

REAPPRAISING VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS AT THE SECONDARY AND VOCATIONAL LEVEL FOR THE PROMOTION OF SELF-RELIANCE

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Abstract

This paper x-rays some vocational subjects that are supposed to be well funded and implemented as veritable ways of providing practical skills to secondary and vocational training institutions for the promotion of self-reliance and the way out. The vocational subjects should be reappraised through purposeful funding and orientation towards skills acquisition by secondary school students in order to eliminate from their consciousness unemployment problems and other time wasters. In this regard, Nigerian government has been singing with self-reliance as a veritable economic freedom for individuals to gain self-employment potentialities but has ended up in her lackadaisical attitudes to actualizing it as a result of so many problematic issues that have crept into the full implementation of vocational subjects in their respective training schools. The issues are: the absence of good electricity supply for optimum teaching and learning of skills to take place in laboratories, and the problems of time-wasters in the forms of poor funding, wide-scale corruption, and so on. As a way out, some recommendations have been proffered to ameliorate the above mentioned problems like: purposeful leadership in all its ramifications including others; that could make self-reliance a functional reality for the common good of the Nigerian people.

What is actually at stake in Nigeria today to attain the status of a self-reliant nation is the functional empowerment of her population with saleable skills in vocational and technical education programmes. It is the development of human and material resources that must be the central thrust of education, and they are known

to equip any individual with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and competence necessary to expand and increase the productive base of industrials as well as small-scale businesses so as to meet both domestic and foreign demands of goods and services as currently dictated by globalization. Any nation that cannot use its manpower potentials to exploit its natural resources for gainful employment of its citizens would continue to wallow in under-development. This is the reason why programmes of vocational and technical education are a major dispensation system of skills acquisition for self-reliance and a nation's quest to achieve economic self-efficiency. Hence, many advanced nations of the world do not play with the programmes because they are a major arrester of unemployment and poverty problems of their respective societies and communities. The programmes are known to focus on the development of all aspects of the human personality, that is, the synthesis of the physical body, brain and mind to perform various duties that are expected to uplift an individual and a nation. This may account for why the programmes remain the occupations in the Nigerian economy which require beneficiaries to undergo series of systematic training to ensure factory floor work competencies that can benefit the general good.

In this regard, students at the secondary school level should be "caught young" early enough so that they could imbibe the culture of self-employment before they grow into adulthood. This means that all vocational subjects studied at this level should be well marched with functional equipment, tools, gadgets, instruments or machines, so that such

students could cultivate the culture of competence and good attitude to work right from their youthful age. Invariably, they will not be strange to self-employment initiatives in the environment they dwell. This is the reason why the junior secondary education level should be rejuvenated through purposeful funding so as to boast the functionality of the various laboratories and serve the practical side of theoretical work studied.

In Nigeria today, it is very easy to talk of any blue-print or policy for empowering junior secondary school students with practical studies of the various pre-vocational subjects when the issue of poor leadership qualities of politicians are not addressed. Leadership is still a major problem as political leaders and other sensitive heads of parastatals think of what they can benefit from the economy rather than engaging in service-oriented and welfare programmes that have direct impart on the masses, thereby, wasting time in her road to advanced living, otherwise, all positive efforts will not receive the desired end. It is when policies are made and fully implemented that would guarantee advanced living for the blessing and joy of citizens. Invariably, taking a clue from this situation, unemployment has come to stay almost permanently in many developing countries in Africa, especially Nigeria. It has become endemic as a single factor plaguing many tertiary institutions' graduates, and a holistic action must be done by all tiers of Nigerian government to arrest the ugly situation.

Unemployment, therefore, is a situation of socio-economic problem in which people, whether trained or untrained, are willing and able to work but are not employed. Although most nations in the world experience unemployment but it varies in magnitude from place to place. Any person affected is always seeking for job or forced to be self-employed. Self-reliance means

using one's acquired skills to achieve self-employment in order to guarantee economic survival. Unemployment and self-reliance are likened to two sides of a coin. They are the two economic consequences which affect many countries and are parallel in nature. Self-reliance is positive while unemployment is negative to the achievement of national development and economic efficiency. In modern Nigeria, unemployment is soaring every year by leaps and bounds while self-reliance achievement is negligible. These may be due to unpalatable ethics and unfavourable good governance which many leaders and political office holders have adopted. Such as: failure to solve the epileptic electricity power supply, large-scale corruption, lackadaisical attitude to work, and sustainable accountability to the populace, among others.

