

**A Critique of the National Policy on Education with Reference to Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

*Due to the numerous technical skills and vocational knowledge that abound in the field of Vocational and Technical Education, it has been acknowledge by various governments in various countries as the true solution to the reduction of extreme poverty and unemployment. These opportunities however have not been fully utilized in Nigeria due to unfavourable policy issues. This paper gave a criticism of the National Policy on Education with reference to Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria. The paper gave a general overview of policy, policy issues, characteristics of good policy and also clarified concept of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria. The paper also identified the strength, weakness and opportunities of the National Policy on Education with Respect to Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria. Suggested policy to be included in the National Policy on Education on Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria was also proposed. Conclusion and recommendations were also made to enhance effective National Policy on Education with Respect to Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Skills, Curriculum, Policy, National Policy on Education, Vocational and Technical Education.

**Introduction**

A policy refers to a plan of action agreed or chosen by a political party, government, business or an organization which guides their action and decision. It can also refer to the principle that an individual believes in, that influences how he behaves. Singh (2014) defined a policy as a definite course or method of action selected by government, institution, group or individual from among alternatives and in the light of given conditions to guide and, usually, to determine present and future decisions. According to Kessara (2016), a policy is a principle or protocol to guide decisions to achieve rational outcomes.

In the field of education, policy is a plan of action used by the Ministry of Education to set out clear rules and expectations for the delivery of programs and services to the public (Olajide, (2015). Policies come from legislation or from decisions made by elected officials, such as

Ministers and School Trustees, or public servants and school administrators. Policies can be communicated through various instruments, including: policy documents, laws, contracts, partnerships, the funding formula, government direction such as the throne speech, and many others. It is worthy to note that, a good policy is a tool which makes administration easier, and allows people to get on with the organization's core business more efficiently and effectively. Also all policies must comply with existing laws.

### **Characteristics of Good Policy**

A relatively simple way to determine whether a policy is effective is to apply the following 17 criteria. The 17 characteristics of good policy can help us determine whether it is going to be effective prior to its implementation. The 17 characteristics can be used as an audit tool to identify any shortfalls in the documentation prior to its implementation.

Michael (2014) revealed that the 17 characteristics of good policy are :

1. **The policy purpose or outcomes should be clearly stated.:** Policy must have a clear purpose and outcome if it is to be of any value to the organisation. It is important that staff recognise the problem that is being addressed through the policy implementation. It is extremely difficult to implement policy in a situation where people do not perceive there is a need for the specific policy unit to be developed or implement.
2. **The assumptions should be explicit:** Part of the policy statement must clearly express why the policy has been written and what is hoped to be achieved by its implementation. Part of the consultative process prior to the implementation of policy needs to be a testing of the process and ideas as to why the policy needs to be implemented. One of the common problems within organisations is that people among level of the organisation believed policy next year it meant to resolve the specific problem may not necessarily exist across the entire organisation. The assumptions that have been made about why policy needs to be implemented must be tested within the organisational context.
3. **The policy should have a linkage to organizational direction:** Policy makers must ensure that policies linked to the overall direction and goals the organisation. The overall framework of the business will provide some strategic direction, and will be important in assessing the direction of the organisational policies. Policy writers must ensure that the policy supports existing policies and procedures within the organisation. One of the tests of good policy is that it supports the organisation in achieving its goals and objectives.

Often time policy through its implementation can in fact hinder staff in achieving the organisational goals. Policy should be seen as pillars supporting the structure of an organisation. Policy should be written in such a way that they clear obstacles to staff and enable them to better achieve their full potential.

