

**ADDRESSING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA:
A CALL FOR ACTION, NOT RHETORIC**

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ABSTRACT

The Minister of Education, Sam Egwu, while addressing the recent convocation ceremony of Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, assured the millions of unemployed and poor youth lacking employability skills that technical education would enjoy more government support in 2010 because of the role of technology in national development. Such a pronouncement is not new in Nigeria. Previous administrations have raised the people's hope by painting glowing pictures of their development plans and defined the linkages between technological capability and national development. They also swore that youth empowerment would become the government's top priority yet successive administrations have refused to properly fund education and failed to prepare the youth for the world of work and to create employment for the millions of graduates churn out by the educational institutions yearly. This paper calls for the leaders to move away from rhetoric to action and tackle the challenges facing education, particularly technological development and create employment for the horde of unemployed youth. Without addressing the challenges facing technical and vocational education the youth will continue to face soaring unemployment and poverty and the nation will remain underdeveloped.

Keywords: Technical Education, Vocational Education & Training, Human Capital Development, Technological Capability, National Development, Entrepreneurship, Youth Unemployment, Poverty, Employability Skills, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Technical and vocational education (TVE) has been an integral part of national development strategies in industrialized societies because of its impact on productivity and economic development (Wirth, 1972; McNabb, 1997). It is concerned with the acquisition of skills and knowledge for employment and sustainable livelihood (Maclean & Wilson, Springer 2009). Secondary schools in industrialized nations have vocational and technical education departments that prepare students for the world of work. And because of the huge contributions skilled workers make toward organizational growth and development organizations in development-conscious nations spend billions of dollars annually on employees' skill upgrading and retraining programs. More importantly, the 'knowledge-driven' global economy requires an educational program that provides not only academic knowledge and job skills but also problem solving skills, creative and critical minds, and socially responsible citizens.

Despite the contributions of technical education to national development the leaders of Nigeria have not given this sector the attention it deserves. This mentality has in most part contributed to the neglect of technical educational institutions and the reason the youth shy away from technical and vocational studies. As a result most of the secondary school graduates (and some of those who managed to pass through the university) lack the skills and knowledge to compete effectively in the rather tight labor market and thus loiter around in the villages and cities from dawn to dusk looking for jobs that are not available.

Technical education "is that aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of skills as well as basic 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" (Washington-Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, nd; UNEVOC, 1996; Maclean & Wilson, 2009). And vocational education is a practical instruction that gives learners specific occupational skills. It is "training for a specific vocation in industry or agriculture or trade" (Webster, 1993). Thus vocational education and training prepares learners for careers that are based in manual

activities and traditionally non-academic that relate to a trade, occupation or vocation. Specifically, vocational and technical education gives individuals the skills to learn and become productive citizens and for advancement in the workplace (Oni, 2006).

Some scholars perceive technical and vocational education as one of the “bulwarks of social efficiency” as the preparation of a well-trained workforce is a *sine qua non* of “an efficient society” (Camp, 1982 & 1983). And because of the unrelenting changes in the new global economy one may not be relevant in the labor market in future without a certain level of technical skills. The neglect of vocational and technical education in Nigeria leads to the dearth of skilled technical manpower to maintain the nation’s critical infrastructure and to tackle its developmental challenges.

Purpose

This paper seeks to identify the relevance of technical and vocational education and training on socioeconomic and political development and the extent to which it can effectively prepare the youth for future positions in business and industry. Specifically, it focuses on the shortage of skilled technical manpower in Nigeria and argues that vocational and technical education holds the key to national development. This author admits that the issues raised in this paper have been discussed in the ever-increasing literature on vocational and technical education in Nigeria and elsewhere (Duffy, 1967; Camp, 1983; UNDP, 1990, van Ark, January 5, 1992; UNESCO and ILO, 2002; Alwasilah, February 11, 2002; Dike, 2006a; Dike, 2009a and Dike, 2009b and Maclean & Wilson, Springer 2009). This author argues, however, that the analyses in existing studies are more or less superficial and thus limited. The main contribution of this paper, this author ventures to claim, is that it conducts an integrated analysis of the issues to change the wrong perceptions the public has had about technical and vocational education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data for this paper were derived from secondary sources: from the research and analysis of scholars, analysts and practitioners, government documents, and recent newspaper and journal articles on vocational and technical education, and the author’s professional experience in teaching EVOC and

