

MOVING NIGERIA FORWARD THROUGH VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION SKILLS ACQUISITION

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Abstract

This paper focuses vocational and technical education skills acquisition as a veritable process of moving the nation forward in order to achieve a self-reliant workforce. It also highlights that achieving saleable skills by Nigeria youths and adults is the only viable way to eliminate the present day soaring unemployment, poverty and socio-economic ills that are currently ravaging the populace. Categories of students to be trained in the tertiary institutions are in the area of agricultural science education, business education, fine/applied arts and home economics education including their service areas. Also highlighted are the problems that are affecting the smooth-running of the programme like: inadequate funding, incessant power supply in the economy, lack of leadership and accountability, massive corruption, etc. as a way out, the paper recommends that there should be adequate and purposeful funding, elimination of corruption, good leadership and followership, among others.

Introduction

Nigeria's "promised land"¹ now is her ability to provide her teeming youths, adults and women with gainful employment in order to achieve economic self-reliance. This will reduce or eliminate the present soaring unemployment, poverty and socio-economic ills that are currently ravaging the population. To achieve this important economic goal, the Federal Government, through the instrument of the National Policy Education (FRN, 2004), has set the ball rolling by trying to give the appropriate enabling environment to the citizens as to imbibe the culture of acquiring skills in vocational and technical education right from the primary school stage to that of the tertiary institution level. The policy, therefore, defined vocational education as that form of education-which is obtainable the technical colleges and it is designed as a form of skills acquisition which is obtainable the technical colleges, and it is "designed as a form of skills acquisition to prepare individuals to acquire practical skills, basic and scientific knowledge and attitude required as craftsmen and technicians at sub-professional level". The policy also outlined the following goals of vocational education as follows:

- a) to provide the trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels;
- b) to provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development;
- c) to give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be 'self-reliant economically.

This is the reason in Nigeria today, vocational education has become so important that it is the fastest growing educational market that delves into self-employment training and activities. The committee on Research and Publication of the American Vocation Association (1954) defined vocational education as the education 'designed to develop skills, abilities, understandings, attitudes, work habits and appreciation encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to enter or make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis, Maduka (1980), defined vocational education as a type of education deliberately designed for the development of skills and knowledge which can be useful to both the individual concerned and the society.

Egwuelu, (1995), takes technical education as a part of vocational that is designed to prepare the learner to enter an occupation requiring technical information and an understanding of the laws of the laws of science and technology as applied to modern design production. Technical education stresses the engineering aspect of vocational education such as electronic, electrical, mechanical and automobile works. Indeed, it involves the understanding and practical application of the basic principle of mathematics science. In addition, technology has added hard work value to skills acquisition in vocational and technical education. Technology, therefore, refers to the advantage of acquiring disciplined habits, self-control and consciousness, high sense of responsibility including the development of scientific attitude to thinking, behaving and manipulating new machines for high productivity. It also refers to the ways which man has applied his inventions and discoveries to satisfy his wants.

Ekpenyong (2001), while utilizing the definition of technology by the Technology Study Committee of the University of Wisconsin, United States of America stated that technology is the know-how and creative process that may utilize tools, resources and systems to solve problems to enhance control natural and man-made environment to alter human conditions.

Form the foregoing therefore, it has become imperative to given more attention to vocational and technical education skills acquisition in Nigeria in order to make the teeming youths, adults and women to be gainfully employed in the economy. It is against this background that the skills become very relevant in Nigeria today where unemployment and poverty is soaring by every successive year unchecked.

This Is the reason why this paper is trying to highlight the-idea (hat Nigeria should move out of unemployment, poverty and socio-economic impasse to a more sustainable employment creation for the citizens. It is only a viable vocational technical educations kills acquisition that can solve the problem.

