THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION IN NIGERIA

Okafor, Emeka Christian (M.Eng., PGDE.)
Department of Industrial/Production Engineering, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.

Abstract

Technical education, as entrenched in the Nigerian National Policy on Education, is concerned with qualitative technological human resources development directed towards a national pool of skilled and self-reliant craftsmen, technicians and technologists in technical and vocational fields. The two key phrases, which readily come to mind in this type of education, are competency-based skill-acquisition and sound scientific knowledge. In order to cope with the requirements of fast developing economy, to gear up employment generation and meet the challenges of globalization, it was absolutely imperative to realign Technical and Vocational Education system in the country to cater for these requirements. This paper attempts to appraise the contributions of this often neglected but yet inevitable educational sector in order to make significant progress in terms of national development and job creation.

Key words: Job Creation, Manpower Development, Vocational and Technical Education, Labour

Introduction

Technical education facilitates the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge, it is therefore a planned program of courses and learning experiences that begins with exploration of career options, supports basic academic and life skills, and enables achievement of high academic standards, leadership, preparation for industry-defined work, and advanced and continuing education *(CTE, 2009)*.

Nuru (2007) indicated that changes in a country's economy is required to prepare young people for the jobs of the future and technical and vocational education have important roles to play in this process. Technical and vocational education has been an integral part of national development. According to van Ark (1992) the Dutch school system is said to pay attention to "high standards in mathematics and the provision of technical education at ages 14-16 for a third of all pupils, and widespread vocational education at 16 +. Unfortunately, Nigeria does not seem to give technical and vocational education the attention they deserve and this appears to be one of the reasons for rising unemployment and poverty in the society. May (2006) also posits that the neglect of technical education in the area of adequate personnel, financial support and facilities to encourage technical and vocational education are robbing the nation of the contribution their graduates would make in the economy. Furthermore, Asogwa and Diogu (2007) maintained that there is an urgent need for the people's attention to be redirected towards self-reliant and sustainable means of livelihood which technical education provides. This paper therefore brings to the fore some salient contributions this neglected education sector can make in Nigeria economic development by producing labour market ready graduates.

Youth unemployment appears to be shooting up the sky because many of them lack "employability" skills that are often acquired from technical schools. As Edukugho (2004) noted, youth unemployment moved from 4.3% in 1985 to 5.3% in 1986, to 7.0% in 1987 and jumped to 60% in 1997. The report shows that in 2003 primary school accounted for 14.7% unemployment, secondary school 53.6%, and tertiary schools constituted 12.4%. The nation's poverty level was put at 70% and more than 91 million Nigerians are said to live on less than one dollar per day. Most analysts agree that todays employers demand more skills than they did in the past (Yang, 2008). Oranu (2010) reported the several factors that have contributed to the rising demand for skills in the labor market to include: technological and organizational change, trade, deregulation of key industries, and the decline of unions. Bennell (1996) observes that all countries, especially developing countries, need balanced development through *all* of the educational sectors in order to make significant progress in terms of national development.

Technical Education/Training and Enterprise Development In Job Creation

The focus of technical and vocational education and training and the labour market as an area of core competency is on the supply side of the labour market (i.e. the supply of workers) and the intermediation between labour supply and demand. Technical and vocational education and training also performs a social function by empowering people to participate actively in civil society processes.

According to the ILO (2004), The total number of young people (in the 15-29 age group) in developing country like Nigeria increased by 12.4% between 1993 and 2003, but youth employment rose by just 0.6%, it is obvious that young people are 3.5 times more likely to be unemployed than adult, this is because in years to come, the number of young people coming on to the job market in Nigeria will be steadily increasing. Fig 1. Suggests that by facilitating and promoting job-seekers' access to the formal and informal labour market through its activities in the area of technical and vocational education and training and labour market, Nigeria leaders will be making important contributions to reducing unemployment and underemployment. As joblessness and underemployment among large sections of the population also have the potential to fuel conflict, technical and vocational education and training and labour market policy measures can also contribute indirectly to conflict prevention and youth restiveness.

