

# THE PLACE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN SELF-EMPLOYMENT POTENTIALS IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

The paper examined the place of vocational education in self-employment potentials in Nigeria. It looked at the National Policy on Education (2004) in the areas of pre-vocational electives at the Junior Secondary School level and the educational field and occupational categories that fall within vocational education. The global economic meltdown of 2009 that led to massive unemployment, especially the youths, has necessitated the need for vocational education and self-employment. The negative attitude of government and the public towards the promotion of vocational education in Nigeria was also x-rayed. The government appears to be paying lip-service to vocational education and the public is encouraging university education as against vocational education. Based on the foregoing, it was recommended, among other recommendations, that curriculum of vocational schools and institutions should be tailored to the need of industries and self-employment in view.

Vocational education is the education that prepares learners for jobs that are based on manual or practical activities, traditional non-academic and totally related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation. It is sometimes referred to as technical education as the learner directly develops expertise in a particular technology. The major occupational areas of vocational education are: vocational agriculture, distributive education, home economics education, health occupation, trade and industrial education, business and office education and technical education. The National Policy on Education (2004) has the following areas as pre-vocational electives at the Junior Secondary School Level. The pupils are to choose at least one subject each from the pre-vocational electives that they can build on later in life. The pre-vocational electives are: agriculture, business studies, home economics, local crafts, computer education, fine arts, music, dressmaking, hairdressing, cookery etc.

According to Olaitan (1991) vocational education is a kind of education or training that equips the learner with saleable or entrepreneurial skills. It is therefore any form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare individuals for self-employment in their own occupations. To this end, the individual should properly acquire the skills in order to promote self-employment in a particular field.

Vocational education by its nature teaches procedural knowledge for acquiring a skill or trade in contrast with tertiary education that concentrates on research, theory and abstract knowledge. It provides instruction that can help self-employment or in any enterprise that involves the use of tools and other machinery. Ajokporise (2010) asserted that:

Prior to the industrial revolution, the apprenticeship system and the home were the principal sources of vocational education and training. Today, vocational education can be at the secondary or post-secondary level and can make appreciable use of apprenticeship or mentorship.

Vocational education by its nature can enable an individual to set up a business of his own without looking for white collar jobs. Vocational education according to Ajokporise (2010) focused on specific trades such as automobile repairs or mechanic, welding, plumbing, electrical craftsmanship or electrician, hair dressing, tailoring and barbing etc. He went further to say that until recently vocational education was associated with the activities of lower social class of people. As a result it attracted a level of stigma in the past. The impression was created by the early colonial educators that the learning of vocational subjects was for dropouts and mentally handicapped children. The notion has created a certain negative attitude in both students and parents towards vocational education up till now.

However, with the economic depression of 2009 and the loss of jobs, massive unemployment and closure of many factories and industries, the place of vocational education in self-employment potentials has become better recognized. In order that youth employment can be promoted, there is need for Government at all levels to encourage young people to pursue vocational subjects, that will enable them depend on their skills for gainful employment. With such skills, the recipients can set up a business or trade of their own. Solomon (2003) opined that entrepreneurship is the attitude, skills and actions of an individual starting a new business. Vocational education as saleable skills, fall into this category.

It is based on the foregoing that the place of vocational education in this 21<sup>st</sup> century of youth unemployment and global economic meltdown can better be appreciated.

### **Concept of Vocational Education**

As in any discipline, it is important to have a broad idea of vocational education. Various authorities defined vocational education in different ways but they all aimed at the same goal of fitting individuals for gainful employment that will eventually improve their standard of living and the development of the nation.

Omatseye (1995) stated that vocational education is that education designed to develop skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work-habits and appreciation. It involves knowledge needed by workers to enter and make progress in employment, on a useful and productive basis. It is an integral part of the total educational programmes which contributes towards the development of good citizenship by developing the physical, social, civil, cultural and economic competencies of the individual.

The general concept of vocational education is the use of hand but Omatseye (1995) posited that the emphasis should be on the use of both hand and intellect, as it would be of a greater advantage to man,

Oharisi (2007) opined that vocational education is any form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupations. According to him, it is the sum total of all educational experiences systematically organized and presented by an institution to enable the learner acquire basic productive and practical skills.

