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Sustaining Students' Interest in Prevocational Education: A Strategy for Fostering Enrolment into Technical Colleges in Nigeria

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Abstract

The future of Nigeria as a nation depends on her youths who are currently undergoing training in schools. They need all forms of assistance to increase and sustain their interest in prevocational education towards fostering enrolment into technical colleges. Despite the vital role Technical, vocational education and training programmes are observed to be playing all over the world in addressing youth unemployment, poverty and skill development, they still remain greatly detested by Nigerian parents and students as seen in the low enrolment into technical colleges. This may be as a result of the poor societal perception and attitude of the programmes as education for the low achievers, never-to-do-wells and those who cannot cope with the sciences and social sciences. This paper therefore, examined the causes of students' low enrolment in technical colleges and suggested how sustenance of students' interest in prevocational education in junior secondary schools can help to curtail this trend. It is recommended among others that: the government should re-address the issue of funding and providing enabling facilities to ease learning-by-doing in prevocational education towards fostering enrolment in technical colleges.

Keywords: Technical, Vocational Education and Training, Prevocational Education, Enrolment in Technical Colleges

Introduction

Education is the greatest force for bring about change. It involves a learning environment with teachers and students at the centre of the activity. The interaction between the teachers, students and curriculum content brings about learning which is a permanent change in behaviour gained through activity, observation and training. Achieving excellence in education comes from innovative teaching methodology and strategies as well as active involvement of students in the teaching and learning process. In the traditional method and strategies, teachers present course materials in the classroom where students listen, take notes, execute homework and complete their assignment. In many cases, teachers fail to transfer knowledge and skills to students effectively despite technical knowledge in the subject matter. This has often resulted to loss of

interest by students in prevocational subjects and consequently vocational subjects and consequently, resulted in low enrolment in technical colleges.

However, evidence has revealed that unstable leadership characterized by policy terminations and reformations have greatly affected the curriculum content in Nigeria as a result of changes in government administration. These changes are accompanied by different educational structures. For example, in Nigeria, within a period of 55 years three different structures of education have been practiced thus: the 6-5-4 system (six years of basic elementary education, five years in secondary and four years in tertiary); 6-3-3-4 system (six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary school, three years of senior secondary school and four years in tertiary); and now 9-3-4 structure) nine years of basic education, three years of senior secondary and four years of tertiary education) which currently incorporates junior secondary education with primary education. Although, it has not been established as to whether these structural changes or other factors such as teaching methods and strategies, instructional facilities among others are responsible for the enrolment in technical colleges. This paper attempts to examine the concept of Technical and Vocational Education, concept of prevocational education, students' enrolment in technical colleges, causes of low enrolment in technical colleges, the need to make pre-vocational education interesting in schools, likely strategies for sustaining students' interesting in prevocational education for enhancing enrolment into technical colleges and Technical and Vocational Education.

Concept of Technical, Vocational Education and Training

Technical and vocational education (TVE) has been recognized the world over for preparing its recipients for skillful performance on practical tasks and empowerment. It involves the acquisition of practical skills and competencies that can help people to function productively in industrial and commercial occupations (Wapmuk, 2011). TVE is the functional education that provides people with skills, knowledge and attitudes for effective employment in specific occupation. According to UNESCO (2005), TVE is a comprehensive term refereeing to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related science, the acquisition of knowledge, practical skills and attitudes relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. TVE is further understood as an integral part of general education; a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work; an aspect of lifelong learning and preparation for responsible citizenship; an instrument for promoting environmental sound and suitable development; and a method of alleviating poverty. The objectives of TVE as stated by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) in her national policy on education are to:

- i. Provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce particularly at sub-professional level;
- ii. Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development;
- iii. Produce people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man;
- iv. Give an introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies;

- v. Give training and impart the necessary skills leading to the production of craftsmen, technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant; and
- vi. Enable young men and women have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology.

From the above laudable objectives it can be asserted therefore that of TVE enables people to become active citizens who contribute positively to the well-being, economic growth and technological development of the society. The implication of this is that TVE gives attention to the material and human resources development. For the objectives of TVE to be achieved, it becomes necessary that prevocational education be properly taught and its interest sustained in students.

