

THE IMPORTANCE OF VOCATIONAL/TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND COHESION

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Abstract

The Nigerian educational system was revolutionized from the liberal state to a more functional education with the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system in 1977. The new dispensation gave prominence to Vocational and Technical Education whose products would become better, more useful and more productive citizens of the nation. This paper examines the importance of Vocational and Technical Education in National Integration and Cohesion vis-a-vis the various self employment programmes of the present government such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). The paper, therefore stresses that the effective implementation of such programmes could serve as a unifying force amongst the citizenry for a more peaceful and harmonious co-existence.

Introduction

The modern industrial societies of the United States of America, Western Europe, Russia and Japan, undoubtedly owe their present industrial superiority and civilization to technological know-how which is undisputedly the cradle of human advancement and civilization. It is also important to note that none of these nations acquired their technological know-how and became industrialized overnight. Each nation gradually devised, borrowed and adopted its own technology based on the necessities and requirements of its society.

It is perhaps in recognition of the above that Nigeria is attempting to use vocational/technical education and training to empower all unskilled and unemployed Nigerians through various vocational training programmes, such as the ones undertaken by NDE and NAPEP. These are, of course, in addition to the various vocational/technical programmes being run by the existing educational institution.

The backdrop is to eradicate the twin-evil of poverty and unemployment which are capable of snow-balling into national disintegration through social crimes and apathy, like armed robbery, communal/tribal clashes, prostitution, arson, assassination, just to mention a few. This is perhaps in line with the statement of Uzoh (1999) on social crime control, thus:

The best way to control social crimes and social apathy is to offer every Nigerian a share of the national cake to bring the disgruntled, disoriented and dislocated members of our society into the main stream of our national productive life.

Abubakar (1983), rightly observes that technology is a manifestation of modern man's effort to control both his material and human environment in order to give himself the kind of life he thought he ought to have. Thus, while education is the key to modernization (Ukeje [1996] in Omenkeukwu [1998]), Vocational/Technical Education is an engine that generates creativity and skillfulness.

The more one is creative and skillful, the more he abhors destruction, free from prejudice, mind pollution, superstition and conservatism. It is Vocational and Technical Education that provides the tenets for the acquisition of such creativity and skillfulness.

It is rather unfortunate that for a long time our school system has been permeated by fear of vocationalism and uncreativity (Lawal, 1984) and only succeeded in producing job seekers rather than job-makers (Sadiq, 1998).

Our educational system is supposed to depend on the kind of society we hope to build, in terms of quality of men and women. If we are planning for a society in which difference in wealth and income will be much smaller than in the past, and swinging from one social group to another much easier and thus making our people less restive through the acquisition of employment and

saleable skills, then we shall evidently have to plan for an educational system in which the ordinary man or woman could feel adequate and tolerant of one another. Thus, Vocational and Technical education becomes relevant in this direction.

If we recognize that the underlining conditions of life are bound to be changing very rapidly and that everyone will have to face the prospect of living in a much less static type of community than in the past, we shall necessarily put more stress on the need for fostering national integration and mutual co-existence of the citizens of Nigeria through gainful employment which Vocational and Technical education provides. This will make people more appreciative and happier in any work of life.

In a similar vein, Abubakar (1983; 7) states that:

Colonial legacy did more harm than good in the development of scientific traditions within our community such that most government were used to the habit of turning to the western nations for scientific advice rather than to the indigenous scientist, thus establishing a negative feed-back system.

In recognition of the desire to create job-makers out of Nigerians, thereby curbing poverty and unemployment rates in Nigeria, the present government is pursuing vocational skills development programmes through the NDE and NAPEP. After all, the success-or failure of any economy depends on the functionality of its vocational and technical education system. (Osuala, 1992).

This paper therefore, intends to highlight the importance of Vocational and Technical Education in achieving national integration and cohesion through the self-employment programmes of NDE and NAPEP. It will also suggest ways for the effective implementation of such programmes to enhance peaceful and harmonious co-existence amongst the citizens of this great country.

Aims And Objectives Of Vocational/Technical Education In Nigeria

Vocational/Technical Education is a part of the total educational programmes that is highly utilitarian in content and scope. It is seen as the aspect of education that is concerned with learning to work or education that makes an individual employable in a particular occupational field.

Okorie and Ezeji (1998) in Udo and Amobeda (1999), defined vocational education as training or retraining which is given in schools or classes under the public supervision and control. In relation to this, Osuala (1995) asserts that vocational education provides skills, abilities, economic understanding and develop aptitude, attitudes, work habits and competence that help an individual enter and/or make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis.

The aims and objectives of vocational and technical education as contained in section 6, sub section 49 of the *National Policy on Education* are as follows:

To provide the technical, knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development

To provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce particularly at sub professional levels.

To provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of economic and environmental problems for the use and convenience of man.

To enable our young men and women to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology.

To give training and impart necessary skills leading to the production of craftsrt technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self reliant; and

To provide an introduction to the professional studies in Engineering and o : technological skills.

Importance Of Vocational/Technical Education

Vocational/Technical education provides the necessary skills and knowledge which will enable an individual function effectively in specific occupations. This, by and large reduces the level of unemployment and poverty in a given nation both of which are major causes of all antisocial behaviour capable of disintegrating such a nation.

Specifically, the importance of vocational and technical education, according to Osuala (1987), includes among others:

1. Preparing the learner for entry into an employment and advancement his chosen career.
2. Meeting the manpower needs of the society
3. Increasing the options available to each learner.
4. Enabling the learner to wisely select a career.

Given the importance of vocational and technical education, it becomes necessary to examine its characteristics.

Characteristics Of Vocational/Technical Education

The characteristics of vocational/technical education which distinguish it from the General Education as identified by Ingram (1996:30) are

It is taught and learned in its relations, and applications to the actual work of a specific occupation.

It is designed specifically to improve the efficiency of an individual in a specific occupation - either as preparation for employment or supplementary to the duties of employed workers.

It is more value to one who will pursue or is pursuing a specific occupation than lo someone else.

It is timed, such that the learner needs it and applies it to useful and productive work.

The skills and knowledge of specific occupations are taught and learned in their practical and proper relation.

A careful examination of the characteristics above reveals that recipients of this specialized form of education are made functional and productive in the society either gainfully employed or self employed (thus becoming self reliant). If we are all productively busy and well fed, crime rate and other societal vices will

drop and peace, which is a bi-product of national integration and cohesion will reign in the country.

Vocational/Technical Education As A Vehicle For National Integration And Cohesion

Countries all over the world have realized that to enhance economic and national development, there is the need to empower its citizenry through gainful employment and eradication of poverty. Nigeria is no exception. The present democratic government is vigorously pursuing vocational and technical education towards providing employable skills to its citizens so as to ensure national integration and cohesion. After, all around the world, more people than ever are self employed. It is believed that the more people are self employed, the stronger the economy and the higher the standard of living. This alone produces a more cohesive and well integrated citizenry of a nation. As Olayinka Bello (1989) rightly observes, some of the problems Nigerians are facing are due basically to lack of trained talents and that of pitiable wastage and incidence of poverty in the midst of plenty.

In support of this, Kwairanga (1999:170) observes that our educational institutions continue to turn out literate but mostly uneducated and unemployable graduates. He further intones that "over 70% of Nigerians are unemployed because they do not possess the necessary skills". An idle mind is the devil's workshop, so the popular saying goes. This can cause social and political unrest, which is a threat to national integration and cohesion.

According to Mbah (1985:5), as reported by Kwairanga (1999), Nigeria is seen as a nation of division, conflict and diversity. Our division and diversities become vehicle for our self interest, which ranges from indiscipline, poor attitude to work, robbery, arson, bomb blast, religious and ethnic bigotry, all of which are evidence of national disintegration and lack of cohesion. To our minds, Vocational/Technical education is capable of eradicating such socio-cultural vices in the society which will bring about the desired national integration and cohesion.

Vocational education is training aimed at developing necessary skills to make an individual self-reliant and self supporting. It is thus the acquisition of a handcraft or handwork. These include among other skills and professions like carpentry/wood work, engineering, dress making, hair dressing/barbing, weaving, secretarialship, soap making, etc. This will help in developing the

economy of individual citizens and that of the nation. After all, national development, as stated by Kwairanga (1999; 169) is:

The sustained upliftment of the well-being of an entire society towards a better human life. It connotes change and involves complete re-organisation of the entire system of a society, be it economic, political or social with a view to improving the quality of its members.

Vocational/technical education, therefore, plays a great role in the social and economic development of any nation, including Nigeria. The greatest enemy of man is poverty which makes him to disregard others, be selfish, inconsiderate, aggressive and exhibit tendencies that are detrimental to peaceful human co-existence. Vocational/Technical education aims at alleviating poverty. This is because it helps man and the country at large to be self reliant. As Olaitan (1996) in Zwalchir (1999) points out, the elevation of the human condition is the primary concern of education through which people are able to develop knowledge and skills, adopt new behaviours and be better to survive in their society.

The task of nation building does not only lie on how best our natural resources are harnessed or managed. It lies more or less on how best the human assets of this great nation are progressively educated, (Abubakar, 1998). This is where vocational/technical education plays a vital role.

