

USING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY IN THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIA

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Abstract

Vocational Education trains students to acquire practical skills and some scientific knowledge aimed at assisting them to become self-reliant or self-employed. This paper therefore attempts to look at how the study of Vocational Education can help in improving the economic status of individuals and the society at large. The paper examines the problem of economic recession and tries to see how vocational skills can help improve the situation. It is recommended that grandaunts of vocational and technical education be assisted to establish small-scale and cottage industries, among others, so as to empower them economically.

Introduction

The importance of vocational education came to be with the introduction of 6-3-3-4 system which provides students with alternative choice. The system provides Nigerian students with alternative choice because they are exposed to both literary, vocational and technical subjects during the first three years of Junior Secondary School. At the Senior Secondary School, a student whose academic standing is poor can acquire basic skills which will make him useful to himself and the society.

For a nation to develop technologically and also meet the challenges of the dynamic world, programmes must provide the youth the knowledge, skill and attitudes that will enable them to choose occupations of their desire. Vocational education is not only for the achievement of the aims of general education at all levels but also provides training for specific types of job required in a business environment such as computer, catering, poultry, and so on.

Vocational education involves the study of vocations and related science and the acquisition of practical skills and specialised knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of the economy. Vocational education is a dynamic tool for interaction and a powerful means of ushering people into the development process. It helps to receive the indigenous skills and knowledge which is changed into better capacity for use in self problem solving. It also enables one to integrate and apply knowledge so as to improve her effectiveness. It will not be over said if one states that vocational education is one of such investments that a country can make thereby leading the nation to the path of progress.

Hornby (1984), in *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* defines vocation as a natural linking of aptitudes for certain types of work. Osuala (1995) sees Vocational Education as a training intended to prepare students to earn living in an occupation in which success is dependent largely on technical information and an understanding of laws of science and technology as applied to modern design, production, distribution and service.

According to Okafor (1990), Vocational Education is that element of Education charged with preparing people for work. It could also be referred to as education for self-reliance or self-employment. Also FRN (1981) sees Vocational Education as that aspect of education, which gives its recipients an opportunity to acquire practical skills as well as some basic scientific knowledge. It involves the acquisition of skills and competencies that can help individuals to function productively in industrial and commercial occupation.

Objectives of Vocational Education

The National Policy on Education (1977) states the following as objectives of vocational and technical education:

- (a) To provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce.
- (b) To provide people with 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.
- (f) To enable our young men and women to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology.

The realisation of these objectives largely depend on the quality and effectiveness of our educational system. Akinboye (1976) states that educational policies prescribed by previous governments in Nigeria conceived education as a process of merely transmitting information, which at best could only result in incomplete personality development. This is because this concept results from emphasis in retention of information with the assumption that stored knowledge is a guarantee for appropriate behaviour.

Goals of Vocational Education

Yarosan (2002) states that there are five commonly accepted goals of vocational education derived from the central tenets of democracy and from a common deep appreciation of the value and dignity of work. They are:

1. to prepare the learner for entry into employment and advancement in his chosen career;
2. to meet the manpower needs of society;
3. to increase the options available to each student;
4. to serve as a motivating force to enhance all types of learning, and
5. to enable the learner to wisely select a career.

She goes further to mention the objectives of Vocational Education at elementary and secondary school as follows:

- to encourage the maintenance for expansion of occupational programmes and services for disadvantaged and handicapped individuals.
- to encourage the maintenance and expansion of programmes, and services for persons who desire and need post secondary occupational education to successfully act in the labour market,
- to provide statewide leadership for the further development and continued growth of Nigerian Programme of vocational education.
- to encourage the maintenance and expansion of programmes and services which are designed to meet the occupational needs of out - of school youths and adults commensurate with labour market demands.
- to provide occupational planners and decision makers with manpower supply and demand information.
- to provide professional personnel development for local educational agencies through a programme of pre-service and in-service vocational education.
- to improve the quality of occupational and career programmes through exemplary, research, and development programmes and related research activities.

To attain the expected goal, government, some agencies, and companies are involved in this enterprise. Vocational Training Centers, Vocational Improvement centers ,among others are established with a view of providing the expected training. Also, if our nascent democracy will be sustained, if we must achieve accelerated development, then our national needs would require that unskilled labour be reduced to a minimum by providing an ideal education that can help students acquire and develop those needed skills and attitudes for sustained democracy and national development.

Vocational Education and the Economic Recession

Agbebi (1984) defines education as the ever changing complex system of ideas precepts, concepts processes and skills by which a society is established, conserved and furthered in its course of peace and progress. Vocational education can be seen as that aspect of the total education process that focuses on the individual occupation.

A critical look at contemporary trend and momentum of Nigerian education as revealed during the 35th meeting of National Council on Education (NEC) February, 1989 and the 40th Meeting in Lagos in August. 1990 show that 43 years after independence, we are still in a mudding state. This is evident in the varieties of decisions and policies which, to say the least, are very perplexing.

