

VOCATIONAL – TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND THE ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY OF THE NIGERIAN GRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

The development and advancement of science and technology in many technological nations have made it imperative for technical education to be a major part of the educational curriculum, both at the basic and tertiary levels of education. This is to affirm the fact that no nation can sustain its economic growth and development without the support of technical and vocational education of its workforce. The foundation of the pre-independence (Nigeria) also lent credence to this fact, hence, development planners laid the foundation for the establishment of many technical colleges as well as polytechnics around Nigeria at different periods. The instability in government policies as a result of military interventions in the political and national development process led to discontinuity and abandonment of the very objectives for which the institutions were established. This study examines how technical education in Nigeria could be repositioned for economic sustainability of the Nigerian graduates.

Keywords: Technical Education, Vocational Education, Graduate Empowerment, Economic Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a right of every individual. It unlocks the development of personal and national potentials of citizens of a country and the world at large. According to Balogun (2010), education is the light without which the world will be in darkness. It is the basis for scientific and technological breakthrough and also the basis for modernity which has made all nations of the world to accord it immense priority, although the level of priority varies from one country to another. Currently, emphasis is shifting away from the general education that encourages mere acquisition of certificates to skill-based education which centers more on what one can do and the ability to apply requisite skills in a real work environment. In Nigeria, the

rising unemployment has helped to heighten the need for vocational and technical education. This study therefore, traces the historical development of vocational and technical education (VTE), concept of vocational and technical education (VTE) in Nigeria and suggests ways to sustain the economic viability of the Nigerian graduates.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (VTE) IN NIGERIA

The origin of vocational and technical education in Nigeria has a chequered history. Its roots could be traced to pre-colonial era when traditional education was in practice. According to Ogunmilla cited in Sofoluwa and Olumade (2006), “in

traditional education of the various ethnic nationalities, arts and crafts of various types have existed as their own expression of vocational training. The traditional agricultural practices then were developed to suit the cultivation of agricultural species predominantly produced in the different eco-geographical areas of the country". The instructional method then was observation and imitation of the master. During the colonial era, the child was trained in the family trade through direct apprenticeship by either the parents or relations. During this period, non-indigenous companies like Shell BP and the UAC started training artisans among their employees who were to serve the skill needs of the companies at that particular time. There was no arrangement for examination or issuance of any certificate. The emphasis was to improve the learners' ability to accomplish more complex tasks.

In other words, during the early part of the colonial era, vocational training was encouraged. However, schools were built primarily for the purpose of evangelism by the early missionaries. Specifically, the early missionary activities were characterized by literacy types of education which was geared towards winning converts and producing clerks and interpreters (Ajayi & Ayodele, 2002). It was not until 1908 when government departments started to organize some form of vocational training school. The marine training school according to Adegbite (2000) came on board in 1982. The public works, the post and telegraph and railway training schools were also established around 1931. Government active participation in the provision of technical education became obvious between 1930 and 1960. The first technical institute established in Nigeria was the Hope Waddell

Institute in Calabar in 1885 with the aim of providing education in the rudiments training in the technical trade and teacher's education, (Mamman, Chadi, Jirgi, & Mubarak, 2013). Yaba Higher College was officially opened on January 19, 1934 and later became the first vocational and technical institute in 1948 with the motive to train Artisans, crafts men and Technicians, together with teachers of technical education to teach in trade centres, (Aina in Mamman, Chadi, Jirgi & Mubarak, 2013). Thereafter, technical colleges were established by various regional governments in various locations in the country, namely: Enugu (1950), Ilorin (1951), Kano (1953), Bukuru (1953), Sapele (1955), Ijebu-Ode (1959), Osogbo, Oyo (1961), Owo (1963), Aba (1964) and Abakaliki (1966).