Vocational education is sometimes called career and technical education. It prepares students for jobs and careers that are based on mostly manual or practical activities. The term does not apply to the development of professions acquired through tertiary institutions. Vocational education is low on theoretical or academic activity and is generally related to learning a specific trade or occupation. The learner directly develops skills in a particular trade that promotes considerable self-employment and entrepreneurship. Vocational Education and Self-Employment.

Vocational education is an avenue to reduce unemployment, poverty and other related social economic problems in the society. It provides trainees with the knowledge, skills and motivation to engage in any venture like small and medium scale businesses. One of the importance of vocational skill is that it makes the individual job creator and employer of labour, instead of a job seeker or employee.

Vocational education can create awareness about the vast self-employment opportunities that are available that can promote individual's self-esteem. In the process, individuals can contribute effectively to the economic development of the country, as well as sustaining the entrepreneurship traits. Vocational Field and Occupational Categories

According to Ajokpories (2010) vocational education has diversified over the 20th century and now exists in industries, manufacturing, retail, tourism, information technology, agriculture, cosmetics and cottage industries. In this regard, Igwebuikie (2007) listed some vocational fields and their related occupations in the table below:

**Table 1: Occupational Categories in Vocational Feilds**

<b>Vocational Field</b>	<b>Occupational Categories</b>
Agriculture	Agrobusiness, agric, machines, food processing, horticulture.
Distributive	Distribution and marketing of textiles, food, general merchandize.
Health occupations	Nursing, medical equipment operators, dental assistants, medical records technicians.
Home Economics	Child care, clothing service, catering, nutrition, home management.
Office Occupation	Data processing, computer and office machine operators, book-keeping stenographic services, printing.
Technical and Industrial	Construction trades, building trades, manufacturing, maintenance and repairs
Information technology	Electronics, computer programming, telephony, machine tool design.

### **Linkage between Vocational Education and Small Scale Enterprise**

Although there is no universally acceptable definition of small scale enterprises but Akinyoade (2004) quoting Stepnek (1995) defined small scale business to mean "all enterprises employing less than ten full-time workers and not using motive power or machinery. Home and cottage industries come within this size of definition". It follows that the definition of vocational education agrees with that of small scale enterprises.

### **Characteristics of Small Enterprises**

Akinyoade (2004) listed the following as the main characteristics of small scale enterprises that can be used for self-employment in any field:

The small unit's equity base is relatively small and is usually distributed over a smaller base than large firms. Ownership and management are often held by one person. There is greater owner influence - more or one person domination in small enterprises. In some cases, the ownership is highly family centred.

The inability of the proprietor to separate his private from the company's funds contributes to inefficiency and non-performance of most small scale enterprises.

### **Challenges of Vocational Education in Nigeria**

According to Dike (2005), while the number of vocational technical schools has greatly increased in developed countries since 1900 and vocational education has continued to thrive in many societies, Nigeria has neglected this aspect of education. Consequently, the society lacks skilled technicians, bricklayers, carpenters, painters and auto-mechanics, laboratory and pharmacy technicians, electrical/electronic technicians, food processors, horticulturists and skilled vocational nurses etc.

The Nigerian society appears to be focusing on degree awarding institutions with ill equipped infrastructure and teaching aids. The situation is so bad that even old institutions that used to train students in practical vocations are now competing to be accredited as degree awarding institutions. The middle and lower cadre technical skills that are very badly needed for national development are fast disappearing as a result.

In Nigeria, practically every student seeks a university degree, even if it means not acquiring any skill, job prospects or self-employment opportunities Oni (2007) asserted that a developing nation needs efficient services of technicians, engineers, and technologists who have received formal training from vocational - technical institutions. Also, many vocational personnel are not catching up with global trends. In many vocational - technical institutions in Nigeria today, technicians, engineers and technologies are not trained to use computers for business purpose. In addition, the attitude of vocational education teachers to innovation is poor. According to Jegede and Owalobi (2005) vocational-technical

education teachers showed the least positive attitude about computer. Lamentably, these teachers are the very ones saddled with the task of training the junior secondary school teachers. It does appear that vocational education in Nigeria is particularly disadvantaged in that the curriculum still emphasizes manual traditional skills over the use of computer technology. Many schools, vocational institutions and even polytechnics and universities in Nigeria are poorly equipped to deliver quality teaching and learning. There is a drive to increase students intake without a commensurate increase in quality of teaching.

