



## Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria: The Journey so far

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### Abstract

Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria: Journey so far in achieving its aims and objectives were examined under the concept of vocational technical education (VTE), the aims and objectives of VTE, the need for effective VTE in Nigeria as quest for self-sufficiency in food production, security and skilled technicians. Vocational technical education is seen by the paper as that type of education which is capable of equipping an individual with needed skills, abilities and competences that enable one to live and contribute effectively to the development of the society. Way forward to ensure the aims and objectives of VTE were articulated to include: that the government should fund VTE as it require enough fund for it to function effectively, adequate equipment, provision of infrastructure, qualified teaches and government should give proper orientation on wrong perception of the public on VTE as education for the “never-do-wells” were identified as reasons for VTE not achieving its aims and objectives in Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Aims, Education, Objectives, Technical education, Vocational education

### Introduction

Education is very important for the world of tomorrow and because of this, there has been increase in educational institutions worldwide in recent time. Education is an indispensable tool for socio-economic development, transformation, political, technological and scientific advancement. Education enables individuals to acquire knowledge, attitude, values, norms and skills for a living. Hence, it can also be seen as a process of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, interests, abilities, competence and cultural norms of a society by people and to transmit this life to the coming generations, so as to enhance perpetual development of the society. It is not surprising that one of the national objectives of Nigerian education is acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical, social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society.



Education plays vital importance in a knowledge society as a source of basic skills as a foundation for development of new knowledge and innovation and as an engine for socio-economic development. Education is therefore a critical requirement in creating knowledge societies that can stimulate development, economic growth and prosperity (Etim & Okon, 2018). Education according to Agwi (2018) is a key agent of national development, either as a way of developing human capacity, increasing the skilled workforce for modernization or as a means of personal freedom, developing capacity and improvement. Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) is the sub-sector of educational system widely recognized as the engine for economic and technological growth of a nation. Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) according to Federal Republic of Nigeria(2013) is those aspects of the education process involving in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitude, understanding and knowledge relating to occupation in various sectors of economic and social life.

There are five types of institutions that are established primarily for the provision of vocational and technical education in Nigeria. These institutions according to Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) in her national policy on education are: the pre-vocational and vocational schools at post primary level, the technical colleges, the polytechnics, colleges of education at the post-secondary level and at the university level. These institutions are required to issue certificate to deserving individuals who have met the requirements needed. VTE therefore is the form of education which equips an individual with appropriate skills, abilities and competences which acts as facilities for one to live and contribute to the development of the society (Osa-Edo, 2015).

Training aimed at achieving the objectives is through effective VTE programmes at all levels of education requires the service of qualified technology education teachers, adequate training facilities such as tools/equipments and machines in a conducive learning environment. Furthermore, Federal (2013) stressed that the level of infrastructural development and facilities provided by the federal government are affecting, to a very large extent, the level of skill acquisition in the country. The neglect of vocational and technical education as reported by Osunde (2004) in Ekele and Essien (2018) in the area of adequate personnel, financial support and facilities to encourage VTE is rubbing the nation of some contributions the graduates would have made to the economy. Hence, Ayodele (2006) opined that Nigerian education is seen as bookish, theoretical and white collar job oriented. In addition, he further stated that Nigerian educational programmes are not designed to promote Vocational and Technical Education. Unfortunately, Nigeria does not seem to give VTE the attention it deserves. This makes it difficult for its graduates from different institution of leaning to be well equipped with adequate skills that will enable them exploit the natural resources that abound in the economy. On the state of VTE, Ekele and Essien (2013) stressed that under the present educational dispensation in Nigeria, VTE teachers are expected to properly impart vocational skills in the students so that they can become employable upon



graduation. The vocational skills would enable the students to become self-reliant, productive and instrumental to the technological and industrial development of the nation.

The poor state of graduates of VTE and their role in the nation development have raised a great concern among parents, VTE stakeholders and educational policy makers to believe that the aims and objectives have not been achieved since VTE is that education through which knowledge, attitude and practice skills relating to occupations which can put food on the table and improve man's surrounding are acquired. Unfortunately, due to public perception of VTE, the objective seem not to have been realized. It is against this backdrop that this paper is looking at concept of VTE, the aims and objectives of VTE, VTE before the advent of the colonial master, failure of VTE in Nigeria, the need for effective VTE in Nigeria and way forward of VTE.

