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ACHIEVING NATIONAL GREATNESS THROUGH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT
The importance of vocational education stretches from the individual to community and beyond to the nation at large. Thus, even though the individual is the primary beneficiary of vocational education, the community or the nation always benefit from it as well. The paper focused onachieving national greatness through vocational education in secondary schools. It highlighted the concept of vocational education, quality of teaching staff for vocational education, instructional facilities for vocational education programmes and funding of vocational and technical education. Recommendations were also made which include: Government should provide adequate funds for planning, implementing and coordinating of Vocational Education Programme in secondary schools and curriculum designers should harmonize the course content of vocational education programme in Nigerian schools to avoid wastage. In addition, government should increase the number of vocational instructional facilities made available to secondary schools.

Key words: National, greatness, vocational, education, secondary, schools.

Introduction
The debate over the declining standards in education has become common phenomenon with Nigerians. Different governments are accompanied by different policies in education, all aimed at solving inherent problems. Education has been the bedrock of developments around the globe. Nations and individuals all the world over now agree that the way out of series of bondages plaguing them is through education.

However, the standard of education has been a major concern to this present generation. With the introduction of Western education in Nigeria, vocational and technical education has long been treated as relatively insignificant aspects of the country's education system. This has created a situation whereby the majority of Nigerian youth, especially prior to the last decade were trained for clerical and white collar jobs and so failed to develop a number of practical skills. The early pre-independence and post-independence education policies aimed at sustaining the new and independent political structure and administration thus led to high rates of unemployment, increase in crime rates and juvenile delinquency.

Recently, the governments is doubling its effort in promoting vocational and technical education in secondary schools with a very firm and strong belief that skill formation enhances productivity and sustains competitiveness in the global economy. Atchoarena (2004) notes that, there has been a debate recently on the knowledge economy and this has drawn more attention of government to vocational education. In Nigeria, education systems at all levels have witnessed dramatic changes in terms of purpose, organization, structure and changes in nomenclature of certificates awarded. The various reforms in education are reflected in the National Policy on Education (NPE) document. The vision of NPE document and various reform movements are to address the issue of imbalance in the provision of education in different parts of the country with regards to access and quality of education offered (Oranu, 2009). The education reforms/policies of 1970s and 1980s which focused more on the acquisition of certificates instead of the needed vocational skills have caused many Nigerian youths and adults to move into the education industry in pursuit of certificates. As a result of this, the education industries grew rapidly in size in late 1970s and 80s.

The importance of vocational education stretches from the individual to community and beyond to the nation at large. Thus, even though the individual is the primary beneficiary of vocational education, the community or the nation always benefit from it as well. However, vocational and technical education reduce drop-out and unemployment rates by providing training opportunities to persons who are not too far removed from the

realities of the world of work. Experts have observed that Nigeria, and Rivers State in particular, has an unprecedented high unemployment rate because of a lack of skills among youth and few job opportunities (Ololube, 2009). Consequently, it appears that Nigerians are educated but unemployed because of the forms of general education they receive.

Concept of Vocational Education

Consequently, vocational education, like every other concept in academics, has been described and defined by different individuals in various ways based on purpose and functions, that is to say, that it has many definitions that vary in authorities, countries, and time. Akele (2004) notes that, according to literature, vocational education indicates that variations have existed in the meanings of the terms as commonly used in concepts and their applications. Some individuals have suggested that vocational education is the education or training of workers. American Vocational Association in Egwuela (2005) defines vocational education as education designed to develop skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habit and appreciation encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to infer or make progress in employment as a useful and productive basis. Vocational technical education is an aspect of education designed to prepare students for industry, agriculture, commerce and home economics which is usually provided at the senior secondary or lower tertiary level.

According to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), vocational education is defined as that aspect of education that leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. In this sense, it forms a practical segment of education that will help in the development of appropriate skills and competencies to combat youth unemployment, poverty and further contribute to social transformation. Vocational education, according to Yusuf (2006) is a form of education that seeks to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupations. This type of education provides the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for effective employment. Odogwu (2005) describes vocational education as a type of education that emphasizes preparation and participation in an occupation of social value. Contrasted with general education, vocational education is skill-

oriented and trains both the head and the hands (Oranu, 2009). The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) further describes vocational education as that aspect of education that leads to the acquisition of practical skills as well as applied scientific knowledge. It is a planned program of courses and learning experiences that begins with exploration of career options, supports basic academic and life skills, and enables achievement of high academic standards, leadership, preparation for industry-defined work, and advanced and continuing education.

Jacob (2006) laments that in the early Nigerian education system, little focus was placed on vocational and technical training that could produce persons adequately skilled, confident and properly oriented towards eventual self-employment and self-reliance. This phenomenon, he concludes, accounts for the large scale unemployment of youth still today. One of the greatest handicaps in the improvement of vocational and technical education is human resource planning that has led to the acute shortage of qualified teachers. Omekwe (2009) states that there is a noticeable lack of teacher preparation and in-service programmes and also difficulty in recruiting well educated teachers with skills and competence in vocational and technical education. Other prevailing issues on human resource planning that hinder the implementation of vocational and technical education includes the shortage of qualified technical education teachers, lack of inductive teaching strategies and lack of teacher participation in decision making.