Concept of Prevocational Education in Nigeria

Prevocational education in Nigeria include the following subjects: practical agriculture, basic technology, business studies, home economics, local crafts, computer education, cultural and creative arts, and music are taught at the junior secondary school level of education. At this level of education, emphasis is placed on exploratory experiences within the general education context. Prevocational subjects are subjects in technology that seek to immerse students in technology through exploration. These subjects provides students with a process of orientation in production and consumption through experiences in planning, producing, testing, servicing and evaluating types of consumer and industrial goods (Uwameiye & Onyewadume, 1999). The exposure of students to prevocational subjects enables them to develop a wider understanding of industrial processes and helps them explore their individual interest and aptitudes. Students may develop desirable traits and attitudes, such as pride in productive work, and respect for authority through such exposure. The philosophy of pre-vocationalism presupposes that the products of the Junior Secondary School should be equipped with the capacity to be familiar with the world of work, career options and choices. FRN (2004) outlined the following as the objectives of prevocational education in Nigeria introduction of students into the world of technology and choice of vocation at the end of junior secondary school and later in life:

- i. Provide basic pre-vocational orientation for further training in technology;
- ii. Provide basic technological literacy for everyday living; and
- iii. Stimulate creativity and sustain interest.

The attainment of these objectives is capable of sustaining students' interest in vocational subjects and fostering enrolment into the Technical colleges and Technical and Vocational Education programmes at the tertiary education level.

Students Enrolment in Technical Colleges in Nigeria

According Dike (2007), Technical and Vocational Education is a planned programme of 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. It is integral part of national development strategies in many societies because of the impact on human resource development, productivity and economic growth. Technical colleges in Nigeria are faced with series of challenges which hinders its programmes. According to Ibeneme (2007), Nigeria does not seem to accord TVE the

attention it deserves despite its proven contributions in other nations. Corroborating this view, Aina (2006) asserted that since the introduction of TVE in Nigeria educational system some years ago, enrolment in its programmes has remained low. This development Aina stated has posed inherent danger to technological and national development. The transition rate at the end of the junior secondary school as prescribed by FRN (2004) in her national policy on education states that the: (i) senior secondary school 60%; (ii) technical colleges 20%; (iii) vocational training centres 10%; and apprenticeship scheme 10% (National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) (2011). However, at the current annual turnout rate of the junior secondary schools in Nigeria of about 4million, expected enrolments in technical colleges will be 800,000 (20%). Consequently, the total enrolment of students in Nigerian technical colleges in 2009/2010 academic session was 74,299 as against 6,625,943 for the secondary schools in Nigeria. This when compares unfavourably with the expected 800,000 which reveals clearly that technical colleges are only able to enroll barely about 9.3% of their target. To this end, Yakubu (2006) reported that the total enrolment figures into TVE programmes in Nigeria as at 2006 was less than three percent (3%). He added that this figure, in comparison with countries seeking to have rapid socio-economic development is negligible as those countries target about 50% enrolment. Ozioma (2011) asserted that Nigerian schools pay little or no attention to TVE, teachers and students seem not to understand what it is all about and consequently develop some contempt and aversion for TVE programmes, teachers and students now makes TVE to be unhealthy. The state of enrolment of technical colleges in Nigeria needs attention. Despite successive governments' efforts directed as promoting TVE, the enrolment in technical colleges is still very poor when compared to enrolment in general education programmes.

Causes of Low Enrolment into Technical Colleges in Nigeria

The causes of low enrolment in Technical, vocational education and training in Nigeria include the following:

- Low self esteem, negative peer pressure and apathy towards Technical and Vocational Education are foes in real life that make students drop out of school, go to jail, become teen parents and even end up as arm robbers, kidnappers, militants and have often led to youths violence, teen pregnancy and school attrition.
- Poor societal perception. Most people are yet to understand the meaning, scope and content of technical, vocational education and training. They perceive it as education for the handicapped, never-do-well, or education for those who cannot cope with the sciences and social sciences.
- Elitism. According to Oviawe & Anavberokhai (2008), elitism is the belief of a group in the society that because of superior privileges, power and talent they tend to hold on to this belief through a system of education that will sustain this group's interest. Since the elites control the means of decision-making, Technical, vocational education and training is not accorded priority. Many of the occupations in TVET at the technical college level are perceived as ignoble and unbecoming, an average Nigerian parent will not want their children/wards to earn a living as a full time plumber, brick/blocklayer, carpenter, auto mechanic, electrician, home economist, or farmer. This is because they perceive that these occupations are for the poor and underprivileged. Most parents want their

children/wards to be medical doctors, accountants, lawyers, administrators and good politicians (Igbinedion & Ojeaga, 2012). Explaining the reason for the low enrollment of students into technical colleges, the Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Education Research and Development Council, NERDC, Professor Godswill Obioma, said they were given 'a stigma of inferiority, resulting in the ever-increasing registration of students into secondary schools.

