

# VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN STATES

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## **Abstract**

*Vocational education is a specialized programme of training designed to equip individuals with balanced work behaviour reflecting cognitive, affective psychoproductive and perceptual skills. It is also an integral part of general education. Vocational education training follows a set of goals and objectives in preparing learners for the world of work and these goals are quite impressive. To the average Africans, vocational education is received as education for those unfortunate members of the populace who, for one reason or the other are mentally, physically or socially handicapped. The paper examines the concept of vocational education, its goals and challenges that hinder vocational education from achieving its goals/objectives and the roles of vocational education in the economic development of African States. This paper argues that, if serious attention is given to vocational education, it has the role of providing skills and employment, thus transforming African States economically, technologically in her human resources development potentials.*

The world over, vocational education is viewed as a catalyst for technological advancement. O'connor and Trusell (1987) defined vocational education as an education that prepares trainees for jobs on careers at various levels from a trade to a craft or a position in engineering, accounting, nursing, medicine and other healing arts, architecture, pharmacy, law etc. Craft vocations are usually based on manual or practical activities which are traditionally non-academic and are related to a specific trade, occupation, or vocation. It is sometimes referred to as technical education as the trainee directly develops expertise in particular group of techniques.

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Vocational education may be classified as teaching procedural knowledge. This can be contrasted with declarative knowledge, as used in education in a usually broader scientific field, which might concentrate on theory and abstract conceptual knowledge, characteristic of tertiary education (Wolf, 2002). Vocational education can be at the secondary, post-secondary level, or further education level and can interact with the apprenticeship system. As the labour market becomes more specialized and economics demand higher levels of skills, governments and businesses are increasingly investing in the future of vocational education through publicly funded training organizations and subsidized apprenticeship or traineeship initiatives for business.

Thornton (2012) noted that vocational education militates against job insecurity especially in an uncertain economic environment. Agbai (2002) observed that many countries are placing emphases and adopting vocational technical education, because it is globally perceived as the means of ensuring the production of adequate and appropriate productive manpower. It will be pertinent at this juncture to review situations in some countries as they concern vocational education.

### **The Global Trend of Vocational Education**

#### **Australia**

In Australia, vocational education and training is mostly post-secondary and provided by registered training organizations. Assessment standards for the different vocational qualifications are provided by Australian Quality Training Framework, Australian Qualifications framework and industry Training packages.

The apprenticeship system includes both traditional apprenticeships in traditional trades and traineeships' in other more service-oriented occupations. Both involve a legal contract between the employer and the apprentice and provide a combination of school-based and workplace training. Typically, apprenticeship lasts 3 to 4 years; traineeship lasts only one to two years. Apprentices and trainees receive a wage which increase as they progress ([www.oecd.org/dataoecd](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd)).

A crucial feature of the training package (which accounts for about 60 percent of publicly funded training and almost all apprenticeship training) is that the content of the vocational qualifications is theoretically defined by industry and not by government. The National Center for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), owned by the federal, state and territory ministers is responsible for collecting, managing, analyzing, evaluating and communicating research and statistics about vocational education and training.

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### **Germany**

Germany runs a unique system of vocational technical education (Agbai; 2002). Germany operates a dualistic system which ensures that training is acquired both in the vocational schools and the industry. The German-model is also applicable to countries in the German language areas: Austria, Liechtenstein and Switzerland (including the French and Italian Speaking parts of the country).

In Germany for example, a law (Berufsausbildungsgesetz) was passed in 1969 which regulated and unified the vocational training system and codified the shared responsibility of the state, the unions, associations and chambers of trade and industry ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=vocational education](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=vocational+education)). In 2001, two-thirds of young people aged fewer than 22 began an apprenticeship, and 78 percent of them completed it. Under the German model, vocational training in industry and formal education in schools proceed almost simultaneously. Other German-speaking countries share a similar model.

### **Hong Kong**

In Hong Kong, vocational education is usually for post-secondary 3, 5 and 7 students. The Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE) provides training in nine different vocational fields, namely: Applied science, Business Administration, Child education and community services; construction; Design; Printing; Textiles and Clothing; Hotel service and Tourism students; Information Technology, Electrical and Electronic Engineering; and Mechanical, Manufacturing and Industrial Engineering.