These colleges were not fee paying and they were adequately funded by the government at that time. In 1959, Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Education set up a commission - the Ashby commission - to conduct an investigation into Nigerian needs in post-secondary education. The Ashby commission recommended that adequate attention should be given to technical and vocational education. It also recommended that students studying technical drawing and craft subjects should be encouraged. Similarly, technical schools should be upgraded to award the City and Guilds London Certificate. The Commission for Technical Education (1963) recommended three levels of vocational and technical education as follows: Pre-vocational and pre-technical training usually offered in secondary schools; Craftsmen training usually offered in technical colleges, trade centres and vocational schools and Technical training usually offered in polytechnics and colleges of technology. The fourth

Commonwealth Education Conference (1986) recommended that industry should be closely associated with technical education. This could be through policy-making, manpower planning and curriculum development, and provision of opportunities for industrial experience, accreditation, consultancy services, part-time courses and vocational guidance.

In 1987, the National Council on Education (NCE) approved the National Board for Technical Educational (NBTE) which classified vocational and technical institutions into:

Vocational Schools - these are made up of vocational/artisan training centres to produce artisans. They are post-primary level institutions that offer courses leading to the award of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity Trade Test Certificates.

Technical Colleges - Institutions that produce craftsmen at the craft level and master craftsmen at the advanced craft level. They are post-Junior secondary school institutions offering courses that lead to the award of the Advanced National Technical Certificate/Advanced and National Business Studies respectively.

Polytechnics/Monotechnics/Colleges of Technology -These are post Senior Secondary school institutions, which produce technicians and higher technicians/technologists. The courses offered by these institutions are of two-year duration, each leading to the award of National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) respectively. Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) identified a range of courses offered under vocational and technical education as mechanical trades, computer, craft practice, electrical

engineering trades, building trades, wood trades, hospitality, textile trades, printing trades, beauty culture trades, business trades and leather goods manufacture. This historical evidence has shown that the VTE existed in Nigeria during the olden days before its transformation as it exists today.

CONCEPT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The terms vocational and technical education have been defined differently by different authors. Some authors defined them separately while others defined the twin concept jointly. Oranu *et al.* (2000), saw vocational and technical education as "skill-based programme designed for sub-professional level education and based on a specific vocation. Technical education, on the other hand facilitates the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. The major difference between the two terms, according to Oranu, is that vocational education is limited in scope but gives general technical knowledge. Thus, while every vocational education programme is technical in nature, not all technical education is vocational. This subtle relationship accounts for the interchangeable use of both terms in academic literature. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) through the National Policy on Education, NPE, (2004) UNESCO in Ayonmike, Okwelle and Okeke (2015) defined VTE as those aspects of educational processes involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisitions of the economy and social life. The NPE which came into existence as a result of the national curriculum conference of 1969 further stated that VTE is an integral part of general education and also a means of preparing people for occupational fields and

for effective participation in the world of work. It is an aspect of life learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship; an instrument for promoting environmentally sound suitable development and a method of alleviating poverty.

Vocational and technical education, according to Okorochoa (2012), is an educational training which encompasses knowledge, skills, competencies, structural activities, abilities, capacities and all other structural experiences for securing jobs in various sectors of the economy or even enabling one to be self-dependent by being a job creator. Vocational and technical education, according to 1LO in Oluwale, Jegede and Olamide (2013), is a vehicle for the development of marketable and entrepreneurial skills and engine of development. Amoor (2009) saw it as the core of both individual's and society's economy. The author further stressed that through the acquisition of skills; individuals could explore their environment and harness the resources within it, which could serve them and the society since the wealth of any nation determines its development. VTE, according to Ojimba (2012), is a form of education whose primary aim is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupation and this encompasses field of study (agricultural education, fine and applied arts education, business education and vocational trades in soap making, hairdressing, computer training among others).

Iheanacho (2006) defined vocational education as that aspect of education that deals with business education, farming, book keeping, and bricklaying, among others with aims of acquiring vocational skills in these fields. Uwaifo (2009) posited that technical education is the training of technically-

oriented personnel who are to be initiators, facilitators, and implementers of technological literacy that would lead to self-reliance and sustainability. The author stresses that technical education has direct impact on national welfare. Banjoko, cited in Dokubo (2013), summed it all stressing that skill is a major distinguishing aspect of vocational education which makes it outstanding from liberal arts. In summary, vocational and technical education essentially develops in the individual the knowledge, skills, and desirable attitude for legitimate work.