information technology. The sources of information were carefully evaluated and analyzed to determine their veracity. But the primary method of study was an extensive literature review for description and critical analysis of the status, problems and prospects of vocational and technical education in Nigeria. The questions are: Why has Nigeria failed to recognize the importance of technical and vocational education? Can Nigeria transform into an industrialized nation without technological capability? Could India and the “Asian Tigers” have become what they are without proper investment in human development and technical education? (Agrawal et al., 1995; Mohan, September 2003). Based on the studies and the author’s critical analysis of the recent development in the sector, this paper believes that the leaders cannot give vocational and technical education the attention it deserves without changing their thinking models’ that drive their decisions. Changing their mind-set is a critical first step to restructuring the sector because without changing their thinking, values and beliefs it is impossible to change their wrong impression about the field. As it were, poor thinking leads to poor results.

Brief History of Vocational and Technical Education

The provision of vocational and technical schools has a long history. As noted earlier, the term has changed over the years because of development in the global economy. Before the Industrial Revolution (between 1750 and 1830) the home and the “apprenticeship system” were the principal sources of vocational education. But societies were later forced by the decline of handwork and specialization of occupational functions to develop institutions of vocational education (Duffy, 1967). Manual training that involves general instruction in the use of hand tools was said to have developed initially in Scandinavia (c.1866). However, vocational education became popular in elementary schools in the United States after 1880 and developed into courses in industrial training, bookkeeping, stenography, and allied commercial work in both public and private institutions. As the *Columbia Encyclopedia* (2001) has noted, some of the early private trade schools in the United States include Cooper Union (1859), Pratt Institute (1887), the Hampton Institute (1868), and Tuskegee Institute (1881). The agricultural high school (1888) of the University of Minnesota was the first regularly established public vocational secondary school that introduced extensive public instruction in agriculture.

The number of public and private vocational schools has greatly increased in the United States since 1900. There was an impetus on vocational education during World War II (1939-1945) when the armed services had great need for technicians that the civilian world could not supply. There was a further upsurge on vocational training from the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (the G. I. Bill of Rights), which allowed World War II veterans to receive tuition and subsistence assistance during extended vocational training. There was also the Manpower Development Training Act (1962), the Vocational Education Act (1963), and the Vocational Education Amendments (1968) and the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act (1984). These programs help to improve the nation's workforce and ensure that vocational training is available for economically (and physically) challenged youth.

The United States is not the only society that appreciates skills acquired through vocational and technical education. The Dutch school system is said to pay attention to "high standards in mathematics and the provision of vocational education at ages 14-16 for a third of all pupils, and widespread vocational education at 16 +" (van Ark, 1992). As the global economy is becoming increasingly driven by information technology secondary (high) schools in many development-conscious nations are creating vocational and technical centers that offer training in lifelong trade together with general academic studies and vocational and technical schools are shifting their emphasis to training in the computers and information technology.

In Africa, the apprenticeship system was a means to acquire vocational skills before the arrival of the colonial masters. And in Nigeria, as in most African societies, the youth (young men and women) were trained in traditional vocations such as pottery, weaving, mat making, wood carving, and traditional medicine, to name but a few, by their parents, family friends, and relatives who were masters of the crafts (Fafunwa, 1974). However, everything changed when the colonial masters set up formal vocational schools for those interested in learning particular trades. Early in its history, the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and the City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI) controlled the craft-level technical education in Nigeria through the conduct of examinations in commercial and technical subjects. But the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) that was created in 1952 took over the

conduct of examinations in some technical and commercial subjects from RSA and CGLI, in December 1972. In most cases, however, only the theoretical aspects of the trades were examined by CGLI. Later the federal government introduced the Federal Craft Certificate as practical aspects of the trades examined by CGLI (Oni, 2006; UNEVOC, 1996).

