curriculum content.

4.4 Issue of Facility: It is a well-known fact that vocational education requires adequate facilities for effective training. Without adequate facilities, the students will not be able to acquire the envisaged skills for employment and their education could then be considered a waste. This is equally embodied in two principles of vocational education, which states that:

1. Vocational education will be efficient in proportion as the environment in which the learner is trained is a replica of the environment in which he must subsequently work.
2. Effective vocational training can only be given where the training jobs are carried on in the same way with the same operations, the same tools and the same machines as in the occupation itself.

4.5 Issue of Sufficient Exposure of Learners to the Learning Tasks. Repetitive training is another important issue that should be adequately addressed to ensure effective vocationalisation of secondary education in Nigeria. Okorie (2001) noted that the formation of habits depends upon repetitive training. The implication of this is that the habit-forming experiences must be repeated sufficiently to enable the learners form permanent habit. The repetitive practice will lead to high degree of skill and the performance of the activities will become automatic. This is also embodied in another principle which states that “vocational training will be effective in proportion as the specific training experiences for forming right habits of doing and thinking are repeated to the point that the habits developed are those of the finished skills necessary for gainful employment. This is also in compliance with another principle of vocational education, which states, “For every occupation there is a minimum of productive ability which an individual must possess in order to secure or retain employment in that occupation. If vocational education is not carried to that point with that individual, it is neither personally nor socially effective”. This implies that if the students are not properly trained to perform up to that minimum standard, all the training they undergo could be wasted, because it is not beneficial to them.

5. Challenges Against Effective Vocationalisation of Secondary Education in Nigeria

There are several documented challenges against effective vocationalisation of secondary education in Nigeria. Odu (2010) identified lack of qualified vocational teachers, inadequate facilities and administrators’ misconception of the nature of vocational education as some of the major challenges hindering effective vocationalisation of secondary education in Nigeria. He reported that in 1997, a survey report by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) revealed that seventy four (74) per cent of the TVE teachers (about 270,000) were not available for 23 different subjects. The authors are of the view that with the introduction of 34 new Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects, dearth of qualified teachers may seriously hamper effective teaching of these 34 newly introduced Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects. This partly explains why many secondary schools in Nigeria hardly offer up to ten of the listed 34 Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects thereby limiting student’s choice of subjects. Besides, some of the 34 newly introduced Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects such as GSM maintenance and leather goods manufacturing and repair are yet to be offered in many teacher-training institutions in the country. With respect to administrators’ misconception of the nature of vocational technical education, Odu (2010) posited that many administrators of the programmes, at the policy making level are not trained in vocational technical education hence, they do not seem to understand the needs of the programme when it comes to distribution of funds. This explains why technical and vocational education is grossly under-funded. The under-funding in turn affects the supply of modern facilities and equipment needed to train technical education students of the 21st century.

Furthermore, Odu (2010) identified poor teaching strategies as another major challenge against vocationalisation of secondary education in Nigeria. He noted that the teaching of vocational technical subjects have been too theoretical that most students now consider such subjects as those in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. There is no longer much emphasis on the learners’ practical skill acquisition. Teachers in most cases use lecture method only in a programme they supposed to apply lecture method and demonstration. Odu maintained that appropriate teaching strategies should be employed in teaching technical education subjects so as to achieve the national goals as elucidated in the National Policy of Education.

Atsumbe, Raymond and Mele (2012) identified teachers’ incompetence as another major challenge and reported that the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2004 observed that majority of the present crop of technical teachers handling TVE subjects in secondary schools in Kogi State were grossly incompetent. Similarly, Olaniyan and Ojo (2008) identified non-availability of functional workshop, inadequate instructional materials, absence of electricity for operating the workshop equipment and insufficient funding as other challenges against effective vocationalisation of secondary education in Nigeria. It is obvious that under funding affects the supply of modern facilities and equipment needed to effectively train technical education students of the 21st century.

Poor policy implementation is another major challenges that militate against the realization of the goals of vocationalisation of secondary education as identified by Odu (2010). He noted that there is always a very wide gap between policymaking and policy implementation in Nigeria. Similarly, Durosaro (2012) agreed that the delivery of education in Nigeria has suffered from years of neglect, compounded by inadequate attention to policy frameworks within the sector. He noted that this has made it difficult for good quality education that is empowering and capable of bringing about sustainable development to be provided.

6. Prospects for Vocationalisation of Education in Nigeria

There is a high prospect for vocationalisation of secondary education in Nigeria. Indeed, vocationalisation of secondary education in Nigeria is in compliance with UNESCO's observation that secondary education should be broadened on skills training for the labour market with the integration of TVE, beyond the more traditional focus. According to UNESCO (1999), TVET of the future must not only prepare individuals for employment in the information society but also make them responsible citizens who give due consideration to preserving the integrity of the environment and the welfare of others... TVET programmes need to be not only "demand driven" but also "development need driven" and development here includes all social, economic, personal and environmental aspects.

The benefits that could accrue to Nigeria as a result of effective acquisition of skills, which is the outcome of vocationalisation of secondary education, are numerous. These, according to Oseni (2012) include: Jobs that require skills are undone because there are no qualified people. Therefore, imparting skills in the students in relevant jobs will boost employment, dependency on imported skilled labour from the neighbouring countries will be minimised. In other words, it would make it unnecessary for multinationals companies operating in Nigeria to import "expensive" skilled labour from other countries, technical and vocational skills acquisition by technicians and craftsmen would also boost our competitiveness through reduced costs and reliable workers. The skilled labour we import is expensive; our workers are not adequately skilled to perform the relevant task as such they cannot be relied on. Moreover, a vast skill-base among our youths would increase our attraction for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) that would boost our economy. Presently, we cannot compete with the likes of Brazil and India where FDIs are creating jobs because skilled labour is readily available. In addition, providing more routes for entrepreneurship would allow us to reduce the carnage presently caused by crude apprenticeship systems, lastly, giving our youths more confidence and self-belief, and thereby reduce the distractions that lead to crime and other vices.

7. Suggestions for the Way Forward

- a. Teachers should be trained to handle the 34 Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects recently introduced into the secondary schools curriculum.
- b. Some of the 34 Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects such as GSM maintenance and leather goods manufacturing and repair which are yet to be offered in many teacher training institutions in the country should be offered in relevant teacher training institutions in the country to ensure adequate supply of teachers for these subjects.
- c. Infrastructures such as classrooms, computers, technical workshop, and equipment should be provided to all secondary schools to facilitate effective skill acquisition.
- d. There is need for effective implementation of the policy of vocationalisation of secondary education by ensuring that all forms of impediments and challenges are removed.
- e. Concerted efforts should be made by the government through relevant ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) to enhance the efficiency, resourcefulness, and competence of teachers and other educational personnel through training, capacity building, and motivation.

8. Conclusion

Vocationalisation of secondary education is a very viable strategy for empowering youths for paid or self-employment. However, the implementation of the policy is plaque by numerous challenges. It is believed that if the strategies suggested in this paper are adequately addressed, vocationalisation of secondary education would in a short time achieve its goals and the issue of unemployment and youths restiveness would be a thing of the past.

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