

# VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: THE CRADLE OF SELF-RELIANCE AND ECONOMIC SURVIVAL IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

This paper views vocational education as the cradle of self-reliance in the economy as well as a background tool that could be employed to train Nigerian youths and adults to become self-employed in the world of work. It adds (hat Nigerians could be saved from the present soaring unemployment of youths and adults when governments/stakeholders take vocational education seriously as a way of alleviating poverty and unemployment, and enhancing economic survival among the people. In this vein, when the enabling environment is put in place, problems like large-scale corruption in our national life, moral decadence, lack of funding and procurement of relevant equipment for training youths and adults, etc., will be efficiently minimized. Recommendations such as active government/stakeholders' funding of vocational education, elimination of wide-scale corruption in our national life, functional power supply, making poverty alleviation programme more dynamic and relevant to the people, including others, were proffered in order to make self-employment more meaningful to the Nigerian economy.

## **Introduction**

Taking a cursory look at the nature of vocational and technical education today in Nigeria, there are some differences in distinguishing between the terms "vocational education" and "technical education". Sometimes, the differences are confusing to the person who is just starting to study them. The definitions also differ in accordance with time, authorities and countries. Eya (2001) citing Baird (1972)'s concept of vocational education said that it is "the preparation for occupational endeavours in agricultural education, home economics, trade and industrial education, distributive education and business education".

Therefore, one cannot talk of self-reliance without mentioning the devastating nature of unemployment in the Nigerian economy. Nwaokolo (1992) said that "unemployment is much more than economic catastrophe and that it is a social catastrophe as well. Depression means idleness and idleness means loss of skills, loss of self-reliance, and plummeting of morale, family disintegration, a socio-political unrest. When the economy fails to generate enough jobs for all who are able and willing to work, potential production of goods and services are irretrievably lost." This is where vocational education acquisition skills are very vital to the Nigerian economy. The skills are designed to prepare youths and adults for gainful employment. Tobi (1997) explained that vocational education refers to the activities which aim at acquiring the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are required for employment in a particular occupation, cluster of related occupations or a function in a field of economic activity including business, agriculture, hotel, catering, fine and applied arts, tourist industries, private and public services, etc.

Before the coming of the Europeans to African continent, Africans were already practising vocational education as a way of life. Fafunwa (1991) explained that Africans have imbibed a non-formal education for the training of youths and adults. Vocations such as: hunting, farming, wood carving, bronze casting, pottery, weaving, dyeing, basket making, just to mention a few, were practised. So from the cradle of Nigeria's political system especially from the period of amalgamation in 1914, this form of training youths for gainful employment has not been new to Nigerians. This new way of self-reliance, which is now being sought by everyone including the government in Nigeria, has always been a part of livelihood of Nigerians even up to this day. This is why manhood, as we used to know in traditional Nigerian societies and communities, was determined by maturity into self-reliance, through farming, hunting, art and craft, and blacksmithing, etc., as earlier mentioned. The colonial education, therefore, came to reorient our youths to be white-collar job seekers, thus, replacing our vocational skills, and caused a deviation from the norms, resulting in disorderliness and imbalance in our originally planned economy. Nowadays, vocational education

has become so important that it is the fastest growing educational market that delves into self-reliance and other related gainful employment training opportunities or activities. UNESCO (1978) defines "vocational" and "technical" education together as an umbrella one, thus: ""

A comprehensive term referring to the educational progress when it involves in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life.

ligwuelu (1995) takes "technical education" differently as a part of vocational education, thus:

Technical education is a form of vocational education designed to prepare the learner to enter an occupation requiring technical information and an understanding of the laws of science and technology as applied to modern design production. Technical education stresses the engineering aspect of vocational education such as electronics, electrical, mechanical and automobile works. Indeed, it involves the understanding and practical application of the basic principles of mathematics and science.

### **Development of Vocational Education**

Vocational education is as old as humanity itself. Therefore, before the advent of colonial administration in Nigeria, there existed an indigenous non-formal and informal vocational education system through which cultural heritage, work skills and attitudes within a community or society were passed from one generation to the other especially when it concerned character training and job orientation. Thus, the development of vocational education is in three aspects, thus: Traditional/Pre-Colonial Period, Colonial Period, and Post-Independence/National Education Period.

