Abstract

Vocational education is pivotal to the development of youths all over the world. This is even more important in a developing economy like Nigeria, where about half of the population are youths and the rate of unemployment is high. The focus of this paper is to examine how vocational education can be leveraged for economic development and as a means of reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria. This was carried out using interviews of fifteen youth and ten lecturers selected randomly from Covenant University Ota Community. The data obtained were content analysed. The results suggest the various ways in which vocational education can be incorporated into the formal education of youths and the aspects of vocational education that youths would be more likely to want to participate in. The implications of the findings for research, education and policy are discussed.

Keywords: Vocational Education, Vocational training, Youth, Youth Empowerment, Youth Development, Environment, Panacea.

1 INTRODUCTION

Vocational and technical education have had a slow start and developed less quickly than other forms of education in Nigeria. This was partly due to the fact that the voluntary agencies that pioneered western education in Nigeria were unable to popularize vocational and technical education on the same scale as the literary education (Ovbiagele, 2015). In any case, the Christian Missions were more interested in the natives’ ability to read the bible and literary subjects than in their ability to turn ‘screws and prime water pumps’. The situation was further complicated by the fact that most of the British policy makers were literary men and women who had studied classics at the University of Oxford or London. Fafunwa in Ovbiagele (2007) captured it when he declared “the highest level of technical and vocational Education was the degree course in mechanical, civil, electrical, agricultural and chemical engineering run by all, but one of the six Nigeria, universities in the late 60s and early 70s. Though there were about five post-secondary vocational and technical colleges in the same period, these institutions only trained people in commerce, accountancy, secretaryship, civil, mechanical and electrical studies at diploma level and for professional bodies like the City and Guild Institute of London.

Nwadioha (2009) said the terms “vocational” and technical education are in most cases used interchangeably. However though similar, they are not the same. Vocational education is an aspect of technical education that lay emphasis on skills acquisition and functional education for the development of the society. That is, it leads to employment in a job, a trade or occupation. Technical education is an aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. It gives both quality and quantity of the manpower required for transformation of a country in a technical world of work.

Vocational technical education can be defined as an educational training which encompasses knowledge, skills, competencies, structural activities, abilities, capabilities and all other structural experiences acquired through formal, on-the-job or off-the job which is capable of enhancing recipients opportunity for securing jobs in various sector of the economy or even enabling the person to be self-dependent by being a job creator (Okolocha, 2012).

Osayomuanbor and Edokpayi (2008); and Oluwalola (2008) define vocational and technical education as that type of education that train and help to prepare the individual for employment in a specific occupation or trade. Vocational and technical education according to Nuru(2006) is the appropriate training in skills, abilities and knowledge both mental and physical given to an individual to enable him/her enter and progress in a chosen and trained occupation.
Technical vocational education is defined as that aspect of education that exposes the learner to the acquisition of demonstrable skills that could be transformed into economic benefits and sustainable livelihood (Akerele, 2007). It is in line with this that this study attempts to investigate the various ways that vocational education can be incorporated into formal education, with a view to contributing to economic development.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In Nigeria, education systems at all levels have witnessed dramatic changes in terms of purpose, organization, structure and changes in nomenclature of certificates awarded. For instance, 1970’s to early 1980s witnessed the 6-5-4 system of education; the late 1980s to 2005 witnessed a restructuring of the education system on a 6-3-3-4 system while 2008 witnessed a new reform of 9-3-4 system of education. 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 (Abrar et al., 2010; Yusof et al., 2012).

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 growth, according to Teboho (2000), was mainly in size and not in quality. Teboho further stated that the education system of Nigeria and some other development counties are still far from being ready for the challenges of preparing students for the contemporary global world.

The rapid technological changes in the 21st century poses a number of challenges to education and employment sectors. The new labour market demands have caused many graduates with various certificates to be unemployed. The massive rate of unemployment and the changing face of the economic, social, political, labour market worldwide have led to new education reforms/policies with emphasis on vocational technical education (VTE) geared towards helping the youths and adults to be self-dependent. Cinterfor/Ilo (2006) stated that VTE can be a tool to counteract at least in part, the harmful effect of unemployment by promoting greater job turnover and guarding against the risks of obsolescence.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) opined that vocational technical education is an aspect of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relative to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. Manfred and Jennifer (2004) advocated that vocational technical education comprises all more or less organized or structured activities that aim at providing 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. These definitions show that the relationship between VTE and employments is undeniable. The globalization including that of job market now calls for vocational education curricula, which will ensure that Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) graduates demonstrate work competencies that will meet global quality expectations.

