



## TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: A SOLUTION TO PRECARIOUS YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract:

Unemployment is one of the most serious problems facing Nigeria like many other countries in the world. Nigeria is becoming a predominantly youth society with high rate of unemployment. The development of youth is critical to economic survival and vibrancy of any nation. In order for a country to achieve her development aspiration, the youths need to have access to education that will enable them to enhance their standard of living and gain competitive skills that will be in high demand in the labour market. Young people that lack skills that are valued in global and local economies face limited job opportunities and income growth. The changing nature of work today is placing increased pressure on the youths to acquire technical and vocational education skills. With the youths among the big losers of the recent economic crisis, technical and vocational education is often seen as the silver bullet to the problem of youth joblessness.

**Keywords:** technical and vocational education, skilled labour, self-reliant, youth unemployment

### 1. Introduction

It is a fact that no country can develop without quality technical and vocational education. The development of any nation is critical to the economic survival and vibrancy of that nation. This holds particularly true for developing nation like Nigeria who is still grappling with chronic factors like unemployment and underemployment among the youths which have kept her in the perpetual bondage of economic

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frustration (Uwaifo, 2009). The youth needs exposure in practical work experience in order to be proficient in their chosen career and be useful to them and contribute to economic growth. Technical and vocational education affords individual the chance to acquire practical knowledge and requisite skill training needed in the job market or for immediate self-employment (Boateng, 2012). Okoye and Chijioke (2013) stated that youth participation in technical and vocational education plays an instrumental role in the technological advancement and economic sustainability of many nations. Despite its contributions, Nigeria as a nation appears not to have given this aspect of education the attention it desires. This is viewed as one of the reasons for the nation's under-development.

Today awareness has been rekindled among policy makers in Africa and international arenas on the developmental role technical and vocational education can play in any nation's economy. This rekindled awareness according to Okoye and Chijioke (2013) appears to be predicated on globalization effect and the changing world economy, the economy that demands productive workforce. It is generally recognized in the development of relevant skills is an important instrument for improving productivity and working conditions and the promotion of decent work in the informal economy which represents the major employer in Nigeria and Africa (Catherine & Jacob, 2014). Many countries are therefore working towards improving the quality and skills levels of their labour workforce. Technical and vocational education can open doors for economic and socially rewarding jobs and can help the development of small informal sectors business that could cater for youth unemployment and lead to economic development of a nation. Developing job related competencies among the youth is recognized as critical to progress in solving youth unemployment and economic development.

## **2. Purpose**

This paper seeks to address the significance of technical and vocational education on socio-economic and political development and the extent to which it can effectively prepare the youth for gainful employment. It looked at challenges of youth unemployment and argues that TVE holds the key to the solution of unemployment and national development. The author admits that the issues raised in this paper have been discussed in the ever-increasing literature on TVE in Nigeria. The main contribution of this paper, the author claim is the issue to change the wrong perceptions the public has had about technical and vocational education that had led to precarious youth unemployment situation in Nigeria.

### 3. Review of Literature

There is no doubt Nigeria is fast growing economy and competitive in the world market. However, in order for Nigeria to sustain economic growth and be a major player in global economy it requires a skilled labour workforce in various areas of technical and vocational education. Globally there is a rise in demand for skilled workers. However, there is remarkable decline in the number of youth engaged in TVE profession in Nigeria. Wolf (2011) argued that in order for a country to achieve her development aspiration the youth need to have access to education that will enable them to enhance their standard of living and gain competitive skills that will be in high demand in the labour market. The changing nature of work today is placing increasing pressure on the youth to acquire technical and vocational education skills.

The nature of work has changed during the past ten years and likely to continue to do so well into the future. In recent years, there has been renewed interest in the dichotomy of technical and vocational education. This is more so as political pronouncement in many countries across the globe have taken on knowledge and skills as the key aim of the desire to improve access to education at all levels. Nowhere is the debate more tested, fiercely debated and gained controversy as in Nigeria. However, given recent development in which knowledge and skills have become more acceptable terms in economically more developed nations, in which both are seen to go hand in hand, what is happening in Nigeria is that development is highly sought but has proven to be elusive. This has brought back to the forefront one of the dilemmas which has pre-occupied Nigeria for a long time whether to concentrate investment in general education or in technical and vocational education (Oketch, 2007).

Despite the different in the educational system amongst the nations of the world, their aims have always remained the same to transmit from one generation to the other the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society to prepare the citizen for the future membership of the society and their participation in its maintenance and development (Akwara et al., 2013). Recent development in science and technology, global economic crisis, terrorism and insecurity has made nations to lay much emphasis on the provision of technical and vocational education in the development of youth technical knowledge and skills for stability and economic survival and Nigeria cannot be an exception.