### **Traditional/Pre-Colonial Period**

The African system of education is purely vocational in nature, which is designed to train the youth for 'social responsibility, job orientation, and political participation, spiritual and moral values' (Fafumva, 1991). In this respect, the family was seen as the basis for learning about the community and UK;. . Clings that were acceptable to the public and those things that should be observed as sacred or abhorred. The growing child is also taught how to live, respect elders; obey religious beliefs/rights, and ethical behaviours including the learning of vocations.

Both informal and non-formal education operated and are still operating in Nigeria, likpcnyong (2001) explained, "informal education as that type of education where children unconsciously acquired relevant vocational skills from their parents". It concerns an unconscious learning effort or an unconscious teaching effort. They involve telling the young ones the reason for carrying out a certain aspect of a vocation. E.g., a girl seeing and observing her mother cooking while her mother would ask her "questions about some aspects of the cooking." And a boy could ask his "father why certain crops were planted in particular ways." There are a lot of examples of informal type in Ihc traditional education as found in every vocation, e.g., in hunting, a boy learning a paiticub.r and uncontrolled belia\jour in hunting skills or a girl learning how to take care of a baby, etc. In (hot wny, the individuals exposed to informal vocational education learn to become self-reliant.

### **Non-Formal Vocational Education**

Non-formal education concerns trades, crafts, and professions "which knowledge was ic'iUicld to certain families or communities but were learned through apprenticeship systems or by nun-members of such families". Parents, in most cases, sent their children out to live with masters, mistresses or crafts masters in order to learn certain trades or crafts. Such children would live as apprentices in their masters' homes. Method of learning was by imitation whereby the child would observe closely the posture displayed by the master in performing a trade or craft. This continues until the child attained a stage of perfection so as to be able to work independently. In some professions, like native doctors, rain-makers or herbalists, a sort of initiation into them usually takes place. The child must perform some ritualistic initiation to become a guild member. This is an

advanced development of vocational skills, and it usually takes many years, and this depends also in certain occupations like: bronze casting, blacksmithing, herbalists, or native doctors, etc.

In a nutshell, vocational and technical education in pre-colonial/traditional societies was unorganised, unstructured and uncontrolled. It is worthy to mention here that non-formal vocational

education is still practised in Nigeria today.

### **Modern Direction of Non-Formal Vocational Education in Nigeria**

Taking a cursory look into our traditional/vocational education today, one can see that it is still waxing strong in our societies. It has employed a good percentage of our population. Ekpenyong (2001) also explained that "non-formal education still plays a key role as it has remained a channel for acquiring vocational training in various trades." This is why various governments and stakeholders have fostered the non-formal education in a new direction. For example, Better Life for Rural Women Programme was established to cater for training women in rural areas for different skills, e.g., cassava/garri production, cloth weaving, dyeing, crafts and other trades. As a result of widespread unemployed young school leavers and graduates, some of them have trained in one or more aspects of non-formal vocational and technical education. They are:

1. *Commercial Motor-Cycle Riders:* These are popularly known as "Okada" riders. Many youths and adults have trained in motor-cycle riding in order to be self-employed. Recently, Governor Igbinedion of Edo State expended about twenty million Naira for the purchase of motor-cycles for youths and adults in order to boost their self-employment.
2. *Photography:* This is another non-formal vocational skill, which many youths and adults have imbibed. It is a common practice to find some young school leavers and graduates undertaking to train in photography. This type of vocation has found its market in tertiary institutions, obituaries, wedding ceremonies, birthday parties, traditional festivals, matriculation and convocation ceremonies, etc.
3. *Fashion Designing/Dress Making:* It has attracted both male and female young school leavers and graduates in our society. Many of them have trained in them to become self-employed. This form of vocation is more than mere tailoring as the use of modern sewing machine technologies to evolve a lot of designs have been put to bear to meeting the demands of different classes of people in the society. It also includes sewing of different hats and berets.
4. *Typing/Photocopying Centres:* This involves training in the use of manual typewriters, photocopiers, etc. to meet the local demands of affidavit users, binding of books, duplicating and photocopying of papers. Some youths and adults have gone the extra mile to training in the use of computers as a result of changes in business technology.
5. *Hairdressing/Salons;* These concern all forms of training in perming, plaiting, barbering and other hair treatments. Some male and female youths and adults have found self-employment in them.
6. *Electrical/Electronics/Refrigeration:* They provide non-formal training for young school leavers/graduates in many occupational areas like: refrigeration, electrical installations, TV installation and repairs, etc., and they have achieved gainful employment.
7. *Poultry, Goat/Sheep and Fish Farming:* These have become training grounds for young school leavers and graduates, and many of them have achieved self-employment in the vocations. By starting with a minimum capital outlay, some youths and adults have gradually excelled in them.
8. *Others:* Very many young school leavers and graduates have trained, in addition to their abilities, in skilled areas like: auto-mechanics, furniture making, art work, watch repairs, shoe making, laundering, wood carving, bronze casting, metal work, but just to mention a few of them.

