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VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: AN ANTIDOTE TO UNEMPLOYMENT

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ABSTRACT

The issue of unemployment in Nigeria is one of the most critical problems the country is facing today. This has been a major problem to researchers, analysts and economists as the figure increasingly suggests dwindling potentials. Official figure of unemployment in Nigeria from the Bureau of Statistics puts this at about 20 percent (about 30 million), but this figure still did not include about 40 million other Nigerian youths captured in the World Bank statistics in 2009 (BusinessDay, 2009). It is therefore not out of place to consider massive employment generation as an issue of major focus on national development and economic growth plan of the Nigerian government. Under and lack of effective utilisation of both human and material resources has led to unemployment and poverty in Nigeria. In curbing unemployment in Nigeria, efforts should therefore be geared towards improving the economy by way of providing the right skills to the people, albeit, through technical and vocational education to generate employment opportunities. This will assist in no small measure to tackle economic problems and lead to a more prosperous life.

Keywords: unemployment, underemployment, employment, opportunities, self-reliance, self-employment.

INTRODUCTION

The level of unemployment in Nigeria possess a great danger to the nation if left unchecked by all levels of governments. The federal and state governments had yet to address the alarming rate of joblessness in the land squarely. The erratic economic situation in the present day Nigeria, with the resultant massive unemployment calls for real emphasis on the need for every Nigerian to strive towards self-reliance through self-employment (Anyakoha, 1995). It is to be noted that no meaningful/significant technological development including economic growth can take place in an academic/professional environment devoid of technical and vocational education. Vocational/technological programmes are the imperatives through which the present deficiencies in our educational system can be guaranteed. This is because they will harbor occupational skill, employability, self-reliance and saleable skills which are

required to create and re-create employment opportunities. Skills acquisition in various trades appear to be one of the surest ways through which young people can find their way and bearing in the labor market, be it public or private sector (Ochiagha, 1995). To that extent, sufficient interest must be shown in what goes on in the school/workshop with the hope of profiting by it. Vocational education can only be given to any individual or group of individuals with specified professional calling, trade, occupation or job and who need or can profit by it (Okorie, 2000).

Unemployment is a serious problem in Nigeria (Okorie, 2000) and for an economy; this concept means wasted workforce and the loss of the potential for production of goods and services. Unemployment and the craving for acquisition of saleable skills by Nigerians have justified the inclusion of skill-oriented subjects in the school syllabus (Aina, 1998), and also the introduction of entrepreneurial education in higher institutions. These subjects and courses are designed to train youths in occupation that will enable them earn a living. In the present democratic dispensation, nothing is as precious

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as a saleable skill.

The 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria involves three levels of institutional learning processes at the primary school level, secondary school level and the tertiary level. At the primary level, children start attending primary school when they are six years' old and spend the next six years graduating at the age of 12. Secondary school education which in the past used to last for five years now takes six years to complete. The secondary education is in two phases. Phase I is the Junior Secondary School while Phase II of the programme is the senior secondary school each of which would last for three years consecutively. Institutions of higher education or the tertiary institutions provide the last stage of formal education which takes an average of 4 years completing the 6-3-3-4 educational system.

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

According to Olaitan (1996), vocational education is the essential preparation that will enable the individual to meet his/her developmental needs and aspirations, which for many will constitute an immediate entry into the world of work. UNESCO (1974) defines vocational and technical education as "a comprehensive term that encompasses those facets of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies, related science (technical) and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge associated with occupations (vocation)".

However, from whichever perspective one views vocational and technical education, it can be seen as a functional type of education that emphasizes skill acquisition and manpower development. Osuala (1998) observes that vocational and technical education stresses people development rather than people maintenance. The education capitalizes on the capacity of people to change, to learn new and improved skills, to develop creative approaches to the generation of services and production of goods. \ hence, vocational and technical education is essential to the socio-economic and technical development of any nation. Still, Brennam and Little (1996) assert that, as long as vocational education is an integral part of sustainable self-employment, frequency of training to reflect the relevant skills should be encouraged by vocational educators and other agencies that provide such training skills. The emphasis here is to allot more time to

practical skills over theory in each trade during training as this will enable the trainees to gain practical experience in their chosen vocation so as to be gainfully employed in the world of work as a technical personnel.

