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Public Perception of Vocational and Technical Education and Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study focused on the public perception of vocational and technical education and youth unemployment in Nigeria. It assesses the perception of some Nigerian parents, students and employers who responded to the questionnaires distributed to them. Findings revealed that vocational and technical education is not popular or known to many parents and students, while those who have knowledge about VTE have perception that it is an educational system meant for the poor and less privilege in the society, that society does not accord enough respect and prestige to such education, certificates and jobs. Some employers of labour who responded to the questionnaire agreed that graduates of vocational and technical education possess skills for employment in labour market, while majority of them disagreed, stating that many of the graduates lack communication and managerial skills, and are not enterprising. Findings also revealed that public perception of vocational and technical education in Nigeria is not encouraging as this manifest in low enrolment of students in technical schools, polytechnics and vocational and technical departments in the universities, leaving the nation with larger number of graduates who are not professionals but are unskilled, thereby contributing to high unemployment rate amongst Nigerian youths.

Keywords: Vocational and technical education, perception, unemployment

1. Introduction

The role of education in developing the individual into a complete human who through knowledge and skills acquired will contribute to his immediate community and the society at large cannot be over emphasized. It has been observed that technology drives the new world of today, changing the various ways of doing things, ranging from household chores to office duties and almost in all areas of human professions. The world is constantly undergoing various changes and the uncertainty of how to meet the technological needs of the future should be the concerns of policy makers in the education sector. Technology, skills, attitudes and competencies in today's world are considered as foundation for economic, social and political growth of any nation. Therefore, embracing vocational and technical education (VTE) in a developing nation such as Nigeria can help to grow needed skilled manpower to boost development and create abundance of employment for different levels of jobs, while at the same time keeping her teeming youth engaged economically.

There has been confusion on the appropriate nomenclature to use to describe this type of education where skills are acquired, some call it vocational and technical education (VTE) while others feel it is better named technical and vocational education (TVE). But whichever name it is called, they convey the same message of skill acquisition and technical knowhow. Vocational and technical education has been described in different ways by different authors; UNESCO (1978) defines technical and vocational education as a comprehensive term referring to the educational process which involves in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skill and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. Vocational and technical education (VTE) is a type of education that provides practical activities which is necessary for a particular occupation, such education comprises of activities described as learning by doing, which enables it to cater for individuals with endowment of skills. According to Masaruf (2015), vocational and technical education is an educational training which comprehends 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.

Ekong (2006) and Sulayman (2014) sees vocational and technical education as a specialized training organized either in a formal or informal setting for the purpose of imparting occupational skills to individual or groups of individuals. Both authors also see vocational and technical education as education which aims at enabling these groups of persons to acquire skills that would make them render specialized services or become creative, make them to be self-employed and also become employers of labour. From this description of vocational and technical education, the acquisition of occupational skill is an avenue for generating employment for the individual, as these skills are embedded in courses such as Home Economics, Business Education and Agricultural Education. It can therefore be said that if these courses are well

positioned, they can produce graduate entrepreneurs who can create jobs, thereby reducing unemployment rate. Salau (1998) reported that perception of the public about vocational and technical education is that it is aimed at preparing the youths for low status jobs and an education for less able students.

Every economy in the world desire development irrespective of its size, for this reason, nations are investing in education so as to bring about rapid growth of economic, social, political and abundance human capital. In line with this, Nigeria as a nation is not left out of League of Nations that is desirous of this growth as this will manifest in high productivity and alleviate poverty and reduce unemployment rate. Nigeria Bureau of statistics (NBS) stated that unemployment in the country stood at 23.1% of the workforce in the 3rd quarter of 2018, of these figures, youth unemployment fluctuated between 36.50 to 38%. The problem observed in Nigeria in the pursuit of this economic growth through vocational and technical education is the poor public image or poor public perception which has bedeviled this sector of education. This has resulted in low enrollment of candidates in vocational and technical institutions. Education they say moves the society and uplifts individual in social ladder as it helps to equip the people with skills from one generation to the other. Vocational education is seen as a tool for removing some social challenges such as poverty, low productivity and high percentage of unemployment, which Nigeria as well as other developing nations faces. Aina (2009) in Sulayman (2014) agreed that the importance of vocational and technical education cannot be over emphasized as the role of technology in the transformation of economies and improvement in people's standard of living cannot be ignored, that because of the importance of the practical training acquired in vocational and technical education, Nigeria would become relevant technologically and competitive in the world market. Vocational and technical education remains an aspect of education that can stimulate entrepreneurial development. As reported by Ojajuni (2010), this type of education equips its recipients with skills which lead to environmental scanning among the entrepreneurial characteristics which stimulate people with the ability to take and bear risk as well as acquisition of managerial skills. Ojajuni's report confirms that vocational and technical education has the potential of reducing or solving unemployment among youths.