ADVANCEMENT OF TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

It is evident that nations that have advanced technologically and scientifically have paid so only to the extent they have paid more than verbal commitment, substantial financial and technical resources in the education sector and VTE in particular. In Nigeria, vocational and technical education has long been perceived as critical to national development. Unfortunately, it has not been accorded the seriousness it deserves. The cumulative result is that today, vocational and technical education in Nigeria is in a terrible shape, crippled by a general, persistent and chronic crisis in terms of funding, staffing, curricula, infrastructure and facilities. Successive Nigerian governments have, for long, pursued poorly planned and disjointed educational policies with profound and devastating consequences on the development of the country. For example, our educational system has witnessed series of transformation without achieving the desired goal. The 8-6-2-3 system of education which operated during the colonial era was changed in 1954 to 6-5-2-3 system.

The 1969 National Curriculum Conference recommended another change to 6-3-3-4 system (six years primary, three years in junior secondary, three years in senior secondary and four years in the university). In September 2011, 9-3-4 system made up of nine years of basic education called lower (primary 1-6) and upper (junior secondary 1-3), three years in senior secondary and four years in the university came on board with emphasis on pre-vocational and vocational skills acquisition at the secondary school level. This educational system was designed to equip its recipients with knowledge that will make them to reason rationally and learn skills that will help them have a decent and useful living. The essence of the reform as stated in the National Policy on Education (NPE) document, according to Abar, Baloch and Ghouri (2010) and Yusof, /a' faran, Rahman and Ghouri (2012) was to address the issue of imbalance in the provision of education in different parts of the country with regards to access and quality. Igwe in Gusua (2008) stated that one of the merits of 3-3 system of secondary education is that it will equip its recipients both intellectually and vocationally based on the recipient's area of interest, attitude and capability.

According to Gusua (2008), crises in education started when government went all out to implement the 6-3-3-4 system without adequate planning put in place. Gusua (2008) further stated that pre-vocational subjects meant to lurch Nigeria into a respectable industrialized state with abundant pool of lower manpower became a mirage. The teaching of pre-vocational subjects ended up not having either workshop or qualified teachers. VTE subjects (where possible) were theoretically taught like social studies. The hopes that reforms will enable schools fabricate some of their

basic needs such as chairs, desks, beds, etc. never materialised. Priorities were misplaced, and huge resources squandered with virtually no results to show for it (Akwara, 1998). It is the legitimate duty of any responsible government to put in place an educational system that will cater for the welfare of its citizens by providing them with relevant skills that will make for the socio-economic development of the society. This is not the case in Nigeria where corruption, negligence of VTE programmes, and government misplaced priority is the order of the day.

Nigeria's transition to democracy is expected to open up opportunity for the development of vocational and technical education. Rosefield and Mills (2013) cited in Orinos (2014:26) argued that "democracy is attractive but elusive concept which literally means people's rule, a governance system where the political sovereignty of every citizen reign without privilege or special entitlements". The researchers further noted that the mission of a true democracy is to provide the variety and quantity of public services the people want. A true democratic government in addition to the above mission should provide her citizens with education that is skill driven which will reduce unemployment in the country. In line with this, Otamiri (2014) stated that quality education is the type that fulfils the desired standard of knowledge and skills for individual and social needs of the country. One wonders the extent this type of democratic mission is being practiced in Nigeria. How far has the successive democratic government in Nigeria pursued the issue of vocation technical education and training for the manpower needs of the country visa-a-visa the unemployment situation affecting the Nigeria youths?

The youth unemployment, according to Sun (2015) stood at 861,110 between December 2014 and March 2015. Jobs created by public institutions stood at 5,726 while informal sector generated 400,000 jobs. This shows that people who are jobless exceeded the number that got jobs within the period. This calls for proper attention to VTE programmes. According to Usioboh (2007), successive governments have over-emphasized other university education programmes above technical and vocational education. The researcher further stated that, what is needed is for the government to give adequate and equal attention to all the levels of education in the overall best interest of the country. Unfortunately, the government's too much emphasis on general and science education has affected VTE. The society, which is expected to put pressure on government to finance the planning and implementation of vocational and technical education, according to Amoor (2009), has a misconception that vocational and technical education is an education that is meant for the drop-outs, unintelligent persons and non-achievers.

