

Vocational Education in Nigeria and Its Significant Role in National Development

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ABSTRACT

The history of vocational education in Nigeria dates back to pre - colonial era. People adopted it to meet their daily needs. It was practiced in families while training in it occurred under apprenticeship system. Missionary schools excluded it from the curriculum in favour of literary education. Early 1930's saw vocational education in two missionary schools: Hope Waddell Training Institution, Calabar and Nassarawa School. Post independent Nigeria witnessed the publication of the National Policy on Education which favoured the development of vocational education. Since then it has positively influenced individuals and national development. However, its growth has been hindered by implementation problems. For effective manpower development, vocational education requires megabucks, reliable power and favourable societal attitude. Vocational education with its characteristic comprehensiveness in nature and responsiveness to emerging technologies remains a veritable tool for training manpower needed for national development anywhere. As a workshop - based education, it is concerned with the methods of processing materials using tools and equipment, into products of economic value. It is also involved in providing services in home economics, health occupations and other service areas. In the light of the foregoing, vocational education holds the key to national development of any nation in the world.

Keywords: Vocational Education, Nigeria & National Development

INTRODUCTION

Human and material resource development is an essential ingredient for a nation's socio- economic developmental plans programs and policies. Vocational education actually brings about the efficiency and the development of human resource in the art and science of job creation, economic development and skill acquisition to power the socio-economic values of Nation towards its greater height. Vocational education as perceived by Olaitan (1991) in Agbongiasede (2007) is the kind of education or training that equips the learner with saleable or entrepreneurial skill. Subsequently it is any form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare individuals for employment in any chosen occupation. Osuala (1998) affirmed that vocational education also advocates the development of manipulative skills for employment and that they are geared towards production. By implication, vocational education provides the recipients with the opportunities to develop their psychomotor, cognitive and affective skills, so that they can take their rightful places in the society and assume responsibility beyond their immediate environments.

Subsequently, the National Policy on Education (2004) asserted that vocational education is a form of education that equips individuals with skills, abilities and competencies to equip themselves economically and contribute to the development of their society. The National Policy on Education (2004) also expressed the vision of vocational and technical education as follows;

- To enable our young men and women to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology
- To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.
- To provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to solve environment problem for the use and convenience of man.
- To 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.
- To give an introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies.
- To provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce particularly at sub-professional grades.

Similarly, international agencies such as International Labor Organization (ILO) and United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) used the combination of technical and vocational education in its definition.

They viewed vocational education as the lifelong study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupational employment in various sectors of economic and social life (UNESCO and ILO, 2002).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The origin of vocational education dates back to the beginning of human communities (Roberts, 1971). Vocational education existed in traditional forms and people had to work for their survival. It was practiced within family circles. Under indigenous system or traditional vocational education, the Nigerian child was taught various skills through weaving, sculpturing, blacksmithing, carving, farming, fishing, cattle rearing, hair plaiting, dress making, bead weaving, leatherwork, pottery, brick making, basket weaving, raffia works, mat weaving and others (Nduka, 1982 and Fafunwa, 1995). The foregoing were forms of vocational education in pre - colonial Nigeria.

During the colonial era in Nigeria, vocational education was not accorded a worthwhile recognition by the missionary school system. Education was literary as in most former British colonies. For almost a hundred years in Nigeria, educated people were those who read classics: Latin, Greek, Milton and Shakespeare. Most of Nigeria's early scholars were famous for their literary erudition or "much book learning" (Fafunwa, 1995). In the light of the foregoing, vocational education had a very unpopular beginning in Nigeria. As the "mother" of all forms of education, it was not given such an overwhelming official recognition as was accorded grammar school education (Okoro, 1993; Ibritam, 2001; Datol, Danwanzam and Associates, 2004). Many authors blamed this unfortunate situation on the influence of missionary education in Nigeria.

The missionary education system focused mainly on training catechists and clerks. There was no programme for vocational skills training in the formal education curriculum until 1909 when some form of vocational education programmes were opened in the country. The Nassarawa School, opened in 1909 in the North, had a technical wing attached to it: leatherwork, carpentry, smithing and weaving were taught. The Hope Waddell Training Institute founded by the end of last century (1895), also had a technical wing attached to it: tailoring, carpentry, among other crafts were taught to students.

These institutions were nevertheless pioneers in vocational education (Nduka, 1982). Other early attempts at encouraging vocational education in Nigeria include: Boys' Vocational School, Ididep, Ibiono, Akwa Ibom State in the forties, trained teachers in various types of crafts (erroneously called "Handwork"), making use of local raw materials; Blaize Memorial Industrial School in Abeokuta ran a vocational programme for the youth. The foregoing were trends in the evolution of vocational education between late 1800 and 1909 under the missionary era.

In 1925, Memorandum on education policy in British Tropical Africa was issued. The policy statement invited governments to take a more active part in the provision of technical education which required more costly equipment and properly qualified staff (Nduka, 1982). Sequel to the foregoing the government opened trade centres and technical institutions. Yaba Higher College was an instance of a technical education institution established in 1934 (Nduka, 1982; Okoro, 1993; Imarhiegebe, 2003).