Evidently, the policy makers have not handled Nigeria's quest for development and industrialization properly as they have failed to give technical education, skills acquisition and general human capital development the attention they deserve. The nation's theory-based curricula and technical institutions have failed to meet specific national development needs as the students are often given few or no general education to enhance their skills in the preferred trades. Because of the deficiencies in technical education the graduates are unable to secure admission into formal tertiary institutions. The image of technical education has since suffered as it is perceived as a program for academically unintelligent students who are only good at working with tools such as hammer, screwdriver and spanner or wrench. This has apparently contributed to the general neglect of technical education in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, the National Board for Technical Education (NTBE) was established in 1985 to manage the technical institutions for quality assessment and program accreditations at polytechnics, professional institutions, technical colleges and training centers, and to set guidelines and standards for admissions to different programs in each institution. In 1992, however, the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) was established and charged with the conduct of technical and business examinations that were conducted by the RSA, CGLI and WAEC (Oni, 2006; UNEVOC, 1996).

Thus, higher levels of technical skills are acquired in tertiary institutions such as the polytechnics, professional institutions (colleges of education), and technical education at the University level. Here most technical education is academic as students are exposed to mostly theory with rudimentary practical application in formal educational settings. The students in two-year programs in polytechnics are awarded a National Diploma (ND) and those in four-year programs receive the Higher National Diploma (HND). As noted earlier, because of poor funding mechanisms the nation's technical institutions lack instructional facilities, workshop and skilled instructors for proper technical education

and training. In fact, the 'half-baked' roadside auto mechanic or other master craftsmen are more skillful in their trade than those who passed through the higher technical institutions. As in other higher institutions the agencies in-charge of technical education in Nigeria have not performed their duties well.

The problems facing technical education have a long history. A review of the history of education in Nigeria shows that before independence, in 1960, the Ashby Commission was set up to review Nigeria's manpower needs (Ashby, 1960). The Commission reported a shortage of skilled manpower at all levels (lower, middle and high) and observed, "The major defect in Nigerian education is the strong bias toward the traditional literary and academic subjects." And "This is reflected in a lack of respect on the part of the public for manual labor." (Ashby, 1960:18) The report strongly recommended for Nigeria to introduce technical subjects in secondary education and warned that the nation would not "afford to ignore" (Ashby, 1960) the recommendation. Furthermore, the report indicated that Nigeria would need to produce hundreds of engineers and thousands of technicians yearly for decades to be able to meet the technical manpower needs of the society.

Although some technical and vocational schools were established following the recommendation of the Ashby Commission, the nation's secondary schools and higher institutions have since remained oriented toward white-collar jobs. This attitude is reflected on the employers' preference for regular university graduates with Bachelors degree (BS/BA) over graduates of Polytechnics with Higher National Diploma (HND) and the pay disparity between the graduates (*ThisDay*, February 25, 2008). The case remains unsettled in spite of government's repeated promises to address the problem. Because the leaders failed to take the Ashby report seriously Nigeria is suffering from a dearth of competent lower, middle and high level technical manpower.

The Neglect of Technical and Vocational Education

Everyone appears to be wondering why Nigeria has failed to develop as it should, despite its vast human resources and stupendous oil wealth. The neglect of technical education is robbing the nation the contributions its graduates would make to national development. Thus, the inability of the policy makers

to make educated decisions is detrimental to the progress of the society. But making a good decision is not a chance act; it requires a skill, which most of the leaders seems to lack. Meanwhile, Dike (2006a) has observed that the under-development status of Nigeria could be linked to the odious neglect of its educational institutions, which are responsible for human capital development. And Streeten (1984) has argued that development of human capital would help any nation achieve to some extent 'self-sufficiency in food production, capital, and goods and services' and 'the understanding of the nature of the environment, the preservation of it and eventually will eradicate environmental degradation, desertification, deforestation and soil erosion.'