Vocational and Technical Subjects at the Secondary/Vocational School Level

The National Policy on Education (2004) explained that the secondary school is divided into: junior secondary and senior secondary, and the duration is three years each.

(a) Junior Secondary School: At the junior secondary school level, students are exposed to pre-vocational courses as outlined in the National Policy on Education (2004). It is both pre-vocational and academic that would make students to acquire further knowledge and skills.

Industrial Technology: This subject deals with the following areas: metal work, woodwork, auto mechanics, and electrical and electronics. Also, this subject is core at the junior secondary school level and is grouped under Group A subjects offered. In Group B, as outlined by the National Policy on Education (2004), pre-vocational courses are as follows:

(i) Agriculture: Crop, poultry, fishery, livestock production, etc.

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- (ii) Business Studies: Bookkeeping, commerce, office practice, shorthand and typewriting.
 - (iii) Home Economics: Home management, food and nutrition, textiles and clothing.
 - (iv) Local Craft: Weaving, dyeing, blacksmithing, bronze casting, etc.
 - (v) Computer Education: Knowing the various parts of the computer, software, hardware, etc.
- (a) acquiring technical skills;
 - (b) exposing students to career awareness by exploring usable options in the world of work.
 - (c) exposing youths to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology.

(b) Senior Secondary School: The vocational and technical subjects are as follows:

Technical Areas: These are: Applied Electricity, Auto-Mechanics, Building, Construction, Electronics, Metal Work, Technical Drawing and Woodwork.

Vocational Areas: They are as follows:

- (i) *Agriculture:* Crop, fishery, poultry, livestock production, etc.
- (ii) *Business Studies:* Bookkeeping and Accounting, Commerce, Economics, Shorthand, and Typewriting.
- (iii) *Home Economics:* Food and Nutrition, Home Management, Clothing and Textiles.
- (iv) *Fine Art:* Fine Art.

(c) Vocational Education and Technical Colleges: The National Policy on Education (2004) explained that vocational education “is that form of education which is obtainable at the technical colleges. This is equivalent to the senior secondary education but designed to prepare individuals to acquire practical skills, basic and scientific knowledge and attitude required as craftsmen and technicians at sub-professional level.”

Graduates of junior secondary school (Year three) who have benefited from pre-vocational education are admitted into the technical colleges or vocational centres for the purpose of:

- In technical colleges, technical courses are offered in modules. Students can avail themselves of the opportunity by offering one or more modules so that they can acquire employable skills by securing employment at the end of training. Other options available to graduates are:
- (a) set up their own businesses and become self-employed and be able to employ others;
 - (b) pursue further education in advanced craft or technical programme and in post-Secondary (tertiary), technical institutions such as polytechnics or colleges of education (technical), and universities (NPE, 2004).

Students in Technical Colleges take the various examinations organized by the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB). The certificates obtainable are:

- (a) Modular Trades Certificate (MTC);
- (b) National Technical Certificate (NTC);
- (c) National Business Certificate (NBC);
- (d) Advanced National Technical Certificate (ANTC); and,
- (e) Advanced National Business Certificate (ANBC).

Beneficiaries of the above certificates can also be admitted into Tertiary institutions, be it colleges of education, polytechnics or universities. The scope of courses offered in technical colleges is very wide as follows:

- (a) **Automobile and Foundry Trades:** They are:

1. Agricultural implements and equipment mechanics' work.
 2. Automobile Engineering Practice: Auto-body Repair and Spray and Painting.
 3. Automobile Engineering Practice: Auto-Electrical Work.
 4. Automobile Engineering Practice: Auto-body Mechanics' Work.
 5. Automobile Engineering Practice: Auto-body Building.
 6. Auto Engineering Practice: Part-Merchandizing
 7. Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration: Mechanics' Work.
 8. Mechanical Engineering Craft Practice
 9. Welding and Fabrication Engineering Craft Practice
 10. Foundry Craft Practice
 11. Instrument Mechanic's Work
- (b) **Electrical Engineering Trades:**
1. Electrical Installation and Maintenance Work
 2. Radio, Television and Electrical Work.
- (c) **Building Trades:**
1. Block-laying, Bricklaying and Concrete Work
 2. Painting and Decorating
 3. Plumbing and Pipe-fitting
- (d) **Wood Trades:**
1. Machine Woodworking
 2. Carpentry and Joinery
 3. Furniture Making
 4. Upholstery
- (d) **Hospitality:**
1. Catering and Practice
- (e) **Textile Trade:**
1. Garment Making (Ladies/Men Dresses)
 2. Textile Trades
 3. Dyeing and Bleaching
- (f) **Printing Trades:** They are:
1. Printing Craft Practice
- (g) **Beauty Culture Trades:**
1. Cosmetology
- (h) **Business Trades:**
1. Stenography
 2. Typewriting
 3. Data Processing
 4. Store Keeping
 5. Book-keeping
- (i) **Leather Goods Manufacture** including Shoe Making and Repair.

Issues/Problems Militating Against Funding of Vocational and Technical Education Programmes in Nigeria

Issue of Poor Leadership Disposition from the Wrong End in Nigeria: Tying it to Positions instead of Welfare and Service-Oriented Activities

Leadership disposition in Nigeria today is very low because leaders and citizens tie it to positions. There is a dire need of youths, adults and leaders in all areas of human labour to have vision, initiative, accountability, truth, honesty, trust, and above all, to be selfless. They ought to be leaders who should stand against all forms of corruption (including money laundering), ignorance, disease and disorderliness. Many leaders in the sub-Saharan African countries have the belief that being a leader is likened to a position where all the materials and money allocated or budgeted to it become their own and for their family lineage alone. In short, many Nigerians tie leadership to positions instead of responsible welfare and service-oriented activities or programmes that cater for the common good. Leadership that is tied to any position, in all circumstances, makes the people and resources entrusted in its care to suffer and degenerate into their tiny and lowest ebbs. Where there are persistent problems of basic infrastructural and educational facilities, it means that leaders and other sectorial heads tie

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leadership to positions. Hopper (2009) opined that any community, society, or country that ties leadership to any position easily lends itself to organized falsehood and wide-scale corruption. The author went further to say that leaders do not have the sense of serving the common good, no love of truth, no sense of justice and possess poor spirit of cooperation to achieve a progressive workforce in an economy. Yole (2010) added that the problems of leadership are also the big problems of followership dispositions because many citizens see it as “a-wait-for-your turn” and “re-cycling” profiles for the privileged few men and women in an environment. Hence, such followers see no waywardness, foolishness and greediness as vices in the leaders they are worshipping. President John F. Kennedy of USA (1963) told American people that they should not think of what America as a nation could do for them, rather, to think of what they should do for America as a nation. This is a typical example of tying leadership to responsible welfare and service-oriented activities and programmes for the benefit of the general good through the sacrifice of greediness, waywardness and foolishness.

Issue of Poor Time Management in Laboratories of Tertiary Institutions

This concerns poor time management in the laboratory practical sessions of institutions. In most cases, the equipment, tools or instruments are grossly inadequate while some of them are obsolete due to neglect and poor funding in the following areas:

- (i) Computer, Typing and Shorthand skills,
- (ii) Agricultural Farm projects/field trips,
- (iii) Home Economics Practical sections,
- (iv) Fine and Applied Arts studios and galleries,
- (v) Technical Drawing Rooms,
- (vi) Metal technology,

- (i) Automobile/Mechanical workshops,
- (ii) Wood Work technology,
- (viii) Electrical/Electronic Design/Research Workshops,
- (ix) Medical/para-medical activities, etc.

Yole (2010) also explained that what is common in such laboratories is that the equipment are grossly inadequate to go round students, thereby, encouraging laboratory instructors and technicians to share students into several groups. Such practice leads to poor mastery of the practical training. In some other cases, some equipment have become obsolete due to technological advancement. Modern tools are not easily purchased to reflect current global technological trends.

