

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (VTE) IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

The paper examined how Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) could be practiced in the 21st century to stimulate students' interest and improve manpower development so as to reduce unemployment in the country. VTE is a form of education which helps the recipient to acquire knowledge and specific skills with which to start work and earn a living. As a result of neglect of VTE programmes in Nigeria, unemployment has been on the increase. In this paper, some considerations are made which include among others instituting two or more years of apprenticeship in VTE programmes.

Introduction

The introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), has no doubt challenged the educational sector in the 21st century (VTE programmes inclusive). Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) is the type of education which equips the learner with the necessary knowledge and specific skills with which to start work. It encompasses the training (on-the-job, out-of-school, artisans) given to an individual to advance his/her proficiency in relation to his/her present or future job. It is therefore expected that VTE programmes in the 21st century should incorporate and consistently use ICT facilities such as interactive video disk, computer, internet, and web camera so as to equip the recipients with the necessary "soft skills" with which to adapt to work environment. ICT facilities would also help the VTE programmes to create learning environments which are flexible, dynamic and capable of responding to a wide variety of individual needs and learning styles. Adapting to these challenges would no doubt enhance the quality of VTE programmes so as to attract students' interest and improve the productive capacity of labour force for self reliance.

It is not surprising that Federal Republic of Nigeria (2009) emphasized the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society. Since VTE programmes are centred on acquisition of skills for gainful employment, they can go a long way in helping the recipients contribute meaningfully to the society and curb the menace of unemployment in Nigeria if properly practised. As Dike (2007) opined, VTE is expected to yield untold profits to the whole nation if given the required attention. There is therefore an urgent need to explore the issues challenging VTE programmes, and possibly identify the way forward in the 21st century so that its objectives can be maximally achieved.

Concept of VTE

Among the scholars who made concerted efforts to define VTE, the definitions given by Akaninwor (2004) and Ordu (2012) are of interest to the researcher. Akaninwor (2004) defined VTE as a type of education designed to prepare the recipients to be self reliant. According to Ordu (2012) VTE can be seen as that type of education, designed to prepare individuals for gainful employment as semi-skilled or skilled workers. In other words, it is the training designed to advance an individual's proficiency in relation to his or her present or future occupation. From the above definitions, it could be deduced that vocational and technical education is the type of education or training designed to equip the learner with the necessary skills needed to start and progress in specific occupations and provide on-the-job training for those already engaged in one form of job or another.

According to NCCE (2003), VTE has its subunits as business education, agricultural education, computer education, fine and applied arts, home economics education and technical education. In the same vein, Ekpenyong (2008), listed VTE occupational areas to include technical education (engineering technology and related sub-fields, electrical/electronic technology and related sub-fields, building technology and related sub-fields, Automobile engineering and related sub-fields), business education (secretarial studies or office technology and management, accounting studies, distributive or marketing studies, general business studies), agriculture (agronomy, soil science or agricultural engineering), and home economics (home science, food science, clothing and textiles, hotel and catering management).

Objectives of VTE

According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (2009 pg 44), the main objectives of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) at the tertiary level include;

1. To provide courses of instruction and training in engineering, other technologies, applied science, business and management leading to the production of trained manpower.
2. To provide the technical knowledge and skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development of Nigeria.
3. To give training and impart the necessary skills for the production of technicians, technologists and other skilled personnel who shall be enterprising and self reliant.
4. To train people who can apply scientific knowledge to solve environmental problems for the convenience of man, and
5. To give exposure on professional studies in the technologies.

The dream of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is that VTE should facilitate the economic and social development of the nation but it has not been demonstrated that VTE has

maximally achieved these objectives. This could be seen by the unabated increase in unemployment of graduates (including VTE graduates). For VTE to achieve its objectives in the 21st century, the identified barriers to the actualization of its goals should be reduced or eliminated.

Issues of concern in VTE programmes

A good number of problems had been identified by different scholars which include among others; inadequate political will by the government, deficient educational monitoring and evaluation procedures, inadequate funding, administrators' misconception of the nature of VTE, poor incentives for VTE teachers, rapid rate of technological changes, inadequate infrastructure, inadequate curriculum, apathy towards VTE, recruitment of non qualified teachers for VTE programmes, inadequate number of qualified VTE teachers, inability to meet re-training needs of VTE teachers, scanty VTE research materials, inadequate VTE guidance and counselors (Ibeneme, 2007; Ekpenyong, 2008; Okeke & Eze 2010; Ordu, 2012).