## **Colonial Administration/Missionary Period**

The missionary bodies started educational work in Nigeria, and they gave Western education in the three "Rs" - reading, writing and arithmetic. This was to enable them to carry out clerical duties and interpretation of the Bible. They made the initial efforts in opening schools in the Yoruba area, and the eastern part of Nigeria. One can safely say that the introduction of Western education to Nigeria was a religious one and not political because the colonial administration was not interested in education at the initial stage of their governance.

After sometime, the missionary groups realized that giving literary education alone to Africans was not enough, and they decided to introduce some vocational education into schools curricula. In order to achieve their objectives, they introduced some kinds of industrial education to enable the students develop the use of their hands. The British Governor in Nigeria at that time, Governor Freeman, felt that the idea was good but could not grant these missions some financial assistance to run the programmes. Despite this, the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) embarked on vocational training of youths by establishing some industrial schools at Abeokuta, Lokoja and Onitsha so as to encourage agricultural production in order to foster the multinational trade between Nigeria and Europe. Also in 1870, the Church Missionary Society started a brickfield where students were trained to learn brick-making. After the establishment of agricultural schools, a simple machine for producing garri was invented in 1878. This was the reason why the development of vocational and technical education started to gain popularity during the early part of the twentieth century in Nigeria.

After the amalgamation of both Southern and Northern Protectorates to become Nigeria as a country by Lord Frederick Lugard in 1914, a lot of schools were opened by the Missionary societies. In 1925, the Phelps-Stokes Commission Report on Education in Africa influenced some major changes as a way of re-directing education in the continent. Therefore, the outcome of the Phelps-Stokes Report and memorandum on educational policy in Africa was the passing of a new Education Ordinance and code, and this took effect from 26<sup>th</sup> May, 1926. According to Ehiametalor (1990), this was the first time that education was fine-tuned to take care of the local environment, through government participation and towards setting up of vocational oriented manual work. And "the emergence of trading companies like U.A.C. and John Holt also galvanized the thoughts for organized technical training for skill development and technical occupations. This was the reason why in 1943, Asquith and Elliot Commission, according to Tobi (1997), advocated a higher training need for technical teachers that would be deployed to teach vocational subjects in secondary schools; while Harlow and Thorpe Commission of 1949 also made an urgent requirement to establish colleges of technologies for training technicians and managers. The Ashby Commission (1959), whose report was submitted to the Federal Government in 1961 after independence included the following:

- a) Vocational and technical education should be included in both primary and secondary schools curriculum.
- b) Students should be encouraged to take courses in technical drawing and craft subjects, and more expansion work in technical schools should be carried out to accommodate more students.
- c) City and Guilds Certificate courses in machine shop, engineering, telecommunication, motor vehicle mechanics, etc. be approved (Tobi, 1997).

In 1952, after the adoption of Harlow and Thorpe Commission of 1949, the government, for the first time, set up some institutions called "polytechnics" in Nigeria. They were opened at Ibadan, Kaduna and Enugu, including Yaba Technical College, Lagos. All these were efforts put in place to make recipients self-reliant.

## **Post Independence/National Education Period**

After Nigeria's independence in 1960, a lot of attention and encouragement has continued to be used to improve the training of youths and adults in acquiring skills in vocational and technical education. The Federal, States and Local Governments, missionaries

and private individuals have contributed immensely to the growth and development of vocational and technical education in Nigeria.

