

Innovations in Vocational Education Curriculum Practices in the 21st Century Nigerian Secondary School System: The Rivers State Experience

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Abstract

This paper is on innovations in vocational education curriculum practices in the 21st century Nigerian Secondary school system: The Rivers State experience. It discussed innovations, concepts of vocational education and how it can hold the students interest. Furthermore, the paper encouraged that innovation can only be guaranteed if students do thing differently in Rivers State from the past by imbibing skills that would encourage sustainable habits for the life of work ahead. Moreso, the reasons for an innovative vocational education in Nigeria secondary schools by way of emphasis Rivers State was spelt out, the challenges facing vocational education in Rivers State which if not nibbed can affect an innovative system was enumerated, how to strengthen vocational education in secondary schools in Rivers State was not left out. In the conclusion, it was reiterated that since vocational education covers a wide area of employment gap, that it should be given the priority that it deserves in Nigeria and by implication Rivers State. The recommendations are that public-private partnerships is the way forward for vocational education, Nigerians should be re-orientated for them to change their negative perception of vocational education and students of vocational education be giving to learning, strive to grow and be focused, training and retraining programmes be organized for teachers, curriculum designers should carry the native people in the process of curriculum construction and that government should do all things possible that once there is an innovated curriculum, it is implemented to the latter.

Keywords: *Innovation, vocational education, curriculum, secondary school*

Introduction

Innovation is the presentation of new things, ideas, concepts or a thought, an ideology on how a process or something is carried out. Rogers (2003) had defined innovation as ideas, practices or objects that are perceived as new by an individual or others who wants to adopt it. While Jeremiah & Alamina (2017), see it as a deliberate novel and specific departure from old practices that would have been perceived better way of doing something. This means that when there is a new approach, that is intentional and strategically aimed at improving an archaic practice on something or otherwise, it can be described as an innovation especially because this new, intentional and strategically targeted practice is a way that is more effective and efficient than the old way of doing that thing, then an innovation could be claimed to have come in place.

Innovations in vocational education curriculum can simply be described as an embellishment in the way of practice of vocational education emanating from the curriculum. Vocational as a term is described by UNESCO in Okorie (2001), as an education made-up to train skilled workers for industry, agriculture, commerce e.t.c. and mainly domiciled in the senior secondary

level of education. It added further that this type of education include, in its curriculum general studies, and practical training for the development of skills needed for a particular pre-occupational practice in a way that is closed to its theoretical goal. Wenrich and Wenrich also in Okorie (2001), opine that this type of education is vocational or technical training or retraining which is given in institutions of learning or gatherings that are given to organized supervision and control that are carried out such that participants would be gainfully employed upon graduation. This suggests that vocational education is a type of education that would provide employment opportunity to its participant who would have been equipped in all, the knowledge, skills, attitudes and aptitude to supply a societal need and have his/her own need met in the process too. This kind of education seems to properly suite the need, yearnings and aspiration of a 21st century Nigeria.

The 21st century Nigeria is that where graduates are roaming the streets without jobs they could call theirs. There is mass unemployment and poverty is the other of the day in our nation. These problems of the 21st century Nigeria can be mitigated or possibly curbed if appropriate and adequate innovative vocational education curriculum that would inculcate saleable skills into the youths and all others that are willing to be engaged but unemployed, for them not only become usefully engaged based on knowledge, skills and attitudes but for them to also create employment for others in their class (Njoku, 2012). Innovations in vocational education curriculum practices in the 21st century Nigeria is necessary because we live in a time where we are all threatened by youth unemployment, insecurity, high poverty levels, food insecurity, social insecurity, and economic insecurity (Obioma, Agbide & Ikeoji 2018). In fact the latest statistical record has it that Nigerian is the number one nation with the highest number of poor people in the world (NBS, 2018), a situation that has left most enlightened Nigerian in a state of hue and cry.