### **India**

Vocational training in India is provided on a full time basis. Lauglo and Maclean (2005) stated that full-time programmes are generally offered through Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), under the ministry of Labour, Government of India. Part-time programmes are offered through state technical education boards or universities, which also offer full-time courses. All the state governments run vocational schools.

### **Japan**

Japanese vocational schools are known as senmon gakko. They are part of Japan's higher education system. They are two-year schools that many students study at after finishing school (although it is not always required that students graduate from high school).

### **United Kingdom**

The first "Trades school" opened in the UK in 1907 (Owen, 2002). The system of vocational education in the UK initially developed independently of the state, with bodies such as the RSA and City and Guilds setting examinations for technical

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subjects. The Education Act of 1944 made provision for a Tripartite system of grammar schools, secondary technical schools and secondary modern schools, but by 1975 only 0.5 percent of British senior pupils were in technical schools, compared to two-thirds of the equivalent German age group (Wolf, 2002). In 1994, publicly funded Modern Apprenticeships were introduced to provide quality training on a work-based (educational) route (world class Apprenticeship, 2008).

### **State of Vocational Education in Nigeria**

Nigeria recognizes the need for vocational education and expressed this in the National Policy on Education (2004:46) as follows:

- a) To provide manpower in applied science, technology and commerce, particularly at the sub-professional grades;
- b) To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development;
- c) To provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man;
- d) To give an introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies;
- e) 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; and
- f) To enable our young men and women to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology.

To realize these objectives, the Federal and State Governments decided to reorganize and substantially expand technical and vocational institutions particularly during the Third National Development Plan Period (1975-80) so that the country would reach a technical and vocational student population target of 117, 686, in 1980. The number does not include those being trained in vocational schools run by government and commercial departments.

Aghenta (1990) observed that this initiative of government failed to yield results due to certain defects; the most prominent of which are poor training, unemployment of its graduates, and poor job performance of these graduates, by 1993/1994; the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) formed the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES). The Objectives of SIWES according to ITF (2002; 1-4) are to:

- provide an avenue for students in institutions of higher learning to acquire industrial skills and experience in their approved course of study;
- prepare students for the industrial work situation which they are likely to meet after graduation;
- provide students with an opportunity to apply their knowledge in real work situation thereby bridging the gap between theory and practices;

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- enlist and strengthen employers' involvement in the entire educational process and prepare students for employment in industry and commerce.

Again, there have been reported cases of failure in the implementations of SIWES, and efforts directed to achieve its aims and objectives. Agbai (2000) criticized the weak school-industry bond that characterized SIWES. Wodi and Dojubo (2009) found that school equipment were not found replicating those in the industry. On the issue to poor equipment, study has revealed dearth of relevant facilities, equipment and manpower in the teaching and learning of Vocational education generally and Business education in particular (Njoku, 1992; Ayeduso, 1996; and Adeboye, 2002).

What this means is that both in school and in industry, vocational education has not really been positioned to achieve the desired results. With lack or inadequate facilities in schools the teaching of vocational education is still theoretically based and with weak school-industry bond, industry players are yet to view SIWES as their direct responsibility. Yet, at the end, graduates in vocational education are found "worthy in learning".

### **Prospects of Vocational Education**

If vocational education is properly implemented in schools, starting from primary to tertiary institutions, it will go a long way to helping the citizens to be self-reliant, eradicate poverty and enhance stability in the nation's economy hence develop the Nation.

The following are prospects of vocational education according to Ogunmola and Ugiagbe (2003).

**a) Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practical:** Vocationalizing the education has the prospects of bridging the gap between theory and practical works in schools. Students will see things done practically as it has been taught in the theory class. The teachers will demonstrate the skills to the students if the laboratories and workshops are well equipped. Students will be exposed to the use and handling of machines and changes and innovations of various equipment in various occupations. This will make them fit into the world of work, and gain full employment in factories or industries after graduation.

**b) Encouragement of Indigenous Technology:** Vocational education always keeps pace with the level of technological development in any country. And so influences various courses and programmes to be offered in schools, colleges and universities, which will in turn bring about curriculum change and innovation to suit the needed technology. This therefore will assist the country to develop her own technology rather than depend on imported ones. In so doing, industrial growth, and expansion in the various careers of vocational education will be encouraged.

