Technical and Vocational Education: Key to Poverty Alleviation in the Third World with Particular Reference to Nigeria

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Abstract

Education is considered to be the key to effective development strategies, technical and vocational education is the master key that can alleviate poverty, promote peace, conserve the environment, improve the quality of life for all and help achieve sustainable development. This study sets out to examine the potency of technical and vocational education as a key for poverty alleviation. The concept and the scope of technical and vocational education was discussed as well as the causes of poverty and its alleviation through technical and vocational education. It was concluded that no meaningful poverty alleviation can be achieved by any nation without effective and efficient technical and vocational education programmes. It was therefore recommended that there should be emphasis on the practical aspect of vocational education so as to enhance the production of productive members of the nation's labour force who will be self-reliant or employable in an industry or company. The man power needs of technical and vocational schools should be met by employing people who have the basic human capacity, and knowledge of vocational courses. Proper funding of technical and vocational education by the government, nongovernmental organizations, private individuals and the society should be provided.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Poverty Alleviation, Self-reliant, Technical Education and Vocational Education.

1.   Introduction

Education in a broad sense is a process by which an individual acquires the many physical and social capabilities demanded by the society in which he/she is born into to function. It is to a nation what the mind is to the body, just as a diseased mind is handicapped in the coordination and direction of the bodily activities. Education as defined by Okojie (2007), involves the socialization of individuals to become integral part of the society in which they live. Education has a direct way of reducing poverty in any country. It is viewed as the single most important factor in improving the quality of the lives of people, both economically and socially.

According to Ojo and Vincent (2000), "Education is many things to man, a visa to success, a passport to the unknown, a catalyst to great heights. Education empowers, refines, civilizes, enlightens, enriches and gives confidence to man". Education inculcates proper values for the survival of the individuals and society. It helps to develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their internal and external environment. It is the bedrock for national development and poverty alleviation.

The level or nature of development in a country is often considered to be an offshoot of the nature of her educational programme and system. This point is true to the extent that the technological objectives of a nation are usually rooted in the educational programmes of the country. Thus, education for poverty alleviation is a veritable factor for socio economic emancipation and economic self-reliance of every country.

This paper attempts to provide an overview of poverty, its descriptions and implications associated with it and how technical and vocational education can be used for its alleviation.

Education holds the key to upgrading the quality of goods and services we produce and to improving productivity that is urgently needed in the Nigerian economy. The wealth or poverty of nations depend on the quality of higher education (Akpomi, 2009). This therefore means that the quality of graduates pushed into the workforce by higher education set pace for national growth and development.

2.   The Concept of Technical and Vocational Education

Technical and vocational education is that aspect of education that gives its recipients an opportunity to acquire practical skills as well as some basic scientific knowledge (Nigerian National Policy on Education, 1981). Technical and vocational education is that aspect of education that exposes the learner to acquisition of demonstrable skills that could be transformed into economic benefits (Akerele, 2007).

Technical and vocational education has been an integral part of national development strategies in many societies because of its impact on productivity and economic development. Vocational education is geared towards the production of the educated man who can effectively work with his head, heart and hands. The development of the economy and the crave for self-reliance and self-sustainability is the driving force of any nation. Technical and vocational education is understood to be:

- ❖ An integral part of general education.
- ❖ A means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work.
- ❖ An aspect of lifelong learning and preparation for responsible citizenship.
- ❖ An instrument for promoting environmentally sound and sustainable development.
- ❖ A method of alleviating poverty. (Obanya, 2005)

The broad goals of vocational and technical education are meant to:

- ❖ Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels;
- ❖ Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development;

❖ Give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self reliant economically (Obanya, 2005).

3. Scope of Technical and Vocational Education in Nigeria.

The scope of technical and vocational education in Nigeria are as follows:

❖ In Nigeria, there are five types of technical educational institutions outside the universities they are the pre-vocational and vocational schools at post-primary level, the technical colleges, the polytechnics, colleges of Technical Teacher Education at post-Secondary level. (Federal Republic of Nigeria1981).