#### **4. Importance of Technical and Vocational Education**

Technical and vocational education system plays a crucial role in the social and economic development of nation. Owing to the dynamic nature, they are continuously subject to forces driving change in the schools, industry and society (Lee, 2008). The economic competitiveness of a country depends on the skills of its workers. The skills and competencies of the workforce in turn is dependent upon the quality of the country's education and training system (Mustapha & Greenan, 2002). Technical and vocational education is perceived as one of the crucial element in enhancing economic productivity. Tessaring & Wannan (2010) sees it as that system of education that comprises of more or less organized or structured activities that aim to provide people with the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to perform a job or a set of jobs, whether or not they lead to a formal qualification.

With the rapid technological advancement which the world is now witnessing and the continuous transformation of the world economies through globalization, there is a great pressure than before in many countries to develop their technical and vocational education system to meet their developmental needs. That is why it is important for schools to prepare and supply future worker with appropriate knowledge and skills to enhance their productivity and therefore promote economic growth. Nevertheless, technical and vocational education has sometimes become a tool for addressing the economic, political and social stability of some nations. As a result of rising unemployment, lack of skilled workers, high dropout rate, and the changing demographic nature of the workforce, this have placed the issue of workforce education high on the education reform agenda of many countries.

Many countries acknowledge that Technical and vocational education improves the quality of human resources most particularly in the developing countries (Kuruvilla, Erickson, & Hwang, 2002). The acquisition of skills enables the learner to apply their knowledge and skills to solve basic economic and social problems. Technical and vocational education programs have significant relative contributions to the acquisition of self-reliant skills, opportunities for self-employment and total reintegration into the mainstream of the society. Ajibola & Soyemi (2012) indicated that technical and vocational education is a tool for empowering people especially the youth, for sustainable livelihood and economic development. Akerele (2007) asserts that technical and vocational education exposes the learner to acquisition of demonstrable skill that could be transformed into economic benefit. It is a way of developing in individual functional skill necessary for useful living. Technical and vocational education is fundamental in teaching skills, attitudes and facts requisite to success in a

given occupation. The goal of technical and vocational education is to provide opportunities to gain knowledge, skills and attitudes that prepared young people for adult world. It is further perceived as important tool towards social development, citizenship and sustains ability (UNESCO, 2004). Nigerian youths need economic, political and social empowerment to enable them discharge their roles and contribute to national development. These all lay claim to the need for youth to participate in technical and vocational education.

## **5. Challenges of Youth Unemployment in Nigeria**

In spite of Nigeria great geographic, cultural and demographic diversity, it shares many challenges and issues that are fundamental to improving quality and relevance of TVE as a means of human resource development. Technical and vocational education is a multifaceted multi-disciplinary and pragmatic field of study aimed at equipping the individual with requisite TVE skills which will enhance their relevance and functionality in the society (Nelson, 2013). As a result, it plays a vital and indispensable role in the development of the society. Due to their dynamic nature, they are continuously subject to the forces driving change in the school, industry and society. Often shaped by the needs of the changing economy and local community, the challenges and opportunities are unique. The issue today is not so much about the value and importance of TVE, how to ensure its relevance, responsiveness and value in an increasing global economic is the issue. Technical and vocational education have been recognized the world over as tools for empowering people especially the youths for sustainable livelihood and social economic development (Ajibola & Soyemi, 2012).

In Nigeria, the number of enterprises capable of offering TVE skills to youths is limited, while many institutions have poor delivery capacity and commonly lack funding to inadequate facilities both quantitatively and qualitatively, non-availability of adequate human capacity, brain drain and poor staff training and retention profiles. Others include weak institution, industry partnership, defective curricula, traditional approach to teaching, poorly equipped laboratories and workshops, poorly monitoring standards and inadequate ICT environment (Uwaifo, 2009).

Currently Nigeria has the largest population of poor and unemployed in the Sub-Saharan Africa and also ranked 158<sup>th</sup> in the human development index Audu, et al., (2013) , with a nominal GDP of \$207.11 billion and per capita income of \$1.401. It has the largest economy in Africa. As impressive as the figure may appear Salami ( 2011) stated that the youth unemployment has been one of the major problems facing Nigeria. According to Doreo (2013) unemployment rate in Nigeria is growing at the rate of 16

per cent per year with youth impacted the most and accounting for three times the general unemployment. The youth unemployment scenario in Nigeria has been attributed partly to a mismatch between inadequate educational outcomes and skills. Salami (2013) opines that Nigeria spirally youth unemployment can be said to have significantly contributed to the dramatic rise in social unrest and crime such as Nigerian Delta Militancy, Kidnapping, Boko Haram and the job crisis (Akintoye, 2008). Audu et al., (2013) also notes that the level of youth unemployment in Nigeria has attendant adverse psychological, social, occupational, and financial effects.

