

EMERGING ISSUES IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper attempts to unravel the teething problems and issues that have arisen over time in the concept of Vocational Education in Nigeria. Despite "the crucial importance of Vocational Education in Nigeria, especially as it relate to human capital development, there has emerged numerous problems that have tended to stunt the growth of Vocational Education in its attempt to attain the fullest height and accelerate socio-Economic development. This paper also attempts to examine and analyse these issues that have affected the growth of Vocational Education in Nigeria. It also proffers solutions and useful recommendations that will tend to expose the problems and find a solution for the issues enveloping (lie accelerated growth of Vocational Education. This paper will therefore, attempt to proffer solutions that are implementable.

Introduction

There are numerous emerging issues involved in the vocationalization of Education in Nigeria and these issues have either stunted the growth of Vocational Education or have contributed to the realization of the goals of Vocational Education.

The literature on Vocational Education has been written from different perspectives by different writers. Obeta (2007), defines vocational education as the type of education that prepares people for entry and growth in an occupation. It equips students with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitude for employment in an industry either as paid employee or in self-employment. Vocational education, according to Okoro (1998), consists of six major areas namely Industrial technology education, Business education, Agricultural education, Home economics education, Distributive education and Health education. Those skill areas are usually offered at the secondary and post secondary education levels in Nigeria. As Roberts (1971), noted, a review of the literature of vocational education indicates that variations have existed in the meaning of terms commonly used and in concepts and their implications. Some individuals have suggested that Vocational education is the education or training of workers. This concept implies that any type of education or training in which a worker participates is vocational education. That vocational education is education for manual work, which suggests that it is concerned with works involving mental activities... That vocational education is education in certain specific subjects and frequently more subjects confined to the secondary schools. Olawepo (1992), stated that the National Policy of Education (1981), placed great premium on Vocational and Technical Education in view of the important role in technological and industrial development of Nigeria. It has recognized it as an aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge.

Roberts (1951), defines Vocational and Technical Education as a type of education or training designed for preparing the individual learner to earn a living (to be self-reliant) or increase his earnings in an occupation where technical information and an understanding of the laws of science and technology as applicable to modern design, production, distribution and services are essential for success. Agbebi (1984), defines technical education as "that aspect of education which utilizes scientific knowledge in the acquisition of practical and applied skills in the solution of technical problems.

By and large, Vocational/Technical Education Egwaoje (2007), submits has a common element in most of the suggested meanings which is that of providing the individuals with knowledge, skills and attitude required in the world of work, ft was further stated by Egwaoje (2007), that since the Colonial era, various institutions and organizations in Nigeria have been established to provide vocational education, and/or training services to the general public and/or to special segments of the community. More recently, there have been renewed efforts by the government to provide functional technical education to its citizens (FRN, 2004). It was the opinion of Egwaoje (2007), that despite all these efforts by the government and the extensive public funds invested in vocational/technical education, the nation is still confronted with the apparently unending problems of youth unemployment and economic recession. The question then is, if the purpose of Vocational Education is clear, why has the government not achieved its major objectives?

The Emerging Issues

There is need to analyze (he diversifications in the concept of Vocational Education in order to be able to effectively examine the emerging issues in the steady advancement of Vocational Education in Nigeria. Okoro (1998), stated that vocational education consists of six major areas namely industrial technology education, business education, agricultural education, home economics education, distributive education and health education. We may place emphasis on the emerging issues in Home Economics Education as a segment of the concept of Vocational Education in Nigeria. It should be pertinent to state that an emerging issue in Vocational Education is the issue of inferiority of these vocations as compared to the regular secondary grammar school education. The perception of Vocational Education by the members of the public as not of the same status with the regular education is a teething problem in Vocational Education in Nigeria. Egwaoje (2007), was of this view in trying to identify the problems of vocational education. Imarhiagbe (1992), cited Ilinfun (1988), who noted that the philosophical objectives of vocational technical education however beautifully expressed will remain a wise paper work if only a handful of vocational technical colleges exist here and there in this country. When compared with the evolution and quantity of secondary schools, the vocational technical schools have remained scanty in number. In 1985, less than 120 vocational technical Colleges were functioning with an enrolment of less than 60,000 against over 6,000 secondary schools with an enrolment of over 8 million. The ratio of enrolment in vocational technical colleges to secondary schools stood at some 1:133. It can be seen that the emphasis was on secondary grammar school education rather than vocational education. There was no easy realization of the positive effects vocational education had on economic and technological growth of the economy. The less emphasis on vocationalization of Education led to dearth of manpower in the technical sector of the economy which had a negative effect on socio-economic development.