Above all the challenges mentioned about is corruption which usually hinders all the good initiatives formulated in Nigeria. The country is ranked top among the most corrupt nations in the world. Corruption has continued to affect our national values, destroy good initiatives and make progress almost impossible. Unless drastic measures are taken to arrest the incidence of corruption in our national life (public and private sectors), nothing of great national value should be expected in Nigeria. Much as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) has been trying to arraign corrupt politicians and individuals before the court of law, nobody has been sentenced so far to serve as a deterrent. It is either the accused person is set free or made to pay fines, even the liberal fine they called "plea bargaining".

Faulty educational systems and government policies are also problems facing vocational education in Nigeria. The Nigerian educational system has been witnessing and is still witnessing changes. It has been from one educational system to another there have been the 8-5-2-3 system, the 6-5-2-3 system, the 6-3-3-4 system and now the 9-3-4 system. It appears the educational policy makers are confused and their interest in the growth and development of the Nigerian educational system is questionable. The frequent changes, including distorted academic calendars have had negative effects on the delivery of vocational education over the years.

Another big challenge is poor power supply from Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN). Almost all known vocations depend on an efficient and stable electricity supply. This has affected most manufacturing companies, including private community development entrepreneurship initiatives. Most companies now depend on diesel powered generators and with the high price of diesel; it has become very difficult for such companies to break-even. Poor Public Perception to Vocational Education

Poor public perception to vocational education is yet another big challenge facing this type of educational system in Africa. According to a paper on the Strategy to Revitalize Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TYET) in Africa (2007), for many years, vocational education was considered as a career path for the less academically endowed. This perception, said the paper, was fuelled by the low academic requirements for admission into technical and vocational education programme and the limited prospect for further education and professional development.

Worse still, the impression is sometimes created by governments that the primary objective of the vocational education track is to keep dropouts or "lockouts" (students who are unable to move up educational ladder, not because of poor grades but because of lack of places at the higher level) from the basic and secondary school system off the streets, rather than project this type of training as an effective strategy to train skilled workers for employment market and for sustainable self-employment.

#### **Weak Monitoring and Evaluation of Technical Education**

According to a paper on Strategy to Revitalize Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Africa, (2007), the current training programmes in many African countries, including Nigeria are supply-driven. The TVET programmes are very often not designed to meet observed or projected labour market demands. The emphasis appears to be on helping the unemployed to find jobs. This situation has resulted in many vocational school graduates not finding jobs or finding themselves in jobs for which they have had no previous training.

Another problem is that training institutions do not track the employment destination of their graduates. Consequently, valuable feedback from the past trainees on the quality of the training they have

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received and the opportunity for their experience-based inputs to be included into the review of curricula and training packages are lost,

### **Conclusion**

Vocational education is one of the keys to self-employment potentials for youths who are now faced with massive unemployment in this country. However, government educational policies have not taken due cognizance of the promotion of this type of educational system. The public and even parents consider the vocational education track as fit only for the academically less endowed individuals. The youths themselves are not helping matters as all of them want to attend universities without taking into account whether they will be employed after graduation.

Vocational education trades like automobile repairs or mechanic, welding, plumbing, electrical craftsmanship or electrician, hair dressing, tailoring, barbing, graphic art, painting/portrait art, sign writing, computer (internet services) etc are areas self-employment can be possible.

Apart from faulty vocational educational policies, the problems of corruption and poor power supply are hindrances to the total realization of the objective of vocational education programme in Nigeria. Above all, the lip-service the government and the society pay to vocational education programme is the bane of this educational sector.

### **Recommendations**

Based on this write-up, the following recommendations are made:

- The federal government should take steps to address the imbalance between technical/vocational schools by coming up with a legislation that would encourage the establishment of vocational institutions instead of the present concentration on the establishment of more universities in this country.
- The federal government should sincerely, financially and diligently implement the 6-3-3-4 system of education in line with the national policy on education. Today, the system only prepares students for tertiary institutions.
- In order to change the public negative views towards vocational education, vocationally skilled workers should be paid wages that are equal with their outputs.
- The curriculum of vocational schools and institutions should be tailored to the need of industries and self-employment in view.
- The EFCC and ICPC should redouble their efforts to reduce the incidence of corruption in our daily lives.
- The power supply situation needs to improve for the economy to move forward. This problem has greatly affected productivity in Nigeria.

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