### **Vocational Technical Education before the Advent of Colonial Masters**

This is the period between 1892-1945 long before the arrival of the missionaries in Nigeria, VTE had cultural inclinations and undertones. It involved traditional and rigorous use of hands and muscular energy in doing work and creating goods and services needed for use in the society (Uko, 2016). There existed several forms of apprenticeship programmes co-ordinated by parents, relations and other elders who were into one form of trade or the other. If the type of skill needed for the child was not obtainable within the family, arrangement was made for apprenticeship programme elsewhere. Western education came with colonialism and the type of education was centred on liberal knowledge (Ordu, 2013). The colonial masters taught the people how to read and write and also established Teacher Training Colleges for the training of the catechists. The handicapped (physically disabled persons) who could not benefit from the opportunity of interacting with "white man" had to be taught certain skills for their benefit while the healthy ones were left for the "catch man" or the intellectuals. This was the genesis of how vocational education was attached to the "invalids" or the "never-do-wells". This notions has continued to linger till today and VTE has come to be regarded as such for the less privileged, less academic persons and the less intelligent persons (Onoh, Onu & Oluka, 2012).

It should be noted that the colonial masters have tried in ensuring the objectives of VTE in Nigeria was achieved, Uko (2016) summarised of some such efforts:

1. As early as 1842, the mission school at Behule (Abeokuta) had workshops for black smiting, carpentry and shoe making.
2. In 1876, the first technical school in Nigeria was established at Tope near Badagry.
3. In 1901, an institution in Nassarawa was established which operated VTE programmes.
4. In 1905, the Hope Waddell Training Institute founded in 1895 in Calabar offered different VTE courses.
5. The 1920 – 1921 period witnessed the Phelps Stokes commission report which had a positive recommendations on VTE.



6. In 1925, the memorandum on the education policy was published. The white paper included that education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupation and traditions of the various people in the society.

In October 1960, Nigeria gained her independence. It was obvious that the type of education (including VTE) inherited from the British government was not adequate to meet the socio-economic needs of Nigerians, finally, in 1977, the Federal government of Nigeria issued the first National Policy on Education. This policy favoured the development of VTE in Nigeria. The above account indicates that VTE is recognized as the key to technological development of Nigeria and sequel to its official recognition, Vocational Education has made some positive impacts on individuals and Nigeria as a nation.

### **Vocational Technical Education Journey So Far**

After Nigerian independence, technical and vocational education followed closely in the pattern developed by the British government. Technical institutes offered courses of different lengths at the sub-professional levels for fulltime, part-time, and evening students. These courses were organized into departments and covered both technical and commercial subjects.

Of major importance to the development of technical and vocation education beginning from 1962, was the publication of Ashby Report. In April 1959, a year prior to Nigerian independence, the federal minister of Education for Nigeria was appointed to serve on a commission. In a white paper issued in 1961, the Federal Government accepted the commissions report in principle as a minimum basis for building education in Nigeria for the next ten years. From 1962, the curriculum was slightly modified and the craft schools became a sort of post primary intermediate course from which pupils entering the trade centers were recruited. The trade centers became technical training schools. Under a new policy all trade centers became technical schools and technical institutes were converted into technical colleges (Osuala 2004).

Furthermore, what really gave impetus to the present level of awareness, planning and organization of vocational and technical education sterved down from the 1966 report of comparative technical education similar to Abroad and Recommendations for a National plan on Vocational and Technical Education in the Republic of Nigeria as contained in the 1977 National Policy on Education. This was revised in 1981 and 1998 (Onoh, Onu & Oluka, 2012) and at present 2013.

Nigeria education system at all levels including vocational technical education have witnessed dramatic changes in terms of purpose, organization, structure and changes in nomenclature of certificates awarded. For instance, 1970's to early 1980's witnessed the 6-5-4 system of education. Late 1980's witnessed a re-structuring of education system on a 6-3-3-4 system while the 2008 witnessed a new reform of 9-3-4 system of education. The various reforms in education are reflected in the National Policy on Education (NPE) document. The vision of NPE document and various reform movements are to address the issue of imbalance in the provision of education in different parts of the country with regards to access the quality of education offered (Yusof, 2018). The education reforms policies of 1970's, 1980's and 1990's which focused more on the acquisition of certificates instead of the needed vocations skills have caused many Nigerian youths and adults to



move into the education industry in pursuit of certificates. As a result of this, the education industries (VTE inclusive) grew rapidly in size in late 1970's, 80's, 90's till date.

