

Stephen Aigbepue
School of Business Studies, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi
E-mail:steveaigbe09@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

This paper seeks to juxtapose the revitalization of vocational & technical education, which provides theoretical and practical skills necessary for self reliance with the aid of information technology as panacea for poverty alleviation as outlined in the National Policy on Education (2004) and the National Policy on Information Technology (2001). The roles of Vocational Education and Information Technology towards poverty reduction and the inhibiting factors to poverty alleviation through vocational and technical education in Nigeria were discussed. Vocational education was viewed in this era of Information and Communication Technology as an indisputable means of reducing poverty in the society by imparting the relevant vocational and ICT skills, knowledge and abilities required for work. Recommendations made the provision of vocational/technical guidance service at all levels of training institutions, provision of dedicated and special intervention funding as well as improved awareness campaign of the leading role of vocation/technical education to the acquisition and development of entrepreneurial skills.

Keywords: Vocational, technical, education, poverty, alleviation

Introduction

Education in general terms refers to an exercise that engages every one. It is a process of enabling individuals to live as useful and acceptable members of a society. An individual either goes through liberal, general, or vocational and technical education in the bit to acquire knowledge and be useful to the society. The adults who did not have an opportunity for formal education at youth were directly or indirectly involved in education as education means more than just going to school. Okoye(2002), described an educated man as a refined gentlemen, socially, morally, intellectually, physically, and aesthetically useful to the society. There is no doubt that some fundamental societal norms and values are required for a person to survive in the society, hence the need for the acquisition of vocational and technical skills and competence which are information communication technology based for self sustenance.

In any economic setting, the level of technology determines the level of economic growth. Technology is embedded in its ability to improve on the ways things are done for better performance, and it is only through the application of appropriate technology that the poor and the unemployed can be made functional in the society. This justifies the recognition of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) by the Federal Government as a veritable tool for poverty alleviation because no nation can grow economically if poverty is persistent.

The modern society which is ruled by ICT is very complex hence the need for the individual to obtain a type of education that would equip him with knowledge and economic understanding in order for him to be highly functional in the society (Amaewhule, 2000). Nigeria as a country has been experiencing one form of crisis or the other, and such crisis have been attributed to poverty, joblessness

and poor educational opportunities. The concern of this paper therefore, is to examine the role of vocational and technical education in the era of information and communication technology towards poverty alleviation in the Nigeria society.

Concept of vocational and technical education

According to Etim and Otuo (2009), vocational and technical education, traditionally, was poorly given the recognition it deserves as it was informal in outlook. They continued that vocational education is a generic term embracing all the experiences an individual needs to prepare for some useful occupation.

Giashino and Gallington (1997) see vocational and technical education to mean 'training or retraining' which is given in schools or classes under public supervision and control and is conducted as part of a programme designed to prepare individual for gainful employment as semi-skilled or skilled workers, technicians, or sub-professionals in recognized occupations, and in new and emerging occupations or to prepare individuals for enrolment in advanced technical education programmes. Vocational education includes preparation for employment in any occupation for which specialized education is required, for which there is a societal need, and which can most appropriately be done in schools. Osuala (1999) opined that vocational education which means vocational or technical training/retraining refers to systematic learning experiences which are designed to fit individuals for gainful employment in recognized occupations as semi-skilled workers, or technicians or sub-professionals. It includes guidance and counseling in connection with training and other instructions directly related to an occupation.

According to the National Policy on Education (2004), Technical and vocational education is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitude, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of the economic and social life. The N P E further elaborated the concept of Technical and vocational education to include: an integral part of general education, a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in world of work, an aspect of lifelong learning and a preparation for responsible citizenships, an instrument for promoting environmentally sound sustainable development, and a method of alleviating poverty.

This imaginably indicates that vocational and technical education is a veritable tool for the alleviation of poverty.

Information and communication technology

According to Ikelegbe (2007), the Nigerian National Policy for Information Technology (IT) in its executive summary states that IT is the bedrock of national survival and development in a rapidly changing global environment, especially in a nation like Nigeria that aspires to participate effectively and become a key player ...

The diffusion of ICT has contributed enormously to the growth of economies in developed nations and developing nations are earnestly facilitating policy frameworks to ensure an equitable diffusion of these technologies. Balogun and Lawal (2004) view ICT as the various technologies that enhance the creation, storage, processing, communication and dissemination of information. Simply put, ICTs can be referred

to as the application of technology to information processing.

The National Policy on Information Technology (2001) sees ICT as the bedrock for national survival and development in a rapidly changing global environment and defines it as computers, ancillary, equipment, software and hardware and similar procedures, services and related resources. It was further defined by the policy to include any equipment or intercom muted system or subsystem of equipment that is used in the automatic acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission or reception of data or information.