STATUS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The development of vocational and technical education in Nigeria has its root in the pre-colonial education system. In those days, education, which was informal in nature, laid emphasis on the training of the youths in the skills already acquired by the parents. Through this informal education system, the children were taught the skills for which their parents were well grounded and for which they were noted, thereby promoting the preservation and transmission of such skills from one generation to another.

Olabode (1985) observes that the attitude of our forefathers towards technical and vocational education showed that:

- our forefathers were known to want things done;
- they had high regard for people who could use their hands; and
- African-technology was a rare integration of practical and theoretical know-how.

During this pre-colonial period, education placed more emphasis on dignity of labor and was more utilitarian in nature. However, with the introduction of western system of education by the European Christian missionaries in 1842, vocational and technical education was relegated to the background and treated it as a relatively insignificant appendage of the country's education system. This was largely due to the motives of the missionaries which were for evangelization and production of clerics who can assist them in their commercial enterprise. The motive of the missionaries was not to develop Nigerian citizens technologically. The motive was hinged, as pointed out by Olabode (1999), on the Educational Ordinances of 1882, 1887, 1908 and 1916, all of which have one major characteristic in common: the relegation of vocational and technical education to the background.

TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT FOR ARTISANS THROUGH VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

VTE results in the production of highly skilled workforce which Nigeria currently lacks. In developed countries, equal attention is given to all aspects of education including vocational and technical training, availability of skilled labor in every conceivable

vocation ranging from bricklaying and carpentry to painting and auto mechanics. The neglect of vocational and technical education in Nigeria is depriving the country of the complementary contributions the graduates should be making to national development. In addition, it is causing frustrations among the populace as most artisans lack the required level of expertise and professionalism that their counterparts in organized societies have. Members of the public go through a lot of hassles to get a competent mechanic to repair their vehicles just as they encounter genuine difficulties getting competent hands to handle faulty home appliances, office or work equipment amongst others. The neglect of this critical aspect of education can be traced to a series of factors, the primary one being poor funding. For example, in 2010, the Federal Government spent only N249.08 billion on education out of a budget of N4.07 trillion. This sum translates to just about 6 percent of the total budget in spite of UNESCO's recommendations that at least 26 percent of national budget of developing nations be allocated or devoted to education for the healthy development of that sector. Poor or inadequate funding is affecting the growth and progress of most vocational and technical colleges. The colleges have found it difficult to provide the necessary tools and facilities for practical teaching experiences for their students. It is a situation calling for urgent redress if Nigeria is to reap from the enormous benefits arising from investing in the technical abilities of the youth. In other words, VTE is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and skills for the world of work to increase opportunities for productive work, sustainable livelihoods, personal empowerment and socio-economic development in knowledge economies and rapidly changing work environments (Maclean and Wilson 2009). Radwan and Akindeinde (2010) argued that in order to achieve the African continent's developmental aspirations, young people need to have access to an education that will enable them to enhance their standard of living, become aware of health issues, achieve their desired family sizes and gain competitive skills that will be in high demand in the labor market. De Hargentaye (2009) recalls that vocational training is only one of several instruments for employment generation, whereas vocational training can develop appropriate skills thereby improve labor supply and the "employability" of the workforce. The demand for labor depends on

incentives for investment including prices, the exchange rate and generally, the business climate in the country. Most programmes emphasize the improvement of skills of the youth labor force or support the creation of youth entrepreneurs, and the emphasis is placed on improvement of quality in the supply of employable persons. As for demand, emphasis is placed on creation of an environment conducive to the growth of the private sector – a measure that has indirect, but nevertheless important, implications in the creation of employment for the youths. However, UNIDO, African Union, Yen, and UNOWA (2007) argued that the skill development and youth employment should not be isolated from one another, but be undertaken in a linked and complementary manner. There is need, therefore, for concerted efforts to seek a more direct role for the private sector in programmes that generate jobs for the youths.

