

IMPORTANCE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN ECONOMIC REHABILITATION AND RELIANCE

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Abstract

The paper examines the status of vocational education in relation to the impotence of vocational education in economic emancipation in Nigeria. In the process, an analysis of vocational education was undertaken with a view to highlighting the importance and relevance of vocational education in a technologically changing country as Nigeria. The paper advocates **that** the improvement of vocational education is a sine-qua-non in the production and development of skilled manpower needed for the development and growth **of any** nation. It states that though vocational education suffered some neglect in the scheme of things in the Nigerian education system in the past, time has come for it to be given the necessary attention it deserves. **finally** it made a number of recommendations geared toward the improvement of vocational education in Nigeria.

Introduction

Vocational education was neglected in the Nigerian education system in the past. It was the National Policy on Education (1998) that brought' Vocation education to the limelight for the first time. There are several reasons for such neglect, but prominent amongst them are (I) The inability of Christian missionary educators to propagate vocational education at the same level and with the same vigour they propagated literary education (2) Vocational education is very expensive in terms of manpower and equipment: (3) The Missionaries were more interested in the Nigerian natives' abilities to read the Bible and write simple letters than in their abilities to use screw-drivers to turn screw-hails, type a mail-able letter, establish a self-sustaining business outlet or acquire a functional/skill knowledge; and (4) The colonial policy-makers themselves were technologically handicapped as they were products of literary education who had studied Classics at the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and London.

The Nigerian successors who saw the colonial administrators as models maintained the status quo and so played down on vocational education. When private individuals such as Nope Wadel Institute in Calabar and United Africa Company (UAC) saw the need for the services of products of vocational manpower they established schools. However, the products of such schools were not regarded on the same footing as products from the government grammar schools. Admission seekers to schools therefore, preferred the highly respected and recognized government "grammar schools. Only those with deficiencies in the admission requirements enrolled in privately owned schools and vocational institutes. Vocational students were seen as inferiors and relegated to the background in the scheme of things. Because the situation was so for very many years it became a stigma on such category of students and that stigma still haunts products of vocational education in our society today. Even when a product of Vocational education climbs to the position of policy decision making, the first thing he does is to renounce vocational discipline and put on the borrowed robe of literary education for that is what it takes to be like the master - the colonial administrator.. Can this trend ever change? Can the dichotomy between the literary education and Vocational education products be removed in Nigeria?

New discoveries and inventions have reduced the vast size of the world in which we live to a small village. The communication satellite and the internet have made it possible for the simultaneous dissemination of information and news to different parts of the world within a very short space of time in the same way, the wide use of computers in almost all aspects of human activities in the developed countries of the world is spreading like wild fire across all the facets of-"Nigeria's economy. The growing application of modern techniques and office automation in business, industry, engineering, etc. which are products of vocational education will no doubt, soon affect our students, teachers and even our private lives in this country. In all these, Nigeria seems ready to be an onlooker or at best a greedy consumer who has no part to play in the development of technologies which have mounted the global podium from where it dictates the economic times for the whole world. Nigeria found herself in this condition because she failed to give vocational

education the recognition and attention **it** deserves.

It is on this ground that this paper will attempt to;

- 1 Define vocational education as it relates to the above title;
- 2 Highlight some of the problems facing vocational education
- 3 Identify some vocational education prospects in "Nigeria
- 4 Suggest possible ways to improve vocational education in Nigeria.

What is Vocational Education?

The term Vocational Education in broad sense refers to functional skill based education. Although vocational education may not qualify as a pure science education, it is the basis for technology. High technology being at the pyramidal apex derives its footing or base from vocational education.

Vocational education includes preparation for employment in any occupation for which specialized education or training is required and for which there is a societal need. Vocational education is concerned with the whole hierarchy of occupation from those requiring relatively short periods of specialized preparation, such as typists and accounts clerks to occupations requiring two or more years of specialized education, such as nurses, secretaries and salesmen or women. Vocational education is that type of education designed for the training or preparation of individuals who are interested in specific occupations. It is an education for gainful employment. It is also an education which makes a person to be more employed in one occupation than in the other.

Vocational Education is married with technical education in the 1998 edition of the National Policy on Education in which vocational education is defined as that form of education which is obtainable at the technical colleges, it added that this is the equivalent to the senior secondary education designed to prepare individuals to acquire practical skills. Basic and scientific knowledge and attitude required as craftsman and technicians at sub-professional level. However technical education in the 1981 edition of the National Policy on Education was defined as that aspect of education, which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge.