The fast disappearance of culture of hard work on the part of the students, youth laxity, gap between theory and practice also constitute barriers to the maximum attainment of VTE objectives. However, these problems can be reduced/eliminated by the following measures, if consistently planned for, monitored and implemented. These measures will hopefully help VTE programmes to adapt to the challenges of the 21st century.

VTE in the 21st century

For VTE to adapt to the challenges of the 21st century, most of its problems should be reduced or eliminated. Some of the measures to be adopted in addressing them are discussed below.

1. **Incorporating Innovative Technologies into the VTE Programmes:** This implies that innovative technological facilities like interactive video disk, computers, internet facilities, power point, mechanized agricultural equipment, should be consistently used in the VTE programmes for learning and practice. Obsolete facilities that are no longer in use, should be recycled or discarded. Chukwumezie (2011) stated that for VTE to live up to .the challenges of today and the future, it is imperative that the new technologies are incorporated into the programme.
2. **Making VTE Programmes Training Environment A Replica Of The Working Environment:** This means that the environment where VTE programmes are offered should reflect what is currently obtained in the field of work. The same tools, machines and operations used in the world of work should be used in VTE

programmes so that students would be acquainted with the real practices. As Uzoekwe, Akuezilo, Ezeobi and Obidile (2012) asserted, students should be made to face the realities of life when they are still in school to avoid frustrations later in life. It is therefore important that students should be provided with the real working tools to use for mastery.

3. **Incorporating two or more years of apprenticeship in VTE programmes:** For VTE graduates to really be self reliant, they need to master the secrets and mysteries of the occupation/business they want to venture into. This they can do by observing successful entrepreneurs / experts for a reasonable number of years and not just for some months as provided in the Students' Industrial Working Experience Scheme (SIWES). It is therefore necessary for more years of apprenticeship to be incorporated in VTE training programmes to enable the students acquire adequate knowledge and skills for self reliance.
4. **Assigning students on Industrial Training (IT) in VTE Programmes According to Related Field of Study:** Students on Industrial Training in VTE programmes should be assigned according to their related field of study. During the Industrial Training, VTE students should be given the opportunity to participate in their field/related field of study whether in government or in private establishments. This will help them to acquire the skills needed in their trade/profession. Highlighting the need, Ndinechi (1997) opined that government contractors should engage the services of VTE students (those related to their field) when executing their contracts. This according to him, will give the VTE students opportunity to acquire the practical experience necessary for initial employment.
5. **Giving adequate training and re-training for VTE teachers:** VTE teachers should be given adequate training and re training so that they can acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to teach students. As the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2009) rightly asserted, no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. VTE teachers should be given the opportunity for in-service training. When the training/retraining required is not available in our local environment, maximum support should be given to them to be trained/retrained abroad. This is in line with Osahon (2013) who maintained that to ensure quality service delivery in VTE programmes, teachers should have adequate training/retraining in places like Japan and America where VTE is impacting positively on the economy.
6. **Consistency in Implementing VTE Policy:** Government should stop paying lip services to the VTE programme policies. VTE programmes serve as a transformative

tool for economic development. It is therefore important that government should back up policies relative to VTE programmes with effective implementation to achieve its goal. This will address the observation of Okeke (2005) that the delivery of VTE programmes in Nigeria had suffered for years due to inadequate attention to policy frameworks. It is therefore important that government should try and implement its fantastic policies in VTE programmes in Nigeria.

7. **Adequate Funding:** It is note-worthy to state that without adequate funding, maximum realization of VTE objectives in Nigeria may not be achieved. VTE programme administrators should source funds to argue government's allocation to improve VTE. Available sources include among others, international organizations, special grants, multinational companies, special tax for VTE, alumni associations, communities, tuition fees, contributions from industries/beneficiaries and consultancy services. In line with this Abelega (2013) maintained, unless VTE programme administrators look out for funds outside the ivory towers (government allocation), VTE programmes in Nigeria will continue to operate below expectations. When all these and others identified by other scholars are put in place, we would expect a VTE programme which would help to produce more employers than employees of labour in the 21st century.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussions, it is therefore recommended that;

1. Government and philanthropic individuals should help in subsidizing the training and re-training costs of VTE teachers in order to help them keep abreast with the current technological skills needed in the 21st century.
2. Government should back up policies relative to VTE programmes with effective implementation.
3. Curriculum planners should incorporate two or more years of apprenticeship into the VTE training programmes to ensure real mastery.

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