National Policy on Education (2004) highlights the goals of vocational and technical education to include;

- To provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at crafts, advance crafts and technical level
- To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.
- To give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically.

From the National policy on Education guidelines on vocational and technical education, the government expects the VTE to produce competent skilled manpower in addition to general or literary education. Nigeria as a nation endowed with abundance of human and natural resources requires enormous workforce that include skilled labour, craftsmen, technicians, and artisans who will work to provide services for economic and national development. But this dream can only be achieved through a well thought out policy on vocational and technical education and its implementation. Nigeria made some effort on vocational and technical education by establishing the 6-3-3-4 system of education in 1987 but this system of education was bedeviled by numerous challenges such as lack of power to operate the heavy equipment imported, lack of trained personnel and instructors to teach these technical areas. However, this 6-3-3-4 system of education was meant to create a working society where school leavers at any level will have some sellable skills to earn a living or be self employed, thereby reducing unemployment. Though there still exist some vocational and technical schools scattered all over the country, Nigeria as a nation is seen not giving enough attention to vocational and technical education, as this is evident in many ill-equipped vocational centres and technical schools. The neglect of VTE in the areas of modern equipment, finance and adequate personnel to encourage vocational and technical education are robbing the nation of the contribution their graduates would make in the economy (Ajayi, Arogundade and Ekundayo, (2007) in Masaruf Magaji (2015).

Despite the potentials of vocational and technical education have to address the challenges of skill gaps and reduce unemployment among the Nigeria teeming youths, students, parents and the larger society show little interest in this type of education as compared to the high enrolment of university degrees, even when some universities offer these technical and vocational courses, the enrolment still remain low as observation has shown that majority of the students in this VTE did not make the course their first choice but failed to secure admission in their preferred choice course areas. Vocational and technical education most times is considered inferior or less prestigious compared to academically-oriented programmes offered by the universities, this public perception accounts for the low self-esteem of some TVE graduates, non-commitment of students already on the programme to learn skills and also putting skills they acquire to practice after graduation.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, governments at all levels are making effort to reposition vocational and technical education owing to the high rate of unemployment among the youths. Despite this, there seem to be low participation and lack of interest from the core stakeholders (youths) in this type of education. It has been observed that there is poor perception of VTE or total ignorance on the advantages to this type of education from the general public as some described it as education meant for the poor, drop outs, less privileged, not clever enough for academic work, does not provide jobs seen as 'prestigious' in the society, seen to provide only 'dead-end-jobs' that cannot lead to further self development and does not offer substantial managerial skills for higher jobs. This position was emphasized by a survey of public technical and vocational education and training (TVET) teachers carried out by Ayub (2015) in Ghana as reported in Adjei (2017) which found that none of the respondents wanted their own children to study technical and vocational education and training

programmes. This same attitude applies to Nigeria where the seemed general perception is affecting students' enrolment in VTE programmes. This study therefore investigates how the Nigerian public perceives VTE programmes and how it has contributed to unemployment among youths in Nigeria.

1.2. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the public perception of vocational and technical education programmes in Nigeria and unemployment among the youths in Nigeria. This study specifically will:

- Investigate the students' perception of vocational and technical education programme in Nigeria
- Evaluate the perception of parents and employers of labour towards vocational and technical education programmes in Nigeria.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Public Perception of Vte in Nigeria

Perception is the organization, identification and interpretation of sensory information in order to represent and understand the presented information; perception is not only reception of these signals, but it's also shaped by the recipient's learning, memory, expectation and attention (wikipedia.org). Merriam-Webster dictionary described perception as results from observation, concept (mental picture) and consciousness. From these definitions of perception, it clearly shows that individuals make decisions based on what they see, feel and experience.

