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Decentralizing Vocational Education in Secondary School Curriculum in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The Policy Brief focuses on decentralizing vocational education in the secondary school curriculum. This is by granting local government authorities the power to decide on vocational subjects from the thirty-four trade and entrepreneurial subjects listed in the National Policy on Education (2013). The brief targets increasing enrolment in vocational education via a partnership between schools providing formal education and vocational education institutions through the indigenous apprenticeship system. The policy brief is formed on the notion that if Nigeria is to meet targets 3 and 4 of the UN SDG 4, policies driving skill development must be aligned towards meeting the needs of its diverse society, with more attention towards providing incentives to Vocational Enterprise Institutes, and development of skill programs in improving societal perception toward indigenous craft and trade.

Keywords: Apprenticeship, Curriculum, Decentralization, Indigenous Skills, Policy Reform, Secondary Education, Skill Development, TVET

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) four outlines the need for quality education and emphasizes technical and vocational skills to provide employment and empower people via its target 3 and 4 (UNDP, 2023). For Nigeria to achieve SDG 4, its approach toward the implementation of its policies towards vocational education must be realigned towards achieving the needs of its diverse society.

Over the years, Nigeria has been faced with a dearth of technical and vocational skills, with formal education being chosen and preferred over technical and vocational education. The Policy brief aims to increase participation in vocational education via collaboration with vocational education institutes, and formal schools through the apprenticeship system.

The formal system of education in Nigeria reflects the colonial system of education. Which does not match the needs of the society but was designed to serve the needs of the missionaries and colonial government at the time. This has led to the low societal perception towards vocational education via the apprenticeship system (Akanbi, 2017).

As a nation with a remarkably diverse population and societies, the needs of various societies vary from one region of the country to another. Hence diverse needs, implying different skills to be learnt in proffering solutions to the unique needs of each region. The National Policy on Education (2013) identifies technical, vocational education and training (TVET) as a valuable tool which is pivotal to overcoming the economic crisis the country currently faces (Ekpo and Onweh, 2012).

The policy outline includes basic technology as a subject at the junior school level, and thirty-four entrepreneurship subjects at the senior secondary level (FRN, 2013). It also relegates the learning of vocational and indigenous crafts such as the making of tie and dye, shoe making and leather works to vocational enterprise institutions which are considered by members of society as an inferior form of education when compared to formal education (Adefunke and Olaitan, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

This policy brief examines the National Policy on Education, UNESCO Nigeria Education Sector Analysis, as well as draws insight on other literatures text. In searching out these literature texts, key terms such as “Decentralizing TVET in Nigeria” and “Vocational education in secondary school curriculum in Nigeria” were utilized on Google Scholar. Data were utilized from UNESCO TVET

Country Profile for Nigeria. The African Journal Online Database was also utilized in conducting a search for literature texts. Akounjom et al. (2024) emphasizes the potential of blended teaching methodologies to enhance practical skills acquisition in vocational education. However, there was limited data on vocational education and apprenticeship system in the Nigerian context which is a limitation in the production of this policy brief.

Vocational Education in Secondary Schools in the Nigerian Context

Vocational education as a branch of TVET was introduced in the secondary school curriculum, based on the philosophy of exposing students to the need to develop skills for self-reliance, and in building an egalitarian society as stated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013).

The current curriculum design aims to expose students to specific vocational skills such as woodwork, metal works and building construction at junior secondary school level, and at Senior secondary school level provides a list of entrepreneurial skills to be learnt from the thirty-four vocational subjects. The skills to be learnt are not divided into modules which can be easily undertaken by the learners with the goal to mastering these crafts (Agbulu, 2016).

Vocational skills which are tagged as more informal such as shoe making, dyeing, and bleaching, baking, weaving, boat making, painting and decoration were left to vocational enterprise institutions (VEI) (FRN, 2013). These skills which have been left to VEI's are more common in societies with more artisans practicing and making a living from these skills, but students spend more time in school learning under formal education, with little or no time to learn these skills available in their societies at VEIs (UNESCO, 2021).

Identified Issues

Centralized Vocational Subjects in Secondary School curriculum.

At Junior Secondary School level, students are mandated to choose Basic Technology as an introduction to the learning of TVET. Concepts such as safety and accident, workshop practice, machine tools, certain introductory concepts in technical drawing, building and construction, electrical work and metal work are taught at this level.

This is reflective of the National Council on Education's approach towards education policies, centralizing curriculum content and policies which can be accepted by all the states, without considering the diverse educational needs of the state, and what could be considered as an introductory form of basic vocational education based on the diverse societal needs of these states (UNESCO, 2021). This was raised as a major criticism of the approach toward educational policies development by UNESCO (2021) based on its education sector analysis conducted in Nigeria.

At Senior Secondary School level, the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) outlines thirty-four subjects, of which students are to select one subject in learning vocational/entrepreneurship education. The courses chosen are, in most cases, imposed on the students by the school based on its capacity to teach any of the courses.

These 34 subjects are, however, more theoretically focused than practical, which is due to the unavailability of experienced teachers to teach these subjects, lack of tools and machines to enable the learning of these courses, impracticality of skills learnt in studying TVET course in solving a societal problem (Adefunke and Olaitan, 2020). Ladan (2023) highlights that the shortage of qualified TVET instructors significantly hampers the effectiveness of vocational education in Nigerian secondary schools. The above factors listed have contributed to the perception of education as a luxurious experience and not a necessity, due to its inability to empower the learner to contribute to the economy via skills learnt.

