AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.2, January-April, 2021 https://ajemates.org
ACADEMICJOURNALS
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PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA UNDER A DISTRESSED ECONOMY

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Abstract
Vocational Education is the education that prepares students for jobs and careers that are based on mostly manual or practical activities. Sometimes refers to as technical education. Vocational Education promotes self-employment and is considered as vital requirement for attainment of self-sustenance. Most countries with distressed economy like Nigeria neglected this aspect of education. This has led to shortage of medium and good quality, skilled technical manpower required for the economic development. Today, graduates are therefore vastly unemployable. This paper highlights the roles and challenges of Vocational Education in a distress economy in Nigeria. Curriculum must be revised to meet the direct need of industries, and the incorporation of computer studies to meet the need of the current world were some of the recommendations made in the paper.

Keywords: Vocational, Technical Education, Distress Economy and Development

Introduction

One of the challenges posed by the economic depression in Nigeria is as results of the massive loss of jobs and closure of many industries. This is a global phenomenon, whose effects felt more on Nigeria whose economies even in the best of times has been very vulnerable. It is the belief of many economists that the way out of the economic depression is to return back to

production. An industrial capacity utilization of about 53% for a nation like Nigeria, for example gives cause for concern. The implication of this is dire need to create jobs and avenue for massive employment. According to Igwebuike (2009), Vocational Education and training offers the best opportunity to produce an employable workforce in any country. Sadly, in a distress economy as Nigeria, where there is no clear and workable policies in place for Vocational Education and Technical Training. In this paper, an attempt will be made to explain what Vocational Education is and some recommendations will be proposed with Nigeria in mind.

Vocational Education is any form of education designed to prepare individuals for gainful employment as semi-skilled or skilled workers or technicians or sub-professionals in recognized occupations and emerging occupation or to prepare individuals for enrolment in advance Technical Education Programme. Okoro (1993) said Vocational Education is any education whose primary purpose is to prepare person for employment in recognized and presented by an institution to enable the learner acquire basic productive and practical skills.

Vocational Education provides an instruction that is usually given to those who need employment, in commerce and industry or any type of enterprise that involves the use of tool and other machinery. Vocational focuses on specific trades such as automobiles repairs, or mechanics, welding, plumbing, poultry farming, fisheries, crop production, electrical, craftsmen, hair dressing, tailoring and barbing etc and has until recently been associated with the activities of lower social class type of people. As a result, it attracted a level of stigma in its past. However, with economic advancement and the demand for higher levels of productivity and efficiency, the place of vocational education has become better appreciated (Marope, Chakroun and Holmes,2015). The labour market has become more specialized and nations are demanding higher level of skills at different levels. Government and business today are increasingly investing in the future of vocational education through publicly funding organizations and subsidized apprenticeship (Mureithi, 2009, Richard

Skiba, 2020). Igwebuike (2009) listed some vocational fields and their related occupation in: Agriculture, Home Economics, Technical and Industrial, Office occupation and Health occupation.

What is Technical Vocational Education?

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is understood as comprising education, training and skills development relating to a wide range of occupational fields, production, services and livelihoods. TVET, as part of lifelong learning, can take place at all level of education and include work based learning and continuing training and professional development which may lead to qualifications (Daniel UchennaChukwu et al, 2019). TVET also includes a wide range of skills development opportunities attuned to national and local contexts. Learning to learn, the development of literacy and numeracy skills, transversal skills and citizenship skills are integral components of TVET (UNESCO, 2015) It is also education that prepares people to work as technicians or to take up employment in a skilled craft or trade as a tradespersons or artisans. Vocational education is sometimes referred to as career and technical education (Eicker, G.Haseloff and Lennartz, 2017).

Uses of Technical Vocational Education

From increased productivity and innovation over higher employee retention to knowledge transfer within the company, there are plenty of good reasons to invest in additional education for your staff. But not only is it a smart move for employers to offer training opportunities, it is an equally good idea for their workers to embrace them. In this article we will examine why taking part in vocational training is crucial for employees and how it offers numerous benefits both in the short term and in the long term for future leaders (Youth) (Njoku, Isigwe and Paulinus, 2019).