Issue of Poor Maintenance Culture of Engines, Machines, Equipment and Spare-parts through Trial and Error Methods

Clark (1999) explained that Nigeria is very guilty of this aspect in her economy. She has not been able to use the various practical testing instruments for the selection and employment of new brands of engineers and other professionals who can show full enthusiasm and skills in the performance of their duties especially in the management of sensitive organizations and parastatals of the economy as it is done in the advanced world.. What is common is that mediocre ones are employed to run sensitive areas of the economy. Such personnel have not been able to match their practical skills with theories learnt about the various working environment of engines, machines and spare-parts. In most cases, they cannot ‘sift’ the facts of maintenance culture from the related working manuals; hence, many of them use residual knowledge to work through trial and error methods which cannot actually get into the root problems. Hopper (2009) explained that the

following sensitive areas of the Nigerian economy have become very problematic and cannot serve the efficiency of the common good of citizens, thereby, wasting time on the road to achieving advanced development:

- (i) electricity power supply (NEPA/PHCN),
- (ii) railway services (Nigeria Railway Corporation),
- (iii) water supply system (Water Boards),
- (iv) communication network/services e.g. NITEL.
- (v) seaport maintenance, e.g.: Nigeria Ports Authority,
- (vi) air-craft/airport maintenance, e.g., Nigeria Airways,
- (vii) highway/bridge maintenance, e.g., major express-dualized or trunk roads are poorly maintained throughout Nigeria,
- (viii) maintenance of government-owned and official vehicles and parks,
- (ix) turn around maintenance (TAM) of oil refineries, e.g., the four refineries in Nigeria are in a sorried-state due to poor maintenance culture.

The Way Out

It is not easy to implement any national programme in Nigeria like that of vocational and technical education. It cannot succeed without nurturing some values to live by at the background of it so as to pave a way out to implement vocational and technical education programmes especially when polytechnic and university graduates are not rated the same on the basis of “par excellence.”. They are as follows:

(a) *Selfless Service and Competence:* Selfless service is a quality exhibited by a leader by considering the general good of the people at heart and play down the dictates of his personality desires. While competence is achieved when there is a good combination of a person’s education, skills, attitudes, and personal

attributes in doing things. This is double-sided, that is, certification and personal attitudes, and both of them must merge to produce a good work. In this vein, when the quality of selfless service is combined with competence, the natural flow of good work achievement that would be of benefit to the general good of the people or society will emerge. Hence, President John F. Kennedy of the United States of America in 1963, advised American citizens that they should not ask for what the country would do for them but what they would do for the country.

Taking a clue from this, those Nigerian leaders and directors who are being entrusted with the implementation of the universal basic education (UBE) including vocational and technical education programmes should first of all see to their successes rather than looking for what they would gain from it (at the detriment of the general good of the people).

(b) *Leadership by Example:* Leadership by example is very much lacking in Nigeria’s programme delivery system, but it is a value ingredient to be nurtured at the background of implementation of VTE programmes. This type of value is absent especially where finance, structures and equipment are involved. In most cases, leaders think of what they would gain in money or money’s worth from the system rather than using their positive and creating thinking to increase productivity in seeing to it that the scheme succeeds as is done in advanced nations.

(c) *Monitoring and Accountability:* This is an important ingredient because monitoring is a kind of “watching and recording or keeping track of events in an implementation process in order to ensure that a scheme is being implemented to specifications (Eraikhuemen, 2002). Hornby (2006) defined accountability as the state of being responsible for one’s decisions or actions, and one is expected to explain them when asked. This is where many projects, programmes or

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schemes fail in Nigeria. All forms of corruption are contributing to Nigeria's backwardness. The result of corruption is certainly affecting the vocational and technical education programmes in all sectors of the economy.

(d) Sincerity of Commitment and Purpose:

For any scheme to succeed, there should be sincerity of commitment and purpose to be nurtured at the background of it. Recent happenings in Nigeria's political scene reveal that politicians in power are just interested in how much money or money's worth they are able to gather or to make out of their positions rather than being interested in actual execution of programmes in accordance with work specifications. No wonder Yole (2010) said that Nigeria's politicians do not encourage people-centred development but enslavement.