(i) In Nigeria today, vocational and technical education is perceived to be the greatest vehicle for achieving quick and desirable changes in the nation's economy. Through this form of education, human resources that would have been idle can be tapped and utilized for national integration which promotes the nation's economic development. Development depends on the type of knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies which are the products of vocational/technical education. This type of education will promote national integration and cohesion by empowering people through employment and poverty eradication.

Education can challenge fear, suspicions and superstition which are obstacles to national consciousness, integration and stability. Accordingly, Kanu (1999) asserts that: "Education is capable of bringing about change of negative attitude and values of a people and can be used to inculcate in them positive attitude of cooperation and national consciousness which cuts across regional and states boundaries".

An educational programme that can bring about such desirable change for national integration and cohesion, to our minds, is no other than vocational and technical education, It is perhaps in recognition of this that the present civilian government is mounting various aspects of vocational/technical education programmes through its organ of National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). This is with a view to imparting necessary employable knowledge, skills and attitude capable of enhancing the quality of life of the beneficiaries as well as a means of promoting national integration and cohesion.

The Place of NDE and NAPEP in Fostering National Integration And Cohesion

When a country is faced with a particular social problem, it cannot but map out strategies to solve such a problem with tenacity and fixity of purpose. Thus, the Federal Government of Nigeria established the NDE and

NAPEP as intervention programmes for employment creation and poverty alleviation.

The National Directorate Of Employment - NDE

Employment is said to be the most consequential factor by which man's existence and survival is sustained and by extension a vehicle for national growth and stability, Umar (2002). asserts that employment grew to become an organizational, national and even international issue as it became the responsibilities of groups of individuals and nation to create avenue for the sustenance of livelihood of its citizens through work.

Prior to the creation of the NDE, the employment climate in the country was very bleak. An estimated 3 million graduates of various schools were jobless thereby posing serious threat to national security, stability and consequently, national integration (Umar, 2002).

It was perhaps in recognition of [he above situation that the federal government took a bold and decisive slop to establish the NDE in November. 1980 following responsibilities, with the for according to Umar (2002:24).

- (i) Developing both short and long term solutions to the problem of mass unemployment:
- (11) Assisting the government in (he formulation and implementation of a national policy on employment. Expanding the employment opportunities in both the urban and rural sectors. Promoting self employment as a viable and indeed desirable alternative to paid employment; and
- (v) Initiating programmes and schemes which will be instrumental in assisting the unemployed obtain work either in the private/public sector or self employment basis, and providing for unemployed persons in various identified skills to improve their marketability and qualitative self employment.

The Directorate has translated these range of responsibilities into four (4) core programmes of action which are now well into their fifteenth year of full nation wide implementation. These are:

1. Vocational Skills Development Programme (VSD)
2. The Agricultural Programme
3. The Small Scale Enterprises Programme
4. The Special Public Works Programme

The vocational skills and youth development programme is the most popular of all NDE programmes in terms of recruitment of participants, According to Umar (2000). it is second to none and has conservatively touched the lives of no fewer than a million youths in all the slates of the federation, lie further reiterated that because one of the major causes of unemployment in Nigeria has been lack of productive and marketable skills on the part of the employable youths, a large proportion of school leavers are not adequately prepared to fit into the productive sector of the economy and cannot provide services that can generate sustainable economy. Thus, the National Directorate of Employment designed the Vocational Skills Development Programme (VSD) to cater for this group of persons. The objectives of this are:

- (i) To provide technical and vocational training for graduates of primary/secondary schools, school drop-outs and those with virtually no literacy records.
- (ii) To equip the youths with such that will enable them to be self employed or gain wage employment.
- (in) To provide alternative employment opportunities to the youths so that they can form cooperatives to start business.

The VSD programme has provided opportunities to several unemployed youths to acquire skills in about 100 different trades under the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (Umar, 2000).

The National Open Apprenticeship scheme is the most prominent of all the schemes under the programme. Participants are attached to trainers (master crafts men) who are either individuals, priMile or public institutions for a period ranging from six months to three years. As reported by Umar (2000). "from 1987 to 1991. a total of 500.000 youths have benefited and many more are still benefiting from the scheme in all the slates of the federation and Abuja. This, no doubt, has gone a long way in stemming the delinquent behaviours of our youths which are capable of disintegrating the nation.

Poverty Eradication Program¹ (NAPF.P)

The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) consist of all programmes and projects that are aimed at eradicating absolute poverty among the people of Nigeria (FGN, 2001). The government thinking, and rightly too, is that when poverty, which makes man become lawless and exhibit tendencies that are detrimental to peaceful human coexistence, is eradicated, the nation would become more cohesive and integrated.

