

**STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN FOR IMPROVEMENT OF TECHNICAL AND
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH-EAST
GEO-POLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA FOR YOUTHS EMPOWERMENT**

BY

**DR ALEXANDER U. ONYIA
DEPARTMENT OF TECHNOLOGY AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
ENUGU STATE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

Abstract

The stake holders in education from the South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria are now developing a fresh awareness on the critical role Technical and Vocational Education can play in national development and poverty reduction within the zone. Technical and Vocational Education programmes differ slightly from state to state in Nigeria in terms of implementation and strategic approach in policy actions. TVE is undergoing promising reforms that are designed to build on the inherent strengths of the system. The people of the south-east, most of the time consider vocational education as an alternative education programme for academically less endowed. The poor perception formed the key strategic issues being considered by the south-east stake-holders in education. The emerging strategic framework is to promote skill acquisition through competency – based training for the youths in the south-east zone. In order to enhance the status and attractiveness of TVE in the south-east, necessary machinery should be put in place to promote TVE as a tool for economic empowerment. Since education is considered the key to effective development strategies, technical and vocational education (TVE) must be the master key that can alleviate poverty, promote peace and improve the quality of life and engender sustainable development.

Introduction

The fresh awareness among the stakeholders in education on the critical role Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) can play in national development and poverty reduction cannot be over emphasized. The increasing importance that South-East geo-political zone governments now attach to Technical and Vocational Education at various levels is an indication that it is a sure way of

employment creation and poverty alleviation for the people (COMEDAF 11+, 2007). One of the most important features of T.V.E. is the orientation towards the world of work and the emphasis of the curriculum on the acquisition of employable skills. According to the National Policy document on Education (2004), the delivery systems are therefore well placed to train the skilled and

entrepreneurial workforce that the south-east zone needs to create wealth and emerge out of Poverty. Another important characteristic of TVE is that it responds to different training needs of learners from different socio-economic and academic backgrounds; and prepares them for gainful employment and sustainable livelihood. The ever-struggling youths of the south-east, the unemployed, the poor and the vulnerable members of the south-east can therefore capitalize on this and benefit from it.

Current status of T.V.E. in the south east zone of Nigeria

Technical and Vocational Education TVE programmes differ slightly from state to state in Nigeria in terms of implementation and strategic approach in policy action. In the South-East, the traditional apprenticeship offers the largest opportunity for the acquisition of employable skills in the informal sector. The formal TVE programmes are school-based, and are being guided by the National policy document on Education (2004). TVE programmes are offered at secondary school level (Technical) polytechnics, Colleges of Education ((Technical) and universities. In some countries like Ghana and Swaziland, strategic attempt was made to expose young people to pre-employment skills and they have incorporated basic vocational skills into the lower or junior secondary school curriculum. The socio-economic environment and the contextual framework in which TVE delivery systems currently operates in the South-East indicates weakness in the zones economies and huge army of poorly educated, unskilled and unemployed youths roam the streets looking for non-existing jobs. Also

observed are low quality gender and economic imbalance with very weak evaluation mechanism.

TVE is undergoing promising reforms that are designed to build on the inherent strength of the system. National Directorate of Employment NDE, SIWES and other programmes of government are measures put in place to support the formal sector in exposing the youths to different skills and processes of skill acquisition. All these bodies ensure that acquired skills are relevant to the needs of the labour market. The training also includes the inculcation of shared cultural values and attitude development. The dual system practised in Germany, if carefully integrated into our system, will boost the competency level of our skilled youths. The dual system promotes the linkage of vocational training to the world of work.

Societal perception of TVE

The people of the South-East most of the time consider vocational education as an alternative education programme for the academically less endowed. They consider general education as superior to TVE. The impression is that products of vocational education stream find it difficult, if not impossible to proceed to higher institutions.

The poor perception formed the key strategic issues being considered by the south east stake-holders in education. According to Onyia (2010), the curriculums of TVE programmes should be expanded to include more science based courses and some humanities to expand the intellectual ability of the products of T.V.E. programme. Gender stereotyping should also be addressed as this has made the girls more derogatory, especially when some courses are more practical oriented.

Linkage between vocational and general education

The National policy document on education stated that general education provides intellectual backing to vocational education. This implies that general education teaches those values, skills, and knowledge which every member of the society should possess in order to be an effective citizen. The primary objective of vocational education is to prepare individuals for the world of work, through skill acquisition and training. This condition tends to affirm the perception of inferiority of vocational courses to general education. Onyia (2010) opined that a total reform of the curriculum of our technical and vocational programmes is pertinent, in order to have an integrated and all-embracing course content.

The TVE programmes should be linked to the needs of the labour market. The ultimate aim of vocational training is employment. Therefore, both formal and non-formal TVE programmes should be harmonized so as to prepare students to acquire relevant practical skills, for the emerging labour market economy.

The emerging strategic framework is to promote skill acquisition through competency based training for the youths in the south east zone. The vision of the strategy is to position TVE as a tool for alleviating poverty, and empowering the youths from the south-east. The key focus is to create sustainable livelihoods and socio-economic development of the south-east.