Better chances of employment

Research has shown that additional training has a positive impact on a person's employment opportunities. Acquiring new skills and competencies can extend options for professional advancement and offer additional career

choices. There are also indications that VET may contribute to reducing unemployment and protect people from becoming unemployed in the first place.

Higher earnings levels

Studies typically show that individuals who seek additional education receive higher wages than their counterparts. According to studies conducted in the Netherlands, staff taking part in continuing VET measures earned 3.3%-15.7% more than those who did not. This benefit continues to be present and compound throughout their career.

Increased job satisfaction

ZainalArifin, NaziefNirwanto and Abdul Manan,2019 Opined that Workers who attend advanced training generally feel more satisfied with what they do. In fact, the evidence is highly supportive that the effects of training on job satisfaction increases with the number of training days, although at a diminishing rate. One of the reasons is that training allows people to elevate their skills to the level their jobs require of them. Empirical results have shown for this to have significant impact on the feeling of job satisfaction. In short, those who feel better prepared and competent at what they do generally feel better doing it(*Gough et al, 2013).*

Improved flexibility and mobility

As mentioned above, the acquisition of additional skill sets has a positive influence on career opportunities. Better-qualified people are usually in higher demand and are therefore able to command a wider range of choices. This also results in better job mobility as it makes it easier for employees to transit from one job to another.

Lifelong learning

Workplace learning should also not be seen as a one-time investment but a continuous process. The research suggests that this attitude is shared by employees who actively engage in it. Workers who take part in additional training in the present are also more likely to do the same and upgrade their skills later in life.

A positive influence on child education in families

One curious outcome of vocational training is the effect it has on the next generation. It appears that parents who

invest in VET programs have a stronger tendency to provide learning activities for their children and dedicate themselves to creating a more stimulating environment than those who don't.

VET provides mental, health, and societal benefits

Vocational training has also been shown to help individuals develop social competencies and improve health-related behaviour. It can have a positive impact on a person's motivation, attitude, self-esteem, and self-confidence especially among the unemployed. Furthermore, additional training is also good news for society as a whole as it is linked to increased membership of voluntary organizations taking part in the civil society (Balwanz, 2019).

What is Distressed Economy?

There is no direct statistical formula that designates any economy to be "distress" or "not distress" however, a definition can be derived from a dictionary; The Oxford learner's dictionary defines distress as "cause of great pain, discomfort or sorrow, suffering caused by want of money or other necessary things". From this definition, it is possible to ascribe certain characteristics to a distressed economy as follows:

- An economy with a low industrial capacity utilization
- An economy with high level of unemployment
- An economy with high mortality rate
- An economy with low life expectancy

Economic distress also means conditions affecting the fiscal and economic viability of a rural community, including such factors as low per capita income, low per capita taxable values, high unemployment, high under-employment, low weekly earned wages compared to the state average, low housing values compared to the state average, high percentages of the population receiving public assistance, high poverty levels compared to the state average, and a lack of year-round stable employment opportunities (Maryam and Adamu ,2017).

Financial distress is a condition in which a company or individual cannot generate

sufficient revenues or income, making it unable to meet or pay its financial obligations. This is generally due to high fixed costs, a large degree of illiquid assets, or revenues sensitive to economic downturns. For individuals, financial distress can arise from poor budgeting, overspending, too high of a debt load, lawsuit, or loss of employment (Ikpesu andEboiyehi, 2018)

Prospect of technical vocational education in Nigeria

There is no doubt about what tomorrow might bring about developing functional TVET in Nigeria. Therefore, it would be possible if the country can develop a system that makes learning more interesting and involves the students in the various aspects of their educational programme. Such a system should be that which:

- Helps the trainee to capitalize his interest and abilities.
- Provide the training that he or she would meet after School.
- Provide the trainee, the manipulative and thinking habits required in the occupation itself.
- Providing training on the actual and relayed jobs.
- Ensure that training is carried out to the extent that it gives the trainee productive capacities.
- Making sure that training is given to those who needs it, wants it and can benefit by it.
- Ensure that each member of the group has equal opportunity to participate.
- Helps to properly socialize the entire students and puts them on their toe skilfully.