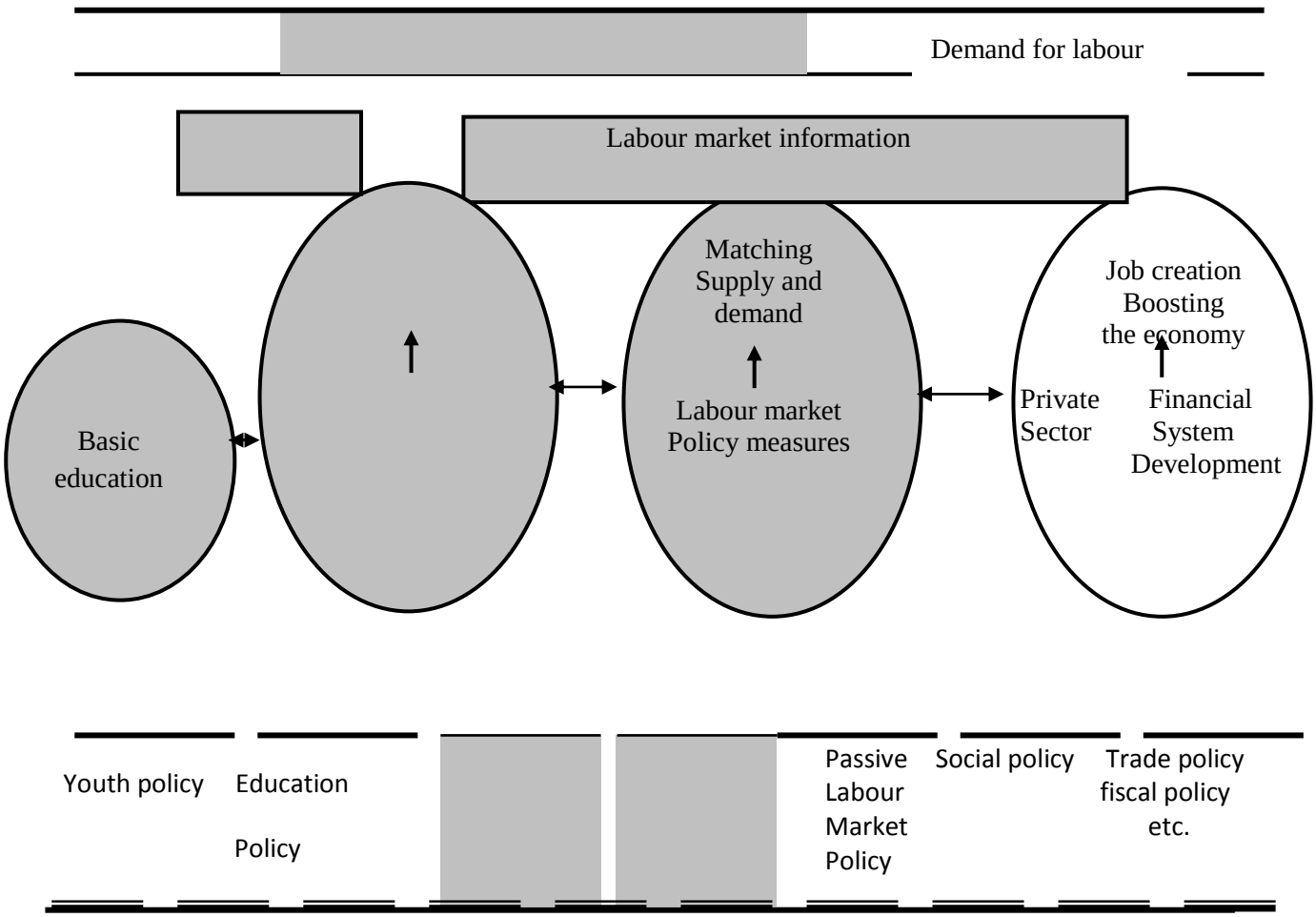

Fig. 1. Model of Technical education and youth employability indicator in economic development

The model shows that any measure undertaken in the core competency area of technical and vocational education and training promotes employment-oriented and socially and ecologically sustainable growth processes in developing and transition country like Nigeria through improvements of competitiveness. Private sector development play an important role in creating jobs and thus stimulating the demand side of the labour market – explicitly or implicitly as an intended outcome of efforts to boost the economy – whereas the focus of technical and vocational education and training and the labour market as an area of core competency is on the supply side of the labour market (i.e. the supply of workers) and the intermediation between labour supply and demand. Technical and vocational education and training also performs a social function by empowering people to participate actively in civil society processes.