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### **c) Promote the taste and Consumption of Home-Made Goods and Services.**

The prospects of vocational education will encourage the consumption pattern of Nigerians. If the indigenous or cottage industries in Nigeria are producing quality goods and services, Nigeria will have a preference for home-made goods to imported ones. This will as a matter of fact, encourage more cottage industries and improve employment of youths and adults in the country.

### **Problems of Vocational Education**

Despite the prospects and the good intentions of the Federal Government in establishing vocational education, many problems have hindered the full achievement of these goals. Ogunmola and Ugiagbe (2003) enumerated the following problems:

- 1. Missionary and Colonial Factors:** According to Okafor (2011), the western education came with the agenda and motives of satisfying the needs of the missionary. That is in areas of evangelism and proselytization. It is obvious that the type of education pursued by the early missionaries was heavily religious; imagine the teaching of the 3R's- Reading, writing, and arithmetic which was aimed at getting interpreters to bridge the communication gap and a few clerks that would help them in their plundering mission. This led to the establishment of grammar schools and no technical college.
- 2. Lack of Economic Self-reliance Awareness:** lack of awareness of the importance of skill acquisition has led many students to offer courses in liberal arts and the have ended up as job seekers. No wonder, Awodiya (2005) advised that students of higher institutions, irrespective of their areas of specialization and studies should have basic knowledge and skills in Vocational Education.
- 3. Inadequate Influence:** Vocational education actually is very expensive as it is capital-equipment based. Even though all the tier of government in Nigeria are interested in funding the course, yet they have approved lean resources to implement it. This has led to inadequate infrastructure, poorly equipped laboratories/workshops etc.
- 4. Parental Influence:** Some parents have cultivated the idea of influencing the course (s) to be taken by their children/wards. In most cases, they want to be called parents of lawyers, doctors and so on.
- 5. Students Interest/laziness:** Students are no longer interested in learning vocational skills. They do not want to handle tools. Some are very lazy and so are looking for white collar jobs where they can sit under air conditions. They do not want to “suffer”.

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6. **Corruption:** There have been cases of money laundering and other forms of looting government funds by public officers. Agholor and Obiazi (2011) noted that this money ought to be plunged into development projects but are usually diverted for selfish interest.
7. **Erratic Power Supply:** For industries, small scale businesses, artisans, technicians to do well and be effective they need electricity but unfortunately, Nigeria's erratic power supply has hindered them. Many foreign investors have turned back because of this problem. If this country must move forward and be developed, as a matter of urgency, power supply system must be addressed appropriately.

### **Improving vocational education in African States**

Vocational education programmes are viable tools that if properly implemented will go a long way to reducing the poverty level of the citizens, and promote economically self-reliant and developed nations. For this to be achieved and for the problem of vocational education to be conquered, the following strategies should be adopted to improve vocational education. The following strategies were outlined:-

1. Curriculum planners should ensure that teachers give room for demonstration and practice.
2. Local experts such as engineers, machine operators cobblers, tailors etc should be involved in the implementation of curriculum. They can serve as resource persons in the teaching and learning processes.
3. Government should establish more vocational schools, supervise and inspect schools regularly, and ensure that all schools follow the approved curriculum and conform to national policy on education. There should be regular inspection to make sure that the facilities in the schools are used well.
4. There should be training and retraining of the vocational education teachers through seminars, workshops and conferences to enable learn to handle and operate equipment and machines.
5. Field trips should be organized for the students to institutions and organizations related to the skills they are exposed to:
6. There should be awareness and orientation of the students and the general public about the benefits of acquiring vocational skills.
7. Equipment/tools should be provided and maintained.
8. Government should find a lasting solution to the problem of erratic power supply.
9. Soft loan schemes should be provided as take off for trainers.

### **Conclusion**

If Africa must have a stable economy, self-reliant nations and eradicate poverty, vocational education must be re-generated. The recommendation above must be adopted. The youths should be equipped practically. With this, Africa will be like

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America, Britain, Germany, Japan and even China who have rehabilitated drug addicts, school dropouts and several destitutes with the help of skills acquisition programmes.

There are so many uncorrected typographical and grammatical errors!

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