According to Egwaoje (2007), this lack of support and recognition was because of the poor understanding or misconception of vocational education practically or functionally. The general public did not see the usefulness of vocational education to business/commerce and industry. The major issue here is the lack of emphasis on Vocational Education initially. The same writer Egwaoje (2007), is of the view that the rapid stride in science and technology has contributed immensely to the development of new industries and the presence of new technologies have led to the demands for training and retraining in new skills in the existing and new occupational areas so that people might fit into today's and tomorrow's world of works.

According to Baker (1982), he is of the opinion that at the moment opportunities are expanding in such technical areas as computer, science, medicine and engineering. The consequence of this lack of emphasis on Vocational Education is the resultant effect of lack of qualified teachers in this field; to (each the practical skills required in vocational education. Baker (1982), was of the view that from the available records that only a very small percentage (about 1.5%) of the recommended courses in Vocational Technical Colleges were taught, as qualified teachers in these areas were few. Tools and equipments were inadequate and efforts are now been made by government to improve on this ugly situation.

The interests generated for the development of Vocation Education were as a result of the reforms in the educational sector of the economy. The reforms led to much awareness on the necessity for growth in vocational education. Education according to T.N. Ekwujuru (2007), has always been regarded as the primary agent of transforming a society towards sustainable development and increasing people's capabilities to transform their vision for the society into reality. There is a strong connection existing between educational development, economic, political and social trends and national growth in education not only provides scientific and technical skills, it also provides the motivation, justification and social support for pursuing and applying them. Education enables a country to bring forth the values, behaviour and life styles appropriate for a sustainable future. It is a lifelong learning process that is not limited to the four walls of the classroom or the spatial location of an institution. Reform of the educational system will enhance this life long process through a dynamic and progressive engagement of all citizens by encouraging them to develop their individuality and bring forth their sense of creativity, empathy, equality, justice and internationality.

Obaji (2006), stated that in Nigeria, the reform of the educational system is one of the most important issues currently on national political and socio economic agenda. The goal of educational reform is to draw attention to the need for government to focus on the core function and to implement

performance related reforms and changes in managerial principles in the delivery of educational services for a progressive development of the educational system. This is in order to build a society that allows every citizen to have their dream or goal and a system that encourages everyone to fully demonstrate their creativity and challenging spirit.

It is therefore, the reform in the educational system that has brought much focus and emphasis on Vocational Education in Nigeria. It is also pertinent to state that another emergent issue in Vocational Education especially as it pertains to Home Economics Education (Molokwu 2001), is the marginalization of the subject in Nigeria and the subject has lived in the ghetto for many years.

Several research areas covering courses and programme modifications as well as shift in knowledge base and paradigms, and development of pro-active strategies for legislating and projecting the image of Home Economics have been identified as challenges for the 21st Century Home Economists. Molokwu (2001), stated further that the responsibility for this shift falls heavily on Home Economists in the Universities and other institutions of higher learning that are research oriented. Funding remains a major and critical issue in educational shift and improvement. Projects and funding does not come easily for Home Economics. The reasons are not far fetched - they are rooted in the problems of poor public image, lack of legislation/political participation by Home Economists and poor administrative support.

It is thus clear that funding of Home Economics Education is an emergent issue in the study of the vocation. Christy Wakissa et al (2001), stated that Home Economics as a vital subject at all levels of education is potentially rich in psychomotor cognitive and effective learning opportunities. Consequently, instructional materials are essential to students to benefit maximally from the learning experience. These include chalkboard, graphs, charts, posters, pictures, specimens, radio, television, film strip projector, the slid projector, etc. Various authorities have expressed the importance of instructional materials in the study of Home Economics (Anyakoha 1991). What can be deduced from the foregoing is that funding is a problem and instructional materials are vital to the study of Home Economics which makes funding of vital importance in order to procure instructional materials.