Challenges of Vocational Education in Nigeria

According to Dike (2005), "while the number of Vocational Technical Schools had greatly increased in the developed countries since 1900 and Vocational Education has continued to thrive in many societies, Nigeria has neglected this aspect of education. Consequently, the society lacks skilled technicians, bricklayers, carpenters, painters and out mechanics, laboratory and pharmacy technicians, electrical/electronic technicians, food processors, horticulturalist, skilled vocational nurses etc." This is getting out of hand.

Government should focus on rebuilding their manpower starting from the proportion of skilled technicians and workers to those with university degrees. In Nigeria, every student seeks a university degree, even if it means not acquiring any skills or any job prospects for the matter. It is not whether, at the federal or state level, we have a framework or plan to reverse this unfortunate trend (Needham, 2018).

Global advancement is today driven by information technology. Oni (2007), opined that "a developing nation, need efficient services of technicians, engineers, and technologist who have received formal training from Vocational-Technical Institutions.

Akanbi (2012) noted that in businesses, banking customers service records are stored in computers likewise banking operations have gone beyond electronic and they utilize online real time access and updating methods. In order to work in an industrial nation, vocational personnel clearly need to be computer literate. Vocational personnel are not catching up with global trends.

The attitudes of Vocational Education Teachers to innovation are poor. In a study investigating the computer attitudes of teacher educator Jegede and Owolabi (2005),found that the vocational technical education teachers showed the least positive attitudes about computer literacy.

Vocational institutions and even polytechnics and university are not well equipped to deliver quality teaching and learning. Corruption and poor funding have denied many institutions in Nigeria the opportunity to grow and match their counterparts in other parts of the world. (Ayentimi, Burgess,
and Dayaram .2018) reported that "technical and vocational education is capital intensive" the lack of funds limits the amount of technical and industrial exposure that a trainee can acquire in the learning and in Nigeria there is inadequate manpower..

Faulty educational training system and government policies are also big issues in Nigeria. The Nigeria educational system had and is still witnessing changes in educational system. There have been the 7-5-2-3 system and 9-3-4

system. System change including distorted academic calendars, have negative effects on the delivery of vocational education over the years (Muwaniki and Wedekind, 2018).

Nigeria is a developing country with serious economic problems which resulted to unemployment and its social vices like arm-robbery, cultism, ritual killings, kidnapping, religious crisis, drug peddling etc. In fact Nigeria is in a state of insecurity. The high level of unemployment in the country is a blame for Nigeria's rising insecurity. The level of unemployment contributed to the high level of poverty particularly in the Northern part of the country. In view of the above we can conveniently say that our country Nigeria has a long way to go in terms of its economic development which is very important in solving the problems of insecurity (Wambayi, 2012).

Conclusion

Vocational education training provides one of the keys for a well-rounded development of any nation's economy. The inadequacy of trained vocational and middle level technical man power represents a very serious gap in the development of a country like Nigeria. Governments, private sectors, trade unions and non-governmental organizations, through their policies and activities, have major roles to play to reverse this trend. Government should also provide an enabling environment for public, private partnership (PPP) so that collectively economic realities can be achieved.

Recommendations

Based on these studies, the following recommendations are put forward:

i. Federal Government should take deliberate steps to address the in balance between technical/vocational schools by coming up with a legislation that would force the establishment of private vocational institution.
ii. Practical technical skill that can promote self-employment in economic should be provided.
iii. Economics Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practice Commission (ICPC) must show

a determination to stamp out corruption from public life.

iv. Technically skilled workers are to be paid wages that commensurate with their outputs, and comparable to what white-collar workers earn. This might change the attitude of unemployment youth and school-leavers that are currently idle and encourage secondary leavers to pursue vocational and technical training.
v. Nearly all known vocations required for national development rely on efficient and stable electricity supply. There is an urgent need for government to build a firm foundation for the generation, transmission and distribution of reliable electricity across the country.
vi. Government via legislature should formalize the promotion and funding of vocational skills acquisition.
vii. The level of computer literacy must be improved by creating a computer integrated vocational education curriculum in all institutions beginning at secondary level.

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