Prior to the present dispensation, Nigerians have historically considered VTE as an education programme meant for low level, low brilliant and less privileged or second class citizens (Okoro, 1993, Eze and Okorafor, 2012). Vocational Technical Education Curriculum according to Grubb (1985) has always had to battle against not only the resistance of academic curricula, but also the suspicion that they provide second-class education and tract to some individuals’ of lower class.

In Denmark, efforts are made by the government to increase the number of training places and strengthening their practical element (Michael, 2002). The reform implies substantial changes in structure and content such as emphasis on social and personal (Khan & Ghouri, 2012) skills.

In Germany, a report according to Michael (2002) showed that one of the objectives of the German programme is to promote the vocational education of gifted young people and to raise the standard of vocational education and training. In Kenya, the 8-4-4 system was introduced with emphasis on technical and vocational education which ensured that the graduate students at every level have some scientific and practical knowledge that can be utilized for self employments, salaried employment or further training. (Republic of Kenya, 1984)
According to Michael (2002) the French National Assembly approved the law on social modernization which contains important measures concerning vocational education and the right to employment. The French Minister for Vocational Education officially launched the "craft high school" programme, which is aimed at reinforcing the synergy between different vocationally oriented education pathways, particularly the vocational and technological ones.

3 METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used for this study was qualitative research approach utilizing in-depth interviews. A total of fifteen youth and ten lecturers selected randomly from Covenant University (CU) Ota Community. Content analysis and comparative analysis was used to analysis the data. The following questions were asked with the depth interviews with fifteen youth and tens lecturers:

1. How can vocational education improve the quality of built environment?
2. In what way can vocational education improve the studies of architecture, building technology and engineering in university education?
3. What is the economic benefits of vocational education in term of income generation for graduate of architecture, building technology and engineering?
4. In what dimension can vocational education enhance the employability of the graduate of architecture, engineering and building technology?
5. How can vocational education position the graduate in field of architecture, engineering and building technology into leadership opportunity in built environment?
6. In what area can vocational education harnesses the talent/skills of the graduates of architecture, engineering and building technology?

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the first question, respondents were of the opinion that access to vocational education will ensure that graduates of architecture, building technology and engineering are skilled in material management during construction. The aspect of material management is important in any building project. This will ensure that material wastage is effectively and efficiency reduced on construction site.

They further stated that graduate in these field with verse skills, knowledge, critical thinking and craftsmanship will ascertain the quantity of materials to assign to an artisan to carry out his jobs efficiently on the construction site. The materials management which is key in project management will enhance the built environment in reduction of material wastage.

Another aspect is quality control and assurance in built environment. Cross section of lecturers interviewed agreed that graduates in these fields with pre-requisite background in vocational education and training will ensure quality control and assurance in terms of materials quality; installation, fabrications, erection and workmanship are guaranteed during the construction stage. This is the bedrock for improved built environment. Quality control and assurance are very crucial in construction industry and must not be compromised. Graduates in these fields who have been exposed to vocational education will ensure that construction works follow the building code, regulations, ISO standard and all statutory agencies on quality control and assurance for improve built environment in Nigeria.

Also, Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) will be ensured on construction site and improve a safe built environment. The graduates in these field with vocational education will ensure that all HSE standards and regulations are complied with during the construction stage. They will ensure that all workers on the constructions site comply with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) standards such as helmets, gloves, eye protection, high visibility clothing, safety footwear against health or safety risk at work. They will ensure that HSE standard and regulations are complied with before, during and after any works are carried out on the construction site. They will ensure that full compliance of HSE standard in terms of materials inspections, barricade of the site boundary, safety instructions paste at strategic point, fire muster point, reduction of health hazard to neighboring community.