However, science and technology has been a part of Nigeria's *National Policy on Primary Education* (NPE) since 1981 (Moja, 2000), but like every other public policy, its implementation has been poorly handled. While technical and vocational education has continued to thrive in many societies Nigeria has neglected this aspect of education. Every facet of the economy has been affected by the scarcity of skilled technicians. The society lacks competent bricklayers, carpenters, painters and auto mechanics; laboratory and pharmacy technicians, electrical/ electronic technicians and skilled vocational nurses, etc, which the nation needs to function effectively and efficiently.

And because of the dearth of advanced technical manpower the hospitals are no longer a place where people go to get their ailments treated, but a place they often go and die. Tales abound of how people die out of minor ailments, not to mention major health problems. The refusal of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and other high ranking public officials to employ the service of the local hospitals to tackle their health problems gives credence to the general opinion that the nation's health institutions lack modern medical infrastructure to handle both minor and major ailments (*BusinessDay*, November 27, 2009). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the State of the World's Children (2009) noted Nigeria's poor ranking in maternal, neonatal and infant mortality. According to the report Nigeria and India account for one third of maternal deaths worldwide. Earlier in 2008, Save the Children, a US-based humanitarian organization, claimed that about one million under-5 children die in Nigeria annually. Another study shows that only about 37 percent of Nigerians have access to good drinking water, and 30 percent use modern sanitation facilities. And because of poor training and regulations the

roadside mechanics in the society cause more harm to motor vehicles when contracted to service them. Although road accident is a global problem, a combination of poor driving training and attitudes toward traffic signs and regulations and poorly maintained vehicles and roads lead to rampant road accidents that have sent many people to their early death. According to the 2008 report by the *Corps Marshall of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC)* about 4,800 people die in road accidents in Nigeria yearly (*Daily Sun*, November 20, 2008). This figure could be conservative, given the sordid state of the roads and menace of armed robbers on the highways. In fact, most of the so-called ‘expatriate engineers’ who are being paid millions of dollars to build Nigeria’s roads and bridges, are graduates of technical colleges. Yet Nigeria does not take this sub-sector of its educational system seriously.

It has been widely documented that the quality of education and technological capability of a nation determines its ‘rates and pattern of development and industrialization’ (Enos, 1977; Fransman and King, 1984; Islam, 2001). According to Fransman and King (1984), technology capabilities in developing countries hinge on factors such as “adequate number and quality of human resources with practical experience, skills, and aptitude; useful technological information on sources and conditions of technology transfer; institutions for education and training, for research and development, and for engineering design and consultancy; favorable natural environment and factor endowments, attitudes and customs, etc.” Although Nigeria is the sixth largest world producer of petroleum, it imports fuel for domestic use. However, the shabby performance of Nigeria’s builders (mason/bricklayers) and poor building maintenance often lead to unbridled collapsing of buildings (*ThisDay*, August 17, 2005). Today individuals who can afford it employ competent technicians from neighboring countries to handle their important projects (Dike, 2009a; Dike, 2009b). The havoc caused by the poorly trained technicians in the power sector has been well documented. Spotty electricity supply is the greatest bottleneck to the growth of the economy and national development (Dike, 2009a; Dike, 2009b).

The agricultural sector is also a victim of the shortage of advanced technical manpower. Peasant farmers who are toiling all day in the field with knives, hoes and shovels are unable to feed the nation’s 140 million people. Nigeria’s arable lands are not cultivated all year round because of lack of advanced technology for irrigation and to increase food production. And the society is unable to effectively and

efficiently process, preserve and store the leftover of the seasonal foodstuffs. This has contributed to food scarcity and high prices of basic food items with the attendant rising hunger and starvation. Because of these deficiencies Nigeria imports billions of naira worth of food annually to feed her citizens (*BusinessDay*, November 19, 2007).