Problems Facing Vocational Education

As was mentioned above, vocational education started late in Nigeria. Vocational education products were not recognized in the past and the few ones from Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and private institutions were discriminated against in the industries and seen as inferior to the degree holders from the universities. However, it is gratifying to note that these forms of education were given adequate recognition in the National Policy on Education, first published in 1977, revised 1981 and revised again in 1998. The policy has now provided a basis for its recognition and effective implementation. Otherwise, the situation on the ground does not only discourage the growth of vocational education, it frustrates those already in it. Because of the neglect of these forms of education for a very long time and the inferiority complex associated with it in the past, admission seekers take to it as a matter of last resort. Confirming this statement, Olagunju (1994) reiterated that his entrance into secretarial profession was not intentional, but rather as a result of frustration and inability to pursue the desired university degree programme due to lack of credit in mathematics in West African School Certificate Examination.

The major source of the problems in vocational education is the sharp dichotomy and discrimination between Polytechnic graduates of these forms of education and graduates of the University. Although the government has given them equal starting scale, a Polytechnic graduate is never regarded on the same footing as his counterpart from the university. Another serious problem in the present structure of our formal system of vocational education is the non-articulation of the vocational programmes in the technical colleges and colleges of education with the technician programmes in the Polytechnics. Similarly, the non-articulation of the Polytechnic higher technologists (HND) programmes with the corresponding degree programmes of the university constitutes a nagging problem and a dissatisfier to the Polytechnic graduate. These apparent discontinuities in the structure of our educational system have resulted in the Vocational course in the Technical Colleges, Colleges of Education and the higher technologists course in the Polytechnics (HND) being seen as dead-end programmes.

The dilemma of technical college students who, with some justification, feel frustrated at the thought that their counterparts in the senior secondary school to whom they are not necessarily scholastically inferior have the opportunity to progress without any encumbrances directly from the secondary school to either the Polytechnic or the university is a real one. It can, if not resolved, deter good students who ought to be encouraged to voluntarily choose the part of vocational education, from coming into the system. This fact has

actually denied vocational education the enrolment of bright students. The same dilemma confronts the Polytechnic students at the Higher National Diploma level, who bitterly refer to the inequality in the denial to them of the same opportunity to proceed to post-graduate qualifications which their university counterparts enjoy. These Polytechnic graduates see the present situation as curtailing their personal aspiration for further academic attainment beyond the HND level. Therefore, only a meaningful articulation of their programmes with the programmes of the next level up will resolve the problem.

It must be noted that there seems to be rays of hope now with the establishment of National Business and Technical Examination Board, (NABTEB) charged with the responsibility of conducting examinations for vocational/technical students so that they may also be in a position to seek admissions directly to the Polytechnics or Universities. Otherwise, (he situation now compels everyone to go through the university if he must be recognized as having schooled. All other forms of educational institutions in Nigeria have now become a preparatory ground for university education.

Economic Prospects of Vocational Education

Nature has lavishly endowed this nation (Nigeria) with human and material resources. Although this is the case, there are scarcities of manpower needed to exploit and harness these natural resources for the well being of the citizenry. "Nigerian citizens are suffering in the midst of plenty and the few educated ones are leaving for greener pastures elsewhere. All these are happening because there is a scarcity of trained or skilled manpower, which, of course, are the outputs of vocational education.

For any meaningful development, one needs trained or specialized manpower who must be matched with other forms of capital - land and money. This is what has happened in the developed countries where functional and vocational education are given the pride of place. Today, the differences between developed and underdeveloped countries, between poor and rich countries and between "first and third worlds" are in the functionality of vocational education and technology. Technology has taken over the world and every country is trying hard to be in the team of players of this technology game rather than be a spectator.

Aware of this global trend and to avoid being cut-off from the technological development, Nigeria identified the development of vocational manpower as the surest means of achieving the desired national development. The awareness is manifested by the Federal Government efforts in the areas of increased budgetary allocation to education, emphasis on vocational technical education, expansion of facilities in the colleges of education and universities, the establishment of colleges of education (technical) and the National Board for Technical Education, (NBTE) in 1977 (Ofoh, 1998:25). These indices indicate that there is a growing awareness for the need of utilitarian education. They also show that there is a change in Nigerian education philosophy from literarily based education to vocational based education.

Economic Reliance on Vocational Education

Without an overall plan for technological emancipation, the country will be subjected to perpetual economic and technological slavery by the developed world. The days of intuitive improvising in the use of manpower have gone, and institutions, organizations, governments and people now map out strategies for the acquisition, utilization, improvement and retention of the right quality and quantity of their needed manpower. This is based on the awareness of the fact that no matter how laudable and appropriate a programme, project or policy may be, if the number and caliber of the manpower needed to carry out the programme are not planned for and made available such programme, or whatever, will be as good as nothing. It is on this premise, that the Nigerian education planners, policy formulators and decision makers who had previously belittled vocational education will and have actually come cap-in-hand, soliciting the services of vocational education in the economic and technological emancipation of the country. No right thinking country wishing to be a member of the technologically developed world can afford to play down on vocational education in this millennium of technological race.