This misconception has, in no small measure, frustrated the enrolment of candidates into the vocational and technical education programme in tertiary institutions. It has also affected youth's enrolment into artisan jobs. Everybody wants to play politics that is now more lucrative than anything else. For instance, nine billion naira was announced as allowance for the National Assembly members, an amount which a professor that laboured for years cannot earn during his service years. We need to have a re-think if actually we want the acquisition of skills by youth to be a reality in Nigeria.

ROLES OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Vocational and technical education is not just a Nigerian issue. It has been a long time discourse both in academics and in practice, though the issue in most developing countries like Nigeria has been a question of successful implementation of VTE programme (Okorocho, 2012). In this era of globalization and Information and Communication Technology (ICT), emphasis is on vocational skills for the production of self-reliant citizens. VTE therefore, has the following roles to play:

Youth Empowerment:- In this 21st century characterized by knowledge explosion, emphasis should be on production of self-reliant citizens. VTE should empower the Nigerian graduates with requisite employability skills that should be sustained. VTE schools should produce men and women who, at the end of their education, should be able to put into use the skills they have acquired while in school. Institutions should partner with industries and other businesses to enable students fit into the wider society on graduation, either as individual workers in paid employment or self-employed persons and functional members of the political society. VTE should also empower the people socially and economically so that they will be able to participate in the making of decisions regarding policies affecting their lives, to make the citizens and nations to be self-reliant in the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Ogundele, Akingbade and Akinlabi (2012) revealed that youth and graduate empowerment is influenced through acquired skills.

Enhancement of Citizens National Economy:-

Vocational and technical education should play a crucial role in the social and economic development of a nation (Grootings and Nelsen, 2006; King and Palmer, 2000). The development of a nation's economy is contingent on the quality of skilled human capital in the pool. Vocational and technical education provides student with life skills that will make them to be productive entrepreneurs as it engenders creative and innovative ideas; enlarges the economic pie and increases personal freedom. The business environment is changing at a fast pace due to the rapid emergence of technology and globalization. This has added to the increase in demand of valuable human skills necessary to respond to such drastic changes for economic progress.

As a channel for entrepreneurial skill acquisition:-

VTE play the role of improving the economic situation of Nigeria through production and distribution of goods in different areas of specialization. This is achievable through the training of the students in different specialized fields. In the long run, this will help the students to establish their own enterprise as seen in China, Turkey, India, and Japan among other countries that have succeeded economically through vocational education. This is in line with the views of Lawal (2014) who opined that "for a country to advance socially, economically and technologically, its citizens must be creative and productive with a majority becoming job creators rather than seekers" P.54. The researcher concluded by emphasizing that optimum attention and recognition is to be given to the promotion of VTE in Nigerian if the country wants to attain great achievements in productivity and sustainable economic environment and

natural development. According to Sheieh, Wang and Chon (2009), lifelong vocational education will gradually improve the economic and social development of both the people and the country by making vocational education a channel for exploitation of human resources. Ozasagir, Bayraktutan and Arsian (2010), in their regression and causality test carried out in turkey provided empirical support for a positive relationship between vocational education and industrial productivity. Vocational trainees' productivity, according to Okafor (2011), will contribute to domestic economic activities.

PROVISION OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING SERVICES TO THE STUDENTS

Vocational and technical education should equip students with the right skill for effective adaptation to the business environment. However, no student can acquire all the skills needed in every aspect of the economy. Therefore vocational education practitioners have a role to play in terms of observing and monitoring students' behaviors, attitudes and actions within the environment for proper skill alignment. The behaviour observed will help VTE practitioners to counsel, guide and advice students on their choice of skills. This will help to ensure that students enrolled in appropriate callings for effective performance and sustainability of the skills learnt. With proper guidance and counseling, students can acquire skills in dealing with finance and accounting matters, economics, business, ICT, fine and applied arts, music and entertainment, building , automobile, woodwork, electrical and electronics, metal works and agricultural activities such as fishery, poultry, snailing, piggery, crop planting among other numerous skills that

will make them self-reliant, self-dependent, self-fulfilled and self-actualized.