The financial sector is not spared as it lacks competent technicians to establish databases and credit bureaus to ascertain their customer's credit worthiness and their true identity. Because of this deficiency the banks often give out huge loans to individuals who otherwise would not qualify. The sector also lacks technical expertise to regulate and supervise the banks and to develop financial software to properly tackle the rising fraudulent activities in the banking sector. Thus because of the sector's systemic weakness some bank managers and other top officials connive with crooked politicians and business executives to defraud their banks. This contributed to the huge non-performing loan crises that rocked some banks in recent times (*Daily Independent*, November 17, 2009).

The nation's theory-oriented education and teaching method does not seem to satisfy the needs of the society. Because of poor education and training and motivation the police extort money as low as N20 from the public and violate the human and civil rights of the citizens who question their authority. The police also lack skilled forensic laboratory and fingerprint technicians to conduct criminal investigations. There was a shameful episode recently in the society where the police paraded a goat as a thief; it was hilarious the police noted that the criminal they were chasing transformed into an animal (*BBC News*, January 23, 2009). There is a wide spread public concern about the danger posed by environmental pollution and fake drugs in the society. The *National Agency for Foods, Drugs Administration and Control* (NAFDAC), the agency responsible for controlling the authenticity of foods and drugs lacks competent technicians to properly monitor the manufacturing, importation and distribution of fake/expired drugs in the society (*Leadership*, September 27, 2009). The poor and less educated lack the skills and knowledge to manage their health problems: AIDS, cancer, diabetes and high blood pressure, among other serious health concern.

Although technical and vocational education seem deficient in ‘citizenship or leadership training’ (Friedman, 1982), but as noted earlier, it provides the youth with “life skills” (Alwasilah, February 11, 2002) to enable them become productive entrepreneurs and increase personal freedom. As Sen (1999) has aptly noted, “Freedoms are not only the primary ends of development, they are also among its primary means.” Thus the main problem with Nigeria is ‘Leadership without a moral purpose’ (Dike, 2009c), which has subjected the citizens to immeasurable economic hardship and misery. Also, bad leadership and mismanagement of resources have contributed to the under-funding of education. A review of available data on spending (per cent of GDP) on education in Africa (Table 1) shows Nigeria’s unimpressive position.

Table 1: Selected African Nations: Education Spending (Percent of GDP)

Country	% GDP	Country	% GDP
Angola	2.7	Mozambique	2.4
Algeria	4.3	Namibia	8.6
Cote d’Ivoire	4.6	Nigeria	1.3
Cameroon	3.2	Rwanda	2.8
Ethiopia	4.8	Senegal	3.2
Eritrea	4.8	Sierra Leone	2.7
Egypt	4.5	South Africa	5.7
Kenya	6.4	Sudan	1.4
Liberia	4.5	Tunisia	6.8
Libya	3.8	Uganda	2.3
Madagascar	3.2	Zambia	1.9
Mali	2.8	Zimbabwe	4.7
Morocco	5.5		

Sources: Compiled by the author: Data are extracted from High School Social Studies/Geography manual used by the Sacramento Unified School District, Sacramento, California (2009-2010); and Dike, V.E. (2009c), *Leadership without a Moral Purpose: a Critical Analysis of Nigerian Politics and Administration* (with emphasis on the Obasanjo Administration, 2003-2007), North Charleston:

It has vastly been documented that public disdain for technical education is the major reason for the low enrolment in technical colleges in relation to secondary school enrolment (Table 2). Because of paucity of data current enrolment figures in technical colleges are not available. However, if the 2001 figure is used as an index the number of enrolment in technical colleges from 2002 to present would be uninspiring.