4. **Due process should be observed:** The organisational rules and principles must be established and clearly understood as part of the policy development process. It is crucial that all components of the organisation have some input into the policy development. Policy implemented in one department may seem fair and reasonable until that policy has a deleterious effect impact on other parts of the organisation as a whole. As part of the organisational framework the structure needs to be both developed and implemented that will enable policy development to happen in a concise and engaging manner so that all aspects of the organisation have their input into the policy development and implementation.
5. **All Stakeholders should be included :** Stakeholders in other words those who are directly affected by the implementation of policy and the policy outcomes need to have some inclusive process developed whereby they can participate in the policy development. Part of the policy development process therefore is to clearly identify who all the stakeholders are. And appropriate consultative strategy needs to be implemented as part of the policy development process. One of the significant problems that can develop a stakeholders are invited to participate in policy development is the expectation from each stakeholder their specific outcomes or desires will be achieved by the policy implementation. Oftentimes it is difficult in fact almost impossible to achieve all the desired outcomes from each stakeholder group. One of the key components of policy development is to discuss with each of the stakeholder groups the policy outcomes that are going to be implemented. Where these outcomes clearly do not meet the stakeholders expectations it is imperative that the organisation identify these issues and resolve these conflicts as much as possible.
6. **Public interest should be given a high priority:** Public all government policy needs to have as its core public interest. In other words has the policy been written with the general outcome and expectation being that the public will be better off as result of a policy implementation. One of the core challenges for government as they implement

policy is to ensure that the policy impacts do not have a deleterious effects on members of the community.

7. **Organisational expectations should be met:** Policy writers must realise that they have two audiences they are dealing with first audience is a group of people that policy has a direct impact on. In other words the staff that are going to be directly impacted by the policy implementation. Staff may be required to implement new procedures as result of the new policy being implemented. Their work practices may alter to some extent. The second audience and in oftentimes more crucial audience other leaders within the organisation. Have the leaders expectations being addressed and realised in the policy outcome. It serves little purpose of the policy is tabled at a board meeting to find the majority of the board in fact do not support the policy intent or specific outcomes. Policy writers must have a clear understanding of the organisational expectations and what the policy intent and the outcome is as they develop the policy.
8. **The policy should be effective within the organization:** The intended policy is to achieve a specific outcome is outcome needs to be effective in terms of the impact that it has on the organisation. Part of the consultative process is undertaken appropriately will help identify areas where the policy may not be effective i within the organisation.
9. **The policy should be both efficient and cost effective :** Policy directives must ensure that organisational resources are being used in an appropriate manner. It achieves very little of the new policy is implemented in a cost impact on the organisation is significant.
10. **The policy should be measurable:** This refers to measurable indicators that will provide proof a specific policy is having a desired effect. This is especially useful for the evaluation stage of the policy cycle.
11. **There should be capacity for evaluation of the policy:** As indicated in the desired characteristic above, the ability to measure the effectiveness of any policy gives it capacity to be evaluated. Evaluation of policies helps an organization determine effectiveness and possible areas where change is needed, enabling that particular organization to work at its' most efficient level.
12. **It should be appropriately funded:** Not only must an organization ensure its policies, and policy development initiatives, are properly and appropriately funded, it is imperative

to identify and set aside the necessary funds for its implementation. Your organization should be budgeted for these initiatives; stay within budget.

13. **There should be Clear accountability:** It should be easily apparent in the policy which persons and departments are accountable for what actions, and within what time frame. Everyone, from the policy officers to the direct worker are accountable for some part of the policy, whether it be proper use of funds, proper protocols for developments, or the recommended implementations, must be held directly accountable.
14. **It should follow all appropriate laws:** Policies, whether within government organizations or business, must adhere to certain laws. If the policy officers are uncertain if the policy they propose are crossing any legal lines, then the organizations lawyers must be consulted. Not doing so and allowing improper policy to be adopted in to implementation could be very costly on a legal level.
15. **It should be enforceable:** A policy that cannot be enforced is not worth the time and effort put in to it, much less the paper it is written on. If the policy is practical then it should be enforceable. If not it may need to be revisited and amended.
16. **It should be historically informed:** If an organization is not paying attention to past experiences they often find themselves "reinventing the wheel". It is a waste of time and effort, and money. Using a good policy framework can help prevent repetition as the organization should be constantly reviewing and revising, as necessary, all policies, learning from the evaluations.
17. **The policy ideas should be tested:** Ideas can be tested through "field testing" or "dry runs". More practically however testing can be accomplished by looking back with a historical view, as mentioned previously. Consultations with staff and others who understand and have better "first hand" experience can also be useful when testing a proposed policy.