- Poor societal attitude. The attitude of people towards technical, vocational education and training contributes to the challenges in its teaching. According to Idialu (2007), in schools, the teacher could be teaching people who are not interested in the subjects that are being taught. She added that section 6 sub-section 47 of the 2004 national policy on education recognizes the general public attitudes which regard technical, vocational education and training as somewhat inferior to other types of education.
- Poor entry level. Students who enroll into technical, vocational education and training programmes are considered to have low aptitude (Oviawe & Anavberokhai, 2008). Technical colleges find it difficult to attract good students because there is a strong misconception that they are reserved for the never-do-wells and other negative by-products. Those admitted because they cannot find other things to do barely pass through the programme because of poor aptitude and attitude.
- Poor recognition. There is low recognition associated with manual labour in Nigeria. Nigeria, unlike are counterparts in developed countries, the skilled craftsman does not enjoy the same recognition (Oviawe & Anavberokhai, 2008). According to Dike (2009), Nigerian leaders cannot give technical, vocational education and training the attention it deserves without changing their thinking models' that drive their decision. Changing their mind-set is a vital step towards reorganization the sector since without changing their thoughts, values and beliefs, it is impossible to change their negative impression about technical, vocational education and training.
- Lack of exposure of students to the world of work through work-visit. Public secondary schools and technical colleges in Nigeria do not accord work-visit the attention and consideration they require at the junior secondary education level. This neglect seem to mar the realization of the objectives of prevocational education towards enhancing students interest in Technical and Vocational Education thereby increasing enrolment in technical colleges.
- Insufficient time on the timetable for meaningful practical activities hence most teachers resort to the theoretical method of teaching technical and vocational subjects (Okorie, 2001). The instructional method used in teaching vocational and technical subjects is full of 'showing', 'telling' and 'observing' with a few cases of 'doing and practice' thus contradicting the recommended 'learning by doing' and guided discovery' instructional strategies (Oviawe et al., 2015). This mismatch is also against the principle of vocational education which stipulates that the training environment should be a replica of the work environment. These have resulted in reduction of students' interest.
- Teachers' commitment and attitudinal disposition could bring about students withdrawal of interest in technical, vocational education and training. Government policies concerning teachers' remuneration and good welfare conditions can go a long way to give

them job satisfaction. The disparity in the remuneration and condition of services of teachers in relation to other public servants in other sectors of the economy obtained in Nigeria does not motivate them to work with dedication. Where these conditions are not favourable, a number of negative attitudes to work will be exhibited. Some teachers may go into private business activities as a coping strategy to 'meet up' with their peers in the society as students are unduly neglected. Where this surfaces, students would see withdrawal as the only option for escape. It should be recalled that practical activities in vocational and technical education is to compliment what is taught in class for better understanding and skill acquisition, as it becomes unhealthy for student to cope if it is taught as story-telling. For enhanced enrolment into technical colleges, the youth population to whom the future of Nigerian technological development and sustainability is trusted need to be taught adequately by competent and committed teachers. In-depth analysis of students' low enrolment in technical colleges reveals a very gloomy picture of what the future holds for Nigeria hence, the need to sustain the interest of students' in prevocational education to enable them to remain focused and increasing enrolment in technical colleges.

- Researchers (Ozioma, 2011; Edigbonya et al., 2012) have identified the factors responsible for low enrolment of students in TVE to include: lack of career awareness, discrimination against its graduates, government lukewarm attitude towards TVE, lack of candidate's interest, inadequacies of facilities/infrastructural materials, and lack of career counselors.