One implication of the above scenario according to Salami (2013) is that in another one or two decades most of the youths in Nigeria today will be parents in their mid-life years and with little or no adequate skills in the fast emerging competitive global economy, it is doubtful how they can propel the needed wheel of development. Nigeria must consider a coherent strategy for human development in which TVE plays a significant role. The success of TVE in any developing country can be considered a key indicator of the country's advancement in development. Any country that must have achieved technological fit, TVE must have played an active and vital role as youth skilled manpower would have been required, also to enable its sustainability. Why must Nigeria waste these resources when they can be attained locally if effective youth technical and vocational education policy is put in place?

## **6. What Nigeria Could Learn from Countries that have revitalized their TVE Policies to meet Youth Unemployment?**

The bedrock of technological advancement in many countries lies in the effective implementation of technical and vocational education programme. Countries adopt varied policy guidelines on issues bothering on developing youth knowledge and skills in technical and vocational education and training with a view to producing labour force capable of handling any domestic and/or industrial works demand (Okoye and Chijioke, 2013). Nigeria response to economic recession anchors on its economic pillar through technical and vocational education. Mention is made of a few countries that have confronted youth unemployment through vocational education:

Germany's low youth unemployment rate (about 8%) compared with the high unemployment rates in some other EU countries. Germany is renowned for its technical and vocational education system in contrast to many other countries including Nigeria where technical and vocational education often plays a secondary role. The success of German education is the dual system of education with emphasis on TVET programs at both primary and post primary education levels and through the tertiary education.

Upon graduation from the country's lower secondary education, most of the students (over 2/3 of the population) are channeled to technical and vocational training of the education system at the upper secondary level. Under this program, over one-half of the youth population is made to complete 3 years of intensive apprenticeship and technical and vocational training in specialized industries under qualified vocational professionals. These professionals are usually highly motivated through adequate funding of the program and provision of personal effects. Nigeria business and political leaders should learn from the German approach and invest in creating and supporting a German-style vocational education system. In this case, business will get the skilled workers they need and young people will see new career opportunities open up to them, our middle class will be strengthened and our economy will benefit.

Recognizing that youth are the most valuable resources and a driver of sustainable economic growth, Thailand gives high priority to technical and vocational education for human resource development. Particular emphasis is given to upgrading vocational education provision with a view to attracting and producing the necessary manpower in terms of quantity and quality. This system provides 5 year general education training and 2 year technical and vocational education training at the primary education level (7 years primary education). Provides programmes of work education at the upper quarter of primary education and 3 year lower secondary education levels. Also runs 3 year technical and vocational education and training (TVET) referred to as higher secondary education. In all, their students spend 13 years under their skill acquisition education programs. Funds for running the schools are consistent, stable and supplied by government as at when required (Okoye and Chijioke, 2013). There vocational education and training, retraining and re-skilling opportunities are better linked to local, regional and global realities then this increase the employment prospects of graduates and as a result more students are likely to enroll. Currently, many convivial industrial wares and toys are produced in Thailand, even by students, and many students travel abroad to practice as technologists upon graduation, at that level. This is what Dike (2009) captured when he rightly stated that, 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 colleges.

It is also pertinent to note that Singapore is one of Asia's great success stories transforming itself from a developing country to a modern industrial economy in one generation. During the last decade, Singapore's education system has remained consistently at or near the top of most major world education ranking. The ability of the government skill is a major source of Singapore's competitive advantage. Technical

education today in Nigeria is looked down upon as a dead end option of low quality and typically out of step with the changing needs of employers. But vocational education has been important pathway in Singapore's journey to educational excellence and employment opportunities for the youths. Singapore took a hard look at its own poorly regarded vocational education and decided to transform and reposition it so that it was not seen as a place of last resort but a major sector that contributes to the economy. Part of the success story is that students get a strong academic foundation early in their academic careers so they can acquire the more sophisticated skills required by leading edge employers

Furthermore, Brazil runs dual system of education and training system, in this program students train concurrently in both TVET and general education curricula, in their primary and post primary education levels. The undergraduate education program is stocked with sequential technical and vocational training. Students are selected into specialized vocations and skills acquisition under the country's national service for industrial apprenticeship (NSIA). Curriculum contents of TVET in Brazil are built around;( i) Knowledge and practice technologies and related sciences; provided in stages of module orientation.( ii) Specialized skills acquisition; students are channeled into special skills area based on their proven aptitude, ability and entrepreneurial expressions in relation to social and economic life. Currently, most of the luxurious buses that ply the Nigerian roads are imported from Brazil. Brazil is also named among the developing countries whose economy maintains a very high standard in the world. Nigeria can attain this fit if political will is given to Ajaokuta steel company and other steel rolling mills in the country (Okoye and Chijioke, 2013).