Many years ago the economy of this nation depended on agro-based products: Palm oil, cocoa, rubber and kernel. Although these resources were abandoned following the emergence of crude oil, the economy of this nation has remained dependent on vocational education, because both agricultural activities and crude oil explorations are all products of vocational education.

Importance of Vocational Education

The report of Comparative Technical Education Seminar Abroad of 1966 recommended the following objectives for a National Plan of Vocational Technical Education in the Republic of Nigeria: (1) to provide technological literacy to all pupils, that is, to prepare every pupil for life in technological age; (2) to help

develop the right attitude towards work and the habits of mind conducive to the proper use of technology; (3) to provide adequate technological orientation and preparation for advanced professional education and training in technology; (4) to equip school leavers with skills to earn a living; (5) to stimulate and encourage creativity; and, (6) to provide the awareness that technology does not only solve problems but creates some as well.

Abubakar (1972) stated that science and technology are everywhere around us. According to him, the most recognisable are the material ones; hospitals, industrial firms, transportation, communication system, electricity, and a hundred and one other things. Technology has not only influenced man, but has actually overtaken and completely enveloped man on earth. Technological inventions are so numerous that they cannot be counted, Though this is the case, inventions are going on daily and old inventions are undergoing modifications or total re-orientations, inventions are products of technology and technology is a product of scientific discovery. Science, technology and inventions are all products of vocational education.

It is unfortunate to observe that Nigeria is still day-dreaming in the illusionary hope of "*technological transfer*" whereas what is in actual practice is "*Brain Drain*". The developed world can never transfer their technology to any other nation no matter what price may be paid. Instead, the developed countries using their high technologies and wealth sieve out all the good brains and potential genius from the developing countries like Nigeria to prevent them from becoming developed so that they can continue enjoying their monopoly of technological development.

Therefore, if Nigeria is to break the yoke of underdevelopment and venture into technological growth, then she must remove her eyes from the hands of the developed nations, look inward and improve her quality of vocational education. Vocational education should not be left at just formulation-of high-sounding and appealing policies in pages of papers. Rather, ensuring that infrastructure, educational facilities, vocational equipment and vocational manpower are produced and made available to propel the wheel of vocational progress. A policy should be formulated to attract attention to vocational education so as to give it the recognition it deserves.

Suggestions For Improving Vocational Education

The chequered history of vocational and technical education in Nigeria has painted a very sharp but wrong picture of a strong dichotomy between literary education and vocational education, seeing literary education as education for the elites and vocational technical education as education for the less privileged ones in the society.

This is a bad stigma, which has long been haunting vocational education. This wrong notion has denied this type of education the enrolment of bright and promising students from rich and enlightened homes. Another misfortune against vocation and technical education is the apparent dead-end nature of this type of education. As had been mentioned, there is no link to the next tip level of education to the university education. As things are today in Nigeria, anyone who wants to climb to the zenith of education must pass through a university, and so, all other levels of educational establishments in "Nigeria, starting from secondary through colleges of education to the Polytechnics are all nursery educational establishments preparing candidates for university education and graduation. Lastly, there is a strong discrimination between university products and products of vocational and technical education institutions.

Recommendations

- To improve vocational education and ameliorate the situation, this paper suggests the following:
- (1) The curricula of vocational education should be enriched to include what is left out of the university curricula. The admission requirements should be made equivalent of university admission requirements.
 - (2) Graduates of vocational education should be allowed to climb to the apex of educational attainment by allowing Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology to award degrees.
 - (3) The Federal Government of Nigeria should come up with a definite policy to equate vocational education graduates with their counterparts from the universities. The government as the biggest employer of these two categories of graduates should employ them with equal conditions of service and recognition.
 - (4) There should be a reasonable and attractive incentive for research and innovations to induce those with vocational know how to put in their best and venture into the hidden knowledge of

- invention.
- (5) Vocational education graduates should be well paid both in the government offices and industries.
 - (6) Emphasis should be shifted from mere paper qualifications to skills, abilities and productivities.
 - (7) Inventions and technological breakthroughs should be highly rewarded and well publicized to stimulate hard work and research.

Summary

This paper has attempted to give over-view of what is meant by vocational education. In the ensuing discussions some of the problems confronting vocational education were highlighted as well as some of the solutions and strategies for ameliorating the situation. It attempted drawing attention to the importance and economic prospects of vocational education if given the appropriate stimulations. In doing so, it states that vocational education is the basis for technological development and that any nation which aspires to grow must first develop her vocational education.

Conclusion

Based on the views expressed in this paper, it is a drawn conclusion that Nigeria suffers from technological backwardness because she neglected vocational education. The paper concludes that vocational education is the pivot on which technological development revolves. It advises that the strength of any country is measured by the level of its technological advancement. The developed countries of the world are regarded as developed because of the quality of their technological manpower, which culminated in their output of high technological products. Therefore, any country like Nigeria that aims at achieving economic freedom and technological growth must first develop and recognize vocational education.

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