This situation again is an indication and a smell of danger that is closer than the government think, since Nigeria's over dependence on a mono-economy of oil and neglect of other sectors that could have added value to its GDP is a minus on our ever increasing population (Agbidi, 2015). The concern is especially for the young secondary school learners that leave school in their droves yearly, some of whom may never see the four walls of a higher institution of learning. Perhaps it is for this reason the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) is designed with as many as fifteen (15) vocational elective subjects that the students could choose from. But (NERDC, 2013), has increase the number of vocational subjects to even as many as 34 subjects, the same reason that could be presumed this new innovation on the national policy on education and of course the latest curriculum contents of vocational subjects are aimed to also emphasize what led to the original conception of the intent for vocational education. Nonetheless, even with these number of subjects in place (FRN, 2017), unequivocally stated that the structure of the Nigerian economy which was hoped to be improved by the introduction of different vocational subjects has still not changed from being an import dependent, consumer ridden and an non-diversified economic adventure. This is the reason why it becomes imperative that innovation in vocational education curriculum must be brought in to the vocational education practices to lure students to become interested in vocational subjects and possibly choose and stick to one of them that would benefit such an individual and the society after he/she leaves school. Hence, the reason to investigate innovations in vocational education curriculum practices in the 21st Century Nigeria Secondary School System.

The Concept of Vocational Education Curriculum

Vocational education is a specialized education put together to equip learners for the world of work life or to upgrade employed workers to a new status and standard of work (Okorie, 2011).

This by implication is that one would be adjudged to have gotten vocational education if he/she is able to actively participate in a vocational activity improved curriculum involving what the society needs or desires to be able to ensure maximum living for her members, this perhaps is the reason Eneyoh, Okon & Ekeng (2012), see vocational education as an education that is specific in its preparation of those who get involved in it for gainful employment that would guarantee their future. Okoro in Eneyoh, Okon & Ekeng (2012), also see it as an education that gives spectacular programmes that is received at the secondary and post-secondary school levels. Vocational education curriculum in this sense means all the learning that would equip learners so that they become useful members of the society so that lives are better than that of previous generation particularly because such a curriculum is now innovated, therefore, has new knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are improved, hence would be more impactful. This again, implies that this type of education does not have to give a degree to its receiver for them to become qualified to practice their occupational trade and for it to be relevant to the needs of the society. The view of experts on this type of education is that it consists of six (6) particular areas which include trade and industry, education, business and office education, agricultural education, home economics, distributive education and health occupation education. Based on these areas listed, there is an indication that the trainees of this type of education would require a lot of reassurances and the trainers need to be able to give students the best quality that would make them fit for the world of work after school from an innovated curriculum that is well equipped and readily set for the learners to benefit. This shows that for this type of education to be operational, it must have a curriculum concept that bears some rare characteristics like continuous learning, constant growth and focus (Amadioha & Akor, 2018). These rare characteristic are considered as treated below:

Learning

This is to say that documentation of experiences, lessons learned, information and records available, and the intelligence acquired in support of the students selling activities must be up to date and regularly reviewed. The action point to note is that the plan of the students must be to ensure that what has been learnt is made to work for him or her.

Focus

This type of education would require total focus in order for the trainee or even vocational education practitioners who are already in business and practice keep upgrading their skills and this can only be achieved should they continue to be those who are willing and ready to persevere in achieving skills that will make beneficial and suitable impact in such a way that would not be easily replaced, hence, they must be people who employ vision, setting of priorities, ensuring of targeted direction, aim, and they possess the gut to conclusively pursue a goal from the beginning to the end.

Growth

Growth deals with making sure that opportunities that are yet to be utilized be put into use for better productivity. This is achievable if the students expand his or her competency, area of responsibility, obtaining new equipment, increasing their customer based on competence and taking over new market territories. These things can only be found in an innovated vocational education. This kind of improved vocational education would solve problems and lead to youth empowerment, consumer education, formation of vocational education, manpower development, encourages introduction to professionalism e.t.c. (Chukwuka, 2018). The emphasis here is that, vocational education content should be important but more importantly is an innovated vocational education. Since it equips the students with skills that would enable the students to be completely useful to himself/herself, and the society. According to Nwafor

(2009), such skills include problem solving skills, communication skills, thinking skills, personal skills etc., these same kinds of skills were earlier mentioned by Okorie (2001) as environment habits, process habits, thinking habits, specific habits but are now expanded with the various degree of details on the functionality of them as much more suitably captured in the former representation since it is a reformed, improved/innovation structure of the old.