This implies that ICT relates to all forms of technologies applied to processing, storing and transmitting information in the modern ways through the use of electronic gadgets. In the mission statement of the National policy on ICT, it is stated that ICT would be used for: Creation of wealth, poverty alleviation, job creation and global competitiveness.

The policy also outlined the following general objectives which focus on the development of competitive manpower in IT and related disciplines, that is, to: enhance the availability of trained personnel, provide attractive career opportunities and develop requisite skills in various aspects of IT and poverty alleviation.

Effect of poverty

Poverty is a condition of being poor or unproductive. It can also be referred to as a condition in which a person or group of persons are unable to satisfy their most basic and elementary requirements for human survival in terms of good nutrition, clothing, shelter, health, education, recreation and others. To the layman, it simply refers to members of the society who cannot afford their three square meals in a day. Obaseki

(1997), opined that poverty is a ravaging economic and social phenomenon that manifests in the inability to acquire the basic necessities of life needed for a decent living, in love, self-esteem and in the absence of the means of self-actualization. Uniamikogbo (1997) identified the poor as: those who are unable to contribute adequately to the production process to warrant an income, those for whom the economy has failed to provide jobs, that is, those who are willing and capable of earning an adequate income if only jobs were available and those whose opportunities to participate in the productive process were restricted by discrimination of various kinds, for example, sex, age, race, religion and others.

It should also be noted that though some people are rich while others are poor, yet the concept of poverty is a relative term, because a first class rich man in a particular place maybe poorer than a third class rich man in another place. Despite the fact that poverty is a relative term, economists have devised a means of identifying the status of absolute poverty. This is defined in terms of the number of people living below specified minimum level of income (imaginary international poverty line) which cuts across all countries regardless of the level of national per-capita income. (Todaro, 1977) in (Agbionu, 2002).

In view of the fact that poverty can only be reduced or eradicated completely through strategic planning, the federal government has from time to time designed programmes aimed at alleviating the poverty level of its citizenry. Some of these programmes include the introduction of the National Youth Service Corp Scheme (NYSC) in 1973 which has some cushioning effect on the immediate unemployment problems of fresh graduates. The introduction of the National Directorate for Employment (NDE) also in 1987 made

some impact by solving the problems of unemployment. It still exists to serve as a means of monitoring entrepreneurship. The other programmes introduced at one time or the other by the past administrations includes Operation Feed the Nation (OFN). This was introduced in the late seventies by the Obasanjo Administration, Green Revolution, by the Shagari Administration in the early eighties. The Structural Adjustment program (SAP), Mass Mobilization Scheme for Economic Recovery, Better Life Programme for Rural Women and others were introduced by the Babangida Administration between the mid eighties and early nineties. Abacha like others introduced Family Support Programme and most recently the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) which came into existence in the wake of 2000. Despite the introduction of these programmes, poverty has neither ceased nor abated.

Vocational education and information technology in poverty alleviation

The Federal Government in realization of the role of vocational and technical education in poverty eradication, mapped out the following goals for the successful realization of this objectives as contain in the NPE (2001) as to:

- (i) Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business; particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels,
- (ii) Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development and
- (iii) Give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically. It should be noted that the self-reliant goal of the NPE can only be achieved through vocational and technical education which involves skills, knowledge and abilities required to work in a modern work

environment which is technologically driven.

In a similar vein, information and communication technology play a very vital role in poverty alleviation. The Federal Government being mindful of these immense benefits outlined the role of ICT in poverty reduction to include:

- (i) Restructuring the education system at all levels to respond effectively to the challenges and imagined impact of the information age, and in particular the allocation of special IT development fund to education at all levels,
- (ii) Encouraging massive local and global IT skills acquisition through training in the public and private sectors,
- (iii) Empowering the labour force with IT skills and improving small and medium enterprises productivity,
- (iv) Utilizing IT facilities to develop and transform entertainment industries for wealth and job creation,
- (v) Strengthening the government and private sector collaboration for the attainment of self-reliance,
- (vi) Establishing appropriate mechanisms to accelerate and enhance trade and commerce transaction in the sector,
- (vii) Make the use of IT mandatory at all levels of educational institutions through adequate financial provision for tools and resources,
- (viii) Develop IT curricular for primary, secondary and tertiary institutions,
- (ix) Establish facilities for electronic distance learning networks and ensure effective internal connectivity thereby providing opportunities for educationally

- disadvantage areas to leapfrog into the modern era,
- (x) To promote trade, business and commerce and
 - (xi) To facilitate the opening of global markets for Nigerian businesses and enterprises, (NPE 2001). No wonder the recent strike embarked upon by the University sector was timely and a test of time for the upliftment and re-organization of the dilapidating equipment (IT related) and general facilities for conducive learning process.