Table 2: Enrolment in Secondary and Vocational & Technical Institutions, 1991-2001

Year	Number of Technical Colleges	Student Enrollment	Number of Secondary Schools	Student Enrolment
1991	208	46,083	3,854	1,653,891
1992	202	40,878	5,840	1,814,000
1993	190	72,136	5,948	1,865,189
1994	300	72,136	6,092	2,794,498
1995	240	76,434	5,991	2,934,349
1996	252	89,536	5,859	2,941,781
1997	261	1,179	6,001	2,923,791
1998	261	1,426	5,860	2,901,993
1999	261	1,425	6,008	3,123,277
2000	261	1,835	6,009	3,600,204
	261	1,835	5,959	4,032,083

Sources: Compiled by the author from Social Statistics in Nigeria 1995; Annual Abstracts of Statistics 2001; Federal Office of Statistics, Nigeria, 2001;

Notwithstanding the need for more science and technology graduates or the need for vocational and technical education, if you will, the government has continued to award licenses to organizations and individuals to establish regular private universities, which are poorly equipped. Consequently, many of the graduates lack employability skills that could be acquired from a well-equipped two-year technical college. Because the local higher institutions are unable to meet the demand for advanced technical manpower employers in the public and private sectors are forced to hire technicians from technical and vocational institutions abroad to the chagrin of the public (*Guardian*, August 17, 2007). Experience shows that the massive layoffs resulting from the on-going global economic crisis have affected the youth and others without good education, job training and technical skills disproportionately.

Soaring Youth Unemployment

As noted earlier, Nigeria's current preoccupation with university education reduces economic opportunities of those who are more oriented toward work than academe thus leading to rising youth unemployment. More often than not the public perceives students who take to vocational and technical education as those who lack the ability to continue with formal academic studies in higher institutions. But not everyone needs a university education. Sadly, in Nigeria social recognition and advancement on workplace depend to a large extent on the stack of academic degrees one has acquired. Because of poor public perceptions about blue-collar jobs the youth are not enthusiastic about technical and vocational education. The few technical and vocational schools in the society lack qualified teachers and functional workshops and equipment for hands-on application.

Youth unemployment has been skyrocketing in Nigeria because they lack the relevant skills employers' need as well as for self-employment. The federal government recently acknowledged that about 80 per cent of Nigeria's youth is unemployed and 10 per cent underemployed (*Daily Trust*, November 26, 2008). Others have urged the youth to become "entrepreneurs" and reject "social vices" (*ThisDay*, March 17, 2009). At some point the Minister of Education, Sam Egwu, has expressed concern about the poor quality of graduates from the nation's educational institutions. The political leaders are good at

cataloging the reasons for Nigeria's problems and predicting the future without implementing reasoned policies to create a better future. But as Peter Drucker has observed: "If you want to predict the future, create it" (as cited in Wilson & Blumenthal, 2008, p.1). It is not good enough to implore the youth to become productive citizens, develop entrepreneurial skills, or to reject "social vices" without providing them the training and resources to develop the skills. Nigerians need actions and not political rhetoric on national development, good governance, youth empowerment and employment.

Recent Policy Development

Recent major policy development of the Yar'Adua administration revolves around its unrealistic aspiration to transform Nigeria into one of the first 20 largest global economies by the year 2020 (*Daily Trust*, February 16, 2009) and the so-called Seven-Point Agenda, namely building "power and energy; food security and agriculture; wealth creation and employment, mass transportation, land reforms; security; qualitative and functional education and pursuance of the rule of law." And the drumbeat has been rising to a deafening height as he recently assembled a 405-member panel to realize the Vision 2020 project (*Daily Trust*, February 16, 2009). Nigerians have seen similar economic packages before that built high expectation and hope, only to be disappointed.

The people's enthusiasm and energy is being sapped by 'the politics of unreason' and false promises. The political leaders can make all the noise they want about the impracticable policies of transforming Nigeria into an industrialized nation, but the fact remains that rhetoric alone cannot make the nation an economic super-power. The Vision 2020 program and the Seven-point Agenda will remain a paper tiger without effective institutions and infrastructure and technological capability. History shows that no society has become an industrialized nation without technological capability (Mohan, 2003). This means that for Nigeria to become industrialized proper investment in human capital development must be a major part of its development strategy. Any person who thinks that a country that lacks the skilled technical manpower and infrastructure to generate and distribute electricity for more than three hours in a day and to maintain its roads and bridges could be transformed into an industrialized nation in less than eleven years from today must be living in a different planet.