Technical and scientific education was provided by the government, commercial and industrial organizations in Nigeria during the period under review. The memorandum also encouraged the government to create departments for training technicians required for national development. Public Works Department, the Post and Telegraph Department, the Department of Agriculture, the Nigerian Railways and other commercial and industrial ventures were among the government's contributions towards the development of vocational technical education in Nigeria.

Upon the official opening of the Yaba Higher College, engineering, medical, teacher training courses and agriculture were offered to the first set of students. The ten-year development plan established in 1946 recommended an expansion of technical education which led to the establishment of 14 craft centres in the North, 9 in the East, and 2 in Lagos. The education given at Yaba College was mainly vocational that led to the award of the college diploma. In 1946, the ten year development plan for the welfare of Nigerians was established. The plan recommended an expansion of technical education to meet the demands for technicians and craftsmen. By 1952 there were three technical institutions located at Yaba, Enugu and Kaduna and seven trade centres and eighteen handicraft centres dotted all over the country.

In 1953 the first Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology was opened in Zaria. After a while, similar colleges were opened in Enugu and Ibadan. These colleges offered courses in mechanical, electrical and civil engineering, telecommunication, and agriculture. However, the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology was short-lived. The publication of Ashby Commission Report in 1960 saw the opening of Universities in the North, East and West of the country. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the East offered the first organized Vocational - Technical Education (VTE) programme to be seen in West Africa.

The Commission report also recommended the introduction of technical streams in the secondary schools and three levels of technical education in the country namely:

1. Pre-vocational and Pre-technical levels of training for secondary schools
2. Craftsman training for technical colleges, trade centres and vocational schools
3. Technical training for Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology (Nduka, 1982, Okoro, 1993 and Fafunwa, 1995).

In 1977 the Federal Government of Nigeria issued the first National Policy on Education. This policy has favoured the development of vocational education in the country since its formulation. The current issue of this policy (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) seeks to achieve the five goals which emphasize technological development of Nigeria and subsequently provide solutions to the prevailing economic problems.

To empower vocational education in the pursuit of the above goals and monitor its efforts in achieving quality learning, the government has set up agents of quality assurance to do the job. These agents are National commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Universities Commission (NUC). Each agent has provided minimum standards for use by the training institutions.

In 2005 the National Council on Education (NCE) in response to government declaration of a nine-year basic education programme approved a new curriculum structure namely: lower basic education curriculum (primaries 1-3), middle basic education curriculum (primaries 4-6), and upper basic education curriculum (JSS 1-3) with subject listings. The Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC), was mandated to re-structure the curriculum with the following objectives in view: Develop interest in science and technology; Acquire basic knowledge and skills in science and technology; Apply their scientific and technological knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the society; Take advantage of the numerous career opportunities offered by science and technology; and become prepared for further studies in science technology.

Basic technology as pre-vocational education subject at the upper basic level is designed to accomplish the following goals: inculcation of technological literacy, that is basic understanding of and capability in technology; exposure of students to the world of work to match their talents and interests for wise vocational choice and inculcation of positive attitudes towards work as a source of human identity, livelihood and power (NERDC, 2007).

The above account indicates that vocational education is recognized as the key to technological development of Nigeria and sequel to its official recognition, vocational education has made some positive impacts on individuals and Nigeria as a nation.

CHALLENGES OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA TODAY

It is sad to note that vocational education in Nigeria has suffered from years of neglect, mismanagement and inadequacy of resources commensurate with the needs, population growth and demand of the Nigerian society. As a result, vocational education as a strategic priority for national growth and development has not been effective in providing the desired socio-economic empowerment of the people and the nation at large. Ekwue (1998) in Ikenga, Afolabi and Oru (2009) identified the following as the militating factors against the development of vocational education, these factors are;

- Poor societal attitude towards vocational education.
- Lack of qualified vocational teachers
- Inadequate funding
- Lack of equipment and workshop
- Government policy

Other problems militating against the development of vocational education are;

A. Inadequate Fund

Aniagbosa (1993) in Ukpore (2009) observed that despite government effort to fund education programs, especially vocational education program, there is still lack of fund in the implementation of the program. The inadequate funding of vocational education has become a hydra-headed monster that cannot be conquered by government quarterly subventions but with sufficient and regular funding of the programme. Ukpore (2009) asserted that in a study conducted by Morah (1995) on twenty four secondary schools the following were observed,

- a. While the remaining twenty two schools do not have a single typewriter and these schools were state government owned. These confirmed that the government is compounding the proper implementation of vocational education. Even at this technological era, computer(s) are rarely found in public secondary schools.
- b. While there are forty-three typewriters in one of the schools, the other school has only ten typewriters. These schools were state government owned.
- c. Only two schools of the twenty four sampled have typewriters.