CHALLENGES FACING VTE IN NIGERIA

There are numerous challenges facing vocational technical education and training which have affected negatively both our national life and development. Among the challenges are:

(1) Poor Public Perception and Apathy to Vocational Education:

Vocational and technical education in Nigeria has a very low image and there is need for a turn around on its perception for public acceptance. Observations have shown that many parents, especially the elites, the rich and the political class, do not encourage their wards to make VTE a career and those people who opt probably for VTE programme either by accident or by chance are not motivated or encouraged because the society does not place any significant value or dignity on the programme. In Nigeria today, how many ministers, governors, local government chairmen, professors and even teachers of VTE do encourage their siblings to enlist for VTE certificates? Rather, they prefer them to study courses like pharmacy, medicine, law, accounting etc. Therefore, boosting the image of VTE should be a serious concern to VTE practitioners, institutions and other stakeholders.

(2) Government Lukewarm Attitudes/Poor Funding:-

The three tiers of Government in Nigeria have not fully come to appreciate the contributions of vocational and technical education to national economic development although it is an indispensable tool for tackling unemployment and poverty in the society. This is because successive governments have not found it necessary to adequately finance both the planning and

implementation of standard and sustainable vocational and technical education programmes in the country. In support of this statement, Okorie (2001) and Okeke and Eze (2010) stated that insufficient finance is a realistic and practical factor inhibiting the implementation of vocational and technical education sector. Too much noise is made on the pages of papers and on television screens about vocational and technical education, but little is done to improve the teaching/learning of vocational and technical education programmes in Nigeria.

(3) Shortage of Qualified Vocational and Technical Teachers:-

Many tertiary institutions across the country are inadequately staffed, both qualitatively and quantitatively. In most departments especially in vocational education programmes, the **numbers** of qualified VTE teachers for each specialized area are always in short supply. It is an indisputable fact that without quality VTE teachers, practical work, which is an essential component of VTE programme, will be difficult to implement. Acquisition of skills requires that strict attention and supervision should be given to every student. In other words, individualized instructions become very difficult during practicals due to shortage of qualified VTE teachers and this affects performance of both the teachers and students as teachers were made to teach many VTE courses. Many people who are qualified to teach VTE courses have always abandoned teaching for other better jobs that have prestige and better remuneration. According to Adeyinka (2011), teaching is gradually becoming a profession for fresh graduates of universities and colleges of education who are ready to call it quit, without provocation, as soon as they find better job opportunity. Oluwale, Jegede and Olamide (2013) stated that

attracting qualified staff into teaching and teacher training in technical and vocational education was a problem for most countries, including Nigeria. In order to spur locally needed vocational and technology teachers, it is imperative that Nigerian government should seriously consider proper retention schemes for their best talents by providing special working conditions such as; adequate research supports and other incentives to stem this problem of brain drain.

(4) Lack of Adequate Equipment and Training Infrastructure:- Most vocational education departments in our higher institutions do not have well equipped laboratories, workshops and usable infrastructures. Where these exist, they are grossly inadequate, obsolete and in a dilapidated state. Oduma, (2007) posited that what is seen and referred to as vocational education laboratories in various institutions today are an eye-sore as the laboratories only have items or equipment that were provided at the point the departments were established. It is however a statement of fact that most vocational education departments still depend on engineering workshops and lecturers to teach vocational and technical education courses. Opeoluwa in Dokubo and Dokubo (2013) indicated that only 40% of tertiary institutions in Nigeria have laboratories or workshop spaces for vocational education programmes. They further stated that 60% of other institutions do not have laboratories or workshop spaces and this affects the low quality of technology programmes in higher institutions. Opeoluwa, concluded that this situation is partly responsible for the reason why it has been increasingly difficult to run experiments effectively for students and thus making the teaching and research in vocational and technology difficult.