Lack of partnership with Industries

To ensure that practical content is well drafted out in teaching the required skills for TVET subjects, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 2014) emphasizes the need for an alliance between educational institutions, industries, and private enterprise to ensure that the skills taught are relevant in the industry and are geared towards solving societal problems.

It also highlights that the curriculum must be reflective of the partnership done with the industry, with teaching being conducted in a practical manner and providing an on-site experience to ensure the mastery of skills taught (Udoudo and Ikeji, 2023).

These alliances and partnerships are absent in the way the content for most TVET subjects in secondary school curriculums is drafted and in the teaching methods used to deliver the content of these subjects. Students learning these courses have little or no experience, in most cases, conducting site visits, excursions, field trips, and workshops to practice mastering these TVET skills taught.

Dying out of Indigenous vocational craft

Indigenous vocational crafts are slowly dying out due to lack of technical knowledge transference from the older generation to the younger generation. This is influenced by the perception of the craft being rural/local with more preference toward foreign goods. Crafts such as bronze making, Kofar Mata dyeing, Adire, Aso-Ofi weaving and many are becoming extinguished (Young et al., 2021).

Evidence to Show the Need for Decentralizing Vocational Education

A report from the TVET country profile on Nigeria, prepared by UNESCO-UNEVOC indicates that the enrolment of students in vocational education at secondary school level stands at less than 4% of the youth population, with the percentage even lesser when considering participation at tertiary level (UNESCO, 2022). Nigeria has a labor participation rate of 53.8% with the youth population accounting for 31.9% of the labor force. Its current youth unemployment stands at 28.1% (UNESCO, 2022). The statistics outlined above shows that more Nigerian youth do not possess practical skills to contribute to the economy, which is in correlation to the low participation in vocational education.

The depreciated societal perception towards the apprenticeship system in the nation, which is an Indigenous practice in several Nigerian societies as a structure for ensuring skill development, needs to be revamped with more participation from schools and industries to ensure the transference of knowledge, skills, and technology (Olaitan, 1994, cited in Akanbi, 2017).

Evidence to Show the Need for Decentralizing Vocational Education

The apprenticeship system shows the benefits that a decentralized VE program offers. Learners are allowed to master crafts in modules and to show proficiency in what has been taught via direct observation, tutoring and guidance from their craft teacher. The learner has access to tools and technology within their society to enable them to master the craft being taught. A form of entrepreneurial education is also offered to the learner granting knowledge of the market to sell crafts, and how to contribute positively to the economy based on the craft learnt (Adeyeye et al., 2015).

In some cases, as shown in the eastern and western parts of Nigeria, upon completing all the modules in learning the craft, the learner is given some form of financial capital, tools, and resources to establish their ventures and start making money from the skills learnt. This is beneficial in ensuring that the learner does not need to begin searching for a job after learning the skills but becomes an entrepreneur via the resources provided. Ugege E. J. et. al (2024) argue for aligning technical education programs with industry demands to improve human capacity development in Nigeria.

RESULTS

The following recommendation seeks to advise government officials in the Ministry of Education on how vocational education can increase participation in skill development.

Local Government should be empowered to choose trade areas, crafts and skills within its region. It should work with vocational enterprise institutions

(VEI), industries and schools in formulating contents to be taught in modules to students utilizing performative objectives as the criteria in accessing mastery of these skills in technical and vocational subjects. The local government should be empowered to manage all that has to do with TVET at junior and senior secondary level through partnership with industries, schools and VEIs in its region (Yasdin, 2015).

The apprenticeship system should be incorporated into the formal system of education, by ensuring that schools encourage students to enroll in vocational educational institutes during summer holidays and break periods. This form of partnership between secondary schools and VEI will ensure more participation in vocational education, it will grant students more exposure to tools and technology in the TVE subject being taught in class, which the school might not have the resources to purchase.

It will also improve the societal perception toward vocational education, the more students are encouraged to enroll in VEIs to learn skills in that region, the more it erases the mentality that vocational education is meant only for dropouts or illiterates who do not have access to formal education.

Funding towards vocational education should be improved as TVET is a sector which is capital intensive, due to the need to purchase tools, machinery, and materials needed to develop products. These funds should be given to VEIs through the local government. These can be in the form of grants, low-interest loans, funding program based on student enrollment in VEIs program and others. State governments can set up programs to fund vocational education by working with local government authorities to drive these programs.

CONCLUSIONS

For Nigeria to reduce its dependence on foreign skilled workers in developing its economy and promote industrialization, it needs to look inward and ensure that policies towards TVET are realistic, decentralized and reflect its indigenous approach towards skill development via its apprenticeship system. Collaboration between schools, industries, and VEIs is essential in ensuring the practicality of content taught in TVE subjects, increasing enrollment in vocational education, and in providing the growth of a self-reliant and entrepreneurial mindset within its youth population. Damba E. K. (2024) underscores the critical role of vocational education in equipping individuals with practical skills to reduce unemployment rates in Nigeria.

The funding of TVET should be towards providing incentives to VEIs, schools and industries in encouraging students to develop skills through local government authorities. This will be beneficial in ensuring the growth of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) in the local government.

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