## **7. Way Forward in Resolving Youth Unemployment through Technical and Vocational Education in Nigeria**

It is a well-known fact today both locally and globally that youth represents a very significant stakeholder in any society. The solution to adult problem tomorrow could be attributed to how children grow today. Unemployment in Nigeria is coursing a lot of social vices among the youths and if effective intervention is not put in place to mitigate the unsavory impact could hamper economic growth. For progress to be made in economic and social live in Nigeria the challenges confronting TVE must be recognized and fought vigorously. Nigeria needs to create a new approach for the concept of TVE and its purpose to the society. This is because TVE for some decades now has been perceived to mean the education for the mentally retard, physically handicapped and socially maladjusted students.



We are dip in the millennium. It is regrettable that many Nigerians still believe that TVE is for the students with low intelligence and dropouts from formal school system. TVE is highly useful education because its occupational content offers the trainees the opportunity to acquire skills, attitude and knowledge which are needed for the technological growth of any nation. Nigeria therefore, can create technological value that will reflect on the concept of TVE with the following.

Nigeria needs to be more proactive, inventive and innovative in the way she can develop solution to her problems internally. The current youth situation and appropriate skills needs significant improvement. Nigeria must prioritize its investment in TVE. While universal primary education is necessary, but investment in TVE is also important, keeping in view the global development. Without proper youth knowledge and skills, Nigeria is not likely to compete properly internationally. The public expenditure on TVE must be increased manifold from its present level. It is also necessary that institutional arrangements must be strengthened to address governance issues which most of these institutions are facing. The public partnership is necessary to achieve the desired goals of human resource development. The country's present educational and TVE system is largely supported by the public sector which is not likely to improve the knowledge and skills that Nigeria needs badly (Oni, 2007).

Government at all levels both federal, state and local government should provide adequate financial support to polytechnics and technical colleges to effectively manage the academic programs; maintain facilities and provide benefits and adequate incentive for their workers. Primary and school teachers should be more involved in the orientation of TVE to communities and they should be constantly informed of the nation's manpower needs. The administrators in the school should ensure that qualified and competent teachers are employed to teach pro-vocational and vocational course as recommended in our National Policy on Education. A well-established TVE system should lead to the development of knowledge that is tailored towards meeting the needs of the community. To achieve this, political instability, poor governance, poor economic policies and unequal distribution of income among others ills must be abolished if the significance of TVE is to be felt.

It is worth noting that Nigeria needs to redouble its TVE initiative because economic development and poverty reduction requires investing in the productivity and skills of economically and socially vulnerable groups. Nigeria future economic growth depends less on its natural resources, which are being depleted and are subject to long-run price declines and more on its labor skills and its ability to accelerate demographic transition. Development in any nation is not feasible without a strong technological system. Exploiting the potential of information and communication

technology requires strong skills based (as well as infrastructure and appropriate regulatory framework). Adoption of ICT is associated with the employment of more skilled workers. A labour force with youth solid basic skills foundation is essential for Nigeria to exploit the opportunities open by technological change (Ewelum & Ugochkwu, 2014). The authors advocate that for Nigeria to overcome precarious youth unemployment she must consider a coherent strategy for human development in which TVE plays a significant role. The success of TVE in any developed and developing country can be considered a key indicator.

## 8. Conclusion

Little makes difference to people's lives than the empowerment they receive from education. But for those young people, whose aptitude and talents are practical, expectations are too often limited and opportunities restricted (Wolf, 2011). It is time both stakeholders at federal, state and local government levels recognize the inherent value of technical and vocational education- the intrinsic richness of manual work, practical and technical competences. Recognizing the value of practical skills matters greatly in Nigeria today for individuals and our society and it matters for our economy too. Our future prosperity depends on building an advanced economy founded in high level of youth technical and vocational skills. To extend individual opportunities and rebalance our economy we must raise expectations and unleash talent. For those youths who choose the TVE route, it must be a highway, not a cut de-soc (Wolf; 2011). To deliver economic growth with all that means for standard of living and communal wellbeing, we must prioritize technical and vocational education learning, promote apprenticeship and so produce a new generation of skilled youth capable of building Nigeria's future.

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