B. Inadequate Research and Teaching Facilities/Workshops

Most public vocational education departments in Nigeria record a poor state of equipment, facilities and materials e.g. text books, journals, e-resources, etc that are very important for research and teaching/learning processes. These facilities where they exist at all, are either obsolete, grossly inadequate or in a state of disrepair (Ekwue, 2009). The lack of learning equipments and facilities is another challenge faced by the program and in some cases workshop equipments were imported on a large scale for introductory technology program in secondary schools. But many of this equipment were never installed while others rot away or vandalized.

C. Lack of Indigenous Textbooks

Ehiametalor (1990) in Ikenga, Oru and Afolabi (2009) Observed that in the developed world, most of the textbooks have accompanying workbooks and this have helped the teaching of vocational education subjects. Unfortunately, the students in Nigeria are handicapped since most of their books are imported and lacked the necessary local experiences and simulations. Some of the textbooks published locally lacked adequate modern and sufficient analysis on the subject matters.

D. Dearth of Qualified Teachers/Instructors

The acute shortage of suitably trained and qualified teachers or instructors is a major hinderance of vocational education. Most of the reports of recent accreditation exercises conducted by NCCE, NBTE and NUE will attest to the fact that our classrooms are without qualified lecturers. Ekwue (2009) observed that there are little number of teachers to teach Business studies in Delta State, while academic staff recruitment and retention is an emerging problem of vocational education in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Ekwue (1996) and Nwokolo (1997) in Ikenga, Oru & Afolabi (2009) observed that 80% of graduates from School of Business Education Federal College of Education (Tech) Asaba, are employed in the non-teaching sectors while those recruited to each are trained and later are lost to other sectors, because teaching is yet a low prestigious occupation in Nigeria if compared with other professions.

E. Poor Perception of the Society towards Vocational Education

The societal perception on vocational education is disheartening; The Nigerian society views this noble programme as a programme for the physically challenged, indigent members of the society, school dropouts and for no-do-well students. This has lead to the decline in enrollment in technical and vocational colleges, polytechnic and vocational education departments in tertiary institutions. And because of this, the Nigerian society lacks skilled manpower in the productive sector of the Nation.

F. Nonchalant Attitude of Policy Makers to Genuine Criticisms and Suggestions

Research shows that there is general apathy amongst educational administrators, teachers and students towards vocational education. There is total lack of job commitment and lack of incentives for job effectiveness. As a result, the utilizations of instructional materials and instructional methods by vocational education teachers have been based on physical appeal to teach without any consideration on the needs of the learner or demand of the subject matter (Ekong, 1994 In Ukpore, 2009). This implies the use of traditional teaching method without considering the use of information communication technology gargets or equipments in the teaching learning of the subject matter.

Prospects of Vocational Education in Nigeria

While vocational education in Nigeria has faced offensive developmental problems, there are prospects awaiting fulfillment by the efforts of all stakeholders. The prospects of vocational education in Nigeria lie in the aggressive control or eradication of already identified constraints. Proper handling of constraints is apt to make Nigeria witness and enjoy the prospects of vocational education. (Usoro, Usoro, Akpan & Otu, 2010). These prospects include the potentials of vocational education to:

1. Create jobs for the jobless through entrepreneurial skills training
2. Reduce or eliminate complete dependence on paid job system
3. Train manpower in over one thousand vocational careers represented in Nigeria's departments of human endeavours.
4. Increase female participation in activities associated with national development
5. Equip more individuals with balanced work behavior needed for employment success in the world of work
6. Bring basic technology (technical, agricultural, business, home economics etc.) to the door steps of most Nigerian families
7. Train individuals who will compete favourably with their counterparts from purely academic disciplines
8. Utilize locally available materials in training the youth in skills acquisition for the world of work

9. Create opportunities for meeting the occupational demands of special needs individuals in the interest of national development. More functional and state- of- the- art skills have been introduced into various levels of vocational education curriculum which make product of the programme better off than their counterparts from grammar schools.

Time is fast approaching when most Nigerians would want to send their wards to vocational schools, because vocational education holds the key to Nigeria's developmental problems.

CONCLUSION

Vocational education has an illustrious part, which is the training and the development of individuals to be successful in any career of their choice and should be accorded its rightful place in national development. In view of the fact that vocational education is essentially for nation building, vocational education should concentrate on providing practical activities which will lead to self discovery, self-reliance and socio-economic development of Nigeria.

It is high time that government and the Nigerian society are enlightened on the benefits of vocational education which will actualize the goals of vision 20:2020 of the present government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the content of this paper the following were recommended:

1. Vocational education programme should be emphasized in the National planning policies of all tiers of government.
2. There should be massive information dissemination on the goals and objectives of vocational education on individual and national growth and development.
3. Research and modern teaching methods should be emphasized equally in all the Tertiary institutions to ensure qualitative output (graduate).
4. Government should be sincere in the funding; implementation and monitoring of vocational education.
5. Corporate organizations also have a major role to play in funding, provision of materials, tools, textbooks, and workshops/laboratories, implements/equipment or research materials.
6. Vocational educators should be actively involved in policy formulation, implementation, administration and monitoring of vocational issues in Nigeria.

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