Another bogus public policy is the re-branding campaign being trumpeted by the Information and Communications Minister, Dora Akunyili and the buy 'made-in-Nigeria goods and services' crusade of Achike Udenwa, Minister of Commerce and Industry (*Daily Independent*, October 23, 2009). Meanwhile, Dora Akunyili tried to rationalize the N150 million earmarked for the project in the 2009 budget by arguing before the joint National Assembly Committee on Information that N1.49 billion was spent on a similar re-branding project -the "Heart of Africa" - during the Obasanjo presidency (1999-2007).

The funds being wasted on all the impracticable projects could have been wisely invested on public infrastructure and education to grow the economy, create jobs and stabilize the polity. The re-branding campaigns cannot eradicate corruption and fix the erratic power supply and the pot-holed roads. Neither will it clean up the heap of trash littering the streets or change the mentality of the leaders. The campaigns will not persuade the world to recognize Nigeria as a great nation or to buy the poor quality made-in-Nigeria goods and services. As George Washington Carver has said, "There is no shortcut to achievement. Life requires thorough preparation" (cited in a poster on the wall at the Main Office, George Washington Carver School of Arts and Science, Sacramento City Unified School District, nd). Nigeria can only command the attention of the international community with good governance and high quality goods and services. This means that Nigeria needs a new paradigm for effective transformation of its economy and educational institutions, particularly vocational and technical education.

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY:

A New Paradigm for Effective Transformation

Having traced the trends and state of vocational and technical education this section considers the practical ways to integrate this important sector in Nigeria's development strategy. As noted earlier, vocational and technical education has a low public status (Moja, 2000). But despite the demand for advanced technical manpower the policy makers have failed to adopt appropriate policy to strengthen the sector. It has vastly been noted that a nation's economic prosperity, political influence and power in the global arena depend precariously on its capability to employ science and technology for national

development. Any nation that wishes to remain politically relevant must strive to raise the standard of living of the people through the employment of advanced scientific and technological knowledge (Okoye, 1999). And that means investing in human capital development.

Advanced technical skills and knowledge would enable Nigeria to maximize the exploitation and utilization of all available natural resources, mechanization of the agricultural sector and effectively and efficiently transform raw materials into goods and services, create jobs and bring about the availability of good water supply for domestic and industrial use. And that means good quality of life for the people. Because of the importance vocational and technical education the government should adopt new and better policies to address the deficiencies in the sector and properly integrate it in national development strategies. Soaring youth unemployment leads to poverty and social crisis; and like unemployment, poverty is ravaging the society (Dike, 2003a). The *World Development Indicators* published by the World Bank in 2007 shows that more than 70 percent of Nigerians are living on less than \$1 per day. Skills acquisition is one of the tried-and-true ways to reduce the nation's high jobless rate and poverty. However, Nigeria's poverty alleviation programs have been ineffective because of poor education, planning and implementation, lack of skills training, lack of public assistance to the needy, and unbridled corruption. Throwing some money to the poor and illiterate citizens who cannot manage their own lives to set up small business is like pouring water in a bucket with holes.

The design of Nigeria's educational curriculum is flawed given the neglect of technical and vocational education. Consequently, the nation is today lagging behind in preparing its labor force for the 21st century economy. As a policy, high (secondary) schools should be required to establish technical and vocational departments (or centers) where the youth could learn life-long trade and to solve authentic technical problems with mechanical skills. In addition, there should be some form of school-work-based learning incorporated in schools as integral part of national development strategy (Dike, 2006a). Specifically, the schools should provide real-world examples on how the students would apply what they learned; and in-class instruction should be relevant to the student's needs (Camp, 1982). Toward this teachers must learn to blend theory with practice because theories alone cannot serve any useful purpose.

The nation's industrial productivity has been declining in recent years (*Daily Independent*, November 6, 2007) because of a combination of bad business environment, lack of skills, poor reward systems, and low workers morale (Dike, 2003b and Dike, 2003c). Empowering the people with relevant job skills would enhance their productivity and national development because the progress of any society lies on the quality of its education, institutions and infrastructure, and workers productivity (Lewis, April 2004). Higher productivity gives a nation the advantage of economies of scale, lowers the costs of production and prices of goods and services, and improves its global competitiveness (Dike, 2006b and Dike, 2006c).