Students to be Trained in Vocational and Technical Education

Osagie (1998), Ugiagbe (2002) have stressed that the categories of students to be trained in vocational and technical education are those in the tertiary institutions. Courses found in such institution are: Agriculture Education, Business Education, Fine and Applied Art Education, Education in Health occupations. Industrial Education and Technical Education, in this vein, Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education offer courses leading to the award of the B.Ed/B.Sc Ed., Higher National Diploma (FIND) and Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) with specialization in the following areas:

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| a) Agricultural Education | General |
| b) Business Education | Accounting and Secretarial Education |
| c) Fine and Applied Arts Education | General |
| d) Home Economic Education | General |
| e) Technical Education | Auto Mechanics, Building Construction, Electrical/ Electronics, etc. |

As vocational educational delves into manipulative skills, students can be trained in any of the fields so as to gain employment after graduation. However, most diploma programmes offered in the polytechnics do not include educational courses. Many of them specialize in practical course which are designed to meet the demand of industries, hotels, hospitals, farms, etc, just to mention a few.

Below the tertiary institutions are the government-owned technical colleges and private schools that undertake the training of artisans, technicians, and etc. students are trained in different modules, which qualify them to takes single certificate and advanced certificate examinations of the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB).

Problems of Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria

The genesis of the problems affecting vocational and technical education in Nigeria is the misguided belief that liberal arts education is by far belter and superior, and the best method to achieve quick wealth and positions of authority. Conversely, the passage of time has changed this erroneous belief. Nevertheless, for a nation to be on a solid foundation and footing for industrial and viable small business take-off, its vocational and technical programmes must be well established and organized. In this vein, there has been a lagging behind of vocational and technical education skills - acquisition in Nigeria due to the following reasons:

Colonial/Missionary Factors: When western education was introduced into the African system of education (including .Nigeria), vocational and technical education was not a priority. The British colonial government was mainly interested in getting raw materials for her industries. Before their

coming, Nigeria/Africans were already practicing vocational education as a way of life. Fafunwa. (1991), explained that Africans had imbibed a non-formal education for the teaching of youths and adults. So, the colonial masters, therefore, came to reorient our youths and adults to be white-collar job seekers, thus, replacing our vocational skills such as hunting, farming, wood carving, bronze casting, pottery, brick-making, weaving, dyeing etc. and caused a deviation from the norms, resulting in disorderliness and imbalance in our originally planned local economy. This way why the colonial government was only concerned with the teaching of the "Rs", that is reading, writing and arithmetic and the aim was to get interpreters/clerks to bridge the gap of communication and tax/revenue collection.

Lack of Economic Self-Reliance Awareness: Many youths and adults do not know that vocational and technical education programmes are the only branches of education that can provide gainful and immediate employment to graduated and (that liberal arts education only makes graduates to be job-seekers. This is due to the erroneous belief that the course is offered to the never-do-well members of the society and it has greatly affected the interest of students in both secondary and tertiary schools towards vocational and technical educational subjects.

Inadequate Funding: Vocational and technical education is very expensive as it is capital-equipment based. Even though all the tiers of government in Nigeria are interested in funding the courses, the government have approved lean resources to implement it. This is why there is inadequate flow of finance to purchase teaching and learning materials for training students right from the secondary school level to that of the tertiary institutions. Practical courses that are supposed to expose students to real practical training in order to match the theory learnt in the classrooms have become a mirage.

Invariably, this fact led to inadequate training of students in schools. This is why many of them are not well grounded in practical work and if this trend continues unchecked, it could spell doom for the technological training of Nigeria youths.

Inadequate Workshops/Laboratories for Training: Laboratories/workshops, which house the tools, machines and equipment for the training of students, are hardly available. This is why many vocational and technical teachers resort to the theoretical teaching. Where few equipment or machines are available, students are in groups. This system is not effective, as many students do not have access to such equipment for practice as much as they want.

Moral Laxity in our Educational System: Moral laxity among students is becoming rampant in our schools. Speaking on this issue during the 26th 27th convocation ceremonies of University of Benin, Benin City, in February 2001, the Vice-Chancellor, professor Richard Anao, submitted that students are becoming dishonest in their learning. He stated that students exhibit gangsterism, violence and dishonesty in examination. He therefore, launched the campaign for a moral re-awakening in tertiary institutions (Ugiagbe, 2002).

Parental Influence: Some parents have cultivated an undue influence over their children or wards by counseling them on the type of course (s) to be taken. In most cases, the never-do-wells as well as handicapped ones are often given the opportunity to offer vocational and technical education programmes. This is why incompetence in the raining is now prevalent.

Students Interests: Many students are no longer interested in learning vocational and technical educational skills. Some of them are even ashamed to handle some tools or equipment. E.g., some students are ashamed to sit by the typewriters.