The Place of Technical Education in Manpower Development

Presently Nigeria is offering education in general subjects, but to achieve development, it must offer a variety of courses for disciplines such as technical, vocational, professional, agricultural, and so on, because the country needs a balanced distribution of manpower for all professions (Alam, 2003, 2007), so that the vast population of Nigeria can contribute to economical growth by participating in different professions.

Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) systems play a crucial role in the social and economic development of a nation. Owing to their dynamic nature, they are continuously subject to the forces driving change in the schools, industry and society. Mechanized farming requires technical skills that could be obtained in technical and vocational schools.

The real tests of success of VTE are the employability of the graduates, personal development, opportunities for further education and career development, public acceptance and image. Ultimately, the effectiveness and responsiveness of a VTE system would be measured by its impact on the social and economic development of the nation.

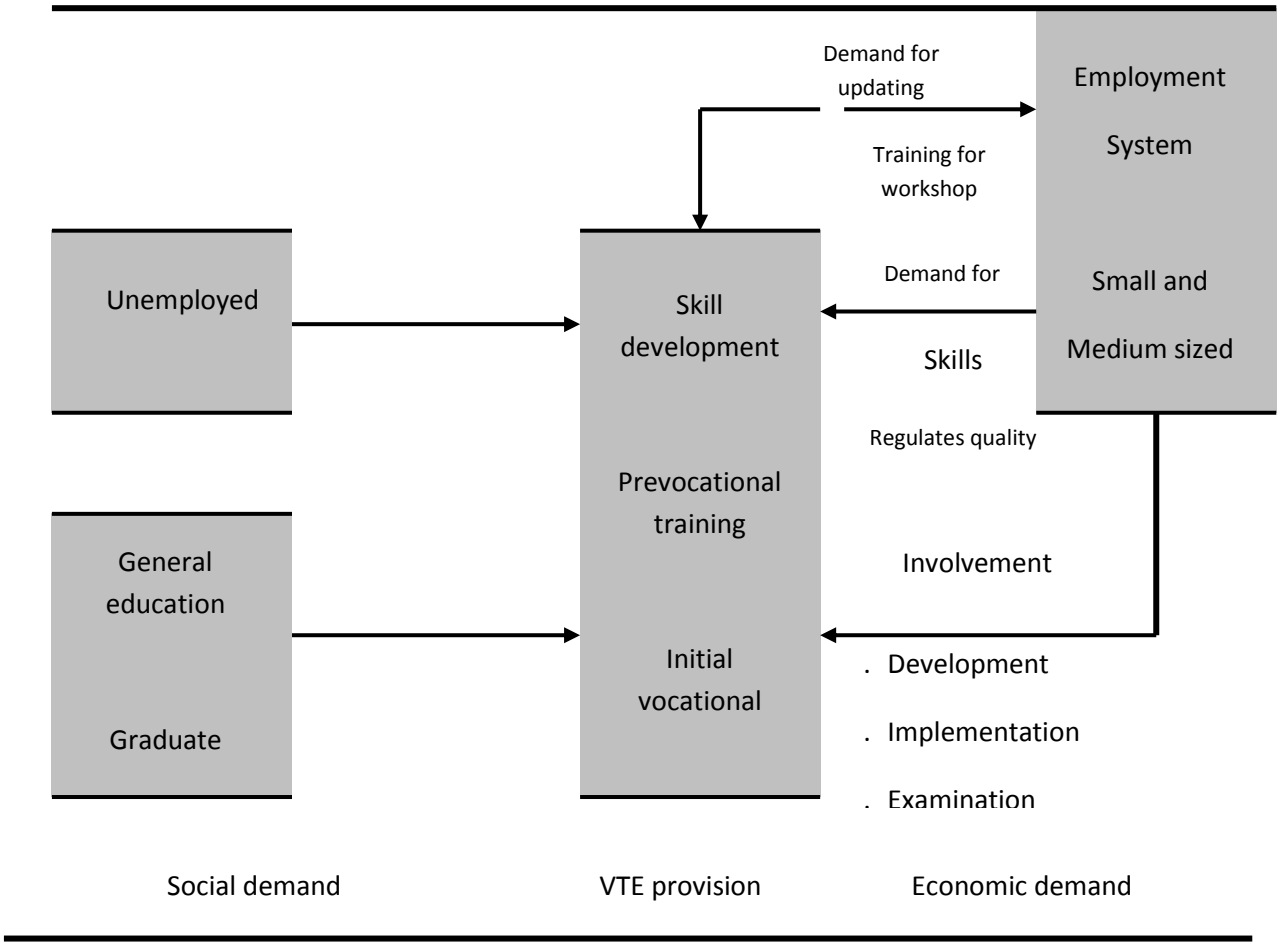

Fig. 2. Vocational and technical education as an adjustment mechanism for labour market ready graduates in Nigeria