In order to enhance the status and attractiveness of TVE in the south-east, necessary machinery should be put in place to promote TVE as a tool for economic empowerment. The use and involvement of successful products of

TVE and entrepreneurs in motivation campaigns will help to counter the perception that TVE is for the never-do-well.

The south-east governments should have political commitments toward the implementation of the policy guidelines as they affect TVE. The implementation strategy is the development of TVE policy that sets out the government vision for skill development and poverty alleviation. Given the scope of human resource development needs of the south-east, emerging out of civil war, it is necessary for the government of the zone to partner with other agencies in order to achieve success in the implementation of TVE programmes in the zone.

Available industries should be involved in the development and articulation of programme that will create access to youths empowerment. It will also help in awareness creation amongst the citizenry on the benefit of taking TVE as the pathway for total emancipation from poverty and unemployment.

The biggest challenge facing the south-east is the issue of unemployment. The ever-struggling youths are faced with economic competitiveness in the Nigerian labour market. The strategic action plan of the stake-holders focused on TVE as the only pathway to come out of the present situation. The strategic approach is to embark on skill development to support theoretical knowledge acquired while in school. The needs of the labour market and the economic status of the zone lay credence to the importance of TVE for the total eradication of poverty in the zone. Information and communication Technology(ICT) education at all levels is also important for survival in a globalized labour market.

The strategic frame-work for the

development of policy for the south-east to address the challenges of technical and vocational training to support economic development and the creation of wealth and contribute to poverty eradication becomes pertinent. The policy document will acknowledge that vocational education alone does not provide jobs or eradicate poverty. Good government policies do both. The strategic plan should urge the south-east governments to create an economic environment that promotes the growth of enterprises and generally stimulates economic growth and development. When businesses develop and expand, additional labour-market demands for technical and vocational education graduates will emerge, new job opportunities are created, more people get employed, and poverty reduced. For this to happen, the TVE system must be labour-market relevant, efficient, with quality standard. The strategic action plan will provide the framework for the south-east governments to live up to the expectations of the people.

Since education is considered the key to effective development strategies, Technical and vocational education (TVE) must be the master key that can alleviate poverty, promote peace, conserve the environment, improve the quality of life for all and help to achieve sustainable development (UNESCO, 2004). According to Bloom, Canning, and Chan (2006), the increasing importance that African governments now attach to TVE is reflected in the various poverty reduction strategies put in place to alleviate poverty at all levels. The World Bank policy paper (1991) emphasized that many geo-political zones in Nigeria are now embracing TVE as the only alternative pathway for

economic emancipation. According to the World Bank, the most important features of TVE is its orientation towards the world of work and acquisition of employable skills. TVE delivery systems are therefore well placed to train the skilled and entrepreneurial work force that the South-east needs to create wealth and emerge out of poverty.

Effective TVE programme as a panacea for graduate unemployment.

In almost all geo-political zones of Nigeria, large number of graduates coming out of the formal school system are unemployed because they are not skilled although opportunities for skilled workers do exist in the economy. The situation made the stake-holders in education from the South-east to now focus on the mismatch between training and labour market skill demands. Critics argue that the lack of inputs from prospective employers into curriculum design and training delivery are partly responsible for the mismatch. Another reason that is often cited for the incidence of high unemployment among graduates is the absence of entrepreneurial training in the school curriculum. But it is worth noting that the new national policy on education (2004) has incorporated it into our school curriculum (World Bank, 2000).

For this reason, the acquisition of employable skills is as important as general education to the South-east. The sheer lack of skills of all kinds in the zone and the demand for poverty alleviation means that we must pursue the development of skills at all levels to create economic development and meet the needs of the unemployed youths.

Conclusion

The strategic action plan for the development of TVE in the South-east will address youths restiveness and create wealth. The strategy will address the challenges of TVE to support economic development and poverty eradication. The strategic framework will present TVE as a valid passport to a well-paid job or self-employment or higher education, and not as an alternative educational opportunity fit only for early school leavers, the less academically endowed or the poor. The strategic plan strongly emphasized that vocational training be integrated into general education so that it becomes less dead-end. In addition to the acquisition of skills, it is necessary to incorporate political and citizenship skills into the curriculum.

Recommendations

- Governments of the south-east should give legislative backing to compulsory TVE programmes in secondary schools in the zone.
- They should improve coherence and capital investment in TVE.
- Promote TVE as a vehicle for poverty alleviation.
- Establish scholarship scheme for the less privileged members of the society
- Give support to children that will choose TVE programmes
- Improve linkages with the employers of labour.
- Support capacity building in TVE
- Encourage private sector participation

References

- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) National Policy on Education. Lagos NERDC Press.
- NDE (1998). National Directorate of Employment
- Onyia, A. U. (2010) comparative Education. The Technology and Vocational Perspective
Enugu: Cheston Agency LTD.
- UNESCO (2006). Technology and Vocational Training experts on Learning for work, citizenship and sustainability Bonn.
- World Bank (1991). Vocational and Technical Education and Training: A World Bank policy paper. Washington D.C.
- Bloom, D. Canning, D. & Chan K. (2006). Higher Education and Economic Development in Africa World Bank working paper, Series – No. 102.