It has been observed that vocational and technical education (VTE) is regarded by majority of the population in Nigeria as an education with less reputation or education that can only provide blue collar jobs. That this type of education is meant for school drop outs, under achievers, people with low intelligence, the physically challenged or for those candidates who could not secure admission into their choice course of study. This position was affirmed by Salau (1998) and Sulayman (2014) that people are of the notion that vocational and technical education aims at preparing youths for low status jobs and it is a dumping ground for the less able students. This public perception was proven right by the government acceptance of the Blueprint of the implementation committee on the 1979 National Policy on Education in which they recommended that vocational centres be established in all the Local Government Areas across the country; that these centres will equip those who could not secure admission into junior Secondary Schools with skills to be self employed or get a lower level paid employment. Vocational and technical programmes in technical schools, polytechnics and the universities appear not to have encouraged enrolment of students; reason is not farfetched as this can be attributed to the image held by many in the society that the pursuit of such programme is not prestigious in the society. This is evident in the enrolment statistics of school candidates for National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) for 2018 having 55,480 compared to West African Senior School certificate Examination (WASSCE) which has 1,578,846 candidates. For NABTEB, the above figure represents enrolment for craftsmen leading to the award of certificates in National Business Certificate (NBC), Advance National Business Certificate (ANBC), National Technical Certificate (NTC), Advance National Technical Certificate (ANTC), National Vocational Certificate (NVC) and the Modular Trade Certificate (MTC) (www.nabtebnigeria.org and www.waecdirect.org). Dasmani (2011) stated that many people accord more respect to office work (white-collar job) than those who do manual work. Technical and vocational education is unpopular and it is left in the background due to the notion that it was meant for the unfortunate and people who are not clever enough to do serious academic work (Bappah and Medugu, 2013). In a study of attitudes and perception by Goathobogwe (2010) in Botswana on attitudes and perception of design and technology found TVE to be unpopular units in schools because it is perceived as tedious, difficult to pursue, costly and time consuming to learn.

In Nigeria, public perception of vocational and technical education (VTE) is seen to be affecting the enrolment of students into technical and vocational school. This position was emphasized by the minister for education Adamu Adamu (2019) at NABTEB, that wrong perception is affecting the enrolment of candidates into technical and vocational institutions and also enumerated the problems facing technical and vocational education to include dearth of qualified instructors, lack of learning materials and ill-equipped workshops and laboratories (Punch Newspaper, 29 Jan, 2019). With these myriads of challenges, unemployment among youth is growing by the day, especially as the country's population is increasing. Akande (2014) enumerated some challenges to include educational system that is deficient in curricula, poor perception by the society and poor teacher training system which have contributed to the failure of educational institutions to provide their students with appropriate skills to make them employable. The national population commission (NPoC, 2013) stated that about half of the Nigerian population is made up of youth who are between the ages of 15-34 years and with this figure, about 1.8million youth are entering the labour market every year (Falusi, 2014). The implication of this high figure is that majority of them become unemployed as there are no government jobs available to absorb them and many do not possess vocational skill that can make them self sustaining. Youth unemployment in Nigeria started to rise in the 1980's when some available industries began to close up due to the effect of structural adjustment programme (SAP) introduced by the military regime. Though successive federal, state and local governments have attempted to reduce youth unemployment by introducing social intervention programmes such as Youth Entrepreneurial Scheme (YES) Sure P and most recently N-power. The Nigerian Directorate of employment which is the most popular, only provided vocational training to young school leavers but had no openings to engage unemployed youths as the programme was plagued with insufficient fund to provide start-off capital for the trained youths after completion (NISER, 2013). It further stated that youth unemployment programs have concentrated more on the training

than other activities which really provide openings for immediate employment in white collar jobs in the small and medium scale industries.

Employers of labour are also stakeholders in the educational sector and are suppose to have input in the curricula of both general and vocational technical education, this is because they serve as consumers of the products from these institutions.

3. Research Methodology

For a study of this nature, a survey research method is adopted. According to Nworgu (1991), a survey research method is one in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data only from a few people or items considered to be a representative of the entire group. Survey research designs is also described as procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviours or characteristics of the population (Tahmina 2018). This survey research design is therefore regarded as the most appropriate for this study because survey studies make use of questionnaires, observations, tests and interviews to obtain information. The population for this study is one thousand (1000) out of which a sample of five hundred (500) made up of parents, students and employers was drawn. This study specifically made use of secondary school students and parents in Ekpoma and employers in Benin City in Nigeria, particularly in Edo state as they fall within the same geographical location of South, Nigeria.

Parents were chosen to participate in this study because to a large extent they influence the choice of course to study and schools their wards attend. Parents whose children are in secondary schools or tertiary institutions were selected through a purposive sampling technique and were asked to respond to the questionnaire developed by the researcher which was validated by two experts in tests and measures. The researcher also made use of convenience sampling technique which is a non-probability technique in selecting parents and students. This sampling technique enables the researcher to select sample (parents and students) because they were readily available, accessible and also convenient for the researcher. While simple random sampling technique was used to select employers (both big and small companies) in Benin City who mostly engages vocational and technical education graduates to respond to the questionnaires.