Although technical and vocational education seem deficient in 'citizenship or leadership training' (Friedman 1982) it provides students with "life skills" (Alwasilah, 2002) to become productive entrepreneurs as it engenders creative and innovative ideas, enlarge the economic pie, and increase personal freedom. Most of the so-called "expatriate engineers" who are being paid millions of dollars to build Nigeria's roads and bridges are graduates of technical and vocational colleges.

Economic Impact of Neglects in This Sector of Education

Successive government in Nigeria has neglected this aspect of education. Consequently, the society lacks skilled technicians: bricklayers, carpenters, painters and auto mechanics; laboratory and pharmacy technicians, electrical/electronic technicians and skilled vocational nurses, etc).

The observable difference in income and wealth between developed and under-developed countries reflects essentially disparities in the level and degree of technological progress. As was pointed out earlier economic development is the process of accumulation of real capital brought about by the application of advanced production methods and organization which raise productivity and, thus, income and investment possibilities. This in turn permits the application of new technological methods which are bound to lead to further increases in productivity, income and investment. Since rapid economic growth seems to imply a higher increase in capital stock than in labour supply, sustained growth depends on technological progress. Without the development of new technologies and, perhaps even more so the adapted application of technologies of industrialized countries to developing countries, it is difficult to imagine how the problem of economic social and political development can be solved within a reasonable span of time.

Substantial productivity increases cannot be achieved without labour adequately educated and motivated for technological and organizational methods. If the allocation of available capital favours the production and import of capital goods while neglecting technical education the (marginal) productivity of invested capital likely falls considerably short of what otherwise could be attained relatively easily.

Technical education would have to provide for the effective utilization of knowledge accumulated elsewhere rather than attempt to bee me self-sufficient in a narrow national sense. With basic technological and organizational prerequisites lacking the exploitation of the technological and organizational experience of the already developed countries would be difficult.

Secondly, enrolments in vocational education and level of economic development are related. Demand for vocational education seemed to exist in industrially developing societies, with growth and diversification of industrial structure. As Nuru (2007) observed, the lower the overall level of a country's development, the weaker is the case for introducing vocational curriculum and diversify it. But it is in these countries the need for vocational education is felt. Emphasis on diversified industrial production emphasizes the need for labour force with vocational skills. Much growth in vocational education took place in countries like Korea

during early industrialisation processes, when employment opportunities could increase. So vocational education becomes more popular in regions where jobs can be guaranteed. The other way can also be augured: unemployment rates may diminish, if people have vocational skills.

For instance, Haq and Haq (1998, p. 96) observed, unemployment rates in the East Asian economies remained low essentially because the population possessed employable vocational and technical skills. However, the relationship between demand for vocational education and economic development may not be linear. When the economies move away from reliance on its agricultural and manufacturing sectors and in favour of service sector, the demand for VTE may indeed decline. A review of the experience of the East Asian countries led Mundle (1998, p. 664) just to conclude the same: enrolments in vocational education in the region has been substantial until a threshold level of gross national product (GNP) per capita (say about $8000) was reached; thereafter the share of vocational education in senior secondary education seemed to have declined.

Prospects of Vocational and Technical Education

There is an established positive linkage between economic growth and investment in human capital. The establishment of National Business and Technical Education Board and a resultant coherent national policy for technical education and vocational training is expected to be a key driver of Nigeria's economic growth. Nigeria's global competitiveness depends on ability of our VTE system to adapt and innovate.

The acceptance/equivalence of national qualifications to international ones will assist in improving the employment prospects of Nigeria's labour force abroad, which is an important source of foreign exchange for the country.

Through industrial linkages, employment generation and growth supporting interventions for skill development, the VTE will contribute towards poverty alleviation in the country. It aims to provide adequate access to VTE facilities and cater for deficient areas and target groups such as women, workers of the informal sector and the destitute sections of society. It has an important role to play for economic development, industrial growth, employment generation and poverty alleviation.