It is important to note that all technical and vocational institutions were established by the government. The government, therefore provide the following;

- (1) Finance for the technical and vocational institutions under its control.
- (2) Building and equipment of educational facilities including classroom, laboratories and workshops,
- (3) Building and equipment of auxiliary facilities such as students' halls, teachers' quarters, recreation and sports facilities.

Finally, to empower vocational and technical education in the pursuit of its goals and monitor as efforts in achieving quality learning, government has set up agents of quality assurance to do the job. These agents are National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Universities Commission (NUC) each agent has provided minimum standards for use by the training institutions.

### **Concept of Vocational Technical Education**

The Concept of vocational technical education is rooted in education for work, the essence of VTE is to train youths who can make use of their brains and hands as a result of their creative and acquired knowledge and skills (Samuel, 2018).

Vocational and technical education is a programme that is design to prepare the individual to acquire skill and applying scientific knowledge in solving technological problems. It is for the development of skill, attitudes and knowledge in people who are ready for gainful employment (Ukoha & Usoro, 2014). VTE is seen as education for work or a kind of education purposely designed to equip learners with professional competences needed to fill the yearning gap in manpower development for a sustainable economy. VTE according to Okoye (2013) is education for those who need it, those who want it, and those who want to progress by it. This implies that an individual who acquires those competences and some psychomotor skills in VTE is ready empowered to be self-reliant. Therefore, VTE should be considered as education for all, since everyone require vocational skills in different occupational skills in different occupational area for gainful employment and self-reliance. Individual with vocational skill has greater opportunity to earn a livelihood as well contribute to the national development. Hence, VTE is designed to offer training to improve individual's general proficiency in relation to their occupation. Furthermore Okolocha and Baba (2016) see VTE as a form of education whose primary aim is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupation and encompasses field of study as well as an engine for creative of wealth for all.

VTE adequately equip students to be more effective in this age of science and technology and to raise a generation of people who can think for themselves and respect the dignity of labour, and propel its citizenry into a bosom economic enderado. What is needed



today and tomorrow are workers with good technical skill background, rugged enough to transform Nigeria into positive technological breakthrough with the ability to meet its immediate demand. As the world around us is changing fast, there must be an increased emphasis on VTE in meeting the aims and objectives in which it was established.

### **Aims and Objectives of Vocational Technical Education**

Vocational Technical Education is used 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. VTE is further understood to be:

- a. An integral part of general education.
- b. A means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work.
- c. A method of alleviating poverty (FRN, 2013).

### **The Objectives of Vocational Technical Education**

The objectives of Vocational Technical Education:

- a. Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels.
- b. Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.
- c. Give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically (FRN, 2013).

To realize all these objectives the Federal and State government decided to recognize and substantially expand technical and vocational institutions particularly during the third national development plan period (1975 - 1980). The need to advance more technologically is evidenced when in 1985, the federal government established seven more federal colleges of education (Technical) throughout the whole federation (Ugboaja, 2016).

From the foregoing, it has been pointed out that the central purpose of VTE is to prepare persons for employment in the occupation of their choice. The individual is equipped with skills, information, attitudes and useful habits which will enable him to live a successful life within the community in terms of meeting certain educational and personal needs like earning income, enjoying leisure for full living and making contribution to improve his world by serving as investment in human capital (Onoh, Onu & Oluka, 2012).

The realisation of the objectives of VTE will be deemed successful if VTE programmes of schools prepare persons for vocational and technical occupations requiring technological knowledge and skills in job operations as planning, control, maintenance, testing and production. The VTE programme will be successful if new systems for the production of food, raw materials and mass productions of goods and services are created. The societies have recognized VTE as the most effective weapon against poverty, unemployment and all the forces that threaten technological development and human progress



if and only if VTE is well carried out as planned in its objectives. It would also follow that the economic status of the Nigerian nation can be measured in the ability to supply its own needs, that is the extent to which the nation is self-reliant. The achievement of self-reliance depends on some measure of technology. It is also dependent on the availability of trained skilled labour force, which is facilitated through effective VTE programmes of schools (Onoh, Onu & Oluka, 2012).

### **Failure of Vocational Technical Education (VTE) in Nigeria**

Vocational Technical Education has not been able to achieve its set aims and objectives which among others were mainly for the acquisition of skills for self-reliance. The failures of Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria can be attributed to the following challenges it faces.