Self-employment requires entrepreneurial skills and employers are calling for an ever increasing range and level of skills and competencies, combining technical and interpersonal skills. Given the growing importance of skills in driving socio economic development and rapidly changing skill requirements, it is asserted that countries need to scale up the quantity and quality of skills development through VTE. However, it is assumed that simply scaling up the existing models of VTE, provision of more young people and adults is not the solution but that profound transformations are required in the conceptualization, governance, funding and organization of VTE to prepare individuals and their societies for the future. It is through VTE that skill development programmes can improve young people's opportunities for decent jobs and better lives.

UNEMPLOYMENT: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND IMPLICATIONS

Unemployment can be conceived to mean the number of people who are not gainfully employed in an area, often given as a percentage of the total labor force. Unemployment is the greatest challenge to underdeveloped and developing countries.

From the content analyses perceptions of job seekers on the issue of graduate unemployment in a study conducted by Fajana (2000), the following factors were identified as the major causes of unemployment in Nigeria:

- The long period of initial unemployment among university graduates in Nigeria, faulty manpower

planning and expansion of educational facilities that have unduly raised the expectations of Nigerian youths, the economic recession, continued proportionality of expatriates in employment.

- The institution of the National Youths Service Corps scheme, the collective bargaining process, graduate attitude to some type of jobs, attitude to jobs in other locations as well as search behavior of employers and job seekers, use of capital intensive technology, wide rural-urban migration, formal-informal sectors differentials.

All these and many more factors contribute to the cause of graduate unemployment in Nigeria. In contexts of chronic unemployment and underemployment, young people themselves are demanding for more opportunities for education and training, an improvement in the relevance of education and training to the world of work.

VTE AS AN ANTIDOTE TO UNEMPLOYMENT

A major antidote to the problem of unemployment in Nigeria is through the development and promotion of entrepreneurial education. Efforts should be made to introduce the study and acquisition of entrepreneurial skills into the curriculum of tertiary education.

The compulsory introduction of job creation skills into the curriculum of higher education will enhance the training and production of employers of labor. Our tertiary institutions will henceforth be able to produce job creators, who will in turn train others to be self-reliant thereby reducing dependence on the government for employment (Punch, 2012). VTE would prepare occupational fields and effective participation in the world of work. Being an aspect of lifelong learning, it would prepare the people for responsive citizenship. It will facilitate poverty alleviation or serve as a critical tool for poverty alleviation. It will prepare learners for careers that are based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic and totally related specific trade, occupation or vocation. It will provide education designed to develop occupational skills. It will give individuals the skills to live, learn and work as a productive citizens in a global society. It will serve as a catalyst for creating employment opportunities. It is a panacea for achieving millennium development goals (MDGs).

SUMMARY

In this paper, we have examined the issue of unemployment in Nigeria. We defined the concepts of

unemployment, underemployment, employment opportunities, self-reliance, self-employment. We also discussed the present system of education in Nigeria and how it affects employment generation in Nigeria. We also discussed the issue vocational education in Nigeria and its status. We discussed the causes, consequences and implication of unemployment in Nigeria and gave antidotes for redressing unemployment situation in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the foregoing discussion on this paper, the following recommendations are made:

- promoting entrepreneurial programmes;
- introduction of youth empowerment scheme;
- provision of equipment to graduates of different skill acquisition centers;
- redesign school curriculum so as to gear this towards entrepreneurship.

The Executive Secretary of National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) in a paper stressed that technical and vocational education has the potential of reducing unemployment in Nigeria. He therefore recommended the inauguration of vocational educational institutes, industrial enterprises institutes and vocational acquisition centers by the Federal Ministry of Education in all the 774 local government headquarters in Nigeria so as to boost the skills of participants for self-employment. He also states that:

- qualitative technical and vocational training holds the ace for youth restiveness and unemployment in the country;
- There should be involvement of private sector institutions in offering vocational, technical, technology or professional education and training at the post-basic and tertiary education level. These institutions would equip secondary school leavers and working adults with vocational skills and knowledge to meet the increasing demand for technical manpower by the various sectors of the nation's economy;
- Vocationalisation in terms of employment generation has been recognized in the world community because it is the catalyst for change and the major indices for the appraisal of a country's self-reliance, economic development and supply of trained and skilled technical manpower so as to be part of the global change.

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