If policy implementation is to be effective in the policy outcomes to be achieved it is crucial that an audit of policy be undertaken prior to its implementation using the above 17 criteria as a guideline. The 17 characteristics of good policy also provide a strong foundation to enable policy to be reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis. It is critical that existing policy be reviewed and evaluated regularly to ensure that it is still achieving the policy outcomes, and organizational objectives that was originally intended to do so.

### **Brief Overview of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria**

The National Policy on Education is the official government document which specifies the plan of action agreed by the Nigerian government to guide the practices in the educational system across all levels of education in Nigeria. The National policy on Education is a formal document produced by the Federal Republic of Nigeria as a guide to all the levels of education in the country. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2014), the National Policy on Education (NPE) prescribes national guidelines and requirements for the effective administration, management and implementation of education at all tiers of government. National Policy on Education is a statement of intentions, expectations, goals and standards for quality education delivery in Nigeria.

The document which was first published in 1977 was a direct result of the National Curriculum Conference held from 8<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> September 1969. National Policy on Education document has undergone some reviews in 1981, 1998 and 2004 and 2013. The document undergoes reviews and reprints and has 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> editions. As the time of compiling this assignment, the latest edition of the National policy on education is the 6<sup>th</sup> edition published in 2013 and reprinted in 2014. Other relevant aspects of the nation's education are specified and their functions well stated. These include among others: adult education, non-formal education, and special education as well as vocational and technical education.

### **Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, the term Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) has undergo changes in nomenclature at different times ranging from Technical and Vocational Education (TVE), Industrial Technical Education, Industrial and Technology Education (ITE) as well as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) among others. The terms vocational education, and technical education are often used interchangeably to refer to the same thing, but both terms are not exactly the same. Atsumbe (2017) described vocational education as any form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare individuals for employment in recognized (chosen) occupations. The author stated that vocational education provides the skills, knowledge and attitude necessary for effective employment in specific occupations. Atsumbe (2017), further

described vocational education as all skill training in specific occupations requiring less than a bachelor's degree .

To distinguish vocational education from technical education, Atsumbe (2017) stated that technical education is a subset or special grade of vocational education offered at post-secondary vocational education programme which involves more mathematics and science. Vocational education is different from vocational training because vocational education occurs in formal school system while vocational training is a skill training given in the informal sector where the basic scientific knowledge involved in the skill is not emphasized. Vocational education occurs at the technical colleges. Examples of vocational training are found in the informal apprenticeship programmes like road side mechanics, carpentry, launders, fine arts among others.

Ogwo and Oranu (2006) defined the composite term Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) as an aspect of the general school curriculum concerned with acquisition of knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for securing and advancing in a chosen occupation. Such occupations include agricultural education, business educations, computer education, fine and applied arts education, home economics education, trades occupation, industrial technical education, and industrial technology education among others. The basic areas of specializations under industrial technology education usually include: automobile technology, building technology, electrical electronics technology, metal work technology and woodwork technology. It includes sub professional training and retraining offered at technical colleges and trade centres to prepare individuals for gainful employment and for progress in advanced technical or professional occupations.

The Nigerian formal Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) institutions include the universities, polytechnics, colleges of technology, monotechnic, colleges of education and technical colleges. The polytechnics, colleges of technology, monotechnic, and technical colleges are under the supervision of the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), while the informal system works mainly through apprenticeships. Polytechnics train graduates of senior secondary school to the standards of National Diploma (ND), Higher National Diploma (HND) and the Post Higher National Diploma (Post- HND).The university train technical teachers and graduates in engineering fields (NBTE, 2017). The colleges of education also train vocational teachers at middle manpower level.