Quality of Teaching Staff for vocational education

Ololube (2009) states that, quality in education often means raising the level of academic performance of pupils, usually as measured in test scores, in the various subjects which form part of their school curriculum. Ololube also asserts that teachers are a vital force in educational effectiveness at the classroom instructional level. Teachers are regarded as prime movers in the improvement of quality in education. Based on this, experts often call for the employment of quality teachers in the school system to reduce waste and improve the overall quality of students and schools. Odogwu (2005) asserts that quality teachers are the ones who inspire students to compete against themselves, to take on tasks that seem to exceed their grasp, and to discover and develop their real mettle as thinkers. He went on

to identify three features of an excellent teacher:

- High quality teachers have a passion in their lives and a deep regard for their students.
- High quality teachers lead challenging and demanding lives that set high standards and inspire their students. In other wards they are prophetic.
- High quality teachers are always fully engaged in the mysteries of life with heart and minds full of wonder and awe, open to learning new things and understanding new realities.

On a similar note, Peterside (2010) asserts that it can be highly embarrassing if teachers who are hired to inculcate problem solving skills and processes in students lack these same skills. He went on to note that adequate student training cannot take place without competent teachers because no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. He argues that the potential and quality of manpower depends on the quality of teachers, and teachers, as much as possible, should be qualified, suitable and interested in the teaching profession. Given the above evidence, it seems clear that a nation's education system at all levels is, to a great extent, improved upon or marred by the quality of its teaching staff. A quality teacher is a facilitator of learning, and therefore must be resourceful, improvisational, well-trained and dedicated. The most acute problem of vocational and technical education in Nigeria today is the shortage of qualified teachers. Worst still, most serving technical teachers do not have the required industrial experience. Omekwe (2009) notes that in an effort to secure highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers, the policy on teacher quality stipulates that, the Nigeria Certificate in Education (N.C.E.) will be the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession.

They reveal that at the secondary school level, while a majority of teachers possess teaching qualifications, a good number of those recruited to teach at that level are without professional certificates. Based on this, they asserted that teachers in the school system are indeed willing to improve on their professional skills but are constrained due to the high cost of in-service programmes and the inability of government to provide the required assistance for the programmes as stipulated in the National Policy on

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Education. Subsequently, Omekwe (2009) notes that government policy so far, has not favoured the recruitment and training of more teachers to meet the challenges posed by newly introduced educational programmes such as Universal Basic Education (UBE). He added that the problem is even more evident in technical and vocational education, despite claims of the adequate provision of quality teachers. The practice of putting all technical courses together as one subject called Introductory Technology, and associated implementation problems, has attracted the attention of experts who feel that it is inappropriate because unlike in integrated science, there is no relationship amongst so many of the subjects.

Instructional Facilities for vocational Education Programmes

Most often, planners do not relate school facilities to the learning process and expect learning to take place in the absence of books, seats, and writing materials; any decline in standard of performance is blamed on teachers and students. Aghenta (2009) asserts that achievement in education depends on the optimum performance of all school administrative elements, which include the technical, the managerial, and the institutional subsystems. Mkpa (2009) is likewise of the view that the availability of requisite facilities is important for the effective implementation of any predetermined objective. He contends that the qualifications and background of a teacher can only be considered fully effective when adequate and appropriate instructional facilities are provided for optimal teaching and learning. He reiterates that there must be a variety of equipment made available to students to enable them to explore the new areas they are exposed to. In Nigeria, vocational education practical and field courses are said to be "board or desk-bound" to the detriment of the students. Based on this, in 1984/85, the Federal Government entered into self-loan agreements with Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia for the supply of pre-vocational workshop tools and equipment to all secondary schools in the country. The supplies were sent and mostly installed. Some, unfortunately, have degenerate into scraps in school corridors because of the non-availability of workshop buildings, thereby rendering them useless (Nworise, 2006).

Although most leaders over time have meant well in terms of education development and reform, the resources

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allocated to the education sector were historically meager and often not properly utilized as a result of poor planning. Today, the number and size of workshops required for a standard technical school continues to be ignored. Similarly, Ogushi (2008) asserts that the 6-3-3-4 education policy which does emphasize technical education ran into serious complications because more than 50% of the approved multibillion dollar equipment is lying idle all over the country, due to the lack of a relatively small amount of money needed to make the equipment functional and build technical workshops.

School libraries in Nigeria, much like technical workshops where available are inadequately equipped resulting in what Omekwe (2009) describes as a book drought with disastrous consequences. In schools today many teachers avoid certain practical lessons because they know the technical or library resources are non-existent or not functional. This does not bode well for the effective implementation of vocational and technical education programmes. Iyalla (2005) opines that government has failed in its responsibility to equip school libraries and laboratories, and argues that this lack of facilities has been proven to be one of the main hindrances to successful vocational education programmes. Obulor (2006) reiterates that it is the duty of the Ministry of Education to provide equipment and expendable materials to schools, and that their inadequacy constitutes a source of frustration and disillusionment among students and teachers.

