

The Role of Vocational Education in Promoting Community Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Vocational education is a vehicle for the development of marketable and entrepreneurial skills. It serves as the fundamentals of man's creativeness and progressive development which increases economic growth and development in the society. Hence, this paper examined the role of vocational education in promoting community development in Nigeria. Being a position paper, it was divided into different sub-headings. The introductory aspect of this work gave an insight into vocational education and the need to promote vocational education in Nigeria. Also discussed extensively was the concept of vocational education as perceived by different scholars. The aims and objectives of vocational education as enshrined in the National Policy on Education were clearly articulated. Further discussed herein was the relevance of vocational education to community development. The challenges confronting vocational education in Nigeria were highlighted and explicated. Recommendations were also offered to promote the sustainability of vocational education.

Keywords: Vocational Education, Promoting, Community and Development.

Introduction:

Education is the right of every human child. As rightly put by Balogun (2018), education is the right of every human being and it is a light without which the world will be in darkness. It is the basis for the scientific and technological development of any country. Education is therefore a real key to vocational training and building capacity, be it in the rural environment or the urban setting. This is because education is universally recognized as one of the fundamental building blocks for human development and poverty reduction. For people to improve their standard of living, they must be given relevant education that will empower them for community living. Going

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by the growing rate of unemployment in Nigeria, the kind of education that will empower people for better living is vocational education.

Vocational education is the type of adult education programme which involves the acquisition of practical skills and technical knowledge. Though vocational education has not received sufficient attention in Nigeria recently emphasis has shifted away from general education that encouraging the mere acquisition of a certificate to skill-based education which focuses more on what one can do as well as cultivating life skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving (Adedokun, 2021). Vocational education is an integral part of an overall system of education. As such, adequate consideration needs to be given towards the training of people in a given occupation, by providing them with the necessary skills and technical knowledge.

In the view of Ovbiagele (2015), vocational education has been part of the fundamentals of man's creativity and progressive development which increases economic growth. Ben (2010) maintained that the National Policy on Education in Nigeria attaches great importance to vocational education; as it is one of the prime movers for achieving the desired technological and economic development of Nigeria. There is no gain in saying that social norms and values are prerequisites for a person to fit into any society, hence the need for the acquisition of vocational skills and competence for self-reliance. For any developing nation like Nigeria, the level of economic growth is tied to the level of technology and it is only through the application of appropriate technologies that the skillful but jobless can be made functional in our society. There is no doubt that the nations of the world that are technologically and economically strong have the strength of their success rooted directly in investment in vocational and technical education.

Ovbiagele (2015) defined vocational education as a type of adult education that emphasizes an individual's abilities and skills toward doing a certain job. It is aimed at promoting social responsibility, job orientation, vocational exploration, and political participation, spiritual and moral values. Examples of this type of education in the traditional society were when children were involved in practical farming, fishing, weaving cooking, carving, knitting and other traditional vocations.

Concept of vocational education in Nigeria:

The concept of vocational education has been explicated from diverse perspectives. Ben (2010) defined vocational education as the education which leads to any occupation, career or profession requiring specialized manipulative skills, knowledge and attitudes. In the same vein, Ben et al. (2012) maintained that the major thrust of vocational education is the application of specialized learning techniques in the realization of both educational and societal objectives. Ben et al., (2012) added that the central objectives of vocational education centre on the achievement of socio-economic, industrial and technological objectives that will eventually manifest themselves in economic stability, industrial harmony, technological advancement and improved standard of living for all.

Vocational education according to Okolocha and Baa(2016) is educational training which encompasses knowledge, skills, competencies, structural activities, abilities capacities and all other structural experiences for securing jobs in various sectors of the economy or even enabling one to be self-dependent by being a job creator. In the opinion of Iheanacho (2016), vocational education is that aspect of education that deals with business education, far mining, bookkeeping, and bricklaying, among others to acquire vocational skills in these fields.