The National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) is responsible for the examination and certification of the occupational trades offered by the technical colleges leading to the award of National Technical Certificate (NTC), Advance National Technical Certificate (ANTC), National Business Certificate (NBC) and Advance National Business Certificate (ANBC). Technical and vocational education focuses on skill acquisition and stands as the key to success, progress, technological and economic development and advancement of any country.

### **Policy Issues in Vocational and Technical Education**

According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004) in her 4<sup>th</sup> edition of National Policy on Education, Technical and Vocational Education is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. While in the 6<sup>th</sup> edition, of National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013 and 2014), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. TVET shall cover the following: Technical Colleges, Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs) and National Vocational Qualification Framework (NVQF).

Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) is further understood to be:

- (a) an integral part of general education ;
- (b) a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work;
- (c) an aspect of lifelong learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship;
- (d) an instrument for promoting environmentally sound sustainable development;
- (e) a method of alleviating poverty.

The National Policy on Education further stated that the goals of Vocational and Technical Education shall be to:-

- a. Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical level;



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- b. Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development ;
- c. Give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically.

In pursuance of the above goals:-

- a) The main features of the curricular activities for technical colleges shall be structured in foundation and trade modules.
- b) The curriculum for each trade shall consist of four components:-
  - (i) General education
  - (ii) Theory and related courses
  - (iii) Working practice
  - (iv) Industrial training and production work
  - (v) Small business management and entrepreneurial training.
- (c) For effective participation of students in practical work, the teacher-students ratio shall be kept at 1:20.
- (d) Trainees completing technical college programmes shall have three options:-
  - (i) Secure employment either at the end of the whole course or after completing one or more modules of employable skills;
  - (ii) Set up their own business and become self-employed and be able to employ others;
  - (iii) Pursue further education in advance craft/technical programme and in post-secondary (tertiary) technical institution such as Science and Technical colleges, polytechnics, college of technology, colleges of education, monotechnic and universities.

The National policy on education further stated among others that:

- (i) More effort shall be made to encourage women to embrace technical education.
- (ii) Recognizing that vocational and technical education is an integral part of technological development, a greater proportion of education expenditure shall continue to be devoted to vocational education at federal and state levels.
- (iii) Each state and local government, in cooperation with appropriate agencies, shall organize relevant apprenticeship scheme and also entrepreneurial training.
- (iv) Every technical college shall establish and operate a production unit for on-the-job training of students and for commercial activities to sustain college operation.

- (v) In recognition of the fundamental importance and cost-intensive nature of vocational and technical education, government shall provide adequate funds for vocational and technical education.
- (vi) Cooperation between the industries and institutions in training shall be encouraged. Industrial Training Fund (ITF) shall organize staff and students industrial attachment as appropriate and in collaboration with the proprietors and industries.

**Strength of the National Policy on Education with Respect to Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria**

Based on my research activities, the under listed are the major outline of the strength of the national policy on education with respect to vocational and technical education in Nigeria:

1. It is truly a Nigerian focused policy on Vocational and Technical Education.
2. It is intended to address the major problem of skill deficiency and unemployment brought by the colonial government educational constitution in Nigeria. Hence, it laid foundation for national integration.
3. The National Policy on Education sets laudable objectives for the Nigeria Vocational and Technical Education system.
4. It gives a comprehensive structure of the nation's Vocational and Technical Education from pre- technical, technical, advance craft/technical programme and in post-secondary (tertiary) technical institution such as Science and Technical colleges, polytechnics, college of technology, colleges of education, monotechnic and universities.
5. It introduces a new system of Vocational and Technical Education system, which aims at realizing a self reliant and self sufficient nation.
6. The content of Vocational and Technical Education in the National Policy on Education has a broad curriculum which aims at creating enough learning opportunity for all children, irrespective of gender, age, ability, class, interest, among others;
7. It makes Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria a full government enterprise and so gives the government a centralized control of Vocational and Technical Education in the country.
8. The issue of funding in education is clearly presented, with the government accepting the bulk of all the expenditure on education.