❖ At the tertiary level, vocational and technical education is available in technical schools, schools of agriculture, technical colleges, colleges of education [technical], polytechnics and universities. These are institutions available in virtually every state of the federation.

❖ Vocational education is the total of those organized and purposeful experiences essential to the career development in a trade, industrial or technical occupation. These occupations are found in any of the career clusters (manufacturing, construction, communication and transportation) and identifiable in the dictionary of occupations which functions in the designing, producing, processing, fabricating, assembling, testing, modifying, maintaining, servicing or repairing of any product or commodity (Usoro; 2000).

❖ Vocational education can be regarded as experience gained directly or indirectly that enables one to participate in a socially useful occupation either in or out of school, at various levels and to be sufficiently equipped to become an intelligent creator of goods and services.

❖ The curriculums of vocational schools are centered on craft/engineering trades, agriculture, business and home economics. Most of the vocational schools run business courses in typing, shorthand, book keeping and their like. While the technical schools run courses in metal work, electronics, technical drawing, wood work, auto mechanics etc. The Ministry of Education monitors and regulates the operations of vocational schools.

4. Definition and Culture of Poverty

There are many definitions of poverty depending on the context of the situation and the views of the person giving the definition. Poverty is the state of human beings who are poor. That is, they have little or no material means of surviving – little or no food, shelter, clothes, healthcare, education, and other physical means of living and improving one's life.

A poor person is considered as one without job, who cannot help himself or cater for his family, who has no money, farm or business. A poor person is described as one who is undernourished and ageing fast, one without self confidence, looks dirty and lives in filthy environment (Elumilade, Asaolu and Adereti, 2006).

Poverty is pronounced deprivation in well-being, and comprises many dimensions. It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. It also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life.

According to Klebanov (1998), the effect of poverty was seen among children as young as two years of age. Poor people, especially women and children, suffer most from various forms of social and economic deprivation, including hunger and malnutrition, inadequate healthcare, limited access to quality education, and low self-esteem. Young unemployed people without any productive usage of their time are easily entrained into crime and violence. The risk is greatest with unemployed youth in conflict or post-conflict areas. Poverty is therefore a threat to national stability and good governance.

Poverty may also be understood as an aspect of unequal social status and inequitable social relationships, experienced as social exclusion, dependency, and diminished capacity to participate, or to develop meaningful connections with other people in society (Silver, 1994).

According to Payne (2003), people make decisions based on the roles and values of the class to which the individuals belongs. For low income group whose lives are based in the present and meeting their immediate needs, are based on survival, relationships and entertainment. The middle class, decisions are made based on work and achievement, planning and preparing for the future. The wealthy group make decisions based on social, financial and political connections that consider traditions and past history.

Differences in values are illustrated in attitudes towards food and having to do with quantity versus quality. For example, for the low income group, having enough food satisfying hunger is most important, while for middle income group, enjoying the quality of the food is important, but for the wealthy, the presentation of aesthetically pleasing food is the most important.

5.   Causes of Poverty

The causes of poverty includes among others:

- ❖ Corruption
- ❖ Bad governance
- ❖ Unemployment
- ❖ Low productivity
- ❖ Unfocused government policies
- ❖ Lack of effective skills training
- ❖ Failure to adjust or re-adjust when situation demands.