Consumption of Foreign Goods in Preference to Home-made Ones: Many Nigerians still prefer the consumption of foreign goods to that of Nigeria-made ones. This is invariably killing our local industries by making such industries to close down while workers become jobless. On the other hand, foreign labour-force is constantly employed while brain-drain from Nigeria to foreign countries is always the order of the day. In fact, the slogan is, "we consume what we don't produce and export what we produce" and what we export are primary products like: petroleum, cocoa, rubber, coal, groundnuts, solid minerals etc.

Corruption: Egbochuku (2003), asserted that corruption has been institutionalized in Nigeria and has become wide-scale in our national life. While Aina (2002), also asserted that Nigeria is the most corrupt oil-rich nation among independent nations in the world, and this is not encouraging the

study of vocational and technical education programmes. Dishonesty and acts of doing illegal businesses or things in return for money or personal gains is the order of the day in Nigerian. Fraudulent practices have no bounds in both the public and private sectors of the economy. Alarming stories of fraud and corrupt practices are being reported daily. This is a discredit to it in the international business community. Foreign businessmen are not encouraged to do business with Nigeria and this does not encourage that full exploitation of the economic opportunities including the study of vocational and technical education that abound in the country which would have taken Nigeria to a higher height of favourable economic development. Funds, which ought to have been used of developing vocational and technical education programmes, and for the provision of other infrastructures, are either embezzled siphoned away into foreign countries by corrupt leaders

Lack of Hard Work: Nigerians have thrown overboard virtues of hard work and put in its place the culture of corruption. Some forms of corruption like: trading in contraband and expired drugs, money laundering, over-invoicing of contracts etc, have continued to deplete hard work as many of them want to become rich over-night. This does not encourage vocational and technical skills acquisition that is hard work-bound.

Erratic Power Supply: Industries, small-scale businesses, artisans, technicians, etc., require electric power to operate. Some industries are out of business while some are not operating of capacity as a result of incessant power failures. The artisans and technicians are thrown out of job and the simple-comfort at home is not just there as a result of the epileptic or permanent failure of power supply in most parts of Nigeria. Apart from the untold hardship which lack of power supply has brought to Nigerians, it has contributed immensely to the economic woes that have befallen the country today. This is the reason why vocational and technical education skills acquisition has not achieved its; rightful place in the economy.

The Way Forward for Vocational and Technical Education Skills Acquisition in Nigeria

Nigeria should take a cursory look at the experiences of some advanced countries like: USA, Britain Denmark Germany, Italy, Japan Canada, France China etc, and study the way they achieved greatness in industrialization and technology. Oyebola (1976), stressed that for a nation to leave backwardness and move forward to greater development, there must be a "rapid progress based on an original ideology and a peculiar of life to achieve self-reliance"¹. Here are some other factors that can move Nigeria forward:

Gifts of Leadership: Nigeria leaders, in all sectors of the economy, must display the right type of leadership in order to accomplish the political will to move the masses forward. Leaders who will see things steadily and see them whole, men and women who will know that the world is neither their master nor their servant, men and women who will accept their limitations and be creative within these limits. Men and women of intelligence and uncompromising integrity must have final say in the affairs of Nigeria, rule her for several years to come. These leaders must have a great deal of self-discipline, selfless spirit, vision and a deep appreciation of masses problems in inculcation vocational and technical education skills acquisition Leaders who could infuse into the Nigeria elites and masses the discipline and massive re-orientation of hard work and self-reliance that are so badly needed today (Oyebola, 1976).

Above all, mediocre, area boys, money bags, go-father, etc, should not be allowed in the art of governance because they do not have the masses problems at heart but to have to have access to free money and perpetrate self-aggrandizement, self-centred ness and all forms of corruption in our national life.

Adequate and Purposeful Funding: Adequate and purposeful funding of vocational and technical education programmes is currently lacking in Nigeria. Like what is obtainable in advanced countries, local, state and national governments (including industries) participate in the funding of vocational and technical education, and Nigeria should imbibe this spirit, as against the present system of funding by the Federal Government alone. To achieve purposeful funding through levies and other legal requirements, firms which utilize the products of vocational and technical graduates are made to participate its funding (Olailan, 1995).

