

The Global Commons of TVET – The Case of South Africa

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Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is the form of education that comprises training in skills necessary for gainful employment as well as acquisition of basic educational foundation aimed at developing individuals with the right attitude to work and the competency necessary to compete favourably in a global society. Vocational and technical education in national development and productivity highlights its problems in South Africa, which among others include poor implementation of the TVET programmes, thus negatively impacting national growth and development.

The introduction of TVET in national development is an exploitation and utilization of a planned programme of courses and learning experiences that begin with exploration of career options, supporting basic academic and life skills, and enabling achievement of high academic standards, leadership qualities, preparation for industry, defining work, and advancing and continuing education. TVET is a programme with various branches that can transform South Africa into a producer/ manufacturer nation from its present status of a consumer/ importer nation and its various courses are career-oriented and thus arm graduates with skills to work in their chosen trade or profession. However, the current South African national policy on education has to place great emphasis on technical and vocational education as an integral part of national development strategy.

National policy on education (2006) describes technical and vocational education as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the education process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technology and related science and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupation in various sectors of economic and social life. For a country to advance socially, economically and technologically, its citizens must be productive and creative; it must have a productive citizen majority who can be job-creators rather than job-seekers. Therefore, vocational and technical education has to include that type of education that prepares people who can apply relevant practical skills to make positive changes within their society and afford a self-dependent life. This form of education has been described severally as an education that provides self-employment, enhances productivity and self-reliance, and reduces over-dependence of school graduates on government jobs. Thus vocational and technical education gives individuals the skills to live, learn and work as productive citizens in a global society.

Set goals of technical and vocational education in South African development has to be defined in different forms, from physical development to mental development which includes social and economical well-being of an individual as well as that of a nation and the world at large. Development in human society is a complex, many-sided phenomenon which means different situations to different thinkers. It can mean development of infrastructural facilities such as roads, hospitals, airports, dams, schools, et cetera, as well as development of people in terms of education and healthcare, or even sport. It defines development in terms of education in the levels of poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment and income inequality. Perhaps at the individual level growth in knowledge, skills, attitude and enhancing ability to service are examples of

development. At the societal level, development is associated with modernization, material advancement, industrialization, scientific and industrial progress, new knowledge and the universal improvement in standard of living, decrease in lots of living and social security management towards social, tribal and gender equality, decrease in unemployment and availability of job opportunities. The primary purpose of technology education is useful employment for adults and youth who are preparing to enter occupations in agriculture, business, home-making, industrial and technical fields.

Technical and vocational education plays a vital role in national development, especially in the following ways:

1. Generation of employment/ creation of job opportunities: technical and vocational education helps to reduce the rate of school dropout or unemployment in the society, technical/ vocational education could be used to develop marketable skills in students/ youth so that they can become easily employable, making an individual to become an asset to themselves and to the nation, and also to prevent them from becoming a liability to the society.
2. Industrial development: technical and vocational education helps a nation to develop technologically and industrially by producing people who are competent and capable of developing and utilizing technologies for industrial and economic development. It is a tool that can be used to develop and sustain the manpower needs of any nation.
3. Entrepreneurship strategy: technical and vocational education offers the beneficiary the ability to be self-reliant, to be job creators and employers of labour.
4. Poverty alleviation: many who are fortunate to graduate in a regular school system and excel in various fields of learning fall back to the skills acquired in technical and vocational institutions in time of employment crisis. This has been proven right in recent time when workers of various categories were retrenched in both public and private sectors due to the deteriorating state of our economy. For instance, such workers who possessed skills other than that for which they were previously employed had something else to fall back on and better off financially than those who had no other skills.
5. Promotion of the South African economy: technical and vocational education promotes the national economy through foreign exchange earnings by exporting our products. The knowledge of technical and vocational education helps in the conversion of local raw materials. This reduces the importation of foreign goods which lessen import dependency and encourage exportation of our local products.
6. Promotion of South African culture and value: technical and vocational education helps to promote the South African culture and cause us to value what we have.
7. Effective technical and vocational education is expected to meet the aspiration of South African society, to shape its future and provide solutions to some of its social, political and economic challenges.

The development of technical and vocational education system has been faced with some constraints, which serve as hindrances to its development. The following are some of the constraints militating against effective technical and vocational education in South Africa:

- misconception of the definition and meaning of the programme.
- wrong societal perception of the technical and vocational education programme.
- weak government policy and poor implementation.
- inadequate funding of the programme.
- lack of basic facilities and workshops.
- inadequate qualified personnel, leaders and administrators.
- lack of power supply in existing workshops which limits the conduct of practical programmes, as we have a problem with load shedding
- problems related to inadequacy of curriculum.

- influence of politics on technical and vocational education programme.

Recognizing the fact that technical and vocational education is the bedrock of any national development, the problems of this form of education should be addressed and its value should be maximised towards productivity and sustainable development in South Africa. It calls for the rebranding and reposition of the technical and vocational education programme to optimally utilize the available human and material resources in order to effectively produce goods and services required for general development.