(e) Habit of Hard Work: This is also an important aspect of the implementation process of any VTE programme. Hard work, in this respect, contributes immensely towards the development of the environment through a person's display of the right attitude to work coupled with his skill competencies and punctuality. Where there is hard work, the products must achieve good quality and longevity, thereby, enhancing self-reliance.

(f) Assimilating Time Management As A Positive Transfer of Good Living Measures to All Aspects of Our Duties

Saraydarian (2009) explained that when men and nations are able to manage time wisely, they will become prosperous and full of joy. This will not happen unless everyone is committed to "eliminate time-wasting activities or time wasters" from his or her consciousness. In this regard, it is at the school, college, polytechnic and university levels that students are "caught young" to cultivate the living culture of managing time wisely. The author further maintained that a man's or

woman's time wasting activities include: all forms of corruption, armed robbery, prostitution, kidnapping, drug abuse, sex abuse (including raping), hooliganism, religious/tribal riots, examination malpractice, certificate racketeering, membership of clandestine groups (popularly known as secret cults), child-trafficking, sale/trading in adulterated and counterfeit goods, and so on. All of them are a result of laziness, poor self-confidence and organized falsehood.

Most importantly, for a nation to progress and live in abundance economically, it must utilize time wisely so as to manage all the human, material and natural resources available for the benefit of the general good. This cannot be achieved when the education of many youths is not intertwined with time management. Bailey (1986) and Saraydarian (2009) opined that every man or woman should use the best talents to choose goodness instead of choosing evil. It is evil-doing that attracts time-wasting activities while goodness brings abundance and progress to the general good of citizens. In this regard, when Nigerian youths, adults and leaders are able to abandon "time-wasting" activities, the following problems will be heavily transformed for the general good:

(g) Working at Low Capacities: This is another vicious cycle of economic inefficiency that is encouraging time wasting activities in Nigeria, and should be solved. Many productive companies, organizations, small-scale and medium scale enterprises are always working at low capacities in the platform of increasing population. It means that the various machinery and equipment have become obsolete and require the installation of modern ones as a result of global technological changes which have affected mass production of goods and services.

The problem is further enlarged with poor quality electricity power supply and that of

good access to pipe-borne water to the various manufacturing industries, businesses and the citizens. Above all, there is poor attitude to work by the personnel employed to manage the sensitive areas of the economy. This is the particular reason why Aguan (2008) opined that many Nigerian youths, adults and leaders are not interested in the work they are assigned to perform but only in the money or money's worth they are able to 'scoop' out of the economy, thereby, perpetrating self-aggrandizement including large-scale involvement in money laundering.

Conclusion

This paper looked at vocational and technical education subjects for self-reliance and the way out in Nigeria's secondary and vocational institutions in order to make all forms of education to be more meaningful to the students. Considering the critical issues raised in this paper, Nigerians are advised to shun all forms of corruption because they are the greatest killers of self-reliance and very inimical to any meaningful development in the economy.

Recommendations

This paper recommends the following:

1. Nigerian youths, adults and politicians should shun all forms of corruption (e.g. money laundry, outright embezzlement of funds through fake receipts, claims and poor execution of contracts) as ways of earning a living in every department of the economy as they amount to criminal wastages of hard-earned resources from national treasuries and settle in private pockets. Meaningful development will not thrive in situations where the above-named vices are prevalent.
2. All stakeholders (governments – Federal, States and Local) including

non-governmental organizations and agencies should stress hard work and dedication to duty. All these take place at the background of self-reliance which stand between a person and his work at all times.

3. All labour unions in Nigeria should teach their members at regular intervals through series of induction courses or otherwise, of the values of hard work, honesty, accountability, and dedication to duty. Less emphasis should be placed on demand for higher wages and salaries when there is no corresponding increase in production of goods and services, but hard work. Labour unions should press for more allowances rather than salary increases.
4. Government should endeavour, as a matter of urgency and sustainability, to establish workshops and laboratories in all tertiary institutions so that students' theoretical knowledge should match practical work. Although this is capital intensive, it can be achieved through gradual purchase of tools, equipment or machines at regular intervals.

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