The Need to make Prevocational Education interesting in Schools

The importance prevocational education in the development of an individual in order to contribute to the technological and economic development in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. Prevocational education is a type of functional education that lay a solid foundation for the training of future engineers, technologist, business men and women, accountants, and entrepreneurs. There is need for prevocational education to change according to time. Prevocational education have reached a point where the demand for change from outside our institutions are numerous and strong and it is critical that decisions are made on how to respond to these changes (Osinem, 2007). The challenges of prevocational education include poor practical skills among students, decreased funding, and lack of tools, equipment, consumable materials and workshops. Furthermore, there exists a dearth the quantity of vocational teachers to teach these subjects; dearth of prescribed and relevant textbooks and other teaching materials in many of the schools where prevocational education is being taught. To this end, Maguire (2000) opined for changes to make prevocational education interesting since technological development has continued to be a major concern of government. If prevocational education do not produce students who are interested in technical and vocational subjects, the nation stand the risk of producing graduates and school-leavers who will continue to roam the streets seeking for white-collar-jobs instead of those who ought to be self-employed and become employers of labour. The decline in enrolment, low quality of students at entry and higher level and high unemployment among school leavers at present depicts the place of TVE programmes in Nigeria. The dramatic increase in the unemployment rate in Nigeria calls for the need for students to

acquire knowledge, and saleable skills for private sector or self-employment which can be achieved through early exposure and interest in prevocational subjects. A critical assessment of prevocational education programmes reveals the need for an overhaul of the programme. The story-telling approach to its teaching and learning should urgently be replaced with the use of appropriate tools, equipments and machines for use in the school workshops. Perhaps, it may be made mandatory for schools to make use of workshops and laboratories in private sectors, industries, local government areas and State Ministries of works for its basic practices to make prevocational education interesting for students. These no doubt are capable of sustaining students' interest in prevocational education towards achieving increase in enrolment in technical colleges.

Strategies for Sustaining Students' Interest in Prevocational Education: a strategy for fostering Enrolment in Technical Colleges

Students in the junior secondary schools are within the explorative stage of vocational development as they narrow their choice and begin to have a more realistic appraisal of themselves and potential jobs (Ezeji, 2001). Therefore, they need to be assisted to realize themselves in line with their occupational fantasy for self satisfaction. Sustenance of students' interest in prevocational education is rested on the teacher who uses the classroom as a workshop and laboratory for experimentation with curriculum contents. With the skills, competencies and experiences, teachers can adopt any of the following approaches to sustain students' interest:

- *Use of rewards and reinforcers:* Reward is something given in return for the services or work done or for good behaviour (Offiong, Edet & Etim, 1996). It is something offered, given or obtained in return for work or services or good action or behaviour. Rewards or reinforcers in prevocational subjects, preceding desired responses by students on task or performance increases the likelihood that such responses will occur next time the eliciting stimulus is presented. This corroborates the law of frequency which states that when a stimulus and response occurs simultaneously, behaviour is strengthened and could be repeated at other times when stimulus is applied. Two kinds of reinforcement are identified: positive and negative (Ezeji, 2001). If a student makes response and a reinforcer accompanies it, the process is described as positive reinforcement; but where it becomes necessary for an aversive stimulus to be removed after a response has been made, it is known as negative reinforcement. Positive reinforcer includes love, money, or even a clap, while negative reinforcers which are unpleasant include scolding, punishment and disapproval. Recognition and application of rewards or reinforcement by teachers when good efforts are made by students would make such behaviours to be repeated hence their interest sustained.
- *Group task and target setting:* Students often prefer peer learning to that presented by the teacher. Teachers can split the class into sizeable groups and allocate task to them and setting objectives for them to accomplish. This will motivate students to put in their best to achieve the objectives. Formation of young peoples' clubs in all areas of TVET can be used to demonstrate group tasks and target setting by teachers. Students feel secured and protected to learn and work with their peers. The teacher should exhibit good

supervisory role so that students do not turn their group tasks into 'cheat chat' session. Formative and terminal evaluation might be useful tools that can control students' behaviour in the workshop and laboratories.