Consequently, the country turned into producing insufficient, unqualified and ill-prepared vocational education graduates who ordinarily are supposed to be the driving force for the economic and industry transformation of the country as experienced in developing countries like China and Turkey. This inadequacy in the field of teaching, laboratory and workshop facilities has contributed to poor performances on the part of students.

(5) Non-Uniformity of Course Contents:-

Most of the Nigerian universities and colleges that offer vocational education programme do not have uniform course contents. Non uniformity in the course contents usually creates problems for students who may wish to transfer to another institution to complete their studies. This disparity in course contents of vocational education programme in Nigerian universities and colleges poses a great challenge for the standardization of the VTE programmes.

An Ideal Environment for the Teaching and Learning of Vocational and Technical Education:-

It is a fact that no meaningful teaching and learning can take place in an environment that is not conducive. Observation has shown that most schools lack adequate infrastructural facilities, have poorly equipped classrooms and obsolete equipment. For a better result, teaching and learning environment needs to be conducive and well furnished. Okoro in Okolocha (2012) opined that effective vocational education can only be achieved where the training on the jobs are carried out, with the same tools and machines as exist in the industry itself. This means that vocational and technical education will be efficient and effective in proportion to the environment in

which the learner is trained. To achieve this, a well-planned and organized environment is imperative for students to learn.

THE WAY FORWARD

The discovery of a problem is half way to its solution. Finding the way forward for vocational education in Nigeria entails the correction of the anomalies highlighted in this paper. To achieve this, the following strategies are recommended.

Boosting the Image of Vocational and Technical Education:-

In this 21st century, the business environment is changing at a very fast pace with regard to the world of work. This demands new skills for proper adaptation to the business world. For Nigerians to meet the skill needs of the 21st century job market, they should have a rethink and change their negative mindset by embracing vocational skill acquisition for the improved socio-economic development of the country. The image of VTE programmes should be boosted through adequate and proper sensitization of the general public and students in particular. Government should make VTE programmes more attractive by awarding scholarships to its students, making it compulsory for each student to acquire at least one vocational/technical skill irrespective of the area of specialization. The government, VTE professionals and institutions offering VTE should use persuasive advertising in both print and electronic media, workshops, conferences, seminars, churches and other local means to create awareness of what VTE is for, what it does, and its benefits in improving the political, social and economic status of individuals and the nation at large. Proper re-orientation will make the education stakeholders to begin to see the vocational and technical education with the seriousness

that it requires. Students must be made to know that certificates do not count anymore, and that what count are the depth of knowledge and vocational skills which they have acquired and their ability to sustain the skill. Once there is improvement in the image of vocational training in Nigeria, young people will move into the programme because the quest for certificate has failed Nigerian youths, graduates and the nation at large.

Involvement of VTE Professionals in VTE Policy Decisions:-

The major problem confronting VTE is the use of non-professionals in handling VTE matters. Ibeneme (2007) noted that many administrators of VTE programmes at policy making level are not vocationally trained persons and thus do not seem to understand the needs of the programme regarding fund distribution. For VTE to be successful, government must ensure that VTE professionals are involved in VTE policy making decisions, planning and implementation. This is necessary because VTE professionals know the needs of the VTE programmes in terms of deploying human and material resources for effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The professionals, according to Manfred and Jennifer in Okolocha (2012), have all the necessary skills, abilities and capabilities for carrying out the programme.

Matching VTE Policies with Needs Assessment and Proper Planning:-

Government should conduct needs assessment of the people and the country at large with respect to VTEK and match it with proper planning before implementation. Policies on education made in a haste will never give desired results. It would be better, according to Gusua (2008), if policies are made in such a way that changes can be

accommodated without disturbing the overall system. Proper planning will also help to avoid inconsistencies in policy decisions which could hinder performance and success of VTE programmes. In line with this, Gove (2014) stressed that if the youth of the country are to be prepared for the anticipated radical change in the world of work, there is need for a plausible plan to overhaul the education system in favour of VTE to enable the youths secure their future.