**Weakness of the National Policy on Education with Respect to Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria**

Based on my research activities, the under listed are the major outline of the weakness of the national policy on education with respect to vocational and technical education in Nigeria:

- i. Evaluation and revision plan put in place for Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria, is inconsistent and poor. It is critical that existing policy be reviewed and evaluated regularly to ensure that it is still achieving the policy outcomes, and organizational objectives that was originally intended to do so.
- ii. Monitoring and implementation practices are not active and lead to the use of unqualified TVET personnel to teach TVET courses.
- iii. The teacher-students ratio specified to be 1:20 specified for effective participation of students in practical work is difficult to adhere to in most Vocational and Technical Education institutions in Nigeria.
- iv. The policy is not appropriately funded in Nigeria. The problem of poor funding of the policy makes implementation ineffective. Not only must an organization ensure its policies, and policy development initiatives, are properly and appropriately funded, it is imperative to identify and set aside the necessary funds for its implementation.
- v. The trend of technological changes and industrial demands for new and emerging skills and work practice is not fully reflected in the Vocational and Technical Education policy. This makes it difficult for Vocational and Technical Education graduates to gain employment or set up their own trade business in their occupational area as specified by the policy upon graduation.
- vi. The policy is not adequately achieving its laudable objectives specified for Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria. It appears as if the policy planning and implementation process are not efficient and is not solving the planned national socio economic problems it was intended to take care of.
- vii. There is also a policy problem of organization and mismanagement of Vocational and Technical Education. The merger of the management of Vocational and Technical Education with that of general education and allowing the general educators as chief executives of the institutional set up is detrimental and counter-productive to the effective organization, supervision and administration of Vocational and Technical

- Education in Nigeria. This government policy issue also lead to the purchase of poor quality and insufficient tools, equipment and machines in the laboratory or workshop.
- viii. The Nigeria educational policy always made several governments to treat vocational and technical education like general education. The government had always been formulating policies on education generally and not on Vocational and Technical Education specifically. The educational policies were geared towards the development of the intellect rather than the acquisition of productive skills. The negative implication of this one-sided policy on Vocational and Technical Education is in the production of individuals to become gentlemen and ladies who are only fit for white collar-jobs.

### **Opportunities in the Policy on Vocational and Technical Education**

A critical observation of the policy with respect to Vocational and Technical Education show that the policy has several opportunities for trainees upon completion of any Vocational and Technical Education programme. This among others includes the following:

- i. In recognition of the fundamental importance and cost-intensive nature of vocational and technical education, government shall provide adequate funds for vocational and technical education.
- ii. Cooperation between the industries and institutions in training shall be encouraged. Industrial Training Fund (ITF) shall organize staff and students industrial attachment as appropriate and in collaboration with the proprietors and industries.
- iii. The policy on Vocational and Technical Education programme recognized the provision of trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical level.
- iv. Provision of the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.
- v. Give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically.
- vi. The main features of the curricular activities for technical colleges shall be structured in foundation and trade modules.

- vii. The policy specified that for effective participation of students in practical work, the teacher-students ratio shall be kept at 1:20. This has the opportunity of reducing overcrowding in classrooms.
- viii. The policy on Vocational and Technical Education specified that trainees completing technical college programmes shall have three options: secure employment either at the end of the whole course or after completing one or more modules of employable skills; set up their own business and become self-employed and be able to employ others; pursue further education in advance craft/technical programme and in post-secondary (tertiary) technical institution such as Science and Technical colleges, polytechnics, college of technology, colleges of education, monotechnic and universities. This specific goals are intended to give trainees a good opportunity for employment and productivity.

**Suggested Policy to be included in the National Policy on Education on Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria**

Detail research on the content of the National Policy on Education on Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria shows that there exist several lapses in the content which hinders effective implementation. I proposed the under listed suggested policy to be included in the National Policy on Education on Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria.