The development and maintenance of physical facilities in educational institutions by communities, parents, and sponsors should continue to be encouraged. This is because lack of such facilities interferes with learning process. The evidence from research h in other parts of the world points to the great importance of school facilities in relation to quality education. Difference in school facilities would be seen to account for difference in achievement. Physical resources include classrooms, lecture theatres, auditoriums, administrative block, libraries, laboratories, workshops, play grounds, assembly halls, and special rooms like clinics, staff quarters, students' hostels, kitchen, cafeteria, and toilet. Amaechina (2014) notes that learning experiences are fruitful when there are adequate quantity and quality

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of physical resources; and that unattractive school buildings, crowded classrooms, non availability of playing ground and surroundings that have no aesthetic beauty can contribute to poor academic performance.

To emphasize further the issue of physical facilities, Jacob (2006) underscores the importance of developing adequate and appropriate physical facilities for quality education to be realized. Mkpa (2009) concurs with Jacob's views on the relationship between physical facilities and effective implementation of policy guidelines. Yusuf (2006) explains the importance of ensuring that there are adequate and appropriate facilities for teaching learning so that educational programmes could be implemented effectively. According to Odogwu (2005), schools that lack adequate classrooms for instance, hold their lessons outside or under trees. During bad weather such lessons are postponed or are never held altogether. This interferes with syllabus coverage and students from such schools do not perform well in examination.

Funding of vocational and technical education

Funding has always been the major constraint to the development of effective vocational education in Nigeria. Although official statements continue to attach importance to vocational and technical education evidence points to the fact that commitments have not been matched with action yet. Ololube (2009) observes that investment in vocational and technical education in the First, Second and Third Development plans are 0.10%, 0.36% and 0.84% respectively. At every level of vocational education in this country enough funds are never allocated to vocational education for acquiring the right environment. Nworisa (2006) notes that, in a regular school system the administrator is often forced to accept working school conditions which he himself knows are not suitable for effective operations of his vocational objectives for students that need them and can profit by them. Without finance, our educational system will crumble. Finance has been one of the most controversial areas of administrative and functional problems in educational institutions today (Manila, 2003). These problems have agitated the minds of politicians,

educators and citizens considering the level of illiteracy and the number of schools to finance in this poor economic state of our country.

The downward trend of Nigeria's economy has created unfavourable conditions for the educational system. Discussing the economic crisis of Nigeria and its effect on education, Ehiametalor (2007: 42) states that, "in the public and private sector, the schools are worst hit, to the extent that the schools could no longer provide for the basic materials needed by the classroom teachers to do their work". Students have to bring from their homes desks and chairs if they want to learn school buildings for the past years have not been renovated and old ones were allowed to dilapidate. The establishment of any educational organization is first preceded by some initial funds and before it can even function, there must be some fund set for its disposal provide the necessary materials and equipment. However, Ocho (2005) contends that, the success of any educational programme in any country depends greatly on the level of its objective. Finance is the live wire of effective education. There is a great shortage of material resources in the education system. Generally speaking, the shortage has resulted from inadequate funding. But the funding is inadequate, among others, because of the huge proliferation of stages and LGA's between 1975 and 1996, which affected not only the number of staff, deployed in the system, but also the requirements for material resources (Odogwu, 2005).

The lack of funds is so severe that the shortage of material resources includes even the most basic resources such as office space, desks, chairs, filing cabinets, type writers and electricity. There is no asset management and no preventive maintenance of any sort in organizations. Equipment that requires regular servicing is frequently not being serviced and equipment or vehicles that breakdown are repaired only if and when money is available. The impact of this situation on capacity is great. It reduces the utilization and efficiency of existing staff and creates poor incentives to work efficiency. At the same time it also increases the need for even more human resources. The federal and state governments need to assert management units with well defined jobs to take care of all assets. They need to adopt policies that give priority to the servicing and maintenance of existing facilities and equipment, before new facilities and equipment are bought. One of the

crucial issues on the vocational and technical education programme is the adequacy of funds to enhance implementation. In this issue, it has been noted that despite increasing budgetary allocation for the survival of education, there is serious obstacle to the successful implementation of vocational and technical education as a result of lack of fund.

Conclusion

It is evident from the foregoing that if Nigeria as a society must move forward technologically, there is much to be put in place within the nation's education industry. Thus, a complete overhaul of the education sector is desirable. Education without skills and adequate occupational information has accounted for the large number of school drop-outs in our society. The problems militating against the successful implementation of vocational technical education programmes in the country are numerous. They range from lack of support, to lack of proper planning and co-ordination of implementation strategies. This position is further compounded by the acute shortage of qualified technical teachers, inadequate workshop spaces and insufficient tools and equipment, coupled with inadequate budgetary provision.

Recommendations

1. The curriculum designers should harmonize the course content of vocational education programme in Nigerian schools to avoid wastage.
2. Adequate funds for planning, implementing and coordinating of Vocational Education Programme in secondary schools should be made available by the government.
3. Government should increase the number of vocational instructional facilities made available in secondary schools.

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