Enrich Laboratory Workshop:

Dramatic changes occasioned by globalization have shown that functional skills acquisition is truly capable of improving ones economic destiny rather than mere acquisition of certificates. To acquire the right skills needed for wider choice of jobs and career paths, well equipped laboratories and workshops become critical. Government should equip VTE workshops with modern equipment, tools and machines to enable teachers and students practice the skills using a replica of what should be obtained in the workplace and as well undertake socially relevant researches. Reprinting relevant books that are out of stock, encouraging new book projects and launching endowment funds for new libraries and books should also be undertaken by the government. Nigerian institutions should not relent in seeking assistance from foreign donors, NGOs, philanthropists and industrialists. Students can acquire the right skills only when they are taught with the right tools, equipment and machines in a good environment. This is why Gove (2014) stressed on need to end the artificial division between the academics and the practical.

Exchange Programmes within and outside the Country:-

Government and institutions should plan, negotiate and fund exchange programmes

with other countries that are already neck deep in skills acquisition practices. This will definitely help to increase the graduates' and teachers' knowledge and technical know-how in the field of vocational and technical education. The involvement of government agencies in skill programmes such as ITF, SURE-P, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), and National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in the VTE programme will help and value and promote the image of VTE. Cooperation between institutions and industries will help to provide students with state-of-the-art equipment, machines and tools and also make the students' experience real life situations.

Interaction between Institutions and the General Public through Exhibitions:-

Internally, there should be a planned interaction among institutions offering VTE programmes and the general public through institutional exhibitions. This will help institutions to know where they have comparative advantage over others in the area of skills acquired. It will also create awareness on what VTE institutions do and capabilities of the students. This will motivate parents and donors to assist institutions in the areas of funding and encourage parents to send in their wards to enroll for the VTE programme.

Staff Training:-

The training of academic staff should be a continuous exercise to ensure consistent improvement in the quality of VTE teachers. The training should be in two folds: training to acquire qualifications required for teaching and continuing professional training. Both types of training can be acquired either locally or overseas. Government should adequately fund and support VTE programme through scholarships awards, funding/research grants,

provision of current books and journals in order to meet the needs required for staff good job performance.

Restoration of Craft Period in Primary and Post Primary Schools:-

Encouraging pupils and students to imbibe the culture of craftsmanship at a tender age will create a very conducive atmosphere for the sustainability of VTE in Nigeria. During the 1970s and 1980s for instance, primary schools pupils and secondary school students were encouraged, through government policy, to undertake handicraft and other skill acquisition tasks themselves as part of continuous assessment during prescribed periods of time. Today, handicrafts are not part of the school curriculum. Parents, especially the elite, rich and influential members of the society, do influence teachers and school management to accept finished (imported or locally purchased) goods from their wards rather than making them learn how to acquire the skills and use same to produce goods. Most schools seem not to observe the craft period any longer. This attitude seems to demoralize the students who would have offered skill courses in higher institutions and even after graduation. There is an urgent need for government, through various boards in charge of primary and secondary schools, to reintroduce this in schools and ensure compliance.

Funding:-

Considering the economic forces reshaping the world today, getting education right should be given priority attention in this democratic dispensation. Government should endeavour to fund VTE and other skill acquisition programmes very well, bearing in mind the capital intensive nature of the programmes; a special fund to be tagged "Vocational and Technical Education Intervention Fund" should be created for the effective implementation of VTE programmes at all levels. This will help to

equip the workshops and laboratories for effective skill acquisition.

CONCLUSION

Improving skill acquisition through vocational and technical education will no doubt solve Nigerian's multiple problems regarding human capital development, empowerment, unemployment and economic instability. The world has recognized that no meaningful social and economic progress could be recorded when majority of the populace are unemployed. This is why nations are striving to overcome the problem of unemployment especially among its youths and Nigeria should not be left out. Since many programmes introduced to tackle the issue of unemployment in Nigeria have failed the nation, it now becomes obvious that the easiest way to achieve the goal is by improving skills acquisition through vocational and technical education for youth, graduate empowerment and sustainability. When all these strategies and solutions are adhered to, VTE in Nigeria will definitely take a new outlook in line with the trend in the global world.

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