Specific Needs for Innovations in Vocational Education Curriculum in Nigeria

Vocational education curriculum for Senior Secondary School in Nigeria needs to be innovated to fill these needs: social reasons, economic reasons, apprentice reasons, crime reduction reason, investment reasons, and increased earning power for the practitioners. The specific needs for innovations in vocational education curriculum in Nigeria are discussed as follows:

Social Reasons

In Nigeria, people are in secondary school particularly with the mindset that education would give them the privilege to be full members of the society. This indeed makes people able to partake in societal activities and transactions since they would have been given trainings in skills and abilities that guarantee that each of them is ready to be a worker. So for the vocational education students, school allows them the opportunities not only for what education offers but more which may include citizenship, learning, leadership, industry etc. All these would have been a far cry if our education particularly vocational education will not allow students the chance to be developed to function in full capacity. The innovated vocational education curriculum relates itself with all the other subject areas in other for it to produce a whole human, by giving the students every right and responsibilities that every other subjects bequeaths to its student that they enjoy even from the family to the nation at large (Okorie, 2001).

Economic Reasons

Vocational education curriculum resource helps us preserve and enhance our natural resources potential. It helps prevent waste of human capacities. So an innovated vocational education curriculum would ensure Nigeria as a nation with a great population the chance to further tap her underdeveloped skills and vocational opportunities. Proper labour engagement as an innovated approach to employment would help Nigeria maximize her wealth of human resources which would solve the problems of underemployment and possible unemployment (Etuk & Umoh, 2003).

Apprentice Reasons

Vocational education curriculum when innovated would augment the need of apprenticeship. An innovated vocational education curriculum would make sure that the unskilled industrial worker in Nigeria becomes much more qualitative through vocational education and trainings (Amos, 2018).

Crime Reduction Reasons

An innovated vocational education in Nigeria would further reduce crime in our country. Currently, armed robbery, cybercrime fraud, car theft, prostitution, human trafficking, drug dealings, kidnapping e.t.c are on the increase. A more improved qualitatively presented vocational education system will discourage the young ones from getting involved in vices that would cut short their lives (Kanno, 2012).

Investment Opportunities

An innovated vocation education curriculum would empower her recipients with the needed technical, financial literacy and skills to engage in self-employment and in entrepreneurship that can lead to self-empowerment (Enu & Omoogun, 2012).

Challenges of Vocational Education Curriculum in Rivers State Schools

There are too many challenges facing vocational education in secondary schools in Rivers State, these are:

1. Poor formulation and implementation policies on vocational education.
2. Insufficient basic instructional facilities.
3. Inadequate funding.
4. Poor maintenance culture.
5. Inadequate availability of manpower.
6. Poor orientation/perception of the society about vocational education.
7. High cost of starter pack to graduates of vocational education.
8. Poor appearance outlook of some practitioners of vocational education.
9. Laziness.
10. Poor assessment of vocational education by stakeholders.

Ways forward of Tackling the Challenges of Vocational Education Curriculum in Rivers State Secondary Schools

1. Adequate policy formulation and implementation mechanism is what is required to pursue an innovated vocational education mandate in Nigeria secondary schools and the government must gain momentum for the political will to actualize every policy initiated such that implementation processes would not be in doubt in whatever manner that would cause any problems whatsoever but done/carry out in a hitch free manner (Okorie, 2001).
2. Vocational education curriculum in reflecting the latest technological advancement in the world must also have all the necessary equipment that would aid free flow of training ensuring that the needs to be met by vocational education is not a struggle for eventual graduates of the type of education (Eneyoh, Okoh & Ekeng, 2012).
3. Insufficient financing is a practical challenge inhabiting the total implementation of vocational education in Nigeria secondary schools. Hence, the stakeholders in vocational education should do well to increase her subvention to the sector. This they can also actualize by empowering the system once and for all by making funds available to acquire all that is needed for training and whatever is produced is sold and the funds returned as revolving funds in the system.
4. The poor maintenance culture that exists in most of the institutions of learning in the country must change. Often tools used by instructors and facilitators as well as students are found lying just anywhere under the scorch of the sun or even beaten by rain, thereby leaving them damaged as they cannot again be put into use. So people who are put in-charge of these facilities must be made to account for them at stipulated time within the training periods, thereby encouraging integrity and accountability.

These and many more issues confronting vocational education in Nigeria must be combated headlong if we hope to get the best of it and put Nigeria on the path to advancement and possibly sustain developmental strides for a long time to come.