Olumoh (2001) in a book review of Professor Wale Oyemakind's "Path to Economic Recovery" examines the political economy of Nigeria and laments the plight of most Nigerians under the present dwindling economic regression and also states that economic decline is not something peculiar to this present age. What makes it rather serious is that, unlike before, poverty is biting so hard that people hardly live well. Provision of the necessities of life, food, shelter, clothing, education and health are hardly met. The employment opportunities are not there. Other means of sustainable living like small-scale business are not functioning well due to high cost of production vis-a-vis low patronage due to low purchasing power. A way out of this mess is through vocational education which will prepare people towards skill acquisition for self-reliance. However, it is a sad commentary that the image of vocational education is not particularly good when compared to other professions like Medicine, Law, Pharmacy amongst others. Again, there is lack of esteem for vocational education programmes because, according to Lazerson (1971), vocational schools are often wrongly marked as giving second-class education. Besides, the stale of teaching vocational education as a profession is not well defined.

The 6-3-3-4 system of education which is based on the philosophy of self-development for national development through a functional education curriculum appears only on paper. Practically it is difficult to operate because it requires personal involvement, observation and monitoring of the learner using a detailed, carefully planned and integrated teaching and assessment schedule, hence, the need for more man-power (trained teachers) than we have today. If we must produce 'men' of vision who can inspire our social development and the necessary vocational innovations required by the-Nigerian society, then we must be prepared to pay the price. The great problems currently facing our educational system seems to have been aggravated by the depth of our present attitude to vocation and consequently it's effect on the present economic predicament (economic recession).

Economic Recession and Its Effect on Survival

Adengbigbe (1985) says in his article that Nigeria is one of those countries that is experiencing the current global economic recession. This calls for a lot of restraint. The situation is to be looked at more critically paying very close attention to vocational and technological advancement by focusing all resources both material and human to industrialisation so that things will work for the better. The Nigerian Society, and indeed parents, pay little attention to the creative demands of Vocational Education. The stimulation they receive; all tend to blind conformity. From early childhood, youngsters have acquired a deficient take-off, they detest manual labour in preference for white - collar jobs. These behavioural attributes are definite obstacles to the development of vocational education for self-empowerment. This has led to so many social problems amongst which are unemployment, social ills such as corruption.

The Way Out of Economic Recession through Vocational Education

National development is a major concern of the government of any country. Nigeria however has continued to be regarded as a third world country that is underdeveloped. The situation is becoming a thing of concern, particularly, because its economy is down partly due to lack of industrialisation resulting to lack of employment. Life generally is quite difficult. Inadequacy of basic economic and social infrastructures such as small-scale industries and cottage industries has also affected the economic power of the citizens since government on it's part cannot provide employment for all.

In order to have the citizens economically empowered, the area of manpower development through vocational education should be explored in areas like:

Small Scale Industries and Economic Empowerment

The small-scale industries in Nigeria are known by the nature of their ownership. They are often a one man or family business with the owner or member of the family constituting the management.

The small-scale business offers employment to a greater percentage of the labour force in the country. The activities of these businesses have proved indispensable in the development and growth of the nation's economy and have also stepped up the level of production of goods and services.

The following are examples of small-scale industries that people can gainfully be employed in:

- (a) The dyeing industry,
- (b) The tailoring industry.
- (c) The printing industry.
- (d) The furniture making industry.
- (e) Leather industry.
- (f) Block making industry.

- (g) Bakery industry.
- (h) The milling industry. (i)
- Garaging industry etc.

A lot could be achieved in terms of economic development through the growth of these small-scale industries as employment will be generated. This will also play a very important role in raising the standard of living of the citizens, because it will provide them better access to food, shelter, clothing, education and health facilities that will improve the general welfare. It also helps in enhancing the citizens' ability to pay taxes. This can now be said to be very important as the country's economy is in shambles.

In an effort towards this direction, recently, the Governor of Kaduna State, Alhaji Makarfi, has arranged a programme where loans will be provided for the establishment and running of small scale industries. This was carried in the News of 5¹ March, 2005.

(b) Cottage Industries

Cottage industries are industries where people work in homes. This serve as a means of gainful employment for every family that is involved in any form of production. They work as either processors such as Gari making, making of dadawa, or as weavers of traditional cloth such as aso-oke, Gwado, they could also work as dyers of cloth such as tie-dyeing. All these are various ways of improving the economic status of the smaller unit of any community (the family), thereby bringing the nation out of the economic mess.

Conclusion

A changing society such as Nigeria needs vocational education for National development. The present system of education, 6-3-3-4, helps to imbibe the spirit with a view to empowering individuals/society for economic growth. This is not much felt because of the faulty operation of the objectives as stated. However, much can be achieved with a proper review and well defined operational objective. Motivational programmes should be put in place so as to encourage students in secondary schools to see vocational education beyond the fact that it is meant for drop outs or those who are not intelligent such as small-scale and cottage industries.

Recommendations

1. Vocational Education should be made a part of general education for all secondary students.
2. Vocational Education should provide an orientation and preparation for those who have the aptitude and desire to pursue advanced vocational education in the Colleges of Education and Universities.
3. Government should grant loans to graduates with vocational and technical skills to establish small-scale and cottage industries.

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