Factors inhibiting poverty alleviation through vocational and technical education

Vocational education in this era of ICT will be of help to the Federal government poverty reduction programmes as they can complement each other, hence for sustainable poverty alleviation through vocational education a number of inhibiting factors must be looked into. These include: Inadequate Vocational Guidance; vocational guidance has been defined as the process by which all the various factors affecting individual occupational choices are sorted out, weighed and brought into focus and by which the young person is assisted to make his choice in the full knowledge of the facts about his own potentials to them, (Olaniyi, 1986). A major cause of unemployment and subsequently poverty in Nigeria today is inadequate proper guidance of the youth. There is no programme for guidance and counseling in most of our primary, secondary and tertiary schools. Where this facility exists, the proper and effective use of it is not made. The result of inadequate guidance of these youth have caused many of them growing up confused of what to do in life and when they make the wrong choice, they become less useful to the community at large. In this political dispensation, many of these children are used as thugs by some unscrupulous politicians as

well as in the wake of recurring religious crisis in the country. These children may have made their choices of career through the attachment of big names and parents influence, (Osuala, 1999) and not to their interest or under career guidance/counseling as expected.

Negative public attitude towards vocational and technical education

The general public have negative attitude towards vocational education. Most people see vocational education as inferior and therefore will not want their wards to go into such profession. To attest to this, Nwachokor (2002) asserted that there is a societal belief that vocational and technical education is meant for dropouts. She added that parental attitude towards vocational education is negative. Most parents will prefer their children to read medicine, law, engineering and the likes. They see vocational education as for those who never do well in the society. This kind of societal attitude will make it difficult for the youths to benefit from vocational education and be well equipped with the necessary skills to face the challenges of being self-reliant. The Government in the seventies and early eighties because of this nonchalant attitude towards vocational and technical education discovered that they needed more middle level manpower to keep our industries going and hence embarked on sponsoring our youths to other developed countries which today some of them did not come back.

Inadequate basic infrastructure, facilities, workshops and laboratory

The basic infrastructure such as the supply of electricity in Nigeria are either epileptic or of low voltage. The incessant black outs have been behind the closing down of many businesses. It is obvious that there is no way production lines can be stimulated when there

is no power to run production lines or where the epileptic power supplied led to the breakdown of many office machines or facilities.

School facilities in terms of equipment and workshops are required if the objectives of vocational and technical education are to be realized. It is worthy of note that some of the important equipment are not available and where available, they are not relevant in today's business world. Isyaku (2003) observed that teaching materials and learning environment rank second after the inadequate capabilities of the learner in ensuring success in the educational ability of the students. A situation where these basic facilities are not available makes the graduates to go into the world of work without a sound knowledge and understanding of what is required of them, and they therefore remained unemployed and poor.

Inadequate funding of vocational education

One of the problems of vocational education in Nigeria is inadequate funding. To realize the objectives of vocational education, one of which is to equip the graduate with the right skills which are required for self-reliance, adequate fund needs to be provided. The Educational Trust Fund's intervention has been of great assistance whereby many institutions that use their funds judiciously and make remittance on time always have their next allocation of fund for further educational development.

Inadequate and ill-equipped vocational education staff

Qualified teachers in vocational education have often been difficult to find. The performances of the students depends to a large extent on the competence of the teachers. Generally, there is a dearth of qualified vocational education teachers at all levels of vocational training. Idih (2002), opined that

many teachers of vocational education were trained with the traditional technology hence they lack the necessary ICT skills to impart to students. Most vocational education teachers have little or no knowledge of modern equipment, some of them have never seen or used the equipment they are required to teach with.

There is also very poor Industrial Experience, which is considered as the teachers' greatest handicap as well as poor knowledge level. Employers are not willing to sponsor these teachers for training to up-date their knowledge with the modern facilities. Oke, (2003) expressed a similar view and opined that "one of the glaring deficiencies of vocational/technical education in Nigeria is lack of institution-industry collaboration.

Irregular review of the curriculum for vocational education

The curriculum for vocational education must be reviewed at all levels to reflect the necessary ICT skills required by learners in line with the policy statement of the federal government in the National Policy on IT (2001) which states that the government will develop relevant IT curricular for primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. The NUC, NBTE and NCCE Syllabi, which have the specifications for vocational training, must also be revisited to accommodate the current demand of the society technologically if poverty is to be eradicated through vocational education and information technology.