1. Introducing a component that will focus fully on fresh re-orientation of Nigerians about the concepts of Vocational and Technical Education and its relevance to skill acquisition, work, employment and self-reliance.
2. Including a complete component in the policy document for full revitalization and re-organisation of Vocational and Technical Education system in Nigeria.
3. Introducing a component that will enhance urgent review of Vocational and Technical Education curriculum at all levels of training.
4. Including a component in the policy that will make government and major stake holders to pursue collaboration with Industry and enterprise for the purpose facilities, funding and quality assurance.
5. Introducing a policy component that will enhance establishment of Vocational and Technical Education resource centres in all the six geopolitical areas of the Country for the purpose training unemployment youths.

6. Including a policy component that will ensure that all government agencies established to fight poverty and unemployment should be headed or administered by Vocational and Technical Education experts and collaborate with skill-based institutions and industries.
7. Introducing a policy component that will enable government to establish the Ministry of Vocational and Technical Education, that is purely saddled with matters of providing skills for the unemployed and fighting poverty.
8. Including a policy component that will enable secondary school education in Nigeria should be vocationalized such that every secondary school leaver is training in a particular vocational skill.
9. Introducing a component in the policy that allows the practice of dual and Technical Education system where knowledge acquisition is currently followed with skill acquisition to prepare trainees for the world of work.
10. Including a work-based learning system where trainees that are already employed or are practicing their trade can have opportunity to further their Vocational and Technical Education training for updating their knowledge and acquiring emerging skills for better performance on the job.

### **Conclusion**

Vocational and Technical Education is indeed relevant to training of youths for employment, self reliance and further education in advance craft/technical programme and in post-secondary (tertiary) technical institution such as Science and Technical colleges, polytechnics, college of technology, colleges of education, monotechnic and universities. If Vocational and Technical Education is to achieve its loadable purpose in Nigeria, like in other developed countries of the world, the proposed suggested content must be included in the policy on Vocational and Technical Education must be included to enhance achievement of the objectives of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

From the foregoing, the following recommendations emerged:

1. Declaration of national state of emergency on Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria to create a national consciousness on skills acquisition.
2. Creating of a National Commission for Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria.

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3. Redefining the Philosophy of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria to capture the needs of industries.
4. Strengthening the administration of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria in Nigeria to enhance implementation.
5. Enhancing adequate Funding of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria to support quality in provision of training facilities.
6. Introducing a functional Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria educational services
7. Structuring a functional continuing teacher education programme for Vocational and Technical Education personnel in Nigeria.
8. Establishing active collaborative partnership to allow industrial experts to participate in the training and retraining of Vocational and Technical Education trainees and teachers in Nigeria.

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**CITATION AND PUBLICATION DETAILS**

**Abutu, Francis;** Ekhalia, B. J.; Ojulokunrin, R. W. & Odey, S. A. (2023). A Critique of the National Policy on Education with Reference to Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria. In A. M. Hassan; H. R. Sa'I; A. S. Bappah, P. S. Williams & N. N. Afaor (Eds) *Funding Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for Sustainable Development in Nigeria*. Proceedings of the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference of Technology Education Practitioners Association of Nigeria (TEPAN), held at Main Hall, Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo, Oyo state. 16<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> October , 2023. 451 -460. Lagos: Technology Education Practitioners Association of Nigeria (TEPAN).

**Publisher:** Technology Education Practitioners Association of Nigeria (TEPAN).

**Date Issued:** 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2023.

**Series/Report No:** 36<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference of TEPAN, 2023. p 451 -460.

**Identifiers:** ISBN: 978-978-967-443-5.

**Sponsors:** The Authors.

**Publication Collection Category :** Conference Paper.

**Website:** [www.tepan.org](http://www.tepan.org) or [www.natt.org](http://www.natt.org)