Elimination of Corruption from National Consciousness: To achieve a giant stride in the acquisition of vocational and technical education skills at all levels of education in Nigeria, there must be conscious effort by every Nigeria to eliminate corruption which has become endemic an institutionalized. No foreigners can do this for the country, Many Nigerians do not believe that they can attain their wealth through hard work unless through embezzlement of government funds, trading in

sub-standard, contraband or narcotic goods, etc. this is the reason why there is a wide-scale corruption and this must be removed from our ways of life. No nation can attain self-reliance in vocational and technical educational- skills acquisition when there is a widespread corruption in all sectors of the economy.

Installation of Permanent Electric Power Supply, for Nigeria to move forward, there must be the concerted effort to solve the present incessant power failure throughout the country. It does not attract the smooth take off of small-scale businesses or industries. Beneficiaries of vocational and technical education cannot be able to set up their own businesses because their trades or occupations depend on the use of constant electric power supply. When government has been able to make power supply stable, then, the much talk much about self-employment of youths, adults and women will be achieved (Aina, 2002).

Training and Re-training of Vocation and Technical Teachers: There is the need to retrain the existing vocational and technical educational teachers in order to update their old skills for new ones as a result of technological changes in computer applications. Also, there is the dare need to train new teachers in order to cope with students population upsurge in schools as few available ones may not be able cope with the present situation. In this vein, more groups of students will be created in order to make maximum use of few tools, machines or equipment available occasioned by low funding to purchase them. The system of group formation does not lead to effective training of the skills, as students do not have extra time for practice.

Fighting Unemployment and Poverty in the Economy: nowadays, unemployment of youths and adults in the Nigerian economy is increasing in every successive year because majority of student receive the liberal arts education as compared to those trained in vocational and education. Liberal arts education beneficiaries are job-seekers while that of the skills are self-employment gainers and can even employ other supporting staff. This is why, Nigerian government should strive to evolve adequate funding of vocational and technical at all levels of her educational dispensation in the economy. It will certainly move the nation forward as more youths and adults including women will be gainfully employed.

Recommendations

In order to move Nigeria forward through vocational and technical education, the following recommendations arc made;

- 1 Nigeria should vigorously address their leadership problems. Her leader are very selfish, self-centred and individualistic and their main aim of seeking elective or power of is to fulfill self-aggrandizement at the expense of the masses. They do not possess the power or strengths to serve the nation and humanity as compared to that Mao Tse Tung of China, president Franklin Delan Roosevelt of USA, Winston Churchill of Britain etc. who turned around their poor and unemployed masses to viable self-employed ones through personal accountability in governance. What has come out of Nigerian Leader is perpetual enslavement of the masses through massive corruption.
- 2 Adequate and purposeful funding of vocational and technical education system be undertaken in order to encourage the purchase of the right tools, equipment or machines for effective teaching and learning. In addition to his, companies or industries that make use of vocational and technical education beneficiaries should be levied to support it. Through this way, abundant purchase of equipment will be achieved. They would stimulate students¹ interests to learn the skills.
- 3 Nigerians should imbibe the culture of hard-work, honesty, reliability and accountability in governance and discard the culture of corruption. No nation excels through massive corruption in the world except through hard-work and purposeful leadership and followership.
- 4 Nigeria leaders should soive once and for all, the problem of erratic power/electricity supply. When this is in place, self-employment of artisans, technicians, small-scale businesses, etc., would flourish massively. Unemployment and poverty would be gradually eradicated. This can only take place when (here is constant electric power supply as (he conductor of the enabling environment.
- 5 all tiers of government, stakeholders and the citizens should sec vocational and technical education programme as a child of necessity. Everyone should support the growth because it is the only way that can serve as a bridge-head through which Nigeria can move forward to solve the problems of poverty and unemployment. Other nations have done it through empowerment of vocational and

technical education.

Conclusion

From what has been discussed so far, it is therefore, obvious that there is need for vocational and technical education to give the right skills with competencies for our teeming youths, adults and women in order to gain self-employment after graduation as a way of moving Nigeria forward, atfd this is the only viable way available to the nation to eliminate unemployment and poverty. This will in turn contribute meaningfully towards national self-reliance that is badly needed today in Nigeria.

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