1. **Poor public perception and apathy of Vocational Technical Education:** VTE in Nigeria has a very low image and there is need for a turn around on its perception for public acceptance. Observations have shown that many parents especially the elites, the rich and political class do not encourage their wards to make VTE a career and those who opt probably for Vocational Technical Education programme either by accident or chance are not motivated or encouraged because the society does not place any significant value or dignity on the programme.
2. **Government lukewarm attitudes/poor funding:** The three tiers of government in Nigeria have not fully come to appreciate the contributions of VTE to national economic development even though it is an indispensable tool for tackling unemployment and poverty in the society. This is because successive governments have not found it necessary to adequately finance both planning and implementation of standard and sustainable VTE programmes in the country. In support of this statement, Okeke and Eze (2010) stated that insufficient finance is a realistic and practical factor inhibiting the implementation of Vocational Technical Education sector is holistically on science education.
3. **Shortage of qualified Vocational Technical Education teachers:** Many tertiary institutions across the country are inadequately staffed both qualitatively and quantitatively. In most departments especially in VTE programmes, the number of qualified Vocational Technical Education teachers for each specialized area is in short supply. It is an indisputable fact that without quality VTE teachers, practical works which is an essential component of VTE programme will be difficult to implement. Acquisition of skills requires that strict attention and supervision should be given to every student. Oluwale, Jegede and Olamide (2013) stated that, attracting qualified staff into teaching and teacher training in VTE was a problem for most countries including Nigeria. In order to spur locally needed VTE teachers, it is imperative that Nigerian government should seriously consider proper retention schemes for their best talents by providing special working conditions such as; adequate research supports and incentives to stem this problem of brain-drain.



4. Lack of adequate equipment and training infrastructure: Most Vocational Technical Education departments in our higher institutions do not have well-equipped laboratories, workshops and usable infrastructures. Where these exist, they are grossly inadequate, obsolete and in a dilapidated state. Oduwa (2007) posited what is seen and referred to as VTE laboratories in various institutions today are an eye-sores as the laboratories only have items or equipment that were provided at the point the departments were established. It is however a statement of fact that most VTE departments still depend on engineering workshops and lecturers to teach Vocational Education courses. Dokubo (2013) indicated that, only 40% of tertiary institutions in Nigeria have laboratories or workshops spaces for VTE programmes.
5. Non-uniformity of course contents: Most of the Nigerian universities and colleges that offer VTE programme do not have uniform course contents. Non-uniformity in the course contents usually creates problems for students who may wish to transfer to another institution to complete their studies. This disparity in course contents of VTE programme in Nigerian universities and colleges poses a great challenge for the standardization of the VTE programmes. Observation has shown that most schools lack adequate infrastructural facilities, poorly equipped classrooms and obsolete equipment. For a better result, teaching and learning environment need to be conducive and well furnished. Effective VTE can only be achieved where the training on the jobs are carried out, with the same tools and machines as exist in the industry itself.
6. Poor organization and slow pace of implementation: Those who formulated the National Policy on Education had a clear vision of an intended mission that is the vocationalizing the school system particularly at the secondary school level. Unfortunately, the programme is bedeviled by organizational and implementation problems. Most secondary school principals are products of general education, which bring about problems in the implementation of VTE policies. These general education principals will definitely give priority to their own type of education before considering VTE and its action to a great extent will reflect in the quality of the VTE system.

### **The Need for Effective Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria**

The economic growth of Nigeria has not matched her efforts in enlarging the education system. Thus by this enlargement, the discrepancy between the number of school products and the number of existing job vacancies has perpetually been out of sort. This has resulted in dashing parent's hope and ruining student's ambitions to securing a decent employment through the acquisition of different educational qualifications. However, the inclusion of skill-oriented subjects into the school curriculum will enhance the scope of employment for the graduating students. When the subjects are properly handled, the products will have improved chances of selecting from wide range of occupations. The general skill training given in the study of the vocational subjects equally enhances occupation mobility (Ogwo & Oranu, 2006).



Globally, there is evidence of strong relationship between a country's technological might and its economic potentials: such that most economically advanced countries are also those with high technological capabilities. An increase in the number of technical personnel to service Nigeria's grouping technical artifacts will equally conserve resources that hitherto the country spends in employing the services of foreign experts (Ogwo & Oranu, 2006).

Furthermore, Uko (2016) stated the following as pressing needs for VTE in Nigeria.

- a. Manpower development need.
- b. Strong quest for self-sufficiency in food production and security.
- c. Strong desire to produce raw materials for its indigenous industries from the local environment.
- d. Total security against any invading attack from foreign countries.
- e. Strong quest for the training of skilled technicians, artisans, technologists and professionals in agriculture and its allied industries.
- f. Strong need for sustainable production industries spread around the rural communities where raw materials are available.