In a nutshell, the government policies "have had significant impacts" on the development and growth of vocational and technical education in Nigeria through the following

Commissions/Committees/Reports: Phelps-Stokes Commission (1926); Asquith and Elliot Commission (1943); Harlow and Thorpe Commission (1949); Ashby Commission (1961); Banjo Commission (1961); Oldman's Report (1961); Dike Committee (1962); Ikoku Committee (1962); Ajayi Commission (1964); Asabia Committee (1967); Taiwo's Committee (1968); Report of the National Curriculum Conference (1969); Workshop of the National Seminar on Education organized By the Federal Ministry of Education (1973); National Policy on Education (1977); National Policy on Education (1981) (Revised); National Policy on Education (1998) (Revised). The 1969 Curriculum Conference gave vocational and technical education the much-desired attention and prominence. This was why the 6-3-3-4 system of education was now adopted by the Federal Government, which embedded the study of vocational and technical education from the pre-vocational level to that of the professional ones obtainable at the tertiary institutions level.

Currently, according to *ITF Guidelines for SfWES Training Programme* (2002), it expressed that Nigeria now have the following tertiary institutions: 20 Federal Colleges of Education (including Technical); 14 State University/Colleges of Technology; 24 Federal University/Colleges of Technology; 32 State Polytechnics; 34 Federal Polytechnics, 38 State Colleges of Education (including Technical), and 4 private universities, and 1 private polytechnic. Meanwhile, many universities and colleges of education have departments for the training of specialized teachers in vocational and technical education while other incentives like scholarships and other special privileges have been granted to such students.

### **Self-Reliance in Vocational Education in Nigeria**

There is a popular saying among all races in the world that education "is the legacy which a nation can bequeath to its citizens." The main thrust is for the citizens to become useful to themselves as well as living healthily in the environment, community, society or nation. Self-reliance, according to Adedoyin (2001), concerns using one's acquired skills to achieve self-employment in order to ensure economic survival in a depressed economy like that of Nigeria. This is the reason why the subject-matter of self-reliance runs like a golden thread through the various objectives of any educational dispensation in Nigeria, and which is why aid to self-reliance like: entrepreneurship and leadership skills acquisition are being approved and embedded in the various programmes of vocational and technical education in the country.

In this vein, self-reliance is of two-fold that would encourage economic survival and development. The first one is national self-reliance as an entity, which will cut across economic, social, and political perspectives. While the second aspect concerns the individual as a self-reliant person. When a nation is self-reliant, it means that all her resources including human and material, are fully utilized in such a way as to producing a favourable economic advancement. Additionally, when the youths and adults are not properly trained vocationally or technically so as to be capable of producing goods and services in accordance with the demand and supply of the society, self-reliance would become elusive and difficult to achieve. This is why no individual or nation can attain self-reliance without productivity (Adedoyin, 2001).

### **Hindrances Militating Against the Achievement of Self-Reliance in Vocational Education in Nigeria**

There are many hindrances standing against the achievement of self-reliance. They are:

#### ***Corruption***

All forms of corruption are contributing to non-realization of self-reliance in the country. Many youths, adults and elders have thrown away the virtues of hard-work, and put in its place the culture of corruption. This new system of national life is fast eroding the fabrics of developmental efforts in the country. Greed, selfishness, self-centredness or self-aggrandizement, which are a product of corruption, have become ways of manifesting progress and success in life among the people. Alarming stories of corruption, fraud, over-invoicing of contracts and supplies, etc.,

perpetrated by Nigerians are being reported daily in our newspapers, magazines and radio broadcasts in Nigeria and that of foreign countries. This is the reason why the country has been tagged as "the most corrupt oil-rich nation among independent states in the world"<sup>1</sup>, (Ayeduso, 2002). For any meaningful development of self-reliance to take place, there must be concerted efforts by all and sundry to shun all forms of corruption in Nigeria.

### ***Shortage of Equipment/Inadequate Funding***

It is the effect of inadequate funding of any educational **system,"which** leads to shortage of equipment/materials/tools needed for teaching and learning. Without them, the gap between theory and practice would continue to widen. Students or beneficiaries cannot be exposed to the required practical training as demanded by the different vocational and technical training right from the primary school level to the tertiary institutions. Invariably, it cannot foster self-reliance after graduation.