The NAPEP, for ease of reference has been classified into four schemes, namely:

1. The Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES)
2. The Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS)
3. The Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWKSS): and
4. The National Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NARDCS)

Of all the four schemes, the Youth Empowerment is of particular interest to the writers which mainly consist of the youth empowerment scheme (YES) majority consist of:

1. The capacity of Acquisition Programme (CAP) and
2. Mandatory Attachment Programme (MAP)

The Capacity Acquisition Programme is a short term skill acquisition programme aimed at empowering all unskilled and unemployed Nigerians through hands on training on creative activities and services. This programme shall equip Nigerians with either formal and productive employment within the public and private sectors or be self employed to provide affordable quality services and create wealth through a secondary programme of micro-credit. Participants shall logically be attached to public or private practical and hands on training centers for a limited period of 3 to 6 months depending on their trade or interest. A monthly allowance of N3,500.00 shall be paid to each participant for the duration of training.

The Mandatory Attachment Programme (MAP) on the other hand is a long term work experience acquisition and training programme designed specifically for graduates of tertiary institutions who must have completed the mandatory NYSC programme. Participants shall be logically attached to construction companies, manufacturing companies, banks and other financial institutions for a period of 2 years. Each participant shall be paid N 1 0,000 monthly for the period of attachment. At the end of the training, participants are expected to be absorbed by the company they are attached to, other interested organizations or be resettled with micro -credit for establishing a productive and viable business enterprises of their choice.

Problems Of Vocational/Technical Education In Nigeria

In spite of the importance of vocational/technical education and its role in national integration and cohesion, it is still saddled with mirage of problems which has hindered a considerable degree of success over the years. Some of the problems include:

1. Poor societal perception of the content of vocational/technical education. The generality of the members of our society view it as being education for the mentally retarded, the never-do-wells and physically handicapped or socially maladjusted students. Hence, the little interest shown in it.
2. Most parents would rather give their children the "bookish" type of education instead of vocational education so that they could become doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc.
3. Most Nigerians have inherent dislike for manipulative skills
4. Poor financing which accounts for poor and inadequate provision of equipments for learning/teaching.
5. Environmental pollution - Most graduates of this education are rarely given places to open and operate workshops in a bid to have and maintain "clean" environment.
6. Lack of employment for graduates of vocational education as greater emphasis is on liberal education.
7. Poor remuneration for the instructors who would have made more money if otherwise.

Recommendations

As a way forward towards making vocational/technical education an effective tool for National integration and cohesion, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. The government should embark on an aggressive enlightenment campaign on the

- relevance of vocational/technical education so that Nigerians should be made to appreciate dignity in labour.
2. More attention should be given to vocational educational in our educational development programmes such that more functional equipments are provided in our technical schools.
 3. Vocational training centers should be created all over the country so as to increase intake and training of more Nigerians.
 4. More vocational instructors, who should ,be well remunerated, should be trained to implement the vocational education programme.
 5. Certain areas should be designed at the urban centers for the purpose of establishing workshops by the graduates of vocational/technical education.
 6. The budgetary allocation to vocational and technical education should be reviewed upward so as to procure the necessary equipments that would elicit the desired skills.
 7. In order to ensure fairness and eliminate spurious claims by potential trainers under the NDE and NAPEP, participants should be closely monitored on continuous basis by officials of high integrity and transparent honesty. This becomes necessary so as to ensure compliance and impact in order to avoid the pitfalls of PAP 2000 when it became "business as usual" and everybody scrambled for the available funds.
 8. Immediate disbursement of loans should be made to graduates of NDE/NAPEP to enable them set up their businesses appropriately.
 9. For the overall success of the programmes, trainees should be placed with only trainers who have standard workshops and the skills to ensure proper training of the beneficiaries.
 10. In order to maintain the confidence of the trainers, NDE/NAPEP should increase the trainers allowances and make such payment promptly as and when due.
 11. For effective supervision and monitoring of participants - trainees, enough vehicles should be provided.

Conclusion

It is not an overstatement to say that for economic development of any nation, the poverty line of its citizens should be reduced to the barest minimum. Similarly, there should be a significant decline in unemployment rate of the citizens. The dual purpose of which is to eliminate the restiveness and idleness in people which are capable of causing social and political unrest and which could snowball into national disintegration.

It is with this realization that the Federal Government of Nigeria is pursuing the vocational and technical education training of the citizens through the NDE and NAPEP in fostering national integration and cohesion. There is no doubt that the coming on streams of these programmes have" stemmed the spate of social vices in Nigeria that are capable of disintegrating the country.

The importance of vocational/technical education in national integration and cohesion can not, therefore, be over emphasized. And it is the position of this paper that if the vocational/technical education programme of the NDE and NAPEP are effectively implemented along with the recommendations there-in, the much desired mutual and peaceful human co-existence as product of national integration and cohesion would be achieved in Nigeria.

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