- *Competition*: Most students are competitive in task execution and teachers can take advantage of this natural urge. This means that students are made to work harder through competitive class and workshop activities to achieve objectives. In the classroom, the teacher in close consultation with the school authority can attach some prizes for the best student in practical work or overall best student in the school. This would encourage students who show less interest in their studies to brass up to work harder in order to stay ahead of others. Adoption of assignments after each lesson taught to students is also encouraged.
- *Provision of enabling facilities and equipment such as classrooms, laboratories, workshops, equipment and tools which can facilitate the teaching and understanding of prevocational subjects is another form of motivating students' and sustaining their interest.* It was mentioned in this paper that the absence of tools, equipment, facilities and workshop make students to withdraw from prevocational education. Hence, the need arises for these facilities, tools, equipment and workshop to be put in place. The government and the society owe the students the responsibility of providing an adequate environment necessary to promote learning of prevocational education in the curriculum. Prevocational education teachers and their students should maintain material supplied to them to ensure their longevity.
- *Knowledge of progress: the knowledge of students progress through results whether positive or negative in prevocational subjects by teachers is capable of motivating or inspiring such students to work harder.* Through this strategy, students who failed in an examination are encouraged to improve in subsequent examination and work towards success in their academic pursuits. Similarly, students who performed well will be encouraged to do better. Teachers should adopt knowledge of students' progress through regular exposure to their performance tests, assignments and terminal examinations through purposeful evaluation procedures. In like manner, observation of practical activities and use of rating scales can be used by teachers to evaluate in psycho-productive skills and the scores analyzed and interpreted as feedback to students to motivate them for necessary adjustment in their studies.
- *Use of improvised instructional materials.* Instruction materials or teaching aids are tools, equipment and materials used by teachers in teaching and learning process to make the less real thereby reducing abstract thinking on the part of the students. These aids include real objects, pictures, illustrations and use of computers, among others. Instructional materials make teaching and learning real and interesting especially where students are involved in the production and utilization of such aids. In like manner, creativity is aroused and developed by students. Prevocational education teachers have the requisite training in the use of instructional materials and should use them to make students remain focused in class with respect to their interest.
- *Exposure of students to field trips/work-visit.* Field trips/work-visits can also be organized to visit technological firms, experts and professionals for students to compliment what is

taught to them in class. According to Kelly (2011), work visits and field trips are a way to reinforce and expand on concepts taught in class. Opportunities provided through work-visit exposes students through exploration to the world of work. The students learn how the experts and professionals work, what they do and qualifications for entry into the field. This helps the students to form their opinion about the nature of work and other requirements towards intelligent career choices, and gives them to contribute to intelligent consumption of goods and services. Information obtained from work-visit provides awareness and enlightenment to students about their environment, which enables them make constructive and effective adjustments and motivates them to be serious with their studies (Uwameiye & Onyewadume, 1999). The choice of career becomes easy because it is based on their understanding and interest of the work situation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Students' interest should be sustained in prevocational subjects towards fostering enrolment in technical colleges because the technological advancement of Nigeria depends on technical, vocational education and training. Various issues have been identified to be responsible for students' low enrolment in technical colleges and suggested some practical ways through sustenance of students' interest in prevocational education in which these issues could be addressed if Technical and Vocational Education must maintain its relevance in the society. Towards sustaining students' interest in prevocational education, this paper recommends that:

1. The entire education system should be overhauled with better policy provisions made for funding and provision of tools, equipment, facilities and workshops in schools to promote 'learning-by-doing' as contained in the curriculum for prevocational education.
2. Evaluation of students' performance in prevocational subjects should not be left to the cognitive domain alone. Efforts should also be made to assess students on psycho-productive skills in practical prevocational education activities in schools.
3. Teachers' condition of service and remuneration should be improved so that they will be more motivated and committed to prevocational education delivery in junior secondary schools.
4. Viable young people's clubs in all areas of technical and vocational education should be established in schools to bring students and their activities together so that their interest can be stimulated and sustained.
5. The Government at all levels should create more awareness on the Television, Newspapers, organize conferences and seminars to educate the public of the significance and potential role technical and vocational education plays toward national economic development;
6. Adequate funds for planning, implementing and coordinating technical and vocational education programmes should be made available by the government. Successful Entrepreneurs and Philanthropists should be contacted to sponsor technical and vocational education programmes.
7. The Government and well established entrepreneurs should give scholarship to the candidates wishing to take a career in technical and vocational education as bait to attract

more candidates' interest and enrolment into technical colleges. Once this is done, it will take care of the society and candidates' interests for the programme and also entice the youth to enroll for the programme.

8. Successful Entrepreneurs in all areas of technical and vocational education should be invited to give career-talks and serve as role models to create awareness to students.

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