Closely related to the foregoing emerging issues is the burning issue of the scarcity of qualified manpower to teach the subject of Home Economics in our secondary and tertiary schools. This is largely due to the less priority placed on vocational education in Nigeria. It is clear that the present education policy has given a measure of recognition to Home Economics as a school subject on paper only-while the actual implementation has constantly been hampered by lack of adequate facilities and poor funding. The New Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), stated that only few schools are able to prepare students for family living and the world of work as specified by the National Policy on education. Molokwu (1992), noted that in the school system, Home Economics has been acutely marginalized. A common feature is to divert Home Economics funds to other subjects and even deploy home economists to teach other subjects. Where it is taught, it is under very difficult and embarrassing situation. Ojiako (2002), stated that besides low student enrolment in technical programmes there is acute shortage of competent and professionally qualified teachers for the vocational education programmes. As in science, technical teachers are few compared to teachers in traditional secondary schools. Presently, only few higher education institutions offer undergraduate and higher degree courses for technical teacher preparation, Egwaoje (2007), is of the view that qualified teachers in these subjects were very few. Tools and equipments were inadequate. Efforts are now being made by government to improve this ugly situation. It is finally stated that the problem of staffing is a very serious problem in the emergence-of Home Economics Education in Vocationalism in Nigeria, which problem is being tackled by the present educational reforms.

Another emerging issue in Home Economics Education is the foundation that the subject will create for family growth and development. Kieren, Vaines and Badir (1984), challenges Home Economists to engage continually in personal and professional reflection leading to a philosophy, knowledge base and practice that enables and empowers individuals and families to live and flourish in today's challenging and perplexing world, Molokwu (2001), poses the question whether Home Economics can promote the conditions that would enable and empower individuals and families to flourish and cope with the demands of the times. Has Home Economics relied too much on old tradition and old knowledge base and paradigms? Brown and Paolucci (1979), redefined the mission of Home Economics as follows; To enable families both as individual units and as social institutions to build and maintain systems of actions which lead to (i) to maturing in individual self formation and

(ii) to enlightened cooperative participation in the critique and formulation of social goals and means of accomplishing them.

Hargrove (1988) and Bubolz (1990), emphasized that if families as democratic social institutions can be enabled to their present place in the society, they can be empowered to anticipate and

participate in taking society to where they want to go. Looking back at the practice of Home Economics under the Nigeria situation and circumstances, it can be said that the past practices were wrong per se and they must meet the needs of that time. Baldwin (1991), noted that the world is not static and the nature and needs of family and society are rapidly and relentlessly changing, to reexamine and restructure our philosophy, knowledge base and practice.

Molokwu (2001), concluded that the historical Home Economics packages as received from the colonial education have served its time. It is now time to move on in a new direction to meet the demand of our time. And that since the family remains the central issue in Home Economics; it is pertinent to examine the family traditions in the context of the Nigerian situation. In Nigeria today, the concept of family poses a vital research question. Molokwu (2001), concluded that in Nigeria today, we need a valid documented research data to come up with a valid Nigeria definition of family. It is after we know what the family means that we are then better able to design programmes that will meet the need of empowerment. He finally submitted that the role of Home Economics as major delivery system for the family is to study the various areas of family life and come up with ways to approach and alleviate the problems.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are therefore made as a way forward;

- (i) Government must make frantic efforts to formulate policies that will re-emphasize the importance of Vocational Education as a necessary tool for economic development.
- (ii) Government should provide an enabling environment for mobilizing Home Economists for political awareness and development of political skills. The formation of Home Economics Council of Nigeria (HECON) is a welcome development. Such other Associations and pressure groups should be formed to propagate and highlight the problems of the subject.
- (iii) There is need for a vigorous teaching of this subject in our schools at any level which is coupled with the need for proper and adequate funding by government so that instructional equipments/materials can be acquired.
- (iv) Government should sponsor a lot of seminars/conferences which will emphasize the usefulness of Vocational Education in the new millennium. Also Vocational Education teachers should be encouraged to embark on research and sponsored for courses and refresher programmes to sharpen their knowledge and intellect in this field.

Conclusion

It is finally stated that in our National democratic dispensation, one should consider a mark of democratic education which creates in the future citizenry a penchant and sense of responsibility for openness, informed public scrutiny and an equal participation at all levels. It is hereby stated that we should reform our schools and we shall find little reform needed in our prisons. It is believed that the only cure to moral or value change is to reform and educate the people with the problem. The people are the youths and children who are yet developing or the adult who have from all indications been part of the system that need to be reformed.

By and large, this paper has largely examined the emerging issues in Vocational Education in Nigeria with special reference to Home Economics Education, and it is submitted that (here is urgent need for a total political revolution in the emphasis on Home Economics Education in Nigeria, and a lot of political awareness should be created as to the importance of this type of education as a sine qua non for National development.

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