When these needs are met through institutionalized, utilitarian form of education (VTE), the challenges emanating from perennial shortage of skilled man-power, high rate of graduate unemployment, underemployment and prolonged economic recession/inflation will be properly addressed. By so doing, Nigeria as a nation will achieve the desired national development, self-reliance and above all the aims and objective of VTE will be achieved.

### **Success of Vocational Technical Education (VTE) in Nigeria**

Agwi (2019), Uwah and Ododo (2018) outlined the following as areas in which VTE has imparted positively to the life of Nigerians.

1. VTE to an extent has played an important role in the area of employment in Nigeria. It has been able to provide employment opportunities to many youths in the country today. If more focus is been placed on this type of education, unemployment will gradually become a thing of the past, as many youth will be delving into entrepreneurship.
2. VTE has contributed immensely in improving the standard of living of beneficiaries. Skilled acquired during the training has helped individuals and also the nation its boost its economy.
3. VTE to an extent has helped to promote stability. This is because it helps in providing employment opportunities and at the same time causes drastic reduction in unemployment rate. Skills acquired have helped individuals and also the nation to boost its economy.
4. VTE has succeeded in reducing the gap between the rich and the poor. It has increased the availability of manpower and boosts the industrial sector and the nation's economy. Industries in Nigeria have grown well due to good maintenance and adequate delivery or products and services.



5. VTE has also served as an instrument of empowerment that provides adults with skills required for sound social living. It has succeeded in the transformation of rural dweller thus leading to the development of the rural areas due to skills acquisition.

### **The Way Forward**

The discovery of a problem is half way to its solution, finding the way forward for Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria entails the correction of the anomalies highlighted in this paper. To achieve this, the following strategies are recommended.

1. **Boosting the Image of VTE:** In this 21st century the business environment is changing at a very fast pace with regard to the world of work. This demands new skills for proper adaptation to the business world. For Nigerians to meet the skill needs of the 21st century job market, they should have a rethink and change their negative mindset by embracing VTE for skill acquisition for improved socio-economic development of the country. The image of VTE programmes should be boosted through adequate and proper sensitization of the general public and students in particular. Federal government should make VTE programmes more attractive by awarding scholarship to its students, making it compulsory for each student to acquire at least one vocational skill irrespective of the area of specialization.
2. **Involvement of Vocational Education Professionals in VTE Policy Decisions:** The major problem confronting Vocational Technical Education is the use of non-professional in handling VTE matters. Many administrators of VTE programme at policy making level are not vocational trained persons and thus do not seem to understand the needs of the programme regarding fund distribution. For VTE to be successful, government must ensure that VTE professional are involved in VTE policy making decisions, planning and implementation.
3. **Matching VTE Policies with needs Assessment and Proper Planning:** Federal government should conduct needs assessment of the people and the country at large with respect to VTE and match it with proper planning before implementation. Policies on education made in haste will bring in such a way desired result. Proper planning will also help to avoid inconsistencies in policy decision which would hinder performance and success of VTE programmes.
4. **Teachers' Motivation:** Teachers in VTE should be motivated to enjoy the profession, by paying their salaries, allowances, and their entitlements like promotional, in-service training allowance should be given to them as at when due. The vocational teachers should be encouraged in order to ensure this optimum performance of the job which will ensure quality teaching in schools and Nigeria as a whole. Nigerian educational system including VTE should help people to attain the competencies needed in the present day world of work. Schools must provide trainings for ever increasing variety of vocations. Students must be inspired to stay in school long enough to attain job proficiency in at least one vocation. Post-secondary and adult vocational educational courses and programme must be made available for students



who need to improve their skills or develop new skill. If Nigeria's VTE needs are to be met, training programmes must be made available at little or no cost to the students.

### Conclusion

Vocational Technical Education is a systematic learning experience which is designed to fit individual for gainful employment and self-reliance by using tools, equipment, machines and other materials to translate theories into practice and employable skills. These skills could only be acquainted in a well-equipped workshop with modern and functional facilities, with qualified vocational technical teachers for successful implementation of the curriculum. It was identified that poor public perception and apathy of Vocational Technical Education was a factor on why the aims and objectives of VTE cannot be achieved since the public believed that the programme is for those who are called "never-do-well". Poor funding of the programme by government also played an important role, as government does not allocate enough fund for the running of VTE. This paper finally identified employment opportunities, poverty reduction, mechanized ways of production of goods and services as ways on which VTE aims and objectives have been achieved in Nigeria.

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