Moreso, during the course of the interview our respondent gave their view on how vocational education can improve the studies of architecture, building technology and engineering in university.
education. All the lecturers interviewed concur that vocational education will improve the university education because skill acquisition and craftsmanship enhance the training of graduate in the university. They further stated that the curriculum in Nigeria educational system should be reviewed to reflect vocational education and training from primary to university/tertiary education. Some of the lecturers sighted the example of Bauhaus in Germany where vocational education is the bedrock of the institution. The lecturers maintained the stance that any country that invest more in the vocational education and training of her youthful population will reap the economic benefits soon. They emphasized that the Nigeria government policy should reflect more on vocational education and training of her youth population which the foundation for economic growth and prosperity of the nation. The lecturers affirmed that vocational educational will ameliorate the quality and competency of university graduates.

To buttress what the lecturers concur, the youth interviewed agreed that prerequisite knowledge in vocational education will position them for success in university education and make our university education robust. The youth stated that vocational education will make them to be more creative coupled with the training in university education.

The youths interviewed express their view on how the economic benefits of vocational education in term of income generation for graduates of architecture, building technology and engineering. They stated that vocational is empowerment for the youth which make them to be economically productive and generate income for themselves. They lay emphasizes on the fact that vocational education enhance the intellectual capacity of the youth, take them off any social device such as crime, idleness, restiveness and gave them the economic power of income generation. They further mentioned that if the youth population of Nigeria have vocational education and training is good for the economic growth of the nation. All the lecturers supported the view of the youth on economic benefits of vocational education. They buttressed the fact that the more the youth population of a developing nation like Nigeria engaged in vocational education and training the more economic advantages the country will be adding to her gross domestic product(GDP).

On the issue of employability of graduates of architecture, building technology and engineering with vocational education the lecturers interviewed expressed their mind. The cross section of lecturers stated that graduates with vocational education will be on the pedestal of employability in the labour market. They viewed the employability of these graduates in area of learning, training, skills, critical thinking, creativity as well as craftsmanship which are the quality the employer are looking for, the rate of these graduates are on the high level. They also view the employability of these graduates in the aspect of self-employment for themselves. In other words these graduates have the competency to start their own business. The youth in CU community expressed their opinion that graduates with vocational education background have high chance of gaining full employment because of their competency. Another area the youth are in accord with the lecturers in the area self-reliance or self-employment which is opportunity for them to work themselves and training some apprentice.

Both the lecturers and the youth interviewed looked at the perspective on how vocational education can position the graduates of architecture, building technology and engineering in leadership in the built environment. The lecturers and youth concur that vocational education will these graduates to be focus which is a quality of leadership because work cannot be done without being focus on what you are doing. Another area of leadership quality that vocational education will embedded into these graduates is confidence, in other word confidence is important to get work done. They all expressed their view that vocational education will bring out the inspirations in these graduates which is part of leadership quality. Passion is another leadership traits that vocational education will impart into these graduates because without passion in what someone is doing success is distance away. Patience which is very essential in human endeavor, vocational education will add this leadership quality to these graduates. Vocational education will bring out the innovation quality of these graduates, innovation is the bedrock of technology breakthrough in this 21st century. They all in accord that vocational education will surely position these graduates for leadership role in the built environment without overemphasizing it.

The lecturers and youth expressed their mind on the last question in what area can vocational education harnesses the talent/skill of the graduate of architecture, building technology and engineering. One thing is to have talent/skill another is for the talent/skill to be harnessed. They all in support of the fact that vocational education is like a refinery that refine the crude talent/skill of these graduates. Vocational education will make these graduates see themselves above the talent/skill and make them to be more innovative. Vocational education will expose these graduates to more opportunities of creativity thinking in their career. Both the lecturers and youth in CU community
concur that vocational education will make the talent/skill of these graduate to be refined, polished and shined for everyone to see and greater benefits for them.

5 CONCLUSION

The findings of the study suggests that educational curriculum in their Nigeria should be reviewed to reflect vocational education from primary education to university/tertiary education. They further stated that the government should increase the percentage of budgetary allocation for education which is the bedrock for economic growth and development. Using the content analysis and comparative analysis to analyze the data collected during the in-depth interview session with ten lecturers and fifteen youth in Covenant university community is vividly that vocational education will improve the quality of built environment, university/tertiary education, income generation, employability and harness talent/skill.

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REFERENCES