One of the ways to motivate workers and improve their productivity is to give them the skills and knowledge they need to effectively perform their duties (Argyris, 1994; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Granted that Nigeria's workers are subjected to appalling working conditions, but constantly calling them out for industrial actions is not the only way to fight for their welfare (*Nigerian Tribune*, October 26, 2009). The Nigeria Labor Congress (NLC) and the affiliated unions should establish technical and vocational training centers in the local government areas where the workers could acquire some employability skills (Dike, 2003b and Dike, 2003c). In today's crisis-ridden economy one of the ways to spur the weak economy is to empower the people with relevant skills to tackle their personal problems and the challenges facing the nation. Thus the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP), the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and teachers in this area should seriously campaign for increased funding for vocational and technical education and launder its image as part of the current agitation to improve the state of education.

To move forward the society should change its wrong perception on technical and vocational education. Adult education is another aspect of non-formal education that has been neglected. As in technical and vocational education, the consequences of the neglect of adult education are glaring (Nnazor, 2005) because no nation would make any meaningful socioeconomic stride without the citizens being literate to a certain degree. In advanced nations individuals with technical skills and field experience in relevant

fields are highly respected and thus work in tandem with those with formal education. The worth of every worker should depend on the person's skills and knowledge and not the stack of academic degrees one has. Secondary and tertiary education should encompass economic, educational and social objectives because workers need more than academic knowledge to function well on the job. For any person to compete (Hamel & Prahalad, July 1994) effectively in the rapidly evolving knowledge-driven global economy he or she must possess relevant job competencies, including technical, business, cultural, interpersonal and intellectual competencies, which could be obtained in well-equipped technical and vocational colleges.

The nation's technical colleges and schools should be properly equipped and teachers with skills and knowledge in the subjects should be employed and motivated to properly educate their students; and professional technical educators (and not politicians) should be hired to manage the technical institutions. To ensure standards the graduates of technical institutions should be thoroughly tested, certified and registered before permitted to work as technicians in their chosen fields. And the agencies in-charge should revoke the certificate of any technician whose work fails to meet the stipulated standards. Technical and vocational education holds the key to Nigeria's development (Dike, 2009a and Dike, 2009b).

CONCLUSION: A CALL FOR ACTION, NOT RHETORIC

Nigeria is brimming with untapped talents. It is the responsibility of every government to provide the citizens with the critical skills and resources to realize their full potential. To develop as it should, Nigeria must take investment in human capacity development very seriously as no nation can compete effectively in the emerging computerized global market place with poorly educated workforce and poorly made goods and services. Nigeria should adopt a skill-oriented educational principle to strengthen the quality of her education because how quickly a nation recovers from the present global economic predicament depends on the strength of its institutions and infrastructure, ingenuity of the leaders, and productivity of the workers (Dike, 2009d). Scarcity of jobs has combined with lack of employability skills and knowledge to cause high youth unemployment. Any administration that can give vocational and technical education the attention it deserves, stimulate the weak economy and create

employment for the army of unemployed youth, will occupy an enviable position in the nation's political and economic history.

However, the government should not be expected to solve all the problems facing technical education alone. Although UNESCO has been assisting Nigeria in resolving some of the problems facing technical and vocational education, more assistance is needed from the private sector, NGOs and other stakeholders in education. The policy makers should adopt reasoned policies to deal with the debilitating deficiencies in the education sector instead of wasting time and resource on the false re-branding campaigns and the Visions and Agenda that will not solve the nation's socio-political and economic problems. The politicians could salvage Nigeria's image by re-branding their mentality, values, beliefs and thinking, and properly invest in human capital development, which is the engine for rapid economic growth and development. No nation can fight a war without an army. In the same token Nigeria will continue to dream of becoming an industrialized nation without technological capability.

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