6.   The Problems of Technical and Vocational Education in Nigeria

The following problems are associated with vocational education in Nigeria:

- ❖ **Poor Funding of Technical and Vocational Education:** The success and developmental advancement in technical and vocational education which have been actualized over the years has been frustrated to failure as a result of poor funding (UNESCO, 2004).
- ❖ **Inconsistent Government Policy on Technical and Vocational Education:** Inconsistency in the formulation and implementation of technical and vocational education policies has been a major set back to the advancement of technical and vocational education.
- ❖ **Poor State of Laboratories, Workshops and other Infrastructure:** Most of the technical and vocational institutions in Nigeria are stocked with obsolete equipment that have outlived their relevance in modern times due to technological advancement.
- ❖ **The Neglect of Technical and Vocational Education:** The neglect of technical and vocational education is socially and economically injurious because it is robbing the nation the contributions the graduates would make on poverty alleviation.
- ❖ **Enrolment Upsurge:** The continuing enrolment into institution of higher learning should have been a plus to national development, but the demand is at variance with the physical capacity to accommodate them thereby creating problem of management.

7.   Poverty Alleviation through Technical and Vocational Education

The guiding principles for technical and vocational education strategy in Nigeria are as follows:

- ❖ **Economic growth and employment creation:** The key to poverty alleviation (i.e. improving the living conditions of people who are already poor) is economic growth and the creation of employment for all. However, poor people without employable skills cannot benefit from the growth process. The challenge then is to raise the productive capacity of the poor, the youth and the vulnerable of society by the acquisition of job-specific competencies through technical and vocational education.
- ❖ **Teaching appropriate vocational subjects:** Osuji (2004) highlighted that government strongly believes that the objectives of job creation and poverty reduction can only be realized through appropriate education which empowers the products of the education system with skills and competencies to become self employed. This hope of the federal government can only be true and realized only if the vocational subjects are well taught in our secondary schools and tertiary institutions.

- ❖ **Access and equity:** The strategy should not discriminate on the basis of social status, ethnic or religious affiliation, age, or academic background. Efforts should be made to reduce gender, economic and geographical inequities that limit access.

- ❖ **Employability and entrepreneurship:** The acquisition of employable and entrepreneurial skills is one of the major objectives of a credible vocational training system.

❖ **Sustainability:** The strategy must incorporate measures that ensure that the training institutions and training providers will continue operating and delivering their programmes in a cost-effective manner.

❖ **Moral and ethical values:** Effective technical and vocational training must not only teach technical and vocational skills but also moral and ethical values like honesty, respect for others, and not defining others as the opposite of oneself.

❖ **Proficiency:** The training must measure proficiency, rather than theoretical knowledge. Training must emphasize proficiency-testing where trainees demonstrate their practical competences rather than follow the strictly examination and certification approach.

❖ **Relevance:** The training system must be flexible, demand-driven and respond to the needs of the trainee, the community and the local industry.

❖ **Responsible citizenship:** Training must include elements of good governance and responsible citizenship such as democracy and basic human rights.

8.   Conclusions

No meaningful poverty alleviation can be achieved by any nation without effective and efficient technical and vocational education system programmes, since the level or nature of development in a country is often considered to be an offshoot of the nature of her educational programme and system. Meaningful poverty alleviation through technical and vocational education cannot take place without adequate funding.

9.   Recommendations

It is therefore suggested that the following measures if well articulated will mitigate and or reduce poverty among Nigerian graduates.

❖ Government should focus on employment creation through a functional technical and vocational education while providing basic literacy.

❖ Emphasizing the practical aspect of technical and vocational education which will help to produce productive members of the nation's labour force that will be self-reliant or employable in an industry or company.

❖ Ensuring that the man power needs of technical and vocational schools are met by employing people who have the basic human capacity, and knowledge of technical and vocational courses.

❖ Enough funds should also be earmarked for the development of the human and material resources for technical and vocational education.

❖ Graduates of the programmes should be encouraged to be self-employed by assisting them with soft loans and/or micro credit. The quality of technical and vocational educational output must be improved if the expected outcome is to be achieved.

❖ The government should provide power and other infrastructural facilities so as to encourage the growth and development of small and medium scale enterprises who most often than not are the employer of graduates of technical and vocational institutions.
❖ The government should come out with clear-cut policy on what is the role of technical and vocational institutions in terms of human capital development.
❖ The government should train and employ more technical and vocational teachers both in quantity/and quality.

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