Two hundred and forty (240) parents, two hundred and thirty (230) students and thirty (30) employers were selected for the study. The questionnaires were self administered with one research assistant; the questionnaires were all recovered. The duration for this study was four months. The questionnaire was made up of three sections: A, B and C. Section A for parents' perception of vocational and technical education, section B for students' perception of vocational and technical education and section C for selected employers. All respondents (parents, students and employers) were to respond to a five-points Likert scale of a close end questionnaire as follows:

SA	=	Strongly Agree -2
A	=	Agree - 1
NE	=	Neutral- 0
D	=	Disagree -1
SA	=	Strongly Disagree -2

4. Results and Discussion

Parents responses varied, some agreed that vocational and technical education training was meant for the less privilege in society (mean=0.96 and SD=1.38) while the parents also agreed that this type of education does not provide lucrative job after training (mean 1.36 and SD 0.74), that it is too expensive to undertake(mean=1.18 and mean=1.20), the parents however disagreed that vocational and technical education was meant for dropouts (mean=0.64 and SD=3.44) and remained neutral when asked if vocational and technical education is for less ambitious students (mean=0.04 and SD=1.28). Overall analyses of parents' responses showed that majority of them have negative perception towards vocational and technical education. This position of many parents lay credence to some other authors position that vocational and technical education is not a popular type of education, where it exists, it is meant for those not clever enough to pursue rigorous academic exercise (Bappah and Medugu, 2013). Parents who responded were of the opinion that vocational and technical education does not provide jobs that people accord respect in the society hence the preference for education that can guarantee white collar jobs.

Students who responded to the questionnaire agreed that vocational and technical education was meant for the poor in society (mean=0.89 and SD=1.38), that it is an education for academically weak students (mean=1.08 and SD=0.94), that vocational and technical education does not provide white collar jobs(mean=1.46 and SD=0.96),but however remained neutral if vocational and technical education is for students that are problematic (mean=-0.3 and SD=0.64) and if vocational and technical education certificates are not respected in the society (mean=0.04 and SD=0.56) The students who the researcher chatted with even though they were not part of the sample, told the researcher that the society does not accord such certificate any respect, that it is better to pursue general education first and if one cannot find white collar job before enrolling in any vocational and technical centre as an apprentice.

For employers of labour, some respondents agreed that vocational and technical education graduates possess the skills for employment (mean=0.54 and SD=1.69), but however some disagreed that vocational and technical education graduates have better job prospects than their counterparts (mean=-0.69 and SD= 2.08), that VTE graduates are resourceful (mean=-0.66 and SD=2.44), that VTE graduates have good managerial skills (mean=1.26 and SD1.38) and that VTE graduates possess good communication skills (mean=-1.06 and SD=1.34). Meanwhile, on the space provided for extra

comment apart from the questionnaire items, some employers commented that some VTE graduates cannot work without supervision and that those employed will have to be trained and re-trained. The employers also advised that the current curriculum to vocational and technical education in Nigeria should be looked into, for possible review to meet the modern trend of technology.

5. Conclusion

From investigation, majority of persons agreed that vocational and technical education is education for the less privilege or for the poor. That it is a common knowledge vocational and technical education is an important type of education which imparts practical skill in recipients especially for employment and self-reliance. All the respondents who were interviewed agreed that due to the wrong perception of vocational and technical education by the public and the dichotomy between HND and B.Sc holders, people prefer pursuing general education first before enrolling in vocational and technical centers, through apprenticeship to acquire skills, though this does not apply to all occupational areas. However, many respondents were of the opinion that Vocational and technical education is not popular in Nigeria while some students do not have idea what this type of education is all about.

6. Recommendations

- Government should make vocational and technical education attractive to the citizens. It is a known fact that inconsistency in government policies contribute to the poor perception the public holds towards vocational and technical education.
- Government should encourage investors in industries, provide infrastructural base for these industries to operate as this will open demand for labor from these vocational and technical institutions.
- There should be serious campaign on re-orientation of the general public on the relevance of vocational and technical education, this may be carried out through career talks and counseling in primary and secondary schools. There should be advocacy to promote vocational and technical education from all stakeholders and encourage the public to stop looking at VTE graduates with prejudice and disdain. Government can do this by sincerely removing the dichotomy between University and Polytechnic certificates.
- Lack of trained teachers in various departments, poor motivation of available technical teachers, problem of power to run available equipment are parts of challenges faced by existing vocational and technical institutions.
- There is need for further study to be carried out to ascertain if the perception of vocational and technical education that holds in Nigeria or Africa is same with what holds in those countries we termed "developed".
- Government and vocational and technical base institutions should aggressively market vocational and technical education to the citizens, to see the need to embrace this type of education.

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