According to the International Labour Organization in Oluwale et al. (2017), vocational and technical education is a vehicle for the development of marketable and entrepreneurial skills and an engine of development. Amoor (2019) posited that vocational education is the core of both individuals and society's economy. Amoor (2019) further emphasized that the acquisition of skills by individuals could explore their environment and harness the resources within it, which could serve them and society since the wealth of any nation determines its development. Banjoko cited in Adedokunm (2021) emphasized that skills are a major distinguishing aspect of vocational education which makes it an outstanding form of liberal art in summary, vocational education is aimed at the development of human abilities in terms of knowledge, skill and understanding so that individual may happily and efficiently carry on activities in the job.

Vocational education is a type of education that trains and helps to prepare individuals for employment in a specific occupation or trade. Ayonmike et al. (2015) defined vocational education as those aspects of education processes involving addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of the economy and social life. It is an integral part of general education and also a means of preparing people for occupational fields and effective participation in the world of work. Ojimba (2012) saw vocational education as a form of education whose primary aim is to prepare persons for employment and this encompasses different fields of study like Agricultural Education, Fine and Applied Art Education, Business Education and Vocational Trades in soap making, hairdressing and computer training among others).

Vocational education as an aspect of traditional education is designed to achieve several aims and objectives. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) cited in Okoro (2022) identified the following as aims and objectives of vocational education in Nigeria:

- i. To provide trained manpower in applied sciences technology and commerce, particularly at sub-professional levels;
- ii. To provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man;
- iii. To provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development;
- iv. To give and impart the skills leading to the production of crafts men, technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant;
- v. To give an introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies;
- vi. To enable our young men and women to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology;

Vocational Education and Community Development in Nigeria:

The importance of vocational education to community development cannot be over-emphasized; as it provides relevant skills and knowledge to individuals to be self-supporting and independent through one's labour, thereby contributing economically and socially to the development of their communities (Osayomuantor & Edokpayi, 2018). Due to inadequate infrastructural facilities and a lack of employment opportunities in our rural communities, most able-bodied men and women have migrated to urban centres in search of white-collar jobs, leading rural areas to be grossly underdeveloped and desolate. This ugly trend can be reversed if individuals and the government can set up vocational education centres in our rural communities.

According to Okolocha and Baa (2016), vocational education aims at alleviating poverty through the empowerment of rural dwellers. This is because it helps man and the community at large to be self-reliant. Improvement in the human condition of living is the primary concern of education through which people can develop knowledge and skills, adopt new behaviour and be better able to survive in their communities.

The success of a nation's economy and community development depends on the quality of its labour force. Therefore, the programme of vocational education is designed to provide technical knowledge and skills necessary for agricultural industrial, commercial and economic development of their immediate communities and the country at large. When youths acquire skills that provide them with financial and psychological security, the society or community at large receives continuous supplies of skilled labour and quality goods and the community becomes developed. The wealth of a community determines to a large extent the developmental level of that community. A rich community is capable of meeting her economic, social, moral and political needs. A relationship enjoys economic stability, if it is industrially buoyant, agriculturally sufficient and technically up to date and these rely solely on the skills acquired through vocational education (Ben, 2010).

Idih (2022) observed that if Nigerian agricultural and mineral resources are to be probably harnessed and economically used, there is a need for emphasis to be placed on the acquisition of skills. Skill promotes economic stability. The possession of skills is important in preventing youths from becoming social misfits. These skilled youth become gainfully employed through vocational training. Acquisition of skills, therefore, helps to arrest social ills such as armed robbery, stealing, kidnapping, and prostitution, as well as, preventing rural-urban drift. These employable youths will remain in their communities and contribute socially and economically to the development of their areas by participating in decision-making regarding policies affecting their lives, community and the Nation.