Prospects of Vocational Education Curriculum in Secondary School in Rivers State

There are so many reasons why vocational education as a mode of study in Nigerian Secondary education is justifiable and should be encourage, however, three of them stand out currently:

Philosophically, Economically and Sociologically (Okorie, 2001). They are therefore hereunder stated:

- a. Vocational education encourages equality as a curriculum alternative to university education. Vocational education would allow every Nigerian citizen that is in secondary school to enjoy equality with other members of the society based on the contribution capacity to the common wealth of the nation.
- b. It bridges the gap between liberal and utilitarian education. Empowerment is the reason people go to school, so vocational education would close every gap of deficiency in the trainee that would have made it impossible for that person to be able make progress considering all the pre-requisite intent of school.
- c. It encourages the opportunities to produce a commensurate number of vocational experts as general education elites. As long as liberal education is able to produce more elites same way, vocational can produce as many persons as possible that can compete with all person who received liberal education in that none is inferior to the other.
- d. It contributes more to the agricultural and industrial development of our nation for further advancement of the country. The agricultural and industrial sectors where there is production and manufacturing or processing and packaging are usually boosted by the effort of vocational education unlike liberal education where manipulative skills are lacking. So vocational education graduates are able to work with their hands and produce what they will eat without having to depend on anybody for employment.
- e. It provides the nation with middle level manpower. Liberal education unlike vocational education usually produce graduates that claim senior positions in every corporate organization, all that cannot get involved with the actual production as done by middle level manpower from vocational education who put their hands to work in pursuit of the fulfillment of the mandate of national goals.
- f. Graduates of vocational education with their wage earning capacity are able to contribute meaningfully to the economic advancement of the nation. Graduates of vocational education based on the fact that they have handiwork are able to generate income by themselves, for themselves and usually increase the internally generated revenue of the society where they live, therefore, are rather assets than liability to a nation.

How to Strengthen an Innovated Vocational Education Curriculum in Rivers State Secondary Schools

Innovation in vocational education practices in secondary schools in Nigeria can be better encouraged, through:

1. **Public – Private Partnership:** Public-private partnership is an essential mechanism for overcoming constraints in the education sector world over. So this approach should be employed in strengthening an innovated vocational education so that there would be opportunity for feedback and every difficulty experience has a complain desk where it will stop and be attended to appropriately and swiftly too. This would guarantee perfect management activities.
2. State government should develop her own strategies on how to improve the outlook and not continue to wait on the federal government all the time for policies and their implantation, and also help to change the perception of her citizens towards vocational education by possibly decentralizing the administration of that educational sector to be managed more holistically by those who have been trained in the science and art of vocational educational to ensure for effectiveness putting measures in place that would check any excesses whatsoever.

3. Taking a few aspects of the vocational education and leaving others behind in order to encourage specialization in the sector and also to ensure that adequate funding get to the sector is guaranteed would be a proper thing to do. This would make it possible that experts of vocational education from such a system would be the best since they will get all the attention needed for them to succeed.
4. Incorporation of internship programme for secondary school students who are involved in vocational education and their teachers must ensure to supervise them at a time like that so that they do not play-away the time. Besides, there should be a recorded booklet to record what they learn daily as they go to their places of assignment.
5. The school and stakeholders can partner to reward the best performing students with start-up packs or tool kits that would facilitate their vocational practice endeavor once upon graduation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper has discussed the processes of innovation of vocational education curriculum in secondary schools in Nigeria, the areas covered by vocational education is wide enough to employ a good number of young people and reduce societal ills currently plaguing the nation. It is encouraged that the way forward be given rapt attention so that every little effort made can be for good in the long run through the same instrumentality of an innovated curriculum.

Recommendations

The following are the suggestions given to support this study:

1. Policy makers and implementation should work together in bringing in public-private partnership to ensure effectiveness in vocational education.
2. There should be re-orientation of the public on vocational education for them not to continue to view it as a second fiddle kind of education.
3. Every student of vocational education should be encouraged to be focus, strive for more learning and pursue growth and development while in training.
4. The designers of the vocational education curriculum should consult widely with the native people to be able to come up with an innovated curriculum that would raise a new generation of secondary school leavers that are going to contribute greatly to the growth and development of the Nigerian nation.
5. The final implementers (teachers) of the innovated curriculum should be given to adequate, proper and functional trainings regularly to enable them up their game in the implementation process.
6. There should be an introduction of industrial training scheme develop specifically to match the education of vocational students before they are finally let off the hook from secondary school.
7. All attempt for the secondary school curriculum innovation should be backed up with all the political will for implementation to the latter by the government that would support the innovation from the onset.

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