### ***Power/Energy Crisis***

Artisans, technicians, business centres, poultry farms, industries, etc., require regular power supply to operate, and be able to produce their goods and services in accordance with the demand and supply of the people. On the contrary, most of all these industries, business centres, artisans, technicians, schools, colleges, universities, etc, to mention a few, have been thrown out of work including production, thereby, negating the achievement of self-reliance in the Nigerian economy,

### ***Moral Decadence/Laxity in Schools***

Moral laxity, decadence and laxity among students are becoming a threat to the achievement of self-reliance in Nigeria. Many students join one form of secret cult or the other. A secret cult, -in (his respect, is regarded as an organization whose activities is held secretly and are characterised by rituals. They hold meetings at night and at secluded places where they cannot be easily noticed and recognised (Aluede, 2000). Also speaking on students' moral laxity at the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Convocation ceremonies held in the University of Benin in 2001, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Richard Anao, stressed that students are becoming insincere, dishonest and untruthful, and that knowledge without character is worthless. He lamented that the level of gangsterism, violence and dishonesty manifested in examination malpractices and other acts of misconduct exhibited by the average undergraduate youth/adult of today "gives ground for anxiety about the future of the country."

### ***Religious and Ethnic Intolerance/Political Thuggery***

In situations where there are religious and ethnic violence or riots, meaningful developments cannot take place. Invariably, self-reliance will be absent. Religious/ethnic riots became prominent when democracy took off in Nigeria in May, 1999, when the issue of 'Sharia' became recognised as a slate religion in some States of the Federation. Also, when the issue of resource-control became prominent in the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria, ethnic riots as a result of who should benefit from oil wells located in some areas became prominent. Various aspects of our national life like the churches, mosques, and National Youth Service Corps programme, hotels, taking oil workers hostage by youths; pipeline vandalization and oil spillage became the order of the day.

Also, political thuggery in Nigeria has taken another dimension as a result of her nascent democracy. Some unscrupulous politicians engaged some unemployed youths to help disorganize electoral processes in order to hijack the results of voters to their credits. Gadgets such as guns, axes, cutlasses, broke!] bottles, and other dangerous weapons have been freely used in voting/election arenas as a measure to perpetrate themselves into power. Some politicians even go as far as using hired assassins to eliminate their opponents from the way (Adedoyin, 2001).

### ***Lack of National Consciousness***

Many Nigerians do not harness their senses and mental powers to make the country progress corporately in entirety but are only self-centred in whatever they do. This is why general laws are never obeyed, and that nothing seems to be working for the general good of the citizens. Some people, especially the wealthy and affluent ones, do not feel obliged to obey simple laws of the land, and they always tried "to bulldoze" their ways through achieving anything they desired. Invariably, the citizens who obey such laws would feel cheated as if they never belonged to the same country. A very good example of national consciousness is what former President John F. Kennedy told

Americans in 1963 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. Nigerians should imbibe this message.

Also, some Nigerian rulers, administrators and the like, recycle themselves in power as if they are the only ones blessed or destined to rule, thereby, depriving new breed with administrative skills of the challenges to contribute their quota to national development. More importantly, most Nigerians abhor accountability in governance. They do not see the need to be probed in such a way as to improving upon dynamism in public expenditure for the maintenance of education,

### **Conclusion**

This paper has tried to highlight vocational education as the cradle for self-reliance and economic survival in Nigeria. In this direction, the various problems facing the achievement of self-reliance in vocational education can be reduced if concerted efforts are made by government, stakeholders and every Nigerian to do so. It calls for the political will in everyone to make them.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the foregoing, it is hereby recommended that:

- 1) Government/stakeholders should introduce regular funding of tertiary institutions involved in the training of students to acquire vocational skills. Although, this is capital/equipment intensive, but small budgets through policy of monetary and fiscal measure, could be evolved so that small quantities of equipment/machines are purchased at regular intervals. Within a short space of time, abundant equipment/machines would have been procured. This would stimulate gainful/self-reliance after graduation.
- 2) Government and all Nigerians should imbibe the spirit of accountability in public financial expenditure in the act of governance.
- 3) Our leaders (including all and sundry) should live by good example by shunning all forms of corruption in our national life. Corruption negates the achievement of self-reliance.
- 4) Government should endeavour to put in place, regular power/energy supply in order to boost self-reliance in vocational education. Artisans, technicians, business centres, poultry farms, industries, etc., require regular power supply to operate and be able to produce their goods and services.
- 5) All Nigerian workers should cultivate the culture of hard work and competence in order to guarantee the achievement of economic self-reliance in the country.

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