According to Sheieh et al. (2019), lifelong vocational education will gradually improve the economic and social development of both the people and the country by making vocational education a channel for the exploitation of human resources. The skills acquired through vocational training and centres set up in the rural communities will lead to the production of craftsmen, technicians and other skills personnel. This group of professionals can partner with industries and other businesses to enable them to fit into the wider society upon graduation, either as individual workers in paid employment or self-employed persons and functional members of the political society.

Challenges confronting vocational education in Nigeria:

Despite the numerous invaluable benefits of vocational education, there are several challenges facing vocational education and training in Nigeria. Some of the challenges have been explicated herein.

- i. **Inadequate qualified vocational education teachers:** Many vocational institutions and training centres in Nigeria lack qualified staff. According to Iheanacho (2016), vocational education staff in vocational institutions in Nigeria are highly inadequate and this has hindered skill acquisition in Nigeria. Idih (2022) alleged that many teachers of vocational education have little or no knowledge of modern equipment and they; have never seen some of the equipment they are required to teach with. Therefore, they lack the necessary skills to impart to

- students. In addition to this, the number of qualified technical staff is few compared to the number of students in our technical and vocational schools.
- ii. **Negative societal perception:** Some members of the public still regard vocational education as education given to school dropouts, never doing well and disabled persons. Nwoachokor (2012) admitted that there is a social belief that vocational and technical education is meant for dropouts. Okolocha and Baa (2016) stressed that parental attitude towards vocational education is negative and this has affected the level of interest which people have in vocational skills.
 - iii. **Inadequate tools, equipment and facilities:** Oluwale et al. (2017) posited that modern tools, equipment and facilities are lacking in most vocational centres and schools. In the view of Ovbiagele (2015), most of the available equipment and facilities in vocational and technical schools/institutions are obsolete and outdated; making it very challenging for the aims and objectives of vocational education not to be fully achieved.
 - iv. **Inadequate funding of vocational education:** The issue of funding is another critical issue in vocational-technical education programmes. The amount of money expended determines the quality of facilities that would be available in most vocational training schools. Most vocational schools in Nigeria are underfunded. This scenario has resulted in the slow pace of development of vocational education in Nigeria (Shieh et al., 2019).
 - v. **Non-uniformity of course contents:** Ovbiagele (2015) reported that most of the vocational and technical schools and colleges in Nigerian universities do not have uniform course contents. This disparity according to Nwoachokor (2012) poses a great challenge for the standardization of vocational-technical education programmes.

Conclusion:

The establishment of vocational and technical education programmes in rural communities will no doubt contribute to community development. If rural communities which are the major source of capital formation in every country are neglected, no meaningful social and economic progress can take place. This is why Nigeria should strive to overcome the challenges of rural communities through promoting vocational and technical education. Paying attention to vocational education in Nigeria would not only tackle the issue of unemployment but would highly promote self-reliance, and community development as well as enhance the standard of living in the community.

Recommendations:

To promote vocational education in Nigeria beyond what it is now, the following recommendations should be taken seriously.

- i. The government should equip vocational education laboratories and workshops with modern equipment, tools and machines to enable teachers and students to practice the skills using a replica of what should be obtained in the workplace.

- ii. The government should change the negative mindset of the public towards vocational and technical education by mounting campaigns, workshops, exhibitions and other forms of positive propaganda to dispel the erroneous perception.
- iii. The government should encourage the training of vocational and technical staff by adequately supporting vocational and technical programmes through scholarship awards, funding/research grants, provide current books and journals for the improvement in the quality of teachers in the country.
- iv. Government and individuals should adequately fund vocational education and other skill acquisition programmes in Nigeria. Special interventions should be created for the effective implementation of vocational programmes at all levels. This will help to fund the education of artisans, craftsmen, technicians and engineers and also equip the workshops and laboratories for effective skill acquisition.
- v. The curriculum contents of the various vocational schools from pre-vocational to the university levels have to be entirely reviewed to ensure uniformity of course contents.
- vi. The government should set up vocational and technical education programmes and centres in rural communities to enhance the socio-economic, development of the areas.

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