Recommendations

There should be a clear mission and vision in articulating the role of VTE within the national education and training system. The education and training system ensured that graduates from the various educational institutions had the necessary knowledge and skills for the many new jobs, which were created in a rapidly growing economy.

There should be a closer cooperation and greater collaboration between education and employment particularly self-employment in order to help the youngsters acquire the necessary skills from the onset. Entrepreneurship development should become part and parcel of tertiary Institutions' curriculum.

Teaching pre-vocational subjects in the primary and junior secondary schools should be taken more seriously to raise the interest of students for these vocational programmes. All stakeholders, especially those within the private sector, should provide more funds for the purchase of instructional facilities. The Educational Tax Fund should consider vocational education a priority area for funding. There should be less emphasis on certificates/ examinations in implementing the curricula content of the various programmes. Acquisition of practical skills should be stressed on the final outcome.

Conclusions

It is needed to direct those in the sector towards making the farmer an intelligent user of our natural resources. Vocational and technical education (VTE) is also needed to prevent waste of human resources. So far, Nigeria has given very little attention to conservation of human resources. It is obvious that the waste of labour by improper employment can be largely avoided through vocational and technical training. Such training is the most potent remedy for unemployment.

From the review of Asian experience in Mahbub and Khadija (1998), a few important conclusive lessons can be drawn for the development of VTE in Nigeria.

- VTE is important for economic growth. The provision of vocational education must be directly related to those points at which some development is already apparent and where demand for skills is beginning to be manifested." Plans for VTE should be preceded by detailed manpower analyses and forecasts.
- Since both general and specific human capital contribute to economic growth, a balance has to be struck between size of general education and vocational education. Further, vocational education need not necessarily be purely vocational and technical. It should also include, like in Japan and Korea, general skills and attributes that are useful across a wide variety of occupations. This is particularly important in the rapidly changing economic systems.
- As specific human capital development can take place both in formal schools and also in the firm-based institutions, it may be important to examine which vocational and technical skills are to be provided in schools and which in the training institutions and enterprise-based organisations.
- As vocational education is necessarily expensive, the government should make adequate allocation of resources for vocational education. Poor investments cannot yield attractive returns.
- Vocational education should not promote inequalities within the educational system. This requires provision of good quality vocational education and training, comparable, if not superior to, general secondary education that would avoid suspicions on the part of the people on the intentions of the government in providing VTE. It also requires effectively linking of vocational education with higher education, so that vocational education is not perceived as dead-end, with no opportunities to go for higher education.
- Lastly, issues relating to VTE are not just curriculum questions, nor are they just economic. They are intricately linked with social, cultural, historical, economic, technical, and political parameters. Hence formulation of sound and effective policies and plans of VTE requires an inter-disciplinary development approach, treating VTE as an integral part of overall educational planning.

References

Hag, Mahbub and Haq, Khadija (1998) *Human Development in South Asia 1998.* Karachi: Oxford University Press.

ILO (2004). Global Employment Trends for youth. Information available in http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public. retrieved 09-06-2010,

Yang, Jin (2008) General or Vocational? The Tough Choice in the Chinese Education Policy, *International journal of Educational Development* 18 (4) (July): 289-304

R.N. Oranu (2010) Vocational and technical education in Nigeria; http://www.ibe.unesco.org/curriculum/AfricaPdf/lago2ora.pdf, retrived August, 2010

Career and Technical Education(CTE)(2009): Washington- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction: http://www.k12.wa.us/CareerTechEd/

Asogwa O and Diogwu, G.O (2007) Vocational and Textile Education in Nigeria in the 21st century, Journal of The Nigerian Academic Forum, Vol. 12 (2), Awka, National Association of the Academics.

May in Ajayi, I.A, Arogundadade, B.B and Ekundayo, H.T (2007) Assessing the Realities and Challenges of Technical Education in Imo state Secondary School Education System; in Nigerian Journal of educational Administration and Planning. Volume (7) March

Nuru, A. (2007) The relevance of National Vocational Education Qualifications (NVQs) in TVE in Nigeria. unpublished conference paper.

Van Ark, Bart (1992). "Vocational education and productivity in the Netherlands and Britain.*"* National Institute Economic Review

Edukugho, E. (2004) "UNESCO tackles decline in technical, vocational education;" *The Vanguard, Nov 25,*