Conclusion

Vocational and technical education is skilled-oriented and employment motivated, and it is very obvious that vocational education is the era of ICT is an indisputable means of reducing poverty in our society. This can be achieved through the acquisition of the

relevant vocational and ICT skills, knowledge and abilities required for work (either paid employment or self-employment) However, the means of acquiring this skills, knowledge and abilities are either lacking or in short supply due to some inhibiting factors.

Some of these inhibiting factors to poverty reduction through vocational education and information technology are lack of proper vocational guidance, negative public attitude towards vocational and technical education, inadequate provision of basic infrastructure/facilities/workshops, inadequate funding of vocational education, inadequate and ill-equipped vocational and technical education teachers, and irregular review of the curriculum of vocational and technical education to reflect the realities of modern work environment. However, these problems can be transformed to better opportunities if stakeholders develop a frame work to further widen the prospects of vocational education.

Recommendations

The problems discussed in this paper have to a great extent inhibited the reduction of poverty through vocational and technical education. The paper therefore suggests strategies which when explored will help in the reduction of poverty through vocational and technical education.

- Vocational guidance services should be made compulsory and provided for at all levels of vocational training to help the youth in making realistic career choices. Where this service is available, emphasis should be made on the effective and proper utilization of it.
- Vocational and Technical education teachers should improve communication and awareness about vocational education

- programmes with schools and between schools. Parents and the business community should be acquainted with what vocational and technical education is all about.
- The problem of inadequate infrastructure and facilities/workshops/laboratories in vocational education is usually attributed to low funding. Government and other stakeholders should invest heavily in the provision of modern facilities for vocational training. This will go a long way in improving the quality of graduates produced thereby reducing unemployment and by extension poverty.
- Technical training for vocational educators is of greater necessity. This informs the need for a workable training policy that will influence the re-training of teachers in the use of techniques and new tools, and facilities provided by ICT.
- The vocational education curriculum at all levels of vocational training should be reviewed periodically to meet the current needs of the business world. The introduction of the entrepreneurship course at all levels of our institutions is timely and should not be abused.

References:

- Agbionu, E. (2002) The Place of NCE Business Education in Promoting Poverty Alleviation Programme in Nigeria. *Business Education Journal Vol (3)*
- Amaewhule, W. (2000) *An Introduction to Vocational Education and Administration, Nigeria* Ibadan:Springfield Publishers

- Balogun, B. F. and Lawal, I.O.B. (2004) Information Systems and Technologies as Pivot for Improving Communication in Secretarial Services. *NAPSSON Journal* 040 2004 Proceedings
- Etim, G. J. and Otuo, O. H. (2009) Problems and Prospects of implementing Vocational and Technical Education in Nigerian Schools. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Research and Development*, Vol. 12 No. 1: August
- Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) *National Policy on Education*. Lagos, National Educational Research and Development centre
- Federal Government of Nigeria (2001) *National Policy on Information Technology*. Federal Government Press
- Gigchino, J. W. and Gallington, R.). (1997) *Course Construction in Industrial Arts, Vocational and Technical Education*. Asip, Illinois: America technical Publishers
- Idih, E.I.N. (2002) Information Technology. A Veritable Tool for Poverty Alleviation. *Business Education Journal* Vol 3 No. 5
- Ikelegbe, S. (2009) Information and Communication Technology: As Tools for Developing Education Sector. *Journal of Business and Management Studies*. Vol. 1. No. 2: July Nigerian
- Isyaku, S. (2003) Business Education for Self-Reliance: Issues and Relevance. *Business Education Book of Readings* Vol 1 No. 3
- Nwoachokor, J.O. (2000) Inhibiting Factors to Poverty Reduction through Business Education *Business Education Journal* Vol. 3. No. 5
- Obaseki, P.J. (1997) *Introduction on Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria*. The Nigerian Economic Society. Ibadan, Patmog Press.
- Oke, J. S. (2003) Strategies for Facing the Challenges of Business Education in the New Millenium. *Business Education Book of Reading* Vol 1 No. 3
- Okoye, O.J. (2002) Youth Restiveness and the Role of Business Education Towards Poverty Alleviation. *Business Education Journal* Vol. 3 No. 5
- Olaniyi, B(1986) *Educational and Vocational Guidance- Concepts and Approaches*. Ife University of Ife Press
- Osuala, E.C.(1999) *Foundations of Vocational Education*. Anambra. Meks Publishers
- Uniamikogbo, S.O. (1997) *Poverty Alleviation Under Nigeria Structural Adjustment Programme, A Policy Framework